

PROOF

Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Wednesday 27 November 2024

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Wednesday 27 November 2024

The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Petitions

Kongwak Butter Factory

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 1165 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council:

The extensive \$36 million development of the Kongwak Butter Factory under the Victorian Government's fast-track, Development Facilitation Program which has already generated substantial local opposition in the hamlet of Kongwak and over 4,100 signatures against the proposal on change.org

The Petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council ask the Victorian Government to:

- a) refer the permit application to the Department of Transport and Planning's Priority Projects Standing Committee for further detailed consideration before a decision is made by the Minister for Planning, and
- b) conduct public consultation meetings with those residents that live within the township boundary of the hamlet who will be most affected, and modify the development in accordance with that feedback.

Renee HEATH: I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General – Fair Presentation of Service Delivery Performance 2024 (*Ordered to be published*).

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in relation to Statutory Rule No. 130.

Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act 2017 –

Birrarung Council Report on the implementation of Burndap Birrarung Burndap Umarkoo Yarra Strategic Plan 2024.

Burndap Birrarung Burndap Umarkoo Yarra Strategic Plan, Report 2023–24 – Reporting on implementation from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024.

Birrarung Council

Birrarung Council Annual Report to Parliament on the Implementation of Burndap Birrarung Burndap Umarkoo: Yarra Strategic Plan 2024

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (09:37): (*By leave*) I wish to speak very briefly to the tabling of the third annual report on the implementation of *Burndap Birrarung Burndap Umarkoo*, the Yarra strategic plan. I want to acknowledge the members and staff of the Birrarung Council who have joined us today in the gallery to see the report tabled, particularly Wurundjeri elders Uncle Dave Wandin, Uncle Andrew Gardiner and Bunurong elder Uncle Shane Clarke. I want to acknowledge the tireless advocate, also for her work, Aunty Di Kerr, who is unable to be here today. Thank you to the Birrarung Council for your ongoing critically important work as the voice of the Birrarung. The health of the river and its land is stronger every day, and that is testament to the work you do advocating for the river and holding public entities to account. I wish to acknowledge the hard work of all public entities contributing to *Burndap Birrarung Burndap Umarkoo*, including Melbourne Water as the lead agency and Jane Doolan, who

chairs the Yarra collaborative committee. I have reiterated to these agencies that while we should celebrate what has been achieved, there is much more work to be done. I look forward to another year of strong partnership and collaboration with the council and all entities as we work together to see a stronger, healthier Birrarung and see the river and its lands returned to rich history and culture and biodiversity.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, I just want to make the point that the minister literally asked me 30 seconds before she stood and delivered that. In the future, the opposition will not be providing leave if those sorts of things are going to continue.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (09:38): *(By leave)* I will just briefly say that one of the greatest problems for the river's health and the future of our environment is to ensure that we do not have unsophisticated, high-density development that is crushing the community but also causing the loss of tree canopy and the impact of run-off onto our rivers. I also say that there needs to be proper protections in place to stop this government destroying our city.

Petitions

Residential planning zones

Response

The Clerk: I have received the following paper for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: Minister for Planning's response to petition titled 'Desist from high-rise high-density zone planning', tabled by Mr Davis.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

Motions

Middle East conflict

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (09:55): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that since the Legislative Council's resolution on 17 October 2023 concerning Israel and Gaza which stated that this house 'stands with Israel', the United Nations Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories submitted a report to the General Assembly on 20 September 2024, and this report:
 - (a) raises serious concerns of breaches of international humanitarian and human rights laws in the occupied Palestinian territory, including starvation as a weapon of war, the possibility of genocide in Gaza and an apartheid system in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem;
 - (b) documents the impact of the conflict escalation since 7 October 2023 on Palestinians' rights to food; to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment; to physical integrity, liberty and security of persons; as well as the disproportionate effects on the rights of women, children, and future generations more broadly;
- (2) further notes that the committee condemned the ongoing smear campaign and other attacks against UNRWA and the UN at large, including that the 'deliberate silencing of reporting, combined with disinformation and attacks on humanitarian workers, is a clear strategy to undermine the vital work of the UN, sever the lifeline of aid still reaching Gaza, and dismantle the international legal order';
- (3) does not support the state of Israel's continued invasion of Gaza; and
- (4) supports calls for an immediate and permanent ceasefire.

Leave refused.

*Members statements***Gippsland Asbestos Related Diseases Support group**

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (09:57): It is so important that as we continue to discuss the relevance and the priority of workplace safety around the state we acknowledge the tireless efforts of people who continue to campaign and advocate for better awareness and understanding of exposure to asbestos and silica dust. I want to commend the tireless work of Vicki Hamilton and everyone from the Gippsland Asbestos Related Diseases Support group, who continues across the state, in subject matter expertise, in advocacy and in on-ground work to make sure that training and assistance is provided to make sure people are aware of the risks of exposure to asbestos and to friable asbestos across the state and indeed around Australia. The risks remain real, particularly for DIY and renovation projects, and I want to commend everybody who has been part of the tireless work of GARDS over many, many years: thank you for the ongoing work that you do.

Education

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (09:58): As we head into the festive season, I want to thank all educators and people who work tirelessly every day across communities –

Members interjecting.

Harriet SHING: to make and create environments for learning that are supportive and that are inclusive. In particular I want to single out one school in Gippsland, Kurnai College, which makes sure through community and on-ground engagement that all students are in a position to learn and to reach their very best potential. Congratulations to every student who will be part of awards ceremonies. I look forward to congratulating you in person. To teachers and staff as well, thank you and congratulations.

The PRESIDENT: Before I call the next member statement, my expectation is that if someone is actually calling out someone who has done something good or paying tribute to someone, they would not get interjected on, so I apologise to the minister. If it happens to any of the next contributors, I will get them to start from the start.

Dusty Daly and Luke and Benny Smith

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (09:59): 16 November was a dark day for the communities of Gippsland and Tongala. It was the day that 15-year-old Dusty Daly and his two cousins Luke and Benny Smith tragically died in a light plane crash over Tinamba West. There is no doubt that these men were much loved by their families and friends and made an enormous impact on their communities. Some of Dusty's friends from Catholic College in Sale asked me to pay tribute to their friend and honour his memories, and these are their words:

Dusty had a wide variety of friends and knew how to make an impression everywhere. Everyone knew Dusty because he always put his amazing personality out there. He always made everyone laugh. When he hosted a party his family was very hospitable and it was a great opportunity to get together.

He never took himself too seriously. On the last day that he was at school we had some spare hair ties. Dusty did his hair in pigtailed and walked around the school making everyone laugh.

Dusty's life has had a huge impact on us.

He openly accepted everyone and he was easy to get along with. He was positive in dark situations and helped you see the brighter side – and he never failed to make you laugh.

We cannot believe that he is gone. Our hearts break a little more everyday sinking into the reality of you not being here and we'd give anything to have that last conversation with you. Something died in each of us on

the 16/11/24 and something will forever be missing but forever engraved in our memories. Our sympathy goes towards the Daly family in their time of grief. Missing you so much.

#forever15.

Isla Bell

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (10:01): Isla Bell was about to turn 20 when she went missing over six weeks ago. Last week her body was found. Isla was allegedly murdered by a 53-year-old man. According to Sherele Moody's Femicide Watch, Isla was the 85th woman in Australia to be killed this year. Since then that number has already grown, because the reality is the risk of a woman being killed by a man is increasing and yet governments continue to defund services and ignore expert advice. The media continues to breach gender-based violence reporting guidelines. The police continue to fail at responding to violence. Men continue to let their friends get away with locker room banter and rape jokes, and we continue to fixate on how we can relate to women in order to advocate for their safety – that they were mothers or daughters, sisters or aunties – when none of that actually matters. What matters is that the system continues to fail us and we continue to be killed. Isla's mum described her yesterday as a fighter. She described her as a force of nature, and we will ensure that her legacy and her memory is too. As her friend Tamara said recently, 'Change is coming, and it is in the shape of a woman.'

Monash Affordable Art Exhibition

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:03): I recently had the great privilege of joining with my colleague the member for Mulgrave in the other place to officially open the *Monash Affordable Art Exhibition*. This terrific exhibition in its first year showcased lots of local talented artists, and it was great to meet some of the artists.

David Davis interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Reset the clock. I do not think Mr Galea was being provocative. My expectation is that he gets heard in silence. Mr Galea, start from the start.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, President. I did recently have the great privilege of joining with the terrific member for Mulgrave Eden Foster in the other place to officially open the *Monash Affordable Art Exhibition* at the Mount Waverley Library. It was a terrific event that was attended by many of the local artists. It is a great way for art to become accessible to all members of the community both in the appreciation and indeed for the artists themselves. Thank you to Felicity and the entire team from Monash Community Arts Society for graciously putting on the event and having us there.

Felicitations

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:04): I would also like to take a moment to wish everyone in the south-east and across Victoria a very merry Christmas and a happy new year. I wish all my constituents a very safe holiday season. I would like to congratulate all of the students in my electorate who have completed another school year and those who are graduating and will receive their results soon.

Thank you to all Victorians who are working through these holidays so that the rest of us can enjoy a break. As the shops get busier at this time of year so does the pressure on retail workers, and I encourage everyone to remember to treat these hardworking people with the respect and courtesy they deserve, because no-one deserves a serve. Thankyou to our emergency services personnel, who will work through the break to keep us safe and secure. Too many of us take your work for granted. Your sacrifice should never go unrecognised.

I want to thank all colleagues in this chamber and the parliamentary clerks and staff who work tirelessly to make our jobs representing Victoria possible. I would also like to give a shout-out and thankyou to my hardworking electorate staff this year. I look forward to continuing to represent my constituents next year.

Treaty

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (10:05): Last week I had the honour of attending the ceremonial opening of treaty negotiations at Darebin Parklands on Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung country. Organised by the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria with the Victorian government, it was a significant step in a process that began eight years ago. The Yoorrook truth-telling commission laid bare once again the devastation wrought by 200 years of colonisation on Victoria's First Peoples. We heard the detailed firsthand accounts of the abuse and discrimination they experienced and continue to endure. It is not enough to merely recognise this history and to say sorry. What matters is change – change for the better, developed with our Aboriginal communities, informed by their knowledge and wisdom. Treaties negotiated in good faith with goodwill with our traditional owners will form the bedrock of that change. This is not about taking from one group to give to another, whatever the culture war warriors would have us believe. It is about reconciling with our past and walking with Aboriginal communities to shape a better future. I applaud the Victorian government for its work on truth-telling and the treaty process and for showing genuine courage and leadership at a time when too many governments across the country are not.

The Family Next Door

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:09): We know that Bayside is a beautiful part of Melbourne and a lot of people want to live there. Soon the beauty is going to be broadcast for all to see on ABC TV thanks to the production of a new adaptation of a novel, *The Family Next Door*, with support from the state government through VicScreen. The adaptation of that book of the same name is by local author and *New York Times* bestselling author Sally Hepworth. I had the great privilege of visiting the set a couple of weeks ago. I met with the Victorian director Emma Freeman and some of the actors and saw just how impressive this production is, injecting nearly \$10 million into the Victorian economy and creating jobs for more than 275 Victorians in the screen industry. The production is also, thanks to the involvement of VicScreen, providing two development opportunities for aspiring local screen practitioners. I met with Dannika Horvat and Paige McLeod, who are shadowing some of the lead production staff to gain experience to help them in their future careers. The state Labor government's screen strategy has so far created 29,000 jobs and generated \$1.25 billion in economic activity across Victoria. It is also showcasing a great part of Melbourne, and I am sure a lot of people cannot wait to watch the final product when it hits our screens next year.

Gendered violence

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (10:08): On the weekend I joined with the Geelong community and the Zonta Club in launching their 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence. While it has been heartening to see so many people turn out for these events, I cannot help but think: how many more times do we have to go out and march? Just last week Isla Bell was the 85th Australian woman to be murdered by a man this year – 85 that we know of. There are countless others who are violently assaulted and injured, who live in fear, who lose families, friends, homes and jobs. As a GP I saw these women, sometimes with horrific, unspeakable injuries, many more with hidden invisible injuries and untold stories. Each time there is some horrific event it captures the public attention and we think, 'Perhaps this is the moment where it all changes, where things finally begin to shift.' Yet they do not. While gender-based violence is pervasive and complex, there are clear steps that governments can take to make a difference. We need a huge increase in genuinely public housing. We need affordable health care and child care. We need to substantially lift the rate of welfare payments. We need to fund community legal centres and family violence support services. We need to fund perpetrator support services, stop taking donations from big alcohol and tobacco and tackle these drivers of violence. Eighty-five women this year, and we know that before 2024 ends there will be more. This Parliament must do more.

Treaty

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (10:09): Treaty has begun. The ceremonial opening of negotiations for Victoria's first treaty was a decisive step towards justice, recognition and reconciliation and a big step towards creating a future built on truth and respect for all Victorians. This moment was deeply personal for me. As a proud First Nations person and a member of this government I stand with a foot in both worlds, representing the voices of my mob, who have carried this fight for generations, and as a member of Parliament, where change must take step in laws and in action. It is humbling and empowering to be a part of this historic process. The opening of treaty negotiations was more than just a ceremony; it was a testament to the courage and resilience of our elders, who have fought for this moment. It was a commitment to generations to come. For non-Aboriginal Victorians this signified an opportunity for unity. Treaty is not just about healing the wounds of the past; it is about forging a shared future where we walk side by side, bound by respect and understanding, creating a stronger, fairer Victoria for everyone. To the many elders, activists, community members and allies who have worked tirelessly, you have my thanks. I honour your efforts, vision and unyielding determination.

Southern Metropolitan Region housing

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (10:11): I have two matters to address today. First, a reminder that only the Allan Labor government is delivering public and affordable housing in Victoria and in my community of Southern Metro. In South Yarra and Prahran – areas I know very well, as my office is there – the Simmons Street and Essex Street developments are providing my community with 677 brand new homes, boosting the amount of social housing, including a 34 per cent increase on Simmons Street and 37 per cent on Essex Street. With the limited time I have I want to draw attention to a few of the hallmarks of these two projects: the dedicating of housing for single women and their children; their modern, all-electric and energy-efficient features; the inclusion of specialist disability builds; and the new community infrastructure these projects bring to the community, including 13,500 square metres of public open space, cafes, bakeries, gyms, rental areas and co-working spaces that all the community can enjoy together. I am proud that in this term we will get this done.

Parliamentary committees

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (10:12): On a second matter, I want to thank all the hardworking staff on the three committees I have been involved with this year as a full or participating member. The work we could not do without them, and they deserve every bit of praise.

Production of documents

Police conduct

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:12): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that in the consultation paper for the systemic review of police oversight, the Victorian government acknowledged:
 - (a) Victoria Police's complaints process requires improvement to effectively manage conflicts of interest;
 - (b) concerns about conduct in relation to Aboriginal children and young people;
 - (c) that the current system of independent investigation of serious police misconduct allegations fails to meet community expectations;
- (2) further notes that the final report for the systemic review of police oversight was delivered to the government in 2022 and has not been made public; and
- (3) requires the Leader of the Government, pursuant to standing order 10.01, to table in the Council, within four weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, the final report from the systemic review of police oversight.

I rise to make a brief contribution on the motion in my own name before the chamber. It has been two long years since this government received the final report of the systemic review of police oversight. In those two years we have seen (1) IBAC's most commonly received complaint being complaints against Victoria Police, (2) more than 95 per cent of complaints made to IBAC about Victoria Police sent back to police for investigation, (3) in the 2022–23 financial year almost 70 per cent of investigations by Victoria Police recommended no action and in only 0.34 per cent of those cases was termination recommended and (4) IBAC commenced investigations for only 23 of the 4000 allegations and almost 2000 complaints made to them against Victoria Police in 2023. Further work done by IBAC in their strategic assessment of Victoria Police 2022–23 acknowledged that key police misconduct risks include misuse of police powers and resources, predatory behaviour, relationships with criminal networks, racial profiling, sexual harassment, excessive use of force and police-perpetrated family violence.

In this context it can be no surprise that public satisfaction with police has fallen to a historic low and the calls for reform of police oversight are at an all-time high. As highlighted in the motion, these are issues that the government is well aware of. We already know that the Victoria Police complaints process needs to be improved to effectively manage conflicts of interest, we already know that there are concerns about the conduct in relation to Aboriginal children and young people and we already know that the independent investigation of police misconduct allegations is failing. We knew all of this before the systemic review of police oversight even began.

So why is it that two years later the final report has never been made public? One reason that has been suggested is that it is because the government is still considering reform options. It is deeply concerning to us that this would be the only justification for not publishing this report. We believe in integrity in government, and we believe in transparency. This report should be released so that we can all do our jobs as crossbenchers and hold the government accountable to the findings of the review. If we do not have the report available to us, how can we be assured that the government's response to the review, if there is one, has listened to the advice on how we will ensure that those who so bravely shared their lived experiences are heard?

We want to be clear: we acknowledge that the work is already underway, and we do not expect the government to be able to solve systemic problems overnight. We appreciate that it does take time to ensure that we do get this right. However, not only do we need to keep Victorians safe, we also need to keep them informed. We ask them to engage and work with us – to share their stories in what is often a retraumatising experience. We owe it to them to share the findings of that consultation and not to make them wait in limbo for years and years on end. Those who were failed by this system are now being made to feel like they are being failed time and time again. That is why we have brought forward this motion today, requiring the tabling of the final report on the systemic review of police oversight.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:16): I am pleased to rise to speak on the documents motion moved by Ms Payne seeking documents in relation to the consultation paper for the systemic review of police oversight. Obviously it is no secret in the public domain that the government, through the Attorney-General and the Department of Justice and Community Safety, has been undertaking work doing a systemic review of police oversight. It is an important part of our integrity system to understand the ways that the actions of Victoria Police are oversights. As we all know, there are very complex and sensitive issues here.

I think it is important that I clarify in the context of this documents motion seeking access to the final report of the systemic review of police oversight that this motion is seeking a consultation summary that captures the feedback received from the stakeholders through the consultation process. There is no final report from that consultation process. There is no consolidated report, as in something that is handed and delivered to the government. It is an ongoing work program that exists within the department. The policy development process that the government, through the public service, undertakes in policy areas such as this does not always result in the kind of report or document that is envisaged existing in the documents motion. It does not always exist in the form that I think that the

documents motion seeks to find. This is not to say the work is not going on, but the sort of consolidated consultation report that is sought in this documents motion is not the way that this particular piece of policy development was undertaken. This is a way of saying the work has been done but the specific document that the motion implies exists and seeks production of does not, and there is a distinction between those two things. It is perhaps a quirk of occasionally how the public service undertakes its policy development process and the work of undertaking legislative reform that something labelled in the way that this document that is being sought to be retrieved through this process is characterised is not in fact the document that has been produced.

Again, it is not to say that the work is not being undertaken, and it is not to say that the systemic review is not going through the normal way that legislative reform and policy development occur. It is just that in the terms of the motion, the documents sought, there is that distinction that should be drawn. It is obviously complex work. The government is undertaking it in a way to get it right. We want to make sure that we can put forward a practical model to keep our police accountable – the exercise of their powers meeting the needs of the range of communities across Victoria – and keep all Victorians safe. We are committed to reforming police oversight with a focus on the experience of those who have experienced misconduct at the hands of police and to make sure they are supported throughout the process and treated fairly and in a culturally safe way.

Obviously, as with Ms Payne, being a member of the Integrity and Oversight Committee, we have an understanding of the way that our integrity agencies, including IBAC, undertake their police oversight functions. It is something that that committee continually, including at some hearings on Monday of this week, seeks to understand – the systemic operation of the police oversight functions. We will continue as a government to work with agencies and with Victoria Police to make sure that these processes are improved. The work on police oversight reform is well progressed, and I am sure that the resolution of that work is not far away.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (10:21): I rise on motion 751, brought to the chamber by Ms Payne. It is a documents motion. It is a straightforward documents motion. I must admit to having some cautious concern on this one, lest it be interpreted that in any way I or the Liberals and Nationals are not supportive of our police force, who deserve our greatest level of support. In line with our general practice we will not oppose this motion because transparency is an important role of this chamber and this seeks documents. It actually is not a broader policy motion; it simply seeks a document. I listened carefully to what was said by the government speaker, and it seems to me that it may be that there are iterations of this document that are in existence, and the intent and effect of Ms Payne's motion is to obtain the most recent or other iterations of those documents. In that sense, I think the intent of the motion is clear.

As I say, we will not oppose this, but I do not want our support for, or non-opposition to, a transparency motion to leave anyone with any doubt about our overwhelming support for our policewomen and policemen, who do enormously good work in our community. As we have seen with the rise in violence, I think it is important that we are seen to be supportive of our policewomen and policemen. They have a very tough job to do. They have a tough job to stand up to the forces of disorder and violence that are so much a part of our community, unfortunately, and increasingly so under this government as it reaches its 10-year mark. We see home invasions and other terrible crimes being committed, and I can say to the chamber that this is not a casual point that I am making here. I have held four or five consultation forums in Southern Metropolitan Region in recent months, and at every single one of those people have risen to say that the biggest issue we have in our area is community safety or the fact that there has been a home invasion.

I will quote an example here. At the Mount Waverley forum we recently held, an older man got up and said he had moved into the area more than 40 years ago, but it has only been in last four or five years that there have been regular burglaries and home invasions in his street quite near to the station in Mount Waverley. It is important to understand that there is actually an upsurge in a particularly nasty form of violence, and it is our police men and women who have to stand up on behalf of the

community and deal with many of these offenders. I just want to be quite clear that our support for them is very strong, and on this occasion we will not oppose the motion, in line with our general practice.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (10:25): I will be brief to allow other members the time to speak on this documents motion. However, I just want to put it on the record that I too have asked the Attorney-General's office to release this report twice this year, only to receive the same response both times that the government is taking the time to get it right – 'it' being the reforms not the report itself, since it is already completed and that is exactly what we have asked for.

It seems questionable that this government cannot share the final report in the meantime, but I am not sure whether the fact is that they cannot or that they will not or that they do not want to. They will not share it because they do not want Victorians to see the endemic Victoria Police corruption, illegal conduct, racial profiling, abuse and incompetence. It seems that the government is scared to show what Victoria Police are capable of, because it will reflect poorly on the government that the police have been complicit in First Nations people being 11 times more likely to be searched than white people last year and show that the government is slow in addressing this.

All we are asking is for Victorians to see the recommendations needed to improve our police force and to give us a report that they said would better meet the needs of complainants and victims of police misconduct, including victim-survivors of family violence, which is so necessary right now, and also the needs of Aboriginal people. If this government wants to stop violence against women, it must start with Victoria Police, who are responsible for the decision for charging it or, often, ignoring it. I thank Ms Payne for bringing this important documents motion here today, and I commend it to the house.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (10:27): I rise to speak on this morning's documents motion in Ms Payne's name. I thank her for bringing it. The Victorian Greens will be supporting this motion. Police powers flow from the state, and it is therefore fundamentally the state's responsibility to ensure that these powers are not abused. Police must be accountable in their actions when interacting with citizens, and they should not be policing themselves. We must not allow the current situation to continue, when 98 per cent of complaints against Victoria police end up with a police internal investigation. We see research and opinion polls showing us declining community trust in police, with more than one in five Victorians reporting in 2022 that they no longer have confidence in police integrity. Victoria Police should be concerned that the public – the people that they are appointed to serve – have such little trust in their behaviour. Abuse of force or power has a profound and detrimental impact on all those who experience it. It ripples out to families and entire communities, undermining safety, self-worth and belonging, and it can contribute to eroding faith in the institutions of democracy and the rule of law. Even minor excesses by police have a significant impact on the community. The abuse of police power impacts most upon the already vulnerable, such as the young, people who are experiencing mental illness, disabled people, those from refugee and migrant backgrounds and Indigenous Australians. Nerita Waight, CEO of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, said:

We know from working with our clients that there is a huge amount of police misconduct that goes on without being recorded or reported on. If Victorian's knew the full extent of misconduct committed by Victoria Police, this record low rating would soon be surpassed. The ... Victorian Government must establish independent police oversight.

First Nations legal and community stakeholders have been calling for the establishment of an independent police ombudsman in Victoria, and in particular the Yoorrook Justice Commission last year was clear and unequivocal that the government must urgently create a purpose-built police oversight authority. This government has been saying since at least 2018 that it is working on a police oversight reform. This must continue with haste. The motion today is calling for the release of the final report for systemic review of police oversight, which has been stalled for targeted consultation for two years. A significant number of individuals and organisations made submissions to that review, and they deserve to read the final report, as do all Victorians. Instead we feel that the report will be kept in this continued closed circle, which lacks openness and transparency. When we look around the world

at the crumbling levels of trust that citizens are experiencing in even the most robust of democracies, we see how the fractures can affect even the strongest institutions. Surely, then, we need to be more transparent, not less. It is time to see this report.

David ETTERSANK (Western Metropolitan) (10:30): Taking on board the advice of Mr Batchelor in his contribution, I seek leave of the house to move an amendment to the motion. I move:

In paragraph (3), for ‘final report from the systemic review of police oversight’ substitute ‘final report for the systemic review of police oversight and/or any related reports’.

Amendment agreed to; amended motion agreed to.

Bills

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

Council’s amendments

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): I have received a message from the Legislative Assembly in respect of the Tobacco Amendment (Tobacco Retailer and Wholesaler Licensing Scheme) Bill 2024:

The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to ‘A Bill for an Act to amend the **Tobacco Act 1987** to establish a licensing scheme for tobacco retailers and wholesalers and make related and other amendments, to make consequential amendments to the **Confiscation Act 1997**, the **Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981** and the **Spent Convictions Act 2021** and for other purposes’ the amendment made by the Council has been agreed to.

Production of documents

Mount Arapiles rock climbing

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:32): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes:
 - (a) the recently announced climbing bans at Mount Arapiles–Tooan State Park have caused significant distress and alarm within the climbing community and the local town of Natimuk;
 - (b) this follows from previous climbing bans and land use restrictions in the Grampians National Park;
 - (c) that consultation related to Aboriginal cultural heritage management does not allow for an open and transparent process that can foster broad inclusion and balance the needs of different land users;
- (2) requires the Leader of the Government, in accordance with standing order 10.01, to table in the Council, within eight weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, documents related to the *Greater Gariwerd Landscape Management Plan* and the draft Dyurrite cultural landscape management plan amendment, including but not limited to:
 - (a) all cultural heritage and environmental reports from the Grampians and Arapiles region for the last 10 years;
 - (b) all reports associated with the Grampians Peaks Trail; and
 - (c) all reports, including draft reports, relating to rock climbing.

This relates to an issue that I first became involved in in 2019, when I was approached by rock climbers who were concerned that in the Grampians area, which is a very famous rock-climbing area, they had effectively been locked out of large portions of that park. This was related to cultural management plans. There were lots of smears unfairly thrown at these climbers at the time. Parks Victoria said that they had put bolts into Aboriginal artwork, which was met with a puzzled reaction by the climbers and indeed a puzzled reaction by me because climbing bolts are up high where you climb, not down low where Aboriginal artwork might be. Later on it was discovered that the bolts around the Aboriginal artwork were in fact put there by Parks Victoria themselves decades ago in a clumsy attempt to protect

artwork. So this group, who are very respectful of Aboriginal heritage and do their best to look after the environment – in fact they have their own volunteer groups that go and clean up areas and make sure that they are in good condition – were very unfairly smeared.

They were fearful at the time that Arapiles might also suffer the same sort of fate as the Grampians, and indeed it looks like this has happened. Large portions of Arapiles have effectively been locked to climbers, and this has been met with severe distress by the people of Natimuk, effectively a climbing town. Many people from throughout Australia and indeed throughout the world who cherish this area, love this area and have their own connection to this area and this land have been locked out from using it for an activity that they have done there for decades. These people were not involved in consultation, and it was very unfair the way that it was done. I understand that the government is running some sort of consultation process – that is what the government has said. I feel that that would be appropriate for these people that have suffered this distress. Indeed it is having a very large impact, even economically, on the town. There are businesses going bankrupt right now. Many people move to this town because of climbing. They love climbing, they love the area, they love Arapiles, and this is by all reports a disaster.

These people deserve to know the thinking that went behind this and that went into this, and frankly they deserve better than what has happened. I hope that this can be resolved, but I think one step towards resolving it would be to let people look at these environmental reports and the cultural heritage reports to see exactly what we are talking about here, because they are at a loss as to what has exactly happened here and why they have been locked out of this activity that they love so much.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:35): I rise to share a few comments on notice of motion 752 today, which has been put before us by Mr Limbrick, and I acknowledge him for doing so. In accordance with the government's custom and practice when it comes to short documents motions, I affirm that the government will not be opposing this particular motion. I do want to briefly make some comments in relation to Mount Arapiles, in particular on what is a draft management plan which is currently out for public consultation. We know that over the last four years there has been substantial archaeological work going on to understand the important cultural heritage that has been discovered at Mount Arapiles, and this has been done in order to provide the climbers with certainty on how they can continue to enjoy the sport that they love without bringing harm to the cultural and natural environment. I also would put forward that these two priorities need not be in conflict with each other. I understand that there is a great interest amongst many of the climbers to work in concert with the traditional owners, and indeed vice versa, to come to a mutually beneficial outcome.

As a result of the rediscoveries that have taken place from the archaeological work, some of the parts of climbing areas are proposed to be protected from climbing and walking. This will still leave, even under this plan, more than half of the climbing and walking areas within this particular state park open, and that is well over 80 climbs as well, as I understand it. There are indeed many examples from around the world as well as right here in Australia of areas of significance being closed to protect their cultural and environmental value. We do have here and we are talking about an area of immense beauty and opportunity, and I really encourage that work between the traditional owners and the climbers to continue, as I am sure that they are all determined to do, to ensure that we can make the most of these opportunities and do so in a way that is respectful of all.

I understand as well that the Minister for Environment has already spoken with several local Natimuk businesses and indeed with the chair of the Grampians Tourism Board as well. We are of course keen to see the opportunities of this area maximised, and I do have full confidence that the Victorian, national and international climbing communities will not turn their backs on Mount Arapiles or Natimuk and will continue to visit this wonder.

I think it is also important to note that amongst the very significant reforms and improvements that this government has made to outdoor recreation in the state of Victoria, we have invested over \$106 million into fully making camping fee-free at national parks right across the state. This includes

three campgrounds that are now free in the Mount Arapiles–Tooan State Park. We have upgraded 56 campgrounds, which compares to our target to upgrade 30. We also have 30 brand new campgrounds and have upgraded more than 29 kilometres of walking tracks and 125 kilometres worth of four-wheel drive tracks as well as planning for the upgrade of seven iconic four-wheel drive adventures.

Whilst it is an important discussion for us to be having, I hope that members will continue to have this discussion in a respectful manner. As I said at the outset, the government will not be opposing the motion before us today.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (10:39): I am obviously extremely supportive of Mr Limbrick's motion. I have stood on the side of climbers for more than five years now, and I have watched the outright and inexplicable hostility to rock climbers shown by our state government, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Parks Victoria and their collective bureaucrats, paid cultural heritage and scientific advisers and activist staff. We have seen this kind of ideological evidence blind prejudice before. It is the same instinct that brought us the environmentally nonsensical native timber ban. It is the same mindset that has squeezed duck shooting bags and season lengths and cut down land available for prospectors in Victoria. Yet with rock climbing it is even more inexplicable.

I have met and spoken to many climbers in the past few years, and it is fair to say that on most political issues we disagree. Some of the most strident advocates for cultural heritage you could find are rock climbers, and all value the landscape they climb in incredibly highly. They know and love it intimately. Many have moved their lives to be closer to these places. Climbing is an all-consuming hobby for many. It is an important part of climbers' identity, incredibly valuable for their mental health and happiness. As a result, it is not an exaggeration to say that Natimuk is a climbers town, and it attracts all sorts: different ages, professions, attitudes. At the rally on the steps of Parliament last sitting week we heard from a local doctor, for example, who detailed just how many local medical professionals have come to the area because of their love of climbing. I know from the rest of my electorate how difficult it is to attract doctors in regional Victoria, and when doctors and other basic services are not available, communities go into a slow death spiral. You cannot attract new young families or workers if you do not have basic services, so a vicious circle begins. The influx of climbers reversed that in Natimuk, and it has built a healthy, diverse community.

In the short time available I just want to reiterate how betrayed the climbing community feels, first on consultation. Whenever this government is criticised over a controversial decision, it claims either that 'consultation' took place or is going to take place, and so it should. This is public land we are talking about – the closure of more than half of Mount Arapiles–Tooan State Park to recreational uses. And the 50,000 visitors a year are predominantly rock climbers – 90 per cent in fact – so you would have thought that Parks Victoria might have spoken to them. It is not like this is an emergency decision. It has been in the works not for months but for years, yet they have failed to engage. Climbing Victoria and the Australian Climbing Association Victoria were blindsided. Parks Victoria might claim 'consultation' with the Gariwerd Wimmera Reconciliation Network, but they are not a climbers peak body. In fact that network themselves stated:

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

The idea that consultation has been launched now is ridiculous when the documents clearly state differently. It is a joke. It says:

You have the opportunity to provide input on how you would like to receive information, improve map and guideline accessibility, update signs, or use chalk.

But:

It is important to note, this consultation will not be reviewing any changes to the areas that need to be protected.

Matthew Jackson, Parks Victoria CEO, confirmed to me at Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, ‘We do not negotiate on cultural heritage matters – that is it.’ There is no point in consulting or even discussing cultural heritage; it trumps everything. Any other user, any other activity, anything else is secondary, no matter the consequences for health, happiness, economies or communities. That is why it is so vital that the documents behind this decision are released. There is a serious question about the extent of cultural heritage being protected by this decision as well as complete bafflement at the failure to produce mitigation issues rather than an outright ban. I would like to end my contribution by saying to climbers that the coalition is committed to repealing these bans.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (10:44): I speak on Mr Limbrick’s motion in relation to Mount Arapiles. I have the privilege of having Mount Arapiles in my electorate, and it is an area of immense natural beauty that is enjoyed by climbers, walkers and campers alike. The traditional owners of Mount Arapiles, who I would like to acknowledge today – and I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging – have been involved in managing the Dyurrite cultural landscape for a very, very long time.

Over the last four years there has been substantial archaeological work to understand the important cultural heritage that has been rediscovered there, and I think ‘rediscovered’ is the operational word here. Cultural heritage sites have been rediscovered in the Dyurrite cultural landscape, including tens of thousands of artefacts, scar trees, rock art dating back at least 3000 years and one of the largest Indigenous stone quarry complexes found in Australia. All of these things are evidence of structured economic, social and permanent settlement and management of our landscape, which we share now, way before we arrived, something that none of us were educated about when we were at school. Surveys have also discovered threatened plants, including skeleton fork fern and western pellitory. These surveys are ultimately about providing climbers, the tourism community and the local Aboriginal community with a level of certainty and structure around this complex issue. It will provide economic certainty for the Natimuk and tourism communities.

I have been contacted by a number of climbers, and I want to pay my respects to the thoughtfulness of climbers that have contacted me. I know the climbing community are especially sensitive and aware of the environment and connection to culture, because they develop that relationship with the land when they become guardians and protectors of it too. Many climbers have contacted me and expressed their commitment to respecting the cultural heritage and environmental values of the Dyurrite cultural landscape. Many have also told me that they want ongoing consultation to ensure the management of this incredible area meets the needs of the local community, climbers, traditional owners and local small businesses and tourism. I think those opposite can play games and exploit this complex issue for political gain, but this is a challenge that has to be confronted. We cannot avoid it. There are multiple perspectives here, and we have to be honest, listening and consultative in the way we deal with this. Our government is determined to strike the right balance between cultural heritage, local tourism and climbers.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (10:49): This is an important documents motion brought to the chamber by Mr Limbrick, and it relates to the documents surrounding the bans that the state government is implementing at Mount Arapiles and so forth, through the Grampians and beyond. These bans are outrageous. They are poorly formed, they are done in secret and they are done without the transparency and openness that is actually required. I say this documents motion will help remedy that particular point, and it will enable us to examine this much more closely. Climbers are a special group of people. They deserve our support. This is a huge industry for that district; it is a huge part of the district. I become quite irritated about the government’s response here, but the extraordinary decisions of this government to, in secret, close down climbing in this state need to be resisted. The extraordinary performance of Parks Victoria’s CEO at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee was just a shocker. If anyone wants an example of what we are dealing with here, it is pure unadulterated ideology that has gone mad.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (10:50): In the minute and a half I have got I obviously will be supporting this. Public land use is one of the things that I and my party have been on about since we were formed, and that is not just about hunting and motorbiking – mountain climbers and rock climbers need the same protections we do. It just seems that no matter what we do we are forever going backwards in the amount of public land that the public can access. There are questions over the Arapiles changes that just need to be answered. I think, as Mr Davis said, transparency is the point here. I support this motion and, whilst gravity is not my friend when it comes to rock climbing, I support the rock climbers.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Climate change

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (10:51): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that we are in a climate emergency, caused by burning fossil fuels such as coal, gas and oil; and
- (2) condemns the Albanese Labor government for approving 28 new coal and gas projects since coming to power, including three new coalmine expansions in September that will generate more than 1.3 billion tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions in their lifetime.

