

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION**

Tuesday, 20 October 2015

(Extract from book 15)

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Ms Kilkenny, Mr McCurdy, Mr McGuire, Ms McLeish, Mr Pearson, Ms Ryall, Ms Thomas,
Mr Thompson, Ms Thomson, Ms Ward and Mr Watt.

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The Hon. D. M. ANDREWS

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier:

The Hon. J. A. MERLINO

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The Hon. M. J. GUY

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The Hon. D. J. HODGETT

Leader of The Nationals:

The Hon. P. L. WALSH

Deputy Leader of The Nationals:

Ms S. RYAN

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FIFTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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McCurdy, Mr Timothy Logan	Ovens Valley	Nats	Wynne, Mr Richard William	Richmond	ALP
McGuire, Mr Frank	Broadmeadows	ALP			

¹ Resigned 3 September 2015

² Resigned 3 September 2015

³ Elected 14 March 2015

⁴ Resigned 2 February 2015

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

ALP — Labor Party; Greens — The Greens;
Ind — Independent; LP — Liberal Party; Nats — The Nationals.

Legislative Assembly committees

Privileges Committee — Ms Allan, Ms D’Ambrosio, Mr Morris, Ms Neville, Ms Ryan, Ms Sandell, Mr Scott and Mr Wells.

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(*Council*): Ms Bath, Mr Purcell and Ms Symes.

Dispute Resolution Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Allan, Mr Clark, Mr Merlino, Mr M. O’Brien, Mr Pakula, Ms Richardson and Mr Walsh. (*Council*): Mr Bourman, Mr Dalidakis, Ms Dunn, Mr Jennings and Ms Wooldridge.

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(*Council*): Mr Bourman, Mr Elasmar and Mr Melhem.

Electoral Matters Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Asher, Ms Blandthorn, Mr Dixon, Mr Northe and Ms Spence.
(*Council*): Ms Patten, Mr Somyurek.

Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Halfpenny, Mr McCurdy, Mr Richardson, Mr Tilley and Ms Ward. (*Council*): Mr Ramsay and Mr Young.

Family and Community Development Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Couzens, Mr Edbrooke, Ms Edwards, Ms Kealy, Ms McLeish and Ms Sheed. (*Council*): Mr Finn.

House Committee — (*Assembly*): The Speaker (*ex officio*), Mr J. Bull, Mr Crisp, Mrs Fyffe, Mr Staikos, Ms Suleyman and Mr Thompson. (*Council*): The President (*ex officio*), Mr Eideh, Ms Hartland, Ms Lovell, Mr Mulino and Mr Young.

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Hibbins, Mr D. O’Brien, Mr Richardson, Ms Thomson and Mr Wells. (*Council*): Mr Ramsay and Ms Symes.

Law Reform, Road and Community Safety Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Dixon, Mr Howard, Ms Suleyman, Mr Thompson and Mr Tilley. (*Council*): Mr Eideh and Ms Patten.

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Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr J. Bull, Ms Blandthorn, Mr Dimopoulos, Ms Kealy, Ms Kilkenny and Mr Pesutto. (*Council*): Mr Dalla-Riva.

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Tuesday, 20 October 2015

The SPEAKER (Hon. Telmo Languiller) took the chair at 12.03 p.m. and read the prayer.

ABSENCE OF MINISTER

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — I advise the house that the Minister for Police, who is also the Minister for Corrections, will be absent from question time today. The Attorney-General will answer questions on his behalf.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE and MINISTERS STATEMENTS

Melbourne Metro rail project

Mr HODGETT (Croydon) — My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. Can the minister guarantee that no further Victorians will have their homes or businesses demolished for the Melbourne Metro rail project, apart from what she has announced today?

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Public Transport) — The Melbourne Metro rail project is the biggest public transport project this state has ever seen, and it is no surprise that those opposite want to cast a little bit of doubt and a little bit of suspicion on this project because they opposed this important project.

Mr Guy — On a point of order, Speaker, it was a very simple question the minister was asked. On a point of relevance, the minister was debating the question. Is this the end of the compulsory acquisitions, or will there be more?

The SPEAKER — Order! At this point the minister will continue. I do not uphold the point of order.

Ms ALLAN — I am surprised that those opposite might want to talk about compulsory acquisition on projects, because their record is not so good in relation to how they treated people and how they did not treat people with respect and fairness.

One of the two key differences — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier, the member for Malvern and the member for Bundoora will allow the minister to continue.

Ms ALLAN — We are working very carefully — ‘we’ as in the Melbourne Metro Rail Authority — with

property owners who have been contacted yesterday and today about the need for their properties to be compulsorily acquired. We needed to do this in alignment with the planning process that needs to start. Because if we want to get on with this project, we need to work through these very difficult stages. These are very difficult and challenging stages, and there will be further work to be done through the planning process confirming the alignment, and we will continue to work with people along the 9-kilometre route of a project that those opposite have never supported and never got in behind.

Supplementary question

Mr HODGETT (Croydon) — Can the minister confirm that the environment effects statement (EES), which would properly set out the requirements for property acquisition, is not even written yet, let alone assessed, before she starts forcing people from their homes and businesses?

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Public Transport) — It is no surprise that the failed former planning minister and the failed former minister do not understand how these processes work. It is very clear that they do not understand how they work. As part of the planning process that needs to be undertaken to finalise this project through the EES, we need to provide into that planning process the location of the properties that need to be acquired. So right now is the right time to be going out there and talking in a respectful way — —

Mr Guy — On a point of order, Speaker, a very, very simple question was put to the minister that she still has not answered: is the EES written, yes or no?

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the minister to come back to answering the question.

Ms ALLAN — As I said, you would have thought that the failed former planning minister might know a little bit about this. To complete the EES we need to detail the properties that are going to be acquired, and that — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Chair is unable to hear the response as advanced by the minister. I require every member to cooperate. The minister to continue. The minister has concluded.

Ministers statements: Djerriwarrh Health Services

Ms HENNESSY (Minister for Health) — I rise to provide the house with new information about a tragic and very sad set of circumstances involving the Djerriwarrh Health Services. Earlier this year, following an analysis done by the Consultative Council on Obstetric and Paediatric Mortality and Morbidity, the government became aware that in 2013 and 2014 there was a higher than expected number of paediatric and perinatal deaths. A review of those cases, undertaken by one of the state’s leading obstetricians and gynaecologists, Professor Euan Wallace, found that of those 10 stillbirths and newborn deaths 7 may have been avoidable.

Upon becoming aware of this information the government had two priorities. The first was to put in place measures to ensure the safety of the hospital’s maternity service for current and future women and babies who will be receiving care there. Secondly, following a peer review of Professor Wallace’s report, the women and families involved in these cases will be provided with all information through an open disclosure process along with all of the support they need.

Nothing can be as devastating as losing a baby, and the government is very conscious that going forward all of its actions cannot repair the loss the people involved have endured. The many measures that have been put in place include the implementation of all of Professor Wallace’s recommendations. Yesterday I met with the state coroner and the health services commissioner to further discuss the supports and response that should be made, and I will continue to discuss with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency how it can be that for over two years one of the clinicians involved had been the subject of an investigation, that this had not been made public and that the health service was not advised.

I have given advice to the board of this health service of my intention to replace it with an administrator. We will continue to do all we can to ensure that this never happens again.

Melbourne Metro rail project

Mr HODGETT (Croydon) — My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. Given that no environment effects statement has been released for the still unfunded Melbourne Metro rail project, will the minister now immediately release the business case that

justifies taking away dozens of homes and business from Victorians?

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Public Transport) — Perhaps it escaped the attention of the shadow minister, but back in February, when the Premier announced that we were fast-tracking this project because it was just too important to waste one single more moment in getting on with delivering the Melbourne Metro rail — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms ALLAN — We announced that we were establishing the Melbourne Metro Rail Authority, and its very first job was to get to work on refreshing a business case that had sat on the shelf for four years under the previous government — a business case that had sat on the shelf for four long years.

We made it very clear in terms of the process in February this year that we would be releasing this business case in 2016. As part of that we also need to go through an appropriate planning process, which includes an environment effects statement.

The member talks about business cases. I could refer him to the preliminary business case that currently sits on the Infrastructure Australia website rating this project as the no. 1 infrastructure project for this state. This was advice that was roundly ignored by those opposite, who left this project to languish, who then came out with a thought bubble that was drafted on the back of an envelope, clearly by the former failed Minister for Planning as he was trying to concoct his Fishermans Bend construction with the Metro rail link.

Mr Hodgett — On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is now debating the question, and I ask you to draw her back to answering the question that was asked.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will come back to answering the question.

Ms ALLAN — We are working on finalising that business case. An important part of that process is going through the compulsory acquisition process, treating people with respect and notifying them appropriately. That is exactly the work that we are doing right now.

In the meantime we are also working with the community and people like the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, who strongly supports this project, and I could not help but notice the comments of former Liberal Premier Jeff Kennett, who last week in the

Herald Sun talked about the Melbourne Metro project — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr R. Smith — On a point of order, Speaker, just to clarify, there is no business case, no environment effects statement and no funding, but the government is taking people's homes with no reason whatsoever.

The SPEAKER — Order! There is no point of order.

Ms ALLAN — I appreciate that the former Liberal Premier is seen as a respected party elder by those opposite, so perhaps they should take his advice and recognise that the Melbourne Metro rail project is a great plan, as he told the *Herald Sun* last week.

We are finalising the business plan. We are getting on with the planning processes. An important step in doing these pieces of work is to go through an appropriate and respectful property acquisition process. That is what has commenced this week, and that demonstrates our firm commitment to not wasting one single moment on this vital piece of city-shaping infrastructure.

Supplementary question

Mr HODGETT (Croydon) — Is it not a fact that the minister will not release the Melbourne Metro business case or the so-called refreshed version because it simply does not exist?

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Public Transport) — Our support for the Melbourne Metro rail project, and can I say it is strongly supported by others in the community, is based on the work that was done previously, the work that was assessed by Infrastructure Australia, the preliminary business case for which can be found on its website that assesses this as the no. 1 rated infrastructure project for Victoria. I appreciate that those opposite cannot quite get their heads around following proper processes. I know they cannot quite appreciate how to support projects in an appropriate way, given their failures. We have to think: was there a business case for the east–west project? I do not think there was.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms ALLAN — We are working through this project appropriately, diligently and carefully, delivering this vital project for this state.

Ministers statements: Box Hill Institute Lilydale campus

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Education) — I am proud to be part of a government that keeps its promises. Yesterday I joined the Premier and the Minister for Training and Skills at the former Swinburne Lilydale site. We made a promise to return TAFE and higher education to the site and less than a year into government we have delivered on that promise. Swinburne Lilydale was forced to shut its doors and lock its gates as a direct result of the savage cuts to TAFE by the previous government. It resulted in the loss of our largest TAFE and the only university in that region.

When in government the Leader of the Opposition sat around the cabinet table and agreed to the cuts to TAFE. He agreed to the closure of campuses. He agreed to the cuts to courses, fees skyrocketing and jobs lost — —

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Speaker, I draw your attention to sessional order 7. The minister has now moved away from setting a context and is debating the issue. I ask you to bring him back to compliance.

Mr MERLINO — On the point of order, Speaker, and the issue of setting the context, we would not have been reopening Swinburne Lilydale and announcing the partnership with Box Hill if the previous government had not — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will resume his seat. The member for Eildon will come to order. The minister will come back to making his ministers statement.

Mr MERLINO — Yesterday was a day for the community of the east. The forced closure inspired an unprecedented reaction within our community. It galvanised thousands of people who voiced their support at the reopening of the campus. We listened and we delivered. The community knew that if we lost that campus, it could never be replaced. No longer is this beautiful fit-for-purpose campus lost as a place of learning.

The Premier, when opposition leader, also announced and made a commitment that we would make it bigger and better. It will not only house a TAFE and higher education courses, but also a childcare centre, a preschool, a maternal and child health centre, a biosecurity centre of excellence, a state-of-the-art tech school for Yarra Ranges, and disability support

provider Melba Support Services. This is a government that keeps its promises.

Drought assistance

Mr WALSH (Murray Plains) — My question is to the Premier. For the second consecutive spring grain crops across many parts of Victoria have failed, putting financial pressure on farm businesses, regional economies and country jobs, and I ask: when will concessional loans be made available for those struggling farming families?

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — I thank the Leader of The Nationals for his question and for his obvious concern for regional communities. I share that concern. We are facing unprecedented low rainfall. Many would describe it as drought. Whether it formally qualifies under various definitions imposed by other governments, let us leave that to one side. There are many, particularly those who are in the broadacre farming business, so grain producers and other broadacre crops, for whom things are very difficult.

To that end the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water has been in constant conversation with her counterpart, Minister Joyce, at the federal level, and I do hope to make announcements on behalf of the government, in partnership with the federal government, quite soon.

We appreciate and understand that there are real challenges — really significant challenges. It is another failed season off the back of some very difficult times. In the breaking of the drought even, there were real challenges at that time. So we understand that now is the time to step up and to provide additional support. Concessional loans are one important part of that. Again, I say to the Leader of The Nationals that we accept and understand how challenging it is in regions of our state. We want to make sure that we provide support, care and assistance to both communities and also to famers in their capacity as small and medium-size businesses.

The Minister for Agriculture, the minister for water and I have had a series of very important discussions on assistance and the measures that we can bring forward into this year, ahead of the next calendar year, that might support regional and rural farmers. But there are broader community considerations here as well. This has a real impact not just on primary producers and those in the broadacre sector but also on many others.

I do genuinely thank the Leader of The Nationals for his question. This is a serious issue, one on which the

government is working hard to develop a plan as quickly as it can ahead of these conditions, which no doubt will worsen as we get into the summer.

On the specifics of concessional loans, the relevant minister in our government is in very positive and constructive conversations with her counterpart, Minister Joyce, in the federal government. We do hope that all of us can work together, acknowledging that this is a very serious issue, to provide the care and support in very practical terms to regional communities that were doing it tough before this failed season. They certainly are now, with every prospect that things will only worsen. But we know and understand that our regional communities are tough and strong. They are absolutely resilient. They are up to this challenge, but that will made a little easier if their government stands with them, and if indeed this Parliament stands with them. I look forward to that in the future.

Supplementary question

Mr WALSH (Murray Plains) — During the last severe drought the then government provided municipal rate rebates to assist farm families and protect country jobs. I ask the Premier: will the government make the same program available to country Victoria during this drought, and if not, why not?

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — I thank the Leader of The Nationals for his supplementary question. I should just point out that I was incorrect in saying the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water has been speaking with the federal Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, Barnaby Joyce. It is in fact the Minister for Agriculture, Ms Pulford, in our government who has been speaking to her counterpart, Minister Joyce, in the federal government.

We, as part of that process I alluded to, are trying to bring forward a whole range of supports. There are many different payments, and there are many different ways in which we support families in regional communities in the course of a year. If any of those can be consolidated and brought forward, then I would have thought that would be of really practical and meaningful importance and real support. That would make a big difference.

We are not looking just at things like rate rebates but also at many other payments that might be able to be consolidated and brought forward into this time of critical need. The Treasurer is involved in that process as well, and once it is concluded, I will be more than happy to provide a briefing to any member of

Parliament who wants to know more about the things we are doing and the decisions we have made by that point to try to support regional communities, who are doing it very tough at the moment.

Ministers statements: Fishermans Bend development

Mr WYNNE (Minister for Planning) — Today I am releasing the *Fishermans Bend Advisory Committee — Report 1* on the Metropolitan Planning Authority's web page.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr WYNNE — The Leader of the Opposition rezoned overnight Australia's most significant urban renewal area, Fishermans Bend. The report I am releasing is 72 pages of new information that shows planning experts and community members found the decision to rezone 250 hectares of land overnight misguided and damaging. The report notes that there is no precedent for this kind of action anywhere in the developed world.

The now opposition leader was told there needed to be a plan for schools, a plan for public transport and a plan for public open space, which he ignored. What does this mean for Victoria? The landowners and developers who owned property in Fishermans Bend had a windfall. Land values in some precincts quadrupled, but that means the cost for the Victorian taxpayer to provide services and infrastructure has surged. The only transport plan the now opposition leader oversaw was a vague dot on a map where a railway station —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Speaker, I draw your attention to sessional order 7, which requires ministers to make statements about new government initiatives, projects and achievements. The minister now has just 34 seconds remaining to complete his statement. He has not even begun to address government initiatives, projects or achievements. I ask you to bring him back to compliance with the sessional order.

Ms Allan — On the point of order, Speaker, I urge you to reject the point of order of the manager of opposition business because clearly the Minister for Planning was outlining significant new work that he is undertaking in cleaning up the mess that is Fishermans Bend that was left to us by the failed former planning minister.

The SPEAKER — Order! I do not uphold the point of order.

Mr WYNNE — Fishermans Bend was described to me by a prominent private sector planner as the Wild West. Only a Labor government can be trusted to invest in services that benefit all Victorians. Only a Labor government will provide equitable access to education, transport, health and community services. We are committed to fixing up the mess that was left for us by the previous government, and that is what an Andrews Labor government will do.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Carrum is warned. I will not have members of the government producing exhibits. Should they do it again, I will have them removed from the house, and that includes removing the members as well.

Employment

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) — It is like being verbally by Elmer Fudd.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the Opposition!

Mr GUY — My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier confirm that it is still his government's policy to create 100 000 full-time jobs in its first two years of office as promised?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Government and opposition members will allow the Premier to respond to the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — I can confirm for the Leader of the Opposition that the answer is yes, and we will not waste even one day in delivering on each and every one of the commitments that we made to the people of Victoria. We do not want to see a situation, and we will never settle for a situation, where we lead the nation not in jobs created but in unemployment — in jobs lost. That is exactly what was delivered by those opposite, and it is one of the reasons they sit opposite, out of government, a failed administration, one that stood in this place day after day and told the people of Victoria, worried about their jobs, 'You have never had it so good'.

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. It was a very

straightforward, factual question about government policy, and I ask you to bring him back to answering it.

Ms Allan — On the point of order, Speaker, I was just going to make the point that the Premier was asked about creating jobs, and that is exactly what he was answering, because we are determined to not waste a day on that important task. I ask you to rule the point of order out of order.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier will come back to answering the question.

Mr R. Smith interjected.

Mr ANDREWS — The member for Warrandyte was the minister for youth but did not know the youth unemployment rate, so you would think he would have the good sense to stay quiet, wouldn't you? But no, the empty vessel is making the most noise, as usual. Every job is worth fighting for.

Mr R. Smith interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Warrandyte!

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is defying your order. I ask you to instruct him to cease debating the question and come back to answering it.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier will come back to answering the question.

Mr ANDREWS — As I have said, the government will deliver on each and every one of the commitments it has made. We understand that employment, growth, providing the preconditions, the policy settings and the government activity to underpin demand and growth — to do everything we can to make sure that Victorians get the skills that they need — is not a four-year holiday from hard work but a comprehensive plan. The Premier's Jobs and Investment Panel, underway; the TAFE Back to Work Fund, underway; and we saw yesterday that the Swinburne Lilydale site, closed by those opposite, was reopened by this government.

We know and understand that jobs start with skills and that a good government is one that works hard every single day. It is not a government happy to see Victoria slide further behind every quarter, every year and then stand up, as they did opposite, and lecture the Victorian people and say, 'You have never had it so good'.

That was the submission of those opposite, as we saw Victoria not no. 1 for jobs growth but no. 1 for jobs lost — —

The SPEAKER — Order!

Mr ANDREWS — No. 1 for jobs lost — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier will resume his seat when the Chair requests that of the Premier.

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is again debating the question, despite your previous rulings. If he has completed his answer, he should simply sit down.

Mr Pakula — On the point of order, Speaker, the Premier has been absolutely relevant to the question. He has been asked whether we stand by our commitment. He has made it clear that we do, and in doing so, he is entitled to place some context around the question, the context being the former government's abysmal record in jobs growth. It is perfectly appropriate and in order.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Chair accepts that the Premier has responded to the question, but the Chair requests the Premier to come back to answering question.

Mr ANDREWS — There is a real choice to be made. You can either work hard every day to keep Victorians in work. you can honour your word and deliver on your promises, or you can sit back and have a four-year holiday from hard work and then have the temerity to get up in here and ask questions. Having celebrated, almost, job losses and unemployment for four years, the previous government did nothing about it then, and it is irrelevant to our plans for a stronger Victoria right now.

Supplementary question

Mr GUY (Leader of the Opposition) — Given that the Premier has said in his answer, 'You can honour your word and not waste one day' and noting that 7800 full-time jobs have been lost since Labor was sworn into office, can the Premier guarantee that over the remaining 15 months of this two-year promise, 7200 new full-time jobs will be created each and every month to achieve that 100 000 new full-time job promise — —

Mr Pallas interjected.

Mr GUY — The Treasurer is helping him; he doesn't even know the figures.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier will respond to the supplementary question and ignore the latter part of it.

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. He talked about figures: 6.7 per cent, that is what it was when we came to government, it is 6.2 per cent today. But we will never settle, as those opposite did, and I can go through the list — but a minute is not enough — the catalogue of companies that left this state under this one hear — —

Mr Guy — On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, it was just a very simple question, which the Premier has not answered: will he keep his jobs promise of 7200 jobs every month for the next 15 months, yes or no?

Mr ANDREWS — The question was answered in the substantive question: each and every one of our election commitments will be honoured.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr ANDREWS — He is having a bad day, old Fisherman's Friend over there, but Mr Fish Fingers over here — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier and the Leader of the Opposition are warned.

Mr R. Smith — On a point of order, Speaker, instead of reverting to type and hurling personal abuse, perhaps the Premier could just answer the question that was asked by the Leader of the Opposition.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Attorney-General will resume his seat. I remind the Attorney-General that when the Chair is on his feet all members should resume their seats. The Chair did not have an opportunity to properly hear the member for Warrandyte on a point of order.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! All members are entitled to make a point of order. They represent their constituencies, and the Chair is interested in hearing each member. The member will make his point of order again, and he will be heard in silence.

Mr Andrews interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier will allow the member for Warrandyte to make his point of order.

Mr Guy interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the Opposition should allow the member for Warrandyte to make a point of order in silence. The Chair has given the member a second opportunity to make his point of order; the Chair expects the opposition to help him.

Mr R. Smith — On a point of order, Speaker, instead of throwing juvenile abuse across the table, the Premier should just answer the question that was asked of him — instead of debating it.

The SPEAKER — Order! There is no point of order. The Premier will continue. He has 15 seconds to conclude his answer.

Mr ANDREWS — The choice is clear: you can either work hard every day to try to create jobs and opportunities, embedding within them skills and life opportunities for the working men and women of this state, or you can do what those opposite did, and that is absolutely nothing for four long years.

Ministers statements: Melbourne Metro rail project

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Public Transport) — I rise to provide new information to the house on how this government is progressing the no. 1-rated infrastructure project for Victoria — the Melbourne Metro rail project. Today this project went to the next stage. It is a difficult but necessary stage that it has been progressed to.

When you consider the size and scale of the biggest ever public transport infrastructure project that has been undertaken in this state, you realise that there will be some disruption and the need to acquire properties along the route. Last night the Melbourne Metro Rail Authority began contacting landowners, residents and businesses who will be impacted by the compulsory land acquisition that is required. This is a necessary step, but we should also reflect and appreciate that this is a difficult time for those people, whether they be property owners, tenants or businesses who have been contacted.

All up, 44 buildings with 94 titles will need to be compulsorily acquired. This includes 15 residential buildings, 1 apartment building with 49 titles and another 14 individual residential properties. As I said, this is a difficult time but an important step in the project. It demonstrates that we need to move very carefully through each stage of the project.

It has come to my attention, though, that a different approach was taken by others in regard to important public transport projects. Those others, who as the Minister for Planning just talked about had a vague dot on the map down at Fishermans Bend, had an alternate proposal for a rail link through the city. It has come to my attention that \$230 000 was wasted by those opposite on a study for a plan that did not address Melbourne and Victoria's transport needs; it was all about the failed former Minister for Planning's obsession with Fishermans Bend — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister's time has expired.

Employment

Mr M. O'BRIEN (Malvern) — My question is to the Premier. With Australian Bureau of Statistics data showing 7800 full-time jobs lost since Labor took office, meaning that in the next 15 months 107 800 new full-time jobs must be created for the government to meet its jobs promise, I ask: has any government in Victorian history achieved this level of jobs growth in 15 months?

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — I do thank the shadow Treasurer for his question. I am reminded of another time he did ask me about historical context and what anyone else had achieved. I can recall a commitment when the member for Scoresby was the Treasurer. Remember those good old days, Speaker! Before the days of side letters, when the member for Scoresby was the Treasurer, I think the number was 50 000. We were going to create 50 000 jobs, and I think it might have been full time, part time, any time — 50 000. And we created as an economy zero! That is what the first budget showed; that is what the second budget showed; and then of course the member for Scoresby was no more.

Then the vandal from Malvern became the Treasurer of this great state. I hope he kept the pen he signed that side letter with; I hope he did. It was such a great day in the history of our state! We will not be lectured to by the vandal from Malvern — —

Mr M. O'Brien — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is now 2 minutes into his question, and he has not given any answer at all to the substantive question. I ask you to draw him back to answering the substantive question.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the Premier to come back to answering the question.

Mr ANDREWS — The question related to government performance. I can recall a government that inherited an unemployment rate of 4.9 per cent. When it left government, having made history, having been rejected — it was the first one-term government since 1955 — what was that unemployment rate? Not 4.9 per cent, but 6.7 per cent.

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Speaker, the question was a specific question about the level of jobs growth. The Premier is not addressing the question. If he wants to take it on notice, he is entitled to, but he is not entitled to talk about whatever he likes instead of answering the question.

The SPEAKER — Order! I do not uphold the point of order.

Mr ANDREWS — The question related to 160-odd years worth of government performance. I am just going through a few more contemporary examples. We know why those opposite would be embarrassed. There were 65 000 more people unemployed by the end of that four-year period — that four year holiday from hard work.

Let me have a look at a few regional examples. In Ballarat unemployment went from 6.2 per cent to 6.8 per cent; in Bendigo, 5.6 per cent to 6.9 per cent; and in Geelong, 5 per cent to 8.2 per cent. The former government sat by and barracked for the departure of the car industry. That is what the Liberals did. In Hume unemployment went from 5.6 per cent to 5.8 per cent; and in Latrobe in Gippsland, 5.8 per cent to 5.9 per cent. The list goes on and on. No part of our state was spared. There was not leadership in jobs growth, but leadership sadly, at a national level, in the number of jobs we lost. We will not waste even one day — —

Mr Clark — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is now debating the question. I ask him to at least make a start on answering it.

The SPEAKER — Order! I do not uphold the point of order.

Mr ANDREWS — We will not waste even one day in delivering on all of our commitments in skills, in education and in level crossings — and there are 4500 jobs there. If only some people would get out of the way, agree to the lease of the port of Melbourne and allow us to get on with job-creating projects like that. We will not be lectured to by those who led our nation in indolence, arrogance and unemployment.

Supplementary question

Mr M. O'BRIEN (Malvern) — I note that in Victoria the highest number of full-time jobs ever created over a 15-month period is 98 784, which was under a Liberal-Nationals coalition government. Premier — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Government members!

Mr M. O'BRIEN — They do not like facts, do they? Facts are our friends.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Malvern will resume his seat. Government and opposition members will allow the member for Malvern to ask a supplementary question of the Premier. The Chair is unable to adjudicate in relation to the question, indeed in relation to the answer, if the Chair is unable to hear the supplementary question.

Mr M. O'BRIEN — I ask the Premier: with full-time jobs going backwards under Labor — —

Ms Allan — That is not true!

Mr M. O'BRIEN — The Minister for Public Transport believes the Australian Bureau of Statistics is rorting the numbers like those opposite do — —

The SPEAKER — Order! I have given the member for Malvern a directive to ask a question. The member for Malvern will ask the supplementary question.

Mr M. O'BRIEN — With the Australian Bureau of Statistics showing that full-time jobs are going backwards under Labor, does the Premier concede that his promise of 100 000 new full-time jobs over two years is just a cruel hoax on Victorians?

Mr ANDREWS (Premier) — I reject the assertions in the shadow Treasurer's question. I do not think we should ever settle. We should never settle, no matter what the number. We should always work hard to create more jobs, more skills and more opportunities in our community. To have the member for Malvern with the wet lettuce out giving us a touch up about hoaxes — I remember, and I wonder if others remember, 'Fix the problems and build the future'.

Do members remember that: fix the problems and build the future? Well, they were the problem, and the Victorian community said, 'We'll have none of your leadership for the future, thank you very much. We'll make you the first one-term government for a very long time'. We will not be lectured to by those who did

nothing at all except cut, close and ignore appalling unemployment performance. That was the record of those opposite, and we reject it.

Ministers statements: Fishermans Bend development

Mr PALLAS (Treasurer) — I rise to inform the house of new action that the Andrews Labor government is taking to fix the calamity caused by the former Minister for Planning and now Leader of the Opposition's slapdash rezoning of the Fishermans Bend precinct. I have asked my department to coordinate a whole-of-government effort to conduct an audit of all land rezoning decisions taken by the previous government. We need now to know exactly how much the Leader of the Opposition's — —

Mr Guy interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the Opposition will allow the Treasurer to continue.

Mr PALLAS — We need to know how much the Leader of the Opposition's cowboy approach to rezoning is eventually going to cost.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr PALLAS — The former Minister for Planning was willing to rezone hundreds of millions of dollars worth of inner city land without a strategy or any clear, publicly discussed rationale. Clearly this government cannot work on the assumption that this is where it ends or that the Leader of the Opposition conducted himself properly in his job. The man is to metropolitan planning what John Howard was to spin bowling: uncoordinated and aimless. He is the Tonya Harding of planning probity. It is no wonder that his projects limped along, dragging down future budgetary capacity.

Some estimates coming from experts say that this reckless blunder, even if it is limited to Fishermans Bend, will cost taxpayers around \$340 million. That is 845 nurses. That is 29 new primary schools. That is 17 000 square kilometres of resurfaced roads. That is more than half of Bendigo Hospital. I guess that is what you expect from a bloke who rates as a good time watching the *Titanic* sink.

The SPEAKER — Order! The time for questions without notice has now expired.

Mr Angus — On a point of order, Speaker, I seek some clarification from you in relation to the behaviour of some government members today who held up props. When members on this side held up props some

weeks ago, they were summarily ejected from the chamber. I seek some clarification from you in relation to the behaviour we have seen today from government members.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Chair has indicated in the past that that is disorderly behaviour. The Chair normally warns members, but if members persist, they are asked to withdraw from the chamber. From what I could see those members did not persist, so I did not feel it was necessary at the time to ask them to withdraw. However, I accept the point of order made by the member that in future, should that occur, those members will be asked to withdraw. I make that point clear.

Ms Ryan — On a point of order, Speaker, I draw your attention to sessional order 12, which says that questions on notice must be answered within 30 days. On 17 September I submitted 35 questions to the Minister for Education in his capacity as the minister representing the Minister for Training and Skills, and they have not been answered, and there are a further four questions I submitted on 15 September which have also not been answered.

The SPEAKER — Order! This matter will be followed through in writing by the minister.

Mr R. Smith — On a point of order, Speaker, I also refer you to sessional order 12. During the last sitting week I rose and said that the Minister for Roads and Road Safety had not answered a significant number of questions on notice. You said you would undertake to ensure that those questions were answered. Over the subsequent week they have not been answered. In addition to that, there are dozens of additional questions remaining unanswered that are well past their due date. I ask you to follow up with the minister and ask him to conform to the sessional orders which this government brought in but seems to be incapable of following.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Chair will follow that through. I will double-check the correspondence and dates accordingly, and if I feel it is appropriate, I will have a discussion with the minister.

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

Warrandyte electorate

Mr R. SMITH (Warrandyte) — (Question 3673) My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. I refer to the minister's letter of 8 October, which states:

VicRoads completed traffic modelling investigations in August 2015, assessing possible options to provide additional vehicle crossing capacity of the Yarra River in the vicinity of the Kangaroo Ground-Warrandyte Road Bridge ...

My question to the minister is: when will my community have access to this modelling, as well as the options suggested by VicRoads?

Broadmeadows electorate

Mr McGUIRE (Broadmeadows) — (Question 3674) My question is to the Minister for Local Government. Broadmeadows is Victoria's poorest community: unemployment was recently equal to Greece, and youth unemployment is estimated to be above 40 per cent. It is the most complex of the postcodes of disadvantage, with twice as many Muslim families as any other state district living side by side with Christian refugees from Syria and Iraq. Broadmeadows was recently identified by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation as a hotspot for potential terrorist recruitment. The electorate is in the heart of one of Australia's fastest growing regions, and it is represented by a designated interface council. The advice I seek for the representative of my constituents, the Hume City Council, is: what is the best method of coordinating critical funding from the Interface Growth Fund to deliver vital and urgent investment for the Broadmeadows electorate, given the severity of its needs?

