# The Governor
The Honourable LINDA DESSAU, AC

# The Lieutenant-Governor
The Honourable KEN LAY, AO, APM

## The ministry

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Legislative Council committees

**Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee**
Mr Barton, Mr Erdogan, Mr Finn, Mr Gepp, Mrs McArthur, Mr Quilty and Mr Tarlamis.
*Participating members:* Dr Bach, Ms Bath, Dr Cumming, Mr Davis, Mr Limbrick, Mr Meddick, Mr Ondarchie and Mr Rich-Phillips.

**Environment and Planning Standing Committee**
Dr Bach, Ms Bath, Mr Grimley, Mr Hayes, Mr Limbrick, Mr Meddick, Mr Melhem, Dr Ratnam, Ms Taylor and Ms Terpstra.
*Participating members:* Ms Crozier, Dr Cumming, Mr Davis, Dr Kieu, Mrs McArthur and Mr Quilty.

**Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee**
Ms Garrett, Dr Kieu, Ms Lovell, Ms Maxwell, Mr Ondarchie, Ms Patten, Dr Ratnam and Ms Vaghela.
*Participating members:* Dr Bach, Mr Barton, Ms Bath, Ms Crozier, Dr Cumming, Mr Erdogan, Mr Grimley, Mr Limbrick, Mr O'Donohue, Mr Quilty, Ms Shing, Mr Tarlamis and Ms Watt.

**Privileges Committee**
Mr Atkinson, Mr Bourman, Ms Crozier, Mr Grimley, Mr Leane, Mr Rich-Phillips, Ms Shing, Ms Symes and Ms Tierney.

**Procedure Committee**
The President, the Deputy President, Ms Crozier, Mr Davis, Mr Grimley, Dr Kieu, Ms Patten, Ms Pulford and Ms Symes.

Joint committees

**Dispute Resolution Committee**
*Council:* Mr Bourman, Ms Crozier, Mr Davis, Ms Symes and Ms Tierney.
*Assembly:* Ms Allan, Ms Hennessy, Mr Merlino, Mr Pakula, Mr R Smith, Mr Walsh and Mr Wells.

**Electoral Matters Committee**
*Council:* Mrs McArthur, Mr Meddick, Mr Melhem, Ms Lovell, Mr Quilty and Mr Tarlamis.
*Assembly:* Ms Blandthorn, Mr Guy, Ms Hall and Dr Read.

**House Committee**
*Council:* The President (*ex officio*), Mr Bourman, Mr Davis, Mr Leane, Ms Lovell and Ms Stitt.
*Assembly:* The Speaker (*ex officio*), Mr T Bull, Ms Crugnale, Ms Edwards, Mr Fregon, Ms Sandell and Ms Staley.

**Integrity and Oversight Committee**
*Council:* Mr Grimley and Ms Shing.
*Assembly:* Mr Halse, Mr McGhie, Mr Rowswell, Mr Taylor and Mr Wells.

**Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**
*Council:* Mr Limbrick and Ms Taylor.
*Assembly:* Ms Blandthorn, Mr Hibbins, Mr Maas, Mr D O’Brien, Ms Richards, Mr Richardson, Mr Riordan and Ms Vallence.

**Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee**
*Council:* Mr Gepp, Mrs McArthur, Ms Patten and Ms Terpstra.
*Assembly:* Mr Burgess, Ms Connolly and Ms Kilkenny.

Heads of parliamentary departments

*Assembly:* Clerk of the Legislative Assembly: Ms B Noonan
*Council:* Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Council: Mr A Young
*Parliamentary Services:* Secretary: Mr P Lochert
**MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**
**FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION**

**President**
The Hon. N ELASMAR (from 18 June 2020)
The Hon. SL LEANE (to 18 June 2020)

**Deputy President**
The Hon. WA LOVELL

**Acting Presidents**
Mr Bourman, Mr Gepp, Mr Melhem and Ms Patten

**Leader of the Government**
The Hon. J SYMES

**Deputy Leader of the Government**
The Hon. SL LEANE (to 18 June 2020)

**Leader of the Opposition**
The Hon. DM DAVIS

**Deputy Leader of the Opposition**
Ms G CROZIER

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¹ Appointed 5 March 2020
² Resigned 17 June 2019
³ Appointed 15 August 2019
⁴ Resigned 23 March 2020
⁵ Resigned 26 September 2020
⁶ ALP until 15 June 2020
⁷ Appointed 23 April 2020
⁸ Appointed 13 October 2020
⁹ Resigned 28 February 2020

**Party abbreviations**
- AJP—Animal Justice Party
- ALP—Labor Party
- DHJP—Derryn Hinch’s Justice Party
- FPRP—Fiona Patten’s Reason Party
- Greens—Australian Greens
- Ind—Independent
- LDP—Liberal Democratic Party
- LP—Liberal Party
- Nats—The Nationals
- SAP—Sustainable Australia Party
- SFFP—Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party
- TMP—Transport Matters Party
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Wednesday, 28 October 2020

The PRESIDENT (Hon. N Elasmar) took the chair at 9.35 am and read the prayer.

Announcements

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The PRESIDENT (09:36): On behalf of the Victorian state Parliament I acknowledge the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of this land which has served as a significant meeting place of the First People of Victoria. I acknowledge and pay respect to the elders of the Aboriginal nations in Victoria past, present and emerging and welcome any elders and members of the Aboriginal communities who may visit or participate in the events or proceedings of the Parliament.

Petitions

Following petition presented to house:

COVID-19

Legislative Council Electronic Petition

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that dance studios and dance schools have been closed for over six months and will continue to remain closed until the last step, due to COVID-19 restrictions and its classification alongside adult gyms under the Coronavirus (COVID-19) roadmap for re-opening.

Dance studios and dance schools, initially classified as ‘creative industries’, have now been put in the same roadmap as adult gyms and other high-risk industries.

Dance studios and dance schools are not gyms. They are not high intensity, rather, they are stop-start training. Servicing the community with over 150,000 children undertaking dance classes weekly, dance studios and dance schools can maintain social distancing with density quotients, without use of equipment and with the required safety measures and COVID-safe plans in place. Children can co-mingle on public park equipment, return to school, school camps and play full contact sport in the third step of the roadmap for re-opening, well before the resumption of their dance classes.

The Premier, the Hon Daniel Andrews MP, noted in his press conference on Sunday, 27 September 2020, that dance studio and dance school restrictions would be reviewed, and clarification sought from the public health team. Dance studios and dance schools are still in the dark, businesses are closing, and many will not survive into 2021.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Premier, the Hon Daniel Andrews MP, and the Department of Health and Human Services to review COVID-19 restrictions and the risk of operating dance studios and dance schools, reclassify dance studios and dance schools rightly as ‘creative studios’, allow dance studios and dance schools to re-open immediately in regional Victoria and as part of the third step of the roadmap for metro Melbourne, and finally allow all dance studios and dance schools to have immediate access to teach from their studios, operating under endorsed COVID-safe plans.

By Dr BACH (Eastern Metropolitan) (948 signatures).

Laid on table.

Dr BACH: I move:

That this petition be considered on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.
PAPERS

Legislative Council
Wednesday, 28 October 2020

Papers

PARLIAMENTARY DEPARTMENTS

Reports 2019–20

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That there be laid before this house a copy of the:

(1) Department of the Legislative Council 2019–20 report; and
(2) Department of Parliamentary Services 2019–20 report.

Motion agreed to.

PAPERS

Tabled by Clerk:

Planning and Environment Act 1987—Notices of Approval of the following amendments to planning schemes—

   Alpine Resorts Planning Scheme—Amendment C29.
   Banyule Planning Scheme—Amendment C159.
   Nillumbik Planning Scheme—Amendment C117 (Part 2).
   Port Phillip Planning Scheme—Amendment C192.
   Wellington Planning Scheme—Amendment C102.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament—

   Local Government Act 1989—No. 115.
   Magistrates’ Court Act 1989—Nos. 112 and 113.


Business of the house

NOTICES OF MOTION

Notices given.

NOTICES OF INTENTION TO MAKE STATEMENTS

Notices given.

Members statements

AUSTRALIA INDIA BUSINESS COUNCIL

Ms VAGHELA (Western Metropolitan) (09:53): This month I had the privilege of attending Australia India Women in Business: Opportunities and Challenges during COVID-19’, an online webinar organised by the Australia India Business Council, the AIBC. It was great to join Her Excellency Linda Dessau, the Governor of Victoria, and Minister Jaala Pulford, along with other dignitaries. The AIBC is a non-government business council and a peak body in Australia devoted solely to promoting, developing and maintaining bilateral trade and business relationships between Australia and India. The online event that I attended formally marked the launch of AIBC’s Women in Business Victorian chapter.

Under normal circumstances it is tough for women to run their businesses, but it is even more challenging for them during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the future continued collaboration and engagement will be critical in addressing the current situation and negative effects of the pandemic on
businesses, not only for women entrepreneurs but for entire business communities across both countries. I think Victoria is the key to building a strong relationship between Australia and India, as Victoria is home to the largest Indian population in Australia. In 2018 we developed Victoria’s India strategy for developing our relationship with India over the next 10 years. Both our countries share a long history, but I feel that has not yet resulted in a strong bilateral trade and business relationship. My best wishes to AIBC to forge this bilateral relationship.

**MELBOURNE STORM AND MELBOURNE VIXENS**

Mr ATKINSON (Eastern Metropolitan) (09:55): I just want to acknowledge two sporting clubs for their achievements on this occasion, one of them being Melbourne Storm, who won the grand final in the NRL, and the other one being Melbourne Vixens, who won the Super Netball.

*Members interjecting.*

Mr ATKINSON: I think Richmond has had enough—

*Members interjecting.*

Mr ATKINSON: The interesting thing about both of these sports clubs is that they have terrific leadership with great culture as clubs, and it is great to see their success. Their success does not just come because of their on-field achievements but indeed because of that leadership within those clubs, and the culture, particularly with Melbourne Vixens, who have a pathway program that involves young people, young women particularly obviously, in netball right across Victoria and brings them through into opportunities to play in higher level competitions, including the most elite level. Congratulations to Simone McKinnis for the great job she has done as coach, to Richelle McKenzie and Rosie King as president and CEO of Melbourne Vixens, to Kate Moloney and Liz Watson, the co-captains of Melbourne Vixens, and to all of the team that had such a remarkable result.

And of course for both of these clubs, as with the AFL clubs, all of them have been in hubs this year. It has been the most challenging of years for sports clubs and yet they have achieved this great success.

**SUPER NETBALL, AFL AND NRL PREMIERSHIPS**

Mr BARTON (Eastern Metropolitan) (09:57): I too rise to speak about some great sporting celebrations, especially for Victorians. I am pleased to rise today to congratulate our professional sporting teams for providing us all with some much-needed excitement and enthusiasm, and some distraction. It started with the Melbourne Vixens’ nailbiting win, with just 2 points separating them from the West Coast Fever. This was followed by two great AFL Melbourne teams at the Gabba to play the grand final.

Mr Gepp: One great, one good.

Mr BARTON: Let us make sure that that does not happen again and we bring the grand final back to its home at the MCG. Congratulations to Richmond for an outstanding game with Geelong. Thank you, Mr Gepp. Finally, Melbourne Storm claimed their fourth premiership by the skin of their teeth. If this pandemic has taught us one thing, it is that Victoria still has the best sporting teams and fans across the nation. It proves that Melbourne is truly the sporting capital of the country, and I would like to make a special mention of two people, Cameron Smith and Gary Ablett, Jr, on their amazing careers.

**OHI DAY**

Mr TARLAMIS (South Eastern Metropolitan) (09:58): Today we commemorate Ohi Day, when 80 years ago, in 1940, the Greek people’s courage stopped Hitler in his tracks and inspired the Allied forces to follow and thus change the course of World War II with this stance against the Axis power of Mussolini ultimately leading to the first Allied victory of World War II. On 28 October 1940 the Italian ambassador in Athens presented an insulting ultimatum to Greek Prime Minister Metaxas demanding an unconditional surrender of Greece or Italy would declare war and invade Greece.
Mussolini gave Prime Minister Metaxas 3 hours to reply. Prime Minister Metaxas not only rejected Italy’s ultimatum but chose the road of resistance. Prime Minister Metaxas’s actions marked the beginning of one of the world’s most heroic efforts against tyranny and oppression.

It is important to note that in addition to Greece having a population seven times smaller than Italy, the disparity in their armed forces was even greater. Italy had close to 10 times the firepower of Greece in its army and navy and seven times the troops. Italy’s large air force had total air superiority since Greece had a very small, defensive air force.

Greece resisted the Axis powers for over 185 days. The Greek victory over the initial Italian offensive in October 1940 was the first Allied land victory in World War II and helped raise morale in occupied Europe. The Greek resistance influenced the course of the entire war by forcing Germany to postpone their invasion of the Soviet Union in order to assist Italy. It was the British prime minister, Winston Churchill, who said of the Greeks that, ‘Hence we will not say that the Greeks fight like heroes, but that heroes fight like Greeks’. Happy Ohi Day to the Greek community in Victoria, Australia and around the world who are commemorating this significant event today.

COVID-19

Dr Cumming (Western Metropolitan) (10:00): I would like to make a statement about the wearing, or rather not wearing, of masks. Yesterday the Premier said that we should prepare to be wearing masks for the remainder of 2020 and potentially into next year. It is okay not to wear a mask in public if you have a medical condition and gain a medical exemption, as I have. This holds true for people with problems with their breathing, such as asthma; for those with serious skin conditions on their face, a disability or a mental health condition; and for abuse or trauma survivors—just to name a few. We should all hold back on our judgements when we notice people not wearing a mask as they obviously have a good explanation for it. It is highly likely that people not wearing a mask cannot wear a mask and are already feeling awkward about that. So do not make it worse. Do not judge them. Do not frown at them. Do not throw sideways glances at them. Show them some empathy and kindness rather than contempt.

AFL Grand Final

Mr Gepp (Northern Victoria) (10:01): I too rise to congratulate Victorian sporting teams. I will not wax lyrical about the Vixens and the Storm given the contributions of others. I agree with most of what Mr Atkinson said, but not his slight against the Richmond Football Club, who I should point out were successful on Saturday night for the 13th time in the history of the league. They are the biggest Australian Rules football club in the world. It is a bit of a slight on Richmond that they are talking about a dynasty. I am not sure you should diminish being world champions with the phrase ‘dynasty’. But on a serious note, I am very pleased for the club. Not many people know, but I do support the Tigers. I know that four years ago, when we won our first flag in 37 years, there were not too many people who did not side with you and say, ‘The Tigers are my second team’. Fortunately the world has corrected itself. We are now back on an even axis, and all of those people are now not so fond of the mighty Tigers.

But off the field the Tigers do an amazing job, like most of our sporting teams here in this state and this country—Richmond in particular with the work that they do with our Indigenous communities through the Korin Gamadji Institute, a wonderful institute and organisation who do so much work. I am very proud to be closely associated with them. And of course the Bachar Houli Foundation does so much fantastic work with the Islamic community and more broadly with the culturally diverse community here in Victoria. Well done, Tigers.

Cycling Infrastructure

Mr Erdogan (Southern Metropolitan) (10:03): I am pleased to take this opportunity to inform the chamber about some good news for cyclists in my electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region. Recently the Minister for Crime Prevention in the other place, the Honourable Natalie Hutchins,
announced three new mobile CCTV trailers for the 6-kilometre stretch of the popular Yarra Boulevard in Kew. These trailers are made possible by a $110 000 grant by the Victorian government and will provide increased safety in light of the malicious tacking incidents on Yarra Boulevard—the annoying and dangerous act of scattering sharp objects on bike paths intended to puncture tyres or injure people. It is a very important issue. This recent announcement will allow our community to feel safe when using this space for travel and exercise. These trailers aim to reduce dangerous behaviour like tacking as well as reduce hoon driving, drug activity and other antisocial behaviour in the area. This is just the most recent announcement for cyclists in the Southern Metropolitan Region.

At the beginning of October the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in the other place announced 100 kilometres of new and improved cycling routes in key inner-Melbourne suburbs. A $13 million investment will deliver pop-up lanes to relieve congestion and promote active transport. These works will improve travel options across Melbourne, including St Kilda in my electorate. These two projects are the latest pieces of investment that make it clear the Andrews government is committed to boosting opportunities and outcomes for cyclists in the Southern Metropolitan Region and for cyclists across our state.

WESTERN BULLDOGS YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) (10:04): It must be a sport day today. Last week I was pleased to participate in celebrating with the young graduates from the Western Bulldogs Community Foundation youth leadership program. Twenty-seven youths from the inner west, from different schools across the western region, were part of this initiative, which provides participants with opportunities to connect, engage and develop through sessions that focus on leadership, resilience, education and employment. This project is part of a wider program of engagement by the Western Bulldogs to play a role while helping young people reach their full potential and ensuring they are accepted regardless of their gender, race or faith. This season alone over 90 youth in the west have participated in programs run by the Western Bulldogs Community Foundation.

Despite COVID-19 restrictions, these inspirational and driven young people continued the course, which was adapted and delivered via weekly Zoom meetings. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all the participants on completing the course. I was inspired listening to them reflect on their experiences with the project. I give special acknowledgement and thanks to Gaye, Kash, Simon, Salim and the volunteers whose hard work and commitment make these programs a reality. It is great to see the Western Bulldogs Community Foundation actively developing programs that ensure engagement with the youth in the west. They are truly a community club for the west. Unfortunately, they missed out on the grand final, but hey there is always next year. Go, Doggies!

Following statement incorporated pursuant to order of Council of 15 September:

WESTERN VICTORIA REGION SCHOOLS

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education)

In mid-October I had the absolute pleasure to announce some really exciting news to three schools in the State’s south-west—Hampden Specialist School, Terang College and Colac Specialist School.

The Andrews Labor government is especially proud of its record in progressively upgrading schools for students with special needs. Portland Bay School and Merri River School in Warrnambool are outstanding recent examples of our rebuilding program.

The community behind Hampden Specialist School has been working so hard with Terang College to relocate both schools’ P–4 campuses from their current shared location to the much bigger and better site at Terang College 5–12.

This government has committed $1.187 million to plan for the relocation and rebuild.

In Colac, the parents, staff and friends of Colac Specialist have also worked long and hard and were just as thrilled to obtain $1.544 million to plan for relocation to part of the old Colac High School site.

Both funding commitments are from the Infrastructure Planning and Acceleration Fund.
The best thing about making these announcements was seeing the excitement in the eyes of the community members—as the Colac Specialist School’s Facebook page said: ‘Amazing!’.

I congratulate everyone involved for their hard work, perseverance and commitment to their students’ futures.

Both of these relocations and builds are great steps forward for the schools, steps that will deliver 21st-century-standard facilities for their students.

Importantly, they will continue to be models of quality inclusive education.

I’m particularly proud that some of the best specialist schools in Victoria will be in my electorate of Western Victoria.

Motions

ANIMAL SHELTERS

Mr MEDDICK (Western Victoria) (10:06): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes community concern about the killing of healthy or treatable companion animals in Victorian pounds and shelters;

(2) calls on the government to:

(a) introduce mandatory reporting of pound and shelter kill rates;

(b) implement the requirement for pounds and shelters to work with approved and regulated rescue groups before ending an animal’s life;

(c) introduce more subsidised and free desexing initiatives for companion animals;

(d) consider the introduction of a trap, neuter, return (TNR) program, noting the positive long-term impacts these programs have on community cat populations; and

(e) commit to implementing immediate reuniting of missing companion animals through vet clinics, to stop the unnecessary process of going through the pound system.

Most people say they love animals. Sometimes I wonder if that is true given the things they do to them or cause to have happen to them, but there is one group of animals where most people really mean it: that set of animals privileged to have been habituated to a co-dependent life with humans. Often we call them companion animals. Unfortunately, there are still practices today that allow animals that we almost all agree are our beloved companions, members of the family, fur babies, to suffer and die needlessly. One large NGO alone reported over 16 000 cats and dogs euthanised last year. This is illuminating compared to many pounds and shelters which do not routinely or thoroughly report the number of animals killed at all.

Small changes in our approach could see big changes in the results for tens of thousands of deserving animals. This motion that I am bringing today is something of an omnibus of small but significant changes to the way we treat our companion animals within Victoria. Taken in isolation, each is a steady, small step towards more humane treatment of animals lost in a shelter, out of place or unnecessarily fertile. Taken together, these small changes add up to a revolution in kindness for the way Victorians treat our companion animals in distress. These changes are the next logical steps to preventing killing and suffering of companion animals in Victoria. They follow on from the work that this government has already done to end puppy farming, establish Animal Welfare Victoria and other important reforms for companion animals already in train.

Let me first run you through the five interlinked changes I think are necessary to take the next kind step in Victoria. First, pet pardons. I am pleased to bring this issue for debate today, but I am devastated by how it was first brought to my attention. It is the story of Dash, an animal who entered foster care following years of abuse and subsequent rejection by the greyhound industry. I want to be clear that, sadly, his story is not a one-off. It is not a mistake or unique. His is a story that reflects the outdated, barbaric practices in our shelter systems that must be relinquished to the past so that a new progressive
model that values the lives of our companion animals can be adopted. The following words are from Claire, who fostered Dash:

Dash was an adorable weirdo. He spent most of the day on the couch, sleeping on his back with all four legs splayed into the air. I used to joke that he was like me in dog form: his favourite pastime was napping and he hated leaving the house as much as I do.

His anxiety was relieved by having us in his sight. He had to be in whatever room we were in, preferably lying right underneath my chair at the desk or beside us on the couch, or trailing on our heels as he followed us around the apartment. His favourite spot was on someone’s lap.

In the six weeks Claire had Dash his anxieties slowly improved. He gained weight, slept through the night and began to trust in the safety of his first loving home. Eventually the time came to return Dash to the shelter so he could begin the process of adoption. He was ready. Claire took comfort in repeated reassurance from shelter staff that Dash would not be killed, and she believed them when they told her that he was doing well. But that was far from the truth. He was already dead. Each time they had lied. The truth was Dash never even met with a behaviourist. Like ticking a box, Dash was added to the long list of animals deemed unworthy of life. The decision to end his life was one of convenience. He was never even given a chance.

Claire’s story shows us that animals are not dying in shelters because there is nowhere for them to go. They are dying because of outdated, barbaric views on anxiety and fear, because it is convenient. It is not okay to kill animals because of something that triggers anxiety or fear, like being impounded in the first place. It is not okay to kill animals because of something that we do not understand or are not prepared to work through with them, especially when there are a whole host of qualified people willing to do so: Victoria’s dedicated independent rescue groups and foster homes. That is the solution to this—to give rescue groups the option to save animals on death row. Many of them have told me they want to do this work. Their passion and purpose is simply to save as many lives as possible. But sadly, many are being blocked from doing so. This will remain the case until offering healthy, treatable animals to rescue groups becomes mandatory. Some shelters claim they cannot work with rescue groups because they are not regulated and therefore an animal’s welfare cannot be ensured if they hand them over to a rescue group’s care. If this is truly the only hurdle, rescue groups tell me they would welcome a code of practice, registration or other forms of regulation for their sector if it means they can access these animals facing death.

Secondly, we need a kill count, because ending convenience killing begins with transparency, and you cannot fix something you cannot see or measure the progress of. The reality is right now it is not mandatory for kill statistics to be reported or released in Victoria, and individual stories like Dash’s remain hidden as a result. The lack of effective data reporting and animal management has been a problem for decades, and often animals are not appropriately defined or evaluated, let alone cared for. Time and again animals are killed. Sometimes shelters even admit their failings. Flaws in behavioural plans and handover processes as well as staff and animal mix-ups—I have heard the same story too many times.

Foster carers or members of the public seeking care for animals that they come into contact with request updates or offer to adopt only to find out the animal they cared for has become a statistic—and not even one that is reported. Had they not persisted they might not have ever known, and if not for their advocacy, these lives would remain forgotten. No animal should be killed unless they are irredeemably suffering. No animal should be killed for treatable issues, but right now, here in Victoria, that is exactly what is happening. This motion calls for mandatory reporting of kill statistics. All pounds and shelters should report when they have killed an animal and, importantly, why. Revealing how big this problem is is the first step towards fixing it.

My third point is one that I am pleased the government is already working on: reuniting rights. Animals sometimes become lost and are found by members of the public whose first thought is often, ‘How can I find the owner and get this animal back to them?’ Under the existing law they are forced to give the animal to a council’s authorised officer or to a local pound or shelter, where they enter a slow and
often flawed system of re-identification. The added stress and uncertainty this causes animals and their owners is immeasurable and, frankly, unnecessary. I know of vets who have scanned an animal brought to them that they recognise and can confirm the client contacts for on their system—it is someone they know, someone they have built rapport with over the lifetime of that animal—but if they contact them to let them know their pet has been found, they are breaking the law. While there is a mechanism for some vets and shelters to scan and reunite animals, it is a very administratively tedious agreement to get in place, and the veterinary association would prefer it applied to all vets. I know the government is very aware of this issue and has already begun community consultation to improve the regulations, and I thank them for this and urge them to speed up their deliberations to ensure change arrives quickly, as every day sees more unnecessary suffering of companion animals in a system that can be very unsympathetic.

The fourth point is an obvious one. Too many animals are bred while shelters overflow, and we need to address over-breeding if we want to affect real change. A breeding blitz is proposed to provide accessible desexing of animals to the many people who might otherwise, for lack of opportunity, allow their animals to reproduce when homes for their offspring do not exist. Every year around 80,000 cats are killed in pounds and shelters across Australia within just days of arriving. Around half of them are kittens. That is half of all the cats and kittens entering shelters who will not leave alive. We know that mandating desexing at council level is largely ineffective. Local councils where it has been legislated have seen an increase in the number of cats surrendered due to the unaffordable cost of desexing or the cost of abiding with this law, with no decrease in cat intakes or kill rates and no increase in registration rates. Desexing needs to be accessible and affordable for everyone, and that is why I am calling for government-subsidised desexing programs. These programs would offer free or subsidised desexing in areas with large stray cat populations and in low socio-economic communities.

I note that accessibility is not just affordability. Sometimes animals are not desexed because of the time it takes to deal with the vet or the unavailability of transport or for a myriad of other reasons why people with complex lives fail to take action. That is why I propose to support rescue and rehoming services in their efforts to rescue animals and assist people in getting their animals desexed where they want that to happen but find it logistically difficult. These charities, with significant volunteer efforts, already do the job of fostering animals and attending to their veterinary needs, including desexing in many cases and finding loving homes for them to go to. They also work with people who may need practical assistance to help them get their animals desexed. I greatly admire the work that these groups do, and I am confident that by supporting them with their desexing bills we can leverage and encourage their work to ensure a great many more animals are desexed and rehomed.

The last part of successful desexing is to provide a mechanism to minimise the problem for cats that are not necessarily owned but are provided some degree of respite shelter or care—domestic cats living wild on farms or in other areas in and around humans who unknowingly provide a positive environment for overbreeding. Another example of animal management where the current solution is killing for convenience is animals trapped and killed and animals left to starve or encroach on our most vulnerable native species. The solution I propose is known as TNR—trap, neuter, return. TNR is an appropriate step towards the non-lethal control of urban stray cat populations. Its successful implementation has been proven in other parts of the world in reducing numbers and improving native animal welfare. Based on extensive research overseas, the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation predicts targeted stray cat populations will see a 30 per cent decrease in cat intake into pounds and shelters and a 50 per cent decrease in the killing of treatable cats in the first year. The program captures, vaccinates, desexes and either rehomes healthier community cats or returns them back to their free-living homes. Desexing shows proven improvement of nuisance behaviour such as fighting and aggression, at the same time increasing the likelihood of semi-owners becoming long-term and informed pet owners.

I know there is some concern around returning unowned cats to the wild, but studies have proven that by following the advice of experts and careful monitoring this model works. Not only does it work, we are looking at a long-term solution to the continued overbreeding that despite decades of attempts
lethal alternatives have failed to realise. We see better results when we look at these issues in whole instead of defaulting to what we consider to be the easiest of options regardless of suffering. A cat should not need to be owned by a human to receive compassion. Trialling TNR is all about extending the basic rights applied to animals we share our homes with in a way that provides tangible welfare outcomes for multiple species, both feline and our native wildlife. Common sense tells you that when you reduce the capacity for wild living animals to breed their numbers are greatly reduced or even eradicated from that landscape. This has been shown to be the only effective way to protect our native wildlife in the long term.

So that is my motion—five reforms to improve our handling of companion animals. These reforms work in conjunction with each other to dramatically reduce the killing of cats and dogs in Victoria. What I am calling for today is not a pipedream. What I am calling for today is a model that works, and there is evidence to prove it. California passed an animal rescue act which makes it illegal for shelters to kill animals who rescue groups are willing to save. Since then the number of death row animals transferred to rescue groups has gone from 12 526 per year up to 99 784 per year. That is literally tens of thousands of lives saved every single year. Similarly, Delaware passed the Companion Animal Protection Act 10 years ago and has seen an 80 per cent decline in killing. There is precedent to show that the outdated arguments about needing to kill animals who are anxious, about rescue groups not being capable of working with shelters or of there being too many animals and not enough homes are wrong. Victoria could be the first state in Australia to implement these much-needed life-saving reforms, because there are thousands of Dashes out there who deserve better—who deserve a chance at a better life. There are many issues that divide Victorians, but one that unites us is our collective love for our companion animals and our desire to protect them from harm. I hope that this motion can receive widespread support from all parties across the chamber today.

I would like to end with a statement that Claire read out this morning:

Last month, the largest e-petition in Victorian history was tabled in Parliament—it demanded an end to convenience killing in our pounds and shelters.

I created the petition after my healthy foster greyhound Dash was killed for treatable anxiety issues—by the large Melbourne shelter that was supposed to be caring for him. Dash was never even listed for adoption. Shockingly, the shelter deliberately lied to us about his death.