Over the weekend Rising Tide, one of the biggest civil disobedience exercises ever to take place in Australia, occurred at the Port of Newcastle, the world's largest coal port. Thousands of people came together from all across the country, including my parliamentary colleagues Anasina Gray-Barberio and Ellen Sandell in the other place. They were there to make it clear that they do not support the approval of new coal and gas projects, and nor should anyone who has even the slightest concern for their fellow humans or life on this amazing planet. It was extraordinary to see the New South Wales government's attempts to try and shut this protest down. It is something we are seeing all over the country, including in Victoria. If only these governments put even a fraction of that same effort into shutting down fossil fuel projects rather than protests, if only they applied proportionate consideration to the disruption and threat to safety that is occurring with climate change.

Victorian Labor will say that the approval of coalmines by the federal government is not relevant to them, it is not relevant to this Parliament. They will say it is a federal issue. Well, jeez, that is some leadership right there, isn't it. Why aren't they advocating to their federal colleagues? Surely that is part of the job of a state government. Why aren't they standing up for the Victorian community, who are being ravaged by the effects of climate change again and again, which is a direct result of the decisions being made by their federal counterparts? The thing Labor do not seem to understand is that the atmosphere does not care where the fossil fuels are burnt. Atmospheric physics do not pay any heed to socially constructed geopolitical boundaries. The impacts of climate change are felt everywhere, and Australia and Victoria in particular are going to feel it disproportionately. Our continent and waters are warming faster than the rest of the world, and we are already feeling the consequences.

You will hear members, I am sure, across this chamber try to minimise Australia's contribution to climate change by focusing only on the proportion of emissions we contribute through the burning of fossil fuels on Australian soil. We will hear Labor talking about how they are tackling local emissions and rolling out renewables. Well, that is great – keep going. Yet our country is one of the biggest drivers of climate change globally because we export extraordinary amounts of coal and gas. We are the second-largest exporter of fossil fuel CO₂ emissions in the world. We are the second-largest exporter of coal, the second-largest exporter of gas. Australia is literally fuelling the climate crisis, and instead of recognising this and trying to slow it down the Albanese government keeps approving new coalmines. Just this term, since they were elected, they have approved 28 new coalmines. They approved three coal projects on Tuesday 23 September this year alone: Whitehaven Coal's plan to

extend underground mining for 13 more years until 2044 at its Narrabri mine, MACH Energy's mine at Mount Pleasant was extended until 2048 and Yancoal's Ravensworth mine was extended to 2032. At least two of the mines, Narrabri and Mount Pleasant, will target thermal coal for export and burning in coal plants.

Approving new coal and gas projects is incompatible with bringing down emissions. This is not my opinion; this is scientific reality, and it is a reality that Labor simply refuses to face. This year we have seen at least 15 national temperature records broken across the world. That has meant deadly heatwaves in places like Thailand, the Philippines and India; hurricanes that have decimated entire towns in the US; and flash flooding that has killed hundreds in Kenya. Our Pacific Islands neighbours are facing an existential threat, with sea level rise already occurring, as my colleague Ms Gray-Barberio spoke about so powerfully at the Rising Tide event. That is all just at 1.5 degrees of temperature rise. This year is shaping up to be the hottest on record so far. It is also likely to be the coolest year we will ever experience again. Let that sink in for a second. The UN *Emissions Gap Report* found that current policies put the world on track to 3.1 degrees of warming, a catastrophic, apocalyptic scenario. The United Nations, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and even the International Energy Agency have all said no new fossil fuel projects can possibly be allowed.

You cannot put out a fire by pouring more fuel on it, yet the Albanese Labor government is taking the complete opposite approach to climate action. The Liberals are not spared criticism here. Their deplorable track record on climate change speaks for itself. They love coal and gas and they are not ashamed to show it. Worse than the Liberals, Labor know what they are doing is unforgivable. But they are so cowed by the fossil fuel lobby, so scared of a climate trigger, they will do exactly what Scott Morrison would have done but then offer nonsense excuses or simply try to avoid the debate altogether. I do not actually get any joy from the illogical partisanship that has dogged climate change debate in this country. It should be above politics. It actually has to be above politics if we have got any hope of dealing with it.

Every time a Labor government is elected I, along with so many others, hold out a sliver of hope that maybe we will see genuine climate action, and every time without fail they disappoint. Actually 'disappoint' is not the right word; 'betray' is a better description of what it feels like. In defending the approval of new coal projects Tanya Plibersek said Labor had to make decisions in accordance with the facts and the national environmental law. The facts around climate change are pretty clear and they say we cannot approve any more coalmines. In terms of the law, here is a thought: change the law. They are the government. That is what responsible governments do. Last year Labor rejected the Greens' call for a climate trigger, a bare-minimum demand that climate impacts be considered as part of environmental planning approvals. Now they continue to hold out on negotiations on their nature-positive legislation. You cannot say you are acting on climate change by putting in a few wind farms and absolve yourself from responsibility for emissions that are the result of new coal and gas projects. This is how the whole climate change thing works: you have to stop making new emissions. Let us be clear, the only reason Labor refused to ban new coal and gas projects is because they are beholden to the coal and gas lobby.

Victorian Labor, if you think this is not about you, you would be wrong. As I said before, you have a responsibility to advocate. But let us look at the actions you are taking here. Here in Victoria the Greens obviously disagree with the Allan Labor government's approach to new gas projects. They literally wrote a new bill just to support a brand new gas project offshore the other week. We had that pass through this place. We appreciate that Victorian Labor have done the responsible thing when it comes to our worst climate pollutant and set deadlines for our brown coal power plants, although some in Labor want to undo even that good work by giving coal a lifeline through the joke that is the hydrogen energy supply chain project, which still has not completely been abandoned by them. At least we can applaud the fact that Victoria is on track to reach 95 per cent renewables by 2035. But every time Labor take one step forward on climate action, their approval of new coal and gas projects puts them a hundred steps behind.

Climate change is a collective problem. Addressing it takes collective action. We need people in positions of power at all levels of government, including everyone here in this place, doing everything they can to limit the worst effects of climate change. This is not a slowly, slowly sort of thing. The time for slowly, slowly was 50 years ago. It is too late. This is not the sort of thing we can hand off to the next generation to deal with. It is too late. The window is rapidly closing to limit the most catastrophic effects of climate change, but Labor governments, state and federal, are living in some sort of dreamland where they think that somehow the steady, sensible thing to do is to keep approving new coal and gas projects.

As the eminent climate scientist Joëlle Gergis has said, approving new coal and gas is:

... an intergenerational crime against humanity.

I would urge everyone in this place to think about that and support the motion that is before us.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (11:01): Before us is a motion which seeks to implicitly condemn the Allan Labor government by association with the Albanese government. For me – and those on this side – I simply cannot support it in its current form. We are not here to draw a false equivalence between jurisdictions; we are here to legislate for the Victorian community and do what is best for Victoria and the Victorian people. That is what my constituents in the Northern Metropolitan Region expect from me. They know that there is an open door and that they can come to me with concerns, and I do hear from them about the cost of living, health care, education and what the Victorian government, not the federal government, is doing about climate change. With respect, the Greens need to decide if their purpose in this place is to move stunt motions for cheap social media grabs at the end, or if they are here to meaningfully contribute to the governing of the state.

In fact on this point I have an amendment that I would like to be circulated in the chamber now. It is really a very simple amendment. I move:

1. Omit all words and expressions in paragraph (2) after ‘condemns the’ and replace them with ‘Victorian Greens for wasting this chamber’s time debating the Albanese Labor government’s record on energy investments; and’.
2. After paragraph (2) insert the following:

‘calls on members of the Victorian Greens parliamentary party to continue resigning their seats to run in the next federal election if they are more interested in the federal government.’

It only asks the chamber to remember who we are here to represent: the Victorian people. We continue to support robust debate and disagreement in this place, but we cannot lose focus on our state. It is, after all, the people of Victoria alone who have given us the mandate to legislate in this place. If our amendment is voted up, we will of course support the motion, and if not, the government cannot support it. That is because in its current form it completely erases the bold climate action –

Members interjecting.

Tom McIntosh: On a point of order, Acting President, the member is trying to make a contribution. There are continual remarks being made behind her, which I think is unfair when the contribution is being made. I think the comments being made were being directed at the member and not members talking amongst themselves. If we could continue with the member being able to concentrate on her contribution, that would be good.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Michael Galea): As you can appreciate, it is hard to hear from this end of the room. I will allow the member to continue, without assistance.

Sheena WATT: In its current form the motion completely erases the climate action that our government has taken every day since being elected. It has been my privilege over the last 12 months to serve as the Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Action. During that time I have seen firsthand just how much the Allan Labor government is doing to reduce our state’s emissions, and I see just how detached this motion is from reality. The motion before us cannot even articulate a critique of

Victoria's climate action strategy. This is because this government has done more to tackle climate change than any other government in our state's history.

I am going to take a moment to reinforce some figures that will be familiar to this house, because I have taken the opportunity to repeatedly remind those on the crossbench and those opposite about our outstanding climate action record. I had hoped that others would not need reminding, but it is simply not the case. In 2020 we legislated a target of 15 per cent to 20 per cent emissions reductions. We smashed the goal and got closer to 30 per cent. We have legislated a target of 28 per cent to 33 per cent reductions for next year, and we are clearly already on our way to achieving that. It is all part of our plan to reach net zero emissions by 2045. I just want to highlight that this net zero target was actually brought forward to come sooner than originally planned because Victoria, our state, is performing so strongly when it comes to climate action. Make no mistake that this is a world-leading climate commitment, and we are getting there by pursuing a renewable energy rollout which is the envy of the nation. Since coming to government in 2014 we have tripled the share of power coming from renewable sources, and now 38 per cent of our energy is renewably generated. In fact that is far in excess of our goal of 25 per cent renewable power by 2020. Let me just say we are going further. We have legislated renewable energy targets of 65 per cent by 2030 and 95 per cent by 2035. This means we will have no coal-fired power by 2035. We have done the hard work on this front. We have managed the closures of our dirtiest coal-fired power stations while also taking care of the workers and the communities most affected by the closures.

That is why I am so energised by the State Electricity Commission. I have spoken about it with enormous pride and I am not going to miss an opportunity to speak again about the SEC, because as we transition away from fossil-fuelled energy production here in Victoria, the SEC is securing the renewable energy jobs of the future and investing in local communities. It is expected to create 59,000 jobs, including 6000 apprenticeships, through the renewable energy transition. It is only a few weeks ago that we enshrined the SEC into the Victorian constitution, and it is already creating more jobs for Victorians. Only last week I had the good fortune to join the minister on a visit to the newly completed Melbourne renewable hub in Melton, in Plumpton in fact, and this SEC project has employed over 650 people to date and will store energy enough to power up to 200,000 homes during peak periods. I know and was happy to see that the minister and the Premier visited another SEC project in Horsham, which will power 51,000 homes and create just under 250 jobs, because with the SEC these projects are happening sooner and are bigger than they otherwise would have been. What an enormous achievement that is, and with over 100 companies lining up to partner with the SEC, there are plenty more projects like this to come.

We have offshore wind targets that lead the nation. We have set targets to produce 9 gigawatts of our state's electricity through offshore wind by 2040, and this has the potential to create thousands of jobs and drive billions of dollars of investment in our economy. We are channelling those financial benefits to our renewable energy transition to go right to where they belong – the hip pocket of Victorians. Partly thanks to our state's renewable energy production, Victoria's retail power prices have fallen over the past few years and are now at 2018 levels. That is really important, and I would like to reinforce that again – that is 2018 levels. We have achieved this in the face of a global trend of energy prices increasing in other jurisdictions.

We are also making it easier for Victorians to reduce their household energy consumption through the energy upgrades scheme and Solar Victoria. I spoke about that in the last sitting week, but I will just say that there is so much to be proud of when it comes to our record on climate action in this state. Solar Victoria is one that I would like to point out. Their work particularly supporting Victorians to put the sun to work in their homes is outstanding. I have been so excited to hear from so many constituents recently, encouraging them to take advantage of the rebates for solar panels and household battery storage. It has been enormously popular. There have been over 360,000 installations of solar products in Victoria, and 280,000 of these are with solar photovoltaic products, with 7500 of those

being solar PV installs at rental properties. As a result, we have ensured that the Solar Victoria program has ensured that rooftop solar now has a greater energy generating capacity than Yallourn.

We are going even further. Let me finish off with some red-hot facts that certainly bring me joy. Solar Vic has supported the installation of 16,200 batteries and 30,000 hot water systems, and we have created 5500 jobs in the process. Thirty per cent of those rebates, I have got to tell you, have gone to regional Victorians, and more than half of them have gone to people with an income of less than \$100,000. Climate action is non-negotiable for us on this side, but standing right beside that non-negotiable action is that we do not leave people behind, and that includes the workers. So I am so glad to see that as part of this we have the creation of 59,000 jobs, as well as a suite of supports for those in rental properties and apartments and those on lower incomes. Once the program is complete, let me tell you, it will help Victorians save more than \$500 million per year on their electricity bills. That is a phenomenal number, worth celebrating. Whether it is through the already existing renewable projects like the SEC, the Victorian energy upgrades or Solar Victoria, our government is doing what needs to be done to reach our world-leading emissions targets – that is right, world-leading emissions targets. Those who wrote this motion have not delivered a single megaton of emissions reductions in Victoria, and this motion seeks to distract us with federal policymaking. Our government is seeking meaningful and bold action to combat climate change, and for these reasons I hope that our amendment will be accepted by the chamber.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (11:11): I am pleased to get up and comment on motion 663 from Dr Mansfield. It is a motion that seeks to attack the federal Labor government, and to that extent there is plenty to attack. I am not sure that they have chosen the targets wisely. We all understand the issues that we face with respect to climate change. We have just had the big meeting in Azerbaijan recently, and none of us can be unaware of the significant issues we face and the need to move to a lower carbon environment and to do that in a thoughtful way that does not damage our economy and does not damage our standard of living.

Tom McIntosh interjected.

David DAVIS: You would actually agree with me on all of that, I would have thought.

The attack is on the Albanese Labor government for approving 28 new coal and gas projects since coming to power, including three new mine expansions in September that will generate more than 1.3 billion tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions in their lifetime. Look, overseas interests, other countries, are purchasing fossil fuels to fuel their economies. Obviously there has to be a sensible movement in the position of a range of other countries, and that is partly what Conference of the Parties was talking about – looking at ways of putting in place support for a range of countries across the world who are in a less strong economic position than some of the OECD countries.

I do want to say here though that the Albanese Labor government has a lot to answer for. Airbus Albo is moving around the world having a lot to say, but he has not delivered on the \$270 he said he would cut from energy costs before the election. In fact the prices have surged upwards. Contrary to the contribution of the government speaker, Victorians are actually paying more in this last couple of years under this government in Victoria and nationally, and the impact on household bills has been profound. We saw the St Vincent's work, which was discussed at length in this chamber a couple of weeks ago, and their energy tracker looks at the actual costs, the actual bills that businesses and households pay. Businesses are paying much more. Households are paying much more; households are paying 22 per cent more for gas and 28 per cent more for electricity in Victoria on the most recent figures released by the St Vincent's energy tracker.

We just need to be very clear about what is actually happening here. In Victoria we have now got an insecure energy supply. The state government's decision not to allow exploration for gas has actually had a devastating impact on Victoria's economy. We are actually seeing businesses leave the state now because of the uncertainty of supply and the increased cost of gas. We have got a state government

that has declared war on gas. They have gone to war with gas. That is what they are intending to do: they are intending to block off the use of gas in this state. As to the idea that shifting to electric will in and of itself improve the greenhouse outcome, well, in fact if you moved to electric today you would probably be producing more greenhouse gases than if you used gas today. That is actually the truth in Victoria today. When you flick on your gas hot water or you flick on your gas heating you are actually producing less in terms of greenhouse gas emissions than an electricity supply that still has a very big reliance on brown coal from the Latrobe Valley.

Tom McIntosh: So are you anti brown coal, Mr Davis?

David DAVIS: No, no, I am actually just stating a bald fact. The state government has said they are closing coal in the valley in 2028, the first tranche, and then the last one in 2035. We have asked for documents in this chamber. We have asked for the government's agreements and the government has not provided those, so we do not know on what basis these agreements have been struck to bring forward the closure of these brown coal stations and the impact that that will have. I say the government ought to get on and provide those documents. New South Wales, in an equivalent situation, did provide very detailed documents. That is not the case in Victoria, where they have fought the release of these documents very significantly.

The Albanese Labor government has also botched the process of bringing on a number of renewable options, and we have seen this matched by the misbehaviour and misperformance in Victoria of the current energy minister. We have seen the slippage of outcomes with respect to the Port of Hastings to assemble for offshore wind. The government says they are going to get rid of coal and they are going to replace it with offshore wind and other arrangements, but the truth is that all of the proposed low-emission technologies are intermittent – inherently intermittent.

David Limbrick: Not nuclear.

David DAVIS: No, no, the ones that have been talked about by this government are all inherently intermittent, and they need storage with them. They say they are going to do batteries, but none of the batteries have the scale or the capacity to provide –

David Limbrick: They never will.

David DAVIS: Well, I am not judging future technologies in the more distant future, but I am saying that at the moment they do not have the capacity to deliver the reliability and security that is needed for Victoria's power system. That is the simple fact. Gas will be needed as will firming the electricity network – a source that can be turned on and can be turned off as required. If we get another burst in winter – low wind, low sun – like we saw in June this year, or a longer version of that, we will be in deep trouble. We know that the gas pipelines were going at full bore. The interconnector that runs across the bottom of Queensland was running at 108 per cent of capacity, pumping gas down into Victoria and New South Wales. Because of this state government's war on gas, they have not allowed exploration. There has not been a single new exploration permit granted in Victoria since 2013 – three of them were granted in 2013.

Tom McIntosh: And your moratorium, Mr Davis. You introduced a moratorium when you were in government for that limited space of time.

David DAVIS: And it was a mistake. I would say that the state government kept that going to 2021, but even beyond 2021 they have sent out a signal: 'Don't come to Victoria; don't look for gas.' All of that is actually a key problem that we face.

I want to also point to the fact that in Victoria the situation with the capacity investment scheme has also seen the feds –

Tom McIntosh: He has taken a missed message. He has taken a message mid-speech.

David DAVIS: No, no, I am just wanting to talk about the federal situation, and there is a big failure in the capacity investment scheme. The capacity investment scheme ought to have included gas, and it was Minister Bowen and Minister D'Ambrosio who actually blocked the capacity investment scheme having gas in it. The federal government ought not to have fought against gas in the capacity investment scheme, because to bring on the low-emission technologies that we all see are part of the future, they do need the firming capacity parallel with them. The capacity investment scheme ought to have had gas as part of it, and it was Minister Bowen and Minister D'Ambrosio who blocked gas being on the capacity investment scheme. If people do not agree with me, I invite them to go and read the transcript of the press conference immediately after the energy ministers meeting. You can see a coordinated pile-on by Bowen and particularly by D'Ambrosio as they kicked the proverbial out of gas and indicated that they would not be supporting gas being part of the capacity investment scheme. Now, I note that South Australia has actually brought its own scheme forward in the last week or two. This is actually quite interesting. The South Australian Labor government has recognised that they have got to have support for gas, and a version of a capacity investment scheme, as I say, has been brought forward in the last week. We are in a position as a state where we actually need to be quite clear about our future. We need to have more low-emission technologies, but we need to have the firming and the security and supply to enable households to have what they need and businesses to have what they need.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:21): I also rise to speak on this motion put forward by the Greens. Once again, the Greens have come into this place and pointed the finger at everyone as if they have no responsibility for actions that have happened in Australia in the past around carbon emissions and energy production. I think it is important to look at the history of the Greens and the actions that they have taken historically and are taking now which have actually held back energy production in Australia – indeed have held back low-emissions energy production in Australia.

Let us start with the genesis of the Greens in the first place. They originated from a protest movement which was protesting what? It was protesting renewable energy in Tasmania. That project never went ahead. It was very successful, and they gained lots of support for stopping low-emissions production. Many years later, back in the late 1990s, there was a bill that went through federal Parliament; I think it was in 1998, from memory. The Greens conspired with the Democrats at the time, a party that was in Parliament, to put forward an amendment that would effectively outlaw new nuclear reactors in Australia – again another low-emissions technology which the Greens conspired with others to knock on the head.

Dr Mansfield was slagging off Australia for all our exports of coal and that sort of thing, but I would like to make the point that lots of people attack Australia but Australia does something actually very good for low emissions energy production throughout the world. We export very large amounts of uranium. In fact the electricity produced with Australian uranium produces electricity almost equivalent to Australia's entire energy grid, and that is zero carbon emissions. So through the uranium exports we are effectively offsetting already our entire electricity grid, but for some reason we are not allowed to use that same technology in Australia. I do not know why. It certainly has got nothing to do with science. It must be more to do with religious reasons, I think. Now the Greens have the cheek 20 years later to say it is too late – it is 20 years too late – even though they were responsible for putting the kibosh on this in the first place.

Then Dr Mansfield mentioned the hydrogen energy supply chain project that has been proposed in eastern Victoria by a Japanese consortium. I paid very close attention to this. I am very supportive of this, and I will be very disappointed if the government caves in to these extremists. They are sequestering all of the carbon in this project. It is a zero-emissions project. It is exporting hydrogen using effectively a stranded asset that Victoria will not use, which is brown coal. It will sequester the carbon and export the hydrogen back to Japan. I have been paying very close attention to what Japan is doing in technology for many years because of my connections to Japan. What they want to do with hydrogen is set off a huge hydrogen economy within Japan. But they need to pump prime that with a

large supply to begin. They are not planning on using brown coal forever to produce hydrogen. Actually what they want to do is use nuclear technology to do it, but in the meantime they are going to try and export it from Australia. I really urge the Victorian government to show more support for this project, because it is groundbreaking technology. It will lead to jobs and economic input in Victoria, and it will strengthen the relationship between Australia and Japan.

As anyone that studies decarbonisation will know, there are many industries that just simply cannot electrify. A good example is steel smelting, another one is cement production. These are very, very difficult to decarbonise. Japan wants to use hydrogen to decarbonise these industries. There are already test plants being planned for producing steel. Rather than using metallurgical coal they can use hydrogen. Similarly, there are ways of producing cement. For many other industries that simply cannot electrify, they are planning on switching them to hydrogen. But Japan needs to secure a large hydrogen supply to kick off that process. It is a quite a unique opportunity that we are presented with here, and indeed the Japanese have scoured the entire world looking for this type of thing. To simply oppose that because of a religious belief that says ‘We cannot use brown coal’ is absolute madness. What the Japanese are planning in Victoria is wonderful and should be supported by all Victorians, whether or not they care about climate change and whether taxes and stuff can change the weather.

I will note another thing Victoria does that is excellent. There was quite a surprise recently when it was discovered that uranium produced in Victoria was being used in the United States to produce, again, zero-carbon energy. We are very lucky in Victoria that we have these wonderful things called mineral sands. We are exporting them around the world. They are very highly strategically valued, because China for a long time has had a stranglehold on this market. There was a strategic priority by the last federal government to prioritise mineral sands developments. With the mineral sands that are being exported, the primary material that they are trying to get from them mostly is an element called neodymium. Ironically, guess what neodymium is used for? It is used for making magnets in wind turbines and electric cars to support the renewables industry, because we need neodymium.

A by-product of these mineral sands, something that just happens to be in the ground with it, is also other stuff, like uranium. The Americans, not wanting to waste the uranium, are processing it and are going to use it for peaceful purposes in nuclear reactors in the United States. Australia, due to our reluctance and our anti-science, this religious belief against nuclear technology, is being left behind. It is so embarrassing for Australia that the UK government was shocked and did not even realise that Australia had prohibited nuclear energy. They could not believe that we were so backwards to not consider this, because every other major developed nation is looking at this, including Japan, who some people want to hamper by stopping this Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project. We must embrace new technologies. This includes nuclear technology, but it also includes, and we need to look at, mineral sands. We need to look at what they are doing with coal to hydrogen; it is an amazing technology.

We need to embrace these technologies and not stand in their way like what the Greens want to do all the time. They think that you can just power everything with wind and solar – we can make ourselves perpetually dependant on China, for ever, perpetually renewing everything that we have to rebuild every 10, 20, 30 years. This is a dangerous thing for us to do. They used to talk – in fact I had a debate one on one with Adam Bandt about this a few years ago – about pumped hydro, saying ‘This is the way that we’re going to store the energy’ and this sort of thing. Of course when people started looking at the analysis of it, and there are lots of pumped hydro sites in Victoria, what it involved was flooding national parks and forests in Victoria, with salt water in some cases. I do not think anyone is going to be supporting that, let alone the Greens, so that is not going to happen. The batteries are good. They are pretty cool; they have pretty big capacity. They are not going to be utility-scale to power the state for the entire day, like we saw yesterday when it was 90 per cent powered by coal. It was not windy; it was pretty cloudy. Renewables were not doing their job yesterday. We are going to have to look at other things to supplement them, and that means gas. The integrated system plan – there is nothing in there saying that we are going to get rid of gas.

We are going to have gas well into the future, and the reason that we need large amounts of gas is because of what we are doing by making ourselves perpetually dependent on Chinese renewables. I will be opposing this motion. I urge the federal government to come up with more of these projects for energy. We must put Australia first and stop strangling our ability to produce energy in this country. We are lucky that we have all these resources and yet we tie our hands behind our backs because of foreign global masters that seem to dictate every move that we make. We have got to stand on our own feet, embrace technology and move forward.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (11:30): I speak on the Greens' motion in relation to oil and gas and the federal government. I must admit my eyebrows raised when I read the motion. To say I was surprised by the Victorian Greens putting forward this particular motion is a bit of an understatement. It is difficult to fathom why the Victorian Greens are using the time and resources of the Victorian Parliament, using their general business slot, to discuss the Albanese government. I presume they are aware that the federal government is also sitting this week in Canberra, not in Spring Street, and if they really want to deal with federal issues, perhaps they ought to explain why their federal counterparts – the federal Greens – knocked off Labor's carbon pollution reduction scheme (CPRS) in 2009.

Now, I am going to go into the effects of this. It is a question that has been raised repeatedly over the last 15 years. You could even say that it haunts the Greens to this day. Fifteen years ago they joined with the federal coalition to oppose a policy that, if it had been implemented in 2009, would have set a national cap and a trade emissions trading scheme. It was designed to reduce Australia's greenhouse gas emissions by setting up a cap on emissions and allowing businesses to trade emissions permits. It was to provide incentives for business to reduce emissions and invest in clean energy technologies. Just imagine where Australia would be today if that policy had gone ahead. It would have formed the early foundations of a national response to dealing –

Tom McIntosh: On a point of order, President, I raised during another member's contribution that if members are making a contribution, they can do so without a running commentary, particularly when it is perhaps out of earshot. The members of the Greens are sitting here making a running commentary while the member is trying to make a contribution. I think if the member could do it in peace and some silence, it would be good.

The PRESIDENT: My hearing must be pretty bad from all that drilling when I was an electrician. I could not hear anything. Actually, I thought the chamber was quite calm compared to other places, but I will remind members that interjections are unruly.

Jacinta ERMACORA: The CPRS would have formed the early foundations of a national response to dealing with climate change in 2009; instead it was scuttled by the federal coalition and the Greens. Imagine how much easier it would have been for state governments across Australia to further implement environmental policies on the back of national investment and business incentives. Despite this, despite the subsequent decade of the Liberal government doing nothing on the climate crisis, this Victorian Labor government has taken the national lead in tackling climate change. To use a racing analogy, the Greens are telling us to saddle up the horse, but I can tell you we are well and truly in the race.

Today I think it is far more appropriate to talk about what the Labor government has done in Victoria in this Victorian Parliament over the past decade to deal with the climate emergency. Victorian Labor has done more to tackle climate change than any other government in this state's history. We have cut emissions at the fastest rate in the country, amongst the fastest in the world. We have exceeded the 2020 emissions targets, and we are already within the range of our 2025 emissions target. With Labor, Victoria has more than tripled the share of power coming from renewable energy since 2014 – it is now 38 per cent. We have done the hard work of managing the closure of our dirtiest coal-fired power stations, with care for the workers and communities that are affected. With Labor, Victoria has legislated renewable energy targets and is putting us on track to have no more coal-fired power by

2035. Under Labor we have enshrined the banning of fracking in the constitution. We are the first state to release the *Gas Substitution Roadmap*. Federal Labor have implemented offshore wind targets. These targets will bring online significant contributions around the nation. The Victorian government are not going to waste the next decade delaying better energy outcomes for Victoria. To this end, Victoria is the nation's leader in large battery storage. Battery storage technology is strengthening the grid and making storage cheaper for clean renewable energy when it is most needed.

Just last month it was awesome to visit the Terang big battery in the south-west with the Minister for Energy and Resources Lily D'Ambrosio. This project will act as a battery but also has a grid firming function as well, which is exactly what Mr Davis is concerned about, so I am sure he will be thrilled with the news that that capability is right there. This was made possible through a \$7 million investment as part of round 2 of the Labor government's Energy Innovation Fund. The project will include 38 inverters and 48 battery containers and create up to 150 jobs during construction.

Victorian Labor has reestablished the SEC. Just last week I was delighted – I could not join, because I was sick actually – Premier Jacinta Allan was in Horsham to announce that the Victorian government will build an enormous solar and battery farm and that it will power more than 50,000 homes. For the record, it is the first state government owned energy project since the electricity grid was privatised in the 1990s. The SEC will retain 100 per cent ownership of this park, with the *Guardian* on 20 November putting it better than I could:

This is a big moment – a big moment for the generation of renewable energy in our state, but also a big moment in terms of putting power back into the hands of the Victorian community [and putting] people ahead of profits.

I could not have said that better myself.

Putting Victorians first, we have actively helped Victorians to reduce their energy bills. We have helped more than 360,000 Victorians receive rebated solar panels, electric hot water systems and batteries. Cleaner, cheaper energy is also creating jobs across our state, and I could go on. Our extensive record of achievements in this critical area speaks for itself, so we will not be lectured by the Greens in this chamber, in this Victorian Parliament, about what Victorian Labor has actually achieved for all Victorians in the energy sector. We do not just talk. We do not block. We do not spend time politicising the federal government and what they are doing. We are getting on with the work of achieving clean and cheaper energy.

In closing, I would like to condemn the Victorian Greens for wasting this chamber's time debating the Albanese government's record on energy investments, and I call on the members of the Victorian Greens parliamentary party to continue resigning from their seats to run for federal election if they are more interested in federal government policy.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (11:39): I am pleased to rise to add my voice to the discussion of the Greens motion today, and we have heard many and varied contributions so far. I would like to start with a comment that Dr Mansfield made – I was listening to it in my office. She started off on atmospheric CO₂ and how it does not recognise where that CO₂ comes from. She spoke about the physics of it, and indeed this is most true: some of the largest clouds of CO₂ that are emitted, in relation to this important issue, happen to be from bushfires, out-of-control bushfires. To that point, we know over the last decades the number of bushfires that have been occurring. Of course they have been occurring in the landscape for millennia. They were occurring when our traditional owners used to burn to manage the bush, to manage the forest, but over periods of time there have been lightning strikes and bushfires. There was the 1939 fire – you could go on – the 1983 fire, 2003, 2006 and, tragically, 2009 and the black summer bushfires. Indeed the bushfire cooperative research centre estimated that CO₂ emissions from the Black Saturday bushfires were up to 165 million tonnes, noting – and this has come from the bushfire cooperative research centre – that the total annual emissions of that time were about 330 million tonnes. Therefore bushfires are significantly adding to

the atmospheric carbon dioxide, that the world, as Dr Mansfield said, does not recognise or know where it has come from.

Bushfires are a huge contributor. What does this government do? This government takes away an industry that supported the mitigation and provided the implementation, the machinery and the expertise to mitigate bushfires. It is also regularly not adhering to the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission which had in relation to the number of preparatory burns and the hectares of preparatory burns a 5 per cent rolling target across the public estate, and it is now somewhere down around 1 per cent. We know that as part of that contribution, which is not in this debate, over 3 billion flora and fauna died in the process. So, no, atmospheric carbon dioxide does not recognise where it comes from, but it certainly comes from out-of-control bushfires and the neglectful, wilful, ideological policies of a Labor Party that is trying to out-green the Greens. That is the point I would like to cover off with.

In relation to climate change and climate action, I know and I hear and I respect that many Victorians want more work done on climate action. Indeed both the coalition in the federal space previously and all governments are lending their ears and their eyes to this. What I do know is that there is great tension in the federal Labor government under Mr Albanese, between Mr Bowen and Ms Plibersek, in relation to renewables and also with this government's Minister D'Ambrosio. There is a huge tension, because in the transition to renewables neither of those federal or state governments have got their act together. They cannot decide where the renewable energy terminal is going to go. Minister D'Ambrosio said, 'Let's put it at Hastings,' but then Plibersek blocked that. They have not had the discussion, they have not done the homework and their timeline for net zero is going to be blown out well and truly because of this incapacity to get it organised. What will happen with that of course is that jobs will go to Bell Bay, potentially, in Tasmania. They could go to New South Wales, and it could be a raving disaster.

What we also know and have heard before is that, yes, in 2017 Hazelwood shut, Yallourn is slated for 2028, Loy Yang A 2032 to 2035 – it has been pushed out – and Loy Yang B sometime after that. We heard today very much from speakers on the government benches about the SEC. What a disgrace it is. We heard again government members talking about the SEC, and where did they talk about it? They talked about it in Melton and they talked about way it over there in Hamilton. I want to congratulate my colleague Emma Kealy for doing an amazing job of calling out the government and the Premier on particular issue in her electorate at Horsham. What happened was there was one person employed in the SEC hub in Morwell. That is right, one person. All hail to that person. The Premier at the time said the SEC would be brought back to Morwell and would create 59,000 jobs. This government was weaponising this issue to grab votes. We also heard back in the day, and I have spoken many times on this issue, about the Latrobe Valley Authority. Now it is in a little backroom corner. It is going to be absorbed into Regional Development Victoria, and out goes that thought bubble.

What we want to see here on this side is action on climate change. We want to see affordable, dispatchable, reliable – I would like to say 'cheap' but nowadays it is almost impossible to say it is cheap. The other day I was travelling in my beautiful Eastern Victoria electorate, and I was coming past the wind turbines on the western side of Wonthaggi. It was a nice day. The sun was out, so all fair and well for solar. There was not a breath of wind. We all know that –

David Davis: I tell you what, Kilcunda is one of the windiest places in the world.

Melina BATH: It is, so it was a bit surprising. Kilcunda is a windy place. It is a beautiful place, but there was no wind. At any time, solar and wind turbines have intermittent capacity, and we need stability in the system.

The other point that I would like to pick up – it was a point raised by Mr Limbrick, and I often raise it in this place – is the importance of being technology neutral and making sure there is a reduction in CO₂ emissions. One of those ways is carbon capture and storage. One of those ways is actually using the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain, and I want to thank the Latrobe City Council for again putting

their impetus to the government and sharing their vision of the importance of the opportunity of having HESC. Not only that, I know my colleague Martin Cameron, member for Morwell, has been with a delegation recently to Japan, and they are champing at the bit to enable world-leading hydrogen technology in our region as well.