Ovens Valley electorate

Mr McCURDY (Ovens Valley) — (Question 3675) My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The Yarrawonga and Mulwala communities are still waiting to hear whether the minister will either support the community's longstanding position in relation to the green route for the new bridge construction over the Murray River or turn his back on the community's preferred route. I heard the New South Wales Minister for Roads, Maritime and Freight speak in Parliament last week about the Yarrawonga and Mulwala bridge crossing, and he said that Roads and Maritime Services NSW had advised him to look at the grey route as an option. With respect, the lead agency in relation to this crossing is Victoria, and the leadership needs to come from the Victorian minister. Therefore I ask: will the minister visit our community to announce his support for the green route as soon as possible, which will confirm the community's strong stance in relation to that route? Anything short of a public announcement on site with all of the community invited would be a major disappointment.

Dandenong electorate

Ms WILLIAMS (Dandenong) — (Question 3676) My constituency question is for the Minister for Industry, who is also the Minister for Energy and Resources, and it relates to energy prices. I seek from the minister information about what the government is doing to make energy more affordable for all Victorians.

Electricity bills are a significant cost to Victorians, making up a large component of every household budget. Since joining this house last year I have received a number of inquiries regarding the cost of energy, with many people wanting to know how to reduce their bills. There is often confusion about the difference between retailers and about different plans.

The privatisation of Victoria's electricity assets has resulted in a market for the price of power, which means that not every Victorian pays the same rate for their energy, and many Victorians are not always paying the cheapest price available to them. It is crucial that everybody is able to have access to reliable and independent information to ensure they can utilise the most affordable energy plans available and maximise the savings on their power bills.

Can the minister provide details about what the government is doing to make energy more affordable, and how this will deliver more affordable electricity for the people of Dandenong and all Victorians?

Gembrook electorate

Mr BATTIN (Gembrook) — (Question 3677) My constituency question today is to the Minister for Education. One of the greatest privileges of this role is attending primary schools and having a chat to the kids about our democracy and how it works. Students at Beaconsfield Primary School are very interested in the democracy of Victoria. They have attended Parliament, and I quite regularly visit the school and speak to grade 5 and 6 students. One of the commitments I made to them this year — and I have run it by the minister — was to ask a question on their behalf. They have sent a question to me that they would like me to ask of the Minister for Education.

The students of grade 6K at Beaconsfield Primary School want to know: what are the government's future plans for funding the very important chaplaincy programs within schools? This is a school that had a very good association with chaplaincy programs; they are very good within that school. They have had community issues, and the chaplains have been

fantastic in not just working with students but also with the community as a whole. The students want to ensure that the funding for those programs going forward is working so that they will see great outcomes for our local community in Beaconsfield.

St Albans electorate

Ms SULEYMAN (St Albans) — (Question 3678) My constituency question is to the Minister for Education. St Albans North Primary School is in a very low socio-economic area in the west and the school had anticipated that this social and economic circumstance would be reflected in significantly increased needs-based funding. However, this was not the case. The result appears to have been caused by an anomaly in the funding model. Many local parents hold university degrees from overseas, which disqualifies the school from receiving higher funding, resulting in a double jeopardy. The parents' tertiary qualifications are often disregarded in Australia when they are seeking jobs, yet the qualifications have been counted against the school receiving the appropriate amount of needs-based funding. Can the minister provide information on the remedy to rectify the issues raised by St Albans North Primary School regarding this funding?

Prahran electorate

Mr HIBBINS (Prahran) — (Question 3679) My constituency question is to the Minister for Public Transport. Earlier this year Public Transport Victoria proposed the merging of tram route 8 with tram route 55. The proposal was announced with little justification or supporting information and was met with concern by many in the Prahran electorate who would lose direct access to the arts precinct and the centre of the CBD. The consultation finished months ago and many residents are anxiously awaiting the government's decision. Tram 8 is already at 116 per cent capacity and passengers fail to see the benefits of transferring from one overcrowded tram to another. Can the minister provide an update on the status of the tram 8 merger proposal, and say whether any alternative proposals have been considered, such as retaining the existing route 8 whilst extending route 55 along Toorak Road or building the Park Street extension to allow for the diversion of other routes off St Kilda Road?

Footscray electorate

Ms THOMSON (Footscray) — (Question 3680) My question is to the Minister for Education regarding the vacant school buildings on Rosamond Road, West

Footscray. Another school in my electorate, the Western English Language School, which caters for newly arrived children for whom English is their second language, is currently in need of more space for its growing number of students. Having the extra rooms at Rosamond Road dedicated to primary-age children would free up the classrooms that are currently being used for primary and secondary teaching, enabling the school to extend its secondary options. My question to the minister is: could the buildings on the Rosamond special school site be opened up for a primary school annex of the Western English Language School?

South Barwon electorate

Mr KATOS (South Barwon) — (Question 3681) My question is to the Minister for Public Transport on behalf of Daryl Bayliss of Torquay. Mr Bayliss is being treated for prostate cancer at the Austin Hospital in Heidelberg, which requires him to attend regular appointments at 10.00 a.m. Prior to the introduction of the new rail timetables in June this year, Mr Bayliss was able to catch the 7.46 a.m. train from Marshall, arriving shortly after 9.00 a.m., prior to an 8-to-10-minute connection to Southern Cross Station to arrive at Heidelberg station at 9.46 a.m., in time for his appointment. Under the new timetable, the 7.46 a.m. departure from Marshall has been dropped. Mr Bayliss now has to catch an earlier train and wait at South Geelong before going to Southern Cross. When Mr Bayliss gets to Heidelberg station, he is charged the full fare. Further, the Austin Hospital is unable to alter his appointment. I ask: when will the minister undertake an urgent review of the changes she has made to V/Line timetables to provide a common-sense solution to the problems experienced by Mr Bayliss and many other rail commuters on the Geelong line?

Yan Yean electorate

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — (Question 3682) My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. My electorate in the outer north has experienced unprecedented growth. What were once country towns and satellite suburbs are now bustling metropolitan. With growth come more people, especially young families. Speed limits on our roads are many and varied, and I believe they need to be reassessed due to significant changes in demographics, usage and new housing estates. I ask the minister to advise on the current VicRoads policy regarding speed limits and for reviews of speed limits on state and council roads in my electorate, particularly in Wallan and in Doreen, in the vicinity of the Wallan Secondary College and Plenty Valley Christian College, in recognition of this growth.

TERRORISM (COMMUNITY PROTECTION) AMENDMENT BILL 2015

Introduction and first reading

Mr PAKULA (Attorney-General) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill for an act to amend the Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003 to provide for the remote entry of premises for the purposes of covert search warrants, to extend the operation of preventative detention orders and prohibited contact orders and for other purposes.

Mr PESUTTO (Hawthorn) — I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

Mr PAKULA (Attorney-General) — Beyond what is in the long title, I can advise the member that the bill is important for the purposes of not allowing the act to sunset, as it would next year without this bill, and to implement a number of the recommendations of the David Jones review that was initiated by the former government in 2014.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

CHILD WELLBEING AND SAFETY AMENDMENT (CHILD SAFE STANDARDS) BILL 2015

Introduction and first reading

Mr FOLEY (Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill for an act to amend the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 to provide for the minister to make standards in relation to child safety with which certain entities must comply and to make amendments to the Commission for Children and Young People Act 2012 and the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 and for other purposes.

Ms VICTORIA (Bayswater) — I ask for a brief explanation of the bill.

Mr FOLEY (Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing) — This bill proposes to amend the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 to essentially enable the introduction of minimum compulsory child safety standards to better protect children from the risks of abuse.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

**EDUCATION LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT (TAFE AND UNIVERSITY
GOVERNANCE REFORM) BILL 2015**

Introduction and first reading

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Education) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill for an act to amend the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 in relation to the constitution of boards of TAFE institutes and to amend various university acts in relation to the constitution of councils of universities and for other purposes.

Ms RYAN (Euroa) — I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Education) — This bill delivers on our election commitment to make our TAFE boards and university councils more democratic, independent and representative of the communities they serve. We made commitments with respect to staff and student representation on those boards, and that is what this bill delivers.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

**CROWN LAND LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT (CANADIAN REGIONAL
PARK AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL 2015**

Introduction and first reading

Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill for an act to amend the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978, the Forests Act 1958, the Land Act 1958, the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990, the National Parks Act 1975 and the Wildlife Act 1975 and for other purposes.

Mr BATTIN (Gembrook) — I ask for a brief explanation of the bill.

Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water) — The main purposes of this bill are to create the Canadian Regional Park, the Kerang State Game Reserve and the Hepburn Regional Park.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

**LAND (REVOCAION OF
RESERVATIONS) BILL 2015**

Introduction and first reading

Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water) introduced a bill for an act to revoke permanent reservations of certain land, to provide for reservations of certain land for specified purposes and for other purposes.

Read first time.

**STATE TAXATION ACTS FURTHER
AMENDMENT BILL 2015**

Introduction and first reading

Mr PALLAS (Treasurer) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill for an act to amend the Duties Act 2000, the Payroll Tax Act 2007 and the Valuation of Land Act 1960 and for other purposes.

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — I ask the Treasurer to provide a brief explanation of the bill.

Mr PALLAS (Treasurer) — As an omnibus bill dealing with a number of statutory entitlements by way of revenue, this bill is aimed at clarifying entitlements to clarify the definitional operation of the various acts and also to secure the existing revenue base.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

**TRANSPORT ACCIDENT AMENDMENT
BILL 2015**

Introduction and first reading

Mr SCOTT (Minister for Finance) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill for an act to amend the Transport Accident Act 1986 to repeal certain subsections of that act inserted in 2013 and for other purposes.

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — I ask the minister to provide a brief explanation of the bill, in particular as to the effect of the subsections referred to in the long title.

Mr SCOTT (Minister for Finance) — I am happy to provide a brief explanation and indeed a briefing, I am sure, for relevant shadow ministers. The bill repeals definitions of what constitutes a severe long-term mental or severe long-term behavioural disturbance or disorder for serious injury. It also repeals a clause which limits the Transport Accident Commission's liability to pay common-law damages where a transport accident was the result of an injured person's own

negligence or where they were attempting to commit suicide. It also repeals a power to create guidelines that can amend the American Medical Association guide for the assessment of the degree of permanent impairment and fixes a drafting error that occurred in 2013.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT (FAIR GO RATES) BILL 2015

Introduction and first reading

Ms HUTCHINS (Minister for Local Government) introduced a bill for an act to amend the Local Government Act 1989 and the Essential Services Commission Act 2001 to provide for a mechanism to set a cap on the increases in rate revenue that can be levied by a council in a financial year, to make consequential amendments and for other purposes.

Read first time.

ROAD LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2015

Introduction and first reading

Mr DONNELLAN (Minister for Roads and Road Safety) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill for an act to amend the Road Safety Act 1986 and other acts to provide greater flexibility in relation to the certification of analyses conducted in approved laboratories, to make minor amendments to the SRoad Management Act 2004, to make other amendments to the Road Safety Act 1986 relating to the licensing of drivers and for other purposes.

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — I ask the minister to provide a brief explanation further to the long title.

Mr DONNELLAN (Minister for Roads and Road Safety) — The bill facilitates the provision of evidence regarding tests for the presence of alcohol, drugs and dangerous goods; ensures that registration and licensing information held by VicRoads may be disclosed in any legal proceeding arising out of the transport legislation or that relates to the performance of road management functions or damage to infrastructure following a road accident; amends a number of provisions relating to the licensing of drivers; and makes other technical amendments to the Road Safety Act 1986 and to the Road Management Act 2004.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

PETITIONS

Following petitions presented to house:

Pascoe Vale South Primary School

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the house the poor condition of the original buildings at Pascoe Vale South Primary School. The school has received no significant state government funding for over 50 years; 71 per cent of the school's physical infrastructure has been assessed by the state education department as 'worn' and in need of repair or replacement. The school's original 1950s 1960s buildings are now dilapidated, and unsuitable for modern technology and teaching practices. There is an urgent need for renewal of the school to serve the growing local community.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria support the provision of funding for new school buildings at Pascoe Vale South Primary School.

By Ms GARRETT (Brunswick) (888 signatures).

Special religious instruction

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the house that the government has scrapped special religious instruction (SRI) in Victorian government schools during school hours.

Prior to the last election, Daniel Andrews and Labor said they would not scrap SRI during school hours in Victorian government schools. Daniel Andrews and James Merlino have announced that next year they will break their promise and will only allow SRI to occur outside of school hours or during lunchbreaks.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria ensure that the Andrews government reverses its broken promise and allow students attending government schools to attend SRI during school hours.

By Mr WATT (Burwood) (484 signatures).

Public holidays

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of certain residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the house that the new grand final eve and Easter Sunday public holidays, will result in both lost productivity and higher wage costs for small business at a stage when many are already facing difficult times. At a time of high and rising unemployment, and where there was no pressing need or compelling argument for their introduction, imposing these two new major costs on Victoria's businesses damages them and their employees, consumers and our state's economy without justification.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria call on the state government to reconsider its decision to introduce two additional public holidays in Victoria.

By Mr WATT (Burwood) (131 signatures).

Markham Avenue, Ashburton, redevelopment

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the house that the Andrews government has announced, via the *Age* website, plans to build a large-scale, high-density 240 uni overdevelopment at 2–18 Markham Avenue, Ashburton, which currently has only 56 public housing units. The area surrounding Markham Estate has been zoned by Boroondara council as neighbourhood residential which restricts large-scale developments.

Prior to the last election, Daniel Andrews and Labor denied that they had any plans for such an overdevelopment.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria ensure that the Andrews government reverses its decision to massively overdevelop this site, and adhere to the maximum height of 9 metres, in line with community expectations.

By Mr WATT (Burwood) (403 signatures).

Tabled.

Ordered that petitions presented by honourable member for Burwood be considered next day on motion of Mr WATT (Burwood).

SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE

Alert Digest No. 13

Ms BLANDTHORN (Pascoe Vale) presented *Alert Digest No. 13 of 2015* on:

Adoption Amendment (Adoption by Same-Sex Couples) Bill 2015

Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2015

Justice Legislation Amendment (Police Custody Officers) Bill 2015

Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment (No Jab, No Play) Bill 2015

Relationships Amendment Bill 2015

Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Saving Energy, Growing Jobs) Bill 2015

together with appendices.

Tabled.

Ordered to be published.

DOCUMENTS

Tabled by Clerk:

Financial Management Act 1994:

Reports from the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water that she had received the reports 2014–15 of the:

Dhelkunya Dja Land Management Board

Yorta Yorta Traditional Owner Land Management Board

Report from the Minister for Planning that he had received the report 2014–15 of the Heritage Council of Victoria

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 — Notice under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule 55 (*Gazette G37 17 September 2015*)

Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust — Report 2014–15

Members of Parliament (Register of Interests) Act 1978 — Cumulative Summary of Returns — As at 30 September 2015 — Ordered to be published

Metropolitan Waste and Resource Recovery Group — Report 2014–15

Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 — Government response to the Environment and Natural Resources Committee’s report on the Inquiry into Heritage Tourism and Ecotourism in Victoria

Planning and Environment Act 1987 — Notice of an approval of an amendment to the Victoria Planning Provisions — VC128

Regional Development Victoria — Report 2014–15

Sentencing Advisory Council — Report 2014–15

State Sports Centres Trust — Report 2014–15

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003 — SR 115

Magistrates’ Court Act 1989 — SR 113

Planning and Environment Act 1987 — SR 116

Road Safety Act 1986 — SR 118

Subdivision Act 1988 — SR 117

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — SR 114

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 110, 111, 113

Documents under s 16B in relation to the *Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983* — Determination of Specifications for Taxi-cabs

Victorian Coastal Council — Report 2014–15

Victorian Inspectorate — Reports 2014–15 under s 39 of the *Crimes (Controlled Operations) Act 2004*, s 131T of the *Fisheries Act 1995* and s 74P of the *Wildlife Act 1975* (three documents)

Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine — Report 2014–15 (two documents)

Victorian Public Sector Commission — Report 2014–15.

The following proclamations fixing operative dates were tabled by the Clerk in accordance with an order of the House dated 24 February 2015:

Cemeteries and Crematoria Amendment (Veterans Reform) Act 2015 — Whole Act — 9 November 2015 (*Gazette S303, 13 October 2015*)

Planning and Environment Amendment (Recognising Objectors) Act 2015 — Whole Act — 12 October 2015 (*Gazette S294, 6 October 2015*).

ROYAL ASSENT

Message read advising royal assent on 13 October to:

Criminal Organisations Control Amendment (Unlawful Associations) Bill 2015

Energy Legislation Amendment (Consumer Protection) Bill 2015

Racing Amendment Bill 2015

Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Bill 2015

Serious Sex Offenders (Detention and Supervision) and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2015.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Program

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Public Transport) — I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5.00 pm. on Thursday, 22 October 2015:

Adoption Amendment (Adoption by Same-Sex Couples) Bill 2015

Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Aboriginal Principal Officers) Bill 2015

Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2015

Justice Legislation Amendment (Police Custody Officers) Bill 2015

Victorian Efficiency Target Amendment (Saving Energy, Growing Jobs) Bill 2015.

In making a few brief comments on the government business program that has been put to the house by the government, I note at the outset that there is a slight change to the government business program that was circulated last Thursday at 4 o'clock to the various parties and representatives of the Parliament under the usual practice with the addition to the program of the Victorian Efficiency Target Amendment (Saving Energy, Growing Jobs) Bill 2015. I apologise to members generally, political parties and the Independents for adding this bill at short notice, but the government has a desire and hope to progress it through Parliament this week, for its passage through both houses.

It will not have escaped the notice of members that a significant number of bills were introduced today. We are very keen to progress those bills, in addition to those that are on the program, through the Parliament over the course of the next few weeks.

This demonstrates — and people who have been around during a government's transition to office in the past would understand — that major pieces of legislation, particularly like some of those being considered this week, take time to develop and to go through the drafting, the cabinet and the community consultation processes. That is why we will see a significant number of pieces of legislation that in particular go to important election commitments coming in this week and in future weeks. I continue to be optimistic that both the program and the legislation that we put up, particularly those Labor election commitments which the Victorian community voted for about 12 months ago, will be supported by the Parliament.

The only other matter I wish to raise for the attention of members is the expectation that there will be an opportunity this week to debate a motion that will affect the next parliamentary sitting week. This year Remembrance Day falls on a parliamentary sitting day. It has happened in the past. I do not think it has happened for a while, but I recall that there was another instance — probably about 10 or 12 years ago — where a Parliament sitting day fell on Remembrance Day. As was the practice then — and I have indicated this, particularly to the manager of opposition business — the government hopes to put forward a motion to the house that if supported will see the Assembly start at 2.00 p.m. on 11 November. It will allow members to attend either the event that is held at the Shrine of Remembrance each and every year or, for members

who are in closer proximity to their electorates than others, events in their local community.

I am happy to share the particulars of that motion with members ahead of it being formally put to the Parliament, which will be tomorrow for consideration on Thursday. It reflects a common-sense approach to ensure that we can continue to do Parliament's business and also pay important respect to a solemn day on the calendar. With those few words I commend the motion to the house, and I hope it is a supported motion.

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — The way bringing business before the house this week has been handled is reflective of continuing, indeed growing, disarray on the part of the government in organising the smooth running of this house and the smooth conduct of business generally. I do not know whether it is because the Leader of the House is being distracted by compulsory acquisition matters or by still unsettled rail strikes — whatever it may be — but we have had a last-minute addition to the government business program. Members were notified on Thursday last week, in accordance with longstanding practice, and then the minister contacted me late yesterday to inform me of this additional item. Why it was not worked out before then, I do not know. But it is a reflection of the fact that things are disorganised, changes are being made at the last minute and there is no certainty, and no smoothness, in how the government conducts itself and presents matters to the house.

We also have the matter of Remembrance Day, which the minister has just referred to. The opposition certainly welcomes the motion and, subject to the detail, expects to support it. No doubt there will be more said when the motion is considered by the house. However, the fact that this partial measure is now being introduced at the last minute when the Remembrance Day date has been known for a long time, and when members on this side of the house have been flagging for a long time the issue of sitting on Remembrance Day, which under the previous government we made sure did not occur, is a further sign of the disarray in the management of government business.

On top of that, we are still awaiting notice of the proposed sitting days for next year. The Leader of the House has kindly foreshadowed to me that these dates will be made known this week, and that is welcome, but they are still weeks later than when they were made available under the previous government. It not only impacts on the community and interest groups but also on the parliamentary committees. Much of the organisation of the business in the calendar of this house is dependent on those sitting days being made

public. It is regrettable that only at this very late stage will we hopefully see those dates later this week.

In terms of the government business program, the minister had very little to actually say about how she saw the business being conducted this week. A number of bills are likely to receive considerable attention during the course of debate and should be considered in detail. Time and again I have reminded the house of the now government's election commitment:

Scrutiny will be enhanced with consideration in detail made a standard feature for bills in the Assembly ...

As I have said before, that has been honoured in the breach rather than the observance. On this occasion I flag that not only do we believe that not considering bills in detail should be the exception rather than the norm, in accordance with the government's policy, but also that the government should be proposing when there should not be consideration of bills in detail, rather than the other way around. The Justice Legislation Amendment (Police Custody Officers) Bill 2015 in particular would benefit from consideration in detail, as would the Adoption Amendment (Adoption by Same-Sex Couples) Bill 2015. Members of this house will have a range of views on the latter bill, not only about the substantive measures being proposed but about various aspects of the bill.

It is important that on bills like this there be provided, as has been in the past, an opportunity for open and respectful consideration and for all members to have opportunity to put their points of view not only on the bill as a whole but on the particular provisions in it. We have had no commitments, undertakings or indications from the government that that is its intention. We can only presume that the government intends to guillotine the second-reading debate on that bill at the end of this week. On that basis the opposition opposes the government business program.

Mr PEARSON (Essendon) — I am delighted to join the debate on the government business program. What is before the house this week is a reflection of this government's intention of getting on with delivering on our election commitments and providing good, confident, able and stable administration to the state of Victoria.

Mr J. Bull interjected.

Mr PEARSON — I advise the member for Sunbury that we are a hardworking government, and the agenda before us reflects that. There are five bills on the program for this week, and a couple of those bills in particular will give full effect to our election

commitments, being the Adoption Amendment (Adoption by Same-Sex Couples) Bill 2015 and the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police Custody Officers) Bill 2015.

I listened to the contribution of the manager of opposition business, in which he expressed some level of angst about why it is taking so long to get some of these bills through. The reality is that you do not want to start ramming through the Parliament legislation that is not properly thought through. As all members know, we need to make sure that there is a degree of discipline and rigour about the way in which we go about crafting legislation, and that takes time. It is important that there be a degree of consultation and discussion with relevant and important stakeholders in order to come up with a measured and considered piece of legislation that will stand the test of time.

Of course legislation needs to be modified, amended and improved through the passage of time, but you can imagine what the response of those opposite would have been if we had rushed some of this legislation through in February or March, or even in December of last year — which is what the Kennett government did when it was first elected in 1992 — only to now be introducing bills to amend the legislation that we hastily introduced. This is a prudent and sensible step in relation to crafting appropriate legislation, which you would expect of this government.

I am advised that the manager of opposition business was advised yesterday that the 2016 parliamentary sitting schedule will be communicated this week. I am a new member to this place but I understand that it is broadly in line with the custom and practice of the past. I note that we are now at the end of October. Given that I assume the house will not resume until the end of February, it is more than reasonable to receive the schedule something like four and a bit months before our first sitting day, and I wonder whether those opposite are fixated on trying to plan their ski trips to Thredbo or their European vacations. That seems to be what their fixation on trying to get the schedule for sitting days early is about. Perhaps they hope to race off to Flight Centre to put down the cash and lock in their holidays to take advantage of the cheap deals for their European sojourns.

I also note the anxiety of the manager of opposition business about Remembrance Day. The government has listened in particular to some members who wish to participate in Remembrance Day services in their electorates, and I think that is an important opportunity members may wish to take, particularly this year. I point out to the manager of opposition business that I

was working in this place in 1997 when Remembrance Day fell on a sitting day. I remember being at the top of the front stairs of Parliament House for the service, and it was a dignified and moving ceremony. While I appreciate that some members opposite, and some members on this side, may wish to spend time at a local Remembrance Day service, one could not fault the dignity with which Remembrance Day was honoured, respected and remembered here in 1997. That was a decision made by the former Kennett government. Phil Gude, a former member for Hawthorn, might have been Leader of the House at that stage. The manager of opposition business is being a bit down in the mouth about something that is quite minor in the scheme of things.

The government is getting on with it. We are doing the things we said we were going to do. We are making sure that the legislation we bring before this house is measured, thought through and considered and will stand the test of time. We are not interested in doing what those opposite did, particularly under the Kennett government — ramming stuff through the Parliament without giving due consideration to the impact that legislation has on the community. I commend the government business program.

Mr HIBBINS (Pahran) — I rise to speak very briefly on the government business program. The Greens will not be opposing the program in this instance. There are five bills on the program, and certainly one of the most important bills on this week's agenda is the Adoption Amendment (Adoption by Same-Sex Couples) Bill 2015. In my mind it is certainly the most important. We certainly welcome that legislation and look forward to hearing the contributions to the debate from all members on this very important bill that, if successful, will go a long way to strengthening families across Victoria and protecting all Victorian children by law. Other legislation requires further scrutiny and greater debate, and I look forward to making contributions to the debate on those when necessary. I welcome the motion regarding Remembrance Day. At this stage I see no reason why the Greens would oppose it. The Greens will not be opposing the government business program.

Mr DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh) — It gives me pleasure to speak on the government business program. As we heard from the manager of government business and the member for Essendon, it is a busy program, and that is not unusual. Some key issues that have come before us are things we promised before the election. Ours is a government that delivers on its promises. It does not just say it is going to do something and then hide in a corner; it actually does it, and this is what this

program does. Having seen a glimpse of the bills that are scheduled for the sitting weeks after this one, we have a very full legislative agenda, as has been mentioned. In this week alone there are five bills on the notice paper for introduction.

The first of these is the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. This bill makes a range of amendments to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011, the Casino Control Act 1991 and the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to implement Labor's election commitments and adopt certain recommendations made in reports by the Victorian Public Sector Commission.

We also have the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Aboriginal Principal Officers) Bill 2015, which will address limitations and empower Aboriginal agencies to have responsibility for the care and protection of Aboriginal children, subject to protection orders. The former government intended to make its own amendments to the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005. However, the coalition's bill was left to lapse on the notice paper, as many bills were at the time. As the Premier said, the former government's four-year holiday meant that many bills ended up languishing on the notice paper until Labor came to office.

The next bill to be debated is the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Saving Energy, Growing Jobs) Bill 2015.

Mr J. Bull — It's a great bill!

Mr DIMOPOULOS — It is a great bill, absolutely. These are bills with titles that people understand and that mean something. This bill continues the work of the Labor government to protect the environment and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Victorian energy efficiency target scheme targets, which were all but abandoned by the previous government, will now be expanded to five years, from 2016 to 2020, compared to the previous three-year operation. This bill also encourages the efficient use of electricity and gas as well as providing for local investment in new technologies to protect the environment.

Also on the notice paper is the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police Custody Officers) Bill 2015. I am particularly proud of this bill, as it is an effective and efficient use of public resources — it frees up 400 police officers from babysitting prisoners by having 400 custody officers replace them so that our police officers can be back on the beat, protecting the community and dealing effectively with crime. The budget provided for close to \$150 million to implement

this key election commitment, and it follows a proud Labor tradition of investing in our police forces.

Finally, we have the Adoption Amendment (Adoption by Same-Sex Couples) Bill 2015. I would not necessarily go to the lengths the member for Prahran went to in saying that it is the most important bill this Parliament has yet seen, but his comment does go to show that we have introduced so many important bills that it is hard to make a value judgement as to which is the most important. It is a very important bill, as are so many others we have introduced, and I will be very proud to speak on it. The measures in the bill were among our election commitments.

On that point, I will address some of the comments made by the manager of opposition business when he talked about disarray and disorganisation. It is all very subjective, I am sure, but my adjectives of choice about the government business program would be 'busy', 'nimble' and 'effective'. I apologise for our progress, and the fact that we now have a couple more bills on the agenda.

On the topic of the government's commitment to legislation, I want to quote Farrah Tomazin in an *Age* article of a few weeks ago:

A strange thing happened to Daniel Andrews in the wake of the AFL grand final: he started to look increasingly like the people's champion.

My view is that he looked like the people's champion from 29 November, if not before. She goes on to say:

Whatever you think of Labor's policies, you've got to hand it to the government for delivering on them. But what made last week particularly notable is the fact that Andrews didn't just fulfil key commitments: on each occasion, he stuck to his guns, stared down vested interest groups, and favoured the underdog or the broader community in doing so.

That is what Labor is about, that is what this government business program is about and that is what every other business program of this government since 29 November has been about. I will be really proud to speak on the bills this week.

Ms STALEY (Ripon) — I rise to talk about three concerns I have with the government business program. The first one is in relation to the very late addition of the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment (Saving Energy, Growing Jobs) Bill 2015. This is a very complex bill. It has a number of aspects to it in relation to what it actually does, because what the Victorian energy efficiency target did previously is now going to change. A lot of the low-hanging fruit in relation to that program has now been taken off the table, and we are looking at different sorts of

technologies and different sorts of take-ups. Understanding just how that applies to different communities, and in particular to my communities in Ripon, is not a simple task. I had started to prepare to speak on that bill, and then I was told it would not be on the notice paper this week. There are a number of documents that members need to look at to fully understand what the bill is doing. A number of reports have been made on this scheme over a long period of time, and they come to very different conclusions. Understanding why they come to different conclusions requires a very close reading of the assumptions underlying their modelling.

Therefore it is not right to bring this bill forward now when we have not had the opportunity of really examining those documents. I certainly have not been given the opportunity to consult the people of Ripon. The introduction of the bill at this time means that I cannot go back to Ripon and ask the people there how they think this will affect them and what it will mean to them. It is really poor for the government to bring the bill forward in this way.

My second concern about the government business program relates to Remembrance Day. I have many ceremonies going on in Ripon that I would like the opportunity to attend, including in places such as Donald. Donald is over 3 hours drive away. It is just not possible for me to get back here in time. It is fine for city members to have a 2.00 p.m. start, but it gives no consideration to those of us who hold country seats, and it is yet another example of the city-centric nature of this government. It is particularly poor that those of us from regional and country areas are going to be prohibited from spending that time with our communities, unlike those who represent city electorates.

The final concern I have relates to the lack of comment and therefore presumed lack of action in relation to the consideration-in-detail stage of the Adoption Amendment (Adoption by Same-Sex Couples) Bill 2015. It is an important bill, and it contains two parts. One you could broadly define as talking about known couple same-sex adoption; the other goes to the issue of stranger same-sex adoption. I understand there are a range of views in relation to both of those sections of the bill. There are people who support the first section of the bill, which deals with families that are currently intact and allows for known couple same-sex adoption, who have severe problems with the second section of the bill. This is exactly the kind of legislation that we should be considering in detail. Not to have that put forward as an option is very high-handed and suggests shutting out debate on this issue.

For these reasons I think this week's government business program is flawed. I thank the house for this opportunity. I urge the government to think more seriously about how it brings issues to this place and provides true democracy for those of us who do not live in Melbourne.

Motion agreed to.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Lara railway station

Mr EREN (Minister for Tourism and Major Events) — I am pleased to inform the house about some exciting news in my electorate of Lara. Our government will be expanding car parking at the Lara train station by 100 spaces. This \$1 million car park upgrade will take the total number of spaces to 450. The additional spaces will be built on adjoining vacant land near the existing car park. The new car park will include additional lighting and provide for CCTV, and it will meet accessibility standards. The project is currently in the design stage. Once this is completed it will go out to tender for construction. Construction is planned for early May and completion for early 2017. This car park upgrade is critical, given that over the last four years it was ignored by the previous government.

Kindergarten funding

Mr EREN — I am also pleased to inform the house that six kindergartens in my electorate will be sharing \$150 000, thanks to the Andrews Labor government commitment to deliver new kindergarten infrastructure improvements. Bell Post Hill Kindergarten, Corio Kindergarten, Lara Kindergarten, Lara Lake Community Preschool, Norlane West Kindergarten and William Parker Memorial Kindergarten will all receive a grant of \$25 000. These kinders will now be able to enlarge their playrooms, giving them flexibility and space for children to learn.

Anti-Poverty Week

Mr EREN — Last Friday I had the honour of joining our Governor-General, Sir Peter Cosgrove, and Lady Cosgrove at an Anti-Poverty Week event in my electorate of Lara. This was a fantastic event. I thank Salvation Army Northside for hosting such a remarkable event and raising awareness of issues relating to poverty and hardship.