Until that day, I had no idea of the level of killing that goes on behind closed doors in our pounds and shelters. Neither does most of the public, who pour millions of dollars into these organisations with bequests, donations, and taxes. The system is broken.

We need mandatory and transparent euthanasia reporting so that shelters are held accountable for how they’re spending our money. And we must give rescue groups the right to save animals on death row—they shouldn’t have to beg shelters not to kill animals, which is what is currently happening.

If you’d asked me a year ago, I would have thought that these measures were already in place—they’re common sense. But instead, thousands of healthy and treatable cats and dogs are being killed each year without being given a chance at a better life.

Thank you, Claire, and thank you posthumously, Dash, for being the impetus, the public face, of this reform. I will leave the fate of this motion and the lives of all those animals in the hands of the members of this house.

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) (10:26): Thanks, Mr Meddick, for bringing this motion to the house today. I intend to speak on this motion not just in relation to the government’s position on the components that it includes as part of today’s debate but also as a self-confessed animal lover who has continuously bored everyone around her with stories, short and tall, about what it is that my adopted animals have gotten up to as part of the incalculable joy that they bring to my life.

In listening to Mr Meddick talk about Dash today I have been reminded time and time again of our newest addition to the family, a greyhound called Sophie. Sophie is like Dash in many, many ways. Sophie is four years old. She is built like a machine. She has solid, rippling muscles and a physique that could, if she were so inclined, get amongst breaking some serious land speed records. But Sophie
is deeply, deeply anxious. Sophie is terrified of men. Sophie, when we adopted her, would take one mouthful of food before retreating outside to chew it whilst looking all around her for danger before tentatively returning to the house to repeat this process until she was no longer hungry. When we adopted Sophie, she paced constantly. She had nightmares and night terrors.

I will never know what it is that Sophie went through before she came to live with us. I will never know what it was that caused her to curl into the smallest ball possible, to almost try to become invisible, when she first came to her forever home. What I do know is that Sophie’s anxiety is a consequence of her environment and is a consequence of the treatment that she had before she came to live with us. What I do know is that dogs—and I say this from the experience of many, many dogs over many, many years—will react in response to the environment in which they live or, in too many cases, try to survive.

Sophie is on anti-anxiety and antidepressant medication. What we have seen in the weeks since we adopted her is a steady attempt by her to relax in her surroundings, to begin to trust the other dogs around her, to begin to eat without leaving her bowl, to try to play with other dogs in ways that should come naturally to her but which were probably knocked out of her psyche from her very early days. We see her upside down in her bed in the roaching position, as it is popularly known for greyhound owners—or indeed the human slaves of greyhounds, as we are known; it is called voluntary indentured servitude and I am a very, very happy captive of that arrangement. Eventually a dog will relax and will breathe out and will come to terms with the fact that it is not going to be removed, that separation is not going to be forever, and indeed that parameters, boundaries and routine are there to stay, causing a dog to understand its position in a pack and to relax into the dog that it was always meant to be.

Mr Meddick’s motion today is not just about Dash. Dash is a symbol and an emblem of not just what we have done as a state to understand how the mistreatment, abuse and neglect of animals occurs every day deliberately or negligently in every way, the many people who go above and beyond to try to assist animals in their welfare, their rescue, their treatment, rehabilitation and vet care, but is also an example of what can be done where a dog, a cat or any sort of companion animal is given the right sort of environment in which to grow and to flourish.

I have been very proud to be part of the discussion on animal welfare reforms in this place since the Andrews government was elected in 2014. Whilst I am filled all too frequently with incredible anguish about the euthanasia which occurs all too commonly in animals who perhaps deserve more effort, more funding, more assistance and more compassion, I am heartened by our work to reduce the number of animals which come onto the market, including through the puppy farm framework which has been shut down, the ending of the sale of dogs and cats through pet shops and through the corresponding work to increase interest in and engagement with adoption models through pounds and shelters.

Our laws are stronger and they have come a long way, but they do bring to mind what happens when animals are not considered fit for purpose, when they go beyond being a cute picture on a Facebook profile or a snapshot on TikTok or a story on Instagram. We want to make sure that dogs, cats and other companion animals are in a position not just to be photo opportunities but to be rightful participants in family life, and this includes through the work that we have done to enshrine tenants’ rights to have pets and to keep them, with the onus now upon the landlord to indicate why it is that this is not reasonable rather than the other way around.

We are continuing to deliver on Victoria’s first-ever animal welfare action plan after we established Animal Welfare Victoria. This is in addition to the grants to animal shelters and foster carers to purchase equipment to upgrade or to expand services which were part of last year’s budget. We know that, as I indicated earlier, organisations, pounds and shelters do the most extraordinary work, in the main, through the commitment of staff, volunteers, treating practitioners and stakeholders to maximise the opportunity for dogs and cats to be rehomed and to connect animals with the right environments in which to thrive, environments which will place and match animals to their temperament, to the
environment in which they will best be suited to a future that is aligned with the humans that they will share their time, their environments and, in my case, their couches with.

We are also assisting community organisations in the not-for-profit space, including community vets, to expand their operation and to support low-cost clinics around Victoria. From personal and local experience with a partnership between the Latrobe City Council and RSPCA Victoria, it was a joy last year to see the positive impact that the Latrobe Loves Pets initiative, as a pilot for the state of Victoria, achieved in partnering with an animal welfare officer, with animal laws officers and with community engagement to provide non-judgemental care and assistance in vaccination, in desexing, in veterinary care and in information and education about how people can look after their animals, can meet their needs and can address issues around hunger, around medication and around training.

We know in relation to the issue of convenience killing, which Mr Meddick has referred to extensively in his contribution and which he has referred to in the motion, that too many dogs and cats are not finding new homes. These are significant concerns. I know that three of my animals would not have found homes were it not for my quirky requirements around being prepared to take in dogs with specific needs, with complications and with the opportunity to spend time in large spaces with other dogs. We acknowledge these concerns that Mr Meddick has raised and we want to work with him and indeed the sector to improve the management and welfare of animals in Victorian shelters and pounds.

There is currently a code of practice in place that outlines when a facility is allowed to euthanise cats and dogs. Currently an animal can only be euthanised after there has been a thorough animal health assessment and where that animal is determined to be unsuitable for homing or rehoming because of untreatable disease, injury, behavioural issues or age. From my perspective the determination of what is unsuitable is the thing which needs to be the focus of government’s work with Mr Meddick, because what is unsuitable for one household will not necessarily be unsuitable for another. Two of my greyhounds have extensive behavioural challenges. However, in my home, in my environment, they are loved, they are cared for, their specific needs are met, and as a consequence they are flourishing.

Mr Leane: Do the donkeys keep them honest?

Ms SHING: Thank you, Mr Leane. I will take up that interjection. I have not yet had the opportunity to talk in this place about my donkeys, and I intend to touch on this briefly. Notwithstanding the anxiety that my beautiful dear girl Sophie, the most recent greyhound addition to the family, suffers, and notwithstanding the relentless stink eye that she cops from two miniature donkeys at very regular intervals when she decides to romp around the property, the donkeys have accommodated the dogs—who are in fact almost taller than they are—in a way that indicates a preparedness to be generous with a shared space. If only us humans could adapt so well.

What I do want to underscore though on a serious note is the importance of determining what is suitable and matching that with people who are prepared to take on animals with specific profiles or characteristics that may well make them unsuitable for one home but perfect for another. I know that to that end, people who work and volunteer in shelters and in pounds generally do so because they are extremely invested in the welfare and wellbeing of the animals under their care. What we do need to do, however, is to make sure that this applies across the board—that in fact we are minimising pound and shelter euthanasia and that we are carefully assessing and understanding what is suitable and applying the broadest possible application to interpreting that on the ground on a case-by-case basis from animal to animal and potential home to potential home. We already have partnerships encouraged between shelters and pounds and community foster care networks. I want to give huge recognition and a vote of respect to everyone within the foster care network who takes on animals across the board in a variety of circumstances, often involving extensive trauma, and provides animals with that initial contact in a safe, secure and consistently routined home.

We also need, on a broader note, to make sure that the health and behavioural assessments upon admission for animals are regulated in a way which enables the most consistent information about
animals across the board to be gathered. Many animals that require juvenile behavioural and vet rehabilitation or short-term relief are placed into these foster care arrangements with these extraordinary families and households under a written agreement with a pound or a shelter. What we need to do is circle back to that pound or shelter to make sure that information and data is gathered about the specific needs of animals under the charge and care of foster care networks so that this can be incorporated as part of the matching and adoption rehoming processes. We also need to make sure that when animals are returned to the animal shelter or pound for rehoming we have reforms in place that ensure that more pounds and shelters work with approved rescue groups.

Today the government is committing to doing exactly that and to understanding better what reforms can be made to enable this to happen and enable it to happen in a way which makes a practical, meaningful and hopefully lifesaving difference to more dogs like Dash and more dogs like my darling Sophie. We want to make sure that good animal welfare outcomes occur at every step of the rehoming process. We also note that community care networks in the foster space do not have the regulatory requirements of pounds and registered shelters. They are not currently required to formally register with councils, and they do not necessarily require the meeting of a particular standard or code of practice.

Whilst we know that many, many groups share and indeed exceed the expectations of not the government exclusively but Mr Meddick and the people and organisations that he represents, we also know that hoarding behaviours, despite the best intentions of those who want to make a positive difference, can adversely impact upon the care, the treatment and the overall incremental welfare improvement of animals who are in these environments and that that lack of adherence to high standards may in fact have potentially devastating consequences for animals who are forced to survive those particular circumstances using the resources and skills that they have available which we might otherwise consider to be high aggression, anxiety or withdrawal, potentially with outcomes which we do not consider to be acceptable in a home environment. I am looking forward to the government having more to say about this particular reform in due course, and I am looking forward to lending my voice in support of making sure that more is done wherever it can be done.

Now, the mandatory reporting of pound and shelter kill rates is something which Mr Meddick has spoken about at length today. Whilst pounds and shelters are required to maintain animal records for five years, including data that relates to the date, reason and method of any animal euthanised, some organisations choose to report these statistics and others do not. So we need to consult, and indeed we will consult, on changes to the code of practice for the management of dogs and cats in shelters and pounds in the coming months to bring this data together into one annual report published by the Victorian government. This will, in all likelihood, include data for pounds and shelters being information on the number of animals—despite what I might like to think, it is broader than dogs and donkeys—presented to shelters and to pounds.

The next point which Mr Meddick has spoken at length about is making the desexing of companion animals more affordable and accessible. We know that vet bills can be enormous and they can be out of reach for many people for reasons that are of a variety of different makings. In particular we look at the consequence of financial hardship, particularly in a post-COVID environment, and we know that more needs to be done.

We also know that there is great opportunity to partner with animal welfare organisations and community groups to make sure that wherever possible we can reach into communities in the same way that the Latrobe Loves Pets pilot program in the Latrobe Valley has done to have and provide non-judgemental facilitation of better outcomes for animals through voucher systems, through assistance from and partnerships with local vets and through regular check-ins from people who can help people to understand as animal owners what it is that they need to do to keep their pets happy and healthy and to minimise, particularly in the case of cats, issues around territorial infighting, urine spraying, feline-related and feline-transmitted disease and the impact of various behavioural challenges that may come, for example, from allowing cats to roam.
If we can provide better access through reduced council registration fees for desexed pets, as we do now with significant differences between desexed and non-desexed registration rates, we will continue to see improvements, particularly as we now know that 95 per cent of cats that are registered are desexed. There is always more work to do, and we need to make sure that we continue to make desexing of companion animals more affordable and accessible.

The introduction of a trap, neuter, return, or TNR, program for cats is something that I think we also need to make a primary consideration of and get more evidence on. It is something which we need to understand in the context of existing practices and existing frameworks for regulations such as the Domestic Animals Act 1994, the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 and the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 to make a clear-eyed assessment of what can be done, not just to understand the numbers of domesticated cats that we are dealing with but to understand more broadly in urban environments the impact that they have where we are not able to check their increasing numbers over time, particularly given their shorter breeding cycles and the fact that female cats are able to reproduce from a very young age.

We are intending to refer this matter to the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, and we want to make sure that this issue is considered in a really fulsome way, including by reference to the issues that Mr Meddick has raised. We also need to make sure that we are looking at this from a number of different angles, including the impact that feral cats have on our native population. I know in Eastern Victoria Region we see surveys with cats that contain the remnants and remains of up to 22 native species in their digestive tracts after one night of hunting and that this in fact does not include those animals that are killed not for consumption by the cat but rather as a consequence of their prey drive. It is what they are; it is what they do. So we need to be very holistic in the way in which we look at this, and we understand that the work of the committee and the advisory concept will be an important component.

The other thing I want to talk about is very popular on Facebook pages, and it occurs where lost animals are found and are usually brought home to someone’s garage or front yard because they have been seen along the side of a road, appear friendly and need to be reunited with their owners. What we do need to make sure of is that we can better facilitate the return of animals—for example, through a vet—and reunite animals with their owners where a microchip can be scanned and where owners can be directly contacted. Of course there is a lot of work to do to make sure that microchip information is up to date and accurate so pets are not inadvertently given to a previous owner who may or may not be a fit person to own that dog, for example. We need to make sure that the welfare of those animals is taken care of as obviously a primary driver in this.

At the last election we committed to implementing changes that would enable cats and dogs who are lost to be taken to a veterinary clinic or a registered animal shelter to be reunited with their owners sooner rather than the current requirement of lost cats or dogs being taken, usually by animal law officers but occasionally by people in the community, to a local council authorised officer. We need to make sure also that we take care of public safety in this regard, and in particular that we are not inadvertently opening up the issue of lost pets—or perhaps not lost pets—being taken in a way that enables information to be scanned for improper purposes, including those that might relate to a family violence situation or to situations where the privacy of that pet’s owner is of paramount importance for any number of different reasons. There is an issues paper that was released in July, and this has been a starting point, a lightning rod, in the same way that Dash has been, with more than 1000 submissions received, including from over 300 vet clinics, 39 rescue or foster groups and 55 councils.

We anticipate that a bill will be brought before this Parliament at some point in the next year to provide that more consistent and streamlined approach to reunite lost pets with their owners. So there is a lot of synergy in what Mr Meddick has proposed today in his motion and the work that the government has already started—that we began when we were elected in 2014 and which needs to go on. On this basis we do not oppose this motion at all. It is really important that we continue to lean into the very
difficult and confronting and often traumatic elements of this particular motion; that we recognise the good work that is being undertaken and replicate that wherever possible; and that we provide the necessary resources to safeguard animal welfare, including through pounds and shelters, including with councils, including with rescue organisations within the not-for-profit sector and including with veterinary networks across the board, for animals like Dash, for animals like my Sophie and like Boots who was here at Parliament earlier today, and not just for these pointy-faced snooters—Hansard is going to ask me to spell that one out—who come into care and who are the most extraordinary gentle, sensitive, loving animals that I could ever want, but for the countless other animals who deserve forever homes, who deserve to be suitably matched and who deserve the care, the attention and the treatment, whatever that may be, to live their lives to the fullest.

It has been a real pleasure to speak on this motion, Mr Meddick. I hope that my enthusiasm for this particular subject matter is well understood and conveyed and has not been lost in translation. I know I joke a lot about my greyhounds, about the world’s fattest whippet who is probably upside down on my bed right now and about my smallest dog, who I am yet to fully bond with but who seems to entertain the others. I know I take up a lot of time on social media and elsewhere talking about why it is that one of the great joys of my life has been to adopt two small donkeys, but this is a serious issue. This is an issue which comes down to compassion, to dignity, to respect, to the responsibilities that we have to be the best we can possibly be, not just to the pets that we call our own but also to assist those people who need and deserve help who genuinely try to be the best pet owners they can. We also need to lean into practices that need to be identified, to have some light shone on them and where necessary to have sanctions applied, including through the use of understanding data, including through the gathering of information so that we can enable every Victorian in a jurisdiction that has just about the highest rate of pet ownership in the world to be the best that it can possibly be for every pupper, for every doggo, for every kitten, for every single animal that is here for our satisfaction, our fulfilment, our joy and our unconditional love. Thank you, Mr Meddick, for bringing this motion. We do not oppose it.

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) (10:54): I too would like to commend Mr Meddick for bringing this motion to the house and would like to say a few words on it if I may. I have some considerable sympathy for Mr Meddick’s position and indeed for this motion. I am a shameless sook when it comes to dogs in particular. I am told that you are either a cat person or a dog person, and if that is the case I am probably a dog person I would suggest, although our cat at home has been known to want—Mr Melhem interjected. Mr FINN: No, it is going very nicely, I can tell you—far too nicely at times. I have over the last decade I suppose become a very enthusiastic advocate—try saying that after a couple of drinks—of pet adoption. That comes from the day that I walked into Lort Smith in North Melbourne. I was there with my daughter. I will never forget it as long as I live—it was a little over 10 years ago—and there was a dog. We had actually picked another dog from the website and we discovered that that dog had already been taken, a little white dog as I recall. We were walking around and all of a sudden there was a dog that just came at us. That dog was a very enthusiastic little dog and she, as it turned out, was also a very, very friendly little dog. I have got to say I fell in love with her almost on the spot. That dog ended up being Bobbidog, and for the benefit of Hansard that is B-O-B-I-D-O-G.

Bobbidog has become a major part of our family over the last 10 years. She is 12 now. She is getting on a little bit but she still has that enthusiasm, she still has that love. It does not matter what time I get home in the morning after Parliament or after work, she is there to greet me. Sometimes she is the only one there to greet me, it has to be said, but she is always there and she is always full of love. She is always full of what we need I think in a pet. Well, it is wrong to call her a pet. She is not a pet; she is a member of the family. The fact that my children often accuse me of loving Bobbidog more than I love them is probably just testament to the bond that I have with her. She is quite an extraordinary animal. I am not sure what I would do without her, to tell you the truth. I cannot believe that anybody
gave her up to begin with, but I am so glad they did. I am so glad they did because she has given us, and me in particular, 10 years of total loyalty, of total love, and she is just a joy in my life.

Then of course there was another time. I went to the Lost Dogs Home, and this has possibly caused some confusion to Yoda—Y-O-D-A—our cat who we got from the Lost Dogs Home. The cat does get a bit confused from time to time. This could be the genesis of that confusion, picking the cat up from the Lost Dogs Home. But we did get our cat, who our youngest daughter is particularly fond of—other daughters are not so fond of, I have to say. Yoda has become also a very big part of our family.

I have to tell the story of how I picked Yoda out. I went to the fairly big enclosure where they have the kittens, and there was a little white kitten that came over to me at the wire. I put my finger through the wire and the little kitten licked me. I said to the woman who was showing me the animals, ‘Can I pick this one up?’, and she said, ‘Most certainly’. So she picked Yoda up and handed him to me, and he immediately started purring. And I said, ‘I will have this one please. Thank you very much’. If I get an immediate purr out of anything, I am pretty happy, so it was a message to me that this was the cat for us.

I have to say that Lort Smith in particular with Bobbidog were particularly careful about where they sent her. They asked us a number of questions and it took a number of days before they actually agreed that we could have her. I was deliriously happy when they did and I am still deliriously happy now, so I give my thanks to whoever made that decision all those years ago to allow us to have Bobbidog in our family. I now have two daughters, two 14-year-olds, who are threatening this school holidays to become volunteers at the Lost Dogs Home. It concerns me enormously that after even just one day at the Lost Dogs Home our house will be full of kittens and puppies, because I am sure that is on the cards.

Having said all that, I have to say to Mr Meddick that nobody wants to see animals put down—nobody. It distresses me enormously when I think of that. Indeed it distresses me enormously when I think what would have happened if we had gone to Lort Smith 24 hours later, because Bobbidog was on her last chance. Yes, she did have a skin condition, which we are still treating to this very day, but she was on her last chance. If we, as I say, went a day later, it would have been a very different story, and that distresses me very, very much.

We have to come up with a better program to get these animals into loving homes. That is an absolutely crucial part of this. That will involve not just the animal services—Lort Smith, the Lost Dogs Home and the RSPCA, and I am sure there are a number of others. That will involve not just them but it will involve the support of government, it will involve an advertising blitz as it were to tell people that that is where you go. If you want a dog, if you want a cat, that is where you go. Whilst I respect the right of people who are breeders and want a particular breed, I would never do that because I have seen all these animals in enclosures both at Lort Smith and at the Lost Dogs Home and I could not leave them in deciding what sort of pet that I would take on board. That is so important. I think we have to—in fact I know we have to reinforce again and again and again to people that this is what should be done. This should be the first natural thought of everybody who wants a pet: you go to Lort Smith, you go to the Lost Dogs Home, you go to wherever there are all these dogs and cats that need you, and that is really very, very important.

The fact that many are put down is to my way of thinking horrendous and very, very sad indeed. Realistically at this point in time it is done very reluctantly by people. Let us face it: if you work somewhere like this, you have got to love animals. If you did not love animals, you would not work at the hostels and the animal protection organisations. So it is devastating for the staff as well as everybody else that these animals are put down, but unfortunately reality as it is at the moment takes over and you can only fit so many animals in at any one time. That is the simple reality. Nobody—and I have spoken to people in these animal shelters—wants to put an animal down unnecessarily. That is for sure.
My suggestion for Mr Meddick is to work together—to work with these organisations so that together you can come up with programs which are going to not just benefit the animals but will benefit the families who will receive these animals and who will care for these animals. My understanding is that not a lot of speaking goes on. That in itself is a problem. I have spoken to people who work in animal shelters of recent times. I have spoken to them, and they say, ‘People need to speak to us. Nobody has spoken to us about this motion’. That, to my way of thinking, is very, very strange. I do not understand why you would not sit down and try to come up with a workable agreement whereby animals can benefit. For example, the Lost Dogs Home has a desexing van which travels around Victoria. It has not so much this year because of the COVID situation, but the Lost Dogs Home has a desexing van. They need another one. In fact they probably should have half a dozen. They already have desexed thousands of cats and they need to continue to do that at a greater level. If the government, Mr Meddick, wants to increase the level of desexing, that would be something that would be positive, that would be productive, that would be proactive and something that would be of great benefit to the community.

I will not speak for too much longer, because I know there are a number of people who wish to speak on this. I know there are a lot of people out there who want to help animals.

**Dr Cumming:** We do, don’t we in the west?

**Mr Finn:** We do. Yes, my word, we do. There are a number of people who want to help animals, who are in rescue groups around the state, and their enthusiasm and their passion is to be admired. Whether they have the skills and the ability to match that is another thing altogether. Because the last thing we want to do is to put animals into the hands of people who perhaps do not have the abilities and do not have the skills to match their enthusiasm. That is something that can only harm animals who are put in that position. I do not have any objection to properly approved and regulated rescue groups doing exactly what Mr Meddick has suggested and what this motion is calling for, but I think we have to be very careful that these groups are regulated, they are approved and the people involved do have the skill level necessary to protect and to nurture the animals that we are talking about.

The motion goes on to talk about the trap, neuter, return (TNR) program, which I have to say I find rather interesting. That is something that we need to look at. There are a number of feral cats—

**Dr Cumming** interjected.

**The Acting President (Mr Melhem):** Order! Dr Cumming! While Mr Finn is very loud and has got a nice voice, I am having problems understanding what he is saying.

**Mr Finn:** Yes, well, Dr Cumming is very loud too; we would have to agree with that. The TNR program Mr Meddick has referred to—I would be very keen to find out the possibilities of that, because the actual logistics of bringing that about I have some doubts about. But let us have a look at it and let us see what we can achieve.

We join the government in not opposing this motion. Let us look at the possibilities. Let us look at what can be done to assist cats and dogs in particular and let us ensure that we can go forward in a compassionate and caring way not just for cats and dogs and companion animals but also for those who care for them. Let us not brand those people who are in animal refuges or animal rescue areas. Let us not brand them as being cruel. Let us not brand them in ways that are totally unacceptable. Let us applaud them for the work that they do. Let us applaud them for the work that they want to do if given the resources, if given the support from government and from the community, and I certainly do that today.

If nothing else comes out of today, I hope that a dialogue will begin between the various stakeholders so that we can have a better result for all concerned. We in the opposition do not oppose this motion, and as I say, there are a number of very interesting concepts that Mr Meddick has raised. I am very
keen to ensure that each and every one of them is examined, and I am hoping that we can all go forward
together to make life for our companion animals, our cats and our dogs, much better in the years ahead.

**Mr BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (11:11): I rise to speak on Mr Meddick’s motion today, and I
will give my credentials as an animal lover to begin with, as everyone else has done.

**Ms Shing** interjected.

**Mr BOURMAN:** Yes. We have a pug who we did buy from a breeder, but we also have a cat, our
last remaining cat, Xena. We actually did a direct rescue. She was a feral. She was about three or four
weeks old and we found her. She was starving, and we thought, ‘We’ll keep her for a few days, fatten
her up, send her to the pound’, but 12 years later here we are. We tend to go to the shelters to try and
get an animal. Indeed we are looking at another pug, and this time we are going to get one through a
shelter. It takes a lot longer, but there are a lot of animals out there. I cannot believe people pay so
much for a breed and then go and abuse them. It blows my mind.

But anyway, there is much about this motion that I do not have a problem with. One, there is
community concern about the killing of healthy or treatable companion animals. This weekend past
we went to a friend’s place and I met one of their dogs. It was an Irish wolfhound kelpie cross. It
looked like just a very small Irish wolfhound.

**Mr Finn** interjected.

**Mr BOURMAN:** We will not get into specifics, Mr Finn. The animal had been abused and did not
like men, so I took it upon myself to see how long it took. It took me about 15 minutes before she was
licking me all over and would not go away. But how people can do this is beyond me. Basically if my
friends did not take the animal it was going to be put down, and it was a perfectly healthy, good animal
that just needed a bit of TLC. So I do not have a problem with that.

Mandatory reporting of pound and shelter kill rates—I do not have a problem with that. In fact what I
would love to see is not necessarily something in Australia; it is the American PETA—People for the
Ethical Treatment of Animals. Apparently they have got a kill rate that would make anyone else blush.
I think a bit of anxiety in an animal, a bit of a minor personality complaint, for want of a better term,
is not a reason to be putting down an animal—and certainly not because the shelter is full or adoptions
are a little low. They are perfectly good animals.

On the requirement for pounds and shelters to work with an approved and regulated rescue group
before ending an animal’s life, that is actually fairly reasonable. There are a lot of breed-specific as
well as animal-specific rescue groups that could help, Pug Rescue, Pugs SOS, Saffron on the Hill—
things like that—being cases in point. Rather than just giving them the green dream, give it the best
ty you can. They are our companion animals, and they are companions for a reason.

‘Introduce subsidised and free desexing initiatives for companion animals’—that seems reasonable.
Some people do struggle to get their animals desexed. Really you should not take on an animal if you
cannot afford it, but times change. I know myself I have gone through hard times where, if I had had
to have an animal desexed at that time, I have no idea where the money would have come from. So I
am good to go there.

Then the wheels fall off. The wheels fall off on the trap, neuter, return thing. Now, I listened to
Mr Meddick’s contribution, and he cites all sorts of statistics regarding TNR and the reduction at
shelters—some American shelters—and things like that. Well, of course they are going to have a
reduction in animals, because instead of putting them in there and then eventually euthanising them,
as the term is—killing them—they go back out, so the numbers are going to drop, guaranteed. But I
am not here to quibble about statistics. I have always had a problem with TNR.

With feral animals—and this motion does not just say ‘stray animals’ or anything like that; this is
basically all animals and community cat populations—once you bring them in you might give them
all sorts of veterinary treatment, make them healthy, desex them and put them back out. It is guaranteed they are not going to breed. I absolutely have no problems with that. But particularly with cats—and I personally am a cat lover—the reality is they will kill somewhere around 466 million reptiles and 272 million birds every year. Now, with the TNR you are not stopping that cat from killing anything; in fact you are making it a little bit healthier and putting it back out there. It is actually putting the life of a feral cat or any other animal above the life of 466 million reptiles and little critters and 272 million birds—native animals. I think that is extremely irresponsible.

If you cannot find a home for a cat or any animal, and I am just going to use cats because it is mentioned here, and if it is a fairly good cat—our cat Xena was a stray, a feral, and we took it upon ourselves to make sure that she was domesticated, and she has always been a little free, independent spirit—just because it is feral does not mean you should put it down. But at some point in time, putting it back out into the wild is extremely irresponsible. There are a lot of people here that talk about the environment and things like that, and now we are faced with TNR—‘Let’s take one of nature’s best killing machines, make it a little better and pop it back out there for up to 20 years’, or maybe not so long; seven years is the average age for a feral cat, which is not that long. It is a pretty tough life. Whilst I am a cat lover, if I am out shooting rabbits or foxes or things like that I will go out of my way to fix up a feral cat. I will do it humanely, as I do with everything. That is one thing I will point out—everything should be humane. But those things are killing machines. If they are a companion animal, happy days. That is a completely different thing, and I think anyone that has ever dealt with a feral cat knows about it. In fact the first feral cat I ever shot attacked the car I was in. They are not shy little creatures. They are not little cuddly Burmese. This costs the environment like you would not believe—and I am sounding a bit like a greenie here.

Mr Finn: Controversial!

Mr BOURMAN: I said ‘greenie’, not ‘Green’.

Ms Patten interjected.

Mr BOURMAN: Close enough. At least someone cares for the environment here. I am putting that out there. The TNR sounds good. It sounds like a good, cuddly answer to everything. The reality of a TNR program is that it just unleashes more killing, and it is not people killing animals, it is animals killing animals. People say humans are the only animals that kill for sport. I do not know if they have ever watched a cat, I do not know if they have ever watched a fox and I do not know if they have ever seen what happens to sheep when the dogs get on top of them. They do not eat them; they just kill them—if the sheep is lucky. It is such a bad thing.