Nothing is the silver bullet. Everything needs to be done in context. This government has been failing on its targets. We have spoken a great deal about gas. Gas is just a disaster in this state. You are cutting gas out. There is legislation where regulators can remove the opportunity of plumbers to replace them in homes. We have seen many of our economists and leaders speaking about the danger if we keep cutting gas. Gas needs to be part of that peaking opportunity, part of that transition. This government has, as Mr Davis has said, had a war on gas. It is nonsensical. Gas needs to be part of the solution as we move to decarbonise in this state. I just think, unfortunately, the Greens once again have got the wrong bull by the wrong horns.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (11:49): It is not too often I briefly agree with my colleague from Eastern Victoria Ms Bath, but I do on that last point: the Greens have absolutely got the wrong bull by the wrong horns on this one. I always look to take the opportunity to talk to action on climate change and the work we do on energy in this state, but I also generally like to talk about the work that we are doing in this state for people of this state and the contribution that we are making to reducing emissions worldwide. I am very proud of the fact that this government, this state, this jurisdiction, has been a world leader. When you look at our 2035 reduction targets on emissions – world-leading, particularly when you think of where we are starting from. Our state has been blessed, has been fortunate, with natural resources. We have had economic advantage that we have used in the last century, whether it be for manufacturing or various other businesses, government or whatever. We have had energy there that we have used. Of course those opposite scrapped the auto industry and other massive industries that we saw from last century that are now gone, but this government has got on with ensuring that we have the power for this state – affordable, dependable, reliable power that will take us for decades and into the end of this century and beyond. I am incredibly, incredibly proud of that, whether it is the work we have done in home efficiency, whether it is the work we have done in energy generation on people's roofs with solar, whether it is wind and the work we are now doing in offshore wind, whether it is in transport or whether it is the many policy areas that we are working on to reduce our emissions across our state.

I think while it is a massive task it is one that we are getting on with and we are delivering on. Year by year we are making our way towards our goals, and we are ahead of our interim goals. The fact that in this state we are generating over 40 per cent of our electricity from renewables is sensational, something you will never hear those opposite acknowledge and something you will rarely hear the Greens acknowledge. We are over 40 per cent off our peak of emissions – again, another incredible achievement for a state that has traditionally and historically been a high-emissions state, one of intensive emissions with our brown coal.

But it is good to hear the Greens talking about climate. I do not think we have heard it much recently – definitely not this year. The Greens have pivoted as a party. They have been playing in a lot of spaces. The early members of the Greens, those that were environmental activists and people who came together not under political motivations but under outcome motivations – there are fewer and fewer of those in the Greens political party today. I think with a federal election looming we see the Greens not only listening to probably internal polling but listening to results across New South Wales, ACT and Queensland elections and Victorian local government elections, and they are seeing that people do not like what they are putting on the table. If you want to get as close as you can get to the worst of American politics, it is the Greens political party. They are radical in their actions, in their divisiveness and in what they are doing, and it is dangerous to the underpinning of democracy in this nation and in this state. It is incredibly dangerous. Democracy is something that we should never take for granted. Democracy is something that we all come to every day and work towards. Although we are in different parties – or independents, crossbenchers or what have you – we all have to come together for the best

interests of everybody in our state, with our different ideas, and get on and govern for everyone. The problem is when you have intolerance, when you have divisiveness and – I think worst of all – when you have arrogance, you get really, really bad outcomes. When you do not listen to other people, when you do not listen to community, when you do not take in the thoughts, the beliefs and the ideas of all of your community and when you just wipe some aside as being stupid or you wipe them aside as being not relevant, that is not governing for all. In doing that we risk our incredible example of democracy.

I think what we have seen this year with attacks on MP offices, what we have seen with the Labor state conference, for example, with so many people ambushing it and trying to knock doors down, is complete intolerance. It is violence; it is aggression. I am proud of the fact that I am in a party where for our conference we come together and we discuss and debate ideas. Journalists are welcome. People from the public are welcome. It is televised. The Greens do it behind closed doors. We know a behind-closed-doors mentality leads to really bad outcomes. It leads to bad behaviours, and I will not go into this. It happens across all parties, all commercials, all unions. You have people who act inappropriately, but you have got to shine a light on it, and you have got to get it out. The Greens' culture of being perfect, of everyone else being wrong and of them being intolerant and morally superior leads to behaviours not being identified within their own party. We have seen those behaviours play out around the nation, whether it be with their MPs or whether it be within their organisation. Every organisation is going to have issues, but you have to acknowledge those. The Greens have not done that, and they are paying the price. We saw it play out a number of years ago in Cooper, where their branch membership tore themselves apart. We are seeing it happening now in Jagajaga, where there are resignations en masse.

It is politicking, and I think what we are seeing here today is blatant politicking. We are approaching a federal election, and we are standing here debating the actions of the federal government. I have no problem debating these issues as and where they are relevant to the state. I have no problem with any political party coming to this place with positions of policy, with ideas. Bring it to this place and let us debate what you want to see implemented in this state. Let us not see this place used for cheap politics that the community not only in Victoria but nationwide are absolutely waking up to with the Greens political party.

I actually wonder whether this motion was written by the former Greens member for Northern Metropolitan before she left the building to start her federal campaign – one that felt like it started some time before she left – rather than having us debate something on one of the many climate-related policies that we have here, whether it is electrification of our buses, whether it is the 600-megawatt auctions we have done for the energy that provides government its power, whether it is the 9 gigawatts that we are looking to establish in offshore wind to power this state, whether it is supporting Victorians to save money and electrify their homes, whether it is the 40-plus per cent reduction in emissions in what was traditionally a heavily carbonised economy or whether it is the 40-plus per cent renewable energy generation that comes into our grid that we should absolutely celebrate and that is growing every year. In 11 years we will have 95 per cent renewable energy.

That is a plan to deliver emission reductions in Victoria that we can all be proud of. We can go out to the rest of the world and say, 'We are doing our bit; we implore you to get on with doing your bit.' We are working with industry. As government, we are setting goals for our people in Victoria, and people are clear, and that is what we should be celebrating – not sitting here debating federal politics.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Drug detection dogs

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:00): (757) My question today is to Ms Georgie Purcell, member for Northern Victoria, and it relates to notice of motion 756, relating to

a ban on sniffer dogs. I ask: when will you move this motion, given the urgency of this matter? I ask this because the motion calls for the end of the use of sniffer dogs at festivals and to let the doggies be doggies, a sentiment that I and my crossbench colleagues wholeheartedly support. Given that we know that the use of sniffer dogs at festivals puts people at risk and that this will be happening at the same time we are finally getting pill testing, it is totally illogical that inside a festival people will be able to receive harm reduction information and have their pills tested, but only if they run the gauntlet past the dogs or decide to take all their drugs at once to avoid the dogs. This issue is a critical issue which needs to be debated by this chamber. So with regard to timing, when are you bringing on this motion? Surely the time is now.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I will call Ms Purcell, but I will just note that under standing order 8.01(b) a member can ask another member about an item on the notice paper. There have been previous rulings that the answers be contained to the timing and so forth, but I do not think we have ever had a question that has actually extended. Next time I go to a presiding officers nerd fest, this might be a great opportunity to speak about something new. I am taking into account, Ms Purcell, there was an extended preamble added to the actual question.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:01): This is a little bit scary; I do not know how ministers do it. I thank the member for his question and for his interest in my motion. In my opinion, the time for this motion is right now. It is urgent with pill testing set to be in place over summer and with the risk of mixing a crime response with a health-based response. But we are in the last sitting week of the year and there is no opportunity to bring this motion forward for debate, so I hope that we can address it as early as possible on the Parliament's return. Unfortunately, the reality is that the festival season will be almost over. I know that all of the progressive crossbench is really keen to debate this motion and to talk about the issue. A shout-out to the pingers crew, Rachel and Aiv.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:02): Thank you for that response. I absolutely agree. Specifically with regard to timing, I ask: are you prepared to collaborate with me to ensure that this motion is debated before the end of this summer? It is so important that we get the opportunity to hear the thoughts of all members and particularly the government as to how this dangerous practice can be banned. This chamber will not be sitting while the festivals are occurring. People will be forced to run the gauntlet to make it to the drug-checking services. I would love to work with you to progress this motion and this issue.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I could hardly hear Mr Puglielli.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:03): I thank the member for his supplementary question. My response is: absolutely, bestie. Always happy to collab with you.

Prisoner access to health care

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:04): (758) My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Minister, how is granting convicted killer Alicia Schiller leave to receive IVF treatment reasonable?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:04): I thank Ms Crozier for her question and her interest in our adult corrections system. I want to express my concerns as well in relation to the reports that were raised today, and I should note that people should not necessarily believe everything they read, especially in relation to the details around these matters. I do want to extend my deepest sympathies in particular to the family and loved ones of the victim. Ms Crozier would be well aware that I cannot go into individual prisoners' health issues in this place. It is not my practice to go into individual health matters because there are privacy laws around what we can and cannot discuss about individual prisoners, especially in a situation where prisoners have been named. What I will say is that when it comes to

fertility treatments it would be my expectation that the welfare of any potential child would be front and centre of those considerations for healthcare providers. As the corrections minister, we are obliged to provide healthcare support, and that is reflective of a modern healthcare system.

In relation to what treatments and whether they are appropriate or necessary, there has been a court case in relation to IVF treatment. There is a 2010 case in which the Supreme Court determined that this is a medical treatment that is necessary and an essential medical treatment. So there is a court case, and I point that out to Ms Crozier, the case of *Castles* in 2010. You can go and search for it, if you like, online. That case gives insight into the court's decision-making about the appropriateness of these matters. But with health treatment in particular these are not simple questions in terms of what is appropriate. They are medical questions in many regards. As the corrections minister, we obviously provide transportation to people to access medical care as needed, but in terms of whether that medical care is needed or appropriate is a medical question, and there are ethical questions there that medical experts need to answer. Obviously from my perspective I think I share many of the community's concerns, and I have had a lot of people respond to me about this issue. I will say that I also share some of those concerns, but they are really ethical, medical questions that need to be answered by health professionals. The court case says Corrections Victoria has an obligation to provide access to health care, in particular for IVF. That is a specific case that I would point you to.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:06): Minister, thank you for your response. Minister, there is a staff shortage at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre that has seen rolling lockdowns of inmates, so I ask: can you guarantee there will be no additional lockdowns to provide staff to escort a convicted killer to get IVF treatment?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:07): I thank Ms Crozier for her supplementary question. In relation to the lockdowns at Dame Phyllis Frost I can say that we actually have a very strong complement of staff at Dame Phyllis Frost. We have a system that is designed to accommodate up to 600 prisoners at Dame Phyllis Frost, and currently we have under 300 at that facility. In relation to those lockdowns I want to take this opportunity to thank the staff, who do an amazing job to make sure that the facility is secure and maintain everyone's safety. Lockdowns for people in custody can be quite difficult. Corrections recently did receive feedback about these lockdowns, and I can say that there was a rostering issue that Corrections Victoria and the department of justice are working to resolve. It is a complex system, and from time to time mistakes are made and issues do arise. I have made it clear to the department that I expect the issues to be resolved with the rostering at Dame Phyllis Frost, because we have a strong complement of staff there.

Ministers statements: child protection

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:08): I am disappointed that the shadow minister who was in the gallery left before I could provide this important update to the house in relation to the Family Services Symposium. I rise to inform the house about the important work being done in the family services sector. I recently had the privilege of opening the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare's second Family Services Symposium. The symposium brings together family services practitioners, leaders and partners across the community sector to share knowledge and ideas and celebrate the great work being done. One of the highlights of the day was the involvement of parents who are part of the centre's lived experience design project. The project brings together parents with lived experience of child protection, with the understanding that by sharing their experiences service design and practice will be better informed. It does this by engaging in deep listening and collaborating and is based on co-design principles and frameworks. This work is so important because we know how powerful the contribution of those with lived experience is and that we can change the lives of vulnerable children and families because of projects like these.

I also take the opportunity to acknowledge the Aboriginal community controlled organisations in attendance at the symposium, including the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency, who had one of their senior practitioners on a panel outlining what keeps them motivated in their vital work every day. When it comes those opposite, we know what motivates their work. They do not make an effort to engage with ACCOs or have genuine concern for children and young people. They only play politics. In fact as my colleague the Minister for Mental Health highlighted earlier this year, Ms Crozier's preferred engagement with an ACCO is to film them from afar. Regarding this event, I would like to acknowledge Deb Tsorbaris and the centre for their ongoing commitment and dedication to the sector and for facilitating another great event. To all the family services practitioners and leaders, thank you for the role you play in making a difference to the lives of vulnerable children and families across our state. Maybe we will see those opposite attending next year.

Great forest national park

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (12:10): (759) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Environment in the other place. Yesterday a former Nationals staffer wrote in the newspaper that the great forest national park is a done deal, locking up 300,000 hectares of Victoria's Central Highlands to protect the Leadbeater's possum. My question to the minister is: is this true?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (12:10): I thank Mr Bourman for his ongoing interest in this matter, and I will refer it to the Minister for Environment.

Aboriginal children in care

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:10): (760) My question is to the Minister for Children. Minister, since 2018 the number of Aboriginal children removed and placed in out-of-home care has increased by 27 per cent. Under the Allan Labor government Victoria has the highest removal rate in Australia of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care, a greater rate than during the stolen generation. Why does the Allan Labor government continue to remove the greatest number of Aboriginal children from their homes in the country?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:11): I thank Ms Crozier for her question. Could I also start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered here today, as we do at the start of every day, which is just so important. The over-representation of Aboriginal young people in out-of-home care right across Australia is completely unacceptable. I have said that here before, and I have apologised for that at the Yoorrook Justice Commission. It is why this government is doing more than any previous government to address the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care but also to empower Aboriginal-controlled organisations – like VACCA, like BDAC, like so many others – to have a self-determined, Aboriginal-led approach to children who may need both the early intervention family services within the family services part of my portfolio but also the child protection services.

Ms Crozier, you were in the house last night when I did have the opportunity – despite the number of times that you denied me the opportunity – both to incorporate the letter from Aunty Muriel Bamblett and to table the letter from Aunty Muriel Bamblett. Last year we had the debate in this chamber, which I was very pleased to work with Dr Bach on, because he was absolutely committed. As Aunty Muriel said in that letter that I had the opportunity to read into the *Hansard* last night in the adjournment debate, Dr Bach and the government and the Greens and other minor parties in this place worked collaboratively together to pass the changes which ensure that we provide Aboriginal people with the opportunity –

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Excuse me, Ms Crozier, would you like an answer to your question, or would you just like to continue interjecting?

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Ms Crozier, I cannot answer your question if you are yelling.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The minister to continue, in silence.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Thank you, President. As I was going on to explain –

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, I ask you to bring the minister back to answering the question, which is: why is the Allan government continuing to remove the greatest number of Aboriginal children from their homes in the country? I would ask you to bring the minister back to answering that very specific question.

The PRESIDENT: I believe the minister was relevant to the question.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: Without interruption, I was seeking to explain to the house the changes that we made last year in relation to the legislation which empowered Aboriginal organisations to work directly with families to both investigate matters that might relate to a child protection matter and also then to case manage those children. That is actually, as Auntie Muriel’s letter pointed out – and if you had actually listened to it rather than continually yelling into the microphone ‘I don’t care’ last night –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! It is unruly to point across the chamber.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: It was very upsetting and distressing last night that, when I was reading Auntie Muriel’s letter, Ms Crozier just kept yelling at me, ‘I don’t care,’ yet here we are today with a further question trying to prove otherwise.

Melina Bath: On a point of order, President, I was in the house when the minister was responding at the end of the adjournment. She may be inadvertently misleading the house, because there was silence while she was presenting her information.

The PRESIDENT: That is not a point of order.

Michael Galea: On a further point of order, President, I was also in the house, and I distinctly heard Ms Crozier say multiple times, ‘I don’t care.’

The PRESIDENT: That is not a point of order. There are a couple of recourses around for people if they want to debate that in future parliaments.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: With 8 seconds I would simply point out to the house that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children we have the highest rate of children living with Indigenous or non-Indigenous relatives or kin of any other place in the country.

Members interjecting.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:15): Yes, here I am, and I am going to ask the minister another question. For those backbenchers, this is an important issue. The commissioner for Aboriginal children and young –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Can we reset the clock with 5 seconds. Ms Crozier, without assistance.

Georgie CROZIER: Minister, the commissioner for Aboriginal children and young people Meena Singh, a Yorta Yorta woman, has said:

Despite Yoorrook’s focus on Aboriginal children and young people in hearings and in recommendations, that focus is virtually absent in the government’s response ...

Why do vulnerable Aboriginal children and young people continue to suffer under this arrogant 10-year-old Labor government?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:16): It is a little unclear, Ms Crozier, from your question whether you are referring to the whole-of-government response to the Yoorrook Justice Commission or whether you are asking a more narrow, specific question about child protection specifically. As I was previously saying, we have invested more in improving the opportunities for there to be self-determined Aboriginal-led decision-making and investigations when it comes to children in out-of-home care who are Aboriginal. This, as Auntie Muriel says in her letter, which I had the opportunity to read into *Hansard* last night, is getting results. I was really pleased that last year these issues were not being denigrated in this kind of political grandstanding and that we had bipartisan support for that work, as demonstrated by Dr Bach taking the opportunity to visit VACCA and work with VACCA. I would again remind the house that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, we have the highest rate of Aboriginal children living with kin or other Indigenous caregivers, which is above 80 per cent. You can find that in the AIHW data.

Ministers statements: housing

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:17): In the last financial year the Allan Labor government has added nearly 3000 new social homes to the inventory across the state. That is the highest number in the last 10 years. As part of the \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build, 10,000 homes are now completed or underway, with nearly 5000 households getting ready to move in or moved in already. We announced the regions where the first 1000 homes will also be built as part of the \$1 billion Regional Housing Fund, and work has begun, with at least 180 new and upgraded homes already being completed, including 50 transitional housing homes to rapidly house people experiencing homelessness. We have also upgraded more than 130 homes.

But while we build, others block. It is the obligation of government at all levels to build more homes for those Victorians who need them most, and the Allan Labor government is holding up our end of the bargain. The Greens, however, in the Darebin, Merri-bek and Yarra councils are all on the record voting against social housing developments that now house thousands of vulnerable Victorians. The Greens-dominated council in Darebin led a vote against the development of new social housing at the Huttonham estate; we built 68 homes. They also delayed the Oakover Road development by 12 months; we built 99 social homes and 197 market homes. The Greens Merri-bek council opposed a development at Harvest Square, which has delivered 119 social homes, many for women and children at risk of homelessness, and 79 market homes. The member for Richmond, as the mayor, voted against building social and affordable homes in Yarra, declaring that the town hall precinct was not the site for it – in other words, ‘not in my backyard’. And let us not forget Markham estate in Ashburton. It went through the entire planning process, only for the Greens to team up with the Liberals to revoke it in Parliament. There we built 111 social homes and 67 affordable homes.

Teaming up again at a federal level, the Greens and the coalition worked together to delay the Housing Australia Future Fund. It was happening, again, until just this week, when the Greens decided that suddenly housing was an important issue and decided to side with the Albanese government’s investment in – (*Time expired*)

Gold prospecting

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:19): (761) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Energy and Resources in the other place. In recent days the popular YouTube channel OzGeology published a video highlighting the challenges that Victorian prospectors are facing understanding section 7 exemptions under the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990. In the two videos that were published, it was explained that many prospectors have been inadvertently breaching the law by prospecting in restricted areas, even if they are on their

own land. This has led to furious debate on prospecting forums and a flurry of posts seeking more information. The original video also noted that they had contacted the department via phone with no clarity provided, and several emails seeking clarity went unanswered. Can the minister explain the reasons for the expanded section 7 restrictions to land use and clarify whether this also covers private land?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:20): I thank Mr Limbrick for his question. It is not a publication I am familiar with, but I am sure that Minister D’Ambrosio will be. I am happy to pass that on for a written response in accordance with the standing orders.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:20): I thank the minister for passing that on. I can assure you that there are very, very many enthusiastic prospectors in Victoria. Many Victorians are concerned about land use restrictions that have already occurred and the prospect of further restrictions in the future. In the videos I mentioned they also referred to someone who was fined nearly \$20,000 due to prospecting on their own land. The more things change the more they stay the same. Next week will be the 170th anniversary of the Eureka Stockade. Are we back at sending the authorities of the state after people digging up a few pebbles of gold? The other concern from this community, which is apparent if you go on any of the various forums, is that information is not clear for prospectors. Will the minister consider reviewing public information provided for prospectors so that none get caught out accidentally breaching laws that they were unaware of?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:21): Thank you, Mr Limbrick. I will pass your supplementary question on to the minister.

Emergency management

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:21): (762) My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. On 9 June 2023 the deputy secretary of Emergency Management Victoria said:

... as recently as last week, have now gone out to market to bring on a delivery partner for the delivery of the next-generation CAD system.

On 20 November 2024, just last week, the old CAD system broke down, forcing operators to use pen and pencil. The next day the deputy secretary of emergency management again told the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee:

We are now very close to appointing that vendor, and we expect for that to be in the coming weeks – that we are able to announce the appointment of the vendor.

With fire season starting this week, when can Victorians expect the new call and dispatch system?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:22): I thank Mr Mulholland for his question. We refer to the C-A-D system as the CAD system. As you have outlined, we have been out for tender for delivery agencies and development of a next-generation CAD. The commercial arrangements in the project – I can reaffirm the information that you provided to the house – are in the final stages. It is a major contract; it is a brand new system. It will be more reliable, more secure and faster to ensure the very best service for Victoria. Once the tender is appointed, I will make announcements in relation to that. In relation to when it will be finished and built, that will take some time. We will ensure that the existing CAD system continues to receive updates and is functioning whilst the new one comes in, and in fact we will keep the old one on board while the new one comes in to make sure that we have got additional contingencies et cetera –

Evan Mulholland: Have some pens and paper handy as well just in case.

Jaclyn SYMES: to avoid having to revert to manual workarounds, correct. Having more contingencies is the right thing to do, and it provides greater certainty to the community. I am not

shying away from ensuring that we have got as many backups as we can. That would be an appropriate use of government resources. I will have more to say very soon in relation to the commercial arrangements for the new CAD.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:24): I thank the Minister for Emergency Services for her answer. When the deputy secretary was asked in June 2023:

Are we expecting to have a new system for Victoria in two years time?

Her response was:

The delivery of the next-generation CAD is over the sort of forward years in terms of how that funding is provided through the budget.

Minister, is there money in the budget to immediately install a new CAD system, or will Victorians have to wait for another budget cycle?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:25): Thank you, Mr Mulholland. We have allocated the funding; I have confirmed that through PAEC processes. You would appreciate that I have been unable to talk about the amounts because of commercial in confidence, wanting to get the best price possible for the system, so the answer to your question is yes.

Ministers statements: pill testing

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:25): I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government's progress on implementing pill-testing services. On Sunday I joined the Premier to announce our pill-testing service provider and to confirm that Beyond the Valley is the first of 10 events which will host this life-saving service from 28 December. Led by a team of health, harm reduction and scientific partners and deploying the best technology available, Victoria's pill-testing services will be offered for the first time at Beyond the Valley, and we are making sure that this vital harm reduction service will be available at one of the biggest events on our calendar here in Victoria.

The experience of our service providers is significant. Youth Support and Advocacy Service has been supporting young Victorians and their families with drug use for more than two decades. The Loop Australia are joining us fresh from delivering pill-testing services in Queensland. And of course Harm Reduction Victoria are an important partner. These partners will work with Melbourne Health for medical consultancy, Youth Projects to offer wraparound care pathways and Metabolomics Australia based within the University of Melbourne to provide secondary and confirmatory testing. The introduction of these services will help keep Victorians safer while enhancing our drug surveillance capabilities.

While some in this place might want to stick their heads in the sand and others might want to go down more frivolous paths, we are getting on with the job of equipping Victorians with the information they need to make safer, more informed choices. I note that pill-testing services are about to be cancelled in Queensland by the LNP government, and just this week they detected deadly nitazenes – as recently as yesterday. We are getting on with this job, and the need for Victoria's pill-testing services has never been more important and never been clearer.

Spent convictions scheme

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:27): (763) My question is to the Attorney-General and relates to the review of the spent convictions scheme, which was tabled last November. Since its introduction, a lack of awareness and general confusion around the scheme has left stakeholders either unaware that their convictions have been spent or not knowing about the process to have their record cleared. For those who experience particular disadvantage due to past convictions, such as young people and Aboriginal people, this can create obstacles to employment, as they do not

apply for jobs because of their criminal convictions. This undermines a key goal of the scheme: to help rehabilitate people with historical or minor convictions by reducing barriers to training, housing, employment and other opportunities. So I ask: will the government commit to making funding available to improve awareness and understanding of the spent convictions scheme as recommended by the review?

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:28): I thank Mr Ettershank for his question on the spent convictions scheme, a scheme that we were very proud to bring in. As you have indicated, the review that was conducted at the end of last year identified that awareness of the scheme is something that we need to do more work on. I can confirm that that work is underway. The last thing we want is for people not to be able to access something, because we did it for a good purpose, and we want people to realise that. We also understand that people, where it is being done automatically without them knowing, would probably like to know about that as well.

What I can confirm is that the department has been prioritising the promotion of the scheme, including delivering information sessions across the state and distributing promotional materials. I have just had a quick look at the justice website, Mr Ettershank, and it has got a pretty good section on spent convictions and has promotional material, social media tiles and the like. We have been encouraging the community legal centre sector and organisations that work with people that perhaps could access the scheme to help us promote the scheme. But in particular obviously you would appreciate that Aboriginal community advocates were front and centre of the development of this scheme, and they are organisations that department staff have been working with to deliver more information. We have presented to the regional and local Aboriginal community justice committees, various committee sector organisations such as Aboriginal community controlled organisations, community justice days, Koori Court staff, the Neighbourhood Justice Centre and Aboriginal men’s yarning circles. As you have indicated, it was a recommendation of the review. It is work that we have undertaken, but there is always more to do. I think even asking the question in Parliament is a good way for further awareness, so I appreciate your question.

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:30): I thank the Attorney for her response. The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service recommended to the review that convictions for repealed offences be expunged immediately upon repeal, automatically and without the need for a person to make an application. Victoria Legal Aid and the Law and Advocacy Centre for Women also support automatic expungement, as a conviction of a repealed offence can still show up on a person’s record for certain checks. Victoria Police, however, have stated that they do not support expungement due to the administrative and resource burden it would place on Victoria Police and that repealed offences should be considered on a case-by-case basis. It is questionable whether expungement would be such a significant burden given the expungement of, for example, homosexual sex offences, which seemed relatively straightforward. Will the government consider improving the spent convictions scheme by automatically expunging convictions for repealed offences?

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:31): I thank Mr Ettershank for his second question. As you would appreciate, the report made several recommendations – I think just over 20 recommendations – and we are working through those with the department at the moment. Issues such as you have raised will be part of those considerations.

Country Fire Authority resources

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (12:31): (764) My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Following the Portland wind turbine fire in June this year the government could not provide any information on built-in fire suppression equipment in the state’s thousands of wind turbines. Thousands of CFA volunteers and hundreds of communities have been left vulnerable. The state government is currently undertaking an overdue audit on fire suppression in wind turbines. When will you be releasing this audit?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:32): Thank you, Mr McCracken. You would appreciate that, as the Minister for Emergency Services, I am not undertaking an audit, so it would not be a report that I would be able to release.

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (12:32): What supports will the state be providing the thousands of CFA volunteers who may be faced with an out-of-control wind turbine fire this summer?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:33): Mr McCracken, I am more than happy to answer your question, but you might be a bit dissatisfied with it, because you are asking about operational matters. I have been on time and time again to explain to the house that it is just not appropriate for me to direct operations, direct training et cetera. I can assure you that these are matters for the CFA and the experts, the professionals – it is their job to ensure their protocols, the safety for their firefighters. I can assure you it is their priority, so I am very confident in the work that they do to support their volunteers.

Ministers statements: Northern Community Legal Centre

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:33): Yesterday I talked about Heathcote, and after I left Heathcote I went to Wallan. It was a fantastic event to open.

A member interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: I am always at Wallan – Treasure Hunter on the weekend. I bought a chicken from the pet store on Saturday.

I was in Wallan, as I am regularly, to open the Northern Community Legal Centre. I had the pleasure of attending that along with my colleagues Mr Erdogan and the member for Yan Yean. The Northern CLC has been delivering essential legal support, education and advocacy to Melbourne’s north-west and northern growth areas since 2016.

Members interjecting.

Jaclyn SYMES: It sounds like lots of people want to go to the facility. Please go and check it out.

I have been working closely with grassroots community groups, service providers and networks, and Northern Community Legal Centre help to deliver sustainable, community-informed strategies that are in tune with their clients’ needs via all of that interaction. Wallan obviously services much of my electorate and many others’ electorates – I am not leaving anyone out. As those of us that frequent that area of the state would recognise, it is one of the fastest-growing local government areas, drawing in residents, new arrivals, refugees and lots of need for community legal services. The new Wallan office will provide free general legal services for Mitchell shire residents and surrounds, prioritising those who experience systemic barriers to justice. That includes people with mental illness, disability, victim-survivors of family violence, young adults and newly arrived or refugee communities, as I mentioned. The new office is being supported by the council, and I thank them for their support. They have provided the space, and there is a \$1 million grant from the Victorian Legal Services Board in their Strong Foundations grants round, which is a stream of funding to help organisations working to improve access to justice for everyday Victorians to make an even greater impact. It is no surprise I love CLCs, and it was a great event.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:35): I thank Minister Stitt: we will get responses in line with the standing orders for both the questions from Mr Limbrick. Minister Tierney will get the answer for the one question from Mr Bourman. I am tempted to direct Ms Purcell in line with the standing orders to give a written response to Mr Puglielli just so my nerdfest report is even better, but I will not.

*Constituency questions***South-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:36): (1283) My question is for Minister Carbin in his capacity as Minister for Police. Minister, what measures are Victoria Police taking to keep the community safe from the rise of right-wing political extremism? I note that Victoria Police were recently present in my community at a rally in Berwick, where neo-Nazi members gatecrashed a rally. Hate and division have no place in Victoria, and I look forward to the minister's response.

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:37): (1284) My constituency question for the Treasurer concerns the fire services property levy. Last year the Treasurer reduced the rate payable by international corporations financing renewable projects to the public benefit rate paid by local fire stations, hospitals and schools. At 5.7 cents per \$1000 of capital improved value, it is a fraction of the 81-cent industrial rate. At the same time farmers faced a 70 per cent hike from 16.9 cents to 28.7 cents per thousand dollars in their levy. In my electorate farming volunteers at one brigade calculated the rates payable in their brigade area: the figure is \$2 million for their patch alone, yet they still have a 32-year-old truck – how is that fair? So I ask the Treasurer: will you reduce the rates payable by CFA volunteers to the public benefit rate or alternatively provide rebates to reward rural volunteers who serve our communities?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:38): (1285) My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Using permanent bicycle counters, data compiled by the Victorian Department of Transport and Planning shows that the number of people riding on St Kilda Road has more than doubled in the past four years, and much of this is down to the infrastructure improvements, particularly the new protected bike lanes. Riders now have a disruption-free 4.5-kilometre trip both ways between the city and St Kilda in wide car-free lanes. With 75,434 riders per month, it just goes to show how effective separated bike infrastructure can be. Minister, our local community, including the Port Phillip Bicycle Users Group, are asking why the government has failed then to deliver the section of the protected bike lane extending to Carlisle Street and when you will deliver this vital infrastructure for our community.

Northern Metropolitan Region

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (12:39): (1286) My question is directed to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events in the other place. My electorate, the Northern Metropolitan Region, is proud to once again hold the 2024 Melbourne Food and Wine Festival. It has evolved into Australia's largest event of its kind, featuring in fact over 400 events across Melbourne and regional Victoria. Not only does the festival showcase our rich culinary history but also significant local and international attention is highlighted on it. Can I just say: given its prominence, could the minister provide detailed insights into the benefits of the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival in what it brings to my region and of course to Victoria? I am particularly interested in terms of tourism revenue, job creation and the promotion of local businesses. I am keen to understand these impacts and how I can continue to appreciate the festival's role in bolstering our state.

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (12:40): (1287) My question is to the Minister for Health regarding the consequences of the government's COVID-19 vaccine mandates. Are registered NDIS service providers permitted to hire unvaccinated workers? I have raised this issue previously, but the problem remains. In Bendigo there is a gardening service that works with NDIS clients. It is unclear whether the vaccine requirements continue to apply to them despite the government revoking the requirements for health workers on 4 October. The gardening service is struggling to hire staff due to

these requirements and has an even greater struggle trying to get an answer. They contacted the NDIS, who could not answer the query and directed them to the NDIS safeguards commission. The commission told them to contact the Victorian health department. The department directed them to the Better Health Channel website to leave feedback. There was no advice on the website and no feedback form. The ‘Contact us’ section of the website directed them back to the Department of Health phone number. When they rang again, they were told to try the NDIS safeguards commission. They have been bounced around between state and federal departments in a situation that is beyond frustrating, and the minister must provide clarity.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:41): (1288) My constituency question is for the Minister for Water, Minister Shing. My constituent is a resident of Rowville who is dismayed at the closure of a local trail near the Police Road water detention basin. Rowville locals regularly use the trail as an access route to schools and healthcare services. It is the only nearby passage connecting the neighbouring suburbs to the east and the west. Without it, pedestrians must travel kilometres along busy arterial roads with no footpaths. My constituent prepared a petition and collected almost 100 signatures from similarly frustrated locals. Melbourne Water has stated that the track closure is due to safety concerns. However, they did not provide transparent information to residents or engage in community consultation before closing this essential path. So my constituent asked: will the member advocate for a prompt restoration of this trail?

Eastern Victoria Region

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (12:42): (1289) My question is to the Minister for Education in the other place. Minister, how will students and their families in Eastern Victoria benefit from the government’s \$400 school saving bonus? This week I visited Morwell Central Primary School to discuss the bonus available for all government school students. Principal Narelle Bloomfield told me that for local families managing the cost of living this payment will alleviate some of the stress and ease the financial burden during the back-to-school period, when family budgets are tight. This money can go to school uniforms, camps, sporting events and school excursions. Education is the ticket to a better future. This is meaningful and targeted support for families that is focused on the next generation and will make an immediate difference. We are backing Victorian families by making the most important investment a government can make, an investment in our children.

Eastern Victoria Region

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:43): (1290) My question is for the Minister for Planning. Victoria has a history of approving wind farms based on inadequate environmental studies that benefit the developers. In 2009 a parliamentary inquiry recommended an enforceable code of conduct for consultants and mechanisms to stop false and misleading information being used in planning processes. None of the recommendations were adopted by the then Labor government. Since then the situation has only worsened, with the government’s priority to rush through renewable projects and scrap due processes. Minister, the coalition’s renewable energy development policy requires large-scale renewable projects to be subject to rigorous and independent planning panel assessments. Will you commit to the same action and restore public trust in the statutory planning process? As projects have been approved, environmental damage has been done and community trust eroded.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:44): (1291) My question today is to the Minister for Development Victoria, and it relates to the Ivanhoe water tank site at 421 Upper Heidelberg Road, Ivanhoe. My community is keen to know how many social and affordable homes will be available at this site. It is a prime location. It is public land. With beautiful mature trees on the site, this is an excellent opportunity to build a significant number of social homes and to provide many more at truly affordable rates alongside those big old red gums. My understanding is that there are

approximately 275 homes in total planned for this site. Can you please inform me how many will be social homes and how many will be defined as affordable homes?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:44): (1292) My constituency question is for the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education in the other place. Minister, how many students in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region will benefit from the \$21.1 million investment to expand the school breakfast club program in the 2024–25 Victorian budget? Recently the Allan Labor government celebrated a major milestone with the 50 millionth meal delivered across Victoria since the program started in 2016. The Allan Labor government has invested \$141.2 million in the school breakfast club program since it began, with \$69.5 million provided in the 2023–24 Victorian state budget. This makes sure that every student can have a nutritious meal before school, which ensures kids can focus inside the classroom and achieve their goals.

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:45): (1293) My constituency question is to the Minister for Police and is asking what the Labor government will do to ensure Melbourne's traditions are protected from the protesting left and that law and order prevails on our streets. Minister, the Myer Christmas windows are a Melbourne icon and tradition. For generations Victorians have come to Bourke Street to see the windows and celebrate Christmas and our city's rich culture. It is a shameful embarrassment that the threat of protest would cause this tradition to be cancelled in 2024. I have been contacted by my constituents in Cremorne and Burnley, and even in the surrounding suburbs of South Yarra and Windsor, with constituents concerned at Greens MPs' silence on this issue and often the open support that many Greens members of Parliament have displayed for these kinds of protests. So I ask the minister what he will do about this. I have to say it is an absolute disgrace.