The Dressmaker

Ms VICTORIA (Bayswater) — A new Victorian-made film debuted on Sunday night. Proudly

funded under the former coalition government, *The Dressmaker* is a fabulous movie, with lots of Aussie stars, all of whom shone. A special mention must go to Judy Davis, who plays Molly. Of course Liam Hemsworth is the country boy every girl would love to fall for, British star Kate Winslet is flawless in her interpretation of the Australian accent and Hugo Weaving is totally lovable, but it is the people off screen I want to mention: the crew, from camera people, carpenters and sound specialists to the post-production talent and so many more. They are the ones who show the Victorian film community as it really is — among the world's very best. I especially acknowledge the sumptuous and simply stunning costumes designed by Melbourne's own Marion Boyce. The juxtaposition of this couture collection against the desolate countryside and dreary 1950s town is a sight for sore eyes. To the director, producer and writer, and all others involved I say, 'Congratulations'.

Chinese Association of Victoria

Ms VICTORIA — The Chinese Association of Victoria, guided by the steady hand of its president, Shirley Teh, has again put on a fantastic gala dinner, showcasing the many talents of this welcoming group of people. The association's aim is to foster the ongoing interaction between the Victorians of Chinese descent and the new generations of both Chinese and non-Chinese people. It does a fantastic job, and I commend the association's members for their energy and dedication.

Wantirna Heights Primary School site

Ms VICTORIA — The Minister for Education has declared the old Wantirna Heights school site surplus to the needs of the department. There are growing concerns about safety and the antisocial behaviour taking place on the grounds. I call on the minister to have staff hold urgent community consultations to make sure that the best outcome is achieved for our local community.

Australian Boulder Climbing Championships

Ms KNIGHT (Wendouree) — There is a particularly awesome woman in my electorate called Naomi Benjamin who, along with a committed and energetic team of volunteers, organised the 2015 Australian Boulder Climbing Championships in Ballarat on 9, 10 and 11 October. It was my great pleasure to drop in on the Friday afternoon, and what I experienced was very impressive. What a great event. It was supported by the Victorian government, the City of Ballarat, Ballarat Regional Tourism and some fabulous

private sponsors, not to mention the amazing local volunteers who worked tirelessly to get the event together and keep it running smoothly over the weekend. In fact it took 4400 hours of volunteer labour to build the wall and run the event. It was the largest ever national bouldering competition. There were 48 120 minutes of live stream, which was viewed across 10 countries; 4367 live stream views; 1100 spectators over three days; 244 competitors from every state and territory, plus 6 competitors who travelled from overseas to participate. Events such as these are so important for regional cities, both in terms of economic activity and community wellbeing.

On the same weekend we also had the Archibald entries and cabaret, as well as other events. The place was really buzzing! A big shout out to all the volunteers who made the national bouldering competition such an enormous and successful event. I also apologise to the organisers for not having a go. It was only the fact that I was wearing a skirt that held me back — and there is not enough live streaming in the world that could have coped with that! Well done Naomi and her amazing team of volunteers.

Wandin Silvan Field Days

Mrs FYFFE (Evelyn) — I thank the committee of the 46th Annual Wandin Silvan Field Days for once again organising a highly successful event. Held over two days, the field days event is very much looked forward to in the Yarra Valley. Once again, as I have for a number of years, I took a stand, and I thank everyone who came to talk to me. They raised a variety of matters. It was noted by many that the member for Monbulk was not there. In fact he only seems to take a stand in election years.

Eastern Golf Club

Mrs FYFFE — Last Friday I was honoured to be invited to the opening of the Eastern Golf Club course at Yering, a project I have strongly supported throughout its planning stage. Designed by Greg Norman, the course sits in the landscape and reflects the openness and majesty of the Yarra Valley. It is a thoughtful development. My congratulations to all involved. Membership of the club has exceeded expectations, with the number of people on the membership waiting list almost exceeding the number of members.

The Premier had accepted an invitation to open the course, but unfortunately — for understandable reasons — had to cancel at the last minute. I was surprised the Premier had accepted due to his former

planning spokesman, Mr Brian Tee, savaging the project, saying it was a stunning betrayal of green wedges and the local community and that the consequences would be felt by future generations. How wrong he and the Labor Party were! The community has embraced the Eastern Golf Club coming to the Yarra Valley for the jobs it has created and the tangible support it is giving to many worthwhile activities in the Yarra Valley. This was evidenced on its opening day when the chosen charity to benefit was the excellent Soldier On organisation.

Julie Dobbie

Ms SPENCE (Yuroke) — Congratulations to all those who participated in the Melbourne Marathon on Sunday, in particular all those participants from Yuroke electorate, including Craigieburn local Julie Dobbie, who has taken part in 16 charity events for the cancer charity Can Too. Over the past six years Julie has raised more than \$16 000 for the charity and covered hundreds of kilometres to help combat cancer. Julie is looking forward to completing 20 events for Can Too, and hopes to raise over \$20 000 for cancer research. She is closer to that goal thanks to her terrific effort at the Melbourne Marathon, where she ran in the gruelling 41.2-kilometre event and is well on her way to raising her goal of \$1000 for that event alone.

All of us here will know somebody whose life has forever been changed because of cancer. Julie lost her own mother and father to cancer, and while any loss of your parents is tragic, it is inspiring to see that act as the catalyst for Julie wanting to make a real difference. Because of the work that people like Julie do, it is our sincere hope that one day we can look forward to a cancer-free future. Well done, Julie, on all your hard work, and all the best for your continued efforts.

I also congratulate another participant in the Melbourne Marathon, the member for Sunbury, who ran a personal best of 3 hours and 5 minutes, a great achievement after launching the Rock N Roll Exchange band the night before. No doubt that time can be improved upon next year with an earlier night and a fresher start.

Euroa electorate public housing

Ms RYAN (Euroa) — I wish to highlight the dire need for additional crisis accommodation in my electorate. The June public housing waiting list shows there are 202 people waiting for public housing in Seymour. Last week a desperately vulnerable young woman contacted my office for help. She had been given a tent and told there was no other accommodation available. We have since found her more secure

accommodation, at least for the next few weeks, and are working with the Department of Health and Human Services in order to find a permanent solution, but it was only once people became aware of and concerned about her mental health that doors started to open. I must say that I do not believe it is the agencies that are at fault here. They are doing what they can with limited resources.

Workplace learning coordinators

Ms RYAN — Labor's decision to sack workplace learning coordinators is starting to have a profound impact on kids in my region. Across Victoria youth unemployment has increased to 15 per cent under Labor, and in my own region of Hume it has increased by 6 per cent since Labor came to office. Youth agencies are concerned that they will see a further spike in youth unemployment as a result of these cuts. Last week I met students studying at the Centre for Community Education in Benalla. Most of them have not had the easiest run at school, but they are all there of their own volition; they want to learn and they want to work. They are the real faces behind the government's decision to cut this support. Under Premier Andrews, getting a job as a young person is not about what you know; it is about who you know.

Dyslexia Empowerment Week

Ms EDWARDS (Bendigo West) — This week is Dyslexia Empowerment Week. Dyslexia is one of Australia's most misunderstood learning challenges. An estimated 20 to 25 per cent of students have learning difficulties, which means they struggle with the acquisition of reading, writing, spelling or maths skills. The reasons for these difficulties are many and varied, from missing time at school to having English as a second language. An estimated 3 to 5 per cent of students, however, will experience ongoing challenges to their learning, even when provided with appropriate support. These students may be classified as having a specific learning disability such as dyslexia. Dyslexia is not an intellectual disability, but children with dyslexia struggle to read, write, organise and comprehend information and often feel as though they are failing each and every day.

Ensuring that all children are given the opportunity to learn to read is important, as is providing appropriate support and understanding to the one or more students in every Victorian classroom with dyslexia. This is what has led organisations and volunteers across the Australian specific learning disability community to create Dyslexia Empowerment Week, which is now in its third year. The aim of this very important week is to

increase our community's awareness and understanding of dyslexia so that young people with dyslexia receive the understanding and support they need.

I was pleased to join the Bendigo BOLD group at its dyslexia empowerment walk on Sunday and congratulate it on its volunteer work in this field. BOLD — building opportunities for those who learn differently — has a focus on each individual's strengths and positive qualities to encourage a deeper understanding about individual learning styles and encourage the teaching strategies which benefit all learners, especially those who learn differently.

Grand Final Friday

Mr BLACKWOOD (Narracan) — The Andrews government has failed to convince local businesses in my electorate of Narracan that the grand final eve public holiday is good for business. My 2015 Narracan business survey received over 200 responses, and 97 per cent of those totally opposed the grand final eve public holiday. Many trade businesses, retail outlets, shop owners and others said the cost simply was too great for them to open. One business insisted that the public holiday would deliver a \$10 000 hit to its bottom line. Some cafe and tourism operators experienced an increase in activity, but they still faced significant extra wage costs and profitability was seriously compromised. The residents of my electorate know that Premier Andrews is totally focused on metro Melbourne. This public holiday was a massive cost to most country business operators.

The holiday also removed the opportunity for a day's pay for thousands of casual employees as their employers chose not to open. Many businesses also said the impact of the holiday carried over to grand final day itself, as many families travelled out of their home town for a weekend away, so in many cases it was a double blow to local businesses, with no income on the Friday — or at least a significant drop in profit if they opened — and less activity on the Saturday. Country business operators are already doing it tough because of economic conditions pretty much out of their control. For the Premier to impose a further financial burden on Victorian business at this time shows just how out of touch and lacking in understanding he is with our business community.

Trevor Sinclair

Mr PEARSON (Essendon) — I would like to acknowledge the life of Trevor Sinclair, a former councillor and mayor of Moonee Valley, who passed away on 6 October at the age of 71. Trevor had worked

at the ordnance factory at Maribyrnong for 52 years before being retrenched. Trevor then threw himself into community work, becoming a councillor at the City of Moonee Valley from 1997 to 2005 and mayor in 2000. Trevor's mayoral term was marred, however, by the tragic loss of his only daughter, Aileen, in a car accident.

Trevor was involved in a number of initiatives, such as campaigning against the proposal to turn the Niddrie quarry into a toxic waste dump, establishing the East Keilor Sustainability Street Community Garden and erecting story panels along the Maribyrnong River to pay tribute to World War I ships lost in battle. It is a 4-kilometre run around the river from Maribyrnong Road up to the bridge and back, and for people like me who have frequently run around the river this has been a beautiful addition to the running track.

Recently, along with the member for Niddrie, I became involved in supporting Trevor's last project, which was to seek support from the Anzac commemoration committee to look at placing new memorial plaques along the boulevard as part of the centenary of World War I.

Trevor was actively involved in Neighbourhood Watch and was chair of the Moonee Valley district since 2013. He led the creation of the Keilor East branch of the Bendigo Bank and was the chair for 10 years. He served on the boards of Lionsville in Essendon and Doutta Galla Community Health, and he was a member of the western region Indigenous arts committee.

More than 250 people turned up to Trevor's service, including the federal Leader of the Opposition. The member for Niddrie gave a moving tribute. Trevor was a loyal and great standard-bearer of our local community and of the broader labour movement. Trevor, I will miss your sharp mind, your vice-like handshake and your unwavering support of our community.

Armadale Baptist Church community garden

Mr HIBBINS (Pahran) — I attended the grand opening of the Armadale Baptist Church community garden. The garden was formed through a partnership between Stonnington City Council, the Armadale Baptist Church and members of the local community, with financial assistance from Baptcare.

The team has transformed unused land on the church grounds into a thriving community garden. To say there is demand for community gardens in Prahran is an understatement. During the recent Spring into

Gardening event at Victoria Gardens, my stall included a vision board for the Prahran electorate, where residents could share their ideas for Prahran. Community gardens ranked highly as something residents want for our electorate.

During my time as a councillor with the City of Stonnington I was able to secure funding, with the support of all my fellow councillors, for a sustainable outreach program. From there a partnership with Armadale Baptist Church was able to be formed, and members of the wider community got on board. The Stonnington area has the second-lowest amount of open space in Melbourne. That is why innovative approaches such as partnerships with other groups in the community are essential to establishing more community gardens in Prahran.

Community gardens bring people together, form connections and enable people to grow their own food in a sustainable way. They also help address the critical issue of diverting food from the waste stream. Food makes up around 50 per cent of household waste and is a major contributor to carbon emissions. By giving people, particularly those who live in apartments, a place to compost their food waste, community gardens play a key role in reducing waste and enhancing local food production.

I want to congratulate and thank all who were involved in setting up the community garden and wish them well as they continue to engage with the wider local community and to grow food.

Bushfires

Ms THOMAS (Macedon) — I wish to commend the many Country Fire Authority (CFA) volunteer firefighters from across Victoria who answered the call to attend the fire that impacted Lancefield and surrounding communities over the past few weeks. I want to acknowledge my local brigades and particularly Stuart Mustey, captain of the Lancefield brigade, and Vince Cafari, captain of the Benloch brigade. These two men have demonstrated great leadership over the last few weeks, not only in terms of their brigades but in the community more widely. When emotions have been running high Stuart and Vince have played a calming role, with a focus at all times on the safety of their brigades and the communities they serve.

Members know the fires were a result of a planned burn that escaped containment lines. What happened is unacceptable, and I am pleased the government has moved quickly to establish an independent investigation to get the answers the Lancefield

community deserves. Vivien Philpotts, coordinator of the Lancefield Neighbourhood House, has been appointed to the investigation and has been working tirelessly to ensure that the voices of affected communities are heard.

On Sunday Lancefield and surrounding communities came together for the Lancefield show. A grant from the Andrews government enabled free entry, and we had a fabulous crowd. Estimates are that there were around 4000 people through the gates, which is a great boost to community morale. The shire, the CFA, the Department of Health and Human Services, Cobaw Community Health Service and all those involved in the fire recovery effort were there. Importantly, \$10 453 was collected at the gate and will be split between the Lancefield, Benloch, Nulla Vale Newham and Pastoria fire brigades.

We have a long, dry season ahead of us. The Lancefield fire is a reminder to us all to have our fire plans in place now.

Cobaarz Eco Salon

Mr NORTHE (Morwell) — On Saturday I had the pleasure of attending the 20-year anniversary of Cobaarz Eco Salon in Glengarry. Congratulations to the owner, Nancy Corser, along with her family and staff on their 20-year achievement. Every business has its challenges, and I commend Nancy and her team for their hard work and dedication in providing a quality hairdressing service to our community.

Country Fire Authority Traralgon West brigade

Mr NORTHE — On Saturday evening I had the pleasure of attending the Traralgon West fire brigade's 75th anniversary celebration dinner and awards night. The Traralgon West fire brigade has come a long way since its inception in 1940, when it had just eight members. The brigade now has approximately 30 members who have done an extraordinary job in recent years in serving and protecting our community in a number of complex and major events. Congratulations to all members who received awards during the evening, including Heather Bolwell for 10 years of service, Captain Raelene Billingsley for 15 years of service, Ron Holman for 35 years of service, and Ian Dunbar and Jeff Blythman, both with 40 years.

Gippsland regional achiever award

Mr NORTHE — I wish to acknowledge Jessi McEwan of Traralgon, who won the Gippsland

regional achiever award at the regional achievement and community awards gala dinner on Friday evening. Jessi has had a number of achievements, including being selected as Australia's first young chef ambassador at the 2014 World Association of Chefs Societies congress in Norway.

Well done also to Mick Schiller from Boolarra, who was a finalist in this same category, for his work with the historical society, the Friends of the Upper Morwell River and the Boolarra South Landcare Group. He is also secretary of the Boolarra Men's Shed.

Both Jessi and Mick are wonderful contributors to our community and deserve every success that comes their way.

Link Health and Community

Mr DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh) — I rise today to congratulate the board, staff and volunteers at Link Health and Community, which recently opened its doors in Oakleigh. Last week it was terrific to again welcome the Premier to Oakleigh, where he officially opened the brand-new, purpose-built facility in a great location right across the road from the Oakleigh train station. Link Health and Community, formerly Monash Link Community Health Service, has been providing health care and associated services to the local community in my area for many years.

The origins of this community health network go back over 40 years to the early 1970s, when it was situated right in the heart of the Oakleigh electorate, in Hughesdale. The network has come a long way but has never lost its vision of caring for the specific health needs of the community. As Link Health and Community recognises, while GP care is vitally important — and it also has excellent doctors — there are other needs in the community that need to be fulfilled. These include physiotherapy, diet management, health promotion, dental services, specialised women's clinics and, very importantly for my community and many others, high-quality and caring counselling services.

I have never seen so many people at an opening. It was a beautiful day. They had coffee and food. There would have been 150 people there from the community. Well done to all involved at Link Health and Community. Thank you very much to the chairperson, Felicity Smith; the former CEO, Gregg Nicholls; the current CEO, Philip Moran; and of course the Premier of Victoria, who has, and has had, a keen interest in health not only in his current position but also in his former role as Minister for Health. The service that Link

Health and Community provides is a model not only for Victoria but for all of Australia.

Mount Waverley police resources

Mr GIDLEY (Mount Waverley) — I rise in the Parliament to thank my local police for their continuing service to our community and for the opportunity to visit the Mount Waverley police station.

On 29 September I was joined by the shadow Minister for Police to view the completed upgrade of the Mount Waverley police station. It was great to see the completed \$1.5 million upgrade, which provides a modern working environment for local officers and much-improved visitor facilities. Of course this ensured that the station was not closed, with the land sold to developers, as was planned prior to the 2010 state election by the then Victorian Labor government. I will continue to work hard for my local community to ensure that local police are provided with the resourcing they need to service Mount Waverley.

Avila College

Mr GIDLEY — Today in the Parliament I recognise Avila College, which this year celebrates its golden jubilee. It was a pleasure to attend the school on Thursday, 15 October, to commemorate both Avila Day and the school's golden jubilee. I thank principal Louise Gunther, associated religious orders and all involved with Avila, which provides wonderful education opportunities for girls.

Protective services officers

Mr GIDLEY — I rise to call on the Victorian Labor government to stop the removal of Victoria Police protective services officers from train stations in the Mount Waverley district. Currently residents using train services from Glen Waverley, Mount Waverley, Syndal and Jordanville stations all have access to Victoria Police protective services officers at these stations from 6.00 p.m. until morning services resume. From 1 January 2016 Labor will remove many officers from these local stations. Victoria Police protective services officers play an invaluable role in improving public safety. I call on the government to continue this service.

Sunbury Agricultural Show

Mr J. BULL (Sunbury) — On Saturday, 10 October, I had the great privilege of attending and opening the 95th Sunbury Show. This was yet again a terrific day. The sun was out, and people had a spring in their step. There were rides, show bags, animals and more. The Sunbury Show is a great Sunbury tradition

that has stood the test of time. I would particularly like to thank the Sunbury Agricultural Society for all its hard work, especially president Tony McMahon, who has done so much for Sunbury and for the show. I am already looking forward to the 100th show, to be held in 2020. I hope to still be the member for Sunbury at that time. If I am, I hope to be asked back to open the show again. Well done to the Sunbury community, all the volunteers and the hardworking stallholders on such a great day.

Grand Final Friday

Mr J. BULL — I wish to follow up on a previous members statement with episode 2 of ‘Grumpy Guy and his not so merry men’. Members will recall the great fear campaign the Liberals waged before the AFL Grand Final public holiday. At the Sunbury Show this was proved unfounded, with many people commenting on what a great day the public holiday was. This is supported by an article published in the *Age* a couple of weeks ago, which states:

A strange thing happened to Daniel Andrews in the wake of the AFL Grand Final: he started to look increasingly like the people’s champion.

First, there was the new grand final public holiday, which turned out to be a roaring success for families, workers and footy fans — despite the angst of business groups and millions of dollars in lost productivity.

...

Whatever you think of Labor’s policies, you’ve got to hand it to the government for delivering on them.

Warburton Mountain Bike Hub

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) — In question time today the Premier said his government will always work hard to create jobs. In typical duplicitous style, the Premier’s actions do not match his words. The Andrews Labor government had the opportunity to boost much needed jobs in the Yarra Ranges by supporting the Warburton Mountain Bike Hub project through the Interface Growth Fund, but the Premier and his anti-enterprise government instead decided to turn their backs on jobs for the people residing in Upper Yarra.

The shovel-ready Warburton Mountain Bike Hub project is the highest priority of the Yarra Ranges Shire Council. The reason it is such a high priority is because it will create jobs and boost the local economy. The feasibility study — supported by the shire council, in partnership with Parks Victoria, the then Department of Environment and Primary Industries, Yarra Ranges Mountain Bikers, the Warburton Valley Community Economic Development Association and the

Warburton Advancement League — shows that this project is a winner. It is expected to inject an estimated \$23 million into the local economy, creating 175 jobs. An additional 130 000 new visitors are expected to be attracted to Warburton every year.

Businesses in the area are suffering at present. If ever there were a project worth supporting, this is it. The time needs to be now. The Interface Growth Fund provided an avenue for funding to complete this high-priority project, but the Premier and his minister failed to put their support behind local jobs. Creation of jobs is not in their DNA. In an extraordinary move, this government put a playground ahead of this project, as well as investing \$720 000 in the Belgrave community hub to support the Deputy Premier. Very sadly, the Premier has put politics well and truly above jobs.

Country Fire Authority Linton brigade

Mr HOWARD (Buninyong) — I was pleased on 10 October to join the Linton Fire Brigade at the opening of its new fire station. It was certainly great to be part of that group on the day. It is a brigade of 89 members led by Captain Michael Hough. The new fire station replaces the 76-year-old building and will cater for the brigade’s needs into the future, as well as serving as the general group station for the area.

It was great to hear from firefighter Tim Cooke, who presented a summary of the 130-year history of the Linton brigade. The mayor of Golden Plains Shire Council, Des Phelan, was also in attendance. I was pleased to offer the brigade my support and thanks for the great work its members do as volunteers supporting their community and other communities across this state.

Country Fire Authority Cape Clear brigade

Mr HOWARD — It was also pleasing to meet there with Cape Clear Country Fire Authority representatives Michael Rowe and Terry Kelly. Michael Rowe has just put out a book, which was launched earlier on the day, called *The Art of Roadside Burning*, in which he and the Cape Clear brigade share their knowledge and experience to help other brigades do more efficient and effective burning on roadsides in the future. I commend them for their great efforts.

East Gippsland Business Awards

Mr T. BULL (Gippsland East) — I had the privilege of attending the East Gippsland Business Awards last week. Members of the local business community from Mallacoota to Lindenow gathered to

recognise some great Gippsland East businesses. Among the winners on the night were Peter, Rachel, Ken and Lyn Treasure of Wuk Wuk Beef, taking home the outstanding achievement award, and Cory Kennedy of Kennedy Trailers, winning young achiever in business. These two outstanding local businesses collected awards in a number of categories. I would like to recognise all who were nominated and congratulate the finalists and winners.

Lakes Entrance Schools Community Hub

Mr T. BULL — Last Wednesday I attended the launch of the Lakes Entrance Schools Community Hub, which is the result of a partnership between the Smith Family and four local schools: Nowa Nowa Primary School, St Brendan's Catholic Primary School, Lakes Entrance Primary School and Lakes Entrance Secondary College. They will work together to improve educational outcomes for the children and young people of Lakes Entrance. This initiative was funded partly by the previous coalition government under the Advancing Country Towns scheme.

Sophie Molineux

Mr T. BULL — I would like to congratulate young West Bairnsdale cricketer Sophie Molineux, who made her maiden century playing for Dandenong against Box Hill in the Women's Premier Firsts competition recently. Sophie has been a trailblazer in East Gippsland cricket, being the first woman to play A-grade in the local league. As I have mentioned before, she is clearly destined for far bigger and better things.

Kate McLeod

Mr T. BULL — It was with sadness that yesterday I attended the funeral of local police officer Senior Constable Kate McLeod in Bairnsdale. Along with the Minister for Police, who is at the table — and I thank him for attending — I was part of a large gathering paying respects to a person who contributed a great deal to our community in East Gippsland.

Whittlesea Chinese Association mooncake festival

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Minister for Industry) — I take this opportunity to congratulate the Whittlesea Chinese Association for organising a wonderful celebration for the mooncake festival. On 26 September I was pleased to join with the association at May Road Senior Citizens Centre, Lalor, to celebrate an important cultural event in its annual calendar.

The mooncake festival, also known as the Chinese mid-autumn moon festival, celebrates the overthrow of the Mongols during the end of the Yuan dynasty in China. The story goes that during this rule, secret messages were hidden in the mooncake as part of the political campaign for change. The festival is celebrated with colourful lanterns and mooncakes. The cakes are traditionally rich, round and filled with a mixture of sweet bean paste, lotus nut paste or salted egg yolk.

The association achieved a successful evening full of culture, which was enjoyed by all. There was an exciting program, including musical and singing performances given by many people, traditional dances, comedy skits, recitals, tai chi demonstrations, art, calligraphy, food and drink. The festival was well attended and appreciated by various multicultural communities in the City of Whittlesea and surrounding areas. It was a timely reminder of the vital role our local Chinese community plays in fostering a greater sense of multiculturalism. The celebration of the mooncake festival and Chinese New Year provide wonderful opportunities for members of all communities to immerse themselves in a rich and vibrant culture, experience the many shared values and celebrate our social harmony.

I take the opportunity to congratulate the committee and the organisers on a job well done and for all their hard work in making the event such a success. I acknowledge in particular Regina Leung-Hining, who is the president of the association, and her committee. Their work is invaluable in bringing these festivities to life.

Family violence

Ms STALEY (Ripon) — Last night, in what is believed to be a first for harness racing, the Maryborough Harness Racing Club joined with Maryborough Rotary Club to theme all the races with messages opposing family violence. I was proud to be able to sponsor race 5, Tolerance, won by Hoo Nien.

Central Goldfields Shire has had a significantly higher proportion of reported family incidents, nearly triple the Victorian average, and is ranked no. 2 in Victoria for incidents of family violence. However, there is a whole-of-community response to this serious problem, of which the Maryborough trots is the latest and perhaps most unusual, event. The Maryborough Rotary Club has developed and implemented a #SayNO2familyviolence campaign across the goldfields region. It is particularly heartening to see this group of volunteers take on change for this cause.

The Central Goldfields Shire Council developed and received funding from the previous Liberal-Nationals government to create Go Goldfields, a community social inclusion program that includes work on family violence. Hatch the Plan is part of Go Goldfields. I was inspired by the commitment and breadth of the community participants when I visited and spoke at their most recent workshop. It is setting out to do achievable plans to tackle family violence in Central Goldfields.

GAMBLING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2015

Second reading

Debate resumed from 16 September; motion of Ms GARRETT (Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation).

Mr NORTHE (Morwell) — I rise this afternoon to speak on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. Principally this bill amends three acts, those being the Casino Control Act 1991, the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011. Under the Casino Control Act 1991, there are changes and clarifications around interstate exclusion orders and what they might mean for Victoria. There are also some technical amendments with respect to training requirements for special employees. Under the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 we see some significant changes to some of the compulsory training requirements for certain gaming industry employees and also some changes with respect to the disclosure of information in regard to precommitment. The bill also amends the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011 to confer new policy and advocacy functions on the foundation and to empower the foundation to collect fees and charges in certain circumstances. Finally, the bill empowers the board to appoint or dismiss a chief executive officer. That is a broad summary of what the bill does.

I thank the minister's office and the department for providing me with a briefing. At this point I might say that whilst the coalition does not oppose the bill, it will raise some issues and concerns that have been expressed primarily by the industry and stakeholders on specific elements of the bill.

Firstly, I will deal with part 2 of the bill, which deals with amendments to the Casino Control Act 1991. As members would appreciate, in the last 24 to 48 hours there has been much news about the casino and Crown in Melbourne and the possibility that Crown will grow

and create a new casino precinct in Melbourne. When it was proposed that Melbourne would have a casino, many years ago now, there would have been a lot of opposition at that time to the merits of that proposal. If you look at the contribution that the casino and Crown make to our economy, you will see that it is quite substantial — I understand it is around \$2.1 billion per annum of value-added contribution to Victoria. It is something that should not be sneezed at nor taken lightly.

I also note, from the statistics provided by Crown, that there are around 17 million visitors per annum to Crown in Melbourne, and that is not necessarily only those who want to have a bet, a play of the pokies or otherwise. It is an entertainment precinct on so many levels and fronts, and it is absolutely critical to tourism in Victoria. Added to that, there are approximately 8700 people employed at Crown in Melbourne. To my knowledge, it is Australia's largest single-site employer, which is quite staggering when you think about it — 8700 people working on the one site, in the one precinct.

Crown has an annual payroll of over \$390 million. Importantly, from a training point of view, Crown College, which works within the confines of Crown, has graduated approximately 4600 apprentices and trainees since its inception. In relatively recent times I have had a couple of tours behind the scenes at Crown. It is a very, very impressive set up; in actual fact it is quite staggering. I am sure those members of Parliament or the community who have had an opportunity to view Crown behind the scenes would agree that it is simply staggering. One thing that caught my eye was Crown College, which was established around 15 years ago. My understanding is that around 1200 Crown employees are currently undertaking paid training in appropriate qualifications and represent more than 18 per cent of its workforce. My comments are confined to the casino, but I must say that Crown has a very impressive set-up, and I will watch with interest as developments may or may not occur into the future.

On the bill itself, I return to clause 3, which makes an amendment to part 2 of the Casino Control Act and deals with interstate exclusion orders. Effectively this is a tidy up or a clarification of the legislation. At the moment we have the situation where in some jurisdictions orders are made by a casino operator at the direction of the chief commissioner of police rather than by the chief commissioner of police directly. In Victoria, the Chief Commissioner of Police may issue a written order if it is in the public interest to prohibit a person from remaining at or entering a casino. It is

referred to in the second-reading speech in relation to alleged underworld figures, alleged Mafia members, alleged outlaw motorcycle gang members and so forth. Those directions may be made in those particular instances, and clause 3 basically tidies this up to ensure that the orders that are made interstate actually apply here in Victoria as well.

Clauses 4, 5 and 6 are in a sense technical amendments with respect to approved training and refresher courses for people working within the casino. Clause 9 substitutes section 9A.1.18 of the Gambling Regulation Act 2003, which defines the training and refresher courses that are approved by the Victorian Commission of Gambling and Liquor Regulation. This legislation proposes changes to training provisions in the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and new definitions had therefore to be inserted into the Casino Control Act 1991. I will say more about that shortly.

Part 3 of the bill provides for changes to the Gambling Regulation Act 2003. It should be noted that under Labor governments gaming in Victoria has unfortunately had a very chequered history over a long period. We have seen the pokie fire sale that occurred some time ago — and the Auditor-General of the day had plenty to say about that in his report. We have also seen legal disputes that are ongoing in respect of Tatts, Tabcorp and Intralot. On that basis alone I suppose one might say there is not a great deal of confidence moving forward in some of the changes that have been made in this area. Again, I will expand further on those later in my contribution to the debate on this bill.

In fact a media release of 29 June 2011 by the then coalition government refers to page 81 of the Auditor-General's report confirming that the auction process was led by Labor's gaming review subcommittee of cabinet, which interestingly included the then Premier, John Brumby, the then Treasurer, John Lenders, and the former Minister for Gaming, now the Premier. One should not forget that the current Premier was the Minister for Gaming during a time when many of these issues were occurring.

The Auditor-General's report was interesting at the time because, according to the government's media release, it stated very clearly:

DPC and DTF appropriately raised concerns on the merits of proceeding with the auction with their respective ministers. However, no formal review was undertaken.

That is one element of that issue.

Digressing slightly, at the moment the lottery licence is up for review — it is due to expire in 2018 — as are the

electronic gaming machine entitlements, which are due to conclude in 2022. There is some concern amongst stakeholders and industry, considering past practice, about what might happen in the future under a Labor government. However, we will wait to see and perhaps hear more on that issue.

There are also current legal disputes with other organisations. I refer to an article in the *Herald Sun* of 8 December 2014 which says:

Daniel Andrews' most pressing problem in his first full week as Premier is the rapidly increasing compensation bill he faces.

Add to east-west link a \$540 million payout to the Tatts group after the Court of Appeal upheld an earlier judgement over gambling licences.

The article goes on to say:

A claim by Tabcorp for \$687 million was rejected.

It goes on further to say:

The possibility of seeing another \$1.1 billion of taxpayers hard-earned dollars joining the \$540 million taxpayer Tatts' payout is assuming massive implications for the new Premier.

It's all very well to float suggestions that the consortium, or at least some of the companies involved in building the east-west link, will take one for the government by holding off on any legal action.

There you have it. Late last year that was conveyed in the media. We had a massive turn of events in May this year with legal disputes primarily with Tatts and Tabcorp. I refer to an article in the *Age* of 16 May this year which states:

The \$1.2 billion legal brawl over Victorian pokies licenses is set to roll on in the High Court.