Whilst I support half of this motion, I cannot support the second half. It is just a disaster, really. It is an environmental disaster, and it is just going to be a cost disaster. It costs millions of dollars a year. Numbers are easy to come by, but governments nationally spend about $2 million a year to control the animals, but the estimated value is $144 million a year of economic loss. I do not know how they come up with those numbers. I am not a statistician—I can barely count to 10—so I am taking that on face value.

But then there is also the issue that there are no limits to this. The motion just says ‘community cat populations’, and I will get to part (e) in a moment. It says ‘community cat populations’. Does that mean in national parks? Does that mean on farmers’ land? Does that mean the farmer will then have to look at controlling them? Feral cats are a pest as it is, and they are required to be controlled in any manner appropriate. But does that then mean, instead of in any matter appropriate, they have got to catch them, get them neutered and release them? As if the farmers do not have enough to do already. So I do not support the TNR thing. I cannot support the TNR thing. It has always been a bad idea and it always will be a bad idea. It sounds easy. It sounds like it will work, and maybe it will in 20 years, but I can tell you now that if you kill a cat it will not kill another animal, with the caveat that at least if you can rehome it that is fair, but putting it back in the wild is just ridiculous.
Then we go to, ‘commit to implementing immediate reuniting of missing companion animals through vet clinics’. That is actually not a bad idea on the face of it, but we open ourselves to a massive privacy and data problem. We all remember that Aussie Farms thing, where basically somehow enough farmers had got their details exposed for a website to be put up for the animal activists to have a go at them. Well, someone can—if they were so inclined, and I am just going to postulate this—take your animal, go down to the vet clinic and say, ‘Where do these people live?’ They give you the details and there we go.

Dr Cumming interjected.

Mr BOURMAN: Thank you, Dr Cumming. It sounds good, but I have a serious issue with supporting this.

Also whilst Mr Meddick was making a contribution he said something that even further disturbed me. It was something to do with a breeding blitz. Now, I must admit I was half dozing during it, as I tend to do with Mr Meddick’s stuff, but I heard it and I thought, ‘What?’, and started listening. It sounds to me like it is another attack on animal breeders. This goes back to 2016 when we had the puppy farm bill. The puppy farm bill I see as being much like the drug issue. A number of people say we should legalise drugs because prohibition does not work and keeping them prohibited drives them underground as a business. What happened with the puppy farm legislation was that all the law-abiding puppy farm people changed their ways, did their thing, but the illegal puppy farming was completely unaffected. So what we have got is an actual problem that was just driven further underground. It is a lot easier now I think with the requirements to track down whether someone is legit or not on Facebook and various other things, but they put a great big long number on there and who is going to be able to tell whether that is a legit breeder or not? I do not think a lot of people who want to buy a cute puppy are going to get on the phone and say to whoever it is, the council, ‘Oh, yeah, check out this number and make sure they’re legit’. They will head down to the car park and grab their Shih tzu or whatever it might be and go home, and it might be on.

I am a believer in regulation, not banning. I am getting a little bit off track here, but it is basically what Mr Meddick said—it just seemed to be another thing about breeders. I really do not think the continuing go at law-abiding breeders is worth it. On that note, I cannot support this motion, because of the last two things. I am actually supportive of the first stuff but, particularly with the TNR, it just really gets up my nose when people say these things as if they are an answer.

Ms TERPSTRA (Eastern Metropolitan) (11:23): I rise to speak in regard to Mr Meddick’s motion, and sadly I do not have very much time left to speak on this. I actually wanted to talk about my dog Skye—

Msatten interjected.

Ms TERPSTRA: Yes, I know. My dog Skye, who came from a pound and who has a little bent paw, also—similar to what Ms Shing talked about—suffers anxiety. She greets people with a growl but brings a ball in her mouth. People do not realise that that is actually an affectionate move and would think that that is something to be very concerned about, so I can understand why she ended up in the pound. She also hates men. She is also very protective of little children, and she follows me to every room in the house. Even when I go to the toilet she is in the toilet with me. She has to sleep in our room. She cannot be away from us and she is very protective of me, so I can totally relate to what Ms Shing said.

The other thing is she has a little bent paw, so she has got some level of disability there, and people do not want a dog that is not perfect. When we saw her in the pound she was clearly depressed and anxious. Consequently, we have made sure now that she has found her forever home with us that she is much loved and cared for and is improving. She did do a little bit of remodelling when she came to our house. She tore through a bedroom and tore up curtains and all sorts of things.
The other animal that we basically found a home for was our cat, Rizzo, who we also got from the Cat Protection Society of Victoria. Again, what is really important is—I think, Mr Finn, you talked about this earlier—we do not just go out and purchase animals, we make sure that we can give animals who are in need of a home a home without necessarily euthanising them.

One thing I just want to mention is in regard to Mr Bourman’s contribution, and I have said this to Mr Meddick before. Cats get a bad rap, I think, and I support the trap and neuter proposition that you are talking about, Mr Meddick, because people do not understand and conflate what a feral cat is versus a semi-owned or semi-domesticated cat versus a cat that is owned by somebody. That is really important, and I have read the RSPCA paper on that matter. I read that some time ago. They have done a lot of good work on that, and I would really encourage people in this chamber and broadly those that are watching at home to read that paper as well, because it actually clarifies the issue. I know that there is some conflation around that, and so consequently I am proud to speak on this motion.

I support the motion as proposed by Mr Meddick, and as Ms Shing eloquently put it in her earlier contribution, the government will consult on changes to the code of practice for the management of dogs and cats in shelters and pounds in the coming months. The government is committed to continuing to make desexing of companion animals more affordable and accessible, and I know some local government councils have made free programs available. In order to further consider this issue and provide more evidence for the government’s consideration, the government will refer this matter to the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee. Again, I am happy to support this motion. There is a lot of commonality between the government’s intentions and Mr Meddick’s motion, and as I said, we support this.

Dr RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (11:27): I rise to speak in support of Mr Meddick’s motion today. This motion is about the welfare of our companion animals, the dogs and cats and other pets who are part of many Victorian families and bring enormous amounts of love and joy to our lives. I know that especially this year, with restrictions on how and when we could socialise with others, many of us took great comfort from the presence of our dogs, cats and other companion animals. So it is quite distressing to be considering this motion today, which is about the routine convenience killing of healthy animals in Victorian shelters and pounds. This is the practice of killing an animal instead of rehoming it, often because of a shelter or a pound deciding it is easier to discard an animal rather than rehabilitate them and get them ready for a new home.

The creation of no-kill shelters and the adoption of unclaimed companion animals is longstanding Greens policy. We have always opposed animal cruelty in all its forms, including the unnecessary killing of animals who end up in our pounds and shelters. Currently shelters and pounds do not have to publish statistics on how many animals are euthanised, which means that many are able to avoid scrutiny and accountability over convenience killing. The Greens support legislated mandatory reporting of pound and shelter euthanasia statistics so that we know how many animals are killed each year and why. We note that similar mandatory reporting has been introduced in international jurisdictions and has successfully lowered kill rates.

We also support measures for pounds and shelters to work more closely with animal rescue groups before resorting to convenience killing. The Greens have always called for the rehoming and adoption of companion animals, and we support reforms that mean that shelters must do more to rehabilitate and look after companion animals so that they can be welcomed into a new home.

I also note that creating more subsidised desexing initiatives for companion animals is also longstanding Greens policy. We recognise that unrestricted breeding of companion animals has led to the overpopulation of some animals and contributed to the problem of convenience killing, especially of kittens and puppies. While some local councils have made desexing companion animals compulsory, we are aware that some residents find the cost of the procedure prohibitive and struggle to comply.
All owners should be able to access desexing programs to help manage unwanted companion animal populations, and we support additional subsidies to help achieve this. I know that many in our community share our concerns about the unnecessary killing of companion animals in Victorian pounds and shelters. I thank Mr Meddick for tabling a petition on behalf of almost 30,000 people who signed it, calling for a number of reforms in the motion we are debating today. The Greens are pleased to also support the Victorian community and support this motion.

**Dr CUMMING** (Western Metropolitan) (11:29): I am pleased to rise today to speak on Mr Meddick’s motion because last year I raised a motion around the 79 councils that currently have 79 ways of registering cats and dogs. The government made a commitment to me last year on the motion that I raised around making sure that we looked at statewide registration. This would go some way to making sure that animals that end up in shelters are actually be reunited with their families. I do hope that the government is acting upon the motion that I raised 12 months ago, because it would complement Mr Meddick’s motion today.

As a doctor of Chinese medicine, I have got a little book here from when I was studying many years ago, in January 1988. This book talks about some of the special merits of veterinary treatment with acupuncture and moxibustion therapy for animals. Over my 20 years there has been many a time when we have actually helped sick and injured animals with complementary therapies. I do hope that we go some way towards making sure that animals are reunited with their families as quickly as possible. I commend Mr Meddick’s motion.

**Mrs McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (11:31): I rise to speak on this motion of Mr Meddick’s today. In doing so I just want to point out that we have got to be very careful about cost-shifting to local government, which is already burdened in many ways by activities that we pass in this place. I think there is a differentiation we need to also be aware of between rural and urban municipalities. Urban municipalities collect sometimes the same amount of money in pet registrations as the total budget of some rural municipalities. In many cases ensuring that we have got a proper system for rehoming or dealing with lost animals or wild animals that are causing trouble, especially cats in many areas, is an issue that urban municipalities do not have to deal with, while having enormous budgets that they collect from pet registrations. In 2019 there were 662,855 dogs registered through local councils and 221,541 cats. All Victorian councils collect a registration fee of $4. If you equate that out, that is $3.5 million that could be used to subsidise desexing and other rehoming activities. There is no doubt that this needs to be done.

I would just say that, and I have contacted all the municipalities in Mr Meddick’s and my region about this issue, local governments by and large do an excellent job at trying to rehome lost animals or find their owners, and social media has advanced this cause now because you often see a dog that they have found, the pound keeper has put it up and in no time it will be reunited with its owner. Vets likewise do an extraordinary job in helping to check microchips. Of course we do not want vets being charged for doing something that absolutely should not be illegal. They should be able to assist in the identification of animals so that their owners can be found, and if owners are not looking after their animals properly, they are the ones that need to be dealt with.

I would say that one of the major issues in this is education. Some people just should not own animals. We have had an increase in people purchasing animals to have companions while they have been locked at home. One wonders what is going to happen if they all go back to work and these poor pets are left locked in an urban environment with nobody there to be their companion. We are going to have a greater influx of distressed animals or animals that are hopefully not let loose, as Mr Bourman has pointed, in rural areas where we have got a major situation with wild dogs and cats causing no end of trouble with our native animals.

This is a serious matter in many rural areas. Not only are wild dogs and cats causing issues with native animals but they are causing issues with farm animals as well. Wild dogs can do enormous damage to sheep and lambs and so on. This is because people get a pet, treat it as a toy effectively and do not...
know how to look after it. Then somehow the pets get released into the wild and become very good predators and we all suffer. I think we need to use the money we collect from registrations to make sure that money is not going into consolidated revenue but is used to help desex animals.

Like Mr Bourman, I have got issues with the fact that we have virtually closed down legitimate breeding enterprises and they have gone underground. The veterinary association have said to me that one of their worst problems is the number of backyard breeders and the cruelty that is inflicted on so many animals where pets are being bred illegally, with no regulation whatsoever, and sold in car parks and in no way properly looked after. We need to do a lot more, we absolutely do, but we have got to be very careful that we do not shift this burden onto local government and that we actually start educating the population about what it is to be a pet owner.

**House divided on motion:**

**Ayes, 34**

Atkinson, Mr
Bach, Dr
Barton, Mr
Bath, Ms
Crozier, Ms
Cumming, Dr
Davis, Mr
Elasmar, Mr
Erdogan, Mr
Finn, Mr
Gepp, Mr
Grimley, Mr

Hayes, Mr
Kieu, Dr
Leane, Mr
Lovell, Ms
Maxwell, Ms
McArthur, Mrs
Meddick, Mr
Melhem, Mr
O’Donohue, Mr
Ondarchie, Mr
Patten, Ms

Pulford, Ms
Ratnam, Dr
Rich-Phillips, Mr
Shing, Ms
Stitt, Ms
Symes, Ms
Taylor, Ms
Terpstra, Ms
Tierney, Ms
Vaghela, Ms
Watt, Ms

**Noes, 3**

Bourman, Mr
Limbrick, Mr
Quilty, Mr

**Motion agreed to.**

**Committees**

**LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE**

**Reference**

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (11:44): I am pleased to rise to move:

That this house requires the Legal and Social Issues Committee to inquire into, consider and monitor the capacity and fitness for purpose of the Victorian government’s COVID-19 contact-tracing system and testing regime and, in doing so, consult with businesses, including small business representatives, the community sector and Victoria’s multicultural communities, and provide:

(1) an initial report to the house no later than 30 November 2020; and

(2) further reports to the house, following the initial report, as required until 31 December 2021.

I read that motion in because it is extremely important. We in Victoria have been facing such a significant issue with the COVID-19 crisis, and today sadly, with another two deaths, the number of Victorians who have died as a result of the second wave has now reached 800. It has been absolutely devastating for the families and friends of those people who have lost their lives and for all who have been looking after those people in their final days and hours, let alone the tragedy and the ongoing economic devastation that has hit our state.

I have been very concerned—as you well know, President—about contact tracing. I have raised it for months and months and months, and the government has brushed it off. In fact even in the first wave, with the Cedar Meats debacle, that very issue, the government said it had been handled absolutely perfectly. Well, we know that was not the case. We know that people that were caught up in that cluster did not have confidence, were not tested, were not contacted for days on end and were so worried
about infecting family members and others. That was not handled absolutely perfectly. Of course with the second wave, with the outbreak from the breaches in hotel quarantine through the security guards and the ongoing widespread community transmission, that occurred because of the failures in contact tracing.

Now, I need to put this all on the record because it is the reason why I think this motion is so important. Every Victorian, in fact every Australian, wants to understand and wants the confidence to know that this government has finally fixed the problems in contact tracing, because those breaches happened months and months ago and because the issues have not been fixed despite the government and the Premier telling us it is rolled gold, it is gold standard and it is the best in Australia. I do not think the community has trust or confidence in what the government is saying, and I think they deserve to. I think they deserve to trust and be confident in the government getting this right.

That is why I think this motion is so important. This Parliament, which has done some wonderful work in the past in terms of inquiries, can actually come together to give the community the opportunity to come before the committee so it can hear from them and then reassure them that the contact-tracing system that is in place will keep us safe, because it has not so far. It has let Victorians down with the hundreds of people that have lost their lives, with the devastation of the economic impacts and with the tens of thousands of businesses that have had to shut, many of which will never open again. With the tragedy of that, there have been some horrendous stories of people taking their own lives and again of young people self-harming. The minister himself said in an answer in question time yesterday that, yes, there has been an increase in young people with suicidal ideation and self-harming. The figures are too high, and the suicide numbers that the government is saying are comparative to last year are false. They are false because the reporting has not finished, and we know that because I am hearing far too often from members of the Victorian community about the suicides that are taking place.

This is the reality of what has happened through this shocking situation that Victoria finds itself in. If ever there was a time for the Parliament to be doing this work on behalf of the community, of every single person that we represent here in this place, it is now. We represent the entire state in this house, and we have an obligation to every single person that we represent to have this inquiry, to not stall any longer and to ensure that the community can be reassured that the contact-tracing system that the government says is the best in Australia is actually the best in Australia.

I do not trust the government. I do not trust what they have been saying, because they have let us down for months and months and months. Victoria has experienced the harshest restrictions and the worst outcomes. Eight hundred people have lost their lives due to COVID in the second wave; 1200 people are losing their jobs a day. The cost to the individual, the cost to the community and the ongoing cost to our society for not just months or weeks but years will be profound. I think that if ever there was a reason for this Parliament to do its work it is to have an inquiry of this nature.

I have said plenty of times that there have been concerns around the conflicting advice that has come out of the Department of Health and Human Services—the confusion. We have seen that in recent days—10 days ago, after the northern suburbs outbreak, which I note the government says came from Box Hill Hospital. I have seen an email from the Box Hill Hospital that explains how they contained it. They contained it within the outbreak that they had, but it escaped into the community—again. And there we had the let-down. It did not work, because the messaging was confusing. The community did not understand exactly what they were supposed to do, and we know that from the very start of this entire scenario—this entire COVID crisis that the entire country has been grappling with—one of the basic things you would think would be to have communication in a variety of languages if we are in a multicultural community, and Melbourne is a very large, vibrant, wonderful multicultural community. Yet they have been let down. The multicultural community have been let down because the government has not provided them with the necessary information that they could actually understand—information that they could understand and then deal with. We know that has occurred because we have seen case after case break out, and it is no fault of the people, because this virus—as the Premier said—is a virus that is highly transmissible. We know that. So we have to look at that.
But as I said, 10 days ago there was that issue around the advice, and in fact the email that was provided to the family from ‘ExistingConfirmedCase’ on 17 October, ‘End of isolation for case’, says:

Dear …

family member redacted—

Thank you for your time earlier today.

As discussed, your family has met the Department of Health and Human Service’s criteria to end isolation.

Please see letters attached.

Thank you for your cooperation during this time.

Now, the family took that to say that they were cleared, so the child went to school. The department is arguing, ‘No, that’s not what we said, and they were told that they weren’t meant to be’. There was clearly a communication breakdown. Communication is part of the contact-tracing capacity, and that is my concern—that we have still got these issues. Forget the Cedar Meats ‘absolutely perfectly handled’ debacle way back in March. It is now nearly November and we have still got these concerns going on, and that destruction of our economy, the tragic lives that have been lost and the cost to all of us are going to be here with us for a long, long time.

Coming into the December Christmas period, businesses want to reopen. They are reopening slowly now, as we all know. It has been a long, hard stretch for everybody. But they also are quite sceptical about the government’s approach to this because of the let-down that they have had time and time again. And we saw that last week. There was the Cox Plate decision—it was a go for a horserace—and then after an outcry on social media the government shut it down. It demonstrates that the approach the government has been taking is not always based on medical advice; it is actually based on public outcry and political outcomes. That is very clear. That is a fact.

We need to have confidence in this system. Businesses are struggling. Some of them, who have not been open since March, are so struggling. And that is what I have found so galling during this week, when the government is celebrating and giving themselves a pat on the back. What about those people? What about those businesses that have not been able to operate, have not had an income since March and have done it so tough? Here we have a government that is, you know, doughnuts and whisky. The Premier is pretty keen on a whisky club, but seriously he has forgotten about the purpose of what he has to do, which is to govern for all of us and for all of us to have confidence in what he is telling us. Let me tell you, that level of confidence is not there. It is not there.

If ever there was a reason for a community to have that confidence, it is contact tracing. This is the biggest issue our state is facing at present. It is the most important issue our state is facing at present. I think that this inquiry that this Parliament will do is incredibly important. The government sent me an amendment to my motion about 25 minutes ago. They want to adjust the date and they do not want ongoing reporting. I say to the government, ‘No. We need to have this done. We need to have this done now—no more delays, no more deferrals, no more fudging—

Mr Ondarchie: No more forgetfulness.

Ms CROZIER: No more forgetfulness, Mr Ondarchie. We do not want the collective amnesia that has gone on like we saw in the hotel quarantine inquiry. We want the facts. We want the truth. We want honesty in where this contact-tracing system is. The failures that have occurred should have been fixed months ago. We should have had this fixed when other states were putting in place the technology so that they could track and trace. This government did not do that. They did not make the investment. We had 14 people in the public health team to do the contact tracing in March and April. For heaven’s sake, we were told we were prepared by the former health minister, but she has gone now and is having continual blues with the current government. She does not agree with them. She almost called the Premier a liar in the hotel quarantine inquiry. I mean, there are significant issues going on internally within the government, but that is not the point. I do not care about the internal
factional fighting that is going on in the government. I am concerned about the Victorian public and their ability to have confidence in the contact-tracing system that they do not have because of these multiple failures time and time again.

If only the government had taken up the support of the ADF when it was offered, like New South Wales did. It did the contact tracing with New South Wales in early April. We cannot go backwards. We cannot look at all of that. This government has made multiple mistakes. Its mismanagement and incompetence have cost so much, as I have said. Hundreds of people have lost their lives. Tens of thousands of businesses have been smashed and will never open or are struggling and just want to get on with their lives or want to reopen and want their employees, who they have been supporting for months on end, to come back in. People have been sitting at home and wanting to go back to work.

Mr Ondarchie: 23 hours a day.

Ms CROZIER: It is just extraordinary what we have had to suffer. As Mr Ondarchie said, we were locked up for 23 hours a day at one point—23 hours a day under a curfew that did not have any basis anyway.

Mr Leane interjected.

Ms CROZIER: I will take up Mr Leane’s interjection. This goes to the point, Mr Leane. The Victorian public has been told by your leader, the Premier, that the rules that have been put in place, which have taken away lots of personal liberties and freedoms—lots of liberties and personal freedoms—

Members interjecting.

Ms CROZIER: Why don’t we just compare us, Ms Shing, with New South Wales? But if I can go back to Mr Leane’s interjection before I come back to yours, through you, Chair—

Members interjecting.

Ms CROZIER: Well, if you had done a proper job—

The PRESIDENT: Order! Have we settled? I have to interrupt business for question time anyway.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

I COOK FOODS

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:00): My question is to the Leader of the Government. Minister, reports on Saturday suggest that I Cook Foods are suing the government for $50 million following the forced closure of their business in February 2019, so I ask: can you guarantee that no police investigation is taking place into any involvement of Dr Sutton in the closure of I Cook Foods?

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (12:00): I thank Ms Crozier for her question. I will have to take it on notice. It is not information that I have.

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:00): I thank the Leader of the Government for that response, and I look forward to receiving that response. You might have to take this on notice as well. Minister, how much has been spent by the government on legal costs for the ongoing legal stoush between the Department of Health and Human Services and I Cook Foods?

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (12:01): I am happy to take that on notice as well.
Mr BARTON (Eastern Metropolitan) (12:01): My question is to Minister Pulford, representing the minister for transport. The taxi and hire car industry was already knocked down prior to this pandemic. However, COVID-19 has been a nail in the coffin for many of them struggling to survive. The government’s lack of economic support for non-employing sole traders has further crippled this industry. Livelihoods depend on an effective recovery plan moving forward. Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria is responsible for outlining the rules and parameters that dictate this industry. One would have thought that as a regulator they would have a statutory responsibility to ensure that the taxi and hire car industry has a plan to move forward. So I ask the minister: what is the CPVV’s plan to relaunch the taxi and hire car industry as we come out of these restrictions?

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business) (12:02): I thank Mr Barton for his question, which is directed to Minister Carroll and which I will seek a written response for him on. But just if I could briefly reflect on the part of the question that I guess in some ways goes to the reopening of a whole lot of economic activity that is occurring from midnight last night, so really starting today, I would again acknowledge and thank you for your advocacy in this sector and wish them well in what is hopefully a rapid resumption of activity as people start taking up those opportunities to move around a bit more freely from today.

Mr BARTON (Eastern Metropolitan) (12:03): Thank you, Minister. If the CPVV do have a plan, is there any chance they can share it with the 110 000 taxi and hire car drivers in Victoria?

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business) (12:03): I thank Mr Barton for his further question about the role the regulator might be playing in economic recovery, and I will seek a response from Mr Carroll to that end.

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (12:03): I wish to update the house on the biggest challenge in the agriculture portfolio right now, one that is consuming much of the attention of those in the agricultural sector around the country, and that is helping agricultural businesses secure a seasonal workforce for harvest season. We need to help them get their world-class produce to market and to do so in a COVID-safe way. Last week I visited farms across northern Victoria, and I continue to hear firsthand about the challenges being faced by our seasonal horticultural industries. Challenges are being faced by producers on fruit and vegetable farms from Sunraysia to East Gippsland, with an estimated shortfall of 20 000 workers statewide for this season’s harvest.

We are tackling this challenge from many angles. We are working to attract Victorians to take up seasonal roles in regional Victoria, we are connecting farm businesses to the Working for Victoria platform and other support they need to get local workers into jobs and we are looking to reinstate the international workers that are a key part of the skilled, experienced and reliable workforce that this sector has come to rely on. The Victorian government has opted into the commonwealth seasonal worker program, and the Pacific labour scheme is working to help local employers take part in these schemes. We are working closely with the commonwealth and other jurisdictions on strategic approaches for addressing labour issues and requirements, such as quarantine and work health and safety arrangements.

Our new seasonal workforce coordinators and CALD engagement officers are on the ground working closely with farmers, local industry groups, employers, labour hire agencies and local government. To date they have connected with more than 125 industry groups and worked directly with more than 40 farmers to support them with their workforce needs and their COVID-safe requirements. Industry has told me there will be accommodation supply challenges for this harvest season, particularly in
relation to meeting COVID-safe requirements. It is why we are providing more than $6 million to help address accommodation supply issues and boost the supply of COVID-safe accommodation. There is no doubt this year’s harvest season will be unlike any we have experienced before, and the only way through it is to continue to work together to find ways to adapt and face these challenges.

COVID-19

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:05): My question is for the Minister for Small Business. Minister, the Victorian events industry is a very significant employer, with many small businesses forming an integral part of that sector. The government has not yet published material allowing the events sector to recommence its operations, but key small business participants tell me that a minimum of 50 attendees, with appropriate social distancing and proper protections, would be required to support a viable return of the events sector, and I therefore ask: given zero COVID-19 transmission in Victoria, when will the small businesses in the events sector be allowed to reopen with rules that ensure they are both safe and viable?

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business) (12:06): I thank Mr Davis for his question. Two new coronavirus cases have been recorded in the last 24-hour reporting period, so it is not true to say that there is no infectious activity. It is not true to say or suggest or infer that the pandemic has been and gone. I think it is a little irresponsible to do that, to be honest.

In terms of the discussions that the government has been having with the events industry to work with them on the safe resumption of what they do, which is of course such an essential part of the fabric of life across Victoria and in Melbourne, the minister who has primary responsibility for this and has been involved in these discussions is Minister Pakula, so I will take the question in part on notice and confer with Minister Pakula to provide some further advice. But I do know that there has been regular engagement with the industry, that they have made frequent representations to ministers, particularly to Minister Pakula, and that they have been working with our department.

I would also indicate, though, as is the case for all industry restrictions, that we will continue to be guided by the health advice and work closely with industry organisations so that the health advice can be informed by the best possible knowledge and understanding of how industry operates. I know that all the industry leaders that I have met with and spoken with over now four months in this role are deeply, deeply committed to a safe and sustainable reopening of the economy, and I have no reason to believe that the events industry would be any different, though it is Minister Pakula who has predominantly been dealing with them on our behalf.

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:08): Minister, I am actually surprised that you have not engaged with this sector yourself directly, because there are literally hundreds and hundreds of small businesses in this sector and I think that this is something that you should engage with. But for my supplementary question, Minister, other governments around Australia have provided significant specific support packages with grants of between $5000 and $100 000 to support events industry businesses. This has included a package for logistics and support groups. I therefore follow with this and ask: will you urgently commit to a specific financial support package to kickstart the small businesses in the events sector in Victoria?

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business) (12:09): As I indicated, I am certainly aware of the discussions between my colleague, my department and the events industry, and I understand that many of them are small businesses. Ninety per cent of Victorian businesses are small businesses.

Mr Davis: But this sector specifically.
Ms PULFORD: Well, lots of sectors specifically. They are engaged with and are having discussions with Minister Pakula in his capacity as the minister responsible for COVID recovery, so I will seek some updated and contemporary advice on the latest in those discussions. What I am able to advise you of through the parliamentary processes I will, but we will probably continue our practice of dealing directly with industry groups rather than with you, Mr Davis.

MURRAY BASIN RAIL PROJECT

Mr GRIMLEY (Western Victoria) (12:10): My question is to the minister representing the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. The Murray Basin rail project business case has been an ongoing issue, with the federal and state governments each pushing the other to release the document and the continued politicisation of the project’s funding. Last week the Victorian Farmers Federation published in a media release that:

Until we see the full revised business case for the Murray Basin Rail Project and have an understanding of the plan to deliver the project as promised, we cannot support this.

The media release goes on to state that:

A fit-for-purpose rail freight network must provide an opportunity for competition amongst train providers, storage facilities, access to all ports and access to the national rail network.

My question to the minister is: will the government release the full revised business case so farmers and stakeholders can give their informed feedback?

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business) (12:11): I thank the member for the question, and I will seek a written response from Minister Allan in accordance with our standing orders.

Mr GRIMLEY (Western Victoria) (12:11): Thank you, Minister. At some point between 2018 and this year the real costs of standardising the whole network have become apparent and it is now simply too expensive to complete. Farmers and other stakeholders are obviously disappointed that something from the original plan back in 2014 is still not completed and, more frustratingly, has now seemingly been abandoned. My supplementary question is: what will be the financial and logistical impact on farmers of no longer committing to standardising the gauge of the whole network, and can the government explain exactly why this was dropped from the new business case?

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business) (12:12): I will seek a written response from Minister Allan.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: MEDICAL RESEARCH

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business) (12:12): I would like to take the opportunity this afternoon to advise the house about the groundbreaking work being done in Geelong in medical research and clinical trials. It was my pleasure to meet with Frances Diver and the team at Barwon Health, along with Professor Eugene Athan and a number of research scientists, last Thursday in Geelong. Medical research is booming in Geelong, with a team of Barwon Health researchers led by Professor Athan receiving funding from the government’s COVID-19 Research Fund to carry out a study into the long-term effects of coronavirus. This team includes researchers from Barwon Health, Deakin University and the Geelong Centre for Emerging Infectious Diseases. Their work will be a nationally significant study into the biological, physiological and psychological impacts of COVID-19 infection on a regional population.