Western Victoria Region

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:46): (1294) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Volunteers within the Southern Otway Landcare program are deeply concerned about the lack of funding available to support their facilitators. The initiatives of dedicated Landcare facilitators create an important social network in rural and coastal communities from conservation to education and citizen science activities, research, working bees and the Shrub Club Landcare native nursery, where residents from the local aged care facility travel to help and kinder kids learn to propagate. After receiving a series of short-term extensions out to 2026, Landcare Victoria is asking for a long-term investment for its facilitator program. According to Landcare Victoria's 2023 annual report this program generated at least \$7 in public value for every dollar of government investment. Minister, will you commit to providing adequate funding to support Landcare facilitators beyond 2026?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:47): (1295) My constituency question is for the Minister for Police Minister Carbines. Can the minister provide me with an update on how police are enforcing Victoria's new laws to ban the public display of the Nazi salute? After several recent incidents where right-wing extremists have appeared at rallies and marches, including one in my community in the south-east that was organised by the member for Gembrook Brad Battin and the member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region Ann-Marie Hermans, I would appreciate an update from the minister as to the good work the Victorian police are doing to keep Victorians safe.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:48): (1296) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. This time of year is not only a concern obviously on the roads for motorists in respect to the fire season but it is also a concern for motorists at any time of the year in terms of visibility. What I ask the minister to do specifically is actually provide the constituents of

my electorate of Ringwood with the maintenance schedule for kerbside maintenance. This might seem like a trivial matter but in fact it is not. It first came to my attention through a local primary school where parents had actually had some difficulty crossing a major intersection where you had four lanes of oncoming traffic. The parents who were taking their children to school simply could not see the oncoming traffic for the tall grass. It is a serious issue. We are in the year 2024, and I would like to think that any government in fact could run a maintenance schedule, make that transparent and public but also enable local citizens to be able to lodge complaints and lodge work orders to ensure that their local kerbsides are safe and that we take seriously in every respect – particularly at this time of year at Christmas – road safety, pedestrians and traffic.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:49): (1297) My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Last weekend at 10:30 am the lifts at Union station in Box Hill in my electorate overheated and shut down due to the mildly hot weather. The station is not even two years old, but this is now an ongoing problem. It is not the first time they have overheated and failed. In fact they have also failed due to rain. Despite significant objections from the local community, Union station was designed specifically with no ramps, and the only way to access the platform for those with disability is via these two outdoor elevators. The Level Crossing Removal Project vilified a number of people who pointed it out, particularly Elizabeth Meredith, who was ridiculed but has now got the cold comfort of having been proved absolutely correct. Can the minister please confirm what temperature range these elevators are rated for and what action has been taken to ensure reliable operation at the station?

Motions

Climate change

Debate resumed.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:50): I rise to oppose this totally misguided motion, which is yet another example of symbolic politics over substance. The declaration of a so-called ‘our climate emergency’ might make some people feel virtuous, but it does nothing to solve the real challenges facing the nation. Climate has always been subject to natural variations, and blaming coal and gas for every extreme weather event oversimplifies a highly complex issue. And as Ms Bath spoke about, emissions from bushfires are a major contributor. In fact the St Patrick’s Day fires in Dr Mansfield’s and my electorate were actually totally caused by electrical elements and out-of-control roadside vegetation. We need to balance the argument, look at the multiple causes but also weigh up the consequences of our actions to fight climate change. That does not mean we should do nothing, but we cannot allow climate alarmism to trump all other considerations.

Let us not forget the human cost of demonising fossil fuels. The coal and gas industries support thousands of hardworking Australians: mothers, fathers and young people building a future. They provide a cheap and reliable source of energy. Just look at what is happening to New South Wales, where we do not approve and build new coal and gas projects. Closing coal power stations for the sake of ideology places more pressure on the few existing ones. Thousands of New South Wales households and businesses are facing a threat of rolling blackouts due to the hot weather. This is not due to our reliance on coal but the failure to admit that coal and gas are abundant and reliable energy sources.

Then there is the hypocrisy. Those pushing this motion live in a world powered by the very energy sources they claim to despise. They fly on planes and enjoy all the comforts of modern life, all while calling for the industries that make it possible to be shut down. It is the height of arrogance to expect everyday Australians to shoulder the burden of their ideological fantasies. And make no mistake, if we do not produce these resources, nations with far lower environmental standards will gladly step in, and the global climate will be worse for it. Higher energy costs have real consequences, especially for industry. We are just offshoring our guilt. Australia’s manufacturing jobs are lost. The products are

made elsewhere, probably at lower labour and environmental standards, and then we re-import them from halfway across the world. I am a fan of free trade, and I understand our entire modern economy, indeed our civilisation, relies on specialisation. This division of labour increases efficiency, productivity and quality. I just find it ironic that the unwitting cheerleaders for this turbocharged globalisation are actually environmental activists.

This motion also exposes the Labor government's double standards. They talk a big game about climate emergencies but have approved 28 new coal and gas projects since coming to power – three of those were just this September. If they truly believed their own rhetoric, they would not have done so. Instead, they pander to activists and Greens members with one hand while quietly approving projects with the other, because they know the economy cannot survive without fossil fuels. We need a balanced, practical approach to energy and emissions, not an alarmist agenda that jeopardises our industries and economy. Innovation, not elimination, should be our goal. By investing in cleaner technology, such as nuclear energy, and improving the efficiency of our existing industries, we can continue to meet global demand while reducing emissions responsibly. I reject this motion and call on the house to stand up for common sense. If we left it to the Greens, we would all be riding bikes and using candles. Labor have obviously woken up to the fact that we need to keep the lights on and the factories operating, so of course they need to approve new coal and gas projects. They will need to approve many more if we are to keep up, let alone improve our standard of living.

If the Greens were really concerned about zero emissions, they would promote a move to nuclear energy, but the Greens are driven by misguided ideology instead of facts and common sense. And if the Greens were genuinely concerned about the environment, they would be championing the undergrounding of transmission instead of bastardising the pristine environment and farming land with above-ground transmission lines. Left to the Greens and others we would all be eating tofu and kale and getting a cannabis fix, and left to the Greens we would continue to pollute the environment by burning waste and creating methane emissions while the Scandinavian environmental warriors, who I am sure are their friends, and many other nations use waste to energy as a totally clean, efficient way of disposing of waste.

One thing the Greens are good at is generating hot air. Their hot-air emissions are legendary but totally unproductive. If the City of Melbourne wants to actually use their hot-air monitors, they might need to hover above this place when the Greens are in full flight. I totally reject this motion of the Greens, and we should all stand up for common sense and logic in the energy space.

Sitting suspended 12:56 pm until 2:02 pm.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:02): I rise to make a contribution on this motion raised by the Greens condemning federal Labor for approving new coal and gas projects. I am also aware that Ms Watt has moved amendments to this motion, which I wholeheartedly support. I think they are fantastic amendments and very worthy for us to explore. I had the benefit of listening to contributions by others in this chamber earlier, and I wholeheartedly agree with the contribution Ms Ermacora made, a very well thought through contribution by Ms Ermacora on this motion. Despite what Mr Davis said, I strongly disagree with his very impertinent sledge about Ms Ermacora's contribution. I think it was a fine contribution and one that will be remembered as being very worthy indeed.

The motion talks about a climate emergency, burning fossil fuels and condemns the federal government. Again, I note Ms Watt's contribution, which calls on the Greens parliamentary party and their members to continue resigning their seats to run at the next federal election if they are more interested in the federal government, because clearly the issues that they are talking about in their substantive motion are matters that are for the federal government. I do not know, last time I looked, Ms Ermacora, we were in the state Parliament of Victoria, and it is really not a matter for our jurisdiction, I would have thought. You have to wonder about and question the motivations of the Victorian Greens in moving such a motion, given the timing of an upcoming federal election. You can

see that what the Victorian Greens are doing is trying to use the Victorian Parliament as a means of campaigning on federal issues, which is something that the former member for Northern Metropolitan used to do all the time in this place. I am sure that Victorians want our time in Parliament used for Victorians.

However, having said that, there is no other government in Australia at a state level who has done more on climate change than not only the Andrews Labor government but the Allan Labor government. There is so much that I could talk about in terms of action on climate and renewable energy – there is just so much that we could talk about. I know that the Minister for Environment and Minister for Climate Action, the Honourable Lily D'Ambrosio in the other place, was saying yesterday that we have just released a report that talks about where we are up to with our renewable energy targets. We have not got there yet but we are in advance of where we were projected to be for this time in terms of bringing down emissions. We have now brought down our carbon emissions by 31 per cent, which is a fantastic result. Of course I know the Greens will always say, 'It's never enough. It's never fast enough. It's never good enough.' But it is – it is fantastic, because no other government in Australia has done as much as this government in its commitment towards renewable energy, putting solar on rooftops and the like.

Let me just talk about, for example, some of the stuff we are doing on solar. Solar Victoria has supported over 36,000 installations in Victoria and also supported over 280,000 installations of solar photovoltaics in Victoria. Seven-and-a-half thousand solar PV systems have been installed at rental properties – for renters. There you go. The program has surpassed an energy generation capacity of 2 gigawatts bigger than the Yallourn power station. We have supported the installation of over 16,200 batteries through rebates and loans. We have supported the installation of over 30,000 hot water systems, and the Solar Homes program will create over 5,500 new jobs.

That is just on the solar aspect. Now I am going to touch on renewables. In 2022–23 over 38 per cent of electricity generated in Victoria came from renewables, which is more than three times the 10 per cent we inherited in 2014. Since 2014, 59 projects providing 4471 megawatts of new capacity have come online. There are nine projects currently under construction which will provide a further 1314 megawatts of capacity, and we have created over 5100 jobs in large-scale renewable energy since we were elected. There is so much I could talk about in regard to this government's commitment to solar, to renewable energy and the like – there is just so much.

What we see from the Greens is that they want to talk about the federal Labor Party –

David Davis interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Well, Mr Davis, I think I am entitled to make my contribution in silence, thank you, without your assistance. We know that those opposite have no plan for Victoria's energy future. You have nothing. You built nothing before, and you have got no commitment to a clean energy future. Your party is full of climate sceptics. You have only got to look at Peter Dutton and his commitment to nuclear. I mean, honestly. Mrs McArthur, are you going to have a nuclear power plant in your electorate, on your farm – no, I think you actually support solar. But the point is that the commitment by Peter Dutton to nuclear means that, if this went ahead – if Peter Dutton was to get elected and we ended up with nuclear – we would have the most expensive electricity per kilowatt hour and we would be waiting another 20 or 30 years for it to actually happen. We cannot wait, because we know that climate change is real, despite what the Liberal opposition say here and what they say in Canberra, because they are full of climate sceptics. You have only got to look at Matt Canavan, who is wedded to coal and has all sorts of messages in his background when he talks to camera. He has got all these messages about coal. So we know what their stripe is when it comes to climate change, and we know that the federal Liberal opposition and their counterparts here in Victoria are climate sceptics.

Victorians know it too, because they voted for a Labor government that made clear commitments toward renewable energy and solar on rooftops and batteries and the like. They have voted for us a

number of times now, so it is clear that Victorians know the difference between a government that is committed to doing something about our climate situation and also committed to renewable energy and the stark contrast – you have no policy over there. What is your policy? I would really like to know what the Liberal–National coalition’s policy is on renewable energy. It is nothing. You peddle these conspiracy theories about secret stores of gas that can power Victoria. I mean, on and on and on it goes. There is no credibility in anything the opposition has to say on that. And you want to pretend that you are living in the past, flush with abundant fossil fuels and gas to power the next industrial revolution. Well, that all sounds very nice, but it is a fiction. The only policies that you have in place are to strangle renewables and promote nuclear energy. Now, we all know what is going to happen if we end up with nuclear here in Victoria. As I said, we are going to have the most expensive power per kilowatt hour, and we will be waiting decades and decades.

Might I just direct everyone’s attention in the chamber to Hinkley C, which I think is horrendously over budget – and how many years behind now? It is in the billions of dollars and so many years behind, and they are still waiting. So go right ahead and hitch your wagon to nuclear – it is one of the worst examples. You want to talk about blowouts – how about that? They should stand here in this chamber and debate the merits of nuclear power. We can bring up time and time and time and time again the examples of nuclear power overseas that have become – not even built – horrendously over time and horrendously over budget, and where they have been built, the cost of power per kilowatt hour is horrendously expensive. God forbid that you lot ever get into government, because we know what would happen. It would be an omnishambles of nuclear proportions – something that the state would never recover from. Because I tell you what, something this state has also never recovered from is when Jeff Kennett sold off the SEC. It has still taken us decades and decades to bring it back, and it will be an important part of our renewable energy mix into the future and Victorians love it. I commend the amended motion to the house, and we do not support this ridiculous motion.

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:12): In the time I have available, what is implicit in this motion is the fact that basically the Greens want to get rid of coal and gas immediately, straightaway, and there are real dangers in ignoring reality and not seeing the world as it really is. We cannot be selling the community a fantasy, because when reality eventually catches up with you it lands with a punch. But I cannot understand why Labor are opposing this, because fantasy policies and projects are their line and length – that is exactly what they do. They want to ban gas exploration for 10 years and then expect to go over to gas.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (14:13): I thank members for their contributions – I think. When people want to understand why governments are not taking meaningful action on climate change, I think they just need to have a look at the debate that has taken place here today. Labor in particular have outdone themselves on this one. I was prepared to be a bit disappointed – I always am on climate debates – but I was quite surprised by the petty level that some members stooped to in this debate. I am going to park the obvious hypocrisy of Labor saying, ‘Federal issues are irrelevant to Victoria.’ I am sure the special Labor internal logic processes made complete sense on this point when Ms Terpstra’s motion to condemn the federal Liberal–National coalition’s plan for dangerous and costly nuclear energy was brought to this chamber about three months ago for debate.

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, Acting President, I think Dr Mansfield should not mislead the Parliament. I had not moved a motion; I was making a contribution on a motion. Dr Mansfield said ‘Ms Terpstra’s motion’, so I think that the record should be corrected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): There is no point of order.

Sarah MANSFIELD: That motion was brought to the chamber for debate by the government specifically to waste time in this Parliament, because clearly there was not enough legislation to fill government business time, but anyway.

Labor might think these amendments that they put forward today are clever, and I am sure someone got a real kick out of writing these and scheming them up. I am sure members are going to go away and have some laughs and pat themselves on the back for coming up with these brilliant amendments. I can understand why they would do this, because it is easier than facing up to the shame that their party is failing us when it comes to climate change. Their party is making decisions that will have devastating consequences for the whole world for generations to come. Remember, Australia is the second largest exporter of coal and gas in the world. We are amongst the leading drivers of climate change. That is what I wanted to talk about, but not one Labor member was respectful enough to even acknowledge the substance of the actual motion.

Many members in this place talked about the importance of acting on climate change in their first speeches, and some of them mentioned their kids or young people or future generations and that they really cared about them. I wonder how those kids that you care about so much, all these young people out there who face an uncertain future, all the people who desperately want to see action on climate change and our Pacific Islands neighbours, many of whom will be in this Parliament this afternoon, whose shores are disappearing by the day, would see Labor's attempts to obfuscate and deflect through these so-called witty amendments. They are not even that witty.

I brought this motion so we could talk about the need to end coal and gas in this country, to talk about how the Victorian state government has a responsibility to this state to advocate for action from our federal counterparts. Yet Labor talked about everything but this, denying any responsibility for taking a role on advocacy and on ensuring we are ending coal and gas. Ironically, they accused us of playing politics when I was trying to have a serious debate about climate change and the contribution of coal and gas. All Labor could talk about was politics. Once again, Labor ridicules us for trying to debate climate change and tries to come up with strange attempts to stifle that debate. They do it in the state Parliament, they do it in the federal Parliament and worst of all they do it in the community every time they try to shut down those who want to take action on climate change.

Labor do not want to talk about it because they do not want to admit their complicity. Climate breakdown is the consequence of decades of deferred decisions and active refusal of governments to acknowledge the urgency of the need for change. When it comes to climate, we have no time to waste. The only ones wasting time here are those who support new fossil fuel projects in a climate crisis, and that includes the Albanese and Allan Labor governments.

Council divided on amendment:

Ayes (16): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Tom McIntosh, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaelyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Noes (22): Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Katherine Copsey, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Sarah Mansfield, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Amendment negatived.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (7): Katherine Copsey, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Sarah Mansfield, Rachel Payne, 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, Michael Galea, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Harriet Shing,

Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

Motion negatived.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:28): I move:

That the consideration of notice of motion, general business, 749, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Committees

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Reference

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:28): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes:

- (a) recent increases in violent crimes, particularly knife attacks in public places, increases in residential aggravated burglaries, and significant increases in aggravated assaults of females;
- (b) the blame for these crimes rests solely with the perpetrators, not the victims;
- (c) that the innate ability to deter and defend against attacks varies, with women and the elderly generally being more vulnerable;
- (d) that capsicum spray can assist with deterrence and self-defence, particularly for the vulnerable;
- (e) the use of capsicum spray is generally nonlethal and only requires minimal training;
- (f) that capsicum spray is unlikely to be used in criminal attacks;
- (g) that stores in Western Australia where these products are legal have seen increased sales in recent months;
- (h) a petition started by Victorian woman Jayde Howard to legalise capsicum spray for self-defence has gathered nearly 15,000 signatures; and

(2) requires the Legal and Social Issues Committee to inquire into, consider and report, by March 2026, on permitting the use of capsicum spray for personal defence, including any issues related to amending schedule 2 of the Control of Weapons Regulations 2021 to remove the prohibition on capsicum spray and any other related matters.

I am pleased to move motion 746 in my name, which effectively calls for the Legal and Social Issues Committee to inquire into and report by March 2026 on the issue of permitting capsicum spray for self-defence.

Before I start, I think we should outline a few facts about Victoria and what is happening at the moment. The first obvious fact is that there is violent crime in Victoria. There are a lot of people who fear violent crime. There are people that have been victims of violent crime, both in their own homes and on the streets. That is the first fact.

The second fact is in Victoria we have the right to self-defence, as in any decent country in the world. If you or someone that you care about or indeed even a stranger is being attacked by a violent criminal, you have the right to defend yourself or to defend others. This is a right that comes from respecting individual bodily autonomy and respecting individual property rights, and of course the primary form of property that anyone owns is their own body. The next fact is that there are many people in the community who for various reasons cannot easily defend themselves from harm by criminals. Many men are quite physically large, and therefore they have a physical advantage in being able to defend themselves against people. But many other people, like older people, women and people who have

disabilities, find it very difficult to defend themselves even though they have this right. So we end up with a dilemma where we have the right to self-defence but with no means of enacting that right or exercising that right; it is like that right does not even exist.

I have spoken to many people who feel vulnerable and concerned in the community who want to protect themselves. Lots of women will be familiar with the stories of their dad or someone else telling them to carry around keys to use in their hand and somehow punch someone with them, which from my understanding is a rather fantastic idea but not really realistic. There are other things like people will carry around some sort of spray or something, hoping that it might serve some useful purpose if they are attacked. But the reality is that none of these things are really effective forms of self-defence. In fact in Victoria we have this weird situation where if you carry them for the purpose of self-defence, that in itself is a crime, which is sort of crazy.

What I would like us to look at are the issues around protecting people's rights and empowering people who feel vulnerable to be able to use something like pepper spray. Many people have said, 'This is going to lead to guns,' and stuff like this. The thing is even in jurisdictions in the United States where concealed carry of firearms is legal, what you find is that actually the most common tool used for self-defence is not firearms, it is pepper spray. There are very good reasons for that. Pepper spray is cheap, it does not require significant training, it is nonlethal unlike a firearm, it does not require special maintenance or skills to use, it is small and can fit in your pocket or in your handbag or wherever you want to hold it and it is reasonably effective. In fact it is so effective that we have PSOs around Parliament who carry it, and police on the street also carry it. There was an issue around PSOs we looked at last term, Mr Bourman. It is well established by law enforcement that pepper spray is an effective tool for self-defence, and I saw it used many, many times during the pandemic. In fact one time I saw it being sprayed from above a cliff down into a crowd of people, which seems to indicate that they do not really think that it is going to cause significant harm even though it may incapacitate people.

One of the other arguments against the legalisation of pepper spray, which I would really like this inquiry to look into, is we have people talking about, 'We don't want to have that, because the pepper spray might be used for initiating crimes.' To that I would respond with two points. The first point is that criminals do not care about the law, and they already have access to weapons, like knives and guns and whatever other weapons they choose. They do not respect the law. People that assault people in the street clearly are not law-abiding citizens. The second point is that pepper spray itself is pretty ineffective for committing most sorts of crimes. If you threaten someone with a knife, they may do what you ask them to do. But if you spray someone with pepper spray, you cannot touch them – you cannot go near them because you will get burnt. It is not a particularly useful thing for people who want to commit crimes.

Another argument against pepper spray: Mr Bourman raised this issue back in 2019, and I remember one of the comments was, 'We don't want women to defend themselves. We want men to stop harming women.' I agree that we do not want men harming women; we do not want anyone harming anyone, actually. I fully support the idea of no man harming a woman. Until we get to that point where that does not happen anymore, we need something in the meantime. The other fact of the matter is that the police cannot be everywhere. The police sometimes prevent crime, but in most cases police are investigating crime after the fact. They cannot be everywhere – it is simply impossible – and therefore in many cases people are forced to become a victim and then report the crime.

You see lots of awful videos of crime incidents where people are attacked and this sort of thing, and one thing that is interesting when you look at countries that have pepper spray legalised is you often see different types of videos. You see videos with the vulnerable people, the people who would normally be victims, fighting back against crime. That is what I want to see in Victoria. I want the people who feel vulnerable, who feel scared of criminals, who do not want to become victims of violence and who do not want to become victims of crime to have the opportunity to fight back. At least give them that power. If you are talking about empowering people, empowering women or

empowering vulnerable communities in Victoria, how can you say that you empower people when you force them to be victims against people who are stronger and more aggressive than they are? It is wrong. You need to give them a fighting chance if they want to do that. I think that is the way to go.

I would like to acknowledge one person who has been campaigning on this issue for some time now: Jayde Howard. She is a content creator on Instagram. She came into Parliament yesterday actually, and she was very interested in what was going on in Queen's Hall. She has been campaigning on this for a long time now. She has a petition, which people should sign if they are so inclined. I think it has just hit 15,000 signatures. She wants women to be able to carry pepper spray for the purposes of self-defence. Many women, many people who have been victims of crime, do not want to be a victim again. They want some sort of chance to fight back. I think it is wrong that we deny people the opportunity to defend themselves and to stop becoming victims. It is time for Victorians to be given the power to fight back against crime.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (14:37): I speak today in response to Mr Limbrick's motion. I would like to start by saying that the Allan Labor government is committed to keeping all Victorians safe and holding those who commit violent offences to account. I note Mr Limbrick's concern about the vulnerability of women in violent attacks, and I definitely agree on that. I am going to put this proposal into a gendered perspective, because this week does mark the beginning of the United Nations annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence. A number of colleagues from multiple sides of the chamber have referred to that this week and in the last two days, and I appreciate that. The purpose of the 16 days of activism is to activate communities to campaign for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls. Just yesterday I attended an event right here in Parliament to mark the beginning of the 16-day campaign. Like many others in this chamber, I heard from Respect Victoria about the ongoing plague of violence against women. In Australia a woman is killed every four days, often by a man she knows. The Australian Bureau of Statistics personal safety survey in 2022 showed that in most recent incidents of violence by a male the perpetrator was likely to be someone known to the victim; that was 85 per cent, and a stranger was 16 per cent. The perpetrator was most commonly an intimate partner, 53 per cent, including a cohabitating partner, 28 per cent, and a boyfriend or a date, 25 per cent.

In the past week alone we have had reports in the newspapers of the recent deaths of two women in Victoria, Isla Bell and Vicky Van Aken. My thoughts are with the families, friends and communities that those women belonged to and of the too many other women who have been killed, injured and traumatised by male violence. I am not sure if Mr Limbrick was there at the launch –

David Limbrick interjected.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Awesome. I think it was very interesting that there was a launch of a Respect Victoria report on men, masculinities and the prevention of violence against women, because that document goes into the biggest causes of violence against women and capsicum is not mentioned there, which is the point of my argument really.

Using capsicum spray is not the answer to keeping women, children and other vulnerable people safe in this state. In fact weaponising women with capsicum spray will not make anyone safer. Kat Berney, the director of the National Women's Safety Alliance, said in relation to similar calls for capsicum spray to be legalised following the Bondi attacks in 2022:

What are we suggesting will happen when a potential victim is armed with pepper spray? What happens when the violence escalates and the perpetrator is also armed with the same weapon?

If women and non-binary folk can carry pepper spray, so can men. So can gangs. So can everyone.

This is not a deterrent. Ms Berney also quoted a 20-year review into people with pepper spray injuries from the *Journal of Clinical Toxicology*. The review found that patients with pepper spray related injuries tended to be older children and younger adults, not people protecting themselves from lone wolf attacks. So keeping Victorian women safe is not about capsicum spray; it is about changing male

behaviour. The Allan Labor government is absolutely committed to ending violence against women. We are leading the nation with over \$4 billion invested in reform, response and prevention since 2014 to end gender-based violence in our state.

But more work needs to be done. The women's safety package announced in May this year is changing laws, changing culture and delivering support for victim-survivors when they need it most. If I can quote the Premier, she said at the launch of the package:

When women are still dying at the hands of men – we must do more ...

From prevention to response to justice, these reforms will target family violence at every stage ...

It's about changing culture to stop violence before it starts. It's changing our laws so that perpetrators will feel the weight of their action.

It is a really powerful and supportive statement by our Premier.

This is an evidence-based, comprehensive approach – we need to keep Victorians safe – unlike the proposal to use capsicum spray as a tool in that defence. I profoundly disagree with it, and there is no evidence that supports that. Allowing members of the public to carry serious weapons, like capsicum spray, would only serve to increase the potential risk to the community. It would increase the number of weapons on Victorian streets and research shows that those weapons are more likely to be used against vulnerable members of our community. You only need to have a look at the United States to see what happens there with guns pretty much freely available in that community. The availability of those weapons is not a self-defence or a safety-enhancing strategy in the US. Availability of weapons in America has resulted in multiple mass shootings pretty much every year – shootings of children, in fact killing of children. Thousands of children are killed in America by guns. Individuals are killed as well as these mass shootings, so more guns do not equal a safer America and more capsicum spray will not equal a safer Victoria.

Furthermore, it is important to note the Legal and Social Issues Committee has several inquiries ongoing at this time, and adding this matter to the top of those would not help things at all. I do not believe the opportunity cost of investigating this issue, weighed up against other priorities of the LSIC, is favourable. This is absolutely a non-evidenced suggestion. It is so unevidenced that I do not support investigating it. It is not even logical to investigate it. If there is more pepper spray out in the community, we know who is going to be using it and who is going to be experiencing the damage and injury as a result of that pepper spray. Increasing the number of weapons in our community will not make our community safer, and therefore I am not going to support and the government is not going to support the idea of increasing the amount of capsicum spray in this community.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (14:46): I rise to speak on Mr Limbrick's motion. I note that he is hoping to set up a Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry with a long reporting date of March 2026, so it does not appear to be something that would be going on top of or in the way of other inquiries but at the end of other inquiries, just to note that not on the substance of the topic but on the allegations or comments that were made prior.

To the motion itself, Mr Limbrick notes an increase in violent crimes, particularly knife attacks, in public places; increases in aggravated burglaries; and significant increases in aggravated assaults of females. It is not hard to substantiate that, with crime out of control across the whole state really, particularly in my own electorate in the northern suburbs, where the recent statistics had car thefts at about one in every 4 hours in the City of Hume, which I represent. So you have a crime crisis that is really out of control. Something that I have raised with the Minister for Police and Minister for Crime Prevention before is the safety of women. In particular, something that has been noted for a long time is about the Merri Creek trail in my electorate, where there have been serious incidences that have been both public in the community and reported in the media as well. We have seen harrowing violence and sexual assault cases along the Merri Creek trail due to inadequate lighting and safety and shrubs around the trail making it an unsafe trail for women. Many women in the community have

contacted me and also contacted other members of Parliament about the fact that it is all right for a bloke to go for a run on the Merri Creek trail but women feel they are not able to due to all of these incidences. We have seen successive state and local governments ignore this issue to the point where young women feel like living and exercising in the northern suburbs is not for them.

When we talk about women's issues, it is important to note that these are the real women's issues that affect women in both the northern suburbs but across Victoria. And when you talk about women's rights, there is nothing more fundamental than women being safe in our community. They are the actual women's issues that are fundamental to people in this state and across Victoria, and so I want to thank Mr Limbrick for bringing this motion forward. We will not be opposing this motion. We all need to do better to understand the impact of crime on victims. In the opposition, we believe that people should be safe at home, at work and in the community, and there is always a limit to what is deemed to be a safe way to protect yourself. Our priority is to hear directly from victims and unions representing front-of-office and front-of-house staff, and we need to focus on the increase in crime and getting that down.

We could all do better in understanding and listening directly to victims of crime, and indeed committees are a great way to do that. I, with a few of my colleagues in the chamber, was recently on the inquiry into local government, and I learned a lot from the local government sector on the ins and outs of local government, on their needs and their wants. I heard from several stakeholders about what was required, the financial strains on local government and cost shifting and also the interaction between state and local government. I am conscious it is important for the entire chamber to be able to have the opportunity to hear directly about these issues. It is all good for us to sort of be in a bubble, to have formed our own views and argue them in this place, but when this place gets out and actually listens to people, I think, is when we do our best work. We will not be opposing this motion, and I thank Mr Limbrick for bringing it forward.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:52): I rise to make a brief contribution to motion 746 in David Limbrick's name. To begin with, I want to speak to all the women out there who signed the petition to allow women to carry capsicum spray for protection. I want you to know that I hear you. I know that it is a terrifying time to be a woman. Now, more than ever, of course we want to be able to defend ourselves. But for the reasons I will set out below, we do not believe that capsicum spray is the solution.

When we look at other jurisdictions like Western Australia, where people have access to capsicum spray, we do not see that it is being used to stop violent attacks against women. In fact it is more often misused to attack others. It would be terrible to see wider access to capsicum spray not improve women's safety and instead add another weapon to the toolkit of perpetrators of violence. We also worry that being in the possession of capsicum spray could create a false sense of security, which could do more harm than good.

When I lived in Paris, most of the women I worked with did carry capsicum spray, so I do have a little bit of insight into this discussion. We all worked in the same bar in the nightlife district, which was next to Moulin Rouge. It was a place where women often did not feel safe late at night. Incidents were often talked about at work, but I never heard one of my work friends report that capsicum spray saved them from these incidents occurring. One of my friends actually said to me that in a moment of panic she could not find it in her handbag and ended up throwing the handbag and running for her life. My final point is that women's safety should not be a women's issue; it is an everybody issue. The focus needs to be on stopping violence before it starts, not on placing the expectation on women that it is up to them to defend themselves against violent attacks. This violence is not inevitable, it is preventable. During the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence I will continue to work to advocate for this cause and to push for advocacy to translate into real solutions, not quick fixes. Although tools like capsicum spray can make you feel safer, the reality is they do nothing to meaningfully address rates of violence against women, and they put the responsibility onto victims, not perpetrators. We

need change as a society. We do not need more weapons on the streets. For these reasons, we will not be supporting this motion.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:55): I rise to make a contribution on this motion in Mr Limbrick's name. I want to say at the outset that I thank Mr Limbrick for bringing it. I understand your intentions around this. When I read the motion it is about a referral to the Legal and Social Issues Committee. I am sure that the secretariat staff are having conniptions about yet another referral. However, I understand your intentions are about looking at trying to reduce how women are feeling under attack and how to improve women's safety and all the rest of it. I understand that. But I also do not think that providing someone access to pepper spray is going to help.

I am speaking as a woman. I am actually older than most people give me credit for, and I have been around to quite a few pubs, nightclubs and districts. I used to live in Sydney; I used to go up the Cross. I have been around a bit, and I can certainly talk about places that I have felt safe and unsafe in. But one thing I know for sure is that if someone is going to come at you with a knife or a gun, capsicum spray is not going to help you. Mr Limbrick, you said this in your contribution earlier anyway. You were talking about laws, and you were talking about how violent crime is increasing. I think Mr Mulholland also talked about this. We have to face reality. If someone is going to attack you, they are going to attack you whether there is a law in place or not. It depends on the circumstances. That person may be having a mental health episode. They may be a violent criminal. I do not know. There are a whole range of circumstances. But I personally, as a woman, would not resort to having capsicum spray on me, because the reality is I might pull the capsicum spray out of my pocket, but I might be overpowered and then have it used against me and used against me in very close proximity. I was just reading about some of the effects of capsicum spray. It can cause temporary blindness. If it were sprayed at me by a perpetrator right in my face, I would probably be suffocated and I would probably have lasting eye damage. So for me, as a woman – and I am speaking as a government MP as well – I worry about how I would then continue to have that weapon in my control and how it might be used against me. There are no easy answers to any of this. It might surprise some of us in this chamber to know that women as a group do not necessarily agree on everything – surprise, surprise. Some of us will have different views about all different sorts of things. I personally think there is a greater risk to having a weapon available for me to potentially protect myself that could then be used against me in terrible ways as well.

I note the government's position is not to support this. I think the point is, and as Ms Ermacora said – and it was a really good contribution, a very well researched and thoughtful contribution by Ms Ermacora – it is probably not a coincidence, maybe it was, but you brought this motion to the house this week during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence. Is it coincidental? I do not know.

David Limbrick interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: It is a coincidence. You should have claimed it though, Mr Limbrick. It is happenstance, but nevertheless it is timely that it is here this week, because we know that 85 women have died this year from family violence. It is horrific just to look around the world and see what is happening to women. If we look overseas in France, we see Gisèle Pelicot, who was raped over many years and drugged by her husband. It is sickening to see what is going on. We see numerous women; I know Ms Ermacora mentioned two. There is a long list of women who have died at the hands of male perpetrators of family violence, but the research is pretty clear – the majority of that violence is committed by men that women actually know. It is not the circumstance where you are out somewhere and a stranger approaches you. Yes, that does happen. Of course it happens, but the majority of the violence that women are dying from is being perpetrated in the home. If I was at home and my intimate partner was going to come at me with a knife or something, would I have my capsicum spray, just carrying it around on me as I am in the kitchen or in the home? I do not know. I just think context is everything. You have got to look at how these things unfold. Sometimes you might predict that something is coming your way, but sometimes it is completely unpredictable as well.

Again, I think it puts the emphasis back on victims to try and protect themselves when the bottom line is and this government's key commitment to Victorians is about reducing family violence. We have got to get to the root cause. There is no magic silver bullet about family violence and what the drivers of gender-based violence are. They are many and varied, and everyone keeps saying there is no magic silver answer or bullet, which is a very unfortunate term in the context of this motion. But what it means is we need to look at trying to reduce family violence, and it means everyone has to work together. We have to take every opportunity, whether it is little kids in the kindy programs, kids at school, teachers, early childhood educators, childcare workers, footy clubs, cricket clubs, police, family violence workers, parents – every single one of us has a role to play in reducing family violence.

In my members statement that I made earlier this week I talked about calling it out, and it starts with respect. When we treat each other with a lack of respect, it has consequences and things flow from that. This is the other end of it, where you get violent crimes perpetrated on women. As I said at the outset, Mr Limbrick, I understand your intention. I understand there is a petition started by Jayde Howard, and I had a look at it just quickly. I understand Victorian women and women everywhere want to feel safe. That should be our right, to feel safe to go about our business and the like. I know Mr Mulholland went and gave a lengthy contribution about parts of his electorate where he says that women feel that they are unsafe. But I want to reiterate the point that the majority of violence that is occurring is by intimate partners, so people women know. As women we have a right to speak up about these things without men's voices actually speaking on our behalf as well. I want to listen to the voices of women who are on the receiving end of this, and they should be able to tell their stories, absolutely. Our government is a strong supporter of ending the scourge of gender-based violence.