The fortunes of two of Australia's biggest gaming companies were reversed on Friday after a High Court ruling paved the way for Tabcorp Holdings to try to claw back a \$686 million windfall from the Victorian government, with rival Tatts group battling to keep its \$540 million in compensation.

The next part of this article is important as it goes on to say:

The decision means the fierce contest over the loss of poker machine revenues has taken another twist. The battle hinges on a 2008 decision by the Victorian Brumby government to remove the companies' duopoly to operate poker machines in the state.

The article goes on further to say:

Last year a trio of Court of Appeal judges slammed the conduct of the Victorian government over reform of its gambling sector, saying it had eroded 'the state's reputation for reliability and commercial morality in its dealings'.

That quote is not from the coalition; it is from a trio of Court of Appeal judges who were quite damning in their remarks about the legal disputes involving the former Labor government.

There is another legal dispute or two I can refer to. One is with Intralot. An article of late last year states:

Intralot approached Tatts in a bid to dump their 10-year contract signed in 2007 to operate Keno and scratchie businesses, with the state government set to approve the deal in a bid to limit Intralot's losses.

The Greek gaming giant has filed a Supreme Court statement of claim against the government for \$63 million in compensation. The government is now embroiled in four legal stashes with gaming companies worth almost \$1.3 billion, with several of the companies maintaining government contracts to provide services despite court action.

There you have it. All of those decisions made in Labor's last term of government are to this day the subject of legal disputes, and we simply do not know what the outcome of some of them will be.

Indeed, if you read the bill and the second-reading speech, you see that there has to be an insertion under section 85(5) of the Constitution Act 1975 because of the current dispute that Intralot has with the government. Clause 8 refers to precommitment, which Intralot is overseeing on behalf the government. A whole litany of decisions taken by the Labor government have now really come back to bite us, and we are still dealing with those as we are debating the bill today.

Moving to clause 8, it deals with some of the changes to precommitment to which I will refer. Voluntary precommitment is an important tool for gamblers to use. I might say that it is one of many tools that those playing poker machines can use. I am proud to say that it was the coalition that instigated the implementation of voluntary precommitment and was supportive of its implementation. Labor is now introducing it, effective from 1 December. I understand that all is going well with that rollout. As I said, it is another tool for punters to use when they are playing gaming machines. People have various opinions about it, but nonetheless it is something that we on this side support and we support the current government's implementation of it.

Voluntary precommitment — which is being badged, if you like, as Your Play — provides an opportunity for players to sign up for a swipe card. They can essentially set their playing time limits and their monetary limits, and they can also track their play over a period of time. Generally those in the industry — those who work at the coalface, if you like, in our gaming venues — are very supportive of it. They are cognisant of the fact

that, I reiterate, it is just one of many tools that can be utilised by gamblers or punters and by the pubs and clubs.

Looking back at the history of this, I refer to a media release of 1 November 2010, in which it was said that a coalition government:

... will ensure precommitment devices will be fitted to all gaming machines to limit player losses and the damage that problem gamblers do to themselves, their families and their communities.

The shadow gaming minister at the time made some comments that we would be working with all the gaming venues to make sure that we could introduce that voluntary precommitment over a period of time.

Moving forward to 31 October 2013, I refer to a media release from the then Minister for Liquor and Gaming Regulation, Ed O'Donohue, a member for Eastern Victoria Region in the Legislative Council, when the then government had introduced into the Parliament legislation to ensure that that would happen. That media release states:

The Victorian coalition government has moved a step closer to fulfilling an important election commitment, introducing legislation to require voluntary precommitment technology on every Victorian electronic gaming machine.

The bill introduced at that time made it compulsory for venue operators to connect their gaming machines to the statewide precommitment system from 1 December 2015. We are not far away from that particular date, and it is pleasing to see that that will be the case. This technology is certainly leading the way in Australia, with Victoria being the first state to introduce voluntary precommitment. As I said, we on this side are very supportive of that.

Interestingly, over time there has been discussion about how loyalty schemes might work within the voluntary precommitment system. I refer to a media release of 29 July 2014, again from the then Minister for Liquor and Gaming Regulation. At that time he made the point that points accrued in gaming loyalty schemes would not be able to be used for further gaming. At the same time the then government wanted to make the points:

Allowing loyalty points to be used for further gaming would undermine precommitment as a vital responsible gambling measure.

Venues that introduce loyalty programs will have the opportunity to use the loyalty cards for precommitment ...

The rationale or reason for that was to try to reduce any stigma associated with using precommitment. We simply want players to be able to use the voluntary

precommitment system. Interestingly, in recent times we have seen some media about this. I refer also to debate in which the current Attorney-General was speaking on the Gambling Regulation Amendment Pre-commitment Bill 2013 and what he had to say about loyalty programs being associated with precommitment. I quote what he is reported as having said on 11 December 2013:

It is ... worth making the point that the government has been quite open about the fact that it sees no problem whatsoever with the precommitment scheme being linked to venue loyalty cards. It has been remarked by problem gambling advocates that having a system where a card designed to help alleviate problem gambling is combined with a card that rewards gamblers for the amount of gambling in which they participate is problematic, to say the least. The government's response —

that is, the coalition government's response —

is to say, 'Combining the precommitment card with the loyalty program helps to destigmatise the precommitment technology'. We should all be somewhat dubious about those claims.

Around that same time the *Age* had a quote attributed to the now Attorney-General. The article states:

Opposition gambling spokesman Martin Pakula said it would be 'completely inappropriate if precommitment technology is used for loyalty programs, and the minister should immediately rule this out'.

What we have are the current minister and the current government adopting exactly the same approach as that of the coalition government at the time, putting the current Attorney-General now very much at odds on that particular point, I would have thought, with the current minister for gaming. That was verified in an article in the *Age* of 19 September, under the heading 'Labor backflip on gaming loyalty card'.

As I said, clause 8 addresses voluntary precommitment, making sure that there are some changes to privacy on information. Clause 8 prohibits the disclosure of a person's precommitment information other than in limited circumstances. I will not go into all the detail of that, but it is an important point that a person's information is protected in those circumstances. We certainly want to ensure that the integrity of the voluntary precommitment system is upheld, and therefore that system should not be threatened by people being able to get information about someone using the system.

Clauses 9 to 13 deal with amendments to training for gaming industry employees. Essentially the situation at the moment is that the responsible service of gaming training can be delivered by a registered training

organisation and that is generally followed by the approval of the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation. The bill changes the way that training is delivered. The amendments provide that the responsible service of gaming training must be approved by the minister instead of the commission. It is difficult to know what the outcome of this might be because the regulations have not been developed, which is a concern. The advice I had in the briefing is that the training is expected to incorporate both online and face-to-face training. The government has given those of us on this side an assurance that it is adopting recommendations from a number of different authorities, including the commission, the Auditor-General, who did a report some time ago, and also the Responsible Gambling Ministerial Advisory Council (RGMAC). Currently the government is looking at setting up a framework to develop the regulations.

I know, as it has been said to me, that stakeholders are concerned about what the end product might be and about who may deliver the program. There is no doubt that there is an air of uncertainty about how the training might be delivered. Nonetheless, as I said, the government has indicated that these changes are a consequence of a number of different reports, including the Auditor-General's report of July 2012, entitled *Taking Action on Problem Gambling*. Paragraph 3.3.3 on page 27 refers specifically to the training.

While I will not go into all the detail of the report, I will note that it recommended some changes. It suggested that the commission may not have had the expertise to evaluate the training courses, which are vitally important for gaming staff. It also concluded that the Responsible Gambling Ministerial Advisory Council extend the purview of the terms of reference of the review it was undertaking to look at the whole level of measures, ways and means of improving training for gaming staff, which made sense. I understand the working group associated with that was a broadly representative group, including the Australian Leisure and Hospitality Group, Gambler's Help, Crown, the Australian Hotels Association and the Victorian InterChurch Gambling Taskforce. There were certainly a wide range of views and diversity in terms of the make-up of the working group.

RGMAC made a number of recommendations — I think 10, from memory — with respect to the responsible service of gaming training. In representations to me there has been some support for the changes to the structure, but other concerns have been to the effect that a lot of the feedback from the Auditor-General's report and even the

recommendations from RGMAC about what should happen with the training may be more about the training content rather than who the service provider might be. Moving forward, we hope the government in its wisdom will take all that on board and will make sure not only that quality training is being provided but that the providers of that training are suitably qualified and give confidence to industry and stakeholders, ensuring that we will not see a step backwards in the quality of training.

Part 4 of the bill relates to the changes to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation to which I have referred. One of the key platforms of the coalition was to bring in the first ever Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. I thank those who delivered on that commitment at the time. Prior to the 2010 election the coalition made a commitment to develop a Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, and it contributed \$150 million over four years to be able to do that. It is something we are very proud of. That was a substantial increase in funding to address problem gambling and to improve problem gambling services in Victoria.

One of the concerns we have raised — and this was certainly raised in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing — was the fact that there has been a reduction of \$2 million in funding for the foundation over the next four years. We are concerned that this bill broadens the functions of the foundation, which will be operating with less money. That is a concern for us, and I know it is a concern for some industry members as well. We understand the government's intention of setting up functions similar to those of VicHealth; nonetheless this issue causes us some concern.

Clause 15 gives the foundation the ability to cost recover in certain circumstances, and clauses 16 to 18 provide the capacity for the board to be able to appoint and dismiss a CEO. There are a number of questions with respect to the foundation that I have, that we have and that industry and stakeholders have raised with respect to these matters. In terms of the first, as members would probably know, both VicHealth and the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation have boards that generally include three members of Parliament to provide that broad diversity of board membership. To this point in time, however, no appointments of any members of Parliament have been made to those boards. That is a question coming legitimately from all sides of the house, so we need an explanation from the government about where that matter sits.

With the new role of the board, how will it interact with other policy and advocacy agencies, such as RGMAC, Gambler's Help, the commission and the department itself? How that might play out is unknown. Will the foundation undertake its own policy work, or does it operate only at the directive of the minister? When giving policy and advocacy advice to the government or the minister, does the board have to have unanimous agreement, or does it operate by majority? How does that information then get back to the government and the minister?

A legitimate question asked in most quarters is: how will the foundation undertake its additional responsibilities and functions when it has less funding? What will the impact be on problem gambling services? Does this legislation mean we are going to have to cut services in one area to ensure the board can undertake its responsibilities in another area? Will the foundation be able to set fees outside of what is intended? There is concern among Victorian industry members and stakeholders, including venues, pubs and clubs, that the foundation may be able to set fees and charges for any type of training or any events that might affect them. I know the intention is to say this relates to interstate events and so forth, but this matter is certainly a concern we need clarified. In summary, the coalition does not oppose the bill. I have raised a number of questions for the government to consider.

Ms EDWARDS (Bendigo West) — It is a pleasure to rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. I thank the shadow minister for liquor and gaming regulation for his contribution and for acknowledging that the coalition will not be opposing the bill. As mentioned by the shadow minister, the bill amends three bills: the Casino Control Act 1991, the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011.

I was privileged to be a board member of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation during the last term of Parliament. That represents my area of expertise with respect to this bill, so I will focus my contribution on the changes that will be made to the foundation. I think it is acknowledged by all parties in this house that there are catastrophic consequences from gambling addiction. Some people who have a gambling addiction need to have in place measures to support them, and the risks around gambling must be managed and addiction must be treated. There are two political amendments in the bill. They will, firstly, provide the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation with a policy and advocacy role. Secondly, amendments to the Gambling

Regulation Act will develop a framework for the responsible service of gaming training.

The bill includes a function that the foundation has not had before. When I first became a board member, while seeing for myself very clearly the great work that the foundation was doing particularly in regard to the promotion of responsible gambling and advertising around that and certainly putting in place a number of service provisions around assisting people who had problems with gambling, it was very clear that the opportunity was there and certainly the capacity was there with the other board members and the people who work at the foundation to have a much stronger and greater role in the gambling space. That is why it was wonderful to see a clear commitment made in the 2014 Victorian Labor platform to expand the functions of the foundation to a policy and advocacy role, which was explicitly excluded when the foundation was established back in 2011.

Nevertheless the foundation has been the problem gambling equivalent, if you like, of VicHealth under the auspices of a public health framework. VicHealth has been a national leader in policy and advocacy, and there is absolutely no reason why the foundation cannot have a similar role. The bill allows the foundation to expand from being merely a service delivery and awareness body to being able to promote policy shifts and advocate for reform. The work done by the foundation is quite considerable, and I will run through some of the great work it does.

The Gambler's Help services provided face-to-face counselling to 6962 clients, including over 24 000 therapeutic counselling sessions and 6892 financial counselling sessions during the last financial year. The foundation has a new in-language service for culturally and linguistically diverse clients. It has expanded services for Aboriginal communities in Victoria, and it has a great school education session to help students to understand the risks of gambling. It is called Gambling's Not a Game, and it is a great school program that is offered to all Victorian schools and youth-based organisations to help students, parents and teachers to understand the risks of gambling and to make informed decisions around gambling. Around 86 school education sessions were delivered during the last financial year, including 73 student sessions.

The foundation also helps gambling venues and their staffs to provide safer environments. The venue support program works in partnership with gaming venue staff and management to support the development and maintenance of responsible gambling environments. The foundation is doing some fantastic work. It works

continually towards reducing gambling-related harm, and the ultimate goal, obviously, is the expansion of services beyond tertiary treatment-focused programs to a comprehensive public health response. The foundation is recognised internationally now as one of the best gambling health services in the world, and its help has been sought by international counterparts in, to name a few, Korea, Wales, Sweden and Japan. In the US the Bet Regret television ads have been adopted by the state of Nevada. The foundation is doing great work internationally.

It is very well known that the actions of problem gamblers, even if it is just one person in a family, have negative impacts on the lives of between 5 and 10 other people. It means that up to 5 million Australians at the moment could be affected by problem gambling each year, including friends, family and employers of people with a gambling problem. It is imperative that we keep a focus on the foundation, the work it does and how it goes about establishing new advocacy and policy programs.

The cost of gambling is extraordinary. People who have a problem with gambling lose an average of \$21 000 a year — and that is one-third of the average annual salary. It is hard-earned money that would otherwise be used to pay bills, pay off the mortgage or to take a holiday with the kids. For some families gambling is so extreme in certain circumstances where a partner might have a gambling problem that it is a struggle to put food on the table. However, it is not just about the money; it is about the harm to these people and their families. Problem gamblers suffer from both mental and physical health problems as well. They find it difficult to hold down a job, and they struggle to maintain relationships. For many families perhaps the biggest loss is the loss of quality time together, which can never be recovered. People with gambling problems are six times more likely than non-gamblers to get divorced.

I would like to read from an article in the *Age* in 2014, which refers to some studies, both Australian and international, around the impact of gambling, and I think this is important in the context of the Royal Commission into Family Violence. It states:

The rapidly changing nature of gambling in Australia has some troubling consequences with new research warning of a violent impact on some families and the vulnerability of Australians to unregulated overseas gambling sites.

...

The families study by Associate Professor Nicki Dowling from Deakin University said according to a review of international studies, including Australia, one-third of people with gambling problems report being the victim of violence

from someone close, or report being the perpetrator of violence to someone close to them.

The review of international research also found 'over half of people with gambling problems (56 per cent) report perpetrating physical violence against their children. Moreover, several recent Australian studies have found that one-third to one-half ... of people with gambling problems and their family members report some form of family violence in the previous 12 months'.

There are links both ways. People with gambling problems have been linked in terms of being perpetrators of family violence, but people with gambling problems also have a much higher than average likelihood of having experienced violence against them.

A further study done by Dr Sally Gainsbury of Southern Cross University examined the growth in online gambling and levels of consumer protection. We know that the younger cohort, the 18 to 25-year-olds, are increasingly using online gambling as a source of gambling rather than pokie machines. Dr Gainsbury said that more than \$1 billion was being spent by Australians annually on overseas gambling sites that had no regulatory oversight by Australian authorities. The article continues:

So you have got now all these offshore operators that are happily taking money from Australians and they are not regulated, there is no consumer protection — that's really where the next step needs to be taken ...

In conclusion, by giving the foundation additional responsibilities in advocacy and policy we are acknowledging the significant role it plays in supporting Victorians affected by problem gambling and fostering understanding and awareness of responsible gambling in the wider community. The advocacy and policy roles will deliver on the government's election commitment, and that will be an important step in reducing the harms associated with gambling. Based on VicHealth, the new role will enable the foundation to apply its knowledge and expertise to problem gambling and responsible gambling in providing policy advice to the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation.

Mr SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) — It is a pleasure to rise to speak on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. It is important to point out that many people who gamble are not problem gamblers. Gambling has become a pastime for many over a number of years. In fact, my late mother used to play the pokies as a social activity once a week. It was certainly a pastime for her.

However, we have a growing issue in Victoria, as in many other states and jurisdictions, where we have a

small percentage of problem gamblers. A longitudinal study was done initially by the Department of Justice in 2009 and continued by the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. It showed that problem gamblers represent 0.7 per cent of gamblers; moderate gamblers, 2.3 per cent; low-risk gamblers, 5.7 per cent; and non-problem gamblers over 64 per cent. Certainly a large portion of those are considered to be non-problem gamblers.

However, problem gamblers account for 35 per cent of total electronic gaming machine expenditure, with moderate risk gamblers representing a further 19 per cent. We are looking at almost 50 per cent of people who play the pokies in that risk category. They are the ones we need to ensure that we have proper support and proper measures in place for.

The member for Bendigo West highlighted comorbidity issues, such as family violence and drug and alcohol issues, which, alongside problem gambling, tend to be a part of the issue. It is important to point those out. The reason I frame those issues is that in government the coalition saw the importance of tackling this issue. That is why we initiated a number of activities, including the establishment of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. This was certainly a first. It is seen as a key body not only in Australia but also as an organisation that has set the benchmark in many other places around the world. It is seen as already doing something, from research to training programs and support programs. It is very much working on how to reform that space and target that 0.7 per cent of gamblers, and more importantly it is ensuring that those people are not affected by some of the other issues I mentioned before, including ultimately following a path to crime.

I was fortunate to have been one of the government representatives on the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. I took that role very seriously because I, like many people in this house, have had family members or friends with these sorts of problems. A relation of mine was a problem gambler. Over the years we saw him lose a whole lot of money and a whole lot of friends and family. I can remember a particular time when my father had to get him out of a really deep situation he was in because of problem gambling. For me it was an important thing to get involved in a piece of policy work that was going to make a difference.

We have already heard from members about the great work the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation has done since it was established. I particularly want to make reference to Serge Sardo, the CEO, and the work he has done, but also Bruce Singh and all the board members who led this organisation from nothing. The

foundation was established with \$150 million over four years to bring all the different agencies and services together to do important research policy work and provide programs and support. That has continued to happen, and we have already heard about a lot of the great work the organisation has done in a number of the programs, whether it be teaching young people in schools or working with young people around the digital issues going forward. A couple of years ago during Responsible Gambling Awareness Week there was a focus which deliberately targeted digital gambling and some of the things to look out for, and it provided ideas around research and targeting of this particular issue.

We have also seen the organisation do work in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, particularly in funding these communities to help address some of the problem gambling issues. It has produced workplace resource kits. At the time the foundation identified that a lot of gambling was actually taking place during workplace hours, where people would be using computers and mobile devices to gamble. One of the things the foundation did was to highlight that issue and address it during one Responsible Gambling Awareness Week.

The Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation also highlighted other issues during Responsible Gambling Awareness Week. One of the other things the foundation did was bring advocates together, including some of the football clubs. I recall that the North Melbourne Football Club was probably one of the first clubs to sign a declaration that it would do whatever it could to highlight issues around problem gambling, and it had representatives speak out against problem gambling. Certainly a huge amount of work has been done by the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, and there is more work to be done with a whole lot of research and programs.

With the bill before us, I certainly have no issue with rolling out the precommitment work initiated by the former government. Having voluntary precommitment was an important part of the coalition's bill. This bill looks at taking that precommitment work further, ensuring that we have the tools to be able to highlight that precommitment. The issue I have with the bill is specifically with provisions about the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation itself. The coalition highlighted the need to put serious dollars into the foundation — \$150 million over four years. What we have in front of us now is a cut in the funding to \$148 million over four years, a \$2 million cut. That might not sound like a lot of money in the scheme of things, but it is a huge amount when costs are going up

around the foundation and also when it has been given additional work to do.

Some of the tasks of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation are around training. Clause 15 of the bill addresses the issue of the foundation being able to recover costs in dealing with some of these things. It is important for us to ensure that there is transparency in the way the foundation operates. I would hate to see the foundation have to run programs which cloud the very work that it does. We need to ensure that the foundation does what it does in a clear, fair and balanced way, and that there is not the need for the foundation to raise money to be able to fund the work it does. That aspect should have been provided for as part of this bill.

As part of the governance of this organisation, I note that I was an inaugural member on the board, and the member for Ovens Valley and Ian Trezise, a former member in this house, were board members as well. It was very important to have members from both sides of Parliament on the board, because it took away the politics. Members of Parliament from the coalition and the Labor Party on the board were able to say, 'We are going to work together to address this really important problem'.

What do we have now? We are 12 months into the game and we have no parliamentary representatives on the board. In terms of the *Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Annual Report* published in 2014, the section headed 'Governance' states:

On 5 November 2011, both houses of Parliament passed the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011 (the act), establishing the foundation as a body corporate. The act established a board consisting of three members of Parliament and four to eight non-MP members (including the chair and the deputy chairperson).

That is what we are meant to have in operation right now. I question the validity of what is currently in place, given that we are 12 months into the Labor government and the board does not have any representatives of this Parliament. We all passed the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011. Many people from both sides of Parliament stood up and celebrated the fact that we had established the foundation, and it is a disgrace that there has been 12 months of inaction from the current government on ensuring that we have parliamentary representation on this important board.

Mr PEARSON (Essendon) — I am delighted to make a contribution to debate on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. At the outset I want to preface my comments by talking a little bit about the

gambling industry in Victoria. The reality is that the industry is a major employer in Victoria. It has played an important role in driving economic growth, employment and taxation. From memory I think receipts from gambling are about the third-largest taxation item in the state budget. The figure is around \$2 billion. It is a significant contributor to the bottom line of the state.

I grew up in Wantirna in the 70s and 80s. Before the introduction of gaming machines, the pubs were bloodhouses. I remember a time in probably the late 70s when my father came home after having a drink after work at the Bayswater Hotel. He was quite surprised that a gentleman had walked into the front bar and his sexuality had been questioned because he was wearing a suit. Then it was on for young and old. Pubs back in the 70s and 80s were not really family-friendly establishments.

The investment in pubs that accompanied the introduction of electronic gaming machines (EGM) was an important economic driver during the course of the last recession. During the significant economic downturn, owners of businesses were able to say, 'I reckon I'm going to have a bit of a revenue income stream coming down the line because I've got a regulated licence and a degree of certainty in tenure over that, so I can ask the bank for a loan that I can invest'. The capital improvements that occurred in pubs at that time of severe economic contraction provided a significant level of employment and a stimulus to the local economy.

It also made those facilities more family friendly. In particular, gaming venues not only became more family friendly but more friendly places for women to frequent, more so than you would have seen in the 70s and the 80s. Speaking from personal experience, over the years I have had some fantastic times with my family at these types of establishments. You can have a good feed, a drink and a punt at places like the Burvale Hotel, the Bayswater Hotel, Zagames or the Anglers Tavern in Maribyrnong.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Ward) — Do you remember the Swagman?

Mr PEARSON — Acting Speaker, I do recall the Swagman well. I remember when it became Stylus before it subsequently burnt down. It was a great institution in the eastern suburbs.

It is important to note that not everyone who drinks becomes an alcoholic and not everyone who gambles is a problem gambler. The reality is that problem

gambling is a profound issue for those who are touched by it. When poker machines were introduced into the state, the former Kirner government established the Community Support Fund, which is designed to tackle problem gambling.

I also recognise that as a concept gambling is a tax that can be best described as a voluntary regressive consumption tax, meaning that in order to have an EGM licence you need to have a liquor licence. Historically most of these licences have been granted in poorer areas, such as in industrial suburbs and in regional and rural communities. EGMs are usually located in these areas. It is a tax based upon consumption. It is regressive because it is found more in these areas than in the leafy suburbs of Camberwell, Hawthorn or Kew. It is voluntary, so it is important to have an appropriate public policy mechanism in place to address some of the unintended consequences of those side effects. That is why the former Kirner government originally established the Community Support Fund and the previous government established the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.

The bill seeks to implement the government's election commitment to give the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation an advocacy and policy role. That is important because sometimes as regulators we say, 'Let's just try this', and then we try something else and something else, and it is never measured. There is no capacity to work out from an evidentiary base whether it is working or not and what impact it is having. Sometimes people are fixated on what sort of taxation receipts we are getting — for instance, thinking that if there is a decline or a flatlining in the level of taxation receipts, it somehow indicates that problem gambling is declining, or conversely if there is an increase in taxation receipts, it is an indication that problem gambling is out of control.

As I said, not everyone who gambles is a problem gambler, and we need to make sure that proper research is done to try to test the impact of these reforms. All of us would agree that we want to segregate problem gamblers from the broader population, remove them from harm and provide the wraparound services they require to get treatment so that they can be cured of their addiction. That has been the spirit and intent displayed on both sides of the house in relation to this industry.

Therefore the bill is important because it will provide the foundation with a advocacy and policy role. For example, we need to be able to define a problem gambler. How do we do that? Is being a problem gambler a symptom of a deeper cause that manifests

itself in this way or do we have people who are pathological gamblers? There is a dearth of research in this area, and this is something that we can examine and tackle accordingly. The foundation offers community education and awareness-raising activities to foster responsible gambling and promote problem gambling help services. Again I think that raising that level of awareness in the community about what is available and providing families and the community with a degree of assistance and support to tackle problem gambling is important.

It is also important that the body be established in the same way as VicHealth was established — to provide knowledge and expertise in advocating and providing policy advice to government. But it is also important that the foundation continue to engage in good stakeholder management practices. This means ensuring that the foundation works closely with the government of the day, with industry, with health professionals, with academics and with community groups, to make sure it has the full array of input and advice in terms of the way it devises and develops a proposal to go to government. What we never want is statutory authorities saying, ‘We are independent, so we are not accountable or answerable to anyone and we will just go off and do or say whatever we like and therefore wasting money as a consequence and coming up with something that is impractical or unworkable or does not reflect the views and values of the community. It is therefore essential that we have the ability to synthesise the various policy inputs to come up with the best package for providing a good response.

Anyone who has read *Power without Glory* will be familiar with the stories of gambling in Victoria before the arrival of electronic gaming machines, and in particular with the stories of John Wren running his illegal tote in Johnston Street, Collingwood. Blokes would blow their money on the horses and he would give them some fish and chips to take home to their wife and kids. Problem gambling has been an issue for a very long time, but the reality is that we need to try to have appropriate settings that reflect changes that occur over the course of time, and as we are transitioning more into the digital world, electronic gaming machines will become a more mature product in the market, and we will therefore see problem gamblers transitioning off to other forms of technology, which emphasises the importance of ensuring that the foundation is properly equipped and able to address that fact and keep pace with the technological change because we have seen some extraordinary changes in recent times.

The bill is an important piece of legislation. It gives effect to the government’s election commitment and

ensures that we have the very best levels of protection for problem gamblers in our community. I am delighted to commend the bill to house.

Mr HIBBINS (Pahran) — I rise to speak on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. The Victorian Greens support the bill, even though it barely scratches the surface of what needs to be done to tackle problem gambling. I am unashamedly antipokies. I believe there need to be fewer of them and greater control of the ones already out there. They have had a devastating impact on Victoria and our most vulnerable communities. Electronic gaming machines and poker machines have thrown fuel onto the fire of problem gambling, taking an enormous toll on Victorian families and our health system. We have seen the financial stress that it brings — family breakdown, job losses, depression and crime. More than \$13 million was lost on poker machines in the Prahran electorate in 2012–13, with losses rising every year. Overall Victorians lost more than \$2.5 billion on the pokies last financial year, with most of these losses concentrated in low socio-economic areas, often in our outer suburbs and regional Victoria.

We know people enjoy a bet, but when people can lose thousands of dollars on a poker machine, something needs to be done. The type of electronic gaming machines we have in Victoria are infamous. They are carefully engineered to be highly addictive, to disguise losses as wins and to efficiently empty the pockets of those who are using them. Some of these machines can turn through thousands of dollars in a single hour, and they can be found in high numbers across all communities but again concentrated in some of the places that can least afford them.

We have heard some talk about the voluntary precommitment technology, as if that is somehow progress in addressing problem gambling. But it is a sham; it is a fig leaf. The voluntary precommitment technology will do nothing to reduce problem gambling and next to nothing to assist problem gamblers and reduce the devastating effects of pokies on our communities. What is worse, to back this up, one can look at the budget papers, which show that the government does not expect any reduction in losses as a result of voluntary precommitment. Page 165 of budget paper 5, the statement of finances, estimates that revenue from poker machines will increase by \$20.5 million between 2014–15 and 2015–16, and will increase by over \$215 million over the forward estimates, and this is when we know that problem gamblers make up around 35 per cent of spending on poker machines.

The government, the opposition and the community all know that problem gambling through poker machines is out of control, but there seems to be a refusal to implement a workable, evidenced-based solution that could significantly reduce this problem. Instead we let the powerful gambling industry sidestep important, realistic measures designed to control and limit problem gambling. It does not affect just those who are problem gamblers but also the 300 000 Victorians who are affected by someone else's problem gambling.

The bill contains some positive steps and small reforms. It makes several amendments to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011. The most important of these is to give the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation an advocacy and policy role, which is a useful amendment in that it gives the foundation the scope to provide advice to the minister, and I am sure it will be very interesting to see what that advice will entail. It also makes a technical amendment to the definition of interstate exclusion orders under the Casino Control Act 1991 that will ensure that all interstate exclusion orders are captured regardless of how they are made. A number of amendments are also made to the Gambling Regulation Act 2003. We support these amendments insofar as they ensure the provision of responsible service of gaming training that incorporates the latest research and industry best practice to those who are on the front line of the gaming industry.

Lastly, the bill amends the precommitment provisions in the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to provide that a person must not disclose information obtained from a precommitment system to a court. This is all well and good, but it is not enough to seriously reduce the harm of poker machines. The idea that a precommitment will work has no basis. There is no evidence that a non-binding precommitment system on pokies will be effective in reducing the losses on problem gamblers, yet we seem to be told that this is somehow a real solution. A player can choose whether or not they register for precommitment; they can have a non-binding or partial precommitment, if they choose to register and set a limit; and they can choose not to enter their card when playing. We know this is ineffective because high-risk gamblers are often categorised as having impaired control and as chronically spending beyond desired playing limits with significant negative consequences. This non-binding, partial program provides a number of means in which a problem gambler can get around this system, and it does nothing to ensure control and spending when a gambling addict cannot do this for themselves.

The Victorian Greens have had a long history of taking strong and consistent action aimed at reducing the harm of gambling. We have shown that, unlike the current government and previous governments, we are committed to taking real steps — and I acknowledge the work of a member for Western Metropolitan Region in the other place, Colleen Hartland, who is the Victorian Greens gambling spokesperson, for all the work she has done in this area — towards negotiating the removal of ATMs from gambling venues, rejecting the voluntary precommitment legislation that was brought in by the previous government and instead proposing our own bill that would implement dollar bet limits, which would have effectively targeted problem gamblers, limited their losses and made real differences to their lives and the lives of their families.

We have heard the call for more research, and that is all very well, but the proposal for dollar bet limits is based on hard evidence published by the Productivity Commission in its 2010 gambling inquiry report which showed that dollar bets are the cheapest and most effective, straightforward option for reducing the harm of pokies. Given that 88 per cent of recreational gamblers do not bet more than a dollar a spin, it would have had a small impact on recreational gamblers whilst targeting those who need support to stop problem gambling. But the bill was voted down by the government — voted down by the Liberal Party, voted down by The Nationals and voted down by the Labor Party. Again a real solution to address problem gambling was rejected. The Liberal, Labor and Nationals parties have shown that they are hopelessly compromised when it comes to regulating the gambling industry and taking action on problem gambling.

We saw it last year with the remarkable Crown Casino licence extension, which included a clause that prevents future state governments from implementing public health reforms such as maximum bet size or smoking bans in the high-roller lounge without compensating Crown. We have seen it in the donations made to political parties for 2013–14. We will not be able to see results from the last financial year until next February, unfortunately, but it is worth having a look at those donations for a moment. We cannot have a situation where there is an industry that is harmful and dangerous to the lives of so many in our community and that needs to be addressed by strong and effective legislation and at the same time that industry is making donations to political parties. It creates a conflict of interest that is against the interests of Victorians.