It was pleasing also to meet with Frances Diver, the CEO of Barwon Health, to learn how over the past 12 months some 200 clinical trials involving 700 participants have been undertaken at Barwon
Health. The trials have included treatments for diabetes, cardiology, stroke and respiratory illness. The subjects have also taken part in an international trial of a COVID-19 vaccine. Geelong is rapidly establishing its credentials as a medical research hub, with Barwon Health’s level of clinical trials at an all-time high, providing locals with access to new and emerging therapies.

I am pleased to share with the house that the Andrews government is boosting the number of clinical trials in regional Victoria through a clinical trial research support service launched last year at Barwon Health as well as at Bendigo Health, Ballarat Health Services, Northeast Health Wangaratta and Goulburn Valley Health. The government has invested $14.7 million in 17 dedicated coronavirus research projects being conducted by the state’s world-leading researchers and $37 million towards the advancement of other life-saving medical research.

I also take a moment to thank those who participate in the trials—a couple of people I met in Geelong on Thursday—who support this important work by making themselves available as trial participants, which is a truly wonderful thing.

COVID-19

Mr O’DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) (12:14): My question is to Minister Stitt, the Minister for Workplace Safety. Minister, on 13 October you stated in the chamber that:

… the government and government agencies owe duties under occupational safety law like every other employer.

Furthermore, you recently noted that since the beginning of the pandemic WorkSafe inspectors have conducted 14 411 visits and inquiries, including 717 onsite inspections. Minister, can you confirm how many of these inspections and inquiries, if any, relate to government workplaces?

Ms STITT (Western Metropolitan—Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for Early Childhood) (12:15): I thank Mr O’Donohue for his question, and I can probably provide some updates to those figures if that is helpful. I am advised that so far there have been 27 920 total workplace visits and inquiries in the year to date, 2020, and I can indicate that onsite visits specifically related to COVID-19 are 6431 at this point in time. I am afraid I do not have a breakdown of whether those visits relate to the public, private or community sectors.

Mr O’DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) (12:16): Thank you, Minister. I trust you will be able to provide that information, pursuant to the standing orders, tomorrow. By way of supplementary, may I ask: given you have reaffirmed the government is, like every other employer, subject to occupational health and safety law, can you confirm whether WorkSafe has received any notification from any government department or agency of any COVID diagnosis?

Ms STITT (Western Metropolitan—Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for Early Childhood) (12:16): Thank you for your supplementary question, Mr O’Donohue. You would be aware that notifications of workplace transmission of COVID-19 are absolutely critical for the prompt investigation of potential breaches of health and safety laws, and for that reason employers are required to notify WorkSafe immediately on becoming aware of a positive case of a COVID-19 diagnosis of an employee or indeed an independent contractor or contractor’s employee if they have attended the workplace during the infectious period. That requirement extends to all employers, whether in the private, public or community sector, and to date we have received over 3700 such notifications from employers. I thank each and every one of those employers for doing the right thing and complying.

CROWN CASINO

Mr HAYES (Southern Metropolitan) (12:17): My question without notice is to the minister representing the Attorney-General. I refer to the Attorney-General’s statement about misconduct by Crown Casino, reported on 31 July last year, that ‘the government had ensured the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation had the necessary resources to do its job properly’, that ‘it was wrong to assume law enforcement agencies were not monitoring potential wrongdoing in
the gaming sector’ and that ‘they do because it is part of the bread and butter of their job’. Given that it has taken a New South Wales inquiry to uncover massive corruption and misconduct by Crown Casino while the VCGLR has been sitting on its hands doing nothing, will the Attorney request the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission investigate the VCGLR’s handling of Crown Casino?

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (12:18): I thank Mr Hayes for his question and his ongoing interest in this specific area. I will refer the matter to the Attorney-General, and I am sure that she will respond within the standing orders.

Mr HAYES (Southern Metropolitan) (12:19): Thank you, Minister, for that reference. Given that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade expressed concern as far back as 2010 that Crown Casino was using the high-roller scheme to engage in visa fraud, with a significant number of Crown visa applicants having no connection to Crown Casino or anyone who intended to gamble there, has the VCGLR ever investigated whether Crown was using the high-roller scheme to facilitate visa fraud?

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (12:19): Again, I thank Mr Hayes for his supplementary question. This question, similarly to the substantive question, will be referred to the Attorney-General.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (12:20): Today I would like to take the opportunity to update the house on this year’s Remembrance Day activities and to inform members of the online poppy campaigns that our fantastic ex-service organisations are running. Of course these organisations include RSL Victoria and Legacy. While COVID-19 has changed the way our community has commemorated the men and women who have sacrificed so much for our country this year, it has lost no significance at all with the veteran community and of course the wider community.

The virtual commemorations held on VP Day to remember the 75th anniversary of the victory in the Pacific and the end of World War II and also on Anzac Day in April were heartfelt and enabled the participation of a wide audience. This year at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month we will once again pause and reflect on and remember the many who made sacrifices on behalf of us and enabled us to enjoy Victoria as it is today.

While we are unable to this year all gather at the shrine on Remembrance Day, we can join an online ceremony similar to the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. Of course it will be streamed from the Shrine of Remembrance Facebook page again. The shrine has been able to install extra cameras for the purposes of these types of events during the challenging times of COVID, and I am very pleased that the government has been able to support the funding of extra cameras to be able to do this.

The 11th is of course an extremely important day. It is also a day to think about the hardworking ex-service organisations and the appeals they run at that time, so I would implore all members if they can via Facebook and other networks and their own social media to amplify that. I am sure we all have someone we will be remembering on Remembrance Day; I know I have. Lest we forget.

AGRICULTURE WORKFORCE

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:22): My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. Minister, it relates to your ministers statement just a few moments ago when you rightly said that Victorian farmers, many of them, are in a dire situation with a lack of seasonal workers and a labour shortage and specifically that Victorian horticultural growers in Sunraysia are quickly approaching their stone fruit harvest and are in dire need of workers to harvest and pack their crop. Now, my understanding is that there is indeed a 26 000 labour shortage, and what I wish to understand is: what specific steps will
you undertake to ensure that the 26,000 workers will get on farm, and what commitment will you make to those farmers so that they will be able to collect their stock and pack their crops? Indeed, Minister, you have had seven months to plan this; why is this returning so late in the piece?

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (12:23): I thank Ms Bath for her question, and I reiterate that this is a very important question. It is the issue that is keeping me awake at night. It is the issue that I am on the phone to my ministerial colleagues about. I spoke to Alannah MacTiernan last night; I spoke to David Littleproud the day before. My deputy secretary of the department, Matt Lowe, and I are having five conversations a day on this topic. We are engaging with industry. We are trying to uncover every solution possible. My commitment to farmers is that I will not rest until I have explored every opportunity, and I welcome anybody else’s ideas. I am open to them all.

We are offering relocation expenses and accommodation expenses. We are having a campaign. We are targeting international students, families and CALD communities. If you have got friends that want to relocate to country Victoria, we will support you. We are looking at supporting the industry through a Victorian supply, but I know that is not going to be enough unfortunately. There are not enough Australians that want to take up this work. The industry has emerged to be so reliant on international workers, whether it is because they are skilled and experienced or it is because they will turn up every day. Unfortunately this is a wicked problem. It is a challenge. I am committed to getting through to all of the options.

The federal government have a role to play. They have opened up the Pacific workers scheme. It is going to be pretty slow to get that off the ground, but I am taking on a shandy approach to this—international workers, local workers, students, anybody that wants to try agriculture, which is a fantastic industry. There are a lot of adventures to be had out there if you want to go and have a go. It is hard work. Anybody who wants to take a week off work, I can find you a farm to go pick on. I do not have a simple solution to this problem, Ms Bath—I wish I did—but I am committed to continuing to work through it.

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:25): I thank the minister for her response, and I note that she has had lots of conversations with engagement officers and 120 groups, I understand. It feels to me that the lead-in time seemed to be great but there are still only 127 jobs out of the Working for Victoria scheme. Minister, I have been contacted by the Deputy Prime Minister of Vanuatu, who says that he has a thousand workers that will be able to come into this country. What guarantee can you give that you will work as expeditiously as possible—and I mean that—to get these workers, who are standing there ready apparently, into our country and onto our farms for fruit harvest?

Ms SYMES (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (12:26): I can attempt to re-answer the question, although I think I have probably covered it off between my minister’s statement and my answer to your substantive question. Vanuatu is indeed a country that is picked up by the Pacific workers scheme. The only people from Vanuatu that have come into Australia at the moment to assist with horticulture are in a trial in the Northern Territory with mango growers. There are other states that are also pursuing these options. None of us have actually got approval to do it yet, and we continue to work as quickly as we can to facilitate charter planes, employer groups, accommodation providers and quarantine options and indeed to make sure that producers tell us the requirements that they have. I would call on all producers to let us know what they want and when. I know that is not a simple question when you are dealing with weather and unpredictability of harvest and the like, but those conversations are daily.

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:27): I move:

That the minister’s answers be taken into consideration on the next day of sitting.

Motion agreed to.
COVID-19

Mr LIMBRICK (South Eastern Metropolitan) (12:27): My question is for the Minister for Small Business. Small business in Victoria has been devastated over the many months of lockdown, a blow that will take months and even years to recover from, and some businesses will not recover at all. It is my understanding that New South Wales has undertaken a much higher degree of consultation, engaging in weekly meetings with small business owners and industry groups, and one would assume that more consultation means a more thorough and pragmatic reopening strategy. Unfortunately in Victoria we have heard many stories of businesses not receiving responses from departments, not having two-way conversations about safety and contacting non-government MPs and the media in desperation. My question to the minister is: how many small business consultation sessions have occurred since the beginning of the pandemic?

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business) (12:28): Thank you, Mr Limbrick, for your question and for your concern about the impacts of the restrictions and the pandemic and the resulting recession on small businesses across Victoria. The very specific question about how many consultations have occurred I will take on notice. It changes every hour or so. But I can tell you I have done several this week. It is constant dialogue with industry. The Council of Small Business Organisations Australia I think have provided me with some insights into how the New South Wales government system of consultation has been of benefit to them. They are a national organisation, so they participate in both systems. Certainly in the time that I have been in the role, which obviously is not the entire time that you are asking about, I have undertaken some reform in terms of different groups and different constellations of people for different purposes. For instance, on Monday whilst we had the small business recovery round table convened there was a separate session on hospitality, which went into more detail on hospitality-specific issues. So there is a constant dialogue.

The other point I would make, though, Mr Limbrick, is that the situation in New South Wales has always been quite different to the situation in Victoria. We have had a higher rate of transmission, we have had an infinitely more significant and impactful second wave, and so the nature of industry consultation has not been the only factor impacting the way that restrictions are eased. In fact overwhelmingly this is guided by public health advice. As I indicated in my response to Mr Davis earlier and have said to many of our business community leaders over recent months, what is incredibly valuable, I find, are their insights into the nuances of the way their businesses operate and their industries operate, because that then is very helpful in the dialogue that occurs between my department and the health department around safe resumption of activity.

We have seen a very, very significant step taken today, and again I would wish everybody who has had a very busy 36 hours in the lead-up to reopening—for those three very significant industries that have been able to take that step—the very, very best for this week. I think there are a lot of people that are walking a little lighter. In no way am I suggesting that that removes the hardship that they have endured and will continue to endure for some time. The financial recovery will be, for many of them, long and difficult, but today is a really happy day for many to be able to be back at work.

Mr LIMBRICK (South Eastern Metropolitan) (12:31): I thank the minister for her answer, and indeed for many of them it is a good day today. As the minister would be aware, each industry operates quite uniquely and some are much higher risk, in terms of the infection risk, than others. Given the diversity and scale of many businesses, the reopening processes could have been reflective of this, but rather than a staggered approach to reopening, with lower risk industries opening earlier, we have had an extended lockdown and then most businesses opening together. I am sure that I am not the only person that has concerns that there may be a third wave of the virus; ensuring that businesses operate safely will play an important role in ensuring that does not happen. What assurances can the minister give that the government and relevant agencies will work with the business community to ensure that best practice risk management, rather than focusing on fines and enforcement as we have seen throughout the year, will be the preferred approach?
Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business) (12:32): That is a great question, Mr Limbrick. All businesses are now required to have a COVID-safe plan, and we have made the process and the form as simple as possible. I have been continually impressed by the deep commitment of our business community to not only safe operations but also really sustainable operations. I think we all felt a chill when you mentioned a third wave. We have just broken the back of the second wave, and it has been an almighty task for everyone. Again, over the course of the last couple of days we have seen all sorts of reports and examples of the different approaches that organisations are taking to manage risk. I would just make the point, though, that when we had community transmission at the rate that we did and transmission and infection at the rate that we did some of those early decisions were based on the concept of total numbers of people moving around and on working outdoors rather than indoors. The clock is defeating me, but I think that is also important to recognise.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: TAFE FUNDING

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (12:33): I am pleased to update the chamber on the important work that the Andrews Labor government has been doing to make Victoria’s TAFE system more inclusive and accessible to Victorians with a disability. We know that education and training open doors into employment, and importantly access to meaningful work improves people’s quality of life. Since coming to government we have been focusing on making TAFE better than ever for all Victorians.

Free TAFE has been absolutely critical. We all know how successful free TAFE has been, including a 94 per cent increase in enrolments among learners with a disability from 2018 to 2019. Further, the Skills First Reconnect program, established by this government, provides wraparound service support for learners who need that little extra help. Twenty-six per cent of learners who have gone through Reconnect identified as having a disability. Of course our commitment to community service funding across the TAFE network means disability liaison officers are available to help learners enrol and complete their studies. I am also proud to have TAFEs step up to create new opportunities for learners with a disability. For example, Holmesglen TAFE offers horticultural pathways to employment for learners with a disability. In a supportive environment students do coursework and practical experience maintaining the grounds at Holmesglen’s campuses.

There is much more to do, and I look forward to the parliamentary inquiry into access to TAFE for learners with a disability providing advice to government on how we can build on the important work that we have done over the past six years.

WRITTEN RESPONSES

The PRESIDENT (12:35): Regarding questions and answers today, from Ms Crozier to Ms Symes, one day for the question and supplementary; from Mr Barton to Ms Pulford, two days for the question and supplementary; and from Mr Davis to Ms Pulford, one day for the question—

Ms Pulford: Two.

Mr Davis: On a point of order, President, is the minister now saying that she is not handling the impact on the small business sector of many of these COVID restrictions? The events sector is comprised of many small businesses. Is she actually arguing that she is now washing her hands of that sector?

Ms Pulford: On the point of order, President, no, I am not, and it is a ridiculous suggestion. As I indicated in my answer, the minister who has been engaging directly with this sector is the minister for COVID recovery and indeed major events. Our standing orders provide us with an extra day if we need to confer with a colleague, and to provide Mr Davis with the most contemporary information I will need to confer with a colleague.
Mr Davis: On a point of clarification, President, I am not only talking about major events. There are a whole series of small events that are conducted by the events sector, so it is beyond the major events sector.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Minister, two days for the question only. From Mr Grimley to Ms Pulford, two days for both the question and the supplementary; from Mr O’Donohue to Ms Stitt, one day for the question—

Mr O’Donohue: On a point of order, President, sorry to interrupt, but for the substantive and supplementary would be my request.

The PRESIDENT: Minister, I believe you have answered the supplementary, unless you want to give more explanation.

Ms Stitt: I believe I have answered the supplementary, President.

Mr O’Donohue: On a point of order, President, I respectfully submit that the minister actually did not answer the supplementary. The supplementary dealt with government departments and COVID diagnoses, and the minister did not actually refer to government departments in her answer to the question.

The PRESIDENT: I will look at the answer and get back to you. From Mr Hayes to Ms Tierney, two days for the question and supplementary; and from Mr Limbrick to Ms Pulford, one day for the question.

Questions on notice

ANSWERS

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:38): President, I wish to draw to your attention questions 2057 to 2074, which were placed on the notice paper on 23 April, and questions 2259 and 2260, which were placed on the notice paper on 15 May. All of these questions were to the Minister for Education, through the Minister for Higher Education representing him in this chamber. I wrote to the Minister for Higher Education yesterday, but I still have not received answers to these questions.

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (12:39): I will seek guidance in terms of questions on notice and whether I have responsibility in terms of those questions to another minister in another place. Regardless, Ms Lovell, my office has checked, and all of those questions were answered by the Minister for Education in August.

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:39): Yes, Minister, and—sorry, through you, President—the President actually reinstated those questions. They are on the notice paper. As a former minister, the process in this house is that we place the questions through you to the minister in the lower house, so you do have responsibility.

The PRESIDENT: Thank you. I will check and come back to you.

Constituency questions

NORTHERN VICTORIA REGION

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:40): My constituency question is for the Minister for Community Sport and Minister for Youth, and it concerns Strathbogie Shire Council’s vision to construct a BMX track and a mountain bike track at Balmattum Hill in Euroa. Generations of Euroa’s young people have needed a designated space to be able to ride their BMX and mountain bikes with their friends. Without such facilities the town’s youth decided to take matters into their own hands and created a makeshift bike track along Sevens Creek. Recognising the need for a designated and safe track, Strathbogie Shire Council have called on the young people of Euroa to join a working group to
decide the best place, design and jumps for the new youth space and BMX track as well as a mountain
bike track at Balmattum Hill. Strathbogie shire are seeking funding to engage the services of a track
design expert to work with the youth to create these tracks. Will the minister give a commitment to
provide funding of $100 000 to Strathbogie Shire Council to start planning the construction of a BMX
and mountain bike track at Euroa?

WESTERN VICTORIA REGION

Mr MEDDICK (Western Victoria) (12:41): My constituency question is for the Minister for
Racing in the other place. A few weeks ago the Coalition for the Protection of Greyhounds announced
that Geelong has become the state’s fifth deadliest greyhound track after another dog was killed.
Maddingley Park collided with another dog, fell and fractured her foreleg. She was killed after the
race. It was her second fall in just two months. Five dogs have now been killed at Geelong’s race track
this year, and every single death occurred at track turns and involved leg fractures. I want to be clear:
it is time for greyhound racing to be shut down, as is happening all over the world. However, it is clear
that while racing continues the Geelong race track has some safety concerns that are killing dogs. What
is the minister going to do about this?

WESTERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Ms VAGHELA (Western Metropolitan) (12:42): My constituency question is directed to the
Minister for Education and Minister for Mental Health, the Honourable James Merlino. There is no
question that every Victorian student has been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. It truly is a year
like no other. I am so proud to be a member of a government that has committed to supporting these
students through this challenging time and providing further economic and mental health resources.
In recognition of the increased challenges posed by the pandemic, I was excited to see the minister’s
announcement that more than 4100 tutors will be deployed across Victorian schools in 2021 to ensure
no student is left behind. Our teachers have done a remarkable job this year, and with the additional
support these teaching teams can ensure that students have dedicated and individualised support
throughout 2021. My question to the minister is: can the minister provide an update on the deployment
of tutors in Victorian schools across the Western Metropolitan Region?

EASTERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Dr BACH (Eastern Metropolitan) (12:43): My constituency question today is for the Minister for
Small Business. I do agree with the comments that the minister made in question time that today is a
happier day for some in our small business sector, but certainly not for everybody, and I for one am
feeling better today. The sun is shining and more of Victoria is opening up, and of course that is a good
thing. One of the things that I was most looking forward to about today, to tell you the truth, was
getting back to many of the pubs and clubs in my electorate to support them by having a beer or two
or five with some buddies of mine. So we actually organised a bit of pub crawl through my electorate,
starting in my favourite pub in Glen Waverley, the Century City Tavern; moving through into Box
Hill heading north to the Blackburn Hotel; and then ending with my buddy, Craig, who runs Vino
Central in Ivanhoe. Now, I have checked with these pubs and clubs. Two of the three are actually
remaining closed, not only now but past 2 November. They just cannot open with current restrictions,
and their key concern is that they do not have certainty about what comes next. We have spoken about
a possible third wave. My question to the minister is: can she provide some certainty about where we
go when there are undoubtedly some further spikes?

The PRESIDENT: Members, please be aware of the time. Most of you are putting the question
after the time and I am allowing that. But please beware of the time.

WESTERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (12:44): I have had many messages from constituents
who have asked why Victoria has not gone back to voluntary wearing of masks. Some of these
constituents have done extensive research on the subject. One particular email refers to research which
states that the University of Hong Kong did not find that face masks were effective in reducing influenza transmission, however, as with hand hygiene, they might be able to reduce the transmission of other infections and have value in a pandemic when healthcare resources are stretched. Why has the government continued with its mandatory use of face masks in public when numbers are so low? New South Wales uses the square-metre rule with safe distancing. You cannot compare a person living in a flat to a person who has a large backyard and a side gate. Minister, I hope that the government seeks to understand what is going on.

WESTERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) (12:45): My constituency question is to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. An environmental disaster continues to develop on Sunbury Road between Bulla and Sunbury. This morning brought another fire at Bulla tip, and the local community has, quite frankly, had a gutful. It does not accept the minister’s assurances that the Environment Protection Authority Victoria has the Bulla tip under control. Locals do not accept that the growing mountain at the tip is good for the environment. Locals do not accept regular fires at the tip are good for the environment and certainly do not accept these fires are good for them or their families. Minister, the EPA has failed local people, and they have no faith the EPA can or will do anything to protect them or their families. Minister, what are you going to do to protect my constituents in Sunbury and Bulla from whatever—and I mean whatever—is happening at Bulla tip?

SOUTHERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:46): My question is for the Minister for Health, and it is in relation to the directives regarding office workers returning to work. I have been contacted by many people to say, ‘When can we return to our offices? When do we have to do away with the stay-at-home orders to work from home if you can?’, because many businesses are wanting to get back into their office place. In fact I got an email this morning that said:

> While I understand the concern around workers returning en-masse to the Melbourne CBD, it seems that those of us in the suburbs are all being lumped in together under somewhat lazy policy and decision making.

It goes on to say that:

> It seems somewhat ludicrous that from 1 November, we can all gather in a pub, but can’t attend the office. It seems that most other workplaces are trusted to implement physical distancing and a COVID-safe environment, but offices are not.

The question I have for the minister is: could he provide some certainty to businesses about the stay-at-home orders, work-from-home orders, because businesses, like everybody else, want to reopen and get back to work.

The PRESIDENT: Is that related to your electorate, Ms Crozier?

Ms CROZIER: Yes, it is.

The PRESIDENT: I will take it. Most of the constituency questions I have heard today are not related to their electorates. I mean, Mr Finn was clear and a couple of people were clear, but this was not clear about your electorate.

Ms CROZIER: Well, President, if I can clarify, I have had a number of businesses within the Prahran electorate where their offices have said, ‘We are sick of working from home’, and this is an email that has come through to me today that highlights those concerns. I have referenced it.

EASTERN VICTORIA REGION

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (12:48): My constituency question is for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. I have been contacted by numerous constituents from the Eastern
Victoria Region who have been waiting for months to complete their firearm safety course. The licensing and regulation division website states that:

… in the interest of public safety, we have made the decision to cease all firearm safety courses until further notice.

It goes on to say a whole lot of other things. Given that we have now started learner testing for drivers licences and that there has been a relaxation of so many restrictions this week, when will the licensing and regulation division of Victoria Police allow firearm safety courses to restart?

WESTERN VICTORIA REGION

Mrs McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:49): My question is to the Treasurer. New councils across western Victoria will soon emerge from local government elections and the coronavirus cocoon. Newspaper reports are already asking how much local governments should borrow to help economies recover. The roads, rates and rubbish mantra has been long forfeited by cost shifting from higher tiers of government. Regional ratepayers already burdened with larger and more inequitable rate bills than Melbourne through rate-in-the-dollar charges do not need huge council debt burdens to add to their disadvantage. The ratepayer ultimately pays. My question is: what measures are the state government considering in its budget to ensure the coronavirus debt burden is neither placed upon western Victoria councils nor exacerbated through burgeoning cost-shifting liabilities?

EASTERN VICTORIA REGION

Mr O’DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) (12:50): I raise a constituency question for the Minister for Police directly related to my electorate, and it relates to the staging grounds for the checkpoints on the metro-rural divide. Police have staging grounds off Peninsula Link, off the Monash corridor and off the South Gippsland corridor and also at Coldstream, all helping to police the divide between the city and country in my electorate. I have been contacted by one show society that is seeking some recompense from government for the cost of hosting police and other emergency services as part of the staging ground. Without wanting to name them, the question I have for the minister is: does the government have a clear policy to recompense those that provide land or services as part of the staging of police and other vehicles to cover costs and recognise the use of that land?

EASTERN VICTORIA REGION

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:51): My constituency question is for the Premier. Faith plays a very strong part in many people’s lives, connecting them with their spirituality and their community. Attending church is very important in my electorate and, frustratingly, in my electorate participants are only allowed to have 20 people in a church. In a church you can keep your mask on, you can socially and physically distance, you can record your name and the spaces are often large amphitheatres, good for social distancing. A local church in Morwell plays a very important role in the Latrobe Valley community. Church services are held, as I said, in a large space. They are willing to totally commit to COVID-safe plans, but they are frustrated with the fact that only 20 people can be in at one time. My question is: will you scrap these unjust rules and put in density quotas for area space which are befitting such large venues and allow these congregations to actually meet when we have zero cases, as we have had in Gippsland for many, many months?

Committees

LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Reference

Debate resumed.

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:52): Before question time there was quite a lot of interjection from members of the government, and one of the interjections was about the second waves that are occurring in Europe. I think there was interjection from Ms Shing and others. Of course we
look to Europe and America and see what is happening there, but we are not in Europe and we are not in the United States. In fact we are in Australia, an island. If I can actually just speak to the efforts of our federal government that organised the closure of international borders—that happened in the very first wave way back in March. We closed the borders to international arrivals. Of course we have been dealing with people coming back into our country ever since, but that was a very proactive response to the pandemic and one that has saved Australia largely from having huge numbers and the spread that we have seen and the devastation that has occurred overseas. So it is ridiculous that the government keeps looking to that without comparing Victoria to New South Wales. Why don’t they ever compare Victoria’s situation to New South Wales?

Ms Bath: It’s an inconvenient truth.

Ms CROZIER: It is an inconvenient truth, that is right, Ms Bath, an inconvenient truth around what happened in New South Wales. If you do look at New South Wales, if you look at the Ruby Princess, that was a very severe mistake and there was a whole range of issues around that outbreak. There were 2700 passengers I think on that vessel, 900 of whom tested COVID-positive—900! Twenty-eight died. But they were able to contain it. They were able to contain the spread of what happened with those passengers that disembarked. Sadly, there were too many that lost their lives and it was a terrible mistake that occurred.

Ms Bath interjected.

Ms CROZIER: They owned the mistake and admitted the mistake—thank you, Ms Bath. They understood and they dealt with it. They had systems in place. Their IT systems were using technology to track and trace. Here in Victoria it was pen and paper, fax and a whiteboard—in 2020! We have got this underinvestment by government into this very necessary infrastructure.

Now, we had again, thankfully, the federal government’s support that they were offering time and time again—‘Victoria, we are here to help you. Let us know what to do’. Finally, they took up the offer to get the chief scientist, Dr Alan Finkel, down to come into the department to have a look at it, to get Commander Hill from the ADF to come into the department and have a look at it. It was a mess. The Department of Health and Human Services was a mess. Everybody knows that. It was dysfunctional and chaotic, with hopeless management and hopeless systems. This was just a few months ago, and the government had had months to fix this. It is a shame on this government that they did not put the resources in place. They did not even follow the pandemic plan, for goodness sake, that was put in place. There was not that chain of command. There was a whole range of failures and issues. That is why the opposition has been calling for a royal commission, because the hotel quarantine inquiry, which is farcical, is not even going to get to the basic questions.

In fact I will, while I am on my feet, speak on that very issue. Again, for that inquiry to have any credibility whatsoever all of those witnesses that had that collective amnesia—the Premier; the three ministers, one now a former minister; the 10 bureaucrats, one now a former bureaucrat, Chris Eccles, and one being the Premier’s own chief of staff; and others—should be recalled before that inquiry, not just affidavits and written responses about what they want to say. The cross-examination in that inquiry has been absolutely underwhelming, and Victorians deserve the truth. They deserve to understand all of those issues. For that inquiry to have any credibility I say all of those witnesses should be recalled—for those 800 Victorians who have died, for their families, for their friends; again, for the businesses who have been devastated who will never reopen, who are now carrying so much debt. This is the frustration with this government—they just do not get it. There are the mortgages, the overheads, the wages, all of those issues that these business have been carrying for months and months and months on end, and some still are not open—they are not opening for weeks. So, yes, while some businesses are opening today, there are so many more that are still not open—they are weeks away. And it is all prefaced on the fact: if the numbers stay low.
To go to the point of Ms Shing and others who were interjecting prior to question time, we do not know if we will have a third wave. We could have a third wave. We do not know if a vaccine is going to be developed. If a vaccine is developed, when will it be rolled out? It could be months—years. We have to manage this virus, and part of managing this virus is contact-tracing capability. It is absolutely critical that the Victorian community has trust in the contact-tracing capability to manage a third wave. And nobody wants a third wave—one of us; not one person; not one person in Victoria; not one person in Australia, because Australians are carrying the economic debt and burden of Victoria. We have not even got the Victorian budget that is going to borrow billions and billions. The government will not tell us when that budget is going to be. Again, it goes to the secrecy of this government. It is appalling contempt of the Victorian public that they will not even tell us when the budget will be.

Ms Symes: It will be good, though.

Ms CROZIER: Will it be good? Well, we are the highest taxing state in the country now, Ms Symes, and you cannot guarantee that there will be no more taxes on Victorians, who are already doing it so tough their businesses are lost. We are the highest taxing state in the country. ‘It will be good’—borrowing—so, again, you think money grows on trees. Somebody has got to pay for these borrowings, Ms Symes. You will flood it with infrastructure. Your projects blow out. Look at all of the cost blowouts in the major projects. You have got a litany of major project blowouts. That money comes from somewhere. Somebody has to pay for it. Who pays for it? It is the taxpayer, not fairies at the bottom of the garden. I could go on all day, and I realise that I cannot, but can I say I had to make that point because I think it is an important point. The recovery is important; investment is important. But let us not forget that it is the Victorian taxpayer who is going to have to pay for this through higher taxes.