The other side of this argument I hear from the conservative political outfits that are out there. Every time someone starts to talk about gender-based violence or any issues around that – gender equality – we get called woke and all the rest of it. Reap what you sow, quite frankly, because when governments or policymakers try to talk about bringing down the tone and talk about why gender equality is important and ending gender-based violence – and as I said, it starts with respect – we get attacked and called woke. This is all part of it. It is all part of a campaign to stop women from feeling safe. You have only got to look to America and the recent election of Trump and the Republican Party over there. Women are very concerned about which way that country is headed, when women will no longer have control over their health and reproductive choices. Women are worried that that then opens the door to other acts of gender-based violence against women.

It is not just about what we do; it is about our actions, what we say and also what we do not say and when we do not act, because failing to act can also mean that we are complicit in not calling out terrible actions, inappropriate behaviour or the lack of respect that women are treated with. Although we are talking about capsicum spray, it is not just in a microcosm. This has a connection to other issues, and I talked about this earlier this week. As I said, this week the campaign 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence is critically important. Our government, the Allan Labor government, will continue to work closely with Victoria Police in monitoring these things. We know that any victim of crime is one victim too many, and our thoughts are always with those who have been affected by any criminal behaviour. As I said, we want to keep all Victorians safe. We have got to continue to drive down the rates of gendered-based violence. I do not think a committee referral to the Legal and Social Issues Committee is actually going to solve this problem. I agree with Mr Mulholland. Sometimes you hear some really interesting evidence and you learn things and all the rest of it, but I do not think this is going to help resolve anything. I just reiterate the point that I made earlier about the consequences of a weapon such as capsicum spray being used as a weapon of violence against a woman at the hands of a perpetrator. I will leave my contribution there, and we will not be supporting this motion.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (15:05): This is not my first rodeo on this subject. In 2019, as Mr Limbrick mentioned, I mentioned it. This is a vexed issue, and I accept that. I am one of five people that I know of in this place that has actually been trained in the use of capsicum spray. It is wildly effective on people attacking you. I did not personally get to use it, but I did personally get to roll

around with people that had had it used on them. The effect even on a secondary dose is pretty good. What it means is that it does not work 100 per cent of the time, but it stops people. Also, if you have had exposure to it before, you know what happens and you can react and withdraw. I did not have that option in my case. When I raised this in 2019 we got the ‘There’ll be blood on the street, weapons for everyone, guns’ – the whole thing. It is just not the case. If this was the case, in Western Australia, where you can buy it – there are some restrictions on how you can carry it – blood would be running all over the streets there, and it is not. I do not think everyone should carry it. I think people that are wanting to, male or female, but particularly females as they tend to be physically weaker –

Sonja Terpstra interjected.

Jeff BOURMAN: I will take that interjection up. It is true. I am afraid to say it, but they tend to be. It is kind of an equaliser; it generally will not end up with someone dead. The old thing of ‘It can be used against you’ has never been proven in the United States with firearms. It is an old wives’ tale. I have researched it time and time again. But like most things, it is pointless carrying the stuff if you are not going to use it. That is something that someone who has it has to go through. It is pointless having anything in your possession to defend yourself with if you will not use it – because it will be used against you. You will be standing there like a stunned mullet while someone walks up to you. That is basically the guts of it.

We do have the legal right to defend ourselves. Under section 462A, I think, of the Crimes Act 1958 you can use ‘force not disproportionate to the objective’. The objective I think in most civilian cases is just to get the hell away. Will it work in most domestic violence situations, particularly with murders? Probably not, but it would help. If you have an estranged partner and they are coming in the door and they have got a knife, you have got nothing. I obviously spent a lot of my time in the police force dealing with domestic violence situations, and I still do not think the law that deals with the perpetrators is tough enough. Let us look at the recent case of a – I will use the word loosely – man who murdered two sex workers and got seven years. That is absolutely outrageous: for two lives, seven years. It is amazing. There is work to be done everywhere. No-one should attack anyone, but when the worst does happen I would expect the legal system to stand up and work for the victims, not for the offenders.

I will finish off with a couple of things. Obviously I am the father of a little girl and I have got a wife. I want them to be as safe as possible. I am projecting something here: Becky, in the years to come, I will want her to do some martial arts, but even they are not the be-all and end-all. I want her to be able to defend herself against someone that takes her right to be left alone for granted and does their thing. I sit here and I look here; this is only a referral to a committee. This is not exactly calling for the legalisation of anything. It is just saying that it is time to put it to a committee. It is over a year, I think. There is plenty of time. I just do not want to be here having this debate time and time again. We have to do the most we can as a Parliament to protect people, to protect women. We need to be doing the best we can, and I think at least investigating this as an option should be supported. I know it is not going to be. There is no outcome for this except the report, and I would urge the government to rethink their opposition to it.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:10): I rise to speak on Mr Limbrick’s motion about the use of capsicum spray in personal defence. I think that it is so sad that the laws in this state are so weak that we actually have to look at taking matters into our own hands. That is exactly what is happening here, and I do not know how we got here. Police are at their wits’ end. I recently saw a police car with a sign pointing to the back of the divvy van that said, ‘They’ll get bail.’ I think it is absolutely unbelievable. It shows that men and women that have given their life in this state for the service and the protection of the community are feeling so defeated that they are using their vehicles as protest signs. Regardless of the crimes people commit, they are probably going to get bail and reoffend.

Last week we heard of another woman murdered – Isla Bell – and the alleged accomplice to her murder has been granted bail. Truth – those are the facts. He has been granted bail regardless of the fact that

he was deemed a flight risk, that she was missing for seven weeks and he said nothing, and that he transported her body in a fridge. Bailed – that is not me making up a story, that is the reality in this state. This government has weakened bail laws in the midst of a women's safety crisis. It is absolutely deplorable, it is disgusting, and honestly, you should be ashamed of yourselves. I find it absolutely incredible that the Premier – a female Premier, mind you – and female ministers from her government participate in marches around women's rights and women's protection when they hold in their hands the power to make the change. I cannot get my head around it. I think it is absolutely unbelievable. I think it is incredible to participate in marches while ignoring the law reform that is needed to protect those exact women. That is what this government does, and I am not politicising the issue; I am telling you what the facts are.

I am disappointed with the minister for justice, who I quite like as a person, and I am glad that they are in the chamber today. I can tell you have sympathy; I honestly know you are genuine in that. But regardless of the sympathy that you have for the women that have been brutally murdered, like Katie, who I wrote to you about, regardless of the fact that their mum was beaten to death on their child's bed – killed – he gets 427 days off his sentence because he was locked up during COVID. I find that unbelievable. You have the power to change that rule. I am asking from my heart: change that law. Take away that right for people that were locked up during COVID, during the world's longest lockdowns in this state. Violent criminals, including rapists and murderers, were given four days off their sentence for every one day that they served because they were inconvenienced. I find this unbelievable.

If you had told me while I was locked up in my home, while I saw businesses in this state go broke and while I saw depression and anxiety go through the roof, that the only Victorians in this state that would be properly compensated were the most violent, disgusting offenders, I would have thought you were joking. That is the reality in this state. It is just unbelievable. I am not even making this up. I want to say that due to the weakness of the laws in this state, there are some women that when he gets out 427 days early, which is lower than his non-parole period, might want some pepper spray. You can say whatever you want, but they might want some pepper spray. In the midst of a crime wave this government has raised the age of criminal responsibility rather than addressing the issue of the root cause and helping those kids see that they are going down a bad path. It does not make a difference to the victim what age that criminal is, but rather than addressing that, you have just taken away their criminal responsibility, turned a blind eye and said there is not a problem here. I cannot believe it. This government has failed when it comes to justice in this state. Let me tell you, those children will continue to offend, because that is what the statistics say, and in this state some people might want pepper spray. It is the reality of it.

Let us now talk about stalking. I am sure you are sick to death of me talking about stalking, but I am going to talk about it again. Victoria has 45 recommendations that were given by Victoria's Law Reform Commission after the brutal death of Celeste Manno, who followed the letter of the law, did absolutely everything she was told to do and had no protection from Luay Sako. He stalked her relentlessly, broke into her house and stabbed her to death while her mother slept in the next room. That mum will never, ever recover. Do you want to know what the cause of Celeste Manno's death was? It was a stab to the heart. He will be eligible for parole in 2050. Let me tell you, when he gets out of jail there will be some people that might feel safer with the use of pepper spray.

I have got 3½ minutes left, so I do not have time to go into the fact that this government would not reform laws around machetes. It is unbelievable. They will not upgrade the rating of what a machete is to being a lethal weapon. I forget the exact term. I am sorry about that.

Enver Erdogan: A controlled weapon.

Renee HEATH: A controlled weapon. Thank you. So you can have that, but not pepper spray. Unbelievable.

I was going to go through and talk about the man who murdered two women in 24 hours, both sex workers, and I hope that is not why he might be out in seven years. I tell you what, the life of a woman is not worth much in the state of Victoria. But I am going to skip through that because I want to address some things that I heard members of the government say in this debate.

The first one was something that one of the members over here said: we do not need the voices of men. Yes, we do. We do need the voices of good, strong men. This may not be very politically correct, because people love to go on about toxic masculinity and they love to demonise men, but I tell you what, good, strong men are an incredible protective factor. You cannot speak out of both sides of your mouth, on the one hand saying to the men, 'Shut up. We don't need you' and then turning around and saying, 'Men are toxic' and 'Men are the problem'. Men can also be an incredible part of the answer. I am so happy about the men in my life that have treated me with so much respect and have stood in the gap at times when I have not been strong enough. They have stood and they have fought for me. They have encouraged me, and they have cheered me on. Those men have been an incredible factor, and then there are some people who choose to completely demonise men and say that any sort of masculinity is toxic. That is a lie. It is something that is costing women their lives, because I tell you what, men need to stand up. Men need to speak. Men need to do better, and men can actually be an incredible protective factor. People do not like to hear it, but it is true.

The other thing that I want to address is we heard a member of the government say that the Allan Labor government are completely committed to women's safety. I think that is ridiculous when murderers in this state can literally get out of jail to get IVF treatment – when murderers in this state who have stabbed people to death can actually get out. It is like, 'Well, you can do what you want.' In Victoria this is the reality. You can stab somebody to death violently but not have to give up on your dreams. You can still get out of jail. You can still have IVF treatment, and then you can raise that child in a jail. Unbelievable. It is time that this government starts standing up for the vulnerable in this community rather than putting the rights of the most violent and disgusting criminals ahead of the rights of the most vulnerable.

I had to skip through quite a bit of my speech, but I will end in saying this: I am so sad that Victoria has gotten to this stage, and I commend this motion to the house.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:20): This motion is coming from a place of great care from Mr Limbrick, and I thank him for raising the subject of self-defence and capsicum spray today. While I thank Mr Limbrick for his work in bringing forward this motion today, the government does not support the motion. The motion of Mr Limbrick talks about a lot of things. In part (1)(a) of the motion he talks about the recent violent crimes, the knife crimes, aggravated burglaries and aggravated assaults of females. He talks about the vulnerable, the elderly and women, and in this case he talks about who he blames. In part (1)(e) he talks about the use of capsicum spray as a measure of self-defence, then in (1)(g) he refers to Western Australia and their example. In part (1)(h) he refers to the petition by Ms Jayde Howard, a Victorian woman who has started a petition which has gathered nearly 15,000 signatures. And then finally in part (2) he:

... requires the Legal and Social Issues Committee to inquire into, consider and report, by March 2026, on permitting the use of capsicum spray for personal defence, including any issues related to amending schedule 2 of the Control of Weapons Regulations 2021 to remove the prohibition on capsicum spray and any other related matters.

The Allan Labor government is committed to keeping all Victorians safe, and we will hold those to account who commit violent offences. The law in Victoria states that it is illegal to:

... carry any article designed or adapted to discharge an offensive, noxious or irritant liquid, powder, gas or chemical so as to cause disability, incapacity or harm to another person.

This includes self-defence. Capsicum spray is an inflammatory agent affecting the mucous membrane of the eyes, throat, nose and lungs as well as an instant dilation of capillaries in the eyes. This leads to temporary blindness and a shortness of breath. While this works as a useful nonlethal and temporary

measure for authorised use by individuals with lawful exemptions, such as protective services officers, allowing members of the public to carry these weapons is dangerous. Allowing members of the public to carry serious weapons like capsicum spray increases the potential risk faced by the community. It increases the number of weapons on the Victorian streets, and it potentially increases the risk of an escalation of violence. That is why we will be opposing Mr Limbrick's motion.

We view things differently. Carrying weapons, even when it comes to self-defence, must be balanced against a broader public interest in keeping weapons off our streets. Allowing widespread and public distribution of this would cause unnecessary and potentially unlawful harm to the community. There is a risk that some members of the public would not restrict their use of OC spray, or oleoresin capsicum spray, to situations of self-defence, and this is something that we cannot allow to happen. We could feasibly see OC spray being used to resolve all sorts of disputes and situations we cannot allow. What if you are annoyed with your neighbour about the rubbish or a fencing dispute? Can it be used to resolve a pavement dispute between a tradie and a contractor? And there is a real threat that OC spray could be used against our first responders. That is why we are working closely with Victoria Police to provide them with the powers and the technology that they need to carry out their jobs effectively.

At the moment OC spray is considered so serious that even protective service officers, or PSOs, can only lawfully use it on members of the public where it is considered proportionate and reasonable – for instance, during violent or serious physical confrontations, where violent or serious physical confrontation is imminent or where a person is involved in violent or other physical conduct likely to seriously injure themselves or result in suicide. But PSOs are expected to exercise appropriate care and diligence and, when it comes to considering it, considerable training. They are not to use spray when there is a subject who is only passively resisting – for example, simply hanging limp or refusing to comply with instructions only.

The federal government have also considered the risk, and they found in 2018 that there is a very serious risk of it being weaponised by members of the public. After considering what we know currently about the effects capsicum spray has on an individual, there is a good reason to limit the access to these materials. I will leave my contribution at that, as I know others are wanting to do the same.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (15:25): Eighty-six women have been killed this year in Australia, largely at the hands of violent men. I should note that the government did not record or track this figure themselves; it was the work of Sherele Moody from Femicide Watch. Like Ms Payne, I hear the calls from many women in this state who want to be able to possess pepper spray, and I understand it; I truly, truly do. I know exactly what it is like to walk home at night and look over your shoulder every 5 seconds to check that no-one is watching you, to carry your keys between your fingers in the event that someone comes at you or to start sprinting or fake a phone call because you do not know what the man behind you is going to do. I know that we are all begging for safety, because I am part of that community begging for safety. Since men and this government are not giving it to us, I understand the desire to take that control into our own hands. I feel sorry for us, that we as women feel so betrayed and ignored that we feel we can only rely on ourselves and each other to fix this crisis. But it is not our crisis to fix. It is the responsibility of men and this government to stop the violence against women, and pepper spray is not the solution to that. It will not make Victoria a safer place, and it will not reduce the disgusting and disturbing rates of violence against women in our state.

I feel frustrated that we as a Parliament seem to have collectively given up on trying to change men's behaviour when we know that that is the solution, and now we are focusing on changing women's behaviour instead. It is the same narrative that we hear time and time again – that women should watch what they wear, how they walk, how they talk and where they go. It seems that this would be adding a new factor to that conversation – what was she carrying? Suggesting that we place yet another burden on women in moments of violence is scary. The absurdity of telling a woman 'Hold a weapon and you'll be safe' – that is not the answer.

I feel that this motion does fail to recognise that the majority of offences of violence against women are committed by men who are known to them – the men in their lives and the men that are in their homes. Sixty-nine per cent of assaults on women by male offenders last year were by an intimate partner. We know and we trust our partners; we do not think to carry weapons around them. To me it feels that this motion lacks this understanding. It essentially suggests that women, if they do not want to be raped, assaulted or killed, should carry pepper spray or other items into every room of their house and keep them on them at all times. It just does not work in reality or in the situation of violence against women that we are living in. In the drafting of this motion, there does not seem to have been any consideration as to how violence against women actually often occurs. It suggests that violence against women is happening in dark alleyways by strangers. It does deny the fact that a dominant response to being raped is to freeze – an uncontrollable, neurological response that many, many women endure. To think that spraying someone with pepper spray who is trying to rape or murder us is going to suddenly give them pause to rethink their intentions and not anger them is another severe risk.

I also wonder about violence against children. Almost 40 per cent of women have experienced physical or sexual violence since the age of 15. Last year one in three victims of sexual offending were under the age of 18, so by this logic we would be considering children carrying weapons to attack this crisis as well.

Despite my criticism of this motion, I have spoken to Mr Limbrick at length about violence against women. Obviously we sit next to each other, and we have a lot of good chats, including on this topic, and we have debated it furiously this week. I have no doubts whatsoever – and I put this on the record – that his intention with this motion is to help us. But as I have laid out, I do worry about the risk that the message of this motion could be unintentionally sending the community: that for children and women, it is their responsibility if they are attacked, not men's; that they cannot be safe in this world unless they hold weapons and participate in the violence inflicted upon them – we cannot fight violence with violence; that men do not have to do anything to change this culture of violence, sexism and misogyny and that they do not have to call out their mates, because if the child or woman really felt threatened, they could have been carrying pepper spray. I do also wonder about how women with a disability are 40 per cent more likely to experience family violence than any other woman. The feasibility of equipping women with pepper spray only applies in reality to a specific subset of women, when we need to attack this crisis head-on for all of us.

I just want to talk briefly about the possible legal ramifications of legalising pepper spray. Take for instance a man stalking a woman home. She turns around and pepper sprays him, and by some miracle she does escape by this. This man now brings her to court for assaulting him with pepper spray. Police and courts already do not believe women so often when they have been abused, even with all of their scars and their pain to prove it. So many of us have simply lost faith in the justice system. But now this motion expects that they will believe a woman when she says she was going to be attacked but has little evidence to prove so.

I believe that instead of using the Parliament's resources to force an inquiry into the use of pepper spray, what would be a much better use of time and money would be an inquiry into the prevalence of sexism and of misogyny in Victoria and how this translates to violence against women, to stop it before it even occurs so that we do not have to carry weapons at all. I would also love it if the government could undertake police reform so that reporting mechanisms are less traumatic and so that officers believe and act on complaints of violence against women. The government could use the money to build specialised sexual offending courts. We could toughen up intervention order breaches, which happen so often; address rape myths in society; and mandate further jury directions in trials. There are many things that we could have an inquiry into to end family violence and violence against women. Better yet, we could achieve change now that would address the real causes of violence against women, because the experts are already telling us what we need to do about this. We just need to listen to them. At the very least, we should not be placing responsibility on women and acquitting men of their responsibilities.

In summary, this motion in my opinion is not the solution, even though I do truly understand the intention behind it and the desires of a section of the female community in Victoria who want this. But for women being sexually, physically and emotionally abused and killed in this state right now, it is not how we end it. This will not protect them right now, and this is a crisis that we need to act on immediately. While I understand that for the most part we are united as a Parliament on protecting women, we are not treating it with the urgency that it needs. This motion is not the solution, and for the reasons I have laid out I cannot support it today.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (15:33): I rise to speak to Mr Limbrick's motion making a referral to the Legal and Social Issues Committee, which the Greens will not support, as it does not address necessary solutions in the face of ongoing and systemic violence against women. All the research across jurisdictions tells us that whenever weapons become more available it is perpetrators that seek out those weapons and then use them. If I am ever accosted, I certainly do not want that person to have a weapon, including a can of capsicum spray. The Greens certainly do not want to see a proliferation of more weapons across our community. The harms of capsicum spray, or more accurately OC spray, have been documented in many places, including the American Civil Liberties Union 2016 report *Pepper Spray Update: More Fatalities, More Questions*. This includes evidence of permanent disability after use of capsicum spray, such as blindness, traumatic brain injury, limb amputation and loss of function of limbs. In fact the findings in that report provide more evidence that even the current uses of pepper spray – for example, by police in this state – should be more highly regulated if not outright banned.

I do welcome the opportunity to speak in this place about the real solutions to violence against women, because we know what they are and there is still a need to increase resourcing to support them. Two years ago the Australian state and territory governments released a 10-year *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children*, and that maps out actions across four domains: prevention, early intervention, response and recovery. Services such as violence prevention, intervention and response are profoundly underfunded still to meet the overwhelming demand. Women also know, and the stats do back up their instinct, that they are far more at risk of violence in, unfortunately, their own home or workplace and from someone that they know. The Australian Bureau of Statistics personal safety survey 2023 tells us that 70 per cent of women and 28 per cent of men who have experienced violence since the age of 15 experienced it from an intimate partner or a family member.

The national plan sets out a range of necessary actions. For example, women who are experiencing violence or at risk of it would have available services on the day that they need them – housing services, medical services and legal services. Men who are at risk of perpetrating violence would have access to early intervention programs, many of which have had high success rates. The plan also sets out that on this topic we need better and more frequent public transport. We need investment in infrastructure that makes public places safer.

There have been many inquiries already into the solutions to gender-based violence, so let us invest in these rather than allowing more dangerous weapons to proliferate in our communities. More weapons in a community rarely makes anyone safer. We need evidence-based solutions like proper ongoing funding for frontline women's services.

Maira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (15:36): I rise today to speak in strong support of Mr Limbrick's motion to hold an inquiry into the legalisation of pepper spray as a form of nonlethal self-defence in Victoria. There have been some ridiculous arguments against Mr Limbrick's motion, some very, very insulting arguments against Mr Limbrick's motion and some completely irrelevant arguments against Mr Limbrick's motion. I am going to address the ones that are not irrelevant and not insulting first.

First of all, this is not an either-or proposition. It is entirely possible, and in fact it is necessary, to expect multiple things from our society at once. When it comes to policing, we can empower police and we can reform our bail laws. We can do all kinds of things. Police are run ragged. They are under-

resourced, and they are trying their best. Police are doing their best to respond effectively to reports of violence and to ensure that restraining orders are enforced and to create safer public spaces, but they need better legislation in order to be able to do that. What they do have, which we do not have, is pepper spray. If it did not work, they would not use it.

We can advocate for cultural change. At the same time, we can run education and awareness campaigns; we can run consent classes in school. I do not know if anyone here is confused about what assault and rape are. It is when the perpetrator does not care whether they get consent or not, so it is entirely irrelevant. We can do all kinds of things to help address the root causes of violence – toxic attitudes towards women or anyone vulnerable or anything that fuels aggression. I will just note that an inquiry into sexism requires an understanding of what biological sex is, so I do not see how that is going to do us any good in this Parliament.

And what about the fact that there are so many male victims? Male-on-male violence is horrendous. People are forgetting that men are also victims, not to mention the fact that good, strong men are just absolutely fantastic. They are a force for good in society that is absolutely unmatched by anything. But as I always say to my students and to my girls, we are our own best defenders. We can use our wisdom. We can make decisions. It is not our fault if we get attacked. It is not our fault if we get assaulted. But there is no point relying on someone to come and rescue us, because it probably will not happen.

What we can also do then is to empower individuals who are vulnerable with tools like pepper spray. We can work towards these long-term solutions, but we must give people the means to protect themselves in the here and now. These approaches are not actually in conflict. On the contrary, they reinforce one another. We reduce the burden on law enforcement and we create a society where victims can feel safer reporting crimes and getting justice and engaging with the legal system, and we can prevent multiple attacks. I believe this is a timely and essential discussion that touches on the safety, autonomy and rights of every individual in our community, especially those who are most vulnerable to violence. Those who are most vulnerable to physical and sexual violence usually share one thing in common: they are physically outmatched and overpowered by their attackers. We all know the shameful statistics about male and female sexual assault and violence. We know about elder abuse, abuse of the physically and mentally disabled and abuse of children.

Then there are the compounding factors that increase the risk of harm to those already vulnerable groups, things that embolden opportunistic thugs and make it easier for predators to attack without being interrupted, things that are not the victim's fault – things like having to be alone in an isolated or rural area or late-night commutes on public transport, like men being allowed into female changerooms and toilets, like men being able to take up positions where they can do body searches, as nurses or police officers, on women. That is just another assault. Can you even understand how ridiculous this is? Simply existing in public spaces, for many cohorts, feels like a calculated risk.

As many have pointed out, this week is the beginning of the campaign 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence against women and girls. I just heard someone say that one of the reasons they are against Mr Limbrick's motion is because only 16 per cent of violent attacks against women are perpetrated by persons unknown to them. As a little girl and as a woman I found myself in that 16 per cent statistic six times. I am also in the other cohort, unfortunately, with violent sexual predators attacking me when they were members of my own family or they were close friends. All of my attackers were treated leniently by the law, or the police officers just could not get evidence to prosecute them. It was just all very tragic.

Now I also know what it is like to be stalked. I also heard today that ending violence before it starts begins with respect. I do not know if anybody here cares what happens when you publicly vilify a woman as a Nazi. I can tell you from personal experience that it has resulted in death and rape threats against me and my four children. It resulted in men stalking me online and in real life, threatening to spit on me, and it resulted in a man securing a fake security guard uniform, asking around to find out

which entrances and exits I used at Federal Court and where I sat during the trial and bringing in a backpack full of eggs to throw at me during the livestream. Thankfully the excellent male court security staff noticed this guy and got rid of him before he could attack.

I find it absolutely revolting that you would use the excuse that it is only 16 per cent of women that this might help. I just do not even think you can hear yourselves. I know you are not horrible people, but I just do not think you can hear yourselves. It is our duty as legislators to explore every single avenue that could provide people with practical and effective tools to protect themselves when the worst happens, before the police get there, when no-one is going to be able to help them. This is not a motion about promoting fear or vigilante justice; it is about empowerment and responsibility and recognising that, while we continue to rely on our police forces to protect us, they cannot be everywhere at all times. When danger strikes, seconds matter. Pepper spray could give someone the critical moments that they need to avoid harm or even save their life. It is not just about pepper spray even; it is about exploring ways to make our communities safer while respecting the rights and freedoms of individuals.

Rather than just going on walks, getting in photos with victims, making nude calendars, making speeches, shaming and blaming all of the good men into watching educational videos and signing up to petitions telling them not to do the heinous things that they already do not even do and giving all the violent thugs and rapists an opportunity to scoff at the ineffective and incompetent attempts to stop them from doing the heinous things that they were going to carry on doing anyway no matter what we did unless they were physically stopped and then caught and charged, this motion is about doing something real about violence against women. It is about giving women and vulnerable people a chance to be their own best defenders. I commend it to the house.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:45): I would like to thank everyone for their contribution to this motion today. I acknowledge that everyone in this place, including me, wants to end violence in the state, and I do not doubt anyone's intentions. But I would say this: there are hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of Victorians who are scared of being victims of crime. Those people want some means of protecting themselves. Under the current laws, because these people would be law-abiding citizens, they have no means of protecting themselves. They stand no chance whatsoever. That is the status quo that is supported by those opposing this motion. Some of those people that want to protect themselves will become victims of crime. Maybe pepper spray would have helped them, maybe not, but the current situation means that those people never stood a chance. They never stood a chance, and the government stopped them from using any means to protect themselves, as was pointed out. Carrying anything for the purposes of self-defence is illegal in this state. In fact the key thing that many people talk about technically could be illegal, is my understanding, if you are carrying them for those purposes.

I would say this: if one of those people that felt frightened of crime ignored the law and they obtained pepper spray anyway and they carried it – and there are lots of people that do that – do you really think that they deserve to go to prison? Because that is the current law. That is the law: if you carry a prohibited weapon, you can go to jail. It just seems outrageous to me. We talk about respecting people, but respect starts with listening to people and what they want. Some people say, 'I want something to make myself feel safer.' Yes, it will not work in all situations, and yes, it probably will not work in the majority of situations. But as Mrs Deeming pointed out, if there is 16 per cent of violent crime in this state that has some chance of being prevented by people being able to have some form of self-defence, then shouldn't we do it? Shouldn't we allow them to do it? Shouldn't we give people a chance of preventing that crime? The government was talking about coming down hard on perpetrators, and yes, we should do that, but I would rather that we stopped the perpetrators in their tracks.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (18): Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe

McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Adem Somyurek, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Noes (22): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Motion negatived.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:54): I move:

That the consideration of notice of motion, general business, 754, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Ombudsman referral

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:54): I am very pleased to be able to stand and move motion 744 in my name. It is an important motion that the Liberals and Nationals are putting into the Parliament to debate, because of what has gone on in relation to the absolute debacle around the VCE.

David Davis interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: Mr Davis calls it a fiasco. I actually think it is much worse than that, Mr Davis. It is compromising a system, and it is causing an immense amount of distress for so many students, their parents, teachers and school communities. It is an absolute shambles, and it is another example of how incompetent this government is. I want to speak to my motion. I move:

That, pursuant to section 16 of the Ombudsman Act 1973, this house refers the following matters to the Ombudsman for investigation and report:

- (1) the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority's (VCAA) admission of a significant error, which led to thousands of Victorian certificate of education (VCE) students gaining access to sample exam cover sheets containing nearly identical questions and case studies to those in their final exams;
- (2) the impact of this error on the integrity of the VCE examination process;
- (3) the adequacy of the VCAA's response, which included minor alterations to compromised exams and replacement of instruction booklets, while allegedly failing to fully address the integrity issues and potential disadvantage caused to other students;
- (4) a review of the role and accountability of executive staff at the VCAA for the systemic errors; and
- (5) a complete review of the systems, processes, and resources used for the VCE examinations, given the evidence of a pattern of systemic failure over at least three years.

As I said, this latest debacle is adding to the litany of systemic problems and failures overseen by Labor, overseen by Jacinta Allan and her Labor government, whether that is the corruption that is permeating through our state, through a whole range of organisations, like the Big Build – we know what is going on, it is rotten to the core; the crippling government debt that is saddling these students that we are talking about today and future generations of young people and their families with an insurmountable debt to pay off; or the health crisis, the crime crisis or the housing crisis. Well, now we have seen how extensive the crisis in education is.

This is an issue that goes to the heart, as the motion states, of the integrity of the VCE examination process, the adequacy of the VCAA's response; the review of the role and accountability of those that are working in the VCAA for the systemic errors; and the review of the systems, processes and

resources, given there have been systemic failures over the last three years. That is the point that the motion – the heart of the motion – goes to. What we have got is just more cover-ups by Labor, who refuse to acknowledge the extent of this very serious problem.

After three years of critical failures by the VCAA during the VCE examination period, a truly independent, thorough and credible investigation is required. Only last year it was said:

These stuff-ups should not have occurred in the first place ... We have to ensure this won't be repeated next year.

That was the Minister for Education in November 2023. Well, guess what, Minister, the stuff-ups have occurred again for the third year, and you still hold your job. Why? You should have been sacked by the Premier if she had any guts and any authority over you and the rest of her gaggle of MPs that are standing behind this systemic failure that has caused so much heartache and concern for tens of thousands of students and the school community and the parents. We need full transparency and accountability to ensure that the integrity of the Victorian certificate of education examinations going forward is reinstated, because there is no integrity under the current leadership of the minister and the Allan Labor government. When you have got three years in a row when these systemic failures have happened, when you have got investigation after investigation and the issue still occurs, it is not working. The system is failing, and you have just got cover-ups by the government. This is a very important issue that is causing, as I said, so much uncertainty for tens of thousands of students because they have been impacted by this, those school communities, those principals and their teaching cohort and of course the broader community. Regardless of whether a student took an exam or whether they did not, their confidence in the assessment process has been completely undermined. And why wouldn't it be when this is not a once-off, when you have got the minister saying, 'Don't worry; all is in hand'?

This is the third time it has happened, so that is why the confidence has been eroded. That is why it is so important that the Ombudsman looks into this, not another Mickey Mouse internal government review that will give the answers the government want. No, we need a proper investigation into this. Going back, following the 2022 exam period Deloitte was engaged to review errors in specialist mathematics exams. Following the 2023 exam period, Dr John Bennett led an independent review panel to scrutinise issues in that year's exam period, which included an error in the chemistry exam paper and students being handed the incorrect Chinese language exam papers. It is clear that, despite these two reviews that have taken place, the major and systemic failings of the VCAA have continued to let Victorian students down. They could not be more let down by the most grossly incompetent government that this state has ever had.

On top of this, the minister has been complicit in an attempt to cover up the VCAA stuff-ups – his words; he calls them stuff-ups. It is more than that; it is actually a gross mishandling in every way of what is going on. The VCAA advised the minister about the error on 14 October. That was last month. That was six weeks ago. It was weeks before the first exam was due to sit too. Instead of ensuring that each compromised exam was completely rewritten, the minister was more concerned with hiding the bungle and keeping it from becoming public. That is the cover-up. That is the extent that this government will go to.

Let us look at the timeline here around that 14 October date that I spoke about when the minister first became aware. If you look back at the timeline, on 5 October some teachers noticed embedded exam questions in cover sheets. On 10 October the VCAA became aware of embedded material in cover sheets and sent notice to schools telling them new cover sheets had been issued. On 12 October, just two days later, the VCAA clarified that it had become aware of the inclusion of embedded exam questions and case studies in cover sheets, and then two days later the minister became aware of the issue but claims he had been assured questions were being rewritten. A week later, on 21 October there was the first consignment of exams delivered to schools. On 29 October the exams started. On 1 November the second consignment of exams was delivered to schools. On 13 November the

minister was then briefed for the first time in a high level of detail. Why the hell did he not ask for that weeks before, knowing that this was the third year in a row that these debacles were ongoing?

This is just a minister who is complicit in the cover-up and who has just failed at every single level. On 14 November it was revealed that half the marks in the business management exam were accessible through the cover sheet, and Kylie White, the head of the VCAA, admitted that questions were included on exam cover sheets but denied exams were compromised. How wrong she was. Then just four days later she falls on her sword and resigns, and then the minister Ben Carroll admits to 56 exams being compromised – 56 exams being compromised – on 18 November. It is now 27 November. I mean, what the hell has he been doing? This all started on 5 October, so this is just an absolute timeline of degradation and cover-up and just hopeless administration by a hopelessly incompetent minister. It should not have been just Kylie White that resigned. It should have been that Ben Carroll resigned, or the Premier should have indeed sacked him. He should have been sacked. She is too weak, she is too afraid of causing further disruption and dislocation amongst her backbench and her unhappy campers and she is too compromised in the cover-ups that she has also been responsible for as minister, and now Premier, in a whole range of areas – that litany that I spoke about earlier.

Since that time, it is very clear that the minister has been continuing to hide the truth. He has refused to release the full list of exams compromised up until today – even that. The list is there, but it does not go to looking at the details that it needs to. That is despite marking taking place. Really, it is about students. Ms Bath, you are a former teacher. Mrs Hermans, you have worked in the education sector –

Ann-Marie Hermans: I was a teacher as well.

Georgie CROZIER: Former teacher – you understand the importance of this. Unfortunately those opposite, that do not have this experience, do not understand the importance of that integrity of how exams –

Melina Bath interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: being compromised and the confidence for students – the full integrity of the marking process. The students need to have that full transparency as to which of their exams and which questions have been compromised.

The students of course now face the real prospect that they might have marks docked from their exams if the assessors at the VCAA suspect they may have had access to the compromised material. So why are the students being punished for the government's incompetence? This is totally unfair and totally wrong, and it shows the extent of what the government will do to save their own hides while the most important time of students' secondary school life is being shattered. That, to go to Ms Bath's comment earlier – her interjection about confidence – is so, so important. This cannot happen again. The impacts are just way too significant.

I want to read in some of what has been said. I am going to quote from the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals and their president Colin Axup:

Principals and staff and schools have been dealing with the fallout without support or clear direction from the VCAA ...

On 17 November a VCAA staff members said:

All exams staff have been told to stick to the story of sample content when they have been asked to work 18-hour days rewriting content ...

There is one (person) who has almost killed herself trying to fix this whilst high-level leaders were going home.

A veteran VCE teacher on 17 November, it is reported, said:

from my perspective the issue is they could have contained it by being open and honest. They tried to hide it which is the major problem.

A senior VCE teacher in leadership at a major government school on 14 November said:

If a school did this they would fail a VCE audit and be told to change their practices ...

Students who have bent over backwards to do their best now find their peers may have had access to substantial material in the final exam.

It is mind-blowing. How is this even possible?

A VCE teacher in a government school said that the VCAA:

should be held to account and must ensure students are not worse off.

They did it and then they covered it up. The only changes they made were to the names in the case studies which gave the kids who saw this a massive advantage ...

Another student said no student ‘will ever trust the VCAA again’:

“It’s a massive breach of trust. The VCAA are the ones always on the moral high ground. I’d rather they apologised as I’d have more respect for them if they did ...