Let us look at who is donating to those political parties. There is the Australian Hotels Association, which has been very generous indeed to the Liberal and Nationals

parties. There is Crown Resorts, which has been very generous to the Labor Party and the Liberal Party. There is Tabcorp, which is donating to political parties. This is outrageous. These business interests should not be donating to political parties, otherwise they are hopelessly compromised in effectively addressing problem gambling. It is absolutely ludicrous. The High Court has recently ruled that it is entirely constitutional for political donations to be banned from certain industries, and it is time we got on with banning political donations from gambling companies. Maybe then we will see the other parties come to the realisation that to take effective action on problem gambling, the gaming industry needs to be highly and further regulated and we will see dollar bet limits placed on gaming machines.

The bill before the house purports to action the government's commitment to developing programs and policies to address problem gambling, but it just skims the surface and does not acknowledge an evidence-based approach that can have a real and genuine impact. In themselves, these measures are useful but completely lacking. With the social costs of problem gambling, it cannot go on, and the current arrangements perpetuate it just because there is some benefit from the gambling industry, which seems to be very generous in its donations to the other parties. We have safety standards —

Ms Victoria — You are jealous, aren't you?

Mr HIBBINS — Some of the donors are actually from addresses in Prahran; obviously I do not mix with the right people.

Safety standards are being implemented in other potentially harmful industries, such as tobacco and asbestos, so it is about time the gambling industry was regulated and real reforms were introduced to limit problem gambling. If this government were serious about pokies reform, it would introduce legislation like the Greens' dollar bet legislation. This would have a real impact on limiting the losses by problem gamblers on poker machines and have a positive impact out there in the community. The Greens will be supporting this bill, but so much more needs to be done.

Ms SPENCE (Yuroke) — I rise to speak on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2015, and I am very pleased to do so. The bill will make a number of amendments, as we have already heard, to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011 (VRGF act), the Casino Control Act 1991 and the Gambling Regulation Act 2003. These amendments will implement the government's election commitments and

address the recommendations made in reports by the Victorian Public Sector Commission, the Victorian Auditor-General's Office and the Responsible Gambling Ministerial Advisory Council.

Of the amendments in this bill, I will focus my comments on the amendments to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act. Importantly, the bill will give the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation an advocacy and policy role. While there are no provisions in the VRGF act that preclude the foundation from undertaking an advocacy and policy role in fulfilling its functions and meeting its objectives, the second-reading speech says that the foundation would not have such a role.

Currently the foundation plays a significant role in supporting Victorians affected by problem gambling and fostering a greater understanding and awareness of responsible gambling in the wider community. The foundation works to address problem gambling through community education and awareness-raising activities that foster responsible gambling and promote problem gambling help services, and by undertaking research to inform best practice in problem gambling treatment, prevention and responsible gambling communication. So it is quite a broad area that the foundation works in.

This bill enables the foundation to draw on its knowledge, experience and expertise, and the relationships it has formed to provide informed advice to the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation to address problem gambling in Victoria. So whilst this government recognises that the gambling industry is an important part of our community that provides significant jobs, entertainment and tourism opportunities, it is also committed to developing programs and policies to address the insidious nature of problem gambling, with a specific focus on the minority of people who develop addictive and destructive behaviours. We know that gambling addiction can have catastrophic consequences for some people, and whilst gambling is a legitimate recreational activity, the risks must be managed and the addiction must be treated.

We know that not all who gamble are problem gamblers, but some are, and the consequences of problem gambling can be incredibly devastating. These include financial hardship, relationship breakdown, involvement in criminal activity and alienation from friends and workplaces. Problem gambling can also be a factor in family dysfunction and domestic violence, including spouse and child abuse.

This government is committed to providing support to problem gamblers, to working with industry and problem gambling experts to prevent and minimise harm, and to supporting health professionals and family services to minimise and treat the harm caused by problem gambling. Providing the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation with an explicit advocacy and policy role will assist in developing programs and policies to address problem gambling, and thereby minimise the harm that is caused. This is particularly important to me and to my electorate, because unfortunately the effects of problem gambling are far too often seen in our community.

In a recent report by Hume City Council the extent of this problem was very clear. The report, *Update on Gaming Related Matters — May 2015 to September 2015*, provided an overview of gaming statistics for the financial year ending June 2015, comparing them to statistics for metropolitan Melbourne and Victoria. The statistics are very concerning. The report notes that the number of venues in the Hume municipality with gambling facilities is 14. So there are 14 venues that have electronic gaming machines, and there are 814 electronic gaming machines operational across those venues. This is a recent increase from the previous figure of 805, and it means there are 6.1 gaming machines per 1000 adults in the Hume City area. If we compare that figure to metropolitan Melbourne, it is slightly higher; metropolitan Melbourne has 5.8 machines per 1000 adults.

According to data that was released by the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation, the net electronic gaming machine expenditure within the municipality for 2014–15 was just shy of \$105 million. That is an enormous amount of money, and it represents a 3.1 per cent increase on the expenditure for the previous year, which was just shy of \$102 million. It also represents a 6.3 per cent increase on the 2012–13 expenditure, which was just shy of \$99 million.

The statistics actually get more concerning when we look at the losses per machine within the municipality. Within the Hume area the losses were \$130 365 per machine. In metropolitan Melbourne the losses were \$101 207 per machine. Statewide the losses were \$96 837. Therefore within Hume the average loss per machine was \$33 528 more than the average across the state. This represents a 25 per cent greater loss on the machines within Hume. If we look at what that equates to per adult within the municipality, it was \$755 per adult. The figure in metropolitan Melbourne was \$590 per adult, and statewide it was \$564.

Within Hume municipality, which has a low socio-economic demographic, there are considerable pressures already within the household, and yet the expenditure on electronic gaming machines is very disproportionate compared with the rest of the state. The unfortunate reality is that the reason the losses are greater per machine and per adult is quite simply because more money is being put in them. That is very concerning to me.

Hume City Council, according to the report, had the seventh highest level of net electronic gaming machine expenditure in 2014–15 when compared to other municipalities across Victoria, with Brimbank, Casey and Dandenong being ranked in the top three. In light of that information, and in light of the provisions of the bill, I congratulate all of those who are currently involved in the promotion of responsible gambling. This is important to our state, and it is important to my community. The bill will assist in increasing the informed advice provided to the minister to increase awareness and address responsible gambling issues. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr McCURDY (Ovens Valley) — I am also delighted to rise to make a contribution in relation to the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2015, and to follow my colleagues, the members for Morwell and Caulfield. As was mentioned earlier, the opposition will not be opposing this bill. I will go through a bit of the detail of the bill, and speak in a little more detail after that.

There are three main issues this bill will address. Firstly, it will amend the Casino Control Act 1991, and that is in relation to interstate exclusion orders and training requirements for special employees. Secondly, it amends the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 in relation to compulsory training requirements for certain gaming industry employees, and provides that precommitment information cannot be disclosed to a court, tribunal or other authority. Thirdly, it amends the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011 to allow new policy and advocacy functions for the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation and empowers the foundation to impose and collect fees in relation to education information and, more importantly, empower the board of the foundation to appoint and dismiss the chief executive officer.

The coalition takes gambling very seriously. In government we initiated the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation and put more money into gambling than any other Victorian government ever has. I was very proud to be a member of the Victorian Responsible Gaming Foundation board, along with the

member for Caulfield, Neil Trezise and the member for Bendigo West, and I believe we all made significant contributions to it. As the member for Caulfield said, board members must be impartial. It is not about politics; it is about getting on and — —

Mr Eren — Do you mean Neil or Ian?

Mr McCURDY — Neil Trezise, Nipper. Certainly — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr McCURDY — Ian Trezise. Neil was Ian's father. I believe Neil was in part responsible for bringing electronic gaming machines into Victoria. I think that is one of the reasons Ian was on the board — to fix a few things that were broken.

The \$150 million that we put into the foundation over four years — \$37.5 million a year — was a significant and important investment. We appointed its CEO, Serge Sardo, who continues in that capacity. We ensured that there were appropriate checks and balances and tools in place to deal with problem gambling. As has been mentioned on both sides of the house, not everybody who gambles has a problem, but it is important that we have safety nets in place for those who do.

In my time on the board we ensured that there were many avenues for people to get help: Gambler's Help, a telephone helpline; financial counselling; face-to-face peer sessions; and of course online support. It was evident to the board that the 18 to 25 demographic was experiencing a growing problem with gambling. Many people find it very easy to gamble online using their iPhones or Android phones these days, and we felt it was important for people to be able to access support online as well.

I am disappointed by this government's performance on gambling on a couple of fronts. It has not contributed the same amount of funding that we did over the four years. Funding should have been increased rather than decreased, because gambling is a concern for a greater number of families in Victoria today than it was a few years ago. Nonetheless I am sure we can work towards that.

My other concern is that the parliamentary board members are yet to be appointed. As the member for Caulfield said, impartiality is vital to the proper functioning of the board. It has to get on with dealing with families and communities that are struggling with gambling problems. During my time on the board we had oversight of many programs and initiatives. Bet

Regret was one of those. I think it is still running now; I remember seeing an ad for it just recently. We also had partnerships with stakeholders that could sell our message. That is really important for the marketing of responsible gambling. Some of those partners were AFL Victoria, Melbourne Victory Football Club, the Collingwood, Hawthorn and North Melbourne football clubs and Netball Victoria. Sport is a fantastic conduit for getting this message out there to the greater public.

I will go into a bit more detail on the bill. It clarifies that if a person is subject to an interstate exclusion order, which can be made in different ways in different states, that order will apply in Victoria. We do not need double standards around gambling just because there is a state border involved. For someone whose electorate abuts New South Wales, I know that it is important that standards be similar.

The bill makes technical amendments to the casino training requirements. Definitions of approved training courses and refresher training courses will be inserted into the Casino Control Act. Courses will be specified as 'approved by the commission', meaning the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation. That is a common-sense and practical measure. The bill amends the Gambling Regulation Act in respect of compulsory training of certain gaming industry employees, which will enable the provision of voluntary precommitment. I note that precommitment was part of our work on the board, and that the previous government was devoted to getting precommitment up.

The member for Morwell mentioned the fact that Labor has a poor track record when it comes to anything to do with gambling. The electronic gaming machines fiasco saw us undersold by about \$3 billion. But that is another issue that we have to put behind us in the hope that we can move forward and support people with gambling problems. I urge the government to continue to invest heavily in this area.

I have mentioned voluntary precommitment, an initiative of the coalition. I hope the government continues to take gambling seriously, and remembers that responsible gambling is not about being antigambling. It is about helping people and families who are facing a gambling problem. It is about having a safety net for those who need support.

The Crown complex is a perfect example of a professional entertainment complex. It is the largest single-site employer in Victoria. At times we need to embrace sensible, safe entertainment, and that includes gambling, as long as there is a safety net for those who for whatever reason cannot manage that. That is what

the responsible gambling foundation is all about. These changes will assist Victoria in addressing problem gambling. As I said earlier, we are not opposing the bill. I commend the bill to the house.

Ms SULEYMAN (St Albans) — I rise to speak in support of the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. We have heard a lot from speakers today about gambling addiction and how it can destroy lives. It can lead to destructive behaviour that not only can ruin an individual but also has the potential to break up families.

The gaming industry plays an important role in creating jobs in the community. My first job was at Crown Casino. I was very fortunate to start my career in the gaming industry at Crown Casino. I was a student at William Angliss when the first casino was built across the road from the existing venue, and it was a source of joy and excitement in Victoria. The fact that hospitality students were given an opportunity to be employed, whether it was on the gaming floors or in the restaurants, boosted the hospitality industry in Victoria.

There is no doubt that the industry provides and creates jobs, not only at Crown Casino but also in other gaming venues in Victoria. It also provides tourism and entertainment opportunities. It has a responsibility, when it comes to consumers, to protect those who are vulnerable and have problems with gambling.

I am not happy to report that the City of Brimbank, as noted previously, is one of the top three municipalities in which gamblers have poured millions of dollars into electronic gaming machines. In Brimbank the figure is more than \$130 million. These numbers are extremely concerning and reflect a greater need to provide support for problem gamblers and, most importantly, to work with the industry to prevent the damage that is caused by addictive gambling.

I note that there are plenty of support services in Brimbank that provide services and counselling assistance, not only to the person who has an addiction but also to the families associated with them. That is important. It is not just the person who can be affected; it is the person's whole family and community that are affected by problem gambling. It is extremely harmful and damaging to a person's identity and family life when they have what I call an addiction to gaming.

But for those who do not have an addiction, the gaming machines, the environment and the entertainment at these venues, whether it is enjoying the fine dining at the restaurants or having a moment at the machines, can be enjoyable. I had the opportunity while working at

Crown Casino for many, many years to meet the patrons, and I saw firsthand the entertainment that it provided to many of them.

This bill amends the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 in order to protect and, most importantly, train gaming staff. That is really important — making sure that staff have their training updated and incorporating the emerging research, best practices and changes to the regulations. This needs to be worked in with management. That is critical to making this work — management needs to be encouraging of staff and to be making sure that they are able to pinpoint the patrons who have an issue with gaming so that the patrons who are identified are then able to seek appropriate assistance from the programs that are available. There needs to be a whole-of-community approach. Not only do staff need to be trained but management has to take on that leadership role and responsibility. I also note that staff members who do not complete this training will not be able to enter the gaming area, and that is an important aspect to this bill.

Ensuring that staff have the most up-to-date training and the ability to identify patrons who may have an addiction to gaming and providing that assistance is the first call. These amendments will allow for a flexible framework to be set for the next responsible service of gaming training model. This is essential to ensure that gaming and hospitality staff can get on with providing the services. The training gives them the knowledge and the ability to spot the problem gamblers and reduce the harm caused.

In order to tackle this issue we cannot just be reliant on staff. We need to go beyond that. This bill makes a number of amendments, which include to the precommitment provisions of the Gambling Regulation Act and to provide a person with the opportunity to set a limit on the time they spend at a gaming machine, and that will include their losses as well. The system will allow players to track their play and spending over a period of time so that they can have some idea of how much money and time they are spending on the machine. Hopefully this system will minimise harm for problem gamblers; it is important that we are able to protect those problem gamblers.

Some of these amendments include amendments to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011. This will confer much more of an advocacy and policy role on the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, which plays an essential role in our community in raising awareness for responsible gambling in the community and provides support to Victorian problem gamblers. The foundation will act in

a manner similar to VicHealth, basically using its knowledge and experience to provide advice and knowledge to the minister regarding matters under the act. Giving the foundation an advocacy and policy role will ensure that the industry and community groups can contribute to and participate in tackling problem gambling through their relationship with the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.

Let me say that there is no doubt that if you do have a problem with gambling, there are services to help you. With the industry and other stakeholders working together, I think that this bill with the necessary amendments will ensure that those who have a problem can get the right counselling and help. I commend this bill to the house.

Ms HALFPENNY (Thomastown) — I also rise to speak on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. As previous speakers have said, this bill makes a number of amendments to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011, the Casino Control Act 1991 and the Gambling Regulation Act 2003. This legislation will deliver on yet another Andrews Labor government election commitment, as well as adopting many of the recommendations that have been made in various reports from organisations and bodies such as the Auditor-General, the Victorian public sector commissioner and the Responsible Gambling Ministerial Advisory Council.

Before going into the detail of the bill and the legislative changes that it makes, I want to speak a little bit about the electorate of Thomastown and the situation with regard to gambling in that electorate. We know there is almost universal recognition that we have a gambling problem in Victoria. It is also a fact that gambling is regarded as a recreational activity. People are out to have a bit of fun — they might be going to the races. It is a social activity where people get together, and this can involve some sort of gambling. Unfortunately there is also a very dark side to gambling, particularly when it comes to electronic gaming machines.

To give some statistical examples of what is going on in electorates such as Thomastown, in 2012–13 over \$56 million was lost through electronic gaming machines in the Thomastown electorate alone. This is an electorate that has, on average, one of the lowest household incomes in the state. While we say there is a problem and that individuals may have problems with gambling, it is not just a problem for a few individuals. There are a whole lot of factors at play at the moment that encourage people to gamble and that can lead to them becoming addicted. We need to make sure we

have the research to help us to come up with ideas that will provide solutions to this terrible problem. As many speakers have already said, problem gambling does not just affect an individual, it affects their families, their friends and the whole of society.

In terms of things that encourage problem gambling rather than responsible gambling, Productivity Commission research has demonstrated that, for example, there is a clear link between accessibility and problem gambling. Specifically, many organisations are very concerned about the fact that a lot of gambling venues are in places that are very accessible, like shopping centres, such as Epping Plaza, and strip shopping areas. During the term of the previous Labor government, planning laws were amended to stop electronic gaming machines being located in venues that are highly accessible, such as shopping centres. However, we are stuck with those machines that had already been established in venues under previous planning laws.

Epping Plaza Hotel is one such venue. It is located in Epping Plaza. People gambling at that venue have lost over \$21 million in the 2012–13 year. That is the highest loss for any venue in the state. It is a terrible situation and one that all of us should be very concerned about. The Thomastown electorate also has one of the highest numbers of gaming machines — there are 418 machines in my electorate alone.

A lot of organisations are doing work around problem gambling, such as Whittlesea City Council and Whittlesea Community Connections. They have done an enormous amount of research, advocacy work and strategic planning to address problem gambling and have it recognised. I would like to acknowledge and commend the work they have done in this area. The amendments to the legislation we are talking about today support the strategies those organisations have been calling for. Of course these amendments are not the end of the story for Labor, but they will assist us to develop a community response to do whatever we can to prevent and reduce problem gambling.

The bill makes amendments in relation to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, which was established under the previous government. The previous government did not give the foundation the authority to advocate or speak up for the community. In fact it was specifically stopped from doing that. The amendments the bill makes to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011 will allow the foundation to advocate and speak up for the community — this was one of Labor's election commitments. It has done the research, and it is focused

on addressing problem gambling. The government should seek and welcome the foundation's advice. It must accept that the foundation speaks for the community and recognise that the foundation can advocate and organise within the community and assist those organisations that are looking at the issue of problem gambling. The Labor government is not frightened of robust and fierce debate. We need to have that sort of debate if we are going to come up with solutions to problems such as problem gambling, particularly in relation to electronic gaming machines and the losses for those using them.

In relation to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, I know there has been talk today in the chamber about the fact that a number of members serve on the board of that foundation. I know, for example, that the member for Bendigo West is a member of the board and she takes this issue very seriously. She has done a lot of work and is very committed to doing what she can to reduce the harm caused by problem gambling.

Another good and practical amendment made by this bill is to provide that the board of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation should have the power to appoint its CEO. The CEO of any organisation must, or should, work closely with the board. It is very important that the views held and the methods of operating align between the board and CEO. It is very much in line with good governance and good practice that the board of any organisation appoints its own CEO so that the views of the board are respected. That has not been the case. Previously the CEO has been appointed by the Governor in Council, but this bill will allow that in future, following the expiration of the current period of office, the CEO will be elected by the board of the foundation.

As I do not have time to speak on all the amendments made by the bill, I quickly raise the amendments about training. Stakeholders and organisations involved in problem gambling have expressed concerns about the training received by those who provide services within gambling venues, how they interact with people and support responsible gambling and are able to understand and assess those who may have a problem and help or assist them wherever they can. Amendments to the Gambling Regulation Act provide more control and oversight of the training that those working in the industry receive so that they can be up to date with the best possible research in order to support those who may have a problem as well as ensure that they encourage responsible gambling. I support the passage of the bill and commend it to the house.

Mr STAIKOS (Bentleigh) — It is a pleasure to rise to speak on the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. I want to make some brief remarks on the amendments before focusing my remarks on the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. The bill amends three acts. It amends the Casino Control Act 1991 to clarify the operation of the interstate exclusion order provisions. The bill also makes a number of amendments to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011, including the empowering of the board of the foundation to be responsible for appointing and dismissing the CEO. The bill also allows the foundation to charge fees for services subject to the approval of the minister.

The most significant reform of the bill relates to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Act 2011, in particular implementing that vital election commitment to give the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation an advocacy and policy role. The second-reading speech relating to the establishment of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation excluded an advocacy and policy role for the foundation. The changes made by this bill allow the foundation to expand from a mere service delivery and awareness body to being able to promote policy shifts and advocate for reform. In essence it gives the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation more clout when it comes to addressing gambling-related harm. The foundation will have a dedicated role in and responsibility for making recommendations to the government in the interests of the community.

I am somewhat familiar with the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation because it has a very strong partnership with football clubs right around our state. It is no surprise that the foundation has such a partnership, because football clubs bring with them transformational power when it comes to putting forward a vital public health message. It is important to note that gambling is a legitimate recreational activity, but it can have catastrophic consequences. As members of Parliament we should promote responsible gambling, and this bill goes some way to doing that.

In terms of the partnership with football clubs, La Trobe University recently conducted some research which made a number of findings. Some of those include: football clubs provide an environment where people are more socially connected at every age group, compared to other Victorians; football clubs are three times more useful for developing social networks than work, education or other community group networks; football clubs are important and effective vehicles for delivering health and safety campaign messages for young people; and a football club's reach is significant

and extends beyond the players, coaches, administrators and volunteers within the club — for every one player, football clubs reach 10 people in the community.

This is where the foundation's Gambling's Not a Game program is very important. It works specifically with our footy clubs to push a very strong responsible gambling message. A number of clubs around the state, at every level of football, have signed the foundation's responsible gambling charter, which commits clubs, among other things, to not promote gambling activities, to promote information and Gambler's Help services, and to deter anyone under 18 from gambling.

This is all very important, because technological change over the years has meant that the nature of gambling has shifted significantly. It is no longer just the pokies at the local pub, club or RSL. It is now an app on the phone which allows you to look at odds, including for a footy match. You cannot watch sport on TV now without seeing the odds totally in your face. It is about separating gambling from the love of the game. That is what it is all about. It is often said that Victorians love a bet, but I think what is even more true is that Victorians love their sport — and we should not be confusing the two.

I am very proud to have a strong relationship with all the football clubs in my electorate. I am a sponsor of many of them. I also have the pleasure of being the patron of the Southern Football Netball League's division 3 competition. I am very proud of the work that the people in the Southern Football Netball League (SNFL) have done in partnership with the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. An article in *Inside Gambling* began with the paragraph:

With gambling advertising going through the roof, and social media and apps making sports betting more attractive and accessible, many young people today consider gambling a normal part of enjoying the game.

It is the SFNL under the leadership of its CEO, David Cannizzo, that is leading the way in promoting responsible gambling among its clubs. David Cannizzo is quoted in the article as saying:

I personally believe there's an unhealthy focus on gambling in sport ... It has increased significantly in the last few years.

...

Signing the charter is our pledge to remain free of the advertising that links gambling and sport, so our players and members can focus on their love of the game ...

Around 150 clubs are currently participating in the Gambling's Not a Game program and they have signed the responsible gambling charter. Of the SFNL's

31 clubs, 18 have signed the charter, which is something they should be very proud of.

Earlier this year, in August, in conjunction with AFL Victoria, the Bentleigh Football Netball Club hosted the first Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation Match of the Month.

Ms Thomson interjected.

Mr STAIKOS — It was against Chelsea Heights. Bentleigh won by 36 points. I was there with them, and I was there for the launch.

Ms Thomson interjected.

Mr STAIKOS — No, I did not bet on it. There is no doubt that AFL Victoria is playing a strong role with the foundation in promoting responsible gambling. AFL Victoria has an enormous capacity to do that because it is comprised of 89 leagues and 1100 clubs in this state.

We do not want to mix sport with gambling, but our sporting clubs are a real part of the solution. Therefore it is entirely appropriate that the foundation should have more clout and more teeth and that it should be given an advocacy and policy role in legislation. I note that the foundation strongly supports this, as would be expected. The foundation chair, Professor Bruce Singh, said:

I congratulate the Andrews government, in particular minister for gaming and liquor regulation Jane Garrett on fulfilling a key election commitment aimed at boosting the role of the foundation.

...

A critical aspect to addressing gambling harm, absent since the foundation's inception, has been the ability to play a role in policy and advocacy.

Advising the minister on policy matters and advocating on behalf of the wider community is essential to delivering a broad, integrated public health response to gambling harm.

Earlier I listened to some of the contribution to the debate from the member for Caulfield, who was talking about a funding cut. The truth is the Andrews government allocated \$150 million over four years for responsible gambling initiatives in this last budget. I do note, however, that the former government defunded the Problem Gambling Research and Treatment Centre, ending any state-funded problem gambling advocacy in Victoria.

As I said at the beginning of my remarks, some Victorians appreciate a bet; however, this is about

promoting responsible gambling. I commend the bill to the house and wish it a speedy passage.

Ms WARD (Eltham) — As previous members have today, I rise in support of these amendments. This is another step in Labor's journey towards delivering on its election commitments and coming good with the promises it made to the people of Victoria, promises it is working very hard, very skilfully and very thoughtfully to implement.

It was great to hear the member for Essendon talking earlier about a very colourful Victorian identity, John Wren, and the interesting gambling and gaming history our state has had. As we know, John Wren was immortalised as John West in Frank Hardy's *Power Without Glory*. Another book currently on our schools reading list is *Runner* by Robert Newton, who talks about Squizzy Taylor, another colourful Melbourne identity who has also contributed some interesting stories to our state's and our city's history. He was, just like John Wren, quite involved in gaming and gambling. Robert Newton paints a picture of Richmond where:

For the residents of Richmond, only one person came to mind whenever Goodwood Street was mentioned. That person was Henry Stokes. Stokes was a self-proclaimed Good Samaritan ...

The truth?

Stokes was an SP bookmaker and sly grogger who'd done so well at his trade that he'd managed to build up a small fortune. As part of his tireless charity work, he ran Melbourne's biggest two-up school ...

Robert Newton talks quite a bit about Squizzy Taylor in this book, and he sets up a story which I think is a great indicator of the character of someone like Squizzy. Squizzy sets up a race between four boys who have to race to the Orient Hotel to deliver an egg undamaged, and Squizzy of course takes everyone's bets across these four boys. He is the only one who bets on the kid wearing the red sash. Why does he bet on the kid wearing the red sash? Because he is the kid with the hard-boiled egg that Squizzy Taylor has set up for him. Squizzy, of course, made a fair bit of money on that race.

These are good indications of why it is so important that we regulate and professionalise the gaming industry. We really need to make sure we have an industry that is properly regulated and that is not overrun with colourful characters such as Squizzy Taylor and John Wren who, as I said earlier, added a fair bit to our history but who also added a fair bit of misery to people's day-to-day lives as they got sucked

in to a number of the games and horrible activities those two men engaged in.

It is great we are continuing to push forward as a party and as a government in trying to professionalise this industry and to make it as accountable and professional as possible. Policies can always be refined and improved, and Labor absolutely understands this and continues to work to do just that across the whole policy spectrum. This is just one part of that. In the Victorian Labor Party's platform of last year, Labor said it understood:

... the insidious nature of problem gambling and that programs and policies must be targeted towards the minority of people who develop addictive and destructive behaviours.

This is exactly what we are speaking to today. We are speaking to that commitment that this party made last year to the Victorian people — that we want to do something and that we want to continue to move forward and continue to help people who need help. As has been said earlier in this place, people who have an addiction do not represent a huge percentage of gamblers or people who participate in gaming activities. There are people who have an addiction, however, and it is our responsibility as a sensible and conscious government to put in place steps to help people who are experiencing that addiction and to help counter addiction as well.

We have put forward a number of changes in this bill, and in my contribution to the debate today I will focus on just a few. One of the ones I was most interested in was improving the skills of workers in venues. I think that is especially important. It expresses a key theme that underlies many of the things we do as a Labor government — that is, we are ensuring we have a skilled, professionally trained workforce across the board. No matter what your occupation or profession, we want to make sure you can be the most skilled and the best you can be. In professions within the gaming industry it is especially important that people are aware of the variety and sometimes intricacy of the laws that exist around gaming, that they understand what the regulations are and that they understand how to interact, manage and work with the huge variety of customers that come through the doors of venues day after day.

Currently we have courses that are approved for five years. Things can change so quickly within a five-year period. As we have seen just last year, governments can change just like that, and this year we have seen that prime ministers can change just like that too, so imagine how quickly things can happen in the gaming industry. In changing that aspect we are certainly encouraging the industry to be adaptive to new

community norms and expectations, to adjust to things as they change and to make sure that the members of its workforce fully understand not only what they have to do but their responsibilities. The gaming industry has huge responsibilities, and it is important that people who work in the industry not only understand them but know how to work in a very professional way.

There is also an issue with training quality, which varies across providers. This goes back again to what I was saying about this government's narrative about ensuring that we have good training practices in place across the board. That is why the Minister for Training and Skills has been working so incredibly hard to get our TAFEs up and running and to have as professionally developed and skilled a workforce as we can.

That is exactly what these amendments will do. They will professionalise this industry and the training people get to make it more coherent and uniform across the board. The Victorian Auditor-General has also made recommendations that we improve courses and have uniformity. I am glad that again the government has proved that not only is it being responsive to the needs of our community but it is taking on board advice. We are taking on board comments and input from people who have spent quite a bit of time investigating things, and we are responding to them, acting and implementing many of the recommendations made. We are not ignoring people; we are listening. This is a hallmark of government; it is what a good government does. It listens and responds. I will use a phrase from a Bracks government election platform: 'We listen and we act'.

Clause 9 creates a power to make regulations that set out who can provide the training, the content of the training and the period for which persons or categories of persons must undertake the training. This is a really good move, and I am glad we are making it. The minister needs to be commended for the work she has done on the bill and for the approvals she has received from many in the sector as well as in the community.

The minister has said that we are looking for a decrease in problem gambling and for people to feel they are in control of their gambling. That is exactly what happens when we have voluntary precommitment, which is something the government is also working towards. It gives people the option of recognising that they may need just a little more control in how they gamble. Signing up to voluntary precommitment gives them a little bit of a trigger. It is a bit like setting an alarm on the phone in your pocket that says, 'Time to stop. You need to stop here'. Giving people that extra tool to help

them control their gambling is a very good thing, and we need to do it.

As the member for Bentleigh said, the amount of advertising we receive from the gambling industry means we need to put things in place to help people to respond responsibly to it. When I was watching the Brownlow a couple of weeks ago and looking on my Twitter feed to see what people were saying, which was often quite funny, the number of ads on my #Brownlow2015 Twitter feed was just astonishing. They were coming in — bang, bang. It was way too much. When you have things going on, when games are on TV and when things are coming up on all of your social media feeds around gambling, you need to reform and refine your responses to gambling and gaming.

As the Greens are saying, it is too easy to cancel everything out and make it incredibly hard for people to gamble. That is when we go back to John Wren and Squizzy Taylor. That is when we go back to the terrible poverty, violence and anger that people experienced during those times. We need to be mature about this, and we need to be responsive to what our community wants. Our community wants to bet on stuff; that is what we do in Victoria. Victorians love to bet. We have a public holiday for a horse race. That is why it is great that the government is stepping in and regulating where it is needed. I commend the bill to the house.

Ms THOMSON (Footscray) — I rise to support the Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2015. Let me get it on the record straightaway that I am not what you would call a gambler. I am lucky if I bet on the Melbourne Cup once a year. I have been known to buy Tattsлото tickets with friends maybe once every 10 years, so I am not the person for whom this legislation is intended. I am not the person who can tell you about what drives people to gamble; I do not have a clue. I went to Las Vegas as a 20-year-old with a group of friends and set myself the humungous limit of US\$10, and once I had lost it I stopped and watched the entertainment that was going on around me in the Las Vegas gambling establishment, which was very entertaining.

This legislation is important because gambling is always going to occur. We could put our heads in the sand, as the member for Eltham indicated, and pretend that we could do away with gambling. We could make it all illegal. We will not have poker machines or gambling on the internet — good luck with that! — and we will not have gambling on horse races, greyhound races, football, cricket or whatever else people might gamble on. But the reality is that people make bets. It is

in our vocabulary — ‘I bet you I have 8 minutes and 4 seconds left to speak’. We like to wager, maybe without money, and therefore we need to regulate it properly.

We know there is a proportion of our community for whom gambling is addictive. They lose expecting that the next time they will win, and then they lose more. The next thing you know you see families being torn apart and people who had good jobs with good incomes losing those jobs, ending up bankrupt or, in a worst-case scenario, landing in jail. There is so much dysfunction that comes with problem gambling at its worst, and we need to regulate it to try to provide support for those people so they do not become victims of their habit. That is what it is — a habit. It is addictive, and it is a habit. Just as with drugs, cigarettes and alcohol, gambling is an addictive drug, and we need to deal with it.

This legislation goes some way towards correcting what were anomalies in the original legislation in 2011, which did not recognise the role that government and government agencies need to play in research and advocacy around problem gambling. That is why I am glad to see the legislation before us today, which will allow the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation to undertake work in policy and advocacy. That is crucial, because the more we know and understand how we limit problem gambling in our communities, the better off we will be.