If I can just return to my motion, though, I know that I have got 7 minutes. I want to say that we know that these contact-tracing failures have been catastrophic. In a report in the Age some time ago it is quoted:

Several DHHS sources claim the government’s difficulties in getting the second deadly wave of coronavirus under control could be linked to ongoing problems with contact tracing, including the recruitment of inexperienced staff and reliance on an outdated and inefficient phone and paper-based IT system.

We know that is the case, as I have said—pen, paper, fax, whiteboards. We use those as the tools, but seriously the investment has not been taken into consideration. If we are to have any faith in the government’s ability to contact trace with what they are saying, that we have got it fixed, that the technology is there, then this Parliament needs to do what they should be doing, and that is to provide the community that we all represent with the confidence and guarantee so that we do understand where we are at, what has happened and that we continue to monitor it. We need to continue to monitor the contact-tracing system because, as I said, we do not know if a third wave will come. Nobody knows that. Nobody wants it, but—

Mr Finn: You never know when Andrews is going to stuff up again, do you?

Ms CROZIER: Well, we do not, Mr Finn, and that is the whole point of the motion, because they have stuffed up for so long and so many people have been subjected to the most horrendous mistakes by this government, a government that will not take the responsibility. Not one person has lost their job over these debacles, not one. They have left because they were found out through the hotel quarantine inquiry and the phone records—Eccles. And the former health minister, she had a spat with the Premier and would not work with him. She is still having a spat with him. But she was not taking any responsibility for these debacles within her own department, the contact-tracing debacles that just have gone on and on and on.

I say again in conclusion that this Parliament has a job to do. We have fought to be in this Parliament throughout this crisis, quite rightly, because there are questions that we needed to have asked of the government. We saw the disgraceful display by the former minister, who refused to answer any
questions and held the Victorian people in contempt at that particular time. Our job is to give the community the assurances and the confidence about what the government are doing, because they have taken away personal liberties and freedoms like we have never seen before. In a Western democratic country we have had curfews and other restrictions that have just kept us in our own homes for 23 hours a day. We have divided the state. Metropolitan Melbourne is still divided off. In fact metropolitan Melbourne still has a 25-kilometre zone on it. So our restrictions have not gone, our freedoms have gone, our liberties and freedoms are still being curtailed by this government.

I say the contact tracing is not up to speed. They cannot control the virus so they have controlled the people. They have controlled us by keeping us locked in our own homes because they could not track and trace. That is why this is such an important motion. I urge every single member to support the motion as it is, because we need those answers now to give confidence to business, to give confidence to every single Victorian and, I say again, every single Australian, because the longer this goes on, the longer the mess goes on, the greater the cost to everyone. Too many people have died, too many people have lost their livelihoods and jobs, and too many people deserve the truth, the honesty and an understanding of exactly where this state is with the contact-tracing system.

Sitting suspended 1.05 pm until 2.16 pm.

Ms TAYLOR (Southern Metropolitan) (14:16): Ahead of speaking on the substantive motion I would like to move an amendment on behalf of Ms Symes, and we can circulate that amendment for everyone to peruse:

Omit all the words and expressions after ‘and provide’ and insert the following in their place: ‘a report to the house no later than 14 December 2020.’.

Also, in speaking further to that amendment, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the government’s concerns regarding the proposal to refer an inquiry to the Legal and Social Issues Committee on the contact-tracing and testing regime. The government is not opposed to the Parliament examining this issue, and it is a great opportunity to further explain to the public how the government and its departments plan to keep people safe and ensure a continued steady easing of restrictions as we advance to the last step and COVID normal. Our concerns are that right now as we literally are easing restrictions, our contact-tracing and testing teams need to be focused on the important task at hand. Requiring the same teams to consider making submissions and to appear at a hearing is not consistent with what the public need them to be concentrating on. That being said, we accept there is interest in the issue. Therefore we suggest that a better balance of those interests is to extend the reporting date to December. That is with regard to the amendment, and I would very much like the house to consider those salient points.

Now, coming back to the substantive motion, there is an inference in and of itself in putting this motion forward with regard to contact tracing in Victoria. We hear that there is that inference, and it is a negative one and I think an unfortunate one, bearing in mind that the system has helped us go from over 700 cases a day literally down to a very, very low number now, zero and the like. We know that COVID-19 is one of the most serious episodes that Victoria has ever faced, actually that Australia and that the world have had to face, and that even those who recover from the virus still can have—and we have seen it—long-term consequences, physical and psychological. And it is quite devastating when you see—I mean, obviously people dying is one thing, and that is devastating in itself—the consequences that can follow and linger with people who suffer from this horrible disease.

I should note that ‘pandemic’ of itself, the nature of that word, is global, and we know that the pandemic is not isolated to Victoria or New South Wales or the Northern Territory or otherwise; it is global, and therefore it is fair and reasonable to look to how the disease has unfolded across the globe. It might be inconvenient, but as with any studies or other exercises that experts undertake they generally speaking like to look at global statistics on issues such as a pandemic, which is of itself global. So I am sorry if it is inconvenient to do that, but on a factual basis it is true that there are people across the globe that are suffering dramatically from this horrible disease.
We know that our public health and contact-tracing teams have been tested to the max, particularly over the last months and preceding months. We know it has been an incredibly challenging time, and we know it is not easy—it is actually really, really difficult—when you are tracing down people. We know that they are having to work very closely with family connections and with other networks across the community. It is not a simple exercise. I am not saying that those opposite are suggesting that, but I think we have to be very factual when we are talking about just what this exercise means.

We know that they have managed to contain multiple complex outbreaks involving multiple large families, multiple large exposures sites and links across multiple geographical areas, and these certainly test any contact-tracing system. These kind of complexities are really pushing those systems to the max. We have seen the efforts to contain this disease locally—Kilmore and Shepparton most recently, and Northern Metro—and this should give every Victorian the confidence that we can take this step forward to COVID normal.

We also know that our public health team, when we are looking at our public health response, is huge. We have 2600 people—epidemiologists, public health clinicians, logistics phone operators, data entry staff and staff working across our local public health units. And I should say, at every point along the way we have been constantly striving to develop this system further and to get the best possible results at every point.

To meet the needs of local communities, six regional local public health units have been established and six suburban local public health units are up and running. They are positioned to act with speed and agility and are informed, very importantly, by local knowledge of how and where the virus is likely to spread and then report back centrally. These local public health units will further the connections with local communities—that is the benefit of being localised—and enhance the capacity of our contact-tracing and testing teams to quickly respond to and contain local outbreaks. I have to say of itself this motion does distract from this important work that our contact-tracing teams have done. Because right now it is critical, perhaps as critical as ever—now that we are moving towards COVID normal—that our teams are absolutely on point and looking out for the welfare of Victorians.

I know that Ms Crozier did mention the Finkel review, and I am just wondering how those opposite actually view the Finkel review. We know that on 18 September 2020 national cabinet agreed to a review of systems and operations in all jurisdictions to strengthen capacity and capability to effectively test, trace and isolate. The fact that you are wanting to do another inquiry on top of that is a bit perplexing. Are you saying that that national inquiry is not up to scratch and therefore you need to do another one down here and further strain our resources? What signal are you sending? Because that is kind of the signal you are sending to me. Are you saying you do not put the national inquiry on a sufficient level or stature and that you have to follow up with another inquiry locally as well? As I said, I am just putting it out there. It is a little bit confusing.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced after September’s national cabinet meeting that lessons learned from Victorian health authorities meeting with our New South Wales counterparts last week would be spread across all other states and territories. I think we can all agree that the time of our contact tracers is best spent doing the hard work to prevent the spread of this disease. I mean, isn’t that fair? Isn’t that what we want them to do? That is what they are actually recruited to do, and right now that is acute.

So while the Finkel review proposes to divert the attention of our contact tracers for the purposes of preparing multiple reports, the national contact-tracing review is at least set up to identify opportunities to better integrate contact tracing across all jurisdictions, an outcome that will be increasingly important as we move towards COVID normal. When you think about it, having that national integration makes a lot of good sense because as we move towards COVID normal you will see the restrictions easing further, there will be interstate travel and international travel in due course. As I say, it is just a bit confusing to me as to why we need another inquiry on top of that, because I am not sure what they say—
Ms Crozier interjected.

Ms TAYLOR: Because you do not trust the Finkel review? Apparently you do not, because that is obviously not going to meet the opposition’s requirements so you need another one here as well. I do not know. It is a little perplexing. I would have thought it is actually a good sign of collaboration across the states to have that integration at that level. It makes a lot of good sense for Australia—for all the states and territories—moving forward. So I think that was the greatest aspect that was perplexing me about this whole motion, and it was already referred to by those opposite—that this review is already in place but they need another review on top of that review because they do not trust national cabinet. So it is a little bit perplexing.

I should say, just to update the chamber, where that national review is at. Two workshops have been held as part of the national contact-tracing review, which were well received by lead reviewer Dr Finkel and the panel. I think we all know here that Dr Finkel is highly esteemed across the country, and I would say internationally, so I think that that is certainly something that should be factored in as well. The first of these workshops involved presentations from the Minister for Health, the Department of Health and Human Services secretary, the chief health officer and others canvassing the end-to-end contact-tracing process from improvements in testing, isolating and quarantining to community engagement, particularly with difficult-to-reach communities.

On that note, I did just want to pick up on a point that was made about communication with our multicultural communities. I know personally, because I have seen a lot of the various translations, that social media, videos, door-to-door doorknocking, the use of interpreters and the like have been used to convey the critical information with regard to managing health and curbing the spread of the disease. There are photos—there is evidence—of people actually physically going out there, of our government reaching out to make sure that our multicultural communities get the information that they deserve and require in order to be able to be best prepared to manage and to curtail the outbreak of COVID-19.

Coming back to the second workshop, which is part of the national contact-tracing review, that workshop focused on data-sharing arrangements across jurisdictions as well as ideas for upcoming technological solutions which could assist contact tracers. I personally very much look forward to seeing that Finkel review on national contact tracing, and I know that the minister will certainly be looking for further opportunities to improve our Victorian and national contact-tracing systems, because ultimately we are all in this together. I know that is a statement that has been used a lot but actually it has brought me a lot of comfort. I actually take delight in that when we think of ourselves in a united way rather than in a politically divisive way and when we think of ourselves, as we all know, as being vulnerable to COVID-19. No-one is bulletproof against this disease. There have been people who unfortunately have caught it, got over it and then caught it again. That is the challenge of this disease.

Fundamentally those opposite do not appear to put a lot of value in the national review and Dr Finkel and what he is leading there. But, you know, it is a little bit confusing because, as I say, having a national—

Ms Crozier interjected.

Ms TAYLOR: I did listen, and it was confusing as to why you would not value it. This is across all states of Australia. I did not see the Finkel review just for Victoria. It is all states of Australia, everyone. I do not think national cabinet is isolated to one state. I personally know that in the Labor Party we hold experts such as Dr Finkel in high esteem and we would certainly value his opinion and his expertise and that of the panel with regard to issues as serious as contact tracing.

We know that when we are looking at testing generally, that is also a critical element of containing the virus, although I do not want to take anything away from contact tracing. I think this is one thing that we can actually agree on, because there was a statement there about just how critical contact tracing is
in terms of being able to control COVID-19. So there is something that I think we can be united on, and I think that is a good thing. We certainly do value contact tracing. We know it is critical, and that is why it has been built so heavily into our public health system and that we have such an extensive team—I mean, literally 2600 people. It is extremely hard, and our public health teams have worked extremely hard in order to be able to get those numbers down from, as I said at the start, over 700 to where we are now so we can now ease restrictions step by step and actually get back to COVID normal, which is an incredible relief.

Certainly I would like to congratulate all Victorians for contributing to getting to where we are now. But of course right now we are at a critical point, a critical juncture, and we do need to make sure that we move forward in a way that is prudent and that we continue to exercise appropriate social distancing and wear masks and the like moving forward so we can genuinely just move forward and get to the point of COVID normal. On that note, I am going to allow others in the chamber to reflect on this motion.

Mr LIMBRICK (South Eastern Metropolitan) (14:34): I am pleased to speak on this motion in support of an inquiry into contact tracing. I think one of the issues that we have seen all along during the pandemic is that we have not had a lot of visibility on some of the decisions and the processes that have been happening behind the scenes. I think that this might provide an opportunity both for the general public to have some insight into what is actually going on and also for the government to showcase the systems that they have been installing. If they withstand scrutiny, then I think that would be good for both the government and the general public to get some assurance that these systems are actually the best available. If they do not and the public is not happy with them, then hopefully there will be some recommendations from the inquiry that will suggest improvements that might be available.

One of the things again which has concerned me during the pandemic is that we keep hearing, ‘Trust the experts, trust the experts’ but, as I have said many times, the experts do not seem to trust us. They do not release a lot of the advice that is being given. I would like the advice to be available to the community to see, because there are a lot of other experts in the community. There are a lot of very smart people in our state that can scrutinise what the government and these experts are doing, and hopefully with more people, with more eyes on it, we will come up with better decisions. We will definitely support the inquiry.

With regard to the amendment on the date change, the advice from the government and from what Ms Taylor was saying about not wanting contact tracers to be doing submissions to inquiries and things like that at the moment, I do not really buy that. I think that if they cannot get a couple of staff to write some submissions and appear before an inquiry, then we have probably got bigger problems. I do not think it is a huge amount of work to write some submissions, which effectively would be outlining current systems that they have already been documenting anyway, so I cannot imagine it would be a lot of extra work. There would be some time that some probably senior staff would have to spend talking to the inquiry, but I would not imagine that it is more than a couple of afternoons. And if it does find some sort of flaw in the process or some improvement that could be made to the process, then it is very worthwhile I think. It is a very small price to pay for either some sort of improvement or at least an assurance that what they are doing is the best available to the Victorian public. I support the inquiry, and we will not be supporting the government’s amendment to change the time on the motion.

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) (14:37): I rise today to support Ms Crozier’s motion regarding the need for an inquiry into the Victorian government’s failed contact-tracing system. This motion goes on to talk about consulting with business, including representatives of small business, the community sector and also importantly Victoria’s multicultural community, all of whom have been deeply affected by this government’s failure.
I represent the Northern Metropolitan Region, which I am bold enough to say is probably the most multicultural region of the state—a number of different languages, a number of different faiths, a number of different backgrounds. We learned through the lockdown of the North Melbourne public housing towers how many different cultures, faiths and backgrounds there are down there. They locked up those towers and put armed police outside those towers—locked those peoples down into their small homes. This government sometimes bangs on about human rights, but there were no human rights being offered down there at the time. I was there. I was talking to people. I know how much they were hurting.

Now, imagine for a moment, if a Liberal government had entertained closing down the North Melbourne high-rise flats and putting armed police outside, the outrage from across the chamber. Can you imagine the outrage from across the chamber about that—locking up women and children in their apartments with armed guards outside. But there was not a peep out of those opposite during this whole thing. Furthermore, we have seen bullying of people in media conferences, women in media conferences, and there was not a peep out of those over there—not a peep from those opposite. We think we should be naming them the Hypocrisy Party.

What this government has failed to do is to recognise multicultural Victoria and how much support they needed through this pandemic. It was a failure. Yet we hear the ALP members stand up today and congratulate each other on what a great job they are doing. But we are here because of a failure of this government. If we were to rank them out of 10—and they want to talk about doughnuts—I would give them a big fat zero out of 10. You can knock down all the whisky you like and claim you have done a great job, but if it was not for your failure with hotel quarantining, we would not be where we are today. The Premier has had months and months to fix the broken contact-tracing system in this state. And it says everything about the fact that here we are on 28 October and yesterday—just yesterday!—they decided to look at QR codes. It is a statement about this government’s incompetence.

They are still running on fax machines and crayons over there. That is how—

Ms Terpstra interjected.

Mr ONDARCHIE: And to pick up Ms Terpstra’s interjection, they are in huge defensive mode right now. But do you know what they will not do? They will not admit their failure. They will not stand up and say to Victorians, ‘We stuffed this up and we’re trying to fix it’. They will not do that. They make a heap of excuses, they run around the block, they head down to Dunkin’ Donuts and pick up some whisky at Dan Murphy’s and think they have done a great job when they have not. They have not, because families are hurt, people are hurt, mental illness is off the scale and, I am sad to say, suicide numbers are up.

Ms Terpstra: Oh, that’s rubbish!

Mr ONDARCHIE: Ms Terpstra’s interjection—‘that’s rubbish’. This is denial 101. You are the new Cleopatra. You are the new Cleopatra, the queen of denial. That is who you are. You will not admit your government is failing. Just stand up and apologise.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order! Mr Ondarchie to continue without assistance, thank you.

Mr ONDARCHIE: And do you know what happened? This poor family in Melbourne’s north, following the instructions of the Department of Health and Human Services, did what they were asked to do, and what was the government’s first reaction? It was their fault. To blame a multicultural family in Melbourne’s north for your government’s failing is just disgusting. It is disgusting at the highest level. Let us blame everybody! I have got to tell you that this is Dan’s form. When it comes to who was responsible for the COVID outbreak in this state, it is ABD—anybody but Dan. He held Mikakos out, he held Eccles out and—look out, you loyal supporters across the chamber—he is coming after you next. Make no mistake about it: he is coming after you next. I will tell you what, we are starting
to see it in ministerial comments already. They are a bit reserved. They are a bit cautious about how much they support Dan, because we know. We saw the loyalty of Jenny Mikakos in this place. I remember interjecting on Jenny a number of times saying, ‘Be careful giving him so much loyalty. He won’t repay it to you. He won’t repay it’. And look what happened.

Ms Terpstra: On a point of order, Deputy President, I ask that Mr Ondarchie bring his comments back to the point of the motion. They are not relevant, some of the matters that he is commenting on, so I would ask him to bring his comments back to the intention and the point of the motion.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Mr Ondarchie, you still have a few minutes left, and I invite you to address the motion.

Mr Ondarchie: Thank you, Deputy President. I am more than happy to address the motion that talks about COVID-19 in Victoria. I am more than happy to talk about that, and that is what I am talking about: COVID-19, as the defence force stands up over there trying to defend Dan. I will tell you what: if you wanted the defence force in this state, you should have engaged the defence force for hotel quarantine. But you failed to do that because you looked after your mates instead. You can stand up all you like and purport to be the defence force for Dan, but the real defence force was offered—offered by the Prime Minister to this state to take care of hotel quarantine—and you rejected it. You rejected it, and that is why we are where we are today.

Do you know what? I noticed as Mr Finn voiced his frustrations today they used examples like, ‘Well, what about the USA?’ and ‘What about the United Kingdom?’ Well, I will give you a better example: what about New South Wales? What about South Australia? Let us look at what they are doing there. And even Queensland! On the cusp of losing an election, Annastacia is still saying, ‘You’re not coming here if you’re Victorian’. Today the New South Wales Premier, the Honourable Gladys Berejiklian, said, ‘I’m waiting to see if the contact-tracing system is going to be improved in Victoria before I open the borders between New South Wales and Victoria’. There is no greater evidence than that. You can talk about the British people, you can talk about the Americans all you like, but the real measure is what is happening between New South Wales and Victoria, South Australia and Victoria, and Queensland and Victoria. The interesting thing is there are now flights directly between Tasmania and Adelaide and people are going, ‘Might just take that up rather than come to Victoria’.

But as you run around with your spreadsheets, your crayons, your fax machines and your bits of paper trying to put together a very amateur contact-tracing system, Victorians are hurting. Families are hurting. Kids have missed out on their special moments at school. They have missed out on their grade 6 graduation, their muck-up days, all the things that they have earned through almost a rite of passage over 13 years at school—you took that away from them. Kids who are waiting to get their drivers licence have been held up and held up and held up, and you took that away from them. People have lost their jobs. They have lost their ability to generate the money they need to put food on the table, and there are so many community groups out there trying to help those people. You did that to them. Make no mistake: you did that to them.

But your first reaction in this place is not to say to them, ‘We’re sorry we put you in that position, and this is what we’re trying to do’; your first reaction is, ‘Let’s defend Dan’. Well, I tell you what, it is not sustainable. It is not going to work, because we have just had enough. As my constituent Tom, a lovely Greek man who has spent his whole life running a fish and chip shop and lives in Bundoora, said to me quite often, ‘You know what? The people aren’t stupid, Dan. The people aren’t stupid’. And they are not; they have worked this out. Your choice of using private security guards instead of police and the defence force caused the state’s second wave outbreak. There is no getting away from that. There are 800-plus people who have died and families who did not have the chance to farewell them properly at all because of the restrictions put on funerals—families who will not get to see them at Christmas time and who will not get to enjoy them, particularly grandparents, coming to children’s weddings and baptisms, because of what you did in causing this second wave.
Businesses are on their knees. The state is in significant economic pain. You will just borrow and borrow and borrow—I suspect to fund operational expenses rather than capital growth in this state—and you will leave it not to my children but to my grandchildren. And I tell you what, if you want an example of this, Ms Terpstra, go find a little kid’s bedroom tonight and smash open their piggy bank, because that is what you are doing—that is exactly what you are doing to the grandchildren. And do you know why they laugh about this? Do you know why they cajole about this over there? Because they do not get money. They do not understand it. They do not understand that it is not their money; it is the Victorian taxpayers money. It is outrageous for this government to spend, spend, spend and have no care for real Victorians.

Then we had last Sunday, when people lined up for the second time, I have to tell you, in front of their TV screens expecting some significant announcements from this Premier to give them the freedom that they so rightly deserve. And what did they get? Nothing—again nothing. Now, I will be reminded about this, but I reckon he did this around Mother’s Day. I reckon he did the same thing. People lined up ready to hear some announcements from Daniel Andrews, and he delivered nothing. So my caution to you on the government benches is this: be very careful standing alongside this chap, because he is going to do to you what he has done to others.

New South Wales has been able to recover through this Ruby Princess stuff. They tackled this hard and put systems in place. What did we do as a result of that? We sent people to New South Wales to go and learn—well down the track, mind you. Well down the track we sent people to New South Wales, and what did they come back with? Yesterday you talked about a QR code. Maybe you are going to put the crayons and the pencils away. Yesterday! This has been going on for months and months and months. Let us not forget that time in July when we went from 65 new daily cases to 288 in one week. And what would they say? What would this government say? ‘It wasn’t our fault—just happened. Let’s look at the UK. Let’s look at the US’, they would say. But it was your fault.

I support this motion of Ms Crozier’s today because it is time to look deep into what is happening. They will say, ‘Oh, there are other inquiries’. Now, I have to say former Justice Coate has a huge responsibility to get all the right answers—not just the answers Dan wants; all the right answers—and to dig and dig and dig and to bring people back, because Victorians will be saying, ‘You put us through this. You caused this, and now you’re stepping away’. It sounds a little familiar to an example we had before where people who wore red shirts were paid by the taxpayer to go out and campaign for the Labor Party, but they said, ‘We don’t know anything about it, and the report didn’t really condemn us’. So that is why it is important that the Legal and Social Issues Committee inquire into, consider, monitor and report on the government’s failed COVID-19 contact-tracing system.

Now, there may be some questions around the timing. There may be, but I think we cannot let this go on any longer, because this government wants to spread this out as long as they can. ‘Let’s delay it as long as we can, because Victorians know the truth’. The great deniers over here do not want to admit their failure to themselves. They do not want to admit their failure to their esteemed leader for fear that they will be demoted or that they will be pushed out or in fact that they could even be named in an inquiry and got rid of. That is why they do not want this to happen.

But more importantly, aside from all the politics in this, they need to be fronting the cameras, looking down the barrel of that camera and saying to every single Victorian, ‘We stuffed this up, and we’re sorry’. Because you did. You did. People have died through COVID-19, people have died through mental illness, families have broken apart and family violence numbers—and I know, because I speak to people who are leading some of the stuff around family violence—are off the scale. Some small businesses will never recover from this—will never, ever recover from this. Families are very much hurt through this. And I will tell you something: between now and November 2022 I am going to remind Victorians every day about what you did to their lives—what you did to their lives. I have to tell you—we talk about numbers of 800-plus—if two A380s crashed in Melbourne, full, there would be outrage here. We would be holding inquiry after inquiry. We would be devastated by it. We would be devastated with those sorts of passenger losses. But I do not see the devastation over there. I do not
see the sadness over there. I just see a cover-up. I just see blame of anybody but Dan. And the best way they deal with this tragedy—this tragedy in Victoria—is to break open the whisky.

A member interjected.

Mr ONDARCHIE: Well, that is just ridiculous. And you may choose to laugh, Ms Terpstra, and see this as a joke, but there are plenty of families and plenty of Victorians who do not see this as funny at all. I support Ms Crozier’s motion.

Mr ERDOGAN (Southern Metropolitan) (14:52): I rise to speak in favour of the reasonable amendment put by my colleague Ms Taylor.

A member interjected.

Mr ERDOGAN: I think this is a matter of general public interest, so I am pleased to speak on this matter. And I was surprised to see some of the previous speakers, whether it be from the Liberal Democrats or from the state opposition, on this issue. They made it sound as though the global pandemic came to this country via this government, which is clearly not the case. But the issue about contact tracers and some of the comments made I found were very unreasonable and unfair. The contact tracers in our state are working very hard. I recall this morning hearing that the number of mystery cases is down to three—this is in a state of over 6 million. So I think they should be commended for the work they are doing and not be lambasted in this chamber.

I think as a government we have been focused on trying to tackle and respond to this global pandemic whilst the state opposition has just been playing politics. We recall the lines that were coming out—you know, you had Dim Tim chasing the bats away in Kew at the beginning of the pandemic, and then more recently they were being quite imaginative because Mr Ondarchie referred to doughnuts. He has been quite imaginative with doughnuts, and he put the first thing that came into his mind onto his social media account. We were out there trying to inform the community about the risks of this pandemic, take steps about social distancing and educate them.

Mr Ondarchie, I do reflect your comments about the multicultural communities in our state. We did—we provided information in multiple languages. We were on the forefront. We engaged with SBS and other multimedia organisations in this space to get our message out. Obviously it is not an easy message. This pandemic has not been experienced in modern times before, so I guess some of that information may have been lost in translation. Since then we have taken further steps and different processes to get that information out through direct community contact and engagement—not just relying on what I call traditional media outlets—so that is including outlets like social media. There was direct doorknocking in some of these communities across the north. We recall the north was greatly affected, and we went out and unlike in other examples of where this pandemic has spread, where governments have shirked their responsibility, we were on the forefront. We were out in the community—direct contact with people that were affected. We did not run away from the challenges.

But I think the contact tracers in this regard have done a really good job, and from where their processes were at the beginning of the pandemic to where they are now I think we have seen gradual and continual improvement. That is all we can ask from them—to continue to improve their processes—and that is what has been happening.

Even recently you would have heard—I am sure you would have heard because it was widely reported—they are implementing new technologies, new customer relationship management systems. A whole bunch of stuff is happening in this space. You will see. I look forward to this inquiry because I think what you will find is many jurisdictions around the world will be coming to Victoria and saying, ‘What are the processes you implemented? What was the technology you adopted? How did you achieve the outcomes you achieved?’.

Members interjecting.
Mr ERDOGAN: I am telling you, they are going to be coming to Victoria. Even your friends in the UK—Boris and others—will be calling us. They will probably be calling Dan. I know, I know, Craig, you would love to call him, but Boris will probably end up calling Dan and trying to get information—how did he implement the contact-tracing system we have got in place, how did he do it—because right now we have only three mystery cases out of over 6 million Victorians. That achievement is amazing.

But obviously it has been difficult. All the sentiment expressed from across the chamber, from all sides about the effects of this global pandemic, the human impact—of course it is terrible, it is devastating. Every day I watch the news, as many Victorians do, not only the news that is happening in our state but also what is happening globally, and it is heart wrenching. Many of us coming from multicultural communities have family that live abroad. I have got family in London; I have actually got a relative that passed away in London. I have got family in Cologne in Germany and family in the Netherlands, in Amsterdam. They are going through it very differently to us, and I think the level of fear is much greater than what we are experiencing right now, so in terms of the effect this has had on the multicultural community, I think many members of the multicultural community, from the feedback I have been getting, are quite appreciative of the government's stance. They are appreciative that we did take the restriction measures, or what members opposite and others have tried to label as broad lockdowns. It was needed, because if we had not taken those steps, then obviously the devastating effects would have been much greater, the human cost would have been much greater. And I think that is why, as part of all this, this was the response that was needed in the circumstances.

But I think what has happened now is we have seen quite a bit of—talk about contradictions and hypocrisy—different lines coming out. Earlier on it was that our restrictions were too strict, and then the line changed. I do not know whether it was Mr O'Brien or Dim Tim or whoever it was saying a different line, but it went from 'too strict' to being 'too lax'—we were opening up too soon.

Ms Crozier: On a point of order, Deputy President, Mr Erdogan has been reflecting on the member for Kew, and I would ask you to ask him to withdraw the comments made about the member for Kew.

Mr ERDOGAN: I withdraw. I think broadly speaking, though, the contact tracing has improved on where it was, but I think an inquiry is quite sound. I think there is great public interest. I have had feedback from all different viewpoints in Southern Metropolitan on this issue. People do have differing opinions, but I think we should look at it and I think we should go in with an open mind as well. My view is that it has improved considerably from the beginning of the pandemic. You look at the numbers as well. I think initially they had 57 in the team, now there are over 2000 professionals, medical professionals and so on to do some of the contact tracing, so they have been utilised. At the beginning it might not have been like what we have now, the system we have got now, but now with the implementation of technologies and continual learning I think we do have a sound system in this state.