“For VCE students who’ve put in countless hours prepping for their final exams, finding out that the exam material was compromised feels incredibly unfair and disrupts the whole merit-based system we rely on.”

“The suggestion from VCAA that this leak has ‘no adverse impact’ is, frankly, dismissive and fails to acknowledge the stress and disruption this breach has caused. For students who sat the exam honestly, the value of their hard work feels undermined ...

There are so many more comments like this from students, principals and teachers who are absolutely devastated. Here is one from Ashleigh Martin from Caulfield Grammar, in my electorate:

“It is profoundly disappointing that this breach has introduced unnecessary stress and uncertainty during what is already a challenging time ...

Martin said students deserved an environment of fairness after their exams, “free from disruptions that may undermine their confidence”.

There is no-one that has got confidence in the system, because this is not a one-off issue. This is a repeated occurrence – the third year in a row, as I have said – and that is not good enough. I say again, the minister should have resigned when Kylie White went, and the Premier, if he would not resign, should have sacked him. She would not do that. He wants her job. They are all tossing and turning, just like the crossbench are tossing and turning over this – not you, Acting President Bourman – and how disappointing it is that the AEU have got to certain members of the crossbench to lobby them. The unions are running this state. This is another example of how the unions are running this state. And when we have had crossbench members tell the opposition –

A member interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: Yes, that is right, the AEU. Well, where have they been? They have been silent on this issue. What a disgrace. They have said nothing, yet they are lobbying the members of the crossbench, the progressive crossbench, who are voting with the government to block this important investigation to be done by the Ombudsman. They should hang their heads in shame, because the young people that have sat the exams today deserve to have this thoroughly investigated by somebody other than the government themselves. It is unbelievable, what is going on in this state, when time after time you have unions, whether it is the AEU, whether it is the CFMEU, dictating to the government and to their palsies on the crossbench.

David Ettershank interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: Well, you are, Mr Ettershank. You should be supporting this motion if you believe in transparency. You always bang on about it. This is about transparency and accountability. Let us get to the truth of what has gone on for these students that have suffered this year and for the students that have suffered in the previous two years. And let us not even think about the lockdown, when students in lockdown had to suffer because of wrong government policy decisions. We on this side of the house were arguing that they should be going to school. Oh, no, there was the union again

in the government's ear. I tell you they are running this state; that is very evident. Those people, the crossbench, along with the government, need to take a good, long, hard look at themselves and understand that this is a reasonable motion, it is a fair motion and it is a motion that is needed, because the Ombudsman is an independent authority designed for exactly this review. Students this year deserve it. Students next year deserve to have a proper review. The parents, the teachers and the school communities deserve to have a proper review. But oh, no, it looks like those progressive crossbenchers are going to side with the government and knock this out. Well, I urge them to change their minds, look at what is going on here and support this important motion.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (16:14): I am pleased to rise to speak on the motion which seeks to make a parliamentary referral under section 16 of the Ombudsman Act 1973 to investigate the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority's handling of the recent exams. I think there are fundamentally serious questions that need to be addressed in the course of this debate. The first matter I want to raise and come to is the question of what has happened and whether it is something that we think is acceptable here in the state of Victoria. The answer to that is no, it is not. Mistakes being made on the VCE exams are unacceptable. It is a stuff-up. It is not something that we as members of Parliament, hardworking people who work in the public service, people who work in our schools, parents or students should expect to happen in what for many of these young people are some of the most significant moments that have occurred in their short lives to date – these VCE exams being the culmination of years and years of hard work in our education system. To have the kinds of mistakes that were made by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority in the delivery of these exams this year is unacceptable. We understand the concern, and action is being taken to fix it.

The central contention, though, in the motion today is not whether the conduct was acceptable. It is not. It is not whether the mistakes were okay. They are not. The question is: what is the best way to address it? What is the best way to make sure that the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority does not let this happen again? There are two courses that we can embark upon and that are presented for consideration. We have the course of action that the Deputy Premier, the Minister for Education, has been very clear on and set out in his response, which is that there is going to be a systematic review, a root-and-branch review of the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. There is going to be a process that has the sort of transparency that you would absolutely want from that process. The review will be conducted in the way that you would expect it to be done with that transparency, with engagement from the experts with the people who were affected, with plans to fix it going into the future and with the report and the process to be independent and for that report to be publicly released. In addition, there will be the installation of an independent monitor to oversee the process for next year's exams so that families, students and schools have confidence that in 2025 the exam process will not have these mistakes repeated. That is what the minister has already announced. The action that he has initiated as the best way to deal with this issue is to get the answers that we need and to make sure that it does not happen again.

The alternative that the opposition is proposing, which is within the remit of this chamber – under section 16 of the Ombudsman Act – to embark upon, is for a different process. It is to require the Ombudsman – not to give the Ombudsman the option – to commence an investigation into these matters. There are a couple of things that are worth noting here. The Ombudsman has the power if she deems it appropriate and she deems it necessary under her own motion powers in the Ombudsman Act to investigate any instance of government administration. Those exist; they are not disputed. They are not affected by what this chamber does here today. She could do that if she so chose. That is her decision – an independent decision of an independent officer of the Parliament. What we have here is an alternative course that would require the Ombudsman to undertake this action and in doing so would further constrain the Ombudsman's ability to deliver on the range of other issues and priorities that the Ombudsman has. We know that parliamentary referrals have to be done above all other business that comes before the Ombudsman. The terms of the act require the Ombudsman to stop doing other things and focus on and prioritise what the Parliament asks them to do. So the question here today is: do we want to divert the Ombudsman's resources away from dealing with other matters and duplicate,

replicate, obfuscate – who knows? – an already announced, independent process that the minister has initiated? We do not need two processes running; we just need the one that the minister has already initiated.

The other point, which the Ombudsman herself makes in her latest annual report, tabled in the Parliament just a couple of weeks ago, is that referrals from the Parliament do divert resources away from other investigations; they do impact on the timeliness of investigations. In the annual report their performance measure is to close 80 per cent of investigations within 12 months of completion. In the last financial year, as reported in this year's annual report tabled in the Parliament two weeks ago, so before this motion was moved – their performance target is 80 per cent – it was 37 per cent for the closing of investigations within 12 months, because –

Georgie Crozier: Give her some more resources.

Ryan BATCHELOR: I will come to this point, Mr Crozier – because of one referral from the Parliament. So far this year we have already got two on foot, and this would add a third, which would mean that other activities, based on the Ombudsman's advice that she has given to this Parliament, would affect the timeliness of other investigations that the Ombudsman deems to be important and necessary, including, one would expect, the priority – the dedicated investigations team that the Ombudsman set up, for example, to investigate matters in the prison and youth justice system.

We also know from the evidence that the Ombudsman gave publicly a couple of weeks ago to the Integrity and Oversight Committee that, although the Ombudsman bills the Parliament, effectively through the seeking of a Treasurer's advance, to cover the costs of referrals of these investigations, the impact in terms of diversion of staff resources, the impact in terms of lags in recruitment and the impact on the expertise that they have available to them to complete their work is affected by these referrals. So we have got to think: do we want the Ombudsman's work focused on this issue and the two other referrals that the Parliament has already made, in June, or do we want a process to get to the bottom of the problem – the independent review established by the government – public, transparent?

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Ryan BATCHELOR: We know, though – Ms Crozier, by interjection, has made reference to what has happened in previous years – that in previous years there were some issues uncovered with a couple of the exams.

Georgie Crozier: Stuff-ups.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Stuff-ups, mistakes – unacceptable, however you want to characterise them. An independent process was put in place. Those exams this year are not affected by mistakes. We have confidence that the independent review process that the minister has announced is going to deliver the certainty that families and students are looking for by next year. We do not have any guarantees that the Ombudsman's process will be concluded by next year, and we do not have any guarantees that it will get to the heart of these issues. The government's independent review process is going to deliver a transparent, open and released review; there is going to be independent oversight of next year's processes. It is a much better path to follow if we want to support our students next year than the politicised games the opposition is playing today.

Georgie Crozier interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Order! Ms Bath, without assistance from her own side.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (16:25): I thank Ms Crozier for her interjections. They were actually very apposite to this very important discussion. Yes, I am actually one of the probably few people in this place who have –

Georgie Crozier: Marked exams.

Melina BATH: facilitated students. I actually have not marked exams in a formal capacity, but I have certainly spent a number of years preparing students all the way through secondary college but also preparing students in years 11 and 12 for VCE exams. I see overwhelmingly the dedication that they show from the early days in year 11, with their concerns about what exams look like and how they will perform, to their growing confidence towards that last year in October – the confidence that they have that they are prepared and ready for those exams. I want to commend all VCE teachers for the work they do – above and beyond, as we say, but it is so true – to really amplify, coordinate, support, encourage and capacity-build their students to meet these exams and meet them head-on with confidence that it is a stepping stone. It is the ability to progress wherever that may be – into the TAFE sector, into a university degree, into a job or into a career. These exams are very important. For thousands upon thousands of students, that confidence that has been instilled in them – encouraged and through their own hard work, with parents and supporters sitting at home and encouraging them and making life as focused as they can to meet these goals – over the last three years has been ripped away. That passion and confidence that students have I can only imagine is in disarray at the moment.

I heard before Mr Batchelor trying to weave his way out of why we should be sending this to the Ombudsman, who is there to investigate government and public service misdemeanours, corruption – whatever you want to call it – impropriety and lack of ability. I feel like Mr Batchelor in his contribution was wanting the government to put a cap on integrity: ‘We can’t give this task to the Ombudsman because she’s overworked.’ Well, she is overworked because we are in a state that has over the last 10 years stripped away integrity and stripped away what I think would have been a very decent public service. They have bloated it with friends of friends of friends, and those that are underneath and getting orders are feeling so frustrated with this.

Harriet Shing interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Order! Minister, if you are going to interject, it has to be from your place.

Melina BATH: They are so, so frustrated.

Georgie Crozier: The Ombudsman is going to politicise the public service. I rest my case.

Melina BATH: Thank you.

Georgie Crozier: The former Ombudsman, not this one.

Melina BATH: That is right. We very much appreciate the Ombudsman and the role of the Ombudsman, and that is why we want to see this go to this investigation. For three whole years we have seen stuff-ups, to quote the Minister for Education, in this system. We want to see a further level of accountability. We want that confidence to be reinstated in our schools, in our principals and in the system.

Very sadly, we know in the state of Victoria that we are not turning out students into the pathways of maths. We know that there has been a decline over the last 20 years of people adopting a career in maths, and this has not only an outcome focus but an economic impact as well by not creating those fantastic mathematicians that can go into so many different spheres of work – technology, engineering and so many more. We have seen the government obfuscate. To pick up Mr Batchelor’s point before, if this was year one and there was a stuff-up then yes, an internal investigation – root and branch, as they like to say, but we cannot say that here, apparently – should have been the investigation. But this is the third year.

Michael Galea: On a point of order, Acting President, my understanding is that it was quite clear that it is going to be a root-and-branch, independent review of the VCAA. I am not sure what Ms Bath is talking about.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Thank you, Mr Galea, that is not a point of order. Ms Bath to continue without assistance.

Melina BATH: I have had some conversations over the last few days and indeed weeks when we had the education inquiry with some very fantastic mathematicians, and they are very frustrated with the education minister. They have written to the education minister on a number of occasions, and they are learned. They are not out of the Weeties box. They are actually practising mathematicians in schools. They have been involved in assessment over many years. They are being ignored by the minister, and some of their comments are quite apposite to this. I am not going to name names, because I do not know these people, but there are people who are working very hard in the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority exam unit. There are other people in the Department of Education, and it is a big beast, that are not doing their job. Clearly they are not doing their job, and they are overstaffed and underproductive in terms of outcomes. We are seeing this at the end, because we are having exams that are deeply flawed – are compromised – and students have not got the confidence that in the exam they are going to sit they are not going to be disadvantaged through this exam process. They have not got the confidence that this government is fixing it up, because it has had three years and it is still broken. And these learned people certainly feel that the government has not made those inroads.

Now, let me just speak to the education inquiry that I know Mr Batchelor was on, and I was a participating member and moved for this inquiry. We actually moved that the Bennett review –

Michael Galea interjected.

Melina BATH: Oh, and Mr Galea. It is not a cheerio; it is a serious topic.

We moved that the Bennett review be implemented – and the government said that they would adopt it – and that the government actually report back to Parliament and provide clarity on what those improvements have been within the next year. That is one of those oversights that this government is not known for.

If this was us, if we were on the other side and there had been three years of stuff-ups by the education minister, whose primary role is to make sure that there is competency in the system to provide students with the best possible future, they would be baying for our education minister's blood. Well, we are baying for his, because it is absolutely unacceptable. He cannot guarantee that no student will be left without disadvantage. He has not done that, and he should be referring this to the Ombudsman rather than to an internal review.

Finally, in speaking with some of the maths teachers, they have said to me that there needs to be systemic cultural change in the education department, that this is the tip of the iceberg and that unfortunately this minister is absolutely derelict in his duties. I commend this motion, and I call on the whole house to do so too.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:34): I do rise to speak on the motion put forward to us today by Ms Crozier on the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA). As my colleague Mr Batchelor noted as well, we will not be supporting this motion for the reasons which he has gone through and which I will further elucidate for the benefit of the chamber and indeed Ms Bath, who was under some confusion as to whether the review being undertaken was going to be an independent root-and-branch review. I can assure Ms Bath that it absolutely is. Now that that matter is settled, we do note, and it is completely inappropriate, that a number of VCE students have been let down at one of the most important times of their academic life. This is exactly as the minister said, and I share his grave concern over these incidents. I also note with a great deal of appreciation the immense effort that the minister himself and indeed his officials have gone to in addressing this very serious problem. As serious as it is, though, we know that a referral to the Ombudsman today – an Ombudsman who members opposite apparently do not even know the name of – is going to achieve nothing other than a cheap political stunt, and I would take the lack of interjections or points of order

there as confirmation that members opposite do not know the name of the Victorian Ombudsman. Again, that is a matter for them.

This referral, if implemented, would further divert resources and time away from the VCAA's number one priority, which is providing timely, fair and equitable examination markings for students ahead of their ATAR release this December. Our absolute priority as this government is to ensure fairness for every single student.

Ann-Marie Hermans interjected.

Michael GALEA: And I note, Mrs Hermans, that I have spoken to many friends of mine, indeed one particular friend who is an English teacher, and I hear the frustration and I absolutely hear the frustration of their students, but I am absolutely proud to be standing alongside a Minister for Education who is perhaps bar none best equipped to deal with this issue and institute the reform that is required. Currently VCAA is on track to meet those scheduled timelines of 12 December for the release of this year's ATAR results. VCAA themselves are actually working to address these issues caused by the early publication of some examination results.

What we are doing and what the important thing to do to get right is to do a proper – and I will say it again for the benefit of those opposite – independent root-and-branch review of what happened. This will include transparency in both the review and the change process. That transparency will extend to ensuring that the report will be publicly released. There will also be an independent monitor for next year's VCE exams to oversee that entire process.

I do note as well some contributions from members opposite that spoke of the Bennett review. The Bennett review looked at some specific issues with regard to understanding maths and chemistry questions. Those errors that were caught by the Bennett review were addressed by the Bennett review and then VCAA took some actions in response to that review. Those incidents and those issues regarding those maths and chemistry exams did not recur this year, so the Bennett review did do the job it set out to do. But what is clear – and I know that the education minister himself has been very clear on this – is that a more significant review is needed, and that is exactly why he has implemented the independent root-and-branch review of the VCAA.

The opposition's motion would deflect and take time out and resources away from an Ombudsman who, I believe, they may have even outrageously referred to as a lapdog earlier this year as well. Mrs Hermans, you have now come into the chamber since I first mentioned this. Perhaps you know the name of the Victorian Ombudsman, and if you do I heartily invite you to interject and tell us all the name of the Victorian Ombudsman, but apparently you cannot. Maybe Mr Welch can tell us the name of the Victorian Ombudsman, maybe he cannot. It seems clear that once again we have a Liberal Party that is running off bad policy, with absolutely no idea, no clue and clearly no vision or no practical plan for the state of Victoria. We see it again with the motion here before us today. Who is the Ombudsman? You cannot tell us. This should not be a trick question. I was sure that someone was going to interject in the first minute of me saying that. It has now been more than 5 minutes into my contribution and not a single member of the opposition can tell us the name of the Victorian Ombudsman, and they still do not know. That goes to the heart of the absolute intellectual baselessness with which they approach this issue, as indeed they have approached every other issue that they take to this place, because there is no depth. There is no substance. They are standing here today putting a referral to an Ombudsman they do not even know the name of. How pathetic the Victorian Liberal Party are. How pathetic each and every one of you are. You have no clue, no idea and absolutely no vision for the state of Victoria. Almost 6 minutes into my contribution I will spare you – no, I will not. You can jump up and say it if you wish to give us the name.

Harriet Shing: Marlo Baragwanath.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Minister Shing. You have said it. You have got the prize for the name that no-one in the Liberal Party seems to know.

Harriet Shing: I just want a chocolate.

Michael GALEA: She has got a chocolate as the prize. Again, absolute intellectual vacuity we see from those opposite.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order –

Michael GALEA: Here we go, Ms Crozier. Please enlighten us. Do you know the name?

Georgie Crozier: Yes, I do. On a point of order, Acting President, while Mr Galea is having a bit of fun, this is an important issue. I would ask you to draw him back to the issue that we are debating. This is about this house referring this important issue to the Victorian Ombudsman.

Harriet Shing: On the point of order, Acting President, Mr Galea not only has been entirely relevant to the motion in his contribution but has been well within his rights to respond to the contributions made by the opposition which in seeking this referral have not been able to identify who the Victorian Ombudsman is. In the context of the standing orders, Mr Galea is actually being relevant –

Georgie Crozier: When does a motion have a person's name in it? It's the Victorian Ombudsman.

Harriet Shing: Sorry, I am going to pick up the interjection there in response to the point of order. Ms Crozier has just asked since when the name of a person actually bears any relevance to the motion. In fact it is an insult to the Ombudsman that nobody on the opposition benches knows her name.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Order! There is no point of order. Mr Galea to continue without assistance, and keep it relevant to the motion.

Michael GALEA: I will say that Mrs Broad did mouth the name of the Ombudsman to me in that last little section there, so I will acknowledge Mrs Broad for that and acknowledge that once again the Nationals certainly seem to be running rings around their coalition partners. I do not know why they continue to put up with them, Mrs Broad.

At any rate, if Ms Crozier was listening to the start of my contribution, she would have heard me genuinely very earnestly talking about the impact this has had on students. Indeed I have actually had some conversations with some VCE students as well, some children of family friends, about the impact that this has had. As I mentioned earlier, some close friends of mine who are in the teaching profession who teach VCE subjects have been frustrated by this as well, as I know the minister is, which is why we have seen this decisive, swift action taken, unlike a political witch-hunt put forward by those in the opposition today that would do nothing other than try to find some other embarrassment for the government. They know that, day in and day out, this is a government, under the leadership of Ben Carroll as Deputy Premier and education minister and Jacinta Allan as Premier, that is delivering for Victorians and is delivering for Victorian school students. If you look at the \$400 school saving bonus, if you look at the all the new schools, Mrs Hermans, in the electorates that we cover in South-Eastern Metropolitan, in Berwick alone we are building more schools in that one electorate than those opposite built across the state in their entire four years in office. They never care about education. They say the right things in opposition and then they get elected. Oh, here we go.

Ann-Marie Hermans: On a point of order, Acting President, this is actually not relevant to this particular motion. I think that we need to really stick to the fact that this is a motion about a situation where exams have been leaked. The member needs to stick to that because there are students whose futures are being impacted by this. It has nothing to do with where the schools are in his region.

Michael GALEA: Further to the point of order, Acting President –

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): You have run out of time, unfortunately. Hold there while I consult the boffins, as they are known. I am afraid, Mr Galea, your time has expired.

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (16:45): I want to make a brief contribution on this motion from Ms Crozier and thank her for bringing this matter before the Legislative Council. I think it is most appropriate that this issue, which is causing concern widely, is appropriately ventilated. VCE exams are a big thing. I think we all know that. Whether you are a student or whether you are a parent or a family member, the VCE exam is exciting, it is challenging and it can be pretty bloody scary to be honest I think for many people who have been through this process. Either way it is a big thing, and it is a reasonable expectation, whether you are a student, whether you are a parent, whether you are a family member or whether you are a teacher, that the exam process is done properly and it is done fairly, and what has happened does not reflect those values. What has happened is absolutely unacceptable.

We have taken the time to read into this matter, as I suppose has everyone who has been following the news. We have also spoken with people directly involved. Can I just say, in terms of Ms Crozier's contribution, and I will say it on the record, that I have not spoken to anyone from the –

Georgie Crozier: Rachel told me. Rachel told me.

David ETTERS HANK: Ms Crozier, please. Let me say it, and then you can disagree if you want to. I have not spoken with anyone from the AEU, and I think it is possibly relevant to bear in mind –

Georgie Crozier: Well, your colleague –

David ETTERS HANK: that the AEU – Ms Crozier! The AEU do not actually have coverage of the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA). They are covered by the CPSU, which is the relevant union.

Ryan Batchelor: They're all the same.

David ETTERS HANK: That's right, yes. And I mean, maybe you should do your homework a bit better before you start verballing people.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Order! Mr Ettershank, I have noticed a bit of this going on. These things should be through the Chair. Have at it with what you want to say, but rather than having a conversation across the chamber – and it is not just you; I have noticed it happening across the chamber – through the Chair, please.

David ETTERS HANK: Thank you, Acting President Bourman. I take on board that advice and will endeavour to do better.

I have spoken with representatives of the staff who actually work in the VCAA, and absolutely there are major problems with that organisation. There is dysfunctionality. There is rock bottom morale. There is a huge problem with excessive casualisation and systemic dysfunctionality, so I do not think there is any disagreement from our point of view. That is why I started my contribution by indicating that I think it is great that you have brought this forward. There does need to be action taken, and I think there is an expectation in the Victorian community amongst parents, amongst students and amongst teachers that action will be taken. The question is: what is that appropriate course of action?

I do not know enough to be able to say what the workload or otherwise of the ombudsperson or the Ombudsman is, but I think it is fairly clear that we need a process that can be done independently, can be done transparently and can be done promptly, such that we can go into the next VCE exam round with a level of confidence that all of those people who will be affected by it know that it is going to be done properly.

I am almost loath to use the expression 'root-and-branch review' because I did get into trouble for referring to bus routes. I do not want to upset Ms Terpstra any further than I already have. In terms of the undertakings that we have received from the government and from the Premier's office and from the government representatives who have spoken this afternoon, there are certain elements to a process that is being proposed that we are supportive of. The first one of those is that there will be a thorough

systemic review, a root-and-branch independent review – please do not hit me, Ms Terpstra – that will get to the bottom, I hope I can say ‘bottom’, of the problems within the VCAA, because that is long overdue. This is the third year in a row, so there needs to be a thorough investigation. But investigations that are done in the dark are not as good as investigations where you can see both the process and the outcome, and so there is also an undertaking from this government that the review process will have a high level of transparency, in terms of both the review process and also the subsequent change process. There is also an undertaking from the government that there will be a public release of the report at the conclusion of that investigation.

In case I did not mention it – also I think it is really important – in terms of that review, it will be at arm’s length. It is an independent review. It is not the Department of Education or the VCAA looking at itself. And then finally, there will be an independent monitor appointed to ensure that those changes are applied correctly, professionally, in the next VCE round, so that there can be a level of confidence that this is not going to happen again. On the basis of those undertakings from government, Legalise Cannabis Victoria (LCV) will be opposing the motion, primarily because this appears to be suitably accurate, it is timely and it fits the criteria to addressing this. And I am sorry –

Georgie Crozier interjected.

David ETTERS HANK: Well, I think it is very disappointing. I am going to just answer that response. I mean, the opposition are very keen to slag the progressive crossbench when we are voting against them, but they are not so sort of unhappy when we are voting with them –

Georgie Crozier interjected.

David ETTERS HANK: it is just that we do not do it enough. And maybe if there were better and more thoughtful resolutions that were brought to this chamber by the opposition we would support them, because we have supported them on their merits. On that basis, LCV will be opposing the motion, and we look forward to a good, thorough and transparent process that will result in a VCE next year that is not marred as this one has been.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (16:53): I am very pleased to stand in support of this motion to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and report on the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority’s (VCAA) failures for the VCE exams. I do want to thank my colleague Georgie Crozier for putting this to the chamber. I note that Ryan Bachelor during his contribution did acknowledge the stuff-ups and mistakes that have happened, and last week the Minister for Education stated that 56 out of 116 VCE examination papers had been compromised. He committed to releasing them to the public, but the public is still waiting.

This is a complete bungle. Thousands of students have worked hard over a very long period of time, they have faced their VCE exams, and to have this hit the headlines I think would be very destructive to them. I know that because I am a parent of a child going through VCE, and I think it undermines confidence. They feel ripped off, disadvantaged and very confused by what has happened. It does impact the students, it impacts the families and it certainly has an impact on the teachers. I thank Melina Bath, my colleague who is a former teacher, for her contribution to this as well. But this is not just a once-off. We have seen errors now over the last three years.

Minister Ben Carroll has been too slow to act on this important issue. The marking of exam papers is well underway. Labor have asked their friends at the Australian Education Union to look into the matter, but it really goes to that issue of marking your own homework or having friends mark your homework – it is not a good idea. The Liberals and the Nationals want to see a truly independent and comprehensive investigation. It has been more than six weeks now since the VCAA about the issues with the exam papers, the hidden text embedded within sample examination papers, and we still do not know all the facts. What were the exams? Which questions were compromised? VCE students and their families deserve better. Our teachers and our schools deserve better. But as I said, this is not the first time. We have had errors now three years in a row. Reviews have been done, but the problems

still remain. The independent investigation put forward in this motion for the Ombudsman will help restore integrity to the VCE assessment process, and it includes a complete review of the systems, processes and resources used for the VCE examinations. Too often we hear in this state about students falling behind in education and standards dropping, but I will say leadership starts at the top. Students, their families and teachers deserve better. They deserve to know exactly how these compromised exams will be graded, which questions have been affected and how their final marks will be impacted.

Minister Carroll found out in mid-October that the examination papers were compromised. He failed to take action to resolve the issue, and now thousands of students are unsure of how they will be impacted. This is just another example of the lack of transparency we see under the Allan Labor government. I ask members of this chamber to support this motion to refer these matters to the Ombudsman for further investigation. As I said, the government should not be marking their own homework or asking friends to do it either. A review is needed after three years of errors. This motion is timely, it is fair and it is reasonable, and I ask the chamber to support it.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:57): I also applaud Ms Crozier for this motion, which is an investigation into the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) exams. As a former secondary teacher and as someone who has enjoyed teaching secondary students, preparing them and teaching them skills so that they are equipped to go into English exams, I am absolutely appalled to think that under this government for the third year in a row we have leaking of exams. To have 56 exams compromised and to expect the opposition to feel comfortable with the government investigating itself is an absolute joke.

I listened to Mr Batchelor and what he had to say – ‘We don’t want to take up the time of the Ombudsman, and we really think that they should be doing something else.’ Let me say, that is actually the job of the Ombudsman: to be looking into the integrity and looking into these issues. So what are we saying – that they cannot do their job? This government is so inept and so incompetent in so many different areas that this poor Ombudsman is run off its feet. Really the issue here is that this is a very important situation where exams have been compromised. Young people have been preparing for these exams and training in these skills from the time they entered secondary college.

Harriet Shing: On a point of order, Acting President, Mrs Hermans has just referred to the Ombudsman as ‘him’ or ‘he’. That is in fact misleading the house on the basis that the Ombudsman is actually female, and she has got a name, which would be good for Mrs Hermans to put on the record as well.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Whilst you may be correct, it is not a point of order.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: The issue here is so important. The government is trivialising the fact that there needs to be transparency and there needs to be an independent inquiry –

Michael Galea: On a point of order, Acting President, I could not have been more clear in my contribution that the root-and-branch review is going to be independent. For Mrs Hermans to be saying otherwise is either unintentionally or deliberately misrepresenting the facts that have been put before this house. I ask her to correct the record.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): That is not a point of order. Can we kind of wind back on the points of order?

Ann-Marie HERMANS: Thank you, Acting President, and I would really appreciate it, if these points of order are going to continue to be about this, that we just keep going.

It is incredibly important to the students and to the teachers that we look into this. It is so important because these teachers spend a lot of their additional time outside of their school life to train students up to make sure that they are ready for these exams.

My question is: which schools were able to get the exams in advance? Which students were able to get the exams in advance? In which regions did this take place? These are really important questions. Who had access to this information? We need to get to the bottom of it, because at the end of the day –

Ryan Batchelor: On a point of order, Acting President, I am just concerned that Mrs Hermans in her contribution is misrepresenting, wilfully or inadvertently, the facts here, which may lead to confusion for anyone listening to the debate, so I ask that she be accurate in her contribution.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Unless you want to make an accusation of deliberately misleading the house, that is not a point of order.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: It seems that the government is extremely agitated by the fact that a former teacher, who is very familiar with VCE exams, is actually standing up to represent this motion and to speak on it. That concerns me in itself – that I have to be interrupted every time I speak on a motion about a VCAA exam that has been leaked and that actually has compromised results. Some people are going to get into universities who may not really have had the ATAR if they had not had a leaking of that exam, and those –

Michael Galea: On a point of order, Acting President, I would appreciate it if Mrs Hermans would not cast negative aspersions on a cohort of year 12 Victorian students, who are passing their VCE exams as we speak. I ask that she not put negative associations on this cohort of year 12 students. That is an outrageous accusation.

Georgie Crozier: On the point of order, Acting President, the government is trivialising and putting ridiculous points of order, and I ask you to ask them to desist and allow Mrs Hermans to continue with her contribution.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Order! That is not a point of order. Mrs Hermans to continue without assistance.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: It really bothers me that this government thinks it is a joke that exams have been leaked and that they want to make a joke of my contribution, because they are constantly interjecting as I speak. Acting President, I actually cannot hear myself.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman): Order! If we can just keep it down. Let us get through this. Mrs Hermans to continue without assistance from anyone.

Ann-Marie HERMANS: When exams are leaked, when they are compromised – in this case we are talking about 56 exams – it impacts the results. It impacts which students get which results and go to which institutions. Let us just, for example, hypothetically say a regional school that is already disadvantaged is in a situation where it did not have access to that leaked information and its students are already disadvantaged – now they are even more disadvantaged because they did not get the information that maybe some other ‘special’ school somewhere else that is maybe elite or government has been privy to.

It tells me that this government has a lot to hide and once again it is incompetent. Once again it is not transparent, and it is not even willing to support or to encourage the crossbench to support a motion that requires an investigation where we can get a report outside of this government. You cannot expect the people of my region in the south-east to honestly believe that this government is capable of investigating its own internal affairs and being transparent with the public about it. It will be the south-eastern region people who will be disadvantaged in so many ways, and I would like to see the list of the schools that actually received this leaking.

I think that we need to look at what is going on here. I am tired of seeing a government that does not pay attention to the concerns of the people. I am tired of a government that will not allow an independent investigation and a report from the Ombudsman. I know that the people in my region are

tired of it. Schoolteachers and students alike do not think this is fair, and they expect a fair deal. This motion is something that will provide it for them.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:05): This motion is actually very important. It goes to a range of issues around integrity, around confidence and around a system that is integral to our state, and that is the education system. What we have seen and heard today in this chamber by members of the government is quite appalling. They have trivialised this matter, they have ridiculed members of the opposition for no reason and they have not grasped the severity of what has happened here. They argue that there is independence and that it needs to be undertaken, again, by their own people. But this is the third time it has happened – the third year in a row. I repeat what I said in my earlier contribution, that the minister said last November:

These stuff-ups should not have occurred in the first place ... We have to ensure this will not be repeated next year.

But it has, and that is why it is concerning. That is why parents are concerned, that is why students are concerned and that is why the opposition is concerned that this is going to happen again, because it is the same people looking into themselves. What is concerning is that members of the crossbench have actually said that we were wrong when in fact members of their own party have sent messages to the shadow minister, and I will read it out:

... the AEU have been active in holding govt to account and seek to allow the dept to deal with it.

We have got unions running this state, and this is just another example of it. They are lobbying the crossbench, and I am sure there will be some fancy deals done down the track. That is the problem in this state. We have got these deals being done. We have got very bad decisions being made. We have got wrong decisions being made, and the impacts are profound, whether it is the increasing debt or whether it is this really important issue around student VCE examinations and the authority that is overseeing them and a minister who should have resigned or been sacked. This is appalling governance. It is an appalling failure, and what we heard from Mr Batchelor and Mr Galea and interruptions by Minister Shing – it was all a bit of a joke and a laugh. The Ombudsman, Mr Batchelor said, was too busy and this would divert resources. If there is not an issue as important as this that an authority like the Ombudsman should be investigating, then goodness, why have them, honestly.

Ryan Batchelor: So they can make decisions on their own motions.

Georgie CROZIER: Yes, but you know, Mr Batchelor, so should the house, and if you had any integrity, if your government had any integrity, you would support this so she could do it.

Michael Galea: You're very touchy today, Ms Crozier.

Georgie CROZIER: Well, Mr Galea, I am frustrated – like those parents are frustrated, like those students are frustrated and like those principals are frustrated – that you are the worst government in this state's history and you will not do the right and decent thing.

Michael Galea interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: Touchy, touchy, touchy.

The PRESIDENT: Ms Crozier, Mr Bourman did a very good ruling before that contributions should be through the Chair.

Georgie CROZIER: President, in my summing up, this is an important issue, and that is what we have been putting up with through the debate – those sorts of comments from a backbench who are just parroting the lines from a government that is drowning in their own demise and corruption and incompetence.

Michael Galea interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: Well, you are all failures. You have got CFMEU running the state. You have got the AEU directing the course in this debate. There are real issues, and if an authority should be looking into something, it is something like this. I am absolutely appalled that the government does not see the decency of what needs to be done here for the sake of students, for the sake of parents and for the sake of principals and their school communities. They are taking the political line and not the decent line. How disgraceful.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (16): Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaele Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

Noes (19): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Motion negatived.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Statements on tabled papers and petitions

Victorian Inspectorate

Report 2023–24

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (17:18): I rise today to make a statement on the annual report from the Victorian Inspectorate, which was tabled I think in the last sitting week. The Victorian Inspectorate is the independent agency of the Parliament with responsibility for overseeing our integrity agencies. In particular I just want to make note of an update that the inspectorate gave in this annual report on progress made by IBAC on implementing some recommendations in a special report that the inspectorate tabled in October 2022 relating to the case of Emma. Emma, which is not her real name, was the victim of terrible domestic abuse at the hands of her partner, who was also a serving police officer. The perpetrator in this case pled guilty to various offences in February 2020. The inspectorate's special report found a series of errors in the handling of this case by IBAC. IBAC, as Victoria's anti-corruption agency, is also charged with oversight of police conduct here in Victoria, and in this instance there were issues with the way IBAC handled this case when it was reported to them. The inspectorate's report provided a very thorough analysis of how our integrity agencies need to be very well informed about the realities of family violence and how they themselves need to be attuned to the issues of risk when they operate in that context.

On Monday of this week the Integrity and Oversight Committee in our annual performance public hearings into the agencies that we oversee heard from a range of witnesses on the topic of handling family violence matters by our integrity agencies and in particular IBAC's work. Monday was obviously the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, which falls as part of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence, so it was incredibly appropriate that it was on that day that we heard evidence from a range of victim-survivors and also from some organisations that are there to support them.

The courage that was shown by the people who came to give that evidence on Monday was astounding. The stories both that we heard in the course of the day but also that were in the inspectorate's report were shocking, and they demonstrated that all agencies, whether they be part of the central government or independent of us as agencies of the Parliament, need to do more to make sure that their approach to dealing with cases that involve gender-based violence take a trauma-

informed approach and that they are aware of the serious risks that exist through family violence and that victim-survivors of family violence continue to experience over time.

The inspectorate's report found that IBAC had serious failings in the way that it handled this case as an exemplar of systemic failings in their approach to understanding gender-based violence and responding, particularly in the instances of family violence when serving police officers were the perpetrators, and in this particular case – in Emma's case – it found that IBAC had fundamentally failed to provide the sort of support and understanding that was necessary. We hope as a result of the inspectorate's work that processes improve – and certainly the annual report says that processes have improved – at IBAC at a policy level. What we heard on Monday was that practice needs to improve as well, and I hope that this practice continues, because improvement in these very serious and often dangerous cases should be our absolute highest priority.