The member for St Albans talked about Brimbank. My electorate takes in part of the City of Brimbank and part of the City of Maribyrnong. Both areas have high dependency and problem gambling issues, and both are trying to tackle those issues as best they can. We know gaming venues are places to go to forget your troubles. That is what it is about. We say, ‘Let’s go somewhere where we can forget what is outside that room. We can concentrate on having a little bit of fun. We don’t have to think about things that are outside, whether our lives are worthwhile, whether our children are safe and happy, or whether we have responsible jobs’. You do not have to worry about any of that. You do not have to worry about any of your responsibilities. You can go there and lose yourself. We need to make sure that those people have the mechanisms at their disposal to control how much they spend and when they spend it and that they are able to get out of the place with some money in their pockets.

I will tell a story that someone told me when I was small business minister. I went on a street walk, as I used to do, to visit shops and small businesses. I went to a fish and chip shop, and I asked the proprietor how

business was, which was always my starting line. He said, ‘We’ve had to change our policy about ordering’. I said, ‘Why?’. He said, ‘Because people used to come in and order their fish and chips. They would go to pick up some milk or whatever they were doing, and they would come back, get their fish and chips and pay for them. Now a gaming venue has opened down the road. People come and order their fish and chips, but they do not come back and pay for them because they have lost their money’. The business changed its policy so that people pay straightaway when they order their fish and chips. If they do not come back for their fish and chips, the proprietor does not mind. But he said, ‘We’ve noticed the difference’.

We need to make sure we give people the ability to shut down that addiction so they are able to get out of that situation — that is crucially important. That is why it is so important we fund the Problem Gambling Research and Treatment Centre to enable it to work out what the triggers are — the very work we need and can utilise to help these people get out of their habit and addiction.

The other thing I want to do is compliment the Western Bulldogs Football Club and a number of other clubs that have taken it upon themselves to sign up to the responsible gambling charter organised by the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. The Western Bulldogs, in the heartland of my electorate of Footscray, is a great club, doing great things in the community. I am very proud of its attitude to social responsibility and of giving back to the community — —

Ms Hennessy — Almost getting there!

Ms THOMSON — And almost getting there. I put on the record my congratulations to the Bulldogs for a very good season. They finished earlier than they had expected. The Bulldogs signed the charter, with the Essendon Football Club and the St Kilda Football Club.

An honourable member — Go Bombers!

Ms THOMSON — Yes, go Bombers as well. Understanding that you rely on gaming to bring in income but that you also have a responsibility to those who might get addicted to it and whom it may damage is a great recognition by football clubs — that they do have that additional responsibility. It is not just about raking in the money, and certainly that is not where the Western Bulldogs come from.

Under that charter, the Western Bulldogs, and all those football clubs, have committed to:

Refraining from making sponsorship deals with sports betting agencies.

Keeping gambling away from areas young people are present, including club, social and fundraising activities.

Not providing gambling inducements for awards and prizes and to promote responsible gambling to players, members and visitors.

It will also:

Commit to engaging with the Gambler's Help venue support program and help services.

In conclusion, the only other thing I would like to talk about is the bill's responsible gambling provisions and the training of staff, because the bill is not just about regulation. We are making those changes in the bill to recognise the way in which we are going to change those training packages. It is not just about knowing the regulation. It is about being able to identify who you can help and how you can help people who need help. That skill is going to take a while to learn. Just as staff have to know how to responsibly serve alcohol and know when to turn the tap off on someone, they have to be able to responsibly determine when they need to turn the tap off on someone who gambles, to guide them to a point where they may be able to make those decisions for themselves.

This bill is a great step along the way to ensuring that we are assisting problem gamblers. It is great to see that the Andrews government — a Labor government I am so proud of — is meeting its commitments to the electorate to tackle problem gambling, and I look forward to the outcomes of the work that the foundation will do.

Debate adjourned on motion of Ms HENNESSY (Minister for Health).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES AMENDMENT (ABORIGINAL PRINCIPAL OFFICERS) BILL 2015

Second reading

Debate resumed from 16 September; motion of Ms HUTCHINS (Minister for Aboriginal Affairs).

Ms VICTORIA (Bayswater) — It gives me pleasure to rise to speak on the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Aboriginal Principal Officers) Bill 2015. From the outset I put on the record that the opposition supports this piece of legislation before the house. The bill seeks to address some practical

limitations within the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, and it is going to allow for a much smoother application of child protection orders relating to Aboriginal children.

I will go through the bill in more detail in a moment, but as an overview the bill provides a definition of the term 'principal officer' within the agencies, which effectively means a CEO or equivalent of an agency. It allows the principal officer, who must be an Aboriginal person, to delegate their responsibilities to a non-Aboriginal person who is acting in that role if they happen to be away or not available. The bill allows for information to be shared between the secretary of the department and also that principal officer. Previously that was prohibited, so, again, it allows for that facilitation to happen. Also, a new part of the bill prohibits disclosure of information provided by the secretary to the agency or the principal officer of that agency to any other person unless it is for the express purpose of being able to, obviously, assist in an authorisation to do with the child, and that will now attract a penalty of up to 10 penalty units.

As I said, the opposition is very pleased to support this bill because it believes these initiatives will help in outcomes for children. If we are talking about outcomes, it is interesting to note that the bill concerns work done by Mary Wooldridge, a member for Eastern Metropolitan Region in another place, who at that stage was a minister in this house. According to the findings of the Cummins review a lot of initiatives were undertaken by the former coalition government. As a minister, Mary Wooldridge introduced a lot of initiatives, including this one, but I also want to place on the record my thanks and support for the work done by the member for Box Hill, who was then the Attorney-General, and the former member for Shepparton, Jeanette Powell, in her capacity as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. Jeanette did an awful lot in this space, including establishing the Victorian Indigenous Honour Roll, and obviously we supported initiatives in the arts portfolio, including the growth of the Victorian Indigenous Art Awards.

The member for Gippsland East took over as the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs when Jeanette Powell retired. He introduced great initiatives, including for example, moving the Koorie Heritage Trust from its former King Street home, where almost nobody found it, to Federation Square, where it has proudly opened. A lot of the initiatives of the coalition government have made a real and practical difference to the Aboriginal community.

In May 2014 Mary Wooldridge originally introduced a very similar piece of legislation to this. The legislation did not get up and ended up lapsing, but its introduction was certainly very timely because one of the pilot projects to do with section 18 — which I will get onto in a moment — could only have been implemented after that legislation was introduced. In terms of timing it was important to understand that that had to be introduced here. Obviously she worked tirelessly in the area of child protection not only for Indigenous children but for all children, and she made great headway. It is one of those portfolio areas that is always going to be difficult. It is always going to be a heated and sensitive area, so I commend the work she did.

When we were in government we further strengthened our commitment to Aboriginal families by introducing what was known as the Victorian Aboriginal affairs framework to span the years 2013 to 2018. Again that was introduced by the former Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Jeanette Powell, and the member for Gippsland East continued her work when he took over as minister. The framework was constructed to adopt the key outcomes of the Closing the Gap initiative in order to create a national approach, and obviously the Council of Australian Governments was involved in that. Everyone decided that it needed to happen. It was one of those things that Victoria took a lead in.

Specific indicators and targets focused on within that framework included commitments to things like education and health care and economic outcomes for Indigenous Australians. Again we made progress in those areas. A major priority for improved effort and reform was around protecting and supporting vulnerable children in the Indigenous community, not only the littlies but the growing youth, if you like. It is interesting to note that the number of Indigenous Victorian children involved in out-of-home care is approximately nine times that of non-Indigenous Victorians, which is significant. It needed to be addressed, and that is another reason why we support this bill — because we know that it will help in the outcomes. It is a slow road, but it needs to be started somewhere.

Some of the key actions taken by the coalition when we were in government saw the development of a five-year plan for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care — I was very proud when that was implemented — and the increased use of Aboriginal family decision-making conferences to make sure a whole-of-community approach was taken rather than decisions being made by somebody sitting in an office, which we know has not worked in the past. We increased the capacity of the Aboriginal permanent care program and increased

funding for Aboriginal-specific services to provide support for young people transitioning from state care. I am always pleased when people are transitioning out of state care.

We had a commitment to appoint a commissioner for children and young people. It was the first time that had been done, and it was incredibly important. Obviously Bernie Geary has done a great job as commissioner. Even more importantly, we asked that there be a dedicated commissioner responsible for vulnerable Aboriginal children and young people, and again that was implemented. We have a good record in this area, and I am glad that most initiatives taken in this portfolio are bipartisan. We all understand that there needs to be progress made, and as I said, it is slow, but it is there.

Our government proudly introduced the commissioner, and I want to acknowledge the amazing job he has done for all children who are at that very vulnerable end of the spectrum. I also acknowledge Andrew Jackomos for his work as the first ever commissioner for Aboriginal children and young people. As shadow minister this is something that is close to my heart. I am very passionate about the Aboriginal community and the statistics that I see around outcomes, whether it be in health, whether it be in incarceration, whether it be in substance dependence or whether it be in abuse, and trying to make sure that those outcomes improve. That is where Closing the Gap came in, and it is something that I commit to furthering.

I will just go back to the establishment of the commission because I think it was really instrumental in what is going on here today. The aim of the commission was of course to make that big difference in those young lives. In his first report Mr Geary said:

I congratulate the —

now former —

Victorian government on being courageous and having the drive to create a commission that is truly independent and able to carry the voice of children to government, service providers and to the broader community.

Of course that required money. We gave a lot of money and commitment to our action plan. For instance, if we take something like Aboriginal health, in 2013 we committed to a nearly \$62 million investment over four years in Aboriginal health, which was the largest amount ever invested. We also provided over \$6.5 million in the 2013–14 budget to strengthen Aboriginal cultural heritage protection and also to deliver services to support the stolen generation — a blight on our history books, but the more we acknowledge what has happened, address it and learn

from it, the more we can be sure that that will not happen again. Again, the bill is a very positive move forward because it means that there is community involvement rather than somebody sitting in an office dictating what the policy will be.

A lot of progress has been made in this area in Victoria. There are more Aboriginal children accessing kindergarten than ever before, more Aboriginal children are being retained in the school system for a longer period of time and Aboriginal student performance in the national assessment program — literacy and numeracy

has been improving also, which is very pleasing. Furthermore, more Aboriginal Victorians are accessing preventive as well as tertiary health services, which means they have confidence in the system and what is being offered to them, and they are finding it approachable. Much of that is being delivered through Aboriginal health organisations and community organisations, and having visited some of those I am terribly impressed with the work they do in terms of their engagement, their sensitivity and the holistic approach they take.

In the 2011 census more than 47 000 people in Victoria identified themselves as being either Aboriginal or a Torres Strait Islander. That was a very big jump from the previous census, and those in the know seem to think that that is because they are understanding that there are now more reasons for identifying with their cultural heritage and background as the services improve and they can receive benefit in a positive way. The previous government was very strong in its commitment to the Aboriginal community, and again I am pleased that this work is continuing. We also gave the pledge to deliver an annual Aboriginal affairs report, and I am certainly looking forward to receiving one from this government. I have not seen it yet, but I am looking forward to seeing it.

The bill is another significant amendment that was envisaged by the coalition government and introduced by the former Minister for Community Services, Ms Wooldridge, last year. The aim is for better outcomes; it is as simple as that. We want better outcomes for the most vulnerable children who, through no fault of their own, are in statutory care. Obviously children are the ones who are not only the most vulnerable but the most impressionable, and if we treat them with respect and sensitivity, that will be reflected later in their lives. As I mentioned before in connection with over-representation, Aboriginal children make up about 1.2 per cent of all children in Victoria but they comprise about 16 per cent of children

who are on care orders or in child protection, so they are highly over-represented. This statistic needs to be addressed, and I think this bill will help.

One of the major recommendations from the Cummins inquiry, which was instigated, as I said previously, by former Minister Wooldridge and on which she did such a great job, was that there be increased self-determination. That will certainly happen as a result of this bill. One of the things we need to focus on is not only self-management and involvement with Aboriginal agencies and organisations but also a commitment to giving these children the opportunity to continue their connection with their cultural heritage and their family — all the things we know are incredibly important to them.

One of the organisations with which we consulted was the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, or VACCA, which expressed great delight at the bill. VACCA said there were things they would like to progress even further, but as it stands that organisation feels that what is before the house is a good thing and therefore it supports the bill. I wish to quote some of the issues covered by the CEO of VACCA, Muriel Bamblett, because her reasoning is important. Muriel said the bill will:

... address some practical matters that will allow for the smoother application of the Aboriginal guardianship measures.

She also said that VACCA had recently completed a section 18 pilot project — and that is what I was alluding to before — and that was one of the really important things time wise, with the former minister introducing the bill and then allowing for this to be assessed. The findings of that assessment have not been made yet, but anecdotally VACCA and other agencies are telling me that there has been marked success. Whether or not it was the cohort of children they were working with is uncertain, and until we have further trials or introduce the system that will not be known.

VACCA recently completed a section 18 pilot project, which I will call the project, which has operated since October 2013 and which was to prepare for this legislation and for the full implementation of section 18. Muriel said that the project:

... has shown to have improved outcomes for Aboriginal children and facilitated Aboriginal children leaving care and returning to their families.

There is nothing that could be more important or make me happier, if all steps are taken to ensure that the family environment is the right place to be. She also said that the project:

... will provide unique input into the forthcoming review of services for Aboriginal children.

As I said before, I am not sure whether the formal review has happened yet or not because we have not seen a report on it, but I am sure it will be released in due course, and I look forward to reading up about it.

The trial consisted of working with 13 Aboriginal children of varying ages who had been in out-of-home care for a long time. Ten of those children in out-of-home care had been in that care for more than eight years — an appalling number — and four of the children placed in out-of-home care had been there since they were six months old. In other words, they had only ever known out-of-home care. Of these children, 46 per cent — a significant number — ‘went home’ from residential or foster care to their parents or to another family member as a result of these new initiatives that Minister Wooldridge at the time implemented, and that was despite being in out-of-home care for such a long period. That is a really good, positive outcome. We look forward to seeing what the statistics are like when this is implemented over a longer period, and I can only hope that the figures remain as high, if not higher.

One of the things that seems to have contributed to that rather high number is the fact that VACCA staff had lower caseloads than those in child protection, so they could spend more time, do more follow-ups, make more phone calls and be more engaged with the families as well as the children. Whether or not that will happen when it is across the broader community I do not know, but a trial is about to start in rural Victoria and it will be interesting to see the comparison and whether they have the staff to pull those sorts of numbers, such as 46 per cent. Again, we watch with great interest.

VACCA’s submission to me mentions a November 2013 report entitled *Koori Kids — Growing Strong in Their Culture*, which states:

DHS areas with well-established Aboriginal community-controlled organisations are characterised by falling rates of Aboriginal children entering out-of-home care.

So we know it is not just a decision that is made here and now; it is also the backup that goes with it — but that makes sense.

One of the things that they are doing with these children — and a lot of the agencies like the Australian Curriculum Assessment Reporting Authority are doing it — is trying to instil in them a sense of culture and heritage. I was privileged to be able to launch the possum skin cloak exhibition, which was on at the

Melbourne Museum when I was Minister for the Arts. It was really heartening to see some of these children who were not necessarily disconnected but who had not been as connected or as informed about their cultural past as possible when they became involved in the making of these very traditional cloaks and learning about the incisions that decorate the inside of the cloak, on the skin side rather than the fur side.

What they learnt about the type of symbolism the designs depicted was fantastic, and then they sat with the elders and learnt about what the symbols meant and learnt about their dreamtime, their culture and their stories. It really made a difference to these children, and I found from talking with staff on the day that they were thrilled at the outcome. They were looking at different modalities of how they would engage these children.

If we have a quick look back to section 18 of the principal act and consider the Aboriginal guardianship provisions, we see that they are based on the principle of the right of Aboriginal people — and I talked about this earlier — to self-determination. I think that is why the outcomes are starting to show. The Aboriginal community of Victoria consistently reaffirms its right to self-determination and its Indigenous rights as outlined in the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the United Nations General Assembly, so we are heading in the right direction.

Let us talk a little about some of the provisions contained in the bill that will allow Aboriginal organisations to progress child protection orders for the most vulnerable of Aboriginal children without delay and hindrance, and that is the idea of not only specifying who the principal is within an agency but also the fact that they can then delegate their powers. If the person the powers are delegated to, for example, is the CEO of the organisation or whomever it might be and they have gone on annual leave, the only thing that the incoming person — the delegate, if you like — cannot delegate is their delegation power. They can delegate almost anything else, including who is to work with the children and who is to help make those decisions.

There are four main new sections that will allow for greater application and efficiency for the principal officers of Aboriginal agencies when dealing with protection orders. New section 18A allows the person acting as the principal officer to perform the functions and exercise the powers specified in an authorisation under section 18 as if the person were the principal officer, and coming back to their delegation, even if the person acting as the principal officer — and this is a

new thing and really important — is not an Aboriginal person. The heads of agencies are always Aboriginal people, but the person the power is delegated to does not necessarily have to be an Aboriginal person. They obviously have to have the best interests of the children at heart.

New section 18B allows the delegation of functions and powers except that of the delegation itself. New section 18C allows the secretary to share with the principal officer information that would have been otherwise prohibited from being disclosed. New section 18D, which is really important, prohibits disclosure of information provided by the secretary to any other person except a person employed by the agency. This is about respecting the child's rights and also their privacy. There is a maximum penalty of 10 penalty units if they breach that provision.

Overall, to me, the amendment in this bill is about balancing the rights of children. It is maintaining that balance between overcoming practical barriers, including disruption to process, which has obviously happened when agency heads have not been present in the past. It also helps maintain that balance by providing Aboriginal people with the self-determination they obviously want and deserve, and also by protecting the best interests of the children, and that is no. 1, so it is very important.

It is never an easy decision to remove a child from their home, if you like from their family, but it is particularly important with Aboriginal children. It is a blight on our history which we cannot sweep it under the carpet anymore that the past actions of government and also non-government agencies have negatively impacted Aboriginal families and their children. That has resulted in continuing experiences of trauma for so many within the Aboriginal community, and we certainly do not ever want to see that happen again. Any policies that support self-management and self-determination offer hope for healing for the Aboriginal community, and that is one of the reasons we say this is a good step forward. It is also hoped that there is strong emphasis placed on the connection for children with their family, their culture and their heritage, and allowing agencies to be able to do this in a far more expedient way will have a good impact on that aspect.

One thing I note, and this harks back to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings when we asked a question about the Aboriginal kinship program, is that the funding allocation is through the Department of Health and Human Services rather than the Office of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, and we still cannot quite work out where that funding is. Perhaps one of the

members of the government, one of the ministers, would like to inform us about that. It is certainly something that I have been looking for an answer to for nigh on six months. The government has to be vigilant to uphold and maintain the process we, as the former government, achieved in implementing the recommendations of the Cummins inquiry. The bill before the house has stepped in that right direction, so I am very pleased.

In addition, specific attention needs to be given to incorporating and maintaining the Aboriginal child placement principle. That is really important for children in protective care, and I also want to stress that there need to be regular reviews. As I said, the section 18 trial has taken place and a review has been or is being conducted, but we need to see the results of those reviews. We need to make sure that the processes are in place, the procedures are adequate and that if they need tweaking, that that gets done.

As I said, I very much look forward to seeing that. I very much look forward to seeing the Victorian government Aboriginal affairs report, which I am sure will be made available fairly soon, and I look forward to seeing where the funding is for the program I spoke about in PAEC. However, I am pleased about the fact that this is going to achieve further positive results for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.

One thing I want to stress is that this requires a whole-of-government approach. This cannot be a silo approach. It cannot be thought of as just a child protection issue or as just an Aboriginal affairs silo in its own right. It needs to be a whole-of-government response, whether it be in health, whether it be in education or whether it be in the arts. All of these must be included to achieve a positive outcome.

This is something we need to do over the long term. It is a long-term commitment that must be bipartisan and have the support of all parties, regardless of which side of politics members are from. It also needs to have the commitment of both government and non-government agencies and, even more importantly, the wider community. Having said that, this is a good step forward for our most vulnerable Aboriginal children, and the coalition will be supporting this piece of legislation before the house.

Ms THOMAS (Macedon) — It is my privilege to rise to contribute to debate on the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Aboriginal Principal Officers) Bill 2015. I will firstly take a moment to welcome the opposition's support for this bill. It is indeed a very important bill.

I also take a moment to acknowledge in the gallery Adjunct Professor Muriel Bamblett, AM, a tireless campaigner for and on behalf of Victorian Aboriginal children, and note that Muriel was awarded her AM in 2004 for her services to her community, particularly through leadership in the provision of services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. It is people like Muriel who will continue to play a very important role in keeping governments like ours honest. Thank you, Muriel.

Before I speak about the bill, I take issue with a couple of points raised by the previous speaker. While I note that the opposition is supporting the bill, I think it is worthwhile to point out to members that the former government had ample opportunity to take action on this issue but failed to do so. If we look at the response of the previous government to the *Report of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry*, which was handed down in February 2012, we see it recommended that a major system reform goal should be:

A plan for practical self-determination for guardianship and Aboriginal children in out-of-home care and culturally competent service delivery.

Despite this being a key recommendation of the *Report of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry*, it took the coalition government two years to bring legislation into the Parliament on this issue. The fact that the previous government then failed to progress this legislation through the Parliament and instead let it lapse on the notice paper at the last election is symptomatic of the dysfunction and chaos that we became accustomed to under the previous government and, I might say, its warped priorities.

Nothing should be of higher priority than doing all that is in our power to protect Victoria's most vulnerable children, and in this instance we are talking about a bipartisan commitment to self-determination by Aboriginal people in Victoria. The self-determination of Aboriginal people is absolutely critical to improving the outcomes and the health and wellbeing of vulnerable Aboriginal children. This should have been a key priority of the previous government, but unfortunately, as we have learnt, it was allowed to lapse under the previous government because it had other priorities.

I have to say again that despite what we heard from the previous speaker, it is true to say that the coalition government showed no ambition in trying to address the concerning over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in care. It promised to deliver a plan but never acted on that promise.

I am very pleased today to speak on this bill being presented to the house. This is an important and significant bill for a range of reasons. It is significant because it is part of this government's ongoing commitment to Aboriginal self-determination, one that it has demonstrated over the last 10 months through the initiatives already implemented by this government. I might add that the Minister for Families and Children, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and indeed the Premier himself have been very keen to see this government deliver initiatives that will help us reach the aspiration of closing the gap between the health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in this state.

It is also an important bill because it seeks to improve the care of Victoria's most vulnerable children — that is, Aboriginal children in out-of-home care. As I said earlier, nothing could be more important for parliaments such as ours than doing all we can to protect and enhance the life opportunities of our most vulnerable children.

In looking at the bill in some detail and what it seeks to do, the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 includes a provision to allow the secretary to authorise a principal officer of an Aboriginal agency to take on specified powers and functions in relation to an Aboriginal child subject to a protection order made by the Children's Court. The intention of the provision is to empower Aboriginal agencies to have responsibility for the care and protection of Aboriginal children. The bill addresses a number of legislative limitations that would currently prevent implementation of these authorisations.

The amendments are necessary to enable Aboriginal agencies to have responsibility for the care and protection of Aboriginal children subject to protection orders. The current provisions present practical barriers to the authorisation of Aboriginal principal officers and Aboriginal agencies. These limitations will be addressed, firstly, by clarifying the meaning of the term 'principal officer' in the act; allowing the principal officer to delegate to an agency within their agency functions and powers they have been authorised to perform or exercise; allowing for suitable arrangements to maintain decision-making for Aboriginal children subject to section 18 authorisations where a principal officer takes leave or during recruitment of a replacement should they vacate the position; providing for appropriate review of decisions when an authorisation has been made; and enabling appropriate information exchange to support authorisation and the protection of confidentiality in relation to section 18 authorisations.

The bill is consistent with the legislated principle of Aboriginal self-management and self-determination and the recommendations that were made in the 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report — the ‘Stolen Children’ report — and the 2012 *Report of the Protecting Victoria’s Vulnerable Children Inquiry*.

As I said earlier, the Andrews government, through the Minister for Families and Children, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Premier and the cabinet more broadly, is making good progress on its commitment to do all it can to close the gap between the health and wellbeing and life chances of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Victoria. Nowhere is this more important than in supporting Aboriginal children.

To that end, and to conclude my comments, I want to make note that in October 2014 Victorian Aboriginal community-controlled organisations prepared a submission with a road map to future approaches for reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.

The submission entitled *Koori Kids — Growing Strong in Their Culture*, called for government to consider eight priorities, the first of which was to establish an Aboriginal children’s forum that would be a decision-making partnership between community, government and the sector. I am very pleased that the Minister for Families and Children announced in June of this year that she would chair a regular Aboriginal children’s forum to shape policies and practices to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care. The minister said at the time that the forum reflects the Labor government’s belief that Aboriginal communities best know the challenges they face and how to provide effective prevention and early intervention. This bill is a very important bill. I am very pleased that the opposition is giving its support to it. It deserves a fast passage through this house. I commend it to the house.

Mr T. BULL (Gippsland East) — It is a pleasure to rise to make a contribution on the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Aboriginal Principal Officers) Bill 2015. As was indicated by the coalition’s lead speaker on this bill, the opposition will be supporting this bill as it addresses limitations within the current legislation.

Like the bill that was introduced last year, this bill has sector support. The sector has a view that this bill will provide practical measures and will assist generally in advancing the rights of Aboriginal people within the state of Victoria. It is a continuation of the work that was undertaken by the previous government. The

Children, Youth and Families Amendment Bill 2014 was introduced into Parliament and second-read by the then minister, Ms Wooldridge.

Many of the areas highlighted in this current bill mirror what was recommended in the 2014 bill. That includes clarification of the meaning of ‘principal officer’ and the measures in the bill to empower the principal officer of an Aboriginal agency to delegate functions, which will allow for improved outcomes, as well as the establishment of appropriate arrangements for sharing information in relation to what are often referred to as ‘section 18 authorisations’. At the very core of this bill is an attempt to support Aboriginal children and families by ensuring that Aboriginal children who are subject to Children’s Court orders remain connected to their community and culture. This is extremely important, and it is something that we have not seen always occur to the extent that we would have liked it to in the past.

The section 18 pilot trial has been mentioned by previous contributors. It was commenced in October 2013, and it was based in metropolitan Melbourne in preparation for the legislation and its full implementation. The trial concluded in June this year, and although we would like to see a little bit more detail, commentary suggests that the trial had good outcomes: it showed improved outcomes for Aboriginal children, and it facilitated Aboriginal children leaving care being able to return to their families. It also provided unique input into the forthcoming review of services for Aboriginal children.

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency provided feedback on this bill, as the lead speaker for the coalition quite rightly indicated. The agency believes the bill provides practical measures to ensure what should be a smoother transition and application of the Aboriginal guardianship program.

The main provisions of this amendment bill allow for the person acting as a principal officer to perform the functions and exercise the powers specified under authorisation in section 18 of the act. That was not previously clear. It provides a definition of the ‘principal officer’, which effectively means either the CEO of an organisation or their equivalent. It allows for the principal officer to delegate their authorised functions and powers to suitable employees of the Aboriginal agency. That flexibility is often required in such instances, and that is a common-sense amendment. It determines that the principal officer must be an Aboriginal person, but it also determines that the person acting as the principal officer is not required to be an Aboriginal person. It allows for

information to be shared between the secretary and the principal officer, which previously would have been prohibited, providing it pertains to the child who is the subject of the authorisation. I think that is a pertinent point. It also prohibits the disclosure of information provided by the secretary to the Aboriginal agency, or the principal officer, to any other person except a person employed by the agency for the purposes of making an informed decision as to whether to agree or disagree with an authorisation.

There are other provisions in this bill, and I will just touch on a couple of those. The bill allows for the review of decisions made by the principal officer of an Aboriginal agency. It requires that the principal officer must prepare and implement procedures for the review and provide a copy to the child and the parents, together with a copy of any case plan that has been required. It determines that the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) can review a decision by the principal officer, or a decision by the Aboriginal agency, on the application of the parent or the child. So where a need to challenge the decision that has been made is identified, we now have a right of appeal.

As the previous speaker touched upon, there is a significant over-representation of Aboriginal children in the Victorian child protection system, and it is one of many areas that has been highlighted in the *Closing the Gap* report that we must continue to work on. In my time as minister I tabled one of the *Closing the Gap* reports. They highlight areas where significant gains have been made, but they also highlight areas where gains are falling short, and areas where in fact there are no gains. That clearly indicates to government that either the policy in place is not working or that it needs to be tweaked and changed, because we are not getting the results we would like to see.

Whilst Aboriginal children and young people make up 1.6 per cent of the Victorian population, they constitute over 16 per cent of children and young people on care and protection orders. This is something we all need to take some ownership of and do something about. It has been very well documented that the outcomes for vulnerable Aboriginal children are generally poorer than for other children in a whole range of areas. As I have said, improvements are being made in certain areas, but we need to fast-track that and perform better over a broader range of areas.

In my community of East Gippsland we have a very proud and very strong Aboriginal community, but we also have a number of challenges facing our Aboriginal youth, so this really hits home in relation to my own patch. It is very important that all of us in this chamber,

regardless of which side we sit on, be involved in creating, establishing and having input into innovative responses to try to address these issues.

Section 18 was included in the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 in the amendments of that year. It was designed to empower Aboriginal agencies to have responsibility for the care and protection of Aboriginal children subject to protection orders. It was a good move, but we have subsequently found that there have been some shortcomings with it. The legislation has caused restrictions in some areas, preventing that work from being carried out to its full capacity. The wording of the section has to be changed because the provision has been found to present a number of impediments regarding section 18 authorisations. There has been a lack of clarity regarding the meaning of the term 'principal officer'. It has not empowered the principal officer or Aboriginal agency to delegate functions and powers to suitable employees of the agency. It has not provided for any review process.

I have mentioned that this bill introduces a review process through VCAT that was not previously available. Moreover, there has been no available review process within an Aboriginal agency for decisions made under a section 18 authorisation. These issues are rectified by this bill, and I am sure everybody in this chamber welcomes these changes. It is certainly a positive step.

The bill provides for internal reviews in the same way that such reviews are available in relation to decisions made within the department. We have not only streamlined the process but we have also done it in line with the avenues of challenge within the departmental structure. Some people would say that an internal review process will often not get the results that are sought, and there is now that avenue through VCAT. This is a very delicate area. When cases arise, they need to be treated as unique and on a case-by-case basis. Whilst we on this side of the house support the bill, the changes will need to be managed with great care and great sensitivity.

Mr BROOKS (Bundoora) — It is a pleasure to be able to join this very important debate on the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Aboriginal Principal Officers) Bill 2015. I have said in this place before that protecting Victoria's vulnerable children and young people is a significant responsibility that falls to government and to all of us in this place. Aboriginal young people and children are clearly disadvantaged and dispossessed in a way that means there is a significant gap in expectations on a whole range of measures between those young people and the rest of

the Victorian community. It is incumbent upon us as members of this place, and as members of government on this side of the house, to ensure that we take the necessary steps to improve outcomes, improve lives and protect vulnerable young people and children, in this case particularly those from an Aboriginal background.

I have talked before about the disadvantage many young Aboriginal people experience. The *Victorian Government Aboriginal Affairs Report 2013*, which is the most recent available, shows that national life expectancy for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians differs by around 10 years, which is a significant deficit for Aboriginal people. Aboriginal smoking rates are higher. Contact with the justice system is more frequent. Recidivism rates are higher. Perinatal mortality rates for Aboriginal babies are higher. There is a significant gap of around 16 per cent in rates of participation in four-year-old kindergarten that still needs need to be closed. While I acknowledge that in many of these areas there has been significant work and improvement, there is a long way to go.

There is a massive difference in the rates of child protection substantiations, with some 7.2 per 1000 for non-Aboriginal children and 67.4 per 1000 for Aboriginal children. In terms of education, results of the national assessment program — literacy and numeracy show a 10 per cent gap in reading ability, a 22 per cent gap in writing and a 17 per cent gap in numeracy. That indicates a real shortfall in opportunities and outcomes for Aboriginal children. This is something we all need to address and take action to improve.

The bill before us flows from the *Report of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry*, which was completed back in January 2012. It was a substantial report by the Honourable Philip Cummins, AO, Emeritus Professor Dorothy Scott, OAM, and Mr Bill Scales, AO. Chapter 12 of the report was dedicated to meeting the needs of Aboriginal children and young people. It set out that the panel considered that more effective outcomes for vulnerable Aboriginal children would be achieved with greater levels of Aboriginal self-determination. It went on to say that while it is recognised there are still a number of important and complex issues that need to be resolved in relation to this provision, making progress in this area is important. A clear strategy is required to establish a transparent process that seeks to delegate the guardianship of Aboriginal children removed from their families to Aboriginal communities.