But I think an independent inquiry by the Legal and Social Issues Committee is quite reasonable. That is why I support the amendment. I am not opposed to the motion broadly. I support the amendment moved by Ms Taylor to extend the time frame by only about four weeks—one month. That is just to allow the team to I guess gather the information. I am guessing there is going to be a lot of information on this issue. But our contact tracers are doing really important work out in the community at the moment. We are at the first steps of opening back up, and I think at this critical stage to allow one extra month is not unreasonable. I think it is quite a reasonable amendment, so I want to speak in favour of the amendment moved by Ms Taylor.

I do understand there are quite a few people who want to speak on this issue—I have noticed. That is why I will keep my contribution brief, but I want to commend all our contact tracers. They have done a great job to get us to where we are. Obviously there has been continual improvement. I believe that they may be the world leaders in this space and a lot of jurisdictions globally will be contacting the Victorian contact-tracing team to share their experiences.
Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (14:59): I rise today to actually support the motion, and I am pleased to hear the debate about the amendment. It is very clear that the Labor Party, as well as the Liberal Party, for many years have actually dropped the ball on the health system here in Victoria. I can say this with very broad shoulders, seeing that it is the Labor Party who is finally after probably 20-plus years about to build a brand-new hospital in Footscray. That hospital was 60 years old.

Just in respect to contact tracing, our current system and this pandemic, in April this year during the pandemic my son went to the Royal Children’s Hospital because he had an orbital cyst. We were in the care of the ENT and he had to have two operations. I was there for the whole 10 days as only one parent was able to be there. He had MRIs, he had X-rays and he had CT scans. But during the two operations that he had to drain that cyst in his sinuses to save his sight he had a tooth broken at the very back of his mouth. Obviously now we are just able to go to a dentist to have that looked at. I was looking at going to a paediatric dental hospital in Werribee, and the appointment that I had made was this Monday. Now, you would think that it would be very clear that the Royal Children’s Hospital could email all of my son’s records to the dental hospital in Werribee. They sent me a form on Thursday which was dated January 2013, and it did not even have a box to tick for emails. So then I inquired to see if there was a more updated version of this. I then received another form dated November 2016, four years ago. This one actually says that there is a Royal Children’s Hospital portal, but there is still no box to tick for emails.

We are in 2020. It would be really simple to email my dentist in Werribee. This is a clear indication of our public health system. In 2020 during a pandemic the Royal Children’s Hospital and the forms that I received do not have the ability to email. Yes, there is the ability to fax. Yes, there is the ability to mail. Of course, tick the box for the release of information request form for a phone call. Clearly the Labor Party as well as the Liberal Party over many years have left our Victorian health system with these major gaps. This pandemic has highlighted these major gaps. It would seem that the New South Wales healthcare system is five years ahead of Victoria, and it is almost frightening to think that Queensland has a better healthcare system than here in Victoria.

Respectfully, I look forward to this inquiry. What this pandemic has done, if anything, is highlight all the gaps around fax machines, emails—what is missing. Clearly, if we are going to get on top of this pandemic, somebody in this government needs to spend money in the right area so that I can actually get my children’s records emailed to the Kiddies Dental Care clinic in Werribee. I will leave it at that.

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) (15:04): I do not plan to speak for long, because hopefully I will be chairing this inquiry. I think it is a very important inquiry and I thank Ms Crozier for bringing this inquiry referral to the Legal and Social Issues Committee. It will be a quick inquiry, and the Legal and Social Issues Committee knows how to do that. We have done it with I Cook Foods. We have been able to turn it around. This will be a quick inquiry and an important inquiry.

We have heard a lot in the media about the deficiencies in Victoria’s contact tracing, and I think certainly when we have been looking at the hotel quarantine it is almost like we should have been looking at how we did our contact tracing. I must say I have been reassured in recent times that our contact tracing has improved significantly. I would say we are probably one of the few states where contact tracing has been stress tested. We have been contact tracing at a very different level to any other jurisdiction in Australia and probably in the world, because in most jurisdictions contact tracing is out the window. You cannot contact trace in the UK, you cannot contact trace in most countries in Europe—it is beyond that now. But what this inquiry will bring is that confidence and that assurance that we are on top of our game, that we do have it in hand and that we can feel confident that Victoria can open up and stay open, because contact tracing will be the absolute key to that.

It actually seems like a decade ago, or it certainly seems like more than a year ago, that we started talking about the COVIDSafe app. I for one actually downloaded that app, and I for one actually keep it open. Of course that app did not prove to be what we had hoped it would be for that contact tracing. So that did not work. That does not mean that other apps might not work going forward. COVID is
going to be with us for quite some time, and we want to be as open as possible and as safe as possible, but we want our businesses to feel comfortable opening up.

We want our community to feel comfortable going out, and certainly when I speak to my friends and colleagues in other countries—in the US and in Europe—many of them are frightened to go out. So even though they are open, people are not actually going out, and we want people to be shopping, we want people to be supporting our local businesses. And I think if this inquiry does one thing by ensuring that we have the best contact tracing in Australia—probably in the world, but certainly in Australia—this inquiry can provide the confidence to our community and gain the trust of our community that we can do this, that we can do this safely, and that we are not going to find a third wave. As Minister Pulford said, it sends a shiver down your spine to even think that we might enter into a third wave.

I am also pleased to hear that there are other inquiries, and I am pleased to hear that Alan Finkel is also looking at this. I have no doubt that we will be speaking to those inquiries and sharing that information and learning. Having a state-specific inquiry to do this will bring the expertise of this state, bring the knowledge of this state into this inquiry, and I think it will complement the other inquiries that are occurring. I note that we are continuing to improve. I hope that this inquiry looks forward and does provide the confidence and assurance that our community needs right now that we can live with COVID.

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:09): I am pleased to endorse Ms Crozier’s motion today. The Nationals will wholeheartedly support this motion. We will support the original motion of reporting in November and again reporting in 2021. There is a key factor in relation to this. COVID will be here well into 2021, and there needs to be an ongoing assessment of our systems in place and indeed contact tracing.

Now, we have seen—unfortunately to the detriment of over 800 people—that the hotel quarantine was a complete and utter debacle. I will not prosecute that, because I have in the past and it is important at the moment to go into more depth in relation to contact tracing. Through that debacle, through the poor leadership decisions, the absolute absence of true leadership decisions by the Premier in that instance to put in not the ADF but security guards that lacked entirely any proper training and rigour in terms of the health system, we began to see the issue where contact tracing really was deplorable and flawed during the Cedar Meats case. We had a Cedar Meats outbreak in April, and indeed the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) interviewed the gentleman, the particular person, in the first instance and they took his word for it. They just accepted that that was fair and reasonable, what he said. They did not go into any depth, and it showed you the lack of depth that was there. That is no disrespect to that person nor the 111 other people associated with Cedar Meats.

The federal government spoke about every person being contacted every day. Well, I have got examples in my electorate where people were not contacted at all after the initial contact. So let me explain. There was a school in Traralgon where it was understood that there was a young person who had COVID-19, and the school was in fact the one entity that really followed up. DHHS first of all informed my constituent’s son that he needed to go off and get a test. Not only that, the school tracked and tracked and tracked his wellbeing. He had the test but he was never contacted again, nor were any of his family—by anyone from DHHS after that one incident. Now, if this system was working, then he should have been contacted again. He should have been actually told his results, but he never learned his results via the system, via the Andrews government’s tracing system. He actually had to go and contact his family GP, and he followed up. If this system is supposed to be working, there should have been a throughput and a follow-up all the way.

We saw in Colac that the community groups actually provided that proper form of tracing. There were zero to 108 cases and back to zero within four weeks. Why? Because community groups, schools, local businesses, the hospital and the abattoir all worked together for this. Indeed we saw the same thing happen in other examples. It was the local communities that were able to get on top of it.
When we look at the Premier we ask: how did it go to this point? He was so cocky and confident. We ended up with 600 to 700 cases daily, and this system was just overwhelmed and caused the lockdown, the incarceration of people in Melbourne and the lockdown of people in Gippsland and regional Victoria. We had our grand final where 30 000 people were able to attend without us even getting a look-in.

The Premier, in the midst of all of these failures, in the midst of the shocking outcomes, the 600 and 700 people daily being identified as active cases, then finally sent a team of officials off to New South Wales to learn the health system and how they were operating. You would think that he would embrace that leadership, that he would go and find out about it and bring it back and say, ‘How is it working for you? Let us help support and protect our constituents, our people, our Victorians’. But when he came back, when he was doing one of his multiple presentations to the media and they asked him, ‘What have you learned and what are you going to adopt in terms of the learnings out of Sydney?’, he said, and I quote:

I’m happy to confirm for you that the biggest outcome out of that is that New South Wales will be copying our IT platform.

What audacity, what an ego, what arrogance, what a po-faced conversation to have after the deaths of 800 people in Victoria.

So we brought back, apparently, a digital system, but the digital system was working in silos with the pen, paper and fax, and this is just not good enough. We see New South Wales is looking at an electronic QR code system as a gold standard and yet this government still is behind the eight ball. The fear people have about the third wave—this cannot happen to our people any longer. It cannot happen to regional Victorian small businesses and families, it cannot happen to metropolitan Melbourne. Victorians deserve the best and they have not got the best.

What we also know from Premier Gladys Berejiklian of New South Wales is that she said she is waiting on improvements in contact tracing before she will dare to open the border to Victoria. I have not seen my son since 22 December. He got engaged. He lives in Sydney, and we are desperate to see him. It is his birthday tomorrow. I endorse the Premier of New South Wales’s convictions around this, but I also—and I am just one of multiple thousands and thousands of people—would like to get across the border and into New South Wales. We deserve a better system, and I endorse Ms Crozier’s motion.

Mr GEPP (Northern Victoria) (15:16): It gives me pleasure to rise today to speak in support of the amendment moved by my colleague Ms Taylor which supports in principle the proposition that has been advanced by Ms Crozier. We are not averse to the notion of an inquiry. We do believe, however, that the dates do need to be adjusted. Unlike Mr Limbrick, who in his contribution said, ‘Oh look, it might take an afternoon or a couple of afternoons, so if that moves resources across for that sort of time frame in order to be responsive to the report’—well, I actually do not think that that is a reasonable proposition. We are still in a period of restrictions. We still have a very live threat to the health and safety of Victorians and we should at all times act in the best interests of Victorians. We should conduct an inquiry, absolutely, in all aspects, and there will be inquiries right across this country and right across the world so that we do take learnings.

There is not a government that I am aware of anywhere in the world, except for maybe one, that turns a blind eye to what is going on in their communities in relation to COVID-19. Most of the governments that I see acting and responding to COVID-19 are doing so with the best intentions. There are many, many models of contact tracing that are going on around the world, and I am sure that inquiry after inquiry will put us in a position where we do probably end up with a model that would be considered to be best practice.

I know that everybody is working hard, particularly the people in this state who have been entrusted with the work of contact tracing. We should not underestimate the complexity of it. We should not underestimate the difficulty of it. I am sure that no-one here would purport to be an expert in how that
is handled, but we do support the inquiry. I know that some may have suggested otherwise, but we do suggest the inquiry is going to be an important step, not just here but also internationally. But we do think that the time frames are too tight and will distract resources.

House divided on amendment:

Ayes, 22

Elasmr, Mr
Erdogan, Mr
Gepp, Mr
Grimley, Mr
Hayes, Mr
Kieu, Dr
Leane, Mr
Maxwell, Ms
Meddick, Mr
Melhem, Mr
Patten, Ms
Pulford, Ms
Ratnam, Dr
Shing, Ms
Stitt, Ms
Symes, Ms
Tarlamis, Mr
Taylor, Ms
Terpstra, Ms
Tierney, Ms
Vaghela, Ms
Watt, Ms

Noes, 15

Atkinson, Mr
Bach, Dr
Barton, Mr
Bath, Ms
Bourman, Mr
Crozier, Ms
Cumming, Dr
Davis, Mr
Finn, Mr
Limbrick, Mr
Lovell, Ms
McArthur, Mrs
O’Donohue, Mr
Quilty, Mr
Rich-Phillips, Mr

Amendment agreed to.

Amended motion agreed to.

Business of the house

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) (15:27): I move:

That the consideration of order of the day, general business, 1, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

NOTICES OF MOTION

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (15:28): I move:

That the consideration of notice of motion, general business, 399, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Committees

ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Reference

Mr HAYES (Southern Metropolitan) (15:28): I move:

That this house requires the Environment and Planning Committee to inquire into, consider and report, by June 2022, on the adequacy of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 and the Victorian planning framework in relation to planning and heritage protection, and in particular the committee is to examine:

(1) the high cost of housing, including but not limited to:
   (a) provision of social housing;
   (b) access for first home buyers;
   (c) the cost of rental accommodation;
   (d) population policy, state and local;
   (e) factors encouraging housing as an investment vehicle;
mandatory affordable housing in new housing developments;

environmental sustainability and vegetation protection;

delivering certainty and fairness in planning decisions for communities, including but not limited to:

- mandatory height limits and minimum apartment sizes;
- protecting green wedges and the urban growth boundary;
- community concerns about VCAT appeal processes;
- protecting third-party appeal rights;
- the role of ministerial call-ins;

protecting heritage in Victoria, including but not limited to:

- the adequacy of current criteria and processes for heritage protection;
- possible federal involvement in heritage protection;
- separating heritage protection from the planning administration;
- establishing a heritage tribunal to hear heritage appeals;
- the appointment of independent local and state heritage advisers;
- the role of councils in heritage protection;
- penalties for illegal demolitions and tree removals;

ensuring residential zones are delivering the type of housing that communities want; and

any other matter the committee considers relevant.

When developers brazenly demolished the Corkman hotel, Melburnians were appalled. The minister responsible for heritage protection, the Minister for Planning, Richard Wynne, thundered that he would make them rebuild it ‘brick by brick’. Now, that was an impulsive but regrettably empty threat. He did not, nor does he, have the legal power to do this. The Corkman hotel vandals got away with it. They escaped with a fine, which does not even cover the extra money they can now get from selling the property as vacant land as a development site. Now, if this were an isolated example of Melbourne’s heritage being demolished while this Parliament turns a blind eye, that would be one thing, but it is not.

Here is a list of heritage homes demolished in my electorate alone all due to a lack of heritage protection. Some were demolished while their heritage values were still being assessed. They are: 34 Armadale Street, Armadale; 19 Moir Street, Hawthorn; Forres at 9–11 Edward Street, Kew; 981 Burke Road, Camberwell; 993 Burke Road, Camberwell; 33–35 Huntingtower Road, Armadale; 34 Were Street, Brighton; Idlywilde at 16 St Georges Road, Toorak; 18 St Georges Road, Toorak; 27 Mariemont Avenue, Beaumaris; 17 Nautilus Street, Beaumaris; Breedon House at 34 Were Street, Brighton; 32 Middle Crescent, Brighton; 25–27 Victoria Avenue, Canterbury; 360 Auburn Road, Hawthorn; 368 Auburn Road, Hawthorn; 55 Seymour Road, Elsternwick; 2 Burgess Street, Beaumaris; 46 Rowland Street, Kew, the home to young Gough Whitlam; and 1045 Burke Road, Camberwell. That is just 20 heritage homes in the last few years in my electorate alone, and that is also Mr Davis’s electorate, Ms Crozier’s electorate, Mr Erdogan’s electorate and Ms Taylor’s electorate too.

Here I am talking about heritage, but this motion seeking a referral to the Planning and Environment Committee, of which I am deputy chair, is about a broader and at present all-embracing issue of planning, which I will talk to later in this speech. I want to thank my crossbench colleague Dr Ratnam, also a valued member of the committee, for her initial collaboration in framing the terms of reference and her continuing support in getting this motion before this house and, with the government’s and hopefully the opposition’s support, getting the issues before the committee.

During my time as an MP I have received many expressions of concern from constituents about the loss of these homes and what these continuing demolitions say about the poor state of heritage protection in Victoria. I have come to the view that a parliamentary inquiry is needed. Some
suggestions I believe require investigations by a committee, especially in regard to heritage protection, and they are the adequacy of existing arrangements for heritage protection in Victoria; whether there should be a federal minister for heritage and a federal department of heritage; whether heritage protection in Victoria should be moved away from the Minister for Planning and have its own minister and its own department; whether there should be a separate Victorian heritage tribunal rather than having heritage decisions made at VCAT; whether developers should be required to pay for independent heritage advice on any building they propose to demolish but not be permitted to appoint the heritage expert; whether councils should have their own heritage department outside the council’s planning division, which would promote local heritage and maintain lists of independent heritage advisers; whether penalties for illegal demolitions, such as the Corkman hotel disaster, and illegal tree removals are sufficient; whether buildings which have been altered to some degree still retain ongoing heritage significance and value; and whether the two levels of heritage protection available—significant and contributory—are sufficient.

In this respect, as well as others, we should look at practices in other jurisdictions, which we have done. This is by no means an exhaustive list of heritage issues which we can consider. Other things that have been brought up are whether communities should make some contribution to helping heritage owners maintain heritage properties in some ways too, but Victorians in general are dismayed and even aghast at the lack of heritage protection in this state. It is a matter I have discussed directly with the minister, and to the minister’s credit he has expressed his concern about this as well. I am glad to have the government indicating it is going to support this today. I am really very pleased to hear that, and I thank the minister.

Here are some of our residents’ thoughts. First, a demolition permit should not be issued without a planning permit. That means you cannot knock down what is there until the planning process has decided what is going to replace it. The current practice puts demolition powers in the hands of private building surveyors, and as I have said to this house previously, the system of private building surveyors is a scam, and it has had a detrimental effect on the quality of our buildings since the Kennett government introduced it and subsequent governments have continued to support it. Heritage protection should not be privatised out to unqualified building inspectors. However, if we required a planning permit or something similar before a demolition could proceed, this would bring councils into the picture, as they should be.

Respected Melbourne planning expert Professor Michael Buxton from RMIT has told me our heritage system is ineffective compared to that of many other countries. He said there is no proper consideration of precincts and that the system relies on the use of the heritage overlay, which he considers a flawed process. Overlays omit too many important areas and buildings. The process is costly and cumbersome and the overlay provisions are weak. Constituents have suggested we look at the heritage provisions in the UK or Canada or New Zealand. Some have noted that in jurisdictions like New South Wales heritage is part of the environment department.

And heritage is not just about old buildings. There is cultural heritage. Some buildings are not architecturally special but have significance due to their place in history. Then there is Indigenous heritage, and I am concerned about the heavy-handed force used to ensure the destruction of significant Indigenous trees as a consequence of the Western Highway extension. Earlier this year the federal government for the second time rejected an application to protect these trees, and I hear there has been some success in a court today but I do not have all the details here.

And there is context too in relation to landscape. In the case of some of the homes in Toorak which are at risk of demolition, it is not so much the home as the loss of the magnificent grounds and gardens which needs to be prevented. One of my constituents, former TV presenter Ilona Komesaroff, has collected the signatures of over 600 Toorak residents on a petition demanding an end to the destruction of local heritage by developers.
The United Kingdom’s Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment sets out four groups of heritage values. One:

Evidential value: the potential of a place to yield evidence about past human activity.

Two:

Historical value: the ways in which past people, events and aspects of life can be connected through a place to the present …

Three:

Aesthetic value: the ways in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from a place.

And four:

Communal value: the meanings of a place to the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory.

My constituents see little evidence of these sorts of values being seriously applied on the ground. Ms Dasha Kopecek from Box Hill advised me of a case in Box Hill where she said that the heritage officer employed by the developer presented a biased, ill-informed heritage perspective, unsurprisingly intended to support the developer. The council heritage officer did not attend a planning forum designed to give residents a chance to discuss the heritage significance of the site. The council officer who did attend and chaired the meeting was unable to summarise the heritage officer’s long and technical report. Few people—residents or council staff—would have actually read his report. VCAT appears ill-equipped to deal with complex heritage matters and has a poor history of dealing with residents’ concerns. Bernadette Pierce from the Save Glen Eira group said their members are concerned about the effect on heritage buildings of large developments carried out adjacent to them. Overshadowing, access to sunlight, wind issues, changes in the watertable and so on can negatively affect heritage buildings, causing distress and expense for their owners.

Last year the National Trust released a document concerning federal heritage priorities. They pointed out that Australia’s heritage creates a unique identity, a sense of place and a strong reminder of our proud history. Our heritage places, from buildings to landscapes, from songlines to character areas, from trees to shipwrecks, all represent our story—the story of our people and our shared connections. They said Indigenous cultural heritage continues to be at risk from incremental destruction and the cumulative impact of large-scale landscape change. Government heritage departments at all levels are underfunded and under-resourced. The ongoing loss of trade skills in heritage leaves heritage places vulnerable to poorly executed repairs and conservation work.

They advocated a program of accredited job skill training to boost the traditional heritage trade skills. They advocated more effort to protect, conserve and celebrate Australia’s heritage. Also, last year the National Trust’s Kristin Stegley had an opinion piece published in the Age titled, appropriately, ‘Governments only pay lip service to heritage’. She said there is a failure to appreciate how heritage contributes to social cohesion and to vibrant, prosperous and healthy communities. She is right. Governments have not done enough to promote social cohesion in recent times, and we could use all the social cohesion we can get right now. She also referred to an editorial in the Age which called for the buck-passing between state governments and councils over heritage protection to stop. The Age is right of course. Both government and councils have a responsibility to protect heritage, and as you can see from the list of demolitions I read out earlier, they are failing to discharge it, and property speculators benefit from this failure in responsibility.

Residents in Boroondara are strongly supporting my campaign for a parliamentary inquiry. Sandra Alexander, Rose Blanden and Christina Branagan from the Boroondara Group for Advocacy and Protection described the changes to the statewide Victorian planning provisions introduced by amendment VC148 in July 2018, just two years ago, as an alarming development which threatens heritage and residents’ rights through exempting notice requirements and the like. As an example, they
pointed out that a local house had recently been approved for contributory heritage protection after a huge community campaign. Then the owners made a planning application to council which would seriously degrade the heritage elements, and due to amendment VC148 local people were not informed, nor does council have to consider their objections as part of the decision process. A second example is a house and garage with an individually significant grading. The owners could subdivide that land, build a fence, demolish the garage or sell the land as a development site, and local residents would be given no notice and have no rights of objection.

They have also raised the issue of VCAT with me. They say that VCAT has become increasingly focused on whether a heritage property has had alterations. This is increasingly being used as a reason to deny heritage protection, yet there is nothing in the guidelines or regulations to support this approach. The fact is that all heritage places have been altered in some way over the years. It is a part of their heritage, and it is what happens all around the world. The claim of alterations was the claim made by developers who developed two century-old buildings in Burke Road, Camberwell, on either side of the Victoria Road intersection, but minor alterations should not destroy the case for heritage protection.

The Boroondara residents also raised the issue of facadism. Planning guidelines are supposed to discourage the demolition of buildings except for their facade, but increasingly places of heritage value are being all but demolished in this way.

In Bayside residents have been concerned about the demolition of unique mid-century heritage. The award-winning Breedon House in Brighton, designed by Geoffrey Woodfall and built in 1966, was demolished in May this year after being refused an interim protection order because it was considered not to be under immediate threat. In the same week a mid-century home in Nautilus Street, Beaumaris, designed by the architect Charles Bricknell, was demolished despite objections from the National Trust and the community group Beaumaris Modern. Beaumaris Modern president Fiona Austin described that week as ‘devastating for our architectural heritage’. She has advised me that Heritage Victoria denied an application by them for an interim protection order after a phone call was made to the owner of Breedon House. Apparently Heritage Victoria was reassured by phone that the owner had no immediate plans to demolish the house, so they did not put a protection order on it. But the owners demolished it the very next day. What a farce. And what does it say about the effectiveness of Heritage Victoria?

The National Trust chief, Simon Ambrose, said:

Mid century homes are an important part of our history and utilised groundbreaking construction methods, innovative approaches to open-plan living and connections to the landscape.

The battle goes on. In August Hawthorn residents launched a campaign to save a 1916 Queen Anne federation villa in Berkeley Street which is at risk of being sold, having been passed over in a heritage study, and a modernist home in Tannock Street, Balwyn North, designed by renowned Melbourne architect Robin Boyd in 1949, was also at risk of being listed for sale in August—and what is more, it is being advertised as a redevelopment opportunity. Professor Philip Goad, a professor of architecture at the University of Melbourne and a board member at the Robin Boyd Foundation, says that more than 60 years later the building is still virtually intact. In mid-October we learned of plans to tear down four period homes in Hampton and replace them with a three-storey apartment block with 36 apartments. Apparently we do not have enough apartments. Changes to the residential zones which allow multi-unit developments in older areas where previously only two new dwellings on a block were allowed have accelerated the market-driven destruction of our heritage.

And it is not just private developers who are the culprits when it comes to heritage destruction. The state government’s Level Crossing Removal Project has been removing a lot more than level crossings. The Upfield line project destroyed trees at Moreland station that were more than 100 years old and destroyed the historic Munro Street signal box despite the objections of hundreds of local residents and the Coburg Historical Society. The fact is that heritage matters. The fact is we are failing
in our duty to protect it for the enjoyment of this generation and the ones who come after, and we need an inquiry to produce ways we can lift our game and do better.

So far I have been speaking about heritage protection, but the motion goes to a number of other important issues concerning the Planning and Environment Act as well. The first of these is the high cost of housing, and I know I am not alone in being very concerned about the high cost of housing. The extent of homelessness and rough sleeping in Melbourne is unacceptable. It is shameful. It is worthy of note that the state government was quite able to find accommodation for our homeless people when it became a public health issue due to the coronavirus pandemic. Let us learn from this and take the opportunity to get fair dinkum about putting an end to homelessness. On our road to recovery from the pandemic I believe that it would serve Victorians better in the light of the near future if public money was being spent on social housing, which might give homeless people a break and also employ local builders, rather than huge, environmentally damaging infrastructure projects.

The inquiry would also look at environmental sustainability, vegetation protection, mandatory height limits, minimum apartment sizes, protecting the green wedges, the urban growth boundary, concerns about VCAT’s role, third-party appeal rights and ministerial call-ins. These issues are all fundamentally important to me and to our party, Sustainable Australia. I have spoken about them many times in the past couple of years. Last year I put forward a private members bill concerning mandatory height limits and restricting VCAT appeals. The bill was narrowly defeated in this place, and I believe it is a great pity for our state because it would have reshaped planning in Victoria and given citizens a much greater say in important planning issues.

This year has shown more than any other since the Second World War how much we depend on social cohesion and people being prepared to act for the good of the community rather than simply pursue their own personal interests. We politicians are much more likely to get that cooperation and support if people know they are being listened to and have a stake in the results. In the area of planning, the community is only involved in a token manner. Property developers have the ear of governments and are far too close to them and, as we have seen many examples of lately, improperly close to them. Governments have been imposing ever-denser populations in Melbourne to satisfy the development industry, often against the express wishes of the community. Now we are faced with a time of change—an unmitigated disaster but an opportunity too. We need to learn the lessons of the coronavirus pandemic and a lesson which we learned in the past but have forgotten.

Right around the globe population density has been a contributor to disease and death. We are witnessing a revolution in working habits, and we must rethink our planning and transport systems. Will more public transport be necessary now, or will more and more freeways continue to be seen as the answer to ever-increasing density? Will ever-increasing density everywhere be seen to be desirable again? To property developers of course yes, but will the general public want to go along with them again? CBD office space is now empty, and it is a long way back from here.

It is time for a rethink of Plan Melbourne, which was written by the true believers that bigger and denser is always best for everyone, especially property speculators. And it is time for a rethink of the planning and environment legislation, which could possibly turn its focus away from an overwhelming concern with higher density and focus its attention on community health, community wellbeing and of course our precious environment and what we value about the past. All of these are primary concerns to local residents but are rarely taken into account in planning decisions under this much-corrupted act. I commend this motion to the house.

Mr TARLAMIS (South Eastern Metropolitan) (15:52): I rise to speak on the motion moved today by Mr Hayes, which requires the Environment and Planning Committee to inquire into, consider and report by June 2022 on the adequacy of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 and the Victorian planning framework in relation to planning and heritage protection. I will not list the large number of items in the motion as Mr Hayes has outlined that and it is quite extensive.
In rising to speak on this motion I begin by saying the Victorian planning system is a pillar of our state’s livability and it is important and critical that we get it right. Planning decisions affect the lives of all Victorians, with the capacity to have a significant impact on local communities, the environment, key industries and the broader economy. Unlike many other regulatory systems, planning has many users and it affects Victorians in one way or another. However, it can be difficult to understand, the framework and terminology used in the planning system can be very intimidating for the wider community and it can be hard to navigate and follow. Therefore we support the need for better understanding of the adequacy of our planning system in addressing the challenges associated with this motion, and that is why we will be supporting this motion today.

Having said that, I think that it is important to basically put on the record a number of initiatives that the government have taken and are taking with regard to the planning act—the things that we have been doing—and what the act currently does. Our planning system is based on key principles of positive community outcomes, enhancing our livability and balancing the environmental, social and economic needs of all Victorians while managing population growth, land use and development across the state. The objectives of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 seek to provide for the following: the fair, orderly, economic and sustainable use and development of land; the protection of natural and man-made resources; a pleasant, efficient and safe working, living and recreational environment for all Victorians; the protection of buildings and places that are of significant aesthetic, architectural historical and cultural value; the orderly provision and coordination of public utilities and facilities for the benefit of the community; the facilitation of the provision of affordable housing; and, importantly, to balance the present and future interests of all Victorians. Effective planning processes are essential for preventing inappropriate land uses and development and for giving the community confidence and certainty in the system. Plan Melbourne 2017–2050 and the eight regional growth plans set the policy direction for Victoria’s future growth development and prosperity for the short and medium term.