Victorian Environmental Assessment Council

Assessment of the Values of State Forests in Eastern Victoria: Terms of Reference

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:23): I rise tonight to speak on the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's *Assessment of the Values of State Forests in Eastern Victoria* and indeed the Great Outdoors Taskforce. The Allan government, in its establishment of the Great Outdoors Taskforce and in addition to the so-called eminent panel, revealed very deeply flawed public land management. Launched in April 2024 by the Minister for Environment, the taskforce's stated aim was to review the '1.5 million hectares of state forests previously managed for timber', noting that the timber harvesting footprint included in that 1.5 million hectares the Central Highlands. It included it, and now what we see is that Minister Dimopoulos is deceitfully cutting out – excising and taking out – the Central Highlands from this discussion, in effect paving the way to locking up the Central Highlands.

When the minister states that there will be – and go and check the website – no large-scale change in land tenure inside the taskforce area, that is correct. That is East Gippsland and north-east Victoria, but it does not mean the Central Highlands. So what this is doing is it is conning the Victorian population. This is smoke and mirrors. The Minister for Environment is going to announce the great forest national park at a politically opportune time. There is no doubt about it.

Adding another 350,000 hectares, including areas in my electorate – Walhalla, Noojee – and then up to Buxton, Eildon, Healesville, Kinglake and Marysville – this great forest national park is about restricting traditional pursuits. It is about appeasing the Gucci Green voters. Jacinta Allan the Premier has said:

... as a proud country Victorian I won't be putting a padlock on our public forests.

Premier, you might not put a padlock on them, but you are going to restrict access. You are going to restrict those activities that people have been doing for hundreds of years. You are going to restrict hunting. You are going to restrict horseriding. You are going to restrict trail bike riding, four-wheel driving and free and dispersed hunting. You are going to restrict prospecting and fossicking, and you have already restricted rock climbing and walking of dogs through certain parts. You might not put a padlock on it, but you are going to diminish the capacity of Victorians to get out, be with their family, commune with nature, take on those activities and have a healthy life.

It is also scandalous that this document that I am speaking to talks about threats to biodiversity. We are going to look at the threats to biodiversity. This government has not had a state of the parks assessment and has not assessed the state of our national parks since February 2018, so we are nearly up to seven years without actually checking. There is no scientific monitoring of what this government is doing in our national parks. Is there any conservation? Is it protecting native flora and fauna? There are no checks and balances. It says it is going to lock it up – well, it is not saying it now, but it means that it is going to lock it up. But it is not actually doing the homework and the science. What else it is doing is ripping the funding out of Parks Victoria, out of the Department of Energy, Environment and

Climate Action. There are less boots on the ground and there are more suits bloating in metropolitan Melbourne. This is not the way to behave – \$95 million budget cuts we see.

We also see Mount Arapiles access being reduced by about 60 per cent. This is a world-famous site. This is a world-famous activity, and people come to live in the regions to conduct and enjoy those activities. They stimulate the economy and they provide jobs and much-needed services in there. We also have the 50,000 hectares of the Wombat and Lerderderg state forests about to be put into national parks by this government. It is not saying it is going to look after flora and fauna any better; it is just going to do it. The impact on our regional communities is significant. There have been, as I said, cuts to regional staff and layoffs. I was talking to somebody who works out of Ballarat the other day. She said, ‘We had fantastic field staff, and there are 15 of those cut out under our nose.’ It is absolutely appalling. This is a government of deceit. It is trying to pull the wool over the eyes of not only regional Victorians but metropolitan people who love to get out in the bush and conduct their activities. The Nationals and I am sure the Liberals absolutely oppose the creation of any new national parks. We want to see our forests protected and looked after, not shut up.

Legislative Assembly Privileges Committee

Report on the Complaint by the Member for Brighton

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (17:28): I rise to speak on the *Report on the Complaint by the Member for Brighton* in the other place. This most recent Privileges Committee report, which inquired into a complaint made by the member for Brighton, serves to teach us all a lesson about the conduct of members in this place. The Privileges Committee serves a vital purpose in protecting the functioning and dignity of Parliament. It investigates breaches of parliamentary privilege, ensuring that this sacred space remains free from undue influence, interference or misconduct. Members who are endowed with these extraordinary powers in excess of every other citizen of this state need to wield them carefully. When the significant powers of this committee are deployed for trivial reasons, it risks becoming an instrument of oppression rather than justice. The misuse can destroy reputations, deter civic engagement and erode public confidence in our democratic processes. Let us just look at the powers that this committee actually has for civilians:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

- (1) admonishment or reprimand;
- (2) admonishment with a request for apology;
- (3) appearance before the bar of the house; and –

I kid you not –

- (4) imprisonment.

That is the most extreme measure and one that is rightfully deemed highly unlikely, but its very existence is extraordinarily threatening, and it should remind us of the gravity of the powers that we hold. For a civilian – a private individual – this public branding, the threat of imprisonment, can have a lasting personal, professional and social repercussion, even if no further action is taken. These powers were entrusted to us in order to uphold the principles of justice and fairness, not to undermine and abuse them.

The report can be summarised roughly in the following terms. After months of investigations the committee made just two findings: firstly, that a little old lady had unknowingly breached an archaic rule, thereby inconveniencing a man who, as it turns out, has ‘put more on the line in defence of human dignity’ than any sitting political figure, which caused him to pause mid-stride and let a woman speak to him and give him a few pieces of paper. After this outrage he bravely continued on with his day, and another member thankfully came to the rescue.

The PRESIDENT: Mrs Deeming, sorry to interrupt you. In this chamber we can only make a statement on a report or paper that has actually been tabled in this chamber, and that document was –

Moira DEEMING: I asked about this, and I was told that I could.

The PRESIDENT: It was tabled in the other chamber.

Moira DEEMING: That is fine. So no-one in this chamber can ever report on it here?

The PRESIDENT: Unless it is a paper or a report that is tabled in this chamber during this term, that is the only –

Moira DEEMING: So that is never?

The PRESIDENT: Probably the answer is never, if that never gets tabled. I am sorry, I have to –

Moira DEEMING: No, that is fine. I will put it in a members statement. Thank you.

The PRESIDENT: I was just trying to pick up on that, and I apologise that we did not pick it up earlier or before you went ahead.

Victorian Auditor-General's Office

Auditor-General's Report on the Annual Financial Report of the State of Victoria: 2023–24

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (17:32): I rise to comment on the *Auditor-General's Report on the Annual Financial Report of the State of Victoria: 2023–24*, released on 22 November and tabled in the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council yesterday. From page 1 it is clear that this is the kind of report the government would have liked to release at 5 pm on the Monday before the Melbourne Cup public holiday, if they had had any say over it. I intended to take a few quotes from the Auditor-General's conclusions and speak around them, but the report is so clear and so categorically bad that it barely needs added political spin from me. Page 1 reports that:

The general government sector (GGS) incurred another operating loss this year of \$4.2 billion. This brings accumulated losses over the last 5 years to \$48 billion.

Further down, an explanation – confirmation of a point made by those on this side of the house constantly in recent years:

Operating expenses increased by \$3.7 billion compared to 2022–23 because of higher public sector employee costs and other operating expenses.

A \$3.7 billion increase in a single year – it is no wonder that:

Interest expenses on debt also increased by \$1.7 billion due to new or refinanced borrowings at higher interest rates. The interest expense now makes up 6.1 per cent of the GGS operating revenue and is expected to increase to 8.8 per cent by 2027–28.

That is all money down the drain. It does not pay for a single nurse or a teacher. It does not educate Victoria's children or pay to fix our roads. It does not even build infrastructure. It is debt interest, pure and simple. It is money which comes straight out of the pockets of all Victorians who pay tax and goes directly into the pockets of the investors, often foreign investors, who own our debt – every single cent of it. As the report notes, this will only get worse if the government continues its course. It says:

Prolonged operating losses and ongoing fiscal cash deficits are not financially sustainable, largely because they lead to higher debt levels than otherwise and indicate underlying structural risks.

The conclusion is clear. If we skip through to page 18, the Victorian Auditor-General's Office reports:

... the state has not articulated a clear plan for long-term fiscal management. Current strategies are short term, reactive and do not address both the existing financial challenges and emerging financial risks ...

This is not even the latest bad news. The report is already outdated, and not in a good way. Since May's budget the government has already been forced to announce a \$1.5 billion hospital bailout and

yet further Metro Tunnel blowouts halfway through the year, and next year's report already looks set to be worse. Some recent headlines on Victoria's economy say it all: 'What the hell has gone wrong with Victoria?', "'Embarrassing": Victorian households fall behind Tasmania' and 'How Victoria became a poor state (and the 16 charts that prove it)'. There is just one odd one out: 'Victoria is an economic powerhouse that leads the nation.' Yes, you heard that right: 'Victoria is an economic powerhouse that leads the nation.' I was surprised too, until I noticed the author's name: one Mr Tim Pallas. You cannot deny that he is a gifted comic, with a skin thick enough to withstand the loudest hecklers, at least I hope so. If he truly believes what he wrote, we have got worse still to come. So I recommend the report to the Treasurer, as I do to the rest of this house.

Department of the Legislative Council

Report 2023–24

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (17:36): I rise to address the Department of the Legislative Council's annual report 2023–24. The report highlights a wealth of achievements, and I wish, once again, to acknowledge the dedicated staff. To the administrative personnel, the researchers, the procedural experts, the support teams – oh, my goodness, your meticulous work underpins every aspect of our parliamentary work. I particularly commend the Usher of the Black Rod's team and the clerks for their unwavering commitment to ensuring that our democracy operates effectively. I also want to thank the community engagement officers and the educational advisers for their tireless efforts in bringing Parliament closer to all Victorians. It is through your dedication that we maintain the trust and accessibility that underpins this institution.

I just do not know how so many of us would operate without the incredible assistance of the cleaners, the maintenance crews and the hospitality workers, who can I just highlight right now are very, very busy in the wake of the rains that just hit. I also want to take a moment to acknowledge and thank sincerely the security staff. I understand that this has been a very challenging year for security here in the parliamentary precinct, and I thank you all for the work that you do not only supporting us here in the precinct but out there in our electorate offices. Thank you so very much.

Having read the report – and thank you so much for popping that off to us in our offices here – I want to quickly turn to page 27 and speak about the reconciliation action plan and its initiatives outlined in the report. I am entirely heartened by the strides Parliament is making to more effectively and meaningfully engage with Victoria's First Peoples. The development of culturally safe practices and the fostering of partnerships with traditional owners demonstrates a genuine commitment to reconciliation and respect for the deep cultural heritage of this land. Can I also say that one highlight is the ongoing collaboration with the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria. This partnership reflects our commitment to working with Aboriginal communities to amplify their voices and ensure that they have a meaningful place in our democracy. The Assembly's role in advocating for self-determination and treaty negotiations of course also sets a benchmark for inclusive governance, and I am proud to see this Parliament, through this place right here, play a supportive role. Equally significant is a focus on education and understanding. The reconciliation action plan emphasises engaging with First Nations histories and cultures to foster deeper awareness amongst members and staff. The cultural awareness training and the ceremonial acknowledgements embedded in parliamentary events truly signify Parliament's commitment to leading by example, and I will take this opportunity to thank the Presiding Officers for their leadership in getting this work to us. Can I also say that they not only enrich our institution but certainly bridge understandings across Victorian Aboriginal communities.

The development, signage and resources highlighting Indigenous cultural narratives ensure that the stories of Aboriginal Victoria are woven into the very fabric of our places. These visible markers serve as daily reminders of the enduring connection between this land and its First Peoples. With that, I would like to acknowledge the sign in the vestibule and say that that actually matters and it is meaningful. Community members have commented to me on that since entering this place as recently as today.

I also want to highlight the importance of continued consultation with Aboriginal communities. As Parliament progresses to reconciliation, it requires listening, reflecting and adapting. I encourage all members and staff to approach this work with open hearts and minds as this Parliament and this state work towards Victoria's first treaty.

This annual report reminds us that our institution thrives because of the people who work tirelessly behind the scenes and the communities that hold us accountable to our shared values. By acknowledging these efforts and embracing the cultural richness of First Nations perspectives we move closer to creating a Parliament that represents and respects all Victorians.

Victorian Auditor-General's Office

Auditor-General's Report on the Annual Financial Report of the State of Victoria: 2023–24

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (17:41): The *Auditor-General's Report on the Annual Financial Report of the State of Victoria: 2023–24* has now been tabled in Parliament. The role of the Auditor-General is to be an independent officer of the Parliament. They provide assurances – or not – to the Parliament and the Victorian community about how effectively public sector agencies are providing services and using public money, but the findings of this report paint a very bleak picture and highlight the financial mismanagement of the Allan Labor government. I note that the Assistant Treasurer Danny Pearson has taken the lead of Labor leaders like Jacinta Allan and Daniel Andrews and undermined the independent analysis by the Auditor-General's office, saying:

... I don't agree with the report. I just don't. We've got a really strong and vibrant economy here in Victoria.

Well, I am not sure what planet the Assistant Treasurer is on, but it is time to take the blinkers off and listen to the findings in this report. Danny Pearson also said:

We're investing heavily in services that Victorians rely upon, and infrastructure they have overwhelmingly voted for. We're not taking a backward step. Let's not underestimate the strength and resilience of the Victorian economy.

Like an episode from *Utopia*, Labor spruiked the Suburban Rail Loop to voters in the lead-up to elections without a proper business case or any details on where the money is coming from to pay for it. The SRL was a thought bubble, but Labor have burst that bubble due to their poor financial mismanagement. In the last decade under Labor state debt has increased. I will just say, in 2014 under the Liberals and Nationals when they were in office the state debt was \$22.3 billion, and now we are not far off a state net debt of nearly \$188 billion – that is by 2028. Given the current state of Victoria's economy and spiralling debt, many commentators have questioned the Premier's decision to sign the contracts for close to \$35 billion to commence the Suburban Rail Loop, a project that is expected to cost over \$200 billion according to the Parliamentary Budget Office. To quote the Auditor-General's report:

Prolonged operating losses and ongoing fiscal cash deficits are not financially sustainable, largely because they lead to higher debt levels than otherwise and indicate underlying structural risks.

The report highlighted that debt is spiralling faster than revenue and economic growth and found that:

While strategies and objectives are in place, the state has not articulated a clear plan for long-term fiscal management.

It states:

Current strategies are short term, reactive and do not address both the existing financial challenges and emerging financial risks ... A more comprehensive approach is needed to ensure long-term fiscal sustainability and proactive management of the state's finances.

In the past we have seen Labor drop the ball when it comes to managing the state's finances but not to the scale of this government. This government are using a wrecking ball, and they are destroying our state. We have the highest debt of any state – more than Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania combined – and yet there is no plan to get out of it. Debt is growing at \$80 million a day and we will

soon be paying over \$1 million an hour just in interest payments to service the debt. Labor is crippling families and businesses with higher and higher taxes and putting Victorians under even more pressure. Despite introducing new taxes, it is evident that the Allan Labor government is spending more money than it is raising, yet it continues to fail in so many areas.

I have spoken to small business owners who are tired. They are beyond exhausted, and they are very sick and tired of the state Labor government. The Australian Industry Group boss said the report made for diabolical reading and served as a warning about the cost of mismanaging the economy, which has already depressed business investment in the state. Now, I just note that between 2023 and 2024 over 150,000 small businesses have shut their doors in Victoria.

The Auditor-General's report highlights the spiralling debt under the Allan Labor government, with no plan for long-term fiscal management. The Auditor-General was also critical of Minister Pearson's failure to provide an explanation for the delay in tabling 131 public body annual reports, as required under the Financial Management Act 1994. We are just 100 weeks away from the next state election. If the Labor government continues to make such poor decisions, our economy will only get worse and people will suffer because Labor cannot manage money; they cannot manage our economy, and Victorians are paying the price.

Department of Transport and Planning

Report 2023–24

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:46): I rise to speak on the Department of Transport and Planning annual report for 2023–24. In particular I would like to talk about the neglect of road infrastructure and planning for roads in the Yan Yean electorate. The government has absolutely failed the people of Donnybrook and Kalkallo in particular with its failure to actually duplicate Donnybrook Road. Donnybrook Road is a single lane on the eastern side of the Hume Freeway. On the western side in the area that was developed by the Liberals there is a beautiful four-lane major road. On the eastern side under Labor there is a single carriageway – a country lane. It is absolutely shocking. There is a single-lane flyover over the Hume Freeway which has caused absolute traffic chaos. It is the only entry and exit point for all of the new estates that have gone in along Donnybrook Road. A couple of weeks ago we had a truck accident there that had people cut off from their homes for hours at a time. But the duplication of Donnybrook Road is just one of the failures that goes with the roads in that area.

As I said, it is the only entry and exit point. The government actually did a master plan for Donnybrook and Woodstock in 2017. That included two other east–west connector roads at Cameron Street and Gunns Gully Road, neither of which has been constructed, which means that Donnybrook Road is that single entry and exit point. Mr Mulholland and I have been raising for weeks and months now the problems in Donnybrook. And what has been the government's response? What is their answer to fixing traffic congestion for the residents there? What they have done is reduce the speed limit on the Hume Freeway to 80 K's at the turn off to Donnybrook Road. They think this is going to improve safety. No it is not. This is their answer to everything. When there are potholes, reduce the speed. When the road surface is bad, reduce the speed. They must be spending a fortune on speed reduction signs because they are all over the state.

They have reduced the speed to 80 k's. A lot of people used to go on to Cameron Street where the Caltex service station is in Kalkallo and do a U-turn because it did allow you to get onto Donnybrook Road a little bit quicker by turning left on the other side of the road. Now they have also banned U-turns at Cameron Street, so people are going to be forced to wait even longer at that exit point off the Hume Freeway and onto Donnybrook Road. I came through last Friday night and had the need to go along Donnybrook Road. It was 7:25 pm when I turned off the Hume Freeway. It was still bumper to bumper along that road and across the flyover and backed up onto the freeway. It is an absolute disgrace, and this government should hang their heads in shame. Their answer is not a solution. They need to build Cameron Street and Gunns Gully Road right through to Merriang Road and give these residents a genuine second entry and exit point to their estates.

We can also talk about Yan Yean Road stage 2. The government keeps saying, ‘Oh, we’ve funded it. It’s happening,’ but we are yet to see any action. It is still in the planning stage. There is a shopping centre that is going to be completely cut off by the way that the government are going to do the intersection surrounding that shopping centre. The traders in that centre – I have met with them. They are absolutely distraught about what is going to happen to their businesses, because this government cannot get their planning right on roads and cannot get the timing right on actually building those roads. They are failing Victorians left, right and centre. Yan Yean Road stage 2 is a further disgrace because people are actually being injured on that road. In April a young man was struck by a car. He was walking along the narrow Yan Yean Road on his way to the Yarrambat Golf Club. He spent nine weeks in a coma and is on a long journey to recovery, all because this government will not invest in the infrastructure that is necessary to support the growth that is going on in the Yan Yean electorate. The member for Yan Yean should be held accountable. She should resign over these roads.

Petitions

Western suburbs bus services

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (17:52): I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration.

I rise to make a contribution on the petition in my name before the house, drawing the Council’s attention to the inadequacy of bus services in Melbourne’s western suburbs and calling for the transformation of the western metropolitan bus network into a functioning network that people can actually rely on. So we are back talking about routes; we cannot seem to help ourselves. I spoke last week about improving the bus services in our outer suburbs, areas that are essential to all Melburnians – not just those privileged enough to live in the inner suburbs – and I spoke of people’s right to access public transport. I spoke of the limitations placed on people’s access to employment, education, health services and shops because they do not have public transport. I spoke of the financial burden on people who are forced to rely on private forms of transport. I spoke of the social disadvantage and isolation experienced by those without access to affordable and reliable public transport.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the western suburbs. While this petition is about buses, it is also about the western suburbs getting a fair share of the state’s resources. The west has always been taken for granted by state governments, until they need a dumping ground for toxic waste projects that will not fly in their own member’s electorate. The dire state of public transport in the west comes as a result of successive governments’ underinvestment and myopic planning. This is from a report I came across recently, and I would like to quote from it:

[QUOTES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Often first home buyers have moved to western fringe areas because of lower prices. However, the price they have had to pay for transport and services has been high, as social infrastructure has lagged well behind residential development.

The report goes on to say:

For residents in these new growth areas, lack of planning or resources strands them without enough transport or other public facilities. Local councils in these areas struggle with barely adequate subsidies. Until we have a commitment by governments to baseline services, including transport, the problems will continue.

I think it is a bit of a case of: the more things change, the more they stay the same, because that was from a report titled *Melbourne’s West: The Way Ahead – A Regional Strategy*, published in 1988 by the Melbourne Western Region Commission.

Melbourne’s Western Region Commission was formed in 1977 and was made up of eight western suburb councils, seven of which sit within the current Western Metro Region, and it was with an aim to promote the development of Melbourne’s west to the federal government. Fed up with the lack of

state funding for the west, they decided the only way forward was to bypass the state government and lobby the federal government directly, which I think is quite extraordinary. It is hard to say how successful the commission were in lobbying the feds. They certainly were not getting much love from the state government of the day, but perhaps we are seeing a slight shift in thinking.

I was really pleased to see government members expressing their wholehearted support for reliable, frequent and connected bus services during the very recent debate on a bus motion. And I read with great excitement on Tuesday of a new bus route connecting Eynesbury, one of the many public transport deserts in the west, with Melton station. Are we finally beginning to see the western suburbs getting some long-awaited public transport love from this government? I would really like to hope so. They could show even more love by reforming the bus network across the western metropolitan area into a fast, frequent, reliable and connected grid, as requested by their western suburbs constituents.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many residents and community activists across the west and the Friends of the Earth, who have worked and continue to work on this campaign. In closing, I would just like to observe that better routes make for better communities, and that is why everyone loves them. To the government we say: please, please get on the bus with us.

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (17:57): It is a pleasure to rise today to make a contribution on this petition. At the outset I would like to thank all those who have signed the petition and those from Melbourne's west who have made the trip into Parliament today. I want to assure you all with this petition that the Allan Labor government is committed to continuing to deliver a modern, safe and reliable bus service in the west as well as integrated and modern transport networks.

We recognise that Victoria's bus network is an absolutely essential part of our state's integrated transport system. It already carries over 135 million passengers a year – that is 21 per cent of all trips taken on metropolitan public transport – and that is why we have delivered new and additional bus routes as part of *Victoria's Bus Plan*, and we will continue to make the investments required to get more Victorians where they need to go.

In Melbourne's growing west we do have a strong record of investment in buses. We have announced and are in the process of delivering new and extended routes across Melton, Keilor, Tarnait, Laverton, Wyndham Vale and many other areas of the west. As a resident of Melbourne's west for nearly 30 years, I understand very well the challenges of getting around the west – and not only around the west, across the west – to connect to different train lines and where people need to get to. We know that in our growing suburbs buses are central to local transport offerings. They provide alternative options for people rather than them having to travel in private vehicles, and for the young, the elderly and members of our community for whom driving is not an option, buses are sometimes the only way to get to where they need to go.

In terms of some of the specific investments that our government has made in the west, we have invested in 60 extra services per week; added to route 215, the Caroline Springs to Highpoint Shopping Centre route, in October last year; and a new bus interchange has opened as part of the new elevated Deer Park station, improving access for services. In April this year Wyndham received the largest share of more than \$150 million through the Growth Areas Public Transport Fund, and this included more than \$21 million for new bus connections between Harpley estate and Cornerstone estate communities and Wyndham Vale station. In November this year the Allan Labor government opened the Tarnait bus interchange on the south side of Tarnait railway station, providing passengers with direct access to the train station. We have also just announced a new route, 452, which will operate seven days a week, giving residents of Eynesbury and Weir Views bus services with the Melton station for the first time. The service is set to begin on Sunday 8 December, and it will provide much greater access to trains and other bus services. Residents of Weir Views will benefit from having a fixed bus route option as well as the current FlexiRide service, which provides public transport access to South Melton, Weir Views and Thornhill Park. Residents in Keilor and Niddrie have been benefiting from

better bus services since the network changes in July 2020, and routes were also extended for the two-way service through Keilor East. These service improvements are another example of *Victoria's Bus Plan* and how it is delivering additional routes and services and making travelling by bus easier and more convenient for people in Melbourne's west.

In terms of our investment, we have got a proven track record of investing in bus services. Our government has invested more than \$550 million since coming to government. We have got another round of the Growth Areas Infrastructure Fund, which has been announced by the Minister for Planning, and that will improve services further. We are delivering services for Melton, Keilor and Tarnait communities, just like we have invested to ensure Wyndham Vale, Laverton and Werribee residents can get where they need to go.

Importantly, we have also done a lot of work on making sure that we are transitioning our fleet to zero emissions. We have already got 50 zero emissions buses out in Melbourne's west, and from mid-2025 new buses ordered for the public fleet will be required to be zero emissions. I want to reassure those members of the community who have been campaigning around this issue that we know that there is more work to do, but we are up for that job, and government MPs look forward very much to continuing to work with the community and with Minister Williams in the other place to make sure that our bus network grows from strength to strength in Melbourne's west.

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (18:02): I rise today to contribute to this petition, 'Bus network reform for western suburbs'. Before I go into why we have this petition, we need to look at why we are asking for buses. Why are we not asking for trains, monorails or fast rail? It is because the west has been neglected by the Allan Labor government year after year, with promise broken after promise after promise. I do not just say that. I will give you an example. We have advocated for rail to the western suburbs to expand, but the Wyndham Vale line – cancelled; electrification of the Melton rail line – cancelled. The bus is the cheapest form we can seek to assist with the expansion and delivery of services for the western suburbs.

The west desperately needs services that cater for people who rely on buses as a mode of transport. The service needs to be cost-effective and efficient. In the past 12 years Melbourne's western suburbs have experienced some of the fastest Australian growth rates that we have seen, yet in the west there is lack of connectivity. For this rapidly growing population there are only two modes of transport – that is, buses and trains. The tram line only goes up to Moonee Ponds, 12 k's from the city, so we are catering for the fastest-growing corridor in Victoria yet we have two modes of transport, train and bus.

I will give you the train lines. In the west we have got two lines, the Werribee line and the Sunbury line. Compare that to the eastern suburbs. What have we got here? We have got the Sandringham line, the Frankston line, the Pakenham line, the Bairnsdale line, the Glen Waverley line, the Alamein line, the Belgrave line, the Lilydale line, the Hurstbridge line and the Mernda line. What are we doing for the western suburbs? We have to ask for the cheapest and most reliable form we can deliver for the western suburbs – that is, bus. That is why we turn to buses. Hopefully with all the debt the Labor government is having at the moment, they can at least cater for bus services in the western suburbs. Rail is fantastic if you have it. In the west we do not. We have two lines. The cancellation of the electrification of the Melton and Wyndham lines has eliminated the west's rail capacity to accommodate growing needs.

Then there is our bus network. Let me talk to you about the bus network; I have got 2 minutes to talk about this. The local bus service network in the west is both infrequent and indirect. Standard local route weekday frequency is about 40 minutes. Currently in the west, bus services are being spread very thin and many are operating at an extremely low frequency and with limited coverage. The complexity and broken character of the old bus system makes it obvious that it is not catering. The bus network has been identified to have minimal service for us all. The routes do not cover the new western metro region to deliver for an expanding population with new streets, new estates and expanding suburbs. Data from research reported by Melbourne University shows us the average travel time for

people living in the western suburbs. For Brimbank it is 60 minutes. In Melton it is 71 minutes. You have got to plan your time. If you have got an appointment somewhere to see a doctor, to see a colleague, you have got to plan your time. Seventy-one minutes – that is your travel time if you want to use a bus. Think about that. What kind of service do we have catering for the western suburbs? The planning approvals of this government also do not consider a future plan for bus routes. At the moment they are approving streets that are too narrow for buses to deliver services.

With the last minute I just want to express that the need to improve bus services in the western suburbs is urgent. Melbourne's growth demands in the west need investment in infrastructure and services for all Victorians, not just those in the inner city. It is time the government stopped making promises and started delivering actual results for people in the west: more buses, more accessible stations and better transport options for all Victorians, especially those living in the west, with a growing population and family expansion. We all live in Victoria. We have the same equality. We deserve the same first-class public transport service in the west as we do have in the east. This Allan Labor government needs to stop neglecting the west and provide a better bus service for people out in the western suburbs.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (18:07): I rise to speak in support on behalf of the Greens on this petition for debate, and I thank Mr Ettershank for bringing this this afternoon. Eighteen months ago I joined community members. Mr Luu was also there and addressed the rally, and Mr Ettershank was there as well. We were at a protest on the front steps of Parliament calling for better and in some cases any bus services for areas across the west and across Victoria. We met on those same steps again this afternoon with the same call. Victoria's bus network needs to be reformed from the long, convoluted and infrequent routes that we currently have to frequent and effective routes. We know that the communities in the west are crying out for this reform. A number of communities across Victoria effectively live in public transport deserts, mainly in rural and regional areas and in outer metro areas, and the west is really afflicted by these deserts.

Victoria's bus plan from 2021 states that a lot of our bus routes have evolved incrementally over the years, meaning that currently many do not have a clear purpose and do not serve a distinct travel need, and when they become overly complex, that does deter potential bus passengers. That complexity combined with low frequencies, poor reliability and long travel times means that Victorians who have the option of driving will tend to take that option instead of the bus, leading to more traffic congestion and more emissions. People without other transport options are stranded. Transport is the second-largest and fastest growing source of emissions in Victoria, so if the government is serious about meeting their own targets for net zero emissions by 2045, we need to take the action to decarbonise our transport network. We know that already 35 global cities will only buy zero-emission buses for their fleets from 2025, and Melbourne's bus fleet should be among them. We know that the Victorian government had previously announced that all new public transport buses purchased from 2025 would be zero-emissions buses, although I was disappointed to see earlier this month the updated zero-emissions bus transition plan watered this commitment down by making allowances for a number of situations, including regional buses and school buses, leaving those using these services with substandard, old and polluting diesel fleets. But we need to be very clear that an electric bus operating on an old and inconvenient route with few passengers will not do as much as it could to reduce emissions. The biggest emission cuts will be made by people being able to leave the car and take a convenient and reliable bus instead, and to achieve that we need the government to get on with real route reform to deliver better buses. Meanwhile, people who do not or cannot drive are stuck with an inadequate system that prevents them from accessing jobs, education and health care and it creates social and economic isolation.

Bus reform for Victoria is not just a technical transport issue and it is not just a climate-friendly transport issue; it is a matter of equity. Communities across Victoria have suffered for too long with inequitable access to fundamental public transport services. I congratulate Friends of the Earth, the Better Buses crew and the petitioners for bringing this important matter to the chamber today. Let us get on with better buses for Victoria.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (18:11): It is my pleasure to speak on Mr Ettershank's petition. I want to thank all the people that signed the petition and Mr Ettershank for bringing it forward for the chamber to have a good debate on buses.

I agree with Mr Ettershank when he says that everyone loves a good bus route. I regularly take the good old 566 bus. I am fortunate to live outside of a bus station, and I take that bus to the train station to get into the city. But not everyone is that fortunate. I know we are talking a lot about the western suburbs, but I would say an equal first or a close second to the western suburbs in terms of bus neglect is the northern suburbs. I know Mr Ettershank and I have had a lot of conversations about buses, and particularly our electorates and Mr Luu's electorate share a lot of commonalities in the area of buses. You have got areas like Kalkallo, where residents have to walk a kilometre and a half to 2 kilometres to their closest bus route because when it was put together the estate was only about 100 metres deep and it has since gone to several kilometres deep, and in particular the areas that I represent around the airport.

Thousands of people work at the airport. If you live in Greenvale, it is about a 15- to-20 minute drive to the airport, but to get there by public transport requires you to get not one, but two buses, which will take you over an hour. If you are a young person who has a part-time job at the airport and wants to get to the airport, you have to take an Uber. You would think that the most efficient way to solve that would be a regular bus. We know that buses are both the most reliable and the cheapest. Infrastructure Victoria has written a lot on it. They are actually value for money because for a good reliable bus, for every dollar invested there is about \$2.45 return.

We have also got growing areas, and I want to talk about, the Hidden Valley estate in my electorate. It has got 2500 residents but still no bus service – no bus service at all. I have talked directly to the minister about this. They are supposedly investigating. You have got a massive retirement living village going up. You have got lots of elderly communities but lots of growing communities as well, but you have still got no buses in Hidden Valley. It is an absolute disgrace that there is no public transport. But this is what we get when we have local members of Parliament who do not listen to their communities and do not raise things for those communities in particular.

I also wait with bated breath for the arrival of the new GAIC funding round that the minister mentioned that is supposedly going to go towards new bus services. I do want to note that we have got \$150 million coming from the Growth Areas Infrastructure Contribution Fund. It has been in there for a while. It was long overdue, and it is welcome. I can suggest that it may be put towards buses for Greenvale, and I will be putting that submission to the minister, but also buses for Wallan, in particular for Hidden Valley. Many have contacted me about that. I also note that there is \$150 million going towards buses towards the end of the year; it will be announced next year. There is \$309 million of unallocated GAIC funds – unallocated growth infrastructure funds – funds that developers have put in the kitty in the state Treasury for the government to get on and spend on buses and community infrastructure and duplication of roads and roundabouts and bus stations and train stations and things like that. But they are leaving more than half of that in the Treasury coffers. There is \$309 million in there at the moment, so you will have \$159 million that for the next state budget will not be spent. It will be propping up the state budget, which is in a terrible position, and making it look \$159 million better off when it could be going to more bus routes. It could be going to things like duplicating Donnybrook Road now that the Hume, I saw this week, has been reduced to 80 kilometres an hour around Donnybrook Road because the government has not duplicated it. That impacts on buses as well. Many people in Kalkallo and Mickleham, for example, have told me about their buses being delayed because of traffic congestion as well, so it is all interlinked. The government needs to do much better on buses.

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (18:16): I would like to thank all of the speakers in this debate. This is a campaign that has been fought out in the west for a long, long time, and I do take on board the comment that this is a problem that afflicts a far larger population than simply the western suburbs. I think it is in all of our growth corridors. There is clearly a huge, huge problem. I

am encouraged by Minister Stitt's comments, and I think we all look forward to seeing the government put its best foot forward to make some real, serious investments in the west. I know that for residents at places like Mount Atkinson the nearest bus stop is a 40-minute walk along a road that carries 40,000 cars a day but lacks a footpath, and that is a 40-minute walk simply to get to the bus stop, where you get to wait another 40 minutes for a bus if you are lucky – if it turns up. That can then theoretically get you to either Rockbank station or Caroline Springs, where you can hopefully access a train. But of course there is no synchronisation between those buses and those train services, so there is enormous potential for improvement. This is a potential for improvement that will tangibly improve the lives of residents in the western suburbs. It will affect their ability to deal with the cost-of-living pressures that they are currently experiencing. It will fight social isolation. It has so many benefits, and at the end of the day it is an incredibly small investment.

Motion agreed to.

Members

Anasina Gray-Barberio

Inaugural speech

Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO (Northern Metropolitan) (18:23): I begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of all the unceded lands, skies and waterways on which we gather today. As I begin this important work in this place called Parliament, a place that was built by the colonisers of Naarm, I pay my deep respect to the ancestors and elders of Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung country of the Kulin nation. I pay my respects to Indigenous leaders here, including member of Parliament Sheena Watt, acknowledging her ancestral and cultural ties to the Yorta Yorta nation, as well as any other Indigenous leaders with us this evening in the chamber. Whether it is concrete, soil or gravel, wherever I walk I know I am walking on Aboriginal land – always was and always will be. I would like to acknowledge faith leaders, community leaders and elders in the gallery this evening.

[CONTENT TO BE INCORPORATED]

I have had the privilege of attending many welcome to country ceremonies, but one led by Sue Hunter, commissioner of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, had a grounding effect on me. She spoke of wominjeka, meaning to come with purpose, reminding me, any space I walk into, to always come with purpose.

My fellow colleagues and community, I rise today with pride and a sense of duty to give my first speech to accept the responsibility before me, aware of the sacrifices, trust and faith borne by all who have come before me, to be the next Greens representative for the Northern Metro Region. Let me begin by thanking my indomitable predecessor Samantha Ratnam for her relentless and courageous service. Sam – I will not look at you – you have decided to step up to contest the seat of Wills, and I have no doubt that you will bring a new world with you. Your enduring spirit for a better and hopeful future for all is what I will carry forward. Thank you for being a tenacious warrior.