The value of that chapter to me as a non-Aboriginal person is quite significant, because it gives a very clear explanation of some of the reasons for the level of disadvantage I spoke about before. The lack of trust in some agencies and authorities is understandable, given the events in our history not too long ago when agencies were involved in the removal of children from their natural families. We have to make sure that there are culturally appropriate and culturally sensitive services and agencies that are able to look after Aboriginal children. We have to follow the principle of self-determination, and this bill deals with the reform of section 18 of the principal act that the Cummins report mentioned. The bill makes provisions which allow the principal officers mentioned in section 18 to delegate their specific powers and functions to a person within their agency, and it allows for those powers and functions to be exercised by a person acting as the principal officer, whether that person is Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal.

The bill repeals section 17(1)(e) of the principal act, which at the moment prevents the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services from delegating a function under section 323, and it allows for the exchange of information that you would expect to be exchanged between the secretary and the Aboriginal principal officer and agency for the purposes of those authorisations under section 18 — that is, for the relevant transfer of information that is required for those agencies to do their jobs properly.

It is important for us to keep in perspective the size of the issue and the level of over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people when it comes to children under child protection orders. When you think that just 1.6 per cent of the Victorian population aged between 0 and 17 are Aboriginal, yet 16.3 per cent of children on child protection orders are from Aboriginal families, it goes to the very heart of the reason this bill is before the house. There is a need for us to do better in providing services and in providing the appropriate care for these kids.

It is great that the opposition is supporting this bill. A similar bill came to the house just before the last election. It would have been better, without making a political point, if this had been acted on sooner, but I commend the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs here in Victoria for bringing this legislation into the chamber in the first year of this Parliament. Of course by the very fact of bringing this legislation before the Parliament, she is making a commitment to doing the hard work that is required. There is no doubt that the implementation of these changes around section 18 will require resources and a lot of hard work, and it is great

that by bringing this legislation in the minister has indicated that that hard work will take place.

This bill follows a number of reforms that the government has made an early start on in terms of protecting vulnerable children. We have had the \$43 million allocation for targeted care packages to move kids out of residential care and into home-based care. That had a focus particularly on primary school-aged children living in residential care, and getting them into home-based care. In particular there is a focus on the over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.

A ministerial committee has been established to advise on out-of-home care and reduce the number of children in that form of care, again with a particular focus on Aboriginal children in their primary school years. The Aboriginal children's forum has been established, and the overall allocation for child protection in the last budget was \$257 million — a 17 per cent increase on the previous year. That budget also included \$1.75 million to directly improve supports that are available for vulnerable Aboriginal families. There is a large range of measures that have been taken involving the investment of fairly significant sums of money and changes to legislation where it is required. We certainly need to do further work to improve cultural competency across the whole of government and in particular to focus on building capacity and empowering Aboriginal organisations themselves to assist children and young people from their own communities. It is great to see this legislation come to this place. I commend the bill to the house.

Ms SANDELL (Melbourne) — It is a pleasure to join the debate and affirm that the Greens will be supporting this bill. As has already been said, the bill amends the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 to give practical effect to section 18, which would allow an Aboriginal organisation such as the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) to take over the role of the Department of Health and Human Services in relation to particular Aboriginal children on protection orders. VACCA has indicated that it supports the bill. The Greens are strong advocates for Aboriginal self-determination, and this bill is at least a step towards that complex but critically important goal. For these reasons I am happy to say that the Greens will be voting for it.

As we have heard throughout the debate, Aboriginal children are heavily over-represented in Victoria's child protection system. That is just one of the devastating consequences of the injustices that have been done to Aboriginal people over the last 200-plus years in this

country and a sobering reminder that we need to work harder and do more to try to right some of those terrible wrongs and injustices.

Victoria currently has a higher number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care than at any other time in its history, including during the period of the stolen generations. That is a sobering and terrible fact. The department is failing many of these children who are in out-of-home care on a number of counts. I want to read out some statistics which give evidence to this claim. In 2013, 84 per cent of Aboriginal children in child protection did not have a cultural support plan, 58 per cent of Aboriginal children had not been subject to any attempts to reunify them with their parents and 15 per cent of Aboriginal children in child protection did not even have a current case plan, and that is a basic legislative requirement. It is unbelievable that there are Aboriginal children in our welfare system without even this most basic level of support. And in 2013, only 51 per cent of Aboriginal children received out-of-home care placements in accordance with the Aboriginal placement principle.

As we know, section 18 sat on the books for a decade but needed additional amendments for it to function in practice. This bill provides those additional amendments, which will allow employees of Aboriginal organisations to take over the role of the department in relation to particular Aboriginal children on protection orders under section 18.

Until recently, VACCA ran a model of guardianship project as if section 18 was already functional. The project achieved some really significant results, with 13 Aboriginal children involved in the project. Despite the fact that 10 of those children had been in out-of-home care for over eight years, 6 of them were returned home to either their parents or to family members.

The main outstanding issue in relation to this bill is the perennial question of resourcing. The bill nominates a commencement date of 1 October 2016, so perhaps the government intends to fund section 18 authorisations in its next budget. I certainly hope so, and I hope the minister can confirm this for me and my parliamentary colleagues before May next year. Clearly section 18 authorisations need to be properly funded in consultation with VACCA and other Aboriginal organisations and with an evidence base. It would be pretty difficult, I imagine, for Aboriginal organisations to take on section 18 authorisations unless those authorisations were properly resourced above and beyond their existing resourcing.

In addition, I hope the minister and the department are carefully considering accountability mechanisms to support these amendments that will improve the level of compliance relating to Aboriginal children on protection orders. Additional support through the Children's Court, for example, could help both children and the relevant Aboriginal organisations when section 18 authorisations are made.

This is a good bill, and I commend the government for bringing it before the house. I hope it will bring new hope, new chances for stability, appropriate support and long-term benefits for Aboriginal children on protection orders. The Greens are pleased to support the bill, and I wish it a speedy passage.

Mr McGuire (Broadmeadows) — 'The past is never dead', as William Faulkner observed. 'It's not even past'. Sometimes we can overlook different issues that remain from when this nation, which has the longest continuous culture known to man, began and how they continue. It is really important that we have not just bipartisanship but now tripartisanship on this issue because this is another step in the evolution of how Indigenous Australians have self-determination and the ability to take control of their own lives and develop beyond the systems that have been in place in the past.

This bill symbolises the Labor government's commitment to supporting policies of self-management and self-determination for Aboriginal communities. Why is this important? It is because the over-representation of Aboriginal children in child protection is incredible. For it to be this high in 2015 really goes to the issue of how we need a different systemic approach. The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that as at 30 June last year 1.6 per cent of Victorian children aged 0 to 17 were Aboriginal. According to the *Report on Government Services 2015*, the number of children on care and protection orders in Victoria as at 30 June 2014 was 9233, of which 16 per cent were Aboriginal. The biggest growth was for children aged 0 to 2, with a 16 per cent increase for all children and a 22 per cent increase for Aboriginal children. Every Victorian should be concerned by these findings.

One of the issues we need to deal with is the echo of the past and trying to improve on that. That is why I commend the minister and the leadership being shown by the Andrews government in bringing this legislation to the house as part of the evolution in how we deal with issues such as this within this Parliament. In addressing it I want to take a bigger picture view as well because although it starts with the initial care

provided for children and families and how we help them, it then moves to consideration of what the connections are into the education system.

In 2012 the then government in Victoria closed the Ballerit Mooroop College in my electorate of Broadmeadows, which was the major pathway school for Indigenous children. It is important to look at what happened there, what went wrong and what can be done in the future. When we look at education as a lifelong learning proposition, we want to affect attitudes and give better opportunities to all of our children. One of the issues in investigating this was finding out what had happened. Essendon footballer and former Norm Smith medallist Michael Long and his wife were involved. Michael's wife, Leslie, was the principal of the school. It seemed to be working satisfactorily, and the cultural connection to the community was strong. There was leadership, and there were role models. I have investigated how we can help bring this connection back into the community.

One of the things that Michael Long has since done is to establish a learning and leadership centre in Darwin. He is using his name power and the lessons learnt during his life to attract Indigenous children to come and use sport as a connector back into education. This is a wonderful set-up backed by the AFL, and it is one of the mechanisms I am investigating in trying to determine how we can help bring Indigenous children back into education.

One of the issues related to this is a campaign I have been running called Saving Footy in its Backyard. Believe it or not, eight clubs in the northern suburbs have folded, and the last remaining club is the Jacana Football Club. Some members would be aware that this club produced Carlton Football Club champion Bruce Doull, Brownlow medallist Scott Wynd and triple premiership player for Brisbane Chris Johnson, who was also a member of the AFL Indigenous All Stars team. He pulled on the purple and yellow jumper again and played in the grand final for the local Jacana club this year. That was an enormous effort because the club is on its knees. All the other AFL clubs in the area have folded. What we are trying to do is look at how we can bring in the right people and the right programs to try to connect the disconnected.

One of the other organisations I have been talking to is Clontarf, which has been highly successful at using football as a connector. Obviously we are looking at what is the right model to bring girls into the picture and give them the same opportunities and connections. The cultural connections and the leadership and how we set that up in a way that works for the Indigenous

children is critical. The proposition is not our view on it but what works and what is practical.

My connection with Michael Long goes back to the fateful initial Anzac Day game in 1990 at the MCG where issues of race were raised. He did not want to talk about it. I tracked him down at Windy Hill. Kevin Sheedy ushered me into the weights room there, and there he was, doing just the mindless bicep curls. He did not want to address the issue because at that time the proposition was that whatever happened on the field stayed on the field. When I got to interview him finally, he made the point. He just said, 'Why do people worry about race? They don't worry about the colour of their car or the colour of their dog. Why do they worry about anybody's colour?'. This was the subtext of what was going on. Because of my connection with him over a long time, on the day he started on what became known as the Long Walk, when he walked from Melbourne to Canberra to see the then Prime Minister and call for greater representation of Indigenous people in the debate, he rang me out of the blue just to talk about the issues and the themes.

It is really quite remarkable when you were consider what happened with Adam Goodes as well. Both their mothers belong to the stolen generations; they were taken from their families as children. That is why I am thinking that if we can look at what we need to do to connect learning, leadership, education and sport, that is a really important proposition. We should not underestimate what happens to children and how that stays with them. These are issues that blight a lot of people's lives, and they carry like a shadow. The bill is another step forward, another progressive step to try to address some of these issues and create the way for opportunity.

The last time Michael Long visited the Hume Global Learning Centre in Broadmeadows he was encouraging all the children to further their education. He could barely stand because of his football injuries. He thanked me for the loan of a couch. I thanked him for an Essendon premiership — and his knee. The Long Walk continues — slowly, courageously.

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — I am pleased to join the debate on the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Aboriginal Principal Officers) Bill 2015. Between the years 1999 and 2002, along with a number of former members and a current member of this chamber, I was involved in work undertaken by a committee to review access to law and legal services in rural and regional Victoria. Representations were made by members of a number of the Indigenous cooperatives around Victoria: in Mildura, Robinvale,

Echuca, the Wangaratta-Wodonga region, Gippsland, Geelong, Bendigo and Ballarat.

A striking observation of committee members at different times was the importance of there being good access to services. One of the outcomes of the committee report was the subsequent institution of good access to legal advice, that being the Fitzroy *Law Handbook*, which was subsequently provided online. At another level, an important focus was to improve individual outcomes. It was beyond the comprehension of members of the committee at the time that in the Latrobe Valley there was a practice of petrol sniffing, which caused great harm to the welfare of the people who embarked upon that activity.

The bill has as its object the amendment of the principal act to make further provision regarding the authorisation of the principal officers of Aboriginal agencies. There are multiple provisions. Some of the relevant ones include that it empowers the secretary to disclose information to the principal officer of an Aboriginal agency about an Aboriginal child who is, or is to be, subject to an authorisation under section 18 of the principal act; under new section 18(2A) it also prohibits the disclosure of information provided by the secretary to an Aboriginal agency or the principal officer of an Aboriginal agency to any other person unless the disclosure is to a person employed by the agency and is for the purpose of assisting in making a decision whether or not to agree to an authorisation, which is provided for in new section 18D; and under new section 18(2A) it requires the secretary to provide the Aboriginal agency and the principal officer with all the information that is reasonably necessary to assist them to make an informed decision whether or not to agree to an authorisation under section 18 of the principal act.

A number of weeks ago I had the privilege of meeting with a man by the name of John Harris, who wrote a book called *One Blood*, which I understand was the precursor to some significant national events. It is a recording of the Indigenous history of Australia and the overlapping of white settlement and a number of issues which arose along the way. In reading about the early settlement of New South Wales and the hinterland or the history of Tasmania or Victoria, one reads about many tragic events that occurred. Whichever prism of history one looks through, 'tragic' and 'tragedy' would be two of the words that would be used to describe the circumstances and outcomes.

Good work was done by Governor Gibbs in New South Wales in the 1830s to effect and bring about justice, following matters such as the Myall Creek massacre —

that counterbalance between the needs of the colonial settlement and settlers in a land that certainly was not terra nullius and the Indigenous populations and communities, as they sought to advance their own welfare. There was the taking of the female members of Indigenous communities by sealers in the early days. In one case in Tasmania there was a community of 80 to 90 adult males and two women, with many of the women having been taken by the sealers to the islands off the coast of Tasmania in a horrific context.

It is interesting to note that in this precinct, just a number of metres from where we are gathered, there is a statue marking the life and contribution of an Indigenous Australian. In the Parliament Gardens Reserve, just north of where we are, there is a statue marking the life and contribution of the late Sir Doug Nicholls. At the unveiling of that statue, which I had the privilege of attending, a quote, which I will read in part, was etched in an important book that Pastor Doug Nicholls had owned. Part of the quote reads:

... but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead ...

That was a focus of his own life. In the early days, his memory had been forever seared by seeing his 16-year-old sister Hilda torn from her distraught mother's arms and packed off by the police to a girls home in Cootamundra.

In his early days, Sir Doug had battled poverty, homelessness, physical hardship and racial prejudice. Reference has been made to AFL football. In the case of Doug Nicholls there was prejudice in the first team he played with. He later moved on to Northcote and then joined the Fitzroy Football Club, where he was a crowd favourite. As I understand it, he became the first person of Indigenous heritage to represent Victoria in the state team. He later went back to become Northcote's non-playing coach. There may be support within this chamber among those who represent that region of Northcote and Thornbury, where the Aborigines Advancement League has its headquarters, for the provision of opportunities for new presidents to rise to help guide and nurture the development of young people in that precinct.

After the war — Doug Nicholls had served in the 9th Battalion of the Australian Imperial Force — the Fitzroy police sought his recall to assist them on the streets of Fitzroy in helping young Indigenous Australians. There were problems with alcoholism and gambling and other social problems. There was a large group of young people who identified with him, and he established a local Fitzroy church as a meeting place. He was ordained as a Church of Christ pastor in 1943.

He made a great contribution to human rights and community service.

I place on the record that Doug's great uncle, William Cooper, was a social and human rights activist who founded the Australian Aborigines' League and the Aborigines Progressive Association in the 1930s. William Cooper was a lifelong, ardent lobbyist of government for Aboriginal equality. By 1937 he had obtained over 1800 signatures on a petition seeking enfranchisement, direct representation in Parliament and Aboriginal land rights. All his efforts and claims were rejected except for one lasting legacy, the National Aborigines Day, which was first celebrated in 1940. In his day Cooper undertook continually the task of confronting Indigenous disadvantage. That also marked the work of Doug Nicholls and his wife, Gladys, as they developed hostels and holiday programs and established the Harold Blair Holiday Scheme and the Tandarra holiday flats. These are but examples of their work for Indigenous Australians.

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency undertakes important work in the context of the bill before the house. A recent annual report of the agency is described as:

... a tribute to our families for bringing us and keeping us together over generations through thick and thin.

It notes further:

While we will remain committed to the rights and safety of our children first, we also know that the best place for children is in safe, thriving, healthy and culturally strong families.

A focus of this bill is looking after the welfare of children in culturally appropriate ways to ensure their safety and also to avert the circumstance where Indigenous Victorians, who represent 1.6 per cent of the Victorian population, are represented in the child protection and child welfare system at a rate tenfold that number. I am pleased to support the bill before the house as it seeks to advance the welfare of Indigenous Victorians and other Indigenous Australians.

Ms RICHARDSON (Minister for Women) — It is my very great privilege to rise to speak in the debate on the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Aboriginal Principal Offices) Bill 2015. Before I begin, I welcome Muriel Bamblett to the public gallery. She is somebody who is dedicated to her community and to her work. Her leadership, her guidance and her advice to me in this space are critically important, and I really want to thank her and to put on the record my appreciation of all Muriel does on behalf of her community. She is a lesson to all of us.

As the member for Northcote I am fortunate to represent a very large Aboriginal community. As I mentioned earlier, I get a great deal of advice and support from that community. I have avoided a lot of mistakes in my career as member for Northcote by listening to the leaders of the Aboriginal community within Northcote and those from the league itself in particular. Yes, we do have some big plans for the Aborigines Advancement League based on the work Lionel and others are doing. I very much look forward to seeing those plans realised based on the leadership shown by the leaders of the Aboriginal community.

As I say, it is very much a privilege to be here speaking in the debate on this bill before the house. I commend the minister for bringing this bill forward. It has sat by the wayside for far too long, so bringing this bill forward is an important step, for not just the Aboriginal community but for our government as well.

As other speakers have said, the bill aims to remove the barriers in place that see Aboriginal services shut out of the care of Aboriginal children who are subject to protection orders. That is obviously a critically important outcome for this bill. The bill is framed within the critically important principle — a principle that should guide the hand of every government and every agency no matter where it is in Australia — which is that when it comes to promoting outcomes for Aboriginal people, the solutions and leadership et cetera must come from the Aboriginal community itself.

The truth is that Aboriginal people know and understand what is best for Aboriginal people, and for too long we non-Aboriginal people have simply got it spectacularly wrong. In truth our cultural arrogance has failed us consistently in this space because we have always overlooked the value of the Aboriginal culture and way of life. To address this bias a critically important first step is to support policies that support self-determination and self-management in everything we do. This is not just something that clearly improves outcomes for Aboriginal people. If we take the time to stop and listen — and if we park our own cultural biases at the door — we see time and again that this rich and valuable culture and these people provide very important lessons for the non-Aboriginal community — lessons we can clearly learn from.

I have seen this directly, time and again, in the family violence space. Written submission after written submission to the royal commission as well as evidence given in the public hearings call for a whole new approach with respect to family violence. They call for a holistic approach — to see the family as a whole within the wider community and not to silo our services

in response to family violence. This is a constant theme across the submissions to the royal commission.

The fact is that if you are looking for a model response to family violence that is best practice, you need look no further than the Aboriginal community. Their culture, their way of life, intuitively guides Aboriginal people in this way. They do it without thinking, and it is this best practice model that the rest of us in a sense are trying to catch up to. For example, in my community in Northcote we see some of the most forward-thinking family violence response practices, and they have been operating in this way for a considerable period of time, because the culture and values of the Aboriginal community have informed that family violence response.

There is a great deal to learn from the principle of self-determination and self-management. It is not a one-way street; it is a two-way street. We have a tremendous amount to learn from the Aboriginal community. The important principle which guides and directs the bill before the house is also a very important principle that we need to put in place for our family violence response.

The important point that needs to be made with respect to the bill is that we have to do so much more to support Aboriginal services as they are delivering support for their own communities. As speakers before me have highlighted, it is Aboriginal children who are most at risk and most harmed by a failed response that we might put in place. We know that Aboriginal children are over-represented in the child protection system but I hasten to add that this is not simply explained by looking at the Aboriginal family and what is going on around it. We must also look to ourselves in part, to our failings and our biases that have no doubt contributed to these poor outcomes.

I take this opportunity to commend the work of Andrew Jackomos, the commissioner for Aboriginal children and young people. He was one of the first people I met when I became Australia's first Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence. Early on in my time as minister, I also met Antoinette Braybrook, the CEO of the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service. They both brought home to me and highlighted the fact that the extremely high rates of Aboriginal children disproportionately represented in out-of-home care as compared to non-Aboriginal children meant that not only was the system failing but somehow we were contributing to those failings. Having a self-determination and self-management principle is the first significant step in addressing the failings we present.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics is pretty stark on this. It notes that 1.6 per cent of Victorians aged from 0 to 17 years are Aboriginal, and yet 16 per cent of those children are on care and protection orders. It is disturbing to note that our state runs second only to Western Australia in the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care. To make matters worse we then place these most vulnerable children away from their culture and their communities and somehow expect that this is going to lead to better outcomes, when clearly it does not. It does not make any sense that we have had this approach.

This has raised well-founded fears within the Aboriginal community that we are seeing a whole new lost generation of Aboriginals who are disconnected from their culture and from their people. This is a harm we have seen generation after generation and that we have imposed on Aboriginal people. This is a very real fear, and it is our limitations we need to look to in order to address that concern.

Sadly, too often family violence is the driver of these protection orders. When you look at the system itself and you drill down into the family violence responses, it is clear that the system does not support Aboriginal women faced with family violence. Mothers are often not aware of their legal rights when it comes to custody. The protective parenting lens that is applied by child protection, which was highlighted as part of the Luke Batty inquest, is ruthlessly applied to Aboriginal families. Many times Aboriginal women have said to me, 'Stop locking up my partner'. That blunt instrument, that blunt one approach that we have, is leading to terrible outcomes for these families, and it is worse for these mothers. Their children have been taken away from them at rates that are way too high.

In response we have our family violence royal commission that is going to report in February next year. We have specifically asked it to have a look at this high-risk group. We are going to have a round table next week to look specifically at Aboriginal rates of family violence. We want to get this right. We want to listen to the Aboriginal community specifically about how they see that we can tackle the harm of family violence and rates of out-of-home care.

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) — I rise with pleasure to speak on the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Aboriginal Principal Officers) Bill 2015. I, too, would like to acknowledge the presence of Muriel Bamblett in the gallery today.

Like the member for Northcote, pockets of my electorate have a very strong and rich Aboriginal

culture and history — I have both Taungurung and Wurundjeri communities. Unlike many other members, I have very little multiculturalism in my electorate, but I have two well-entrenched Aboriginal communities.

The purpose of the bill is to make further provision in relation to the authorisation of a principal officer of an Aboriginal agency, whether it is a childcare or health agency. There are provisions to strengthen the way the system works. At the core of the bill is greater protection for Aboriginal children. The amendments make a number of changes to the act to smooth out a few bugs and make the system more integrated, which works for the protection of the very vulnerable. This is another step towards improving both the legal and the statutory systems to protect Victorian children.

By way of background there is great over-representation of Aboriginal children in the child protection system. It is something I see in my electorate, which was formerly the electorate of Seymour and is now the electorate of Eildon. I have sought representation from different people from time to time, and from the stories that have come up this over-representation is evident.

The Cummins inquiry into protecting Victoria's vulnerable children was commissioned in 2012 by former Minister for Community Services Mary Wooldridge. It is a pretty amazing piece of work. Judge Philip Cummins submitted a very detailed and lengthy report, with recommendations for the way in which we should strengthen the system for our most vulnerable children — and our Aboriginal children, among those, are our most vulnerable. Outcomes for Aboriginal children are much poorer than those for other groups. One of the most surprising statistics is that 16 per cent of children on care and protection orders are Aboriginal children, yet they make up only 1.6 per cent of the population. That figure is very damning. The need to come up with different responses and different ways of dealing with the facts as they are is imperative. We need to be more innovative and to think more creatively outside the square.

In his inquiry, Philip Cummins noted that the history and past actions of government and non-government agencies have impacted negatively on Aboriginal families and the result is a continuing experience of trauma in Aboriginal communities. Whilst in the past there may have been some successes with programs, more generally they were not as successful as perhaps they could have been. Judge Cummins also noted that policies that support self-management and self-determination offer greater hope of healing for Aboriginal communities and that will likely increase

their capacity to care for their children. He pointed out that it is important that the system is strengthened. He recommended that the government address current legislative limitations and implement authorisation provisions in order to promote practical self-determination in relation to Aboriginal children in out-of-home care.

The Cummins report also noted that policies which support self-management and self-determination are the ones that offer hope to heal those communities and help increase the capacity of families within the system to care for their own children.

Reflecting on your contribution earlier, Acting Speaker — I know it might be a little bit more difficult for you in the chair — with all due respect, the work done by the previous government was quite significant as the then minister, Mary Wooldridge, now a member for Eastern Metropolitan Region in the Council, inherited a very broken child protection system. The former Labor government had 11 years to address that and did nothing to progress the situation. The previous government's announcement of an inquiry in 2011 and other action were the first steps in groundbreaking work to try to turn the child protection system on its head. It certainly sounded, Acting Speaker, like you were trying to recreate history — and I know you were not a member of Parliament at the time — and the chamber needs to be reminded that this work was undertaken by the coalition government and it had been left for a very long time by the former Labor government.

We are where we are. A version of this bill was introduced in May 2014 by then Minister Wooldridge. The crux of this bill is about the protection of our most vulnerable. The child protection sector, which is so important, is very supportive of these very practical measures, which build on the previous bill but with tweaks. The main provision allows for a person acting as a principal officer, who may be a chief executive officer or executive director — whatever name the position is known by within that organisation — to perform the functions and exercise the power specified under authorisation in section 18 of the act.

The bill also allows for the principal officer to delegate their authorised functions to somebody else who may be deemed suitable in that organisation to get on and do the job. This provision is important because often in organisations various circumstances may lead to a situation where it is best for somebody else to work with a particular family or in a specific area because they have developed an expertise. It may be very necessary for them to undertake a certain role. Having

this provision in place may make for a much smoother system.

I use this opportunity to talk about the Wurun Child and Family Place in Healesville, which underwent a major expansion in 2014. I was at the opening or unveiling of the new centre, which offers a high quality integrated range of services. Jan and Louise and the team there are doing a great job. One of the things built into the community hub at the centre is integrating the Boorai early years transition program from the Badger Creek Preschool. The weekly program, targeted to children 12 months and older, aims to culturally strengthen their bonds. It also offers greater involvement, interaction and integration with the other early learning services there so that these children and their families are not left isolated. The children have a greater sense of belonging whilst at the same time there is a working towards cultural strengthening.

One of the really good things the centre has done — and it is all well and good to say, 'Yes, we are culturally sensitive; we're certainly making it culturally welcoming' — is go to a lot of effort with staff training and also the look and the feel of the place to make sure that when people are there, they feel very welcome. Another great thing is that when you walk through the front door you could be accessing any service. There is no stigma attached if you are involved in the Boorai early years transition program that you are going somewhere special or different. The centre really is quite welcoming. The Indigenous health nurse from Yarra Valley Community Health pops in occasionally as well to the centre.

The centre is doing a lot to help strengthen families at that very early period so that they build their own capacity to be much better at what they do in the family situation. Already the program is reporting that families are much better linked into services, and the transitions to school or to other funded programs are already reaping rewards. There is still room for growth of the program, but the more successful the program is, the more people will talk about that trust and how good that centre has been and the work being done, and that is great. This program is linked to the bill before the house, because if we can build the capacity of families to look after their own children and have good solid links with the community, that is a great thing. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr PERERA (Cranbourne) — It is a privilege to speak on the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Aboriginal Principal Officers) Bill 2015. This bill broadly addresses the issue of Aboriginal children in child protection. Presently there is a significant

over-representation of Aboriginal children in the child protection system. The system is failing. The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that as at 30 June 2014, 1.6 per cent of Victorian children aged between 0 and 17 years were Aboriginal. The coalition government showed no ambition to try to address the concerning over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in care. The previous speaker mentioned that the coalition government commissioned an inquiry. The coalition in government promised to develop a plan, but it never acted on it. However, it is pleasing to see the coalition in opposition is supporting this initiative. It is great to see bipartisan support in this house.

Evidence would suggest that the involvement of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations in the delivery of services to Aboriginal children and families can reduce their admission into out-of-home care. The bill addresses a number of legislative limitations in the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 that prevent the implementation of authorisations through Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. The capacity to authorise a principal officer is included to enable Aboriginal agencies to have responsibility for the care and protection of Aboriginal children subject to protection orders. The principal officer in this context is the chief executive officer of an Aboriginal organisation or its equivalent.

The intention of the provision is to empower Aboriginal agencies to have responsibility for the care and protection of Aboriginal children. Before giving an authorisation the secretary should provide all the information about the children to the Aboriginal organisation and the authorised officer. This will allow the agency and the principal officer to make an informed decision as to whether or not they agree to the authorisation. It also helps the agency to provide the best care and build a relationship with the children, as the agency will have inside information about the children.

Aboriginal children in out-of-home care have every right to be nurtured in an Aboriginal cultural environment with Aboriginal values. Otherwise they may grow up in somewhat similar circumstances to those of the stolen generations. The members of the stolen generations were not only physically stolen but also had their culture, values and interrelationships stolen. In fact their unique sense of humour, as connected to their culture, was stolen. Their folklore and even their bedtime stories were stolen, which is something I understand, having been brought up with a different cultural background. The bedtime stories I heard are very different to those of my grandchildren, who were born here. According to the *Report on*

Government Services 2015 the number of children on care and protection orders in Victoria as at 30 June 2014 was 9233, of which 1507, or 16.3 per cent, were Aboriginal.

The bill is consistent with the legislated principles of Aboriginal self-management and self-determination. These are the recommendations made in the 1997 *Bringing Them Home — The 'Stolen Children' Report* and the 2012 *Report of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry*. This bill symbolises the Labor government's commitment to supporting policies of self-management and self-determination for Aboriginal communities. The former Liberal government failed to respond to the critical issue of the child protection system, particularly with regard to Aboriginal children and young people. The *Report of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry* was handed down in February 2012. It recommended, as a major system reform goal:

a plan for practical self-determination for guardianship of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care and culturally competent service delivery.

Unfortunately it took the coalition two long years to bring legislation into the Parliament on this issue. It failed to progress this legislation through the Parliament and instead let it lapse on the notice paper at the end of the last Parliament. It was a shameful act. Former government members chose to debate other legislation ahead of dealing with these important issues. The coalition could not get its priorities right, probably because its members did not believe in Aboriginal self-management and self-determination. Unfortunately very little occurred under the previous government.

The Andrews Labor government fully committed itself to addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the child protection system from day one. This starts by recognising the importance of the early years. The *Report on Government Services* showed that around 73.9 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were engaged in preschool nationally — a gap of almost 18 per cent compared to the total population.

In March the government launched the Koorie Kids Shine at Kindergarten campaign to encourage more Aboriginal families to enrol their children in three-year-old and four-year-old kindergarten. In October 2014 Victorian Aboriginal community-controlled organisations that deliver child and family services as well as the Koorie Youth Council, the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People and other community service organisations prepared a submission, with a road map

to future approaches for improving the over-representation of our children in out-of-home care.

The submission, titled *Koorie Kids — Growing Strong in Their Culture*, called for government to consider eight priorities, the first of which was to establish an Aboriginal children's forum which would be a decision-making partnership between community, government and the sector. This was significant because it brought together Koori and non-Koori sectors for the common purpose of improving the life outcomes for some of our most vulnerable children — those already in statutory care and those leaving care — and to prevent them from entering statutory care. The forum will work towards the development of a comprehensive outcomes framework to develop the life skills and cultural identity of children in care to enable successful transitions to adulthood.

The bill places all Aboriginal children in care under the authority and case management of an Aboriginal organisation and creates better supports for carers of Aboriginal children. It provides Aboriginal families with access to accountable universal services to support their needs. This process is a significant point of change in Victoria in the way we work for the protection of our most vulnerable Koori children. I commend the bill to the house.

Ms KEALY (Lowan) — It is with great pride that I rise to speak on behalf of The Nationals and the coalition. We will be supporting the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Aboriginal Principal Officers) Bill 2015. The purpose of the bill is to amend the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 to make further provisions in relation to the authorisation of a principal officer of an Aboriginal agency. These provisions are especially relevant to the people of Lowan, given that we have a very strong relationship and history with the traditional custodians of our land. I would like to speak of the family groups with whom I have worked closely in my time as the member for Lowan and previously as CEO of the Edenhope hospital. Those people are the Wotjobaluk, the Jaadwa, the Jadawadjali, the Wergaia and the Jupagulk people. It is important that bills such as this one be introduced to strengthen the relationships between Aboriginal people and give them the opportunity for self-determination and self-management. That is why I am very proud to stand before the house today and make this contribution to the debate in support of the amendment.

The bill includes a number of provisions and, as outlined by the member for Eildon, contains much housekeeping and tweaking to improve upon the work

of the previous coalition government. Therefore I will briefly reiterate the main provisions. The bill allows for the person acting as a principal officer to perform the functions and exercise the powers specified under authorisation in section 18 of the act. It provides a definition for principal officer, which effectively means CEO or their equivalent, and allows for the principal officer to delegate their authorised functions and powers to suitable employees of that Aboriginal agency. The principal officer must be an Aboriginal person; however, the person acting as principal officer does not need to be an Aboriginal person.