With regard to housing—and I noticed Mr Hayes talked about housing a lot in his contribution—housing and homelessness and affordability and rough sleeping is a significant issue which is of importance to so many people. I know many people in this chamber, in this Parliament and in the wider community are very interested in this issue. The Legal and Social Issues Committee have got a homelessness inquiry going at the moment, and we have been spending a lot of time through that inquiry going out into the community and talking with service providers, individuals and people who are at the coalface, as well as individuals that are accessing or are trying to access the services, to see the ways in which things can be improved and the ways in which we can address these sorts of issues. I know a lot of members have been advocating for a long time in this space, and we look forward to bringing forward a report to this place in due course which will contain a series of recommendations which will hopefully address a series of these issues and look at ways in which we can address these. I will touch on some of the things that we have been doing in that space to date.

Our planning system ensures that housing remains affordable for all Victorians through a range of measures, such as providing an adequate supply of land for housing, streamlining planning rules to reduce the delays in new housing approvals and facilitating the provision of affordable housing. We have released 100,000 new lots in the growth areas through the work of the Victorian Planning Authority, and we will be releasing an additional 50,000 lots in this term.

In 2018 the government amended the Planning and Environment Act 1987 to include the facilitation of affordable housing as an objective of this act. We introduced the definition of ‘affordable housing’ in the act. We affirmed that the responsible authorities can enter into agreements with landowners and others under section 173 of the act for the provision of affordable housing. These reforms encouraged the negotiation of voluntary agreements for the provision of affordable housing as part of the development applications.

To support the councils in negotiating voluntary agreements, the Minister for Planning also announced a suite of initiatives, including active communications and engagement about all aspects of affordable housing agreements, subsidised short courses to support council officers to understand affordable
housing issues and a $500 000 grants program to support councils to progress affordable housing agreement negotiations by providing access to expert professional advice and support to assist in agreement negotiations. These reforms give councils the framework and support that they need to deliver affordable homes so that hardworking families across Victoria can get the safe and secure house that they need.

The Minister for Planning has also recently announced the launch of a development facilitation program to fast-track priority projects that meet specific criteria, including investment certainty, positive short- to medium-term economic impact, job creation and the contribution to broader social objectives like affordable housing and emissions reduction. He has also recently announced a number of approvals for other housing projects as well. I will not go through the list of some of those.

As part of the Homes for Victorians program the Minister for Planning also undertook an inclusionary housing pilot of six surplus government land sites in Boronia, Broadmeadows, Parkville, Wodonga, Noble Park and Reservoir. The pilot will deliver a mix of social, affordable and market housing, including 100 new social housing homes, which will be delivered in partnership with several registered housing agencies. We will have more to say in this area in due course as well.

Sitting suspended 4.00 pm until 4.19 pm.

Mr TARLAMIS: I was about to make a contribution with regard to environmental sustainability and vegetation protection. The planning system encompasses the Victorian government’s environmental objectives and incorporates vegetation, biodiversity and environmental protection requirements established by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, the EPA and all other relevant authorities. Plan Melbourne 2017–2050 recognises the importance of protection of our water sources, waterways, green spaces, biodiversity conservation and a sustainable approach to waste and resource recovery. It was updated by our government in 2017 to strengthen the focus on climate change, energy efficiency and the future supply of affordable housing. Our response to climate change mitigation and adaptation reflects targets adopted by Victoria for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and renewable energy generation. In terms of protecting native vegetation, the planning system recently included new regulations to provide better protection for Victoria’s sensitive native vegetation.

The Victorian planning system provides for some of the broadest third-party notice and appeal rights across the country, covering most developments. Our current planning system actively encourages participation from the community and enables the community to provide input into the potential effects of a proposal. This ultimately leads to better outcomes and decision-making with closer scrutiny, and those community rights have been protected by our government in the planning system.

In terms of heritage, heritage protection in Victoria is delivered through two levels, with a separation of responsibilities between the state and local governments. The role of the state government, through the work of Heritage Victoria and the Heritage Council of Victoria, is to protect and conserve places and objects of state-level heritage significance. Heritage Victoria is responsible for the administration of the Heritage Act 2017, which establishes the Victorian Heritage Register, which lists places and objects of state-level heritage significance, but the government supports all attempts to improve local councils’ protection of heritage as well and will support any initiatives in that way. I know a lot of members want to make contributions on this motion, so I might leave my contribution there and just repeat that we will be supporting this motion.

Dr RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (16:21): I rise to speak in support of this inquiry referral today. In fact I was pleased to be able to work with my crossbench colleague Mr Hayes on developing the terms of reference for this inquiry. Mr Hayes and I share a mutual interest in Victoria’s planning system and also share a desire to improve it. While we do disagree on some of the changes we would like to see made to the system, we agree on the fact that the system is broken, that it is no longer working for the Victorian people or delivering the kind of suburbs and communities we want to see.
When I first became a local government councillor I never expected that I would develop such a keen interest in urban planning. I am a social worker and had spent more time thinking about what goes on in people’s heads and minds than the design of the apartment block they lived in. But I soon came to learn that the two are more connected than I had previously realised. I came to understand that the shape of our neighbourhood has a profound impact on our wellbeing. For instance, does our home have enough space and light to live in? Does it have access to fresh air and green space? Is it affordable? Is it insulated enough so that I can keep it cool during a heatwave or warm during the chill of winter?

This struck me the most at one urban planning committee meeting I was at at Moreland when we were considering yet another application for some poor-quality apartments. We were briefed that the bedrooms indeed had windows but the kind that were so high up on the wall, thin, long slits to allow some light to come in but that you could not look out of, and that was to stop overlooking. A fellow councillor leaned over to me and said, ‘You know what we’re doing? We’re consigning a generation of young people to grow up in bedrooms that they can never look out of’, and that really filled me with sadness. You see, the developers had come up with a nifty way to meet their obligations without building something that was actually livable, and they got to do this because the rules allowed it.

That rule book is our planning system, and it is in dire need of review. We have let big property developers run riot through our communities, manipulating our planning rules to maximise their profits. Residents’ visions of their suburbs with green space, affordable housing and local heritage have been steamrolled, and developers have been able to go permit shopping at VCAT and overturn council decisions. Imagine instead a planning system that meant that new homes were sustainable, affordable, livable and what the community wanted their neighbourhoods to be. It is not a pipe dream. We can change it for the better with political will, and that is why the act needs to be rewritten. The planning framework needs to be revitalised to meet the needs of the future, which is why we need an inquiry to undertake a deep dive into the system, identify big weaknesses and reinvent it so that it delivers the outcomes that our local communities want and need. While an inquiry itself will not fix the system, it is an important step in the journey to do so.

I would like to speak to a few aspects of the terms of reference and highlight some of the areas that I hope the inquiry will thoroughly investigate. Firstly, I am pleased that this inquiry will be focusing on the role the planning system plays in creating more affordable housing. We all know Victoria is in a housing crisis. Our public housing system has been neglected for decades and we now have over 100,000 people on the waiting list. People are struggling to make ends meet while paying high proportions of their income in rent. Instead of promoting and creating more affordable housing, we have seen more houses and apartments being built that are not affordable, are too small to live in and are totally unsustainable.

Our planning system could be doing so much more to force developers and governments to invest in affordable housing. We could be introducing mandatory inclusionary zoning, for example, where a developer needs to set aside part of the development for affordable housing. When developers can buy up land on the cheap and then turn it into luxury apartments to sell at enormous profits there is no reason they should not also be able to set aside some part of their development for public and community housing. It is little wonder that we are in the housing crisis we are in when governments have tried to argue that they have no role in providing public housing but have then created no incentives in the system for developers to fill the gaps. The Greens of course believe that the government should also be a provider of housing, just like they provide other social infrastructure, but when our system is so heavily dependent on the provision of private housing then developers should also be responsible for creating more affordable housing, especially when they have wreaked enormous profits for so many years.

The inquiry will also consider environmental sustainability and vegetation protection. We know that our cities and suburbs are already feeling the effects of climate change and that the severity of climate change will only increase if our governments continue to fail to act on it. Our summers will continue
to get hotter, longer and drier. We will see more extreme weather and more bushfires, and our suburbs will experience the urban heat island effect. This is when our cities start to cook with heat because of the amount of concrete in development not being matched with enough open space and trees, which help keep our cities cool. When there are not enough incentives for new developments to be sustainable or efficient then we risk creating communities that are not prepared for the next few decades. We need tough minimum energy efficiency standards for our homes so that they can stay warm in the winter and cool in the summer, and we need these mandated in our planning system. We need more trees and gardens to limit the urban heat island effect, not more concrete jungles that make our suburbs bake through the summer.

I also wanted to touch on the importance of open and green space in our communities, especially in light of the strange year we have all had. For those of us who have spent the majority or all of this year at home it has been harder if we live in apartments that have no balconies or if there are no parks within easy distance. All of us should be able to enjoy open and green space at home or close to home, and our planning system should be ensuring that we can by not allowing developers to buy their way out of their obligations to provide green open space. The Greens also want better protection of our green wedges and stricter rules on how frequently the urban growth boundary can be reviewed or changed, and I look forward to considering this further in the inquiry.

The inquiry will also look at how our framework could be delivering certainty and fairness in planning decisions for communities. I have spoken in this place about the frustration and disappointment our councils and communities feel when their vision for their local area is so easily overridden and overturned by the system, when developers can just go to VCAT and get a decision made in their favour or when the minister can call in the permit and take control of a project away from councils. The local community should be front and centre in our planning system, not the profits and greed of property developers. This inquiry must consider the reforms needed to stop developers from gaming the system, for example by reforming the VCAT appeals processes or improving consultation on ministerial call-ins.

This inquiry will also consider heritage and how our planning system is currently failing to adequately protect it. I am sure many of us in this place have been contacted by constituents devastated that sites of local significance have been destroyed by urban development and where their local planning schemes could do little to stop it. I would also note that heritage extends beyond colonial Victorian architecture and includes the natural and cultural heritage that our First Nations communities have protected and cherished for centuries. This week we saw the destruction of heritage on Djab Wurrung land, where a sacred directions tree was destroyed to make way for a road. Any reform of the planning system must ensure that First Nations cultural and spiritual heritage is included in a heritage protection scheme, and I hope that this inquiry will acknowledge this in its work.

I would like to conclude by noting that the impact of the COVID restrictions has clearly shown just how important good planning is. Good planning ensures people have access to green spaces, livable homes and good local services. It makes our homes livable and safe. It means we can easily access local services and shops and it means we are able to enjoy parks and gardens close to home. When we have all spent more time this year at home confined to our immediate suburbs it has given us many opportunities to think about the shape of our local communities and what kind of home we want to live in, and reforming our planning system so that it prioritises people over profit will help create the suburbs and neighbourhoods and communities we really want to live in. I am very pleased to support this inquiry as a big first step towards widespread reform of planning in Victoria.

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (16:30): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to this debate on Mr Hayes’s motion to establish an inquiry of the Environment and Planning Committee and have that report by June 2022 on the adequacy of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 and the Victorian planning framework, especially in relation to planning and heritage. Now, I note that this is a long motion. There are many different parts of it. Most we agree
with, some we are less excited about, but the general focus of a proper review of these planning aspects is something that the Liberals and Nationals support.

We have long been concerned that the quality of life in Melbourne is being damaged. We have had very significant population growth, and although that has paused under COVID in recent months, there was huge population growth going back to the turn of the century. It is probably well in this house today to actually give some background to this. Victoria’s population lagged the national growth rates until 1997. Through that period under the Kennett government there was a significant turnaround in the state, and net interstate migration reversed for the first time in about 30 years to a net positive in 1997. Through the period beyond that—most of the 2000s and the period from 2010 through to 2020 until COVID—Victoria had very significant population growth. We had overseas migration and we had very significant interstate movements as well.

Whilst on one level we strongly support increased population growth, at the same time this has got to be moderated and balanced, and it has got to be supported by appropriate infrastructure. At the 2010 election the then Premier admitted that one reason he had lost government in 2010 was because he had not kept up with the need for infrastructure—those are his words, not mine—and because the previous government, the Brumby government, had not maintained infrastructure support for the enormous population growth that had occurred, and I think that is true.

We as a coalition have been in power for four years of the last 21 years, and indeed the lack of infrastructure, the slow provision of infrastructure to match population growth, is a very significant challenge. We strongly support more infrastructure to get the balance right, and there is significant catch-up to do. Whether it is in my own portfolio of transport infrastructure, it is very clear that there is huge catch-up still to be done.

But what has often occurred is huge population growth in a way that has not seen the provision of proper education and health and other services match it, and people naturally become very agitated. And there is the loss of green spaces, the loss of vegetation, the loss of the ambience of streets. We know the story in our suburbs. Mr Hayes and I share, along with Ms Crozier and others, Southern Metropolitan Region. We understand the strong strengths of that region, but many of those are under threat from excessive and poorly thought through development. And we see what happens in what can often be a grand old street or a very good streetscape: first one house is pulled down, and then a dense, unattractive set of flats—let us call them what they are: apartments, units, flats in the old parlance—are built. The building goes close to the boundary. I am thinking about one where I walked on Sunday in Walpole Street in Kew, a grand old house. Two large blocks were knocked over and now there is a very, very dense development with tiny box trees at the front—no canopy to protect from heat. Whatever your view on global warming is, let me tell you one thing: if you chop down the trees in the suburbs and you have concrete and bitumen and tin, it gets hot. Those trees have a very significant impact on our suburbs, not only protecting the ambience and the quality of life but also moderating the temperature. So I say we need to be very careful.

What often happens in these streets is one starts and it makes no great difference to the street, because it is only one property in a long street which has got some canopy trees in the nature strip but canopy trees all around as well. Then what happens is there is a cascade down the street and then on the other side, and then three to five years later there is a huge change in the street. The street is no longer recognisable, the quality of life is impacted. No-one can park, because there are so many vehicles there now, and no-one can get through. It becomes more dangerous for children. This fundamentally changes the quality of life in our neighbourhoods and our streets.

I am very cautious and have had the planning portfolio in opposition on a number of occasions and have been very active in ensuring that we get better outcomes. In government I worked with Matthew Guy to get neighbourhood residential zones implemented. The NRZs were a very significant innovation in protecting our suburbs, and as I have said in this chamber in previous times when I had shadow planning in the last Parliament, the removal by Mr Wynne, the Mister for Planning, of the
neighbourhood residential zones, the emasculating of them with the VC110 planning amendment, removed the two-dwelling cap.

I will never forget the hearing at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. I had written the question for our people. They asked the question about a large block in Elsternwick, a 1000-square-metre block, and VC110 had ripped away the protections. They said to Mr Wynne, ‘How many buildings or dwellings can go on that block? Is it two? Is it four? Is it six? Is it eight? Is it 10, or more?’. He said, ‘It’s 10 or more’. So make no mistake, this government is committed to densification, intensification. It is committed to the destruction of Melbourne as we know it. It wants to fundamentally change the city. It wants high-rise, tall towers, dense structures, all across the eastern suburbs and the north and the west of Melbourne, and it wants to destroy the ambience and the quality of life. It hates people who have got a decent home on a decent suburban block with decent canopy trees, decent opportunities to grow a vegetable patch and a backyard—somewhere for the kids to kick a footy. That is what Daniel Andrews and his planning minister, Richard Wynne, hate, and they want to destroy it.

This government and the previous Labor government, going back to 2000 and Melbourne 2030, has been committed to the slow, steady erosion of a suburban quality way of life. They have a different view. They see it as a more cosmopolitan view. We will all live in towers. We will all live with dense things. Yes, there will be a park down the end of the street, perhaps, but that is not necessarily so. The fact that there are four times as many people in the suburbs, the fact that the trams are crowded—they are not now because of COVID, but if you go back to the load figures last financial year on the trains and the trams, the load factors were extraordinary and the growth of public transport usage was huge. That was fundamentally a result of huge population growth and the densification and the need of people to use alternatives to cars. I am not opposed to having a stronger public transport system—in fact I strongly support that—but it should be done for the right reasons.

I note particularly the difficulty of the Environment and Planning Committee to do the work that is required here. I think it is a significant challenge for the Environment and Planning Committee to do this work. It is a very, very large reference. We are opposed to excessive ministerial call-ins. We want to protect third-party appeal rights. We agree with many of the concerns about VCAT, and I do not let councils off the hook here, because some councils play a game with VCAT. They do not make hard decisions, they just let the thing flow through to VCAT and they seek to blame big bad VCAT. I think big bad VCAT is sometimes bad, but sometimes it is true that councils have not done the work ahead of time to make the decisions and plan their communities properly. I would add to this list and say an active council planning framework ahead of time with clear signals about what can be done and what cannot be done where and how. I think that we have not done enough of that, Mr Hayes, and I would say to the committee to look at how councils can constructively make those decisions.

On the heritage matter, Mr Smith, the new Shadow Minister for Planning and Heritage, has been very active protecting heritage, and I strongly support him in that. We will be working hard to see that our heritage is protected. Our institutional and building heritage is something that we should treasure. It adds to the quality of life, it adds to the sense of place, it adds to the connection that we have and it adds to the history that we all feel is part of Melbourne and our suburbs. It is not an accident that local history groups are so significant. It is not an accident that people have that strong connection to place. I think our heritage protections are really critical to that.

I do want to say something about costs very quickly and then I will stop. We actually need to pay heed to costs, and that is excessive regulation. Part of that is about clarity of the process ahead of time to make sure that people know where they are heading. Mr Hayes, we support this motion and I look forward to working with you on it.

Ms TERPSTRA (Eastern Metropolitan) (16:42): I rise to make a contribution in support of this motion moved by Mr Hayes that the house require the Environment and Planning Committee to inquire into, consider and report by June 2022 on the adequacy of the Planning and Environment
Committees

Legislative Council

Wednesday, 28 October 2020

Act 1987 and the Victorian planning framework in relation to planning and heritage protection. Now, there is quite a lot in this motion—I will just touch on the broad themes—relating to the cost of housing, environmental sustainability and vegetation protection, delivering certainty and fairness on planning decisions for communities, protecting heritage in Victoria, ensuring residential zones are delivered and the type of housing that communities want and any other matter the committee considers relevant.

I have had the benefit of listening to the contributions of others, both on the crossbench and on the benches opposite. I was actually going to say before that we are almost on a unity ticket with Mr Davis, but then he started to attack us. We almost got there. What I can say is there is keen interest by all in this chamber to support this motion but also to work together to try and get the best out of Victoria’s planning laws and frameworks. Mr Barton is sitting there and he will share these sentiments as a representative of the Eastern Metropolitan Region. My own region is a diverse region and it has its own fair share of heritage landmarks, but also we have green wedges within the region and we also have busy activity centres such as Heidelberg. I might just talk very quickly about a couple of things that I have personal experience of having lived in my region for a long time.

I can recall just a few years ago now a local community group formed called the Banyule Estate Residents Group and that was around trying to protect the Banyule Homestead. For those of you who may not be familiar with that, Banyule Homestead was built in 1846 and is a rare and the only intact example of a pre-gold rush mansion in Victoria. It is incredibly significant.

Mr Finn: Where is it?

Ms Terpstra: In Heidelberg. It was built by architect John Gill for Joseph Hawdon. Banyule Homestead sits on land overlooking the Banyule Swamp in the Banyule Flats Reserve. Just as an aside, I will make comment that it is a significant commitment by the Andrews Labor government to in fact preserve the Banyule Swamp and the wetlands because the North East Link will in fact tunnel under those wetlands. It just goes to show you how significant that area is and how invested the community are in protecting that. As I said, this is the only intact example of a mansion built to that style because John Gill as an architect principally built those mansions in Sydney. It is indeed a rare thing. Sadly it was owned by the Victorian government only to get Jeffed in 1995. It was an annexe to the National Gallery of Victoria. It used to display or have within its walls many works of the Heidelberg School artists, and sadly the property has been in private hands ever since then.

The Banyule Estate Residents Group fought a mighty campaign to protect this property when it was sold a couple of years ago and the new owners wanted to turn it into a wedding venue. Now, I was very concerned at the time that what we would have seen was that the matter would have gone to VCAT and they would have lost. But I was so impressed by the efforts that the community members went to in getting acoustics experts to talk about noise—even the impact of the swamp. There are actually—and this is amazing—bugs in the Banyule Swamp that migratory birds feed on. It is so significant; these birds come once a year to feed on bugs in that swamp. It is incredible once you get into these things—you realise. And it goes to what Dr Ratnam was saying before about our communities—how people live in our communities and the value that these things have in our communities. I think these migratory birds used to come from Japan as well. They would make their way down and just, you know, feed in this swamp.

The whole thing around why this relates to planning is if this was going to be a noisy, well-lit venue it would disturb the birds and it would upset the ecosystem in the swamp, right? So you can see how sometimes planning decisions can have really interesting flow-on effects. But, look, the good news was, just in regard to that campaign, that they won. The rejection of that planning application was upheld in VCAT. Today the homestead is still in private hands, sadly. I personally would like to see that mansion returned to public hands so everyone can enjoy the grounds, and also perhaps we could see the history of the Heidelberg School artists being displayed back within those walls. But it was a near miss.
Mr Finn: Come up with the cash, then.

Ms TERPSTRA: Well, it was a near miss, but it just goes to show you that our community are invested in protecting our heritage. Not as a native Melburnian but as someone that has lived here for some time now, what I can say is that what really strikes you about Melbourne and Victoria is how well, generally speaking, Victorians have protected and the governments have protected our heritage. Because you can travel to other capital cities within Australia and oftentimes you do not see the same level of protection for some of these heritage landmarks.

As I touched on before, we also have green wedges in the Eastern Metropolitan Region. I know I frequently get contacted by people who live in Warrandyte and also in and around Manningham who talk about their concerns with regard to planning applications that are being made within the Manningham local government area.

Members interjecting.

Dr Cumming: Well, it is a crossbench day.

Ms TERPSTRA: Well, thank you, Dr Cumming, for that newsflash. In any event what I would like to say is that I appreciate and understand Mr Hayes’s concern about this, so I look forward to this matter being referred to the Environment and Planning Committee. It is good to see that already we have a level of commitment and goodwill that is being spoken about in the chamber today, and I look forward to working with all of you and opposition members to explore many of the aspects that are listed in this motion. There is an opportunity to do some really good work here, and I am pleased to see that the government is saying that they are quite interested in looking at this and making more sense of it.

I will just finish on this point, if I may. I think what is being said is right: sometimes planning decisions can appear confusing or it is not clear about why things have been made, and I think that it is important that the community can feel that they have a level of confidence at least in even understanding decisions or have a level of certainty about why things have been done in a certain way. I look forward to working with everybody on it, and as I said, I commend this motion to the house.

Mr BARTON (Eastern Metropolitan) (16:50): I will just skip through what everybody has already raised, which were very important points that I wanted to raise before, and I will just concentrate on vulnerable Victorians. As many of us know, homelessness affects a wide range of individuals from various circumstances and backgrounds. Homelessness does not just refer to those sleeping rough on our streets. It includes those living in inadequate and unstable housing. I find it completely outrageous that so many Victorians are struggling or unable to find safe and secure housing on a day-to-day basis these days. As a community we need to work together and find a plausible solution to overcome this. Ultimately the solution comes down to housing and to affordability.

To get individuals and their families into safe and affordable housing we have to address the issues at two levels: additional social housing and increased availability of affordable housing. ‘Social housing’ refers to accommodation available to Victorians experiencing homelessness, escaping family violence, with a disability or who urgently need to move for health reasons. It also includes Victorians who have very low household income and who are on the brink of homelessness and are unable to afford the rent. The purpose of social housing is to get these individuals and families off the streets and into the safety of their own home.

My time on the homelessness inquiry has taught me that social housing has to be available where the problem exists. It is all well and good to have the majority of social housing in the city, but you cannot expect someone from rural Victoria to uproot their life, their support networks and their children from their normal routine. As a result, many of these families end up sleeping in their cars or at local camping sites. Ensuring that affordable residential zones and social housing are available in areas where the community need them is a must. That being said, it is all clear that Victoria is in desperate
need of affordable housing in areas suited to our local communities. As I mentioned, additional social housing is important and essential, but it is not a permanent and nor is it a long-term solution.

Affordable housing is the long-term solution. It means that those whose income typically does not meet the high market costs of the areas they live and work in are able to live there. It means that those who are now on low to moderate incomes can comfortably afford the rent. It means that the cost of purchasing property is not fanciful or a dream but reasonable and realistic. We now have generations who can no longer afford to purchase their own home when prices are so astronomical that ordinary working people cannot even dream of affording one.

Rent prices have nearly doubled in the last decade. In regional Victoria rent prices have soared from $185 per week to $330 and for those in Melbourne from $260 to in excess of $400, yet in that same period wage growth fell for low-income households and the pressures of the cost of living have become greater than ever before. If you work in the gig economy or in insecure work, it is clear that you are living from pay cheque to pay cheque. As a community we know that there are people struggling on a day-to-day basis, but in reality do we notice them? Do we actively know who is on the brink of homelessness or on the brink of defaulting on their mortgage or even being able to pay their rent? The fact is many Victorians are one pay cheque away from homelessness. If we are ever going to make a positive change to protect our history, to protect our environment and to protect our most vulnerable members of society, we need to inquire into these topics. Therefore it is no surprise that I will be supporting this motion.

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) (16:54): I rise for the second time today to support a motion moved by a colleague on the crossbench, so it is quite a big day for me. I am quite pleased and very enthusiastic in fact to support the motion moved by Mr Hayes. I commend him for putting this forward, because I think it is a motion that covers a number of areas that do need to be looked at as a matter of urgency, because we are on the precipice here in Victoria at the minute. We are very, very proud of some of our suburbs. We are very, very proud of the planning that has gone into the City of Melbourne over such a long period of time. You just have to go to Melbourne and compare it to Sydney to see where the planning was. When you go to the CBD of Melbourne, it is very, very well-planned—wide streets, trees, the whole thing. It is just a beautiful place, whereas in Sydney you have got, well, goat tracks going in various different directions at any given time. I think that that just emphasises the importance of planning with regard to how we live our lives and how we want to have those things around us.

I have always been of the view that a backyard is a very, very important thing. I have always had a backyard, apart from when I was living in flats for a little while. But as Mr Barton points out, it is quite hard for many to even get a house, much less a backyard. And when you look at the prices now—they are coming down a little bit, I am told—they are pretty horrendous. As somebody who has one daughter in her 20s and another couple coming up at the rear of the field it concerns me as to what is going to happen to them as they wish to go out and perhaps start their own families and maybe even get married, you never know. Stranger things have happened. It does concern me rather that these barriers will be something that will be a huge problem for them. These are issues that we do have to look at.

I think the environmental issues, the green wedge issues, are huge issues. I will give you an example that is going on at the moment out between Sunbury and Bulla. There is a green wedge out there, and right on the edge of the green wedge they are proposing to dump carcinogenic toxic soil. Now, I would have thought if you were going to dump carcinogenic toxic soil somewhere, you would not dump it next to a green wedge, nor would you dump it next to tributaries which flow straight into the Maribyrnong River. It is quite ludicrous in my view and I cannot work out what the hell is going on there, to tell you the truth. I am going to be speaking about it in a minute in fact during statements on reports, papers and petitions, but I just thought I would mention it now because I think the planning controls in this regard are just totally confusing. In one area you cannot build a house, but across the road you can dump thousands of tonnes of carcinogenic toxic soil. If you can tell me the logic there, please do, because I cannot see it. I just cannot see it. It is very, very odd. The matter at the moment is
before the planning minister, and I am very hopeful that he will do the right thing by the people of Sunbury and Bulla and knock this whole deal on the head.

Having said that, I know there are a number of speakers who wish to have their say so I will leave it there, but I do commend Mr Hayes and I look forward to the committee examining the issues that this motion raises and, more importantly, I look forward to the committee finding solutions.

**Dr CUMMING** (Western Metropolitan) (16:58): I rise today to support Mr Hayes’s motion. The reason why I am rising today to support Mr Hayes’s motion is I know that Mr Hayes is very passionate about the heritage of Brighton, but there are wonderful heritage aspects in Western Metro, many, many beautiful heritage buildings in Footscray, because obviously Footscray and other parts of Western Metro have a lot of heritage significance that needs to be looked after and preserved for our future generations.

A member interjected.

**Dr CUMMING**: Especially pubs, and I totally agree. There is many a pub in Western Metro that we need to make sure is not demolished by a developer.

I have spoken many times about social housing and my passion for social housing in Braybrook and Maidstone. I am hoping that in this committee we will be looking at social housing, especially in Maidstone and Braybrook, seeing as this government has not made any special announcements to the same magnitude of the nine areas that they have highlighted within this 59th Parliament. Hopefully this government looks at the quality of the public housing in Braybrook and Maidstone and actually gets it to a standard of now, 2020. It would be absolutely fantastic if this committee could possibly look at that, because obviously the high cost of housing is going to continue. During these pandemic times obviously there have been a lot of people struggling to pay their mortgages. As well there will be many stretches on the market given that there are a lot of Victorians who are thinking of relocating to Queensland.

One of my ex-councillors, Cr Janis Rossiter, who now is living in Queensland, just called me over the weekend for my birthday and explained that in Queensland there are a lot of Melburnians who are buying properties in Queensland sight unseen. So there is going to be obviously a flood on the market in the future, and obviously there are concerns for many at the moment. You have all those small business people, especially in my area of Western Metro, that have lost their business due to their closures in the very, very long lockdown that we have had here in Victoria.

So I am looking forward to Mr Hayes’s report coming back to this Parliament in June 2022, which will just be a couple of months shy of the next state election. Hopefully in 2022 the government has got contact tracing under control and we can actually look after ourselves in a COVID-norm way, making sure that we continue to understand that this is a virus and that we are going to have to continue to wash our hands. Hopefully all businesses will have their COVID-safe plans and be able to continue paying the mortgages off their homes and off their commercial properties and the like.