I am delighted to join in a shared vision with my Greens colleagues, a vision that amplifies empowerment and communities, and to be at the interface between people and justice for better social, cultural and physical environments. I was drawn to the Greens because of their genuine commitment to the planet and to social justice and a dedication for a better future that includes everyone. Nelson Mandela boldly said that there comes a time in one's life when one is faced with only two choices: submit or fight. I choose to fight – to defend people, the planet, freedom and our democracy.

I am not here just to fight for my people. I am here to advocate for all people of the Northern Metro Region. This region is a vibrant and diverse area, spanning Melbourne, Richmond and Brunswick and extending to the rural plains of Kalkallo. It boasts a rich cultural tapestry from the vibrant arts and music scenes in Northcote and Preston to the historic architecture of Essendon, the nature reserves in Greenvale and to where I proudly grew up, Broadmeadows, affectionately known as Broady.

But the socio-economic reality of this region is one of stark contrasts. Intergenerational wealth thrives alongside persistent poverty, with many hustling to break through the mould. While some enjoy inherited stability, others grapple with the simple act of not being included, feeling left behind by unequal development and economic stability. Parts of the region face challenges of below-average education outcomes, high poverty levels, housing unaffordability and limited access to essential economic and social infrastructure. This relentless disparity must be countered with inclusive growth, a growth that truly serves the aspirations of all communities in the region.

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

My family and I arrived in Victoria in the late 1990s in search of better opportunities and a better life, all while understanding that there is no road to liberation; success and equity is easy. I am one of six kids, and if you know Islander families we do not come in small packages. We come in big boxes with lots of bubble wrap, where you always have someone to catch you, guide you and counsel you. I have most of them here today. I would like to pay tribute to my parents Paul and Sowelunga May who are here in the gallery for being staunch knowledge holders, cultural protectors, faith leaders, community builders, showing me a values-based leader is someone who listens with humility, speaks last to hear others and balances the power of peace and decisive action – to believe in the mana of who I am. To my siblings Junior, Junior, Lay, Lay and Emmy, thank you for catching me. My sisters-in-law, Alexandria and Charlene and my beautiful nephew Hugo and niece Ellory who complete our family.

Aiga, the Samoan word for family, is the heart of our culture and I want to extend my gratitude to my Aiga, the two Alwyn Gray families. To the Glenroy family and to the Greens family, thank you for your support. To our community elders, dear friends and supporters here and abroad, thank you for your prayers and fellowship. I would also like to thank my family – my husband Geoff who juggles his own professional responsibilities and supports me, and the sunshine of our lives our boys G and L. Your curiosity, your encouragement strengthens me every day. Mummy loves you.

Growing up in Broady was both a good and a hard existence. I love the fact that we grew up with families of different cultures, sharing in stories of resilience and collective experiences. But on the other side of this was hardship. Any time you said you were from the 3047 postcode, immediately expectations were lowered and stigmatising actions were instant. For a long time I did not feel like I had the power to determine my future, but as I grew older my community showed me that while I cannot see my future I could change my circumstances. I graduated from Penola Catholic College as one of only four Pacific Islander students. From those four, one became the first Pacific Islander to play in the AFL and the other, me, the very first Samoan MP – not bad for a couple of local brown kids.

Margaret Thatcher, the former UK Prime Minister, once said ‘there is no such thing as society.’ It was her belief that individual success is a personal responsibility, but this perspective fails to acknowledge the collective strength that drives progress. In Broadmeadows our achievements are a testament to the power of community, our families, villages and our society all working together to co-create opportunities for the next generation.

I had always known I wanted to give back to my community in some form, but I knew I needed to get some professional experience. I started working with vulnerable groups and the homeless, both adults and young people, learning deeply about the pervasive intrusion of trauma on people’s lives and their aspirations. I have worked in family violence advocacy to fight for culturally specific services for migrant and refugee women and children, communities too often overlooked by a system shaped through a predominantly white feminist lens. I have worked in multicultural foster care to ensure that children and young people removed from their homes remain connected to their culture, honouring their fundamental cultural rights.

I founded Engage Pasefika, a very small grassroots community organisation, in response to the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on our Pacific Island community. I had reached a juncture where I could no longer allow others to dictate what we could or could not access. Representation

matters not just for our community but for all marginalised communities being met with one obstacle after another. They say you cannot be what you do not see. I say do not be afraid to be the first.

[NAME/S AWAITING VERIFICATION]

As a Pacific Islander, we are the people of the Pacific, Samasa Ula Moana. The Moana for our island nations represents our sacred stories of courage and our relational bonds to the oceans and ancestral land. Our islands are on the frontline of the climate crisis, where communities are vulnerable to rising sea levels, with many facing the prospect of never being able to return home because it is under water, gone forever. Our Pacific neighbours from Kiribati, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands will be among the first climate refugees. Rising tides and environmental degradation are forcing them to migrate to countries that do not share their cultural history, endangering their cultural rights and potentially giving up their sovereignty. This displacement is not just a matter of survival for our people; it is a profound loss of identity and self-determination as entire nations are pushed to the brink by the climate crisis. For some sitting in this chamber this may feel like a distant problem, but for many in our region and here today, the climate emergency is no longer a future crisis. It is a present reality that demands our immediate attention and action.

In Victoria we have seen the effects of the climate breakdown already: bushfires, scorching heatwaves, droughts and record-breaking floods no longer one-in-100-year events. Yet we continue to delay urgent bold action on these ever-increasing climate threats. The thing I have come to understand about the climate emergency is that if one is profiting from the climate crisis, it is not in their interest to pursue climate justice. We need to move on from performative politics and work towards a collective solution, a collective solution that constrains global warming from surpassing the irreversible 2 degrees, the point of no return.

I have met many in the community who, despite living in a wealthy First World country, struggle to make ends meet. I have met people who drive 40 minutes to the cheapest market every week just so they can save about 30 bucks on groceries, even though the two major supermarkets are just up the road. We should never lose sight of the fact that the cost-of-living pressures and the housing crisis are devastating so many beyond these walls. As elected representatives with different political persuasions we may not reach consensus on everything, but we do share an inheritance – to work together against pervasive and persistent systemic racism and discriminatory systems that polarise our societies. My people and I sang from the corridors this evening, then we were removed to a room. But we sang with joy, pride and humility because that is who we are. We were banned from sharing a small part of our culture with you this evening, a part of our culture that comes into this place with peace and goodwill. I urge you, it is not my community you need to be scared of. What you should be scared of is the fear you hold in your heart for communities that are not representative in this political institution. We have missed an opportunity to embrace what makes Victoria great, and that is our diversity in all its forms. I will not be the last to request for cultural rituals to be shared, but I do hope that for the next person representing a different part of our society this institution makes space for them and who they are.

In my culture our strength comes from community. I am here to share power with people, not over people. When we bring together voices and lived experiences from all walks of life, we are all powerful.

Members applauded.

Adjournment

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (18:39): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Victorian Agency for Health Information

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (18:39): (1318) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Health, and it is in relation to the Victorian Agency for Health Information – VAHI – data for the July to September quarter, the quarter that we have just been reporting on, which was again late. Nevertheless, there was some data reported, but not all data was reported. Important data, such as the number of patients waiting for surgery and the number who received treatment at individual hospitals, was not included for several health services. This is quite extraordinary. This is a deviation from what has been provided in the past, and it is an important issue that I think Victorians need to understand.

The missing data includes the much-touted Blackburn Public Surgical Centre and the Frankston Public Surgical Centre, but there are many other hospitals, like Alfred Health's Alfred and Sandringham hospitals, that are not included. The Austin Hospital, Heidelberg Repatriation, Eastern Health, Angliss Hospital, Blackburn, Box Hill, Healesville, Maroondah, Yarra Ranges – all are not included. The Mercy Health Mercy Hospital for Women at Werribee – not included. Monash Health, Casey Hospital, Cranbourne, Dandenong, Monash Health at Sandringham, Monash Medical Centre at Clayton, Moorabbin Hospital and Victorian Heart Hospital – I could go on. The list is quite extensive, and I am concerned that it is not being included. The government itself is constantly failing to meet its own performance targets – hospital waiting lists, ambulance response times, waiting times for a specialist appointment. Because of this ongoing mismanagement, we have a health system that is in crisis – and when I say 'crisis', I mean real crisis.

As Labor's debt keeps climbing, our health system is being starved of vital funds, which leads to worse outcomes for Victorian patients. Yesterday and today there have been reports around graduate nurses at the Alfred that have been left high and dry with their graduate positions – again because of these funding cuts, it is thought. Initially they were advertised as 0.8 FTE, but yesterday they were told that they had been cut to just 0.6 FTE. That impacts not only their pay but also those graduate nurses' progression and professional development. It is a very serious and significant issue for the thousands of nurses that are wanting to graduate, are doing a tremendous job in our hospitals and are contributing to the current workforce but also the workforce into the future.

I return to where I started, around the VAHI data for the July–September quarter that is missing. For those health services that I mentioned and others, like Western Health, Footscray, Sunshine, Sunbury, Williamstown and others, the action I seek is for the government to release the missing September quarter data immediately and explain why it was not included in the first place.

Avian influenza

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (18:42): (1319) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation, and the action I seek is for him to cancel the 2025 recreational duck shooting season to help safeguard Victorian native waterbird populations. Deadly strains of bird flu have killed millions of wild birds overseas. In Australia the reality is that we are simply not prepared for its devastating consequences. Threatened species commissioner Dr Fiona Fraser and bird flu expert Dr Michelle Wille have both warned our government that birds will face mass deaths once a highly pathogenic flu reaches our shores. The risk to our iconic native waterbirds is unprecedented, and new data has shown that it has already affected endangered species populations overseas.

The H5 strain of avian influenza and its variants have resulted in the slaughter of over half a billion farmed birds since it was first detected. Millions of wild birds have also died, including 600,000 in South America alone since 2023. Globally waterbirds and shorebirds are the most susceptible hosts for avian influenza. In 2022 shooters themselves reported alarming mortality rates of geese in America and Canada after it was detected. But it is not only birds who are impacted by this; a Canadian team currently remains in critical care with the newest deadly strain. Of the 463 global deaths from bird flu infections since 2003, almost all have been linked to close contact with infected dead and alive birds. In Australia black swans, who are particularly susceptible to the virus, have the potential to be entirely

wiped out when the virus inevitably spreads. This same species has been inadvertently shot time and time again at the hands of shooters who, despite all attempts from the Game Management Authority, are unable to avoid shooting non-target species.

Shooters themselves can become carriers or transmitters of bird flu. Their presence on wetlands poses an exponential danger in spreading the disease to humans and to other birds, because anywhere there is increased interaction with wildlife there is inherent risk. Need I remind the chamber of how global pandemics emerge and then spread? There are so many deadly threats to our native waterbirds, and allowing the duck-hunting season to go ahead in 2025 would be incredibly irresponsible. I hope the minister can do the right thing and prohibit future duck-shooting seasons while this zoonotic risk is prevalent.

Ringwood East train station

Nick McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:45): (1320) Earlier this year Premier Jacinta Allan visited India, and one of the key focuses of her visit, we were told, was:

... ensuring an equal future for women and girls, making sure that everyone is safe, respected and has every opportunity to pursue their dreams and contribute to society – from sport, education and the arts.

It is shame that Ms Allan did not add ‘toilets’ to that list, because she needs a serious lesson from the Indian government on why providing a safe public toilet to women is indelibly connected to their safety and dignity. In his very first address to the nation in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke frankly about how providing clean and safe toilets for women in India was a key focus for his government. He connected the safety and dignity of women to proper access to public toilets and said that it should not be difficult for the country to build toilets so that old women and young girls in rural areas do not have to wait for darkness to ease themselves. He very reasonably argued this. In the next five years his government built 110 million public toilets in India – that is 22 million toilets each year, 110 million toilets.

I want to come to Premier Allan’s record on women’s safety and public toilets. For months now, on behalf of the residents of Ringwood East, I have been campaigning for just one – not 100 million, just one; one public toilet to be included in the new Ringwood East train station. The Level Crossing Removal Project cost taxpayers in the order of a billion dollars and is yet to be concluded with a public toilet. As things stand, the nearest public toilet to the train station is a 190-metre walk from the station, through a car park and a lonely, dark alleyway. This is not a matter of inconvenience, it is a matter of public safety and dignity. It is also a matter of empowering women, girls, including the aged and those with ability constraints, to be able to step out and use public toilets with confidence on the public transport system.

Ms Allan likes to present the safety of women and girls as her government’s top priority. Talk is cheap. Creating the physical infrastructure that delivers a safe environment for women and girls to live in, on the other hand, requires getting off their proverbial bums and making a few hard decisions. The action I seek from the Minister for Transport Infrastructure is to ensure that there is a public toilet, accessible to all on every metropolitan train station in Victoria.

Cost of living

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:48): (1321) My adjournment matter is for the Treasurer, and the action that I seek is that he provide cost-of-living relief to Victorians as this festive season approaches. Parliament is in its last sitting week before the summer break, and I am sure many of us are very much looking forward to some time off with our friends and with our families over the festive season. However, this is not the reality for many. According to Indeed, more than half of Australians are being forced to take on extra work over the holiday period due to the cost-of-living crisis. Coles and Woolworths continue to rip off families and underpay workers to the point where warehouse operators have now gone on strike. This used to be the time of year when families would gather together away from their jobs and enjoy the summer festivities, no matter how much they

earned. But now because of the continual failure of governments to address ever-rising costs of living, even holidays are becoming unattainable for many people.

This crisis has been escalating for years. In that time, solution after solution has been put forward to take on the problem. In that time, things have only gotten worse. The supermarkets are jacking up prices and continue to price gouge, despite calls for regulation. Landlords have continued to raise rents despite our proposal for rent controls. Families across this country have been forced to cut down not just on luxuries but basic essentials in order to keep a roof over their head. This crisis is ridiculous. It is cruel, it is oppressive and it is wholly preventable. People should be able to afford to have a break over the summer or whenever they choose. They should be able to afford to celebrate this festive season without having to scrimp and save. Workers deserve a proper holiday without having to instead take up extra shifts. People need to know that this is not normal and that the holiday season should not bring more stress than joy.

Nursing students

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:50): (1322) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Health, and it relates to the state government's penny pinching impacting on the careers of graduate nurses. I know my colleague Ms Crozier brought this to the attention of the house last night in her adjournment debate, but this also impacts constituents from my Eastern Victoria Region. Indeed a wonderful young constituent has for the past three years been studying to become a nurse, looking forward to their graduate year at the Alfred hospital.

We know that the Alfred hospital has got an exemplary reputation as being a first-class hospital, and it was her first choice in terms of getting that clinical experience and mentoring and then taking that experience back into regional Victoria. The graduate year for nurses should be offered at an FTE of 0.8, for four days a week as we call it. I remember my son when he was doing his nursing degree certainly had that 0.8, but my constituent is one of those 280 nurses that felt shocked after receiving an email advising them that their timeframe had been cut to 0.6 of an FTE, or six shifts a fortnight. They stress very much that they will not be receiving those learning opportunities that they deserve but also that they have an added financial disadvantage to the tune of around \$17,000 a year with this loss of time.

This young regional Victorian is now incredibly concerned about how she will actually cope financially during a cost-of-living crisis on a part-time graduate nursing wage. Of course if you live in the country and then come to the city to work, you need to be able to have accommodation there. It is not something that you can go home and down to very easily. They are certainly concerned about what this compromised budget cut from the hospital, via the government, is going to create.

We know that the Alfred has had to penny pinch over time. It sent out a memo to all staff reminding them to turn off the lights because their budget was tight. Indeed the hospital also said, 'We will have to stop things we have been able to do, and there will be less of us to do it. These are not easy decisions to make.' Now, we can all appreciate that. This is a horrible compromising position that this Labor government is putting hospitals in, cutting money and cutting funding. Well, I am asking the minister to explain to my constituent and to those other 280 nurses what she is going to do in order to be able to offer the continued service at 0.8 for the hospital and also be able to provide hospitals with sufficient funding so that they are not having to turn the lights out unnecessarily or cut services in their wonderful hospitals.

Family violence

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:53): (1323) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, and the action I seek is for the minister to work with the Attorney-General to consider if the laws that deal with breaches of family violence intervention orders are fit for purpose. All too often when we hear stories of women who have lost their lives due to

domestic violence, they did all of the right things. These women warned police about the threats to their life and obtained a family violence intervention order, but tragically they still ended up dead.

Thanks to data from the Crime Statistics Agency on people who repeatedly breach family violence intervention orders, we know that these are not just one-offs but part of a troubling trend. I was provided with data on alleged offenders arrested with a principal offence of breach of family violence order who had previously been arrested for the same principal offence. Essentially this is data about how many people arrested for breaching family violence intervention orders are repeat offenders. Between July 2023 and June 2024, 2010 people alleged to have breached a family violence intervention order had previously been arrested for a breach. Even more alarmingly, of these alleged offenders, 873 had previously breached a family violence intervention order within 30 days. When we compare that to the data from July 2017 to June 2018, in the last six years there has been a 64 per cent increase in people repeatedly breaching family violence intervention orders. This data confirms our worst fears: family violence intervention orders are not adequately protecting victims, and their rate of failure only seems to be increasing.

We are in the middle of the United Nations' 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence. At this time we are asked to reflect on the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls. As community leaders we have a role to play in ending gender-based violence. Advocacy is undoubtedly important, but what is more important is that we consider policies that will meaningfully address gender-based violence in our community. When we look at this damning data and we hear so many stories of women that did all the right things but still died, we are duty-bound to act. So I ask and I plead with the minister to work with the Attorney-General to consider if the laws that deal with breaches of family violence intervention orders are fit for purpose.

Gelliondale wind farm

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:55): (1324) I have been contacted by constituents in South Gippsland who are concerned about the threat of the proposed Gelliondale wind farm and what effect it may have on the local bird populations, including endangered and critically endangered species. The history of government approvals for wind farms in this state suggests decisions are often based on inadequate environmental studies that have been proven erroneous in post-construction monitoring. An example is the high kill rate of white-bellied sea eagles and wedge-tailed eagles at Bald Hills wind farm during post-construction monitoring in 2015. This disproves consultants' claims that the project would pose minimal risk to the species. Communities no longer have confidence in the adequacy and independence of environmental studies. They no longer have the right of appeal under the development facilitation program, and there is no guarantee that this project will be subject to proper scrutiny, because the government is rushing through approvals for renewables projects. My adjournment is for the Minister for Planning, and the action that I seek is an assurance that approval for the Gelliondale wind farm will not be granted without thorough and accurate monitoring of endangered and critically endangered bird species.

Treaty

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (18:57): (1325) My adjournment this evening is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for her to immediately stop treaty negotiations. On 14 October 2023 Australia resoundingly voted no to the Indigenous Voice to Parliament. This racist and divisive referendum pitted Australian against Australian and caused much upheaval in our beautiful country. The overwhelming majority of my electorate of Northern Victoria Region voted no to the Voice. Of the federal electorates located solely in my electorate, the referendum result was a resounding no: Bendigo, 59.47 per cent no; Indi, 66.89 per cent no; McEwen, 60.09 per cent no; Nicholls, 75.24 per cent no; and Mallee, 78.31 per cent no. This is an overwhelming vote against division in our great state.

Now the Premier is pushing ahead with more race-based division by continuing with treaty negotiations, against the wishes of the majority of the Victorian people. My constituents from many

different ethnic backgrounds have made it clear to me that they do not want this. They are concerned by the lack of transparency and openness with the treaty negotiations. The fact that the Premier will not even tell Victorians what demands by First Nations peoples will be considered is another huge concern of my constituents. We have heard of demands for land, water, specific Aboriginal-only services – more than they already have – and even money. Aren't we all Victorians? The definition of treaty in the Oxford dictionary is:

A formally concluded and ratified agreement between states.

If we are all Victorians – all Australians – then how can we have a treaty? It does not make sense.

Everyone wants better outcomes for our Indigenous communities. Most people would be unaware that I am of Indigenous heritage on my father's side, but I have never relied on that to get me to where I am today. I grew up in a low socio-economic household, and my childhood was riddled with physical and emotional abuse, parental use of drugs and alcohol, and neglect, yet here I stand today, a member of this house, proudly representing my constituents of Northern Victoria. I am living proof that we do not need to divide or separate Australians in order to improve their outcomes. I am not entitled to anything I have not earned, just the same as every other Victorian and every other Australian. The way to improve the lives of Indigenous Victorians is not through secretive negotiations costing the Victorian taxpayer hundreds of millions of dollars but through transparent – (*Time expired*)

Large animal incident rescue

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:00): (1326) My adjournment is to the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action I seek is for the minister to advocate for the establishment and financial support of a network of nationally accredited large animal incident rescue, or LAIR, units in Victoria, and to initiate this training firstly through our CFA and SES volunteers in Victoria.

Horses, ponies, donkeys and mules – they are all an integral part of our recreational equine community, as are our important larger farm animals. Unfortunately, road accidents involving these animals are a distressing reality. The Arthurs Creek LAIR team, who I have met with a number of times, has conducted over 150 rescues in the past five years, demonstrating the urgent need for specialised training and resources. What the LAIR team are calling for is funding to conduct a two-year pilot program to train eligible volunteers from the CFA and SES in LAIR skills. We currently only have a few CFA volunteers who are trained, and they are servicing the whole state. They had to take their training in the UK, so we have a lack of trained volunteers.

Large animal incident rescue is where specialist trained responders assist trapped livestock and horses in the event of a truck or float incident, or when trapped in a waterway or collapsed septic tank or following a flood event. In Victoria, there are volunteer members of the CFA who privately funded expert training for the skills required to assist trapped large animals. Imagine that – under this government, they have had to privately fund their own training. Currently this valuable service to animal owners is not officially available. You may or may not get help if you ring 000. Do not even let me go on that tangent.

All of the resources required to deliver nationally accredited skill sets for LAIR have been developed, a registered training organisation is interested in using experienced members of the Arthurs Creek CFA LAIR unit, and delivery is ready to commence in the near future. It will create a network of strategically placed available units across Victoria capable of responding to large animal road incidents. The main goal is to set up a network of eight units around the state of Victoria that are trained with accredited members of local CFA units. They are seeking recognition of the value of a large animal rescue team for animal owners that are in crisis. There is a great risk of humans being hurt or killed whilst attempting to free their trapped livestock or horses. This type of rescue requires specialist skills and training, and the secondary goal is to fund the volunteer capacity building for the CFA LAIR units around the state. The cost would be approximately only \$200 per person and could ultimately

result in a pool of 80 personnel statewide. As the equine population continues, as we have continued needs for our livestock, this is an important – *(Time expired)*

Reptile breeding

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:03): (1327) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for the Environment. What happens in Victoria if you are an expert reptile breeder and so passionate about conservation that you turn your property into a wildlife sanctuary, spending almost \$200,000 of your own money to do so? Well, in the state of Victoria, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action will tell you to kill the endangered animals that you have been successfully breeding on your property because you cannot count them.

I have seen the government and the bureaucratic machine that it wields do some crazy stuff in my time in this place, but putting the COVID stuff aside, this one is right up there. Last week I travelled to Berringa, south of Ballarat, to visit Roy Pails, who is well known amongst the herpetology community as one of the best and most prolific reptile breeders in Australia. After shifting his focus to conservation, Roy, at his own expense, put up fox- and cat-proof fencing around his property, allowing endangered wildlife to live well and breed in the wild on his property. This should be hailed as a conservation success story, with the animals helping to remove the African weed orchid from his property.

The work on his property has led to a collaboration with the first ever genomic DNA analysis of the critically endangered woylie, or brush-tailed bettong. There may be some valid concerns about inbreeding of animals, but Roy has already received commitments from other sanctuaries that would be willing to exchange wildlife to mitigate this. This is on top of businesses and universities offering collaboration and research opportunities. From everything that I have learned reading about this project and going down to visit Roy, he should be considered a conservation hero and nominated for an award. Universities and conservation groups should be visiting to see what an ambitious conservation project can achieve. But no, here in Victoria Roy has been told to either remove the fences, which would kill the animals, or cage them, which would also kill them. I simply cannot fathom this level of boneheaded bureaucracy. Why anyone bothers to do anything worthwhile without some lame government grant is beyond me. My request for action for the minister is simple: please fix this situation. This is your department that is about to destroy a successful, voluntary conservation project that should be a model for others. Please fix this. Work with the department to find a way to allow this sanctuary to continue.

Suburban Rail Loop

Richard WELCH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:05): (1328) The action I seek is from the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop. The recent garden party held by the Suburban Rail Loop Authority in the Box Hill Gardens was a tone-deaf display of total disregard for the local community. It was held in the same open space they are tearing up, removing decade-old trees and taking them away from the public for at least the next 10 years. Hosting a self-promotional event there, as though they owned it, was simply rubbing the community's face in their heartless removal of the open space and added insult to injury for the people of Box Hill. The event was poorly attended, which reflects the growing frustration among locals. In contrast, the community barbecue I helped host in the same gardens saw strong support for the 'Pause the SRL' message. Residents are deeply concerned and frustrated by the SRL Authority's lack of meaningful engagement. One attendee loudly made clear that the SRL was simply attempting to buy-off the local community through this event. Another recurring concern from residents was the wasteful spending on events like this. Instead of addressing legitimate questions about the skyrocketing costs of the SRL and the environmental impacts, the government is throwing money at promotional stunts that achieve nothing more than alienating the community and camouflaging the failure and the brutality of their autocratic planning changes.

Box Hill residents have made it clear they want transparency and genuine consultation. They care about their local park, their trees and their open spaces. What they do not want to see is their hard-

earned taxpayer dollars squandered on events that fail to address the real issues. Locals in Box Hill, as well as all Victorians, deserve transparency on how their money is being spent and assurances that their concerns are being taken seriously, not sidelined by expensive and ineffective PR exercises. The action I seek is for the minister to disclose the full cost of this SRL garden party held in Box Hill to the Victorian people.

St Joseph's Christian college

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (19:08): (1329) My adjournment today is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for her to finally call in the application by the Assyrian Church of the East and get on with building St Joseph's Christian college in Yuroke. The church, at significant cost, has been through VCAT this week against the government – talk about a David and Goliath battle just to get the school approved. Jumping through the hoops, we have had a petition debate on this as well, where almost 5000 Victorians signed the school petition encouraging the government to get on with the job of this. But the government keeps changing the goalposts in regard to this. First it was traffic congestion on Mickleham Road that will slow down traffic. Even though they approved a precinct structure plan with 8000 homes across the road, it is the school that will cause traffic congestion. Then it was the intersection, and they said the school was happy to pay, the school was happy to help with the intersection. They even had the same designers and planners that planned the southern section of the Mickleham Road duplication planning this intersection, and they keep trying to find problems with it. What was it in VCAT this week they had issues with? It was a certain type of tree that they had issues with. So they keep changing the goalposts for the school, and one would think they actually have issues with a new school starting in the northern suburbs that is not a public school.

They have issues with independent and faith-based schools starting up in the northern suburbs. The minister needs to end this farce. It is a farce, and do you know how it is a farce? The government this week in VCAT has acknowledged it made a significant error in all of its planning documents by assuming that Hume City Council were opposed to this proposal. Hume City Council have never been opposed to this proposal. They literally stated in their submission to the government they had no objection to this proposal, but the government in all of their documentation said that Hume City Council was opposed – a massive blunder. The case should have been instantly dismissed. Instead the case has been adjourned until February at massive cost to the school – again, more cost to the Assyrian Church of the East as a result of this government. The Minister for Planning can end this farce. The minister at the table should look across the cabinet table at the Minister for Planning and beg her to call it in on behalf of this great community. I have staff members and close friends in the Assyrian community that are desperate for their school to be built, and the government and the minister need to get on and call it in and approve it.

Presidential visit

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (19:11): (1330) My adjournment debate is for the Premier. The last few months have seen a seismic shift in the political landscapes of both the United States and the United Kingdom. With the unprecedented political comeback of Donald Trump as the 47th President –

David Davis interjected.

Bev McARTHUR: Wait for it, Mr Davis. I will start again since I got that interruption. With the unprecedented political comeback of Donald Trump as the 47th President of the United States and the election of Kemi Badenoch as the leader of the UK Conservative Party, the death knell has sounded for woke politics. The pendulum has swung decisively toward common sense, individual freedom and national pride. The woke agenda which sought to undermine the fabric of our societies through divisive identity politics, cancel culture and anti-merit policies has been decisively rejected. In its place we see the resurgence of ideas rooted in personal responsibility, traditional values and the belief that every individual regardless of race, gender or background has the potential to thrive in a society that

values freedom over conformity and the individual over tribal groups. President Trump has championed the revival of the American dream by prioritising energy independence, revitalising domestic manufacturing and putting American workers first. His stance on securing borders, national sovereignty, reduced taxation and gender ideology reflects a renewed commitment to the safety and prosperity of everyday citizens. Meanwhile, Kemi Badenoch's election as opposition leader in the UK offers an unapologetic alternative government. Her emphasis on free markets, fiscal responsibility and a strong defence of free speech resonates across the Western world. She came to prominence through passionate, principled and powerful arguments against the catastrophic consequences of identity politics. She fights nobly against gender ideologues who seek to chemically castrate children and normalise transgender policy. Together these leaders represent a powerful alliance against the encroaching tide of government overreach and socialist ideas.

It is with great pride and respect that I propose an invitation to President Trump to visit Western Victoria. A tour of our rust belt regions will highlight the shared potential for anti-woke policy, economic revival and community resilience. We too are the forgotten people, overridden by ever-powerful corporations, unions and faceless bureaucratic government. The action that I seek from the Premier is to formally invite the new President on behalf of the people of Victoria.

Energy supply

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (19:14): (1331) My matter for the adjournment tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Energy and Resources, and it is a very important issue. We are approaching summer, and we need to be sure that the energy supplies are secure and reliable for Victoria. I am seeking from the minister an assurance that Victoria will get through the summer without an interruption to supply, without businesses being asked to close or close down their energy usage and without households being deprived of energy when they need it. We have seen an example in New South Wales today: the Premier and others up there are appealing to people to turn off their power. I mean, this is not the ideal way forward, we all understand that, but after 10 years of Labor government, 10 years of Lily D'Ambrosio, 10 years of failure and 10 years of error on energy policy we are in a weaker position. Our gas supplies are not there, the electricity supplies are intermittent, and the risk is that we get one of those long bursts in summer where there is maybe some sun through much of the day of course but the wind is not there, and there is a risk, especially if there is a failure in some equipment. But even separate from that there is a significant risk that our energy supply could be interrupted, particularly into the early evening when there is no sun, and if there is no wind there will be a real problem. We need to have the minister assure the community and explain what steps she has taken to make sure that Victoria will go through this summer without any interruption to supply and with a secure energy supply right through. With the security, that means business is in a position to make sure that its activities continue uninterrupted.

We know that very hot summers also put families at risk and fragile or older people at risk. It is still the truth that the most significant death toll in Australia's history beyond the pandemic in any recent period is the 2009 summer with the huge heat. Before the bushfires, in the week before the bushfires, there was an ambulance and hospital crisis and 374 Victorians died – still the most significant loss from death beyond the pandemic in Victoria's history, and that was because of the enormous heat. We need to make sure that older Victorians and vulnerable Victorians are protected with secure energy supplies, so the air conditioners must keep working and Lily D'Ambrosio needs to give that guarantee to Victorians that they will be safe and secure over summer.

Police safety

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (19:17): (1332) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police. Can the minister please take genuine action to support and protect our police in the light of recent violent protests at our major port and a serious assault on a Bendigo police officer simply doing his job? In the past few days protesters have again targeted the operations of the Port of Melbourne. This has cost tens of thousands of dollars in damages and productivity losses. Protesters smashed

traffic lights, vandalised shipping containers with graffiti, set rubbish alight, slashed tyres and cut the air lines of trucks. These so-called peaceful protests have put the lives of truck drivers and other road users at risk by cutting the brake lines. This further underscores the need for a permit system for protests in Victoria. Police officers are being called away from their posts in regional Victoria to help with these protests. This is a direct result of inadequate police numbers across the state. We currently have over 1000 vacancies. Last Thursday about 70 police called a stop-work in Bendigo and walked out of the station. Police also walked out in Shepparton. The government failed to reach an agreement and then walked away from the negotiations, passing responsibility to Fair Work Australia.

The government has pushed local police to breaking point, and they are protesting in the Premier's own backyard of Bendigo. Among them was Leading Senior Constable Bill Edwards, who had been attacked by a motorcyclist two days earlier. He suffered a broken nose, broken teeth and two black eyes. Leading Senior Constable Edwards said he and a colleague had pulled over a motorcyclist who then allegedly attacked them. Another senior constable suffered neck and hip injuries in the incident. Leading Senior Constable Edwards told the media that he agreed 1000 per cent that violence had recently become worse in Bendigo. Police Association of Victoria CEO Wayne Gatt said members faced danger daily. He said there were now two or three aggravated burglaries every night in Bendigo. These statistics are unacceptable. It is not just time for a fair pay deal for police, it is also time to change the laws to improve community safety and reduce the extra burden being placed on police. I have spoken to local police who are very frustrated. They do all the work required to keep the community safe and get offenders off the street, only for them to face court and have a magistrate let them off 24 hours later because the Allan Labor government weakened bail laws. It is time that the Allan Labor government treat our police with the respect they deserve and take genuine action to support them.

Goorambat East Solar Farm

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (19:20): (1333) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action that I seek is for the minister to inform Goorambat locals, Landcare groups and wildlife carers exactly what actions are being taken to rectify the damage done during the land-clearing phase of the Goorambat East Solar Farm and what actions will be taken to ensure the situation in Goorambat will not be repeated at other energy projects.

An energy developer is building a 630-hectare solar facility near Goorambat, just north of Benalla in my electorate. The Minister for Energy and Resources Lily D'Ambrosio appeared at the site in October for a ceremonial sod-turning when construction of the facility began, but sods of dirt are not the only things being displaced during construction. The developer has cleared almost 130 trees in order to make way for the solar panels to cover the land. Those trees were homes to possums, microbats, parrots, rosellas, swallows and galahs, but the homes of those animals have now been destroyed, and the displaced animals have been rescued by local carers.

I recently met with a volunteer from Benalla who provides wildlife rescue and rehabilitation, who told me about the extensive damage that has been done by the land clearing. The volunteer and other carers have been keeping records of the animals that have been displaced by this extensive tree removal and estimate that they have taken around 90 animals into care, but that number does not include the animals who were injured or who died during the tree fall or were killed on the road.

Wildlife carers have told me that the most damaging aspect of the situation is that the land is being cleared during peak breeding season. It is not just birds living in trees who are being displaced; it is young chicks who do not even have feathers yet and cannot fly away when a tree is falling. The middle of the breeding season, when birds are nesting, is the worst time possible to start clearing land. Native birds and bats as well as pregnant possums are having their homes cut down at the very moment that they are caring for their vulnerable young. There are even reports of endangered regent honeyeaters being seen in the area, and the destruction of hollow trees in this area at this time of year is deeply worrying.

If tree clearing must be done, animals and nests should first be removed with a high platform. The developer is using the slow-fall method for felling the trees without clearing nests, which means young birds and animals that cannot flee might be trapped or killed under branches when the tree lands.

Separately to this incident, the Minister for Environment has announced grants of up to \$3000 to support wildlife rescue volunteers, but the minister should remember that prevention is better than cure. Wildlife rescue volunteers would not have so many animals to save if the government prevented tree felling in breeding season.

Responses

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (19:23): There were 16 matters raised today: Ms Crozier to the Minister for Health, Ms Purcell to the Minister for Outdoor Recreation, Mr McGowan to the Premier, Mr Puglielli to the Treasurer, Ms Bath to the Treasurer, Ms Payne to the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Dr Heath to the Minister for Planning, Mrs Tyrrell to the Premier, Mrs Hermans to the Minister for Emergency Services, Mr Limbrick to the Minister for Environment, Mr Welch to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Mr Mulholland to the planning minister, Mrs McArthur to the Premier, Mr Davis to the Minister for Energy and Resources, Mrs Broad to the Minister for Police and Ms Lovell to the Minister for Environment.

I will make sure that all those matters that were raised will be referred to the relevant ministers for an appropriate response.

House adjourned 7:24 pm.