In addition the bill allows for information to be shared between the secretary and the principal officer that previously would have been prohibited, providing it pertains to the child subject to the authorisation, and prohibits disclosure of information provided by the secretary to the Aboriginal agency or principal officer to any other person, except to a person employed by the agency and for the purposes of making an informed decision as to whether or not to agree to an authorisation. The associated penalty for a breach is 10 penalty units.

As mentioned, the bill builds upon the good work of the previous coalition government. The Children, Youth and Families Amendment Bill 2014 was introduced to this house and second read by the then Minister for Community Services, Ms Wooldridge, on 7 May 2014. It then lapsed before it could be introduced in the other place. Many of the provisions in this bill, which I have just gone through, mirror what was recommended in the 2014 bill, specifically including: clarification of the meaning of the term 'principal officer'; empowering the principal officer of an Aboriginal agency to delegate functions; and the establishment of appropriate arrangements for sharing information in relation to section 18 authorisations. Quite clearly there is a link to the work of the coalition government. It is positive that we can see the Labor government building on the good work of the coalition, and I hope it continues in that direction.

Section 18 is the specific part of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 to which the bill relates. For context, it was introduced on the back of a recommendation arising from the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry, a very significant inquiry undertaken in 2012 by Judge Philip Cummins. The inquiry recommended a major systemic reform, the goal of which should be to:

plan for practical self-determination for guardianship of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care and culturally competent service delivery.

The core of that recommendation is around self-management and self-determination, which are at the heart of ensuring better and more positive outcomes for people of Aboriginal heritage. Of course we have a jaded past in relation to the stolen generations, and it is very positive to see that we have learnt from that negative experience and that we are ensuring that Aboriginal people have good input into what happens in their own family groups. More importantly we are building on that locally and ensuring that we have cultural events and linkages to younger Aboriginal people so that they can understand their cultural history but also be proud of it, which is an enormous step forward.

The provisions of section 18 have been trialled, and although not formally evaluated, early indications are that we are achieving improved outcomes for Aboriginal children and facilitating Aboriginal children leaving care and returning to their families. This provides a unique input into the forthcoming review of services for Aboriginal children, so the indications for the implementation of the provisions in section 18 are very positive.

As I mentioned, we have a strong and proud Aboriginal heritage in the Lowan electorate, but it is concerning that we consistently see over-representation of Aboriginal people in some of our key health and social indicators. Primarily in relation to this bill, 1.6 per cent of the Victorian population are Aboriginal children and young people, but 16 per cent of Aboriginal children and young people are on care and protection orders, which is an enormous over-representation of young Aboriginal people in the core group.

There are many health indicators as well, and I commend a number of Aboriginal cooperatives in my area which are making significant inroads into closing the gap. The first of these is the Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation, which covers Hamilton, Hayward and Portland. It has done some fantastic work, being not only a health service but also providing a number of other services. It incorporates the land council as well, and it has also developed a fantastic project, which I would encourage members to investigate further, in partnership with Alzheimer's Australia, Indigenous Hip Hop Projects and the Gunditjmara community. They have produced a video called 'Yarn Up about Dementia', and the intention is to look at how we can address the high rate of dementia among Aboriginal people. It has a strong message around educating people about dementia, but it also works on the wellbeing, culture and respect that is essential in those local communities.

The Budja Budja Aboriginal Cooperative has a medical service and does a lot of work around allied health and social and cultural opportunities, as well as maternal and child health services. It is based in Halls Gap and runs a fantastic service, and I commend it for the work it does. It is a very vibrant group. I also mention the Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Co-operative. It is based in Horsham but services all of the Wimmera. It also runs a medical clinic which is highly successful, as well as a number of services which complement each other. It really sees itself as a one-stop shop. It has a specific focus on family, offering family counselling and decision-making, support to stop family violence and quit smoking, drug and alcohol support and also support for members of the stolen generations.

This cooperative also has a fantastic focus on children and youth. Recently I visited Goolum Goolum and was pleased to see the progress in the work it is doing to extend its facility to offer playgroup and youth support services. Part of what they do at Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Co-operative is offer children's health check-ups, arrange all immunisations, dental and hearing check-ups for the younger children and run Sista Girl and Brother Boy social and cultural activities. They also run the fantastic Black Cockatoos playgroup and the Kookas homework club, which are making great inroads in ensuring that our younger Aboriginal people have access to those really important early years educational opportunities. The cooperative runs fun fitness activities, including a fantastic gym. It has certainly made good inroads into improving the fitness opportunities and outcomes for younger Aboriginal people who are linked in with Goolum Goolum. The cooperative has programs on healthy eating and hygiene, how to deal with bullying, and it provides support for young people in the justice system.

So here we see three fantastic Aboriginal organisations making huge inroads into closing the gap and ensuring that we do not have continual over-representation of Aboriginal people in our key indicators of how healthy a community is and how healthy a family unit is.

I would like to mention briefly the Baringi Gadjin Land Council. On the weekend I attended the Horsham Northfest, and the festival included some of the Aboriginal people linked to the land council doing a cultural dance and teaching young kids how to do that. It was such a positive thing to see kids involved and to see Aboriginal people having their culture included in day-to-day activities in our community. To ensure that they have opportunities for self-determination and self-management is a step in the right direction, and I believe this bill achieves such a step. I commend it to the house.

Mr CARROLL (Niddrie) — It is my pleasure to rise to speak on the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Aboriginal Principal Officers) Bill 2015. I start my remarks by acknowledging Muriel Bamblett in the gallery today. In July this year I had the pleasure to represent the state government at the 42nd Aboriginal Justice Forum in Mildura, and I had an incredible two days there. This legislation goes a long way to cover some of the work that we did in Mildura and some of the work that is continuing to be done by the Andrews government. Possibly that was my most important meeting since becoming Parliamentary Secretary for Justice.

However, I also rise to speak as the member for Niddrie, which includes the land originally owned by the Wurundjeri tribe — I pay my respects to the elders — with the very historic Brimbank Park, which has been known to contain Indigenous artefacts more than 30 000 years old. I could not be prouder than to represent my electorate and my community, and it was only during the last sitting week that I invited the Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water to visit Brimbank Park to ensure that it gets the significant investment in heritage funding that it deserves.

When I attended the 42nd Aboriginal Justice Forum, I found it to be a very important meeting and very much about the reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians. The Andrews Labor government recognises that as a critical and ongoing process that requires deep commitment and respect. Because I wanted to give the justice forum the respect it deserves, I went to Mildura a day early for meetings with different Koori leaders. A highlight was the caucus dinner the night before where there was a very relaxed atmosphere and we got to know each other before the big day that followed.

While I was there I met with Rudy Kirby, CEO of Mallee District Aboriginal Services, and saw the great work that he is doing on the ground as a leader, investing upstream, with the biggest priorities being children from conception to four years of age, then up to eight years of age. I will never forget what Mr Kirby said to me. He said, ‘We know that if we can invest there, we can change the next generation’.

Dr Alf Bamblett was another person whose passion was education and family and investing in upstream outcomes. A gentleman who did much in the social justice space, he was honoured on the Victorian Aboriginal Honour Roll. In August it was great to be at the Koori Community Justice Awards when Dr Bamblett’s work and the contribution he made as a

leader, not only in Victoria but also across the nation, was recognised. I will never forget when Alf Bamblett, Jr, was quoted in May on the ABC when he was talking about his father and said:

His main driver was his people and their living conditions and education ...

His whole involvement was education, justice, community and services.

That is really what brings us to this legislation before the house today. Consider the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the Victorian child protection system: while Aboriginal children and young people make up 1.6 per cent of the Victorian population, they constitute over 16 per cent of children and young people on care and protection orders. We had the Cummins inquiry. The Protecting Victoria’s Vulnerable Children Inquiry led by Philip Cummins, recommended three years ago — in 2012 — that a major system reform goal should be to plan for practical self-determination for guardianship of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care and culturally competent service delivery.

If you compare the lives of young Aboriginal children with Victorian children generally, you can see that the government needs to do a lot more work. That is what this legislation is putting in place: the framework where we can deliver on the letter of our work. The outcomes for Victorian Aboriginal children are generally poorer than for other children, and it is important that the government and the broader community develop new and innovative responses to address the needs of Aboriginal children in Victoria.

Many of the previous contributions have been about section 18 of the principal act and the role of Aboriginal agencies, but I do not want to go into that detail. I really want to focus on the future and what these reforms we are talking about and debating right now will do. Many speakers have spoken about how the removal of children from parental care is one of the most challenging issues, but in particular that is true for Aboriginal communities. In the light of historical practices in child welfare, many Aboriginal families and communities still experience the traumatic impact of those past practices today. This is a big issue that needs to be addressed, and both sides of the chamber today are willing to address it. It is understandable then that there will be a variety of views in Aboriginal communities about Aboriginal organisations taking on this role and responsibility. It is entirely understandable that there will be a difference of opinion, and it is important that the minister has committed to ongoing consultation to make sure that the way the new

section 18 works will be in line with the principles of natural justice and the principles of self-determination.

The minister herself in her second-reading speech said that the implementation will be managed with great care and the issues will be approached sensitively. For section 18 authorisations to happen, both the board of an Aboriginal agency and the Aboriginal principal officer need to agree to accept the authorisation. Importantly this legislation will clarify the meaning of the term, 'principal officer', which will be defined as the chief executive officer or equivalent of an Aboriginal agency. This is a position most similar to the position of secretary of a department; the person employed as the head of an organisation. This legislation will empower the Aboriginal principal officer of an Aboriginal agency to delegate authorised functions and powers to suitable employees of their agency. It will allow for the powers and functions of a section 18 authorisation to be exercised by a person who is acting as the principal officer, whether that person be Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal.

This legislation is very much about making sure that we get the parameters and the settings right. Importantly though — and I think it is incredibly important — it should provide for internal reviews and decisions made in the course of section 18 authorisations within the Aboriginal agency, in the same way that reviews are already available in relation to decisions made with any government department administrative law process. If the internal review process has been exhausted, an application can be made to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal for a review of the decision. This mirrors the processes whereby the secretary or the delegate is the decision-maker.

I am very proud to be part of the Andrews Labor government, which is fully committed to addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the child protection system. The Premier himself started to address this matter from day one. We know Aboriginal children are over-represented at the tertiary end of the system and under-represented in the early years. The report on government services also shows that around 73.9 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were engaged in preschool nationally — a gap of almost 18 per cent compared with the total population. In March the government launched the Koorie Kids Shine at Kindergarten campaign to encourage more Aboriginal families to enrol their children of three and four years old in kindergarten.

History has shown that past actions of government and non-government agencies have negatively impacted on

Aboriginal families. This has resulted in continued trauma for Aboriginal communities. Policies that support self-management and self-determination provide for healing opportunities and increase the capacity for Aboriginal communities to care for their children.

The legislation we are debating today is a powerful instrument, and the importance of this and the importance of getting the policy settings right should not be lost. The Andrews Labor government is committed to developing a service system based on the principles of self-determination and reform. This will go a long way towards improving outcomes and the cultural connectedness of Victorian Aboriginal children.

I commend this legislation to the house. I know it is legislation that Dr Alf Bamblett would have been very proud of, and it is a tribute to Muriel that she is in the gallery to hear the speakers today. The Andrews Labor government, whether it be through the Aboriginal Justice Forum or even choosing the Budj Bim national heritage landscape as our no. 1 priority for UNESCO world heritage listing, has shown it is committed to the First Australians and to doing everything it can.

It took a Labor government to ensure that this place, the Victorian Parliament, had the Aboriginal flag where it should be — proudly displayed. That was a historic occasion that should not be lost on anyone. That was an occasion I was proud to see happen and on which I was proud to be in this chamber. I commend the legislation to the house.

Mr CRISP (Mildura) — I too rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Aboriginal Principal Officers) Bill 2015. The purpose of the bill is to amend the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 and to make further provisions in relation to the authorisation of a principal officer of an Aboriginal agency. The more common version of this is really that we are trying to improve the child protection system and out-of-home care, particularly for Aboriginal people, by getting some of the administration right.

In pursuing that aim, the bill will allow for a person acting as a principal officer to perform the functions and exercise the powers specified under new section 18 of the act. I will talk a little later about the new subsections proposed to appear in section 18 of the principal act. The bill provides a definition of 'principal officer', which effectively means the CEO or equivalent. It allows for the principal officer to delegate their authorised functions and powers to a suitable

employee of an Aboriginal agency so that the whole thing can work. The principal officer must be an Aboriginal person. However, the person acting as a principal officer does not need to be an Aboriginal person.

The bill allows for information to be shared between the secretary and the principal officer that previously would not have been possible, providing it pertains to the child subject to the authorisation. It also prohibits the disclosure of information provided by the secretary of the Aboriginal agency or principal officer to any other person except to a person employed by the agency for the purposes of making an informed decision as to whether or not to agree with an authorisation. There are penalties for breaching this.

I will look now at the main part of the bill and the way it differs from the act. The bill repeals section 17(1)(e) of the act, which prevents the secretary from delegating the function requiring the secretary to be satisfied that a permanent care order placing an Aboriginal child solely with non-Aboriginal carers will accord with the Aboriginal child placement principle before such an order can be made. Both the secretary and the Aboriginal principal officer will be able to delegate this function, which will prevent any delays associated with carrying out this function. That information taken was from the second-reading speech.

The second-reading speech goes on to clarify section 18 by saying that the bill provides for internal reviews of decisions made in the course of a section 18 authorisation within an Aboriginal agency in the same way that such reviews will be available in relation to decisions made within the department. If the internal review process has been exhausted, an application can be made to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal for a review of the decision. This mirrors the process whereby the secretary or other delegate is the decision-maker.

In my view this brings some decisions about out-of-home care far closer to the communities where these children are likely to be and will be best cared for. Also it requires that the principal officer of the Aboriginal agency must prepare and implement procedures for the review and provide a copy to the child and their parents, along with any case plan that is required. So all the usual checks and balances are there.

There is one slight area of concern in relation to this, which is that since the conclusion of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency the Department of Health and Human Services has supported a pilot program within the rural Aboriginal

community-controlled organisations which is due to commence in 2016. I think there is a little more information needed on how that is going to work and how it will be evaluated.

I think it needs to be said that this bill is building on all of our commitments in this place to do a better job of managing out-of-home care for Aboriginal people. It certainly has been said many times in this debate that for a part of a community that is 1.6 per cent of the population, 16 per cent of the cases of out-of-home care is certainly a statistic that you just cannot get away from.

I would also like to talk about the services that are provided in my electorate. We have Mallee District Aboriginal Services, which has operated in various guises since the 1980s. It began as Sunraysia District Aboriginal Corporation, then became the Mildura Aboriginal Corporation before taking on the name it has today. It has been recognised through its 30 years of work in Mildura as having made a considerable difference.

I pay particular tribute to Rudolph Kirby, who is the CEO of Mallee District Aboriginal Services. In his time, and under the current board, the organisation has taken its services to another level. It provides considerable assistance to the Mildura community. I would like to list some of the services it provides to demonstrate what is available and why this organisation is in such a good position to look at not just the care of children but also some of the base causes for children ending up in care.

Mallee District Aboriginal Services operates a home and community service. It has supported accommodation and assistance programs. It has services for Aboriginal tenants at risk of eviction. It helps early school leavers, works in youth justice and has an early years program. Its Bumps to Babes and Beyond program is, I am sure, an investment that will bear a lot of fruit in the future. It has in-home support. It has the Koori preschool assistant program, which I have seen at work; again, getting children into the education system is vitally important. It provides an Aboriginal kinship carer program and residential care. There is a whole host of services aimed at supporting families so that we can do something about that 16 per cent of children and young people in out-of-home care who are Aboriginal. I know it does its work very well.

The organisation also offers a sport and recreation program. It has a Koori offender and support mentoring program, again aimed at trying to keep families together and prevent some of these issues from arising.

It is working with homeless youth. It has a clever program of better life and longer living. There is the Koori youth night patrol, which is very effective. It has a very extensive medical service, which has been brought very much into view recently.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

ADJOURNMENT

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Stock underpasses

Mr BLACKWOOD (Narracan) — I raise a matter for the Minister for Agriculture. The action I seek is for the minister to reinstate the cattle underpass scheme, which has been forgotten and left unfunded. I note the minister answered a question without notice on 17 September regarding the program. She stated:

This is a \$2 million fund to support the installation of stock underpasses in regional Victoria, which was established under the Regional Growth Fund by the former government. Those arrangements have existed for some time, preceding my time in the role. I am informed, though, that that has been fully allocated.

The facts are that this program was introduced by a former Labor government and then continued by the Baillieu and Napthine governments which allocated around \$2 million from the Regional Growth Fund to it. The purpose of the program was to provide up to \$40 000 in funding to subsidise the construction of a cattle underpass to provide access across arterial and local roads for farmers whose property was divided by the road network. The program has been very successful and has assisted our farmers to improve safety for local road users and their cattle. These days dairy herds are a lot larger than they used to be, with a 500-head dairy herd almost the average and many even bigger. To move a herd this size across a busy road takes time and certainly compromises the safety of vehicles, farmers and the cattle, especially in times of poor vision due to fog, darkness or inclement weather.

I ask the minister to urgently review the funding options for this program. Saying that the funds have been fully allocated makes no sense, as the minister has now been in her position for 11 months and has not allocated any funding to the cattle underpass program. The minister also said that the lease of the port of Melbourne was needed to fund the establishment of the Agriculture Infrastructure and Jobs Fund, from where I assume she is suggesting future funding for the underpass program would come. This is no help to my

local farmers and primary producers, who have been waiting patiently for an announcement regarding the fund.

If the lease of the port takes another 12 months, will the minister leave this program unfunded? Does the minister have any plan at all to support the cattle underpass program beyond saying she is waiting on funds? I ask the minister to commit to funding the program immediately, as farmers and primary producers in my electorate of Narracan have already waited 11 months too long for news.

Family violence

Ms THOMAS (Macedon) — My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence. The action I seek is that the minister join me on 4 December at a community forum to be held at Kyneton Secondary College to discuss the steps our community can take to prevent family violence. I have recently launched a community campaign entitled Macedon Says No to Family Violence. The purpose of the campaign is to raise awareness of the extent of the challenge we face in a country where 69 women have lost their lives this year alone as a result of family violence and where family violence is the leading cause of death and disability for women between the ages of 14 and 44.

Schools, public services, community groups, sporting clubs and businesses have been invited to participate in the campaign by making and displaying a banner that signals their support for ending family violence. Already more than 20 organisations have signed up. In addition, an information kit to support workplace discussions will be supplied. I look forward to each organisation participating in our forum, which will focus on some of the positive actions that are taking place to prevent family violence. I am grateful to the Centre for Non-Violence and the Cobaw Community Health Service for their advice in designing this campaign, and I am also grateful to the Macedon Ranges Shire Council and the Macedon Ranges Local Safety Committee, which have been consulted in the development of the campaign.

There has been a focus in my community on the inadequacy of the Kyneton courthouse to provide safe access to justice for women experiencing family violence. This remains an issue to be addressed. But it is my aspiration that we reduce the number of women and children being beaten, assaulted, manipulated and abused in their homes.

This will be solved not by the justice system alone, but by our community taking responsibility for gender inequality and the behaviours that we have all too often walked past. The minister has shown tremendous leadership on this issue, and she would be warmly welcomed to Macedon. I hope that the minister can join with me in saying no to family violence on 4 December in Kyneton.

Protective services officers

Mr GIDLEY (Mount Waverley) — My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Police. The action I seek is for the minister to reverse the Victorian Labor government's decision to remove Victoria Police protective services officers from services from 6.00 p.m. until the last night-time train service as of 1 January 2016 at Glen Waverley, Syndal, Mount Waverley and Jordanville stations. Currently residents using Glen Waverley, Mount Waverley, Syndal and Jordanville stations all have access to Victoria Police protective services officers at those stations from 6.00 p.m. until the last night-time train service. However, from 1 January 2016 the Victorian Labor government will remove many of these officers from these local stations. That is of great concern to me and of great concern to the community I represent.

Victoria Police protective services officers play an invaluable role in improving public safety, whether it be providing a warm and welcoming greeting to residents when they get off the train at any of those stations or providing an escort to residents when they get off the train and walk to their parked car, particularly children and women late at night. It concerns me greatly that this system, which has been so successful and has had so much support from residents in my district, is now under threat. I note that residents in my district who might be travelling outside of those four stations are likely to also face the scenario that while at the moment they can be assured of a Victoria Police protective services officer being at the station when they get off, from 6.00 p.m. until the last night-time train service, they will not have that available under Labor's program, from 1 January 2016.

There is just no question that a frontline policing presence in the form of these protective services officers not only increases the feeling of public safety among the residents of my district but is also a strong deterrent to crime and criminal behaviour. On those two fronts in particular I would have thought the outstanding success of the Victoria Police protective services officers program implemented by the former Liberal-Nationals government would have stood. I again call on the minister to ensure that the Victorian

Labor government restores these officers at the stations I have mentioned from 6.00 p.m. until the first of the regularly scheduled morning train services commence for all passengers in my district.

Southern Autistic School

Mr STAIKOS (Bentleigh) — My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Education. I call on the minister to support the Southern Autistic School in its endeavour to upgrade a junior toilet block at the school with specialist facilities. To its credit, the school has been fundraising through the local community for this, and it is seeking state government support to supplement its efforts. Anne Crawford, school counsellor at Southern Autistic School, is a passionate advocate for the school and for this particular project. I wholeheartedly support her in this. Like me, I know the minister is a strong advocate for a fair go for all. I call on him to support this fair outcome for the children at Southern Autistic School.

Bayswater electorate level crossings

Ms VICTORIA (Bayswater) — Today I rise to request the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to come out to the Bayswater electorate to meet with concerned constituents at the site of the Mountain Highway and Scoresby Road level crossings. The minister is requested to explain to them why this site, which Labor, when in opposition, listed as one of the 50 most dangerous and congested level crossings in Melbourne, has not yet been funded. Over the past several years the former coalition government spent quite a few million dollars in my electorate on the planning stages, consultation and also importantly the preliminary works to get this project shovel ready, yet it is still sitting there, as it is, with two level crossings. Along with the people of Bayswater, I am a bit dumbstruck as to why this is not being done as a priority.

We have had deaths occur at these level crossings, so for my electorate it is a very important place. The fact that this is not a simple project should not be a reason why it has not been done. Not only are there two level crossings there, but there are also maintenance sheds and stabling for trains parked overnight. It is a difficult job, and we have known that right from the beginning, which is why the last government went out to such great consultation.

Simply not getting these works done because they are too hard is inexcusable. At the last election my opponent stood out there with great placards which said, 'Only Labor will remove these level crossings',

nearly causing accidents. I am still waiting for that to happen. Regardless of whether or not Labor won the seat, a promise was made to remove the level crossings, and I expect that to happen.

Not only have we had unfortunate fatalities there, but quite often the boom gates are stuck. That not only affects people going to and from work and school but it is also a great hindrance to the many great businesses that have been on Mountain Highway for many years, because people simply cannot get to them. Whether it be Heavenly Pies & Cakes, Montano's Patisserie Cafe or one of the new places along that road, people cannot stop because the traffic congestion is so bad.

Under freedom of information, a document was received from the Department of Treasury and Finance. It was a ministerial brief to the Treasurer. It said that action was required by 11 December 2014 and that the level crossing removals for these two sites were listed as shovel ready. Again I request that the minister come out to meet with my constituents who are in my office on a weekly basis asking when this is going to happen. It was promised: it was promised by us, and it was promised by the Labor Party. We expect it to happen, and I would like that to be explained to my constituents.

Beveridge Primary School

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for him to do all in his power to support Beveridge Primary School in its rapid transition from a small rural school to a suburban school. It is always a pleasure to visit Beveridge primary as it has very dedicated staff and a passionate group of parent leaders who work collaboratively to deliver quality programs to its 230 students. Sadly, the quality of the buildings lags well behind the quality of the people who work and learn there. They are manifestly inadequate to support the future needs of this growing community.

Since I began representing Beveridge some 10 months ago, I have become aware that this school has been on an emotional roller-coaster ride of having its hopes for capital improvements and increased funding repeatedly raised and then dashed. In Labor's May 2010 budget, Beveridge primary was allocated \$850 000 as part of the rural school upgrade program, which was to build much-needed new permanent classrooms. By the end of 2010 this funding was cruelly taken away by the incoming Liberal-Nationals government. On not one or two but four occasions the school has not received the portable classrooms it has badly needed to begin the school year.

When the urban growth boundary was extended beyond Craigieburn, past Beveridge to Wallan by the then Minister for Planning, now Leader of the Opposition, Beveridge primary had its rurality funding cruelly ripped away, because the accompanying stroke-of-a-pen urban growth boundary changes by the coalition government meant that Beveridge was no longer a rural school. But what is urban about no reticulated water, especially as a severe El Niño and drought bear down? What is urban about no reticulated sewerage, with the principal having to get it pumped out every term break? He even had to clear it himself when the pit backed up under classrooms and decking. What is urban about having to maintain your own additional water storage and a diesel generator for firefighting in a proven fire-prone area? What is urban about little or no mobile phone coverage to receive emergency warning messages?

Recently the school had difficulty getting its diesel generator serviced. I am advised the education department was unable to provide advice or assistance. Ultimately the Country Fire Authority supplied the school with a list of 170 approved contractors, but it took more than a week of constant phone calls to locate one contractor to attend Beveridge and undertake the service. So any sensible person would not have to ask: what is not rural about all of these challenges? And in the face of this, the school went from 50 to 230 students this year, with 260 expected to enrol next year.

Sadly, with the halving of school capital by the Liberals, it is students like those at Beveridge primary who have suffered. I urge the minister to come out to see firsthand how this school needs to be supported in its growth phase, and I thank him for the additional funding that has come in this budget, especially the equity funding of \$71 000. But more needs to be done — —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The member's time has expired.

Goulburn Valley Health

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is that the minister accompany me on a visit to the emergency department of Goulburn Valley Health in Shepparton. Our emergency department has only 11 treatment spaces; it needs 30. Late this afternoon my husband, who is a visiting medical officer at Goulburn Valley Health, told me that the pressure will be so great tonight that doctors will be asked to discharge patients where safe to do so and avoid admissions where they

can be avoided. The reason is the overwhelming demand on the emergency department.

On 5 October at 8.30 a.m. a school bus carrying 47 secondary college students between Nagambie and Euroa was involved in a collision with a truck. While it was reported that no students suffered life-threatening injuries, eight of the children had to be taken to Goulburn Valley Health for treatment. With only 11 treatment spaces and a high demand in the emergency department, it is easy to see the pressure this places on that department and its staff. In saying this, however, I have been advised that the emergency department staff coped amazingly well in what were clearly difficult and cramped circumstances. I congratulate them for the work they did on this occasion and on every other day they are faced with such limited facilities.

Works are currently being undertaken on this 24-hour emergency service to provide some more waiting area space for families with children and a separate treatment area for children. All of the funding for these works has come from philanthropic organisations including the GV Health Foundation, local Rotary clubs and the Blue Ribbon Foundation, to name but a few. Funding for the redevelopment of Goulburn Valley Health has been neglected for years, and there appears to have been an extraordinary lack of political commitment to our health service. The Goulburn Valley Health annual report tabled in the Victorian Parliament in the last sitting week says the number of people living in the catchment area who receive services from the hospital is at a low of 73 per cent. That means that over one-quarter of the people needing treatment in the area must find it outside the region. There is a 10-year plan to increase the number of people receiving treatment to 86 per cent. However, there is a need for infrastructure and support to provide the ongoing services.

I am pleased to say that we are soon to announce the membership of the Goulburn Valley Health Community Advisory Group and I look forward to working with GV Health, the Department of Health and Human Services and the government to achieve an investment in the much-needed and long overdue redevelopment of Goulburn Valley Health.

Pascoe Vale electorate bus services

Ms BLANDTHORN (Pascoe Vale) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public Transport. The action I seek is for the minister to accompany me to Batman railway station in Coburg North to discuss with locals plans to extend the bus

services along the Gaffney Street corridor. I have spoken in this chamber before about the increased population growth along the Gaffney Street corridor, in particular between the Batman railway station in Coburg and Pascoe Vale railway station, and the need for public transport services between the two railway lines to link those communities. Those services would also carry commuters from the homemaker precinct to the new Coles and Coburg North village precinct and down to the Pascoe Vale end of the electorate. I would appreciate it if the Minister for Public Transport could accompany me on a visit to Batman railway station to discuss these issues with the local community.

Ararat and Maryborough rail services

Ms STALEY (Ripon) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public Transport. I ask the minister to make public any documents, business case, plans, time lines, costings and funding option assessments for any plans to increase passenger services on the Maryborough and Ararat rail lines that the Andrews Labor government has undertaken. I refer to my comments in this place as part of my response to the budget, when I said:

I note there is no move to increase passenger train services from Ararat and Maryborough into Ballarat and through to Melbourne. These are valued services. Patronage is growing on the Ararat line, and there is no question that we need additional services. That is why the coalition government committed to putting them there. Labor has not taken up that idea. Labor is prepared to let country people have inferior rail services. We need to continue to upgrade these rail services, and I will continue to advocate for them.

It is now many months on from the budget. By now I would have hoped that the minister would have taken note of my continued advocacy for additional passenger rail services on both the Ararat and Maryborough lines and would have recognised that the high level of support within the communities along those rail lines for additional weekday and weekend services is driving my actions. The people of these areas, at council, community group and individual levels, constantly tell me to keep going to get these much-needed upgrades.

Maryborough currently has one return service a day via Ballarat. A clear gap is the inability to spend the weekend in Maryborough, as the only train on a Sunday leaves at 8.10 a.m. The previous Liberal and Nationals government announced very specific costed plans for these lines. The policy announcement of a total of \$178.1 million to improve regional passenger rail services across Victoria noted that the 9.08 a.m. train from Southern Cross station to Ballarat would be extended to Maryborough. The return train would leave Maryborough at 1.10 p.m. on weekdays, 1.35 p.m. on

Saturdays and 3.15 p.m. on Sundays and provide a convenient afternoon train to Ballarat, Ballan and Southern Cross. At the time, then Premier Napthine said:

The Victorian coalition government wants to double V/Line's long-distance train patronage within 20 years. This is the biggest single boost to V/Line's long-distance trains in the past 30 years.

On this side of the house we understand that it is not sufficient to continue to run with policy stuck in time since 1999, the last time Labor announced plans for the Ararat passenger line. We have a clear plan on this side of the house — a costed plan — and I look forward to support from the minister to gain these additional rail services for the Ararat and Maryborough lines.

Eltham electorate children's facilities

Ms WARD (Eltham) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Families and Children. The action I seek is that the minister visit Eltham to inspect the works being done at Woodridge Pre-school and Eltham Child Care Co-operative — two great children's facilities in my electorate. The works at Eltham Child Care Co-operative will provide a kindergarten room with 33 spaces, and the new works at Woodridge Pre-school will allow for additional kindergarten groups and the commencement of an after kinder care program, the provision of which is critical for working families in my electorate. As we head towards these facilities being available for use in 2016, I ask the minister to visit and view them and meet the people putting in the hard work providing excellent and critical early childhood education.

Mr Watt — On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I refer to the matters raised by the member for Bentleigh and the member for Yan Yean. Both members asked the Minister for Education to support their schools. I submit that *Rulings from the Chair* says that requesting that the minister continue to do something does not constitute an action. The only way these matters could possibly be in order is if you are willing to rule that the minister has not been supporting these schools over the last 11 months.

Ms Neville — On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, I think the wording used by those members was appropriate and has been used previously. They sought action in relation to issues at those schools that were confronting, and the wording they used was appropriate for the adjournment debate, as it has been for the 13 years that I have been in the Parliament.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! There is no point of order.

Responses

Ms RICHARDSON (Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence) — I would like to thank the member for Macedon for her invitation to attend her local family violence forum. I would like to take this opportunity also to congratulate the member for Macedon for her unwavering advocacy in addressing the harm of this national crisis — which is, of course, family violence. I must say that every time I see the member in the corridors of Parliament she talks to me about her latest local initiative designed to raise awareness and tackle the harm of family violence. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate her on her leadership.

Earlier this year I was delighted to attend Kambrya College with the member for Narre Warren South to launch her Say No to Family Violence campaign. It was a fabulous day, and I note that the member for Macedon is now taking up this campaign for her local community. I have no doubt it will be a tremendous event, so I very much look forward to joining the member on 4 December at Kyneton Secondary College to discuss the importance of tackling the harm of family violence.

Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water) — There were a range of other matters raised by a number of members. I will refer those matters to the relevant ministers.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The house is now adjourned.

House adjourned 7.24 p.m.