I am also hopeful—it was Mr Barton who did the homelessness inquiry, which the whole crossbench supported—with the homelessness inquiry that this crossbench has led that we and this government look at the importance of having more social housing, not just in one place but spread across the whole of Victoria, because that is where it is needed. It would seem from other contributions that I have heard in the last couple of weeks around the difficulties in country Victoria and obviously the bushfires that we have just recently had, the importance of housing and social housing throughout regional Victoria will be something that in the future either the homelessness inquiry or this crossbench inquiry will look at and this government will hopefully take on board. Seeing that this report will be coming in June 2022, maybe the next government will pick these inquiries up and the recommendations and go forward to make sure that there is enough social housing and good-quality social housing not only in my region of Western Metro but also in Western Victoria. I thank and support Mr Hayes today.
Dr BACH (Eastern Metropolitan) (17:04): It is also a great pleasure for me to rise in support of Mr Hayes’s motion. It is a wideranging motion, and I am really pleased to support it today for a whole range of reasons that I will just touch on briefly given the hour. It has been interesting to hear other members speak about some of the reasons why they think Mr Hayes’s motion is really important.

As I have discussed on numerous occasions already in his place, I receive so much correspondence from constituents in my electorate, the Eastern Metropolitan Region, about a number of the issues that Mr Hayes seeks to highlight in his motion. We just heard Dr Cumming talk about the provision of social housing. It was a pleasure, despite the really distressing information I have heard, to sit on a committee recently where we thought deeply about homelessness and the total lack of social housing over many, many years dating back to 2006. I have had conversations with my friend Ms Lovell, the former housing minister, about this. It was my great pleasure to work really closely alongside her in her quest to increase the provision of social housing in Victoria when she was the minister. I look forward, hoping as I do that this motion passes, to the committee being able to provide some really strong recommendations regarding the provision of social housing.

I know that population policy is a particular passion for Mr Hayes. It may not be that I agree with him on every point when it comes to population policy, but I also think it is really important, especially at this point in time, to look at population policy. We do know that many Victorians are thinking about leaving Victoria. Of course what has happened at this time may well have an impact on the number of people who are wanting to come to Victoria. I was pleased that the coalition took a really strong policy regarding decentralisation to the last election. In particular I was pleased that there were strong policies regarding the provision of fast trains that would run services to Ballarat, Wodonga, Shepparton and Geelong as major regional centres. My hope is that the committee, should Mr Hayes’s motion pass as I hope it does, will look closely into some of these things that have been policy interests of mine for some time.

To think about how environmental sustainability should function when thinking about the Planning and Environment Act 1987 is really important. I recently had the pleasure of meeting with an outstanding environmental activist in my electorate, Julie Fechner, and her dingo Muddi to talk about how it is that we agreed that especially as we seek to kickstart our economy, which is on life support right now here in Victoria, we both felt strongly that we need more sustainability initiatives in Eltham but also right across the Eastern Metropolitan Region. Mr Hayes’s motion talks about the green wedges, and again I think we must guard our green wedges so jealously. It was Rupert Hamer who said that the green wedges are the lungs of the city, and so again I am really pleased to see that Mr Hayes wants to make sure that protecting green wedges is a feature of this inquiry.

I, like Mr Hayes, have deep reservations about the adequacy of the current criteria and processes for heritage protection. I was talking to one of my constituents just the other day about this specific matter. I received an email from another constituent in Mount Waverley, again about this specific matter, just very recently. She talked with me about overdevelopment and local amenity and argued that, if some proposed changes went ahead in her neighbourhood, the particular development would irrevocably alter the neighbourhood’s look and feel. That was the language that she used, and it is interesting because she specifically referred to the role of the council. I am looking now at Mr Hayes’s motion, point (4)(f). I think it is right for Mr Hayes to insert that point regarding heritage protection specifically into his motion.

Like I said, it is a wideranging motion, and we could talk about it all day long I am sure, but time is of the essence so I will finish my contribution there. Mr Hayes’s motion goes to the heart of so much of the material that comes to me in my role as a representative for the Eastern Metropolitan Region. For that reason I am pleased to be able to support it today.

Motion agreed to.
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE  
Wednesday, 28 October 2020  
Legislative Council  
3537

Business of the house

NOTICES OF MOTION AND ORDERS OF THE DAY

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) (17:09): I move:

That the consideration of the remaining notices of motion and orders of the day, general business, be postponed until the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Statements on reports, papers and petitions

WEST GATE TUNNEL

Petition

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) (17:10): I rise to speak on the petition that I presented last sitting week opposing the dumping of toxic soil in Sunbury Road between Sunbury and Bulla at the Hi-Quality premises. My very, very great concern about this proposal is very clear, and I have made it very clear on a number of occasions. It involves the health of thousands and thousands of people. Sunbury is about to explode in terms of its population. Sunbury is about to probably double in size over the next decade or so. It seems to me that it is ludicrous that in an area where young families are moving in and where young couples are moving in to start their lives together, to build their homes and to start their families, up the road you would have a toxic waste or toxic soil dump. It is just extraordinary. I mean, this stuff is carcinogenic. For those who do not understand what that means: it causes cancer. It is dangerous. This stuff should not be near people. But the government is proposing that it be dumped just 200 metres from a new residential estate—just up the road from the Goonawarra estate, just around the corner—

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman): Order! Down the back there—could we keep it a bit quiet. It is rare that I have trouble hearing Mr Finn, but I am struggling a bit.

Mr FINN: I looked over there and I saw who was there, and I can understand why you were having trouble hearing me. What I am saying is that it is a real concern when this sort of material is being dumped near residential housing, and it is something that concerns me enormously for future generations. It might not come up in this generation, but it will most surely come up in the next. The prospect of kids with cancer in Sunbury and Bulla leaves me just appalled—just horrified at the prospect.

Of course this new proposal that we are discussing will also involve up to 1000 new trucks. Now, I do not know if it will be every day or every week—I am hearing different figures—but certainly it will be a significant number of new trucks, and we have already got more than enough trucks on Sunbury Road. I am not sure how many members are aware of the Bulla bridge, but that bridge is about 150 years old. It was not designed and it was not built to carry B-doubles and all of these sorts of huge trucks laden with soil. It just was not meant for that. Of course the Bulla bypass is a long way away from what we are hearing—again, on the desk of the Minister for Planning; there cannot be a whole lot of room there at the minute. I am just horrified at the prospect of what will happen if this plan goes ahead.

One question that I am constantly being asked by people in Sunbury is: ‘Where’s Josh Bull in all of this?’ And I have to say, ‘I don’t know’. Here he is, the member for Sunbury, who got re-elected with a massive majority at the last election, and he has disappeared. We have hardly seen him since. Here we have a major threat to his constituents—to tens of thousands of his constituents—a major health threat to future generations, and Josh Bull is nowhere to be found. He is nowhere to be found. I challenge Josh Bull, and indeed I challenge members in this chamber—all members in this chamber from the west—to join together to fight this thing. I have done it before. I did not get anywhere. I will
give it another try. Let us come together. Let us fight this thing together. Let us stop this thing together. Because it is not good for the people of Sunbury, it is not good for the people of Bulla and it is not good for the people of the west that we be regarded as the dumping ground of Victoria. Those days are gone, I hope. They should be gone anyway. What we need to do is we need a united front across all parties and across Independents to come together to fight this thing. Whether we will be able to find Josh Bull in time to do that or not, I do not know. We can only hope. I am an eternal optimist, and maybe we just will. But we do need to come together, we do need to fight this thing and we do need to win. This dumping ground of toxic soil has to be stopped, it must be stopped and I think it will be stopped.

DEPARTMENT OF PREMIER AND CABINET


Mr LIMBRICK (South Eastern Metropolitan) (17:15): I rise to speak on the third report to Parliament on the declaration of a state of disaster related to the coronavirus pandemic. It will be no surprise to members that the Liberal Democrats get very nervous about the use of emergency or disaster powers. As a party that believes that there should be greater limitations on the use of state power in ordinary times, anything that suspends these limitations to expand state power raises concerns.

We have seen four state-of-disaster declarations in recent times, with the most recent declaration set to expire on 8 November. Under the Emergency Management Act 1986 a minister has extraordinary powers to suspend acts or sections of acts to respond to the situation, and we recently had a vigorous and passionate debate in this place regarding the COVID-19 Omnibus (Emergency Measures) and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2020 which allowed for additional classes of people to be appointed as authorised officers under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008. While I opposed this legislation, I can respect that it went through a democratic process and I appreciated the opportunity to ask the minister many questions about specific aspects of the legislation.

What the report into the state-of-disaster declaration makes very clear though is that the government are quite happy to circumvent Parliament if they feel it is necessary. Almost every measure relating to authorised officers that was enabled by the omnibus bill had already been enacted through the use of the disaster powers. In negotiating the passage of the omnibus bill, the opposition and my crossbench colleagues were concerned about the open-ended wording of the legislation. The government amended it to clarify the specific classes of people that could become authorised officers and the specific public health risk powers that they could exercise. While this debate was taking place, however, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services had already issued a direction to, and I quote, suspend ‘section 30(1) of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act to allow for persons not employed under part 3 of the Public Administration Act to be appointed as Authorised Officers under the Public Health and Wellbeing Act’.

This is essentially the original omnibus legislation that many community legal groups, academics and members of the community had significant concerns about. The Parliament received a note from the Governor yesterday that the omnibus act had received royal assent on 20 October. The ministerial directions issued under the state of disaster are all redundant with this act now in force. The government declared a state of emergency on 16 March. They have had plenty of time to establish the appropriate framework for managing the pandemic response and these powers should always have been subjected to parliamentary scrutiny rather than relying on disaster powers. If this had been done appropriately, there would never have been a need for concurrent disaster declaration. It is quite clear that these powers are no longer needed and the disaster declaration should be revoked. If another state of disaster is declared at the end of the current period on 8 November, it will be a shameful example of the government’s disregard for Parliament and democratic processes.
GEELONG RING ROAD TRAFFIC NOISE

Petition

Mrs McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (17:18): Last week I was pleased to present this petition on behalf of local residents in The Heights estate at Fyansford about the traffic noise on the Geelong Ring Road. The residents are fed up with the unbearable traffic noise levels on the estate. Their quality of life is hugely affected and they are angry that to date all parties have been evasive about where responsibility for solving the problem lies.

The petitioners note that while VicRoads 2005 traffic noise reduction guidelines state the noise level objective for residential dwellings to be 63 decibels measured between 6.00 am and midnight, their own recent readings indicate levels averaging above 70 decibels and peaking at above 90. Clauses 63 and 64 of the planning permit for The Heights development require an acoustic report prior to the issuing of any statement of compliance. It appears that the most recent report was conducted in 2014, that it only just met the acceptable level, that the noise level has increased substantially in the time since and that there is no current plan to revisit the testing or propose any solution. I understand there may be no simple answer here, but I am committed to working with the residents to get the best result we possibly can. They seek an extension of the existing road noise barrier to cover the areas of new development.

This is an issue which has come up before. The nearby Wandana Heights and Bell Post Hill areas have in the past mounted successful if lengthy campaigns. It seems to me and to those supporting this petition that the combination of the new housing development needed to accommodate population growth in Geelong and the increased traffic usage of the ring road require comprehensive and universal standards to be adopted. As the volume of traffic increases, so does the blight on the lives of those who live near these busy roads. It is time for a future-proofed universal standard of noise mitigation to be adopted and absolutely required in every instance to avoid each and every new community needing to fight this same battle as Geelong’s growth continues. Nonetheless, we understand that for the residents of The Heights this would come too late. So the first step in finding a solution for them is to get a full understanding of what has happened to date and the agreements, permits and compliance certification involved.

To date I have written to Regional Roads Victoria and the City of Greater Geelong council, and I look forward to working with them and the developer involved. I have also contacted all state government MPs to seek their positive action on behalf of their constituents. I have been pleased to work with local councillor Eddie Kontelj and council candidate and former mayor of the City of Greater Geelong Stretch Kontelj, who joined my well-attended Zoom meeting the week before last. I thank all those who were involved in that session. It was important to understand their concerns, and I will do my best to ensure their voice is more widely heard.

I welcome this petition, which if acted upon would provide valuable material for the campaign to come. The petitioners request

… that the Legislative Council call on the government to release all Acoustic Reports completed for The Heights estate in Fyansford, conduct a new Acoustic Report as a matter of priority and provide all landowners at The Heights estate a copy of the Report, and urgently assess the required noise walls and relevant infrastructure on the Geelong Ring Road above The Heights estate and—

finally—

conduct an inquiry into regulated noise levels along the entire Geelong Ring Road bypass.

I was pleased to support their requests, to present the petition and to pledge my continued assistance to the residents of The Heights.
LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into a Legislated Spent Convictions Scheme

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) (17:22): I think today is a very good day to speak about the report into a legislated spent convictions scheme—a ‘controlled disclosure of criminal record information’ framework—for Victoria because today the government introduced a bill for spent convictions. This is a very memorable day because it is a day that we have been waiting for for decades. In fact in 1987 the Australian Law Reform Commission recommended that we introduce a scheme to protect the disclosure of historical criminal records. Fifteen, 20 years ago nearly every state in Australia adopted a spent convictions scheme—except Victoria. Now, I know Victoria wanted to, but it just could never get the political motivation to do it. So today is a good day. I am very pleased—and I think this is the great work that committees do—because the legislation reflects the recommendations made by this report. And the foundations of the recommendations in this report are from the stories we heard from people who were affected by not having a spent convictions scheme in Victoria.

For many the term ‘spent conviction’ is actually a difficult term. It is hard to define, and I think this is what the committee found. In fact the committee thought that this would actually be better classified and better described as a controlled disclosure of criminal record information, because that is what it is. A spent conviction does not mean that your conviction and your criminal past is erased. It means that you can control who that past is disclosed to. Post COVID, given we have seen incredibly high levels of unemployment, we are going to be seeing people seeking jobs everywhere and this is going to be more important than ever. Just in 2017 there were 700,000 police checks in Victoria. That is 700,000 people who had to declare possibly a mistake they made in their past to a prospective employer. While you should not judge people on mistakes they made in their youth, people are judged on those. The report shows that the inquiry found that was one of the biggest barriers to employment. And not only that but we heard from people who wanted to work for the dole to improve their prospects of employment but the mistakes they had made in the past left them with criminal records excluded them from doing even volunteer work, from even being involved in kinship care and helping foster children from their own families. We know that we have made it harder to get jobs, so today is a great day. Today is the day when many of those people know that they can now move on, that they can now have a future.

I would really like to recognise some of the people that helped us, certainly those at Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation, who invited us onto country to talk about the stories. Uncle Wenzel Carter was part of the Woor-Dungin program that really looked at how we can reduce recidivism in our Aboriginal community and how we can reduce the over-representation in our criminal justice system of Aboriginal people. He said, ‘It is a life sentence after the sentence has been served’. That is the case currently in Victoria, but hopefully not for long. I will leave the last quote to Uncle Larry Walsh, a Taungurung elder, who said, ‘It is hard to live a life where everyone has respect and admiration for you and then all of a sudden something you did as a teenager is being held against you’. So today, for Uncle Larry Walsh, I am pleased to say that this is about to change.

COVID-19

Petition

Dr BACH (Eastern Metropolitan) (17:28): It is good to have the opportunity to rise today to speak on the large petition that I sponsored and tabled this morning seeking the reopening of dance studios and dance schools across Victoria. As I have spoken about previously in this house, indeed on a number of occasions this week, the impacts of both this government’s lockdown and this government road map out of lockdown are being felt disproportionately and indefensibly by Victorian women and girls. Ninety-five per cent of the students who go to dance schools are girls. Many boys love to dance, and that is fantastic. Nonetheless, it is a fact that 95 per cent of students at dance schools are girls. Ninety-five per cent of the staff are women. Many of those who run dance schools are sole traders,
over 50 per cent, and of course we know they received so little, indeed no, state government support, through the long, long months of our lockdown.

Dancing through dance schools is the most popular after-school activity for Victorian girls. Given the fact that Victorian women and girls were disproportionately impacted through the many long months of our lockdown, I would have thought that logic dictates that activities valued most by Victorian women and girls are those that we should be seeking in a COVID-safe way to open up with some priority. But that is not the case. At the moment, for example, in regional Victoria dance schools and dance studios can be open with a strict limit of 20 participants—95 per cent of whom, more indeed, are girls. Inexplicably and indefensibly indoor community sport venues are open in the same parts of regional and rural Victoria with no limits on participants whatsoever—it is 20 for an indoor dance studio but no limit whatsoever for a community indoor sport venue. These community indoor sport venues are overwhelmingly patronised by boys.

Now, again, I call on the government for some explanation—it is a direct apples for apples comparison. Here in metro Melbourne dance schools are still shut. They will not be able to open up even under the current road map until 9 November, and when they do those same rules will apply; indeed they will be more prohibitive. Only 10 participants will be able to be involved in dance studios unless there are multiple rooms, in which case a hard maximum of 20 will be applied. But, again, overwhelmingly the boys, who use what the government is calling indoor community sport venues, will be able to go and play with their friends, often doing and engaging in pursuits that are far more physically active than what occurs at a dance school—I think the government has no idea what actually occurs at dance schools and dance studios—and therefore surely presenting a greater risk, but there is to be no limit on the number of participants as is currently the case in regional and rural Victoria.

So much of what happens in dance schools is involving first and foremost the strength of those engaged, but also the mental wellbeing. Of course there is much actual dancing, but I do not know if the government has bothered to speak to many—

Ms Shing: Show us!

Dr BACH: ‘Show us’, says Ms Shing. And, look, I think I am living, breathing evidence that many blokes love to dance. Show me a dance floor, Ms Shing, and I will jump on it. However, it is just a fact that dance schools are overwhelmingly frequented by Victorian girls and that the staff who work at dance schools are overwhelmingly women. Across the board, I am afraid to say, we have seen that Victorian women and girls have been disproportionately impacted by both the lockdown restrictions and the road map. Angela Jackson, the lead economist at Equity Economics, has said the planned reopening clearly favours male jobs over female jobs.

I want to thank Lisa Archer and Georgia Martin; I want to thank the Dance Arts Alliance for all they have done. The petition that I have tabled before the house has almost 1000 signatures. There are many other petitions that are not in the correct format to table here with many thousands more signatures. I call on the government today to please give Victorian women and Victorian girls a fair go. This appalling campaign against Victorian women and Victorian girls must end. It must end today.

COVID-19

Petition

Mr QUILTY (Northern Victoria) (17:33): I rise today to speak on a petition I presented yesterday, a call to relax restrictions on hospitality venues. We are all social animals, whether we like it or not. Some of us may prefer our own company; others are at their best in a crowd. When it comes to dining, only a handful choose solitude. We are programmed to eat in a group. The hospitality industry feeds this need and has evolved to cater to larger groups gathering in one space to enjoy a meal.

This year has changed all that, and Premier Daniel Andrews has worked hard to ensure our restaurants, pubs and bars have teetered on the edge of collapse. Today is the day when they are allowed to reopen
in Melbourne, with up to 20 people allowed to dine inside and up to 50 outside. For many venues whose physical design, business model or staffing levels were intended to cater for hundreds, not dozens, these limits are next to useless. I am happy to support this petition, which is asking the government to reopen the hospitality industry safely.

The Premier has conceded that the hospitality venues, restaurants, pubs and bars have not been responsible for any COVID-19 outbreaks. He said on 30 July:

I know that it may seem … counter-intuitive that you can go to the pub but you can’t go to your mate’s place, but ultimately … the data drives that decision.

That’s where the transmission is. It’s not in cafes and restaurants …

He repeated that on 14 September—that they are not closed now because they are high-risk settings, they are closed now because it would only mean more virus if we allowed people to move around freely in metro Melbourne.

This industry has hygiene as one of its key performance indicators. If any group can keep COVID at bay, it is the hospitality industry. They are highly capable of putting in place measures to distance diners and to ensure customers are doing all the things they need to do to limit or stop transmission. Every business will put in place a COVID plan that will keep customers safe. But this government’s lack of faith in the industry, a key employer of people in this state, has led directly to the loss of 68 000 jobs since March. Business owners are either at the end of their tether or they have made the heartbreaking decision to close for good. Outdoor dining is not a real solution; for many venues it will not be an option, and for others cold or wet weather will sink a day’s business.

As ever with this crisis, we have seen the government identify a problem and then choose to tackle it with a cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all response. These businesses can craft individual COVID-safe plans. The hospitality industry has been put through the wringer and, like many Victorians, has had enough. Let me correct myself: it is not the industry that has had enough, it is the ordinary Victorians who own, run and work in these businesses. They have had enough. It is real people who through no fault of their own have been told they are not allowed to continue to earn a living.

Listen to what the restaurant owners are saying. Have faith in cafe owners. Let hotel owners demonstrate that they can indeed run their venues professionally and safely. Only the most arrogant would assert they know more about an industry than the people who live and breathe that industry. Listen to the 3829 people who have put their names on this petition so far. This industry can operate safely. Victoria is the best in the nation at providing food and drink in enjoyable surroundings. Let the hospitality industry open up and once again prove how excellent it can be.

WEST GATE TUNNEL

Petition

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (17:36): I rise today to speak to the West Gate Tunnel contaminated soil petition, and I would like to thank the Western Metropolitan Region community for actually signing this petition. The West Gate Tunnel contaminated soil is of great concern to all of my constituents in Western Metro, and this obviously is just the start of the actual fight to find out and to be very clear where this contaminated soil will be placed.

It is very clear that my community does not want any of this contaminated soil dumped in Western Metro. The government gave assurances at the start of this year that they would make sure that Transurban was held to account, but it would seem now that they have changed their position and that we are not quite sure where this soil is going to go. As I have said many times in this place, when I was on Maribyrnong City Council I made it very clear to Transurban that they should think about making sure all that soil was not going to be dumped in my area of Western Metropolitan, seeing that for many, many
years not just this government but governments in the past have considered the western suburbs of Melbourne the dumping ground for toxic material.

We have a levy. The government should be spending that levy on new and improved technologies to make sure that the community is safe and that all of our waste disposal needs are met. This government cannot just continue sitting on the waste levy that has been built up over the last 10 years. At this moment it would seem that somehow Transurban or others could possibly be getting away with actually not being charged this levy. In other words, if we do not actually charge for the filthiest material a waste levy, it will cost future generations. I sincerely hope that the government think twice and they actually look at making sure that there is no special treatment—if anything, they should charge a higher waste levy because of the toxic nature of this waste—and that future generations will be looked after rather than leaving it to future generations to look after this toxic waste that will be possibly secretly dumped in the western suburbs of Melbourne.

I commend my constituents, the petitioners, and continue to petition this government to make sure that they are extremely transparent and that we all know where this contaminated soil is going to be placed.

Members

Ms WATT

_Inaugural speech_

Ms WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (17:42): I begin today with deepest respects, acknowledgement and gratitude to the ancestors, elders and knowledge keepers of the Wurundjeri and Bunurong peoples. I acknowledge your connections to this place before it was as we see it now and as it has always been—a place of meeting, sharing and exchange, a place where ideas were born and dreams were created for all people who make a home on your country.

Thank you, Aunty Di Kerr, for bestowing on me the blessings of the Wurundjeri as I embark on this brave new journey. Our shared ambition for justice, respect and truth telling will guide me always, and in the spirit of truth telling I will share my truth of what brings me to this place, what experiences have shaped my values and the people with whom I share a deep and profound thanks, starting with my mother, who joins me today. Hi, Mudda! You see, my mum is my guide. Annette Gail Watt has a story worth sharing, an injustice worth redress and a lifetime of quiet determination worth celebrating. So today, Mum, I celebrate you. Mum guided me on the dignity of work. Mum was a taxidriver, an aged-care worker, a fruit packer, a meatworker and a food-processing factory hand, and I saw every day what hard work looked like. Mum shared with me the raw honesty of the hardships of that working life with my sister and me. She had no choice, but because of this we understood what a life of exclusion, insecurity and vulnerability looked like, and we were guided by her determination to fight against it. Mum guided me on celebrating and honouring my Aboriginal culture and heritage—that decisions made on her behalf before she could even speak her name, before she was even considered a citizen in this country, do not define our story.

Despite the hurdles, Mum did her best to connect to culture and community in a way that worked for us. I remember like it was yesterday walking into the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service as a little girl for the very first time, and how hard you worked to make sure that we had Koori Santa photos for Christmas. You see, those first brave steps that you took mean the world, so that I could continue to feel safe and secure in connecting with our culture. You are a warrior, Mum, and a special feature in my life.

My late father, John Sydney Watt, inspired me to overcome the challenges of the day and to look for innovative solutions to the bumps in our road. I never quite knew where the ideas came from. Maybe it was the years of watching _Star Trek_, or the wisdom of his mates at the local bowling club, but Dad just seemed to work it out. When Dad had his first stroke, it was like the system was not set up for his determination. He would not resign himself to a life of disability and hardship and nor would we. Dad made me question a system that had failed us and made me wonder if we were alone in that frustration.
Dad inspired me for a life of advocacy and fighting for change, for there is no greater story than the one told by those with lived experience, to look beyond your personal circumstances and see a system and all its parts. For my life in advocacy and social change I say thanks, Dad. For the earliest lessons learned and to keep on fighting when everyone else has given up I say thanks, Dad. Now, I thought to quote some Klingon for you, Dad, but I am not quite sure I would do it justice. I wonder perhaps if that is the first ever reference to Klingon in Hansard, but there you go.

That brings me to my nan, Mona Elsie Watt, who loved lawn bowls, the Lions and the Labor Party. My nan was a remarkable woman who led a quiet life, a life of quiet achievement and pride in the things that she loved. Few things humble me in my life more than to think of the bravery of my nanna. During the war she sang to the troops, and she stood up for herself and her family when it just was not the done thing. She instilled in me values that anchor me to this day, that provide comfort during the trying times and give me strength to fight on. Her ideals, ideas and vision for our community burnt into me a love of politics and its ability to change the world. She spoke to me often about the Labor Party and why there was an alignment with our family’s story. Nan, you see, was a lifetime member of the Labor Party.

It was not too many years ago that my mum walked around the streets of her Brunswick West home with a big belly and bigger ambitions for her life and the life of her unborn girl. It was the northern suburbs that welcomed us as a family for the first time—a northern suburbs that looks a lot different to what it looks like today. Today, as I am honoured to be standing in this place as a new member for the Northern Metropolitan Region, what has not changed is the welcoming spirit of the northern suburbs, a place that has continued to welcome families and create long-lasting, connected communities.

Melbourne’s north is made up of more than 1 million people who come from all different walks of life and is a region rich in multiculturalism and ambition for a brighter future. It is a region where I live and which is home to my family, friends, favourite restaurants, cafes and live music venues that I cannot wait to get back to, and of course home to my beloved Carlton Football Club.

A member: You didn’t!

Ms WATT: Yes, I did. I am endlessly inspired by the stories of resilience, hope and strength from the communities in the north. Never have those qualities been more evident than during the global pandemic we are all enduring. Like many in the north, I understand the economic and social disruption we have collectively experienced, and there has been a significant burden on our carers, separation from our families and the tragic loss of our loved ones in aged care. Around the globe this pandemic has starkly amplified the disproportionate health and economic impacts on the most vulnerable and the risks to us all when the needs of our most marginalised in our community are not met.

I have spent this year as an elected community representative on the boards of some of the most important community organisations in Victoria. Together we have been part of the many groups working tirelessly to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable Victorians. As we move into a new phase of recovery, we simply cannot build back the same structures which were there before. I know in my life that they did not work for my dad, they did not work for me as a child who was his carer and they do not work now. One of the greatest privileges of being in this place is to represent the communities of Melbourne’s northern suburbs, and I will use my voice here to continue the advocacy for those vulnerable Victorians.

I know that I have a powerful predecessor in that work in Jenny Mikakos’s commitment to the most vulnerable and her unwavering principles as a champion for diversity. She worked tirelessly to improve the lives of people in the Northern Metropolitan Region, and I am entirely honoured to have the responsibility to carry on that work.

In our lives we have moments of great significance—those moments that you know exactly where you were and who you were with. One such moment for me was the national apology to the stolen
generations in 2008. The single most transformative moment of my life happened on that day. With tears streaming down my face for my family and for all families stolen by a system of injustice, neglect and uncompromising cruelty, I committed myself to a life serving my community.

It was on that day when my personal story and my political purpose came together. I had the extraordinary opportunity to be sitting in the gallery of the Australian House of Representatives that day and to experience one of the most profoundly important acts of a parliament in the history of our democracy, because Anthony Albanese gave his ticket to me. I sat in the gallery that day next to a great hero of mine, Linda Burney, and committed myself to being part of a fight to ensure our history is recognised and that we build a fair and truly democratic future for First Nations people in this country.

Sadly, until far too recently, to see other Aboriginal faces in our Parliament I had to look beyond our fine state. I looked to Carol Martin, the late Jack Ah Kit, Dr Chris Bourke and my tidda girl always Malarndirri McCarthy to show me that the path is possible. With their example I have worked hard within the Victorian Labor Party to bring self-determination into our structures, and I have brought more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices into our party, into our policymaking and into our decision-making. I so wish that they could be here today, because representation matters.

To begin with what felt like a very lonely journey, I have been extraordinarily grateful to Senator Malarndirri McCarthy for her support and sisterhood. You are too deadly, sister, and I can say that I would not be in this place today without your encouragement and strength behind me. You see, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples allyship with our struggles takes many forms, and none is more powerful than those actions taken with intention and conscious efforts to advance inclusion and representation of First Peoples. So to all the comrades who walked beside me and lifted me up, I thank you for living your values. You absolutely know who you are.

I found these allies across the Victorian labour movement, from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy Committee, the Brunswick Branch and the mighty union movement. I say thank you. To the United Workers Union, the Australian Council of Trade Unions and, later my union, the union for social and community sector workers, the Australian Services Union, I say thank you. Thank you for equipping me with the skills, experiences and comradely actions to progress the big issues in our community like closing the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander outcomes and like changing our constitution to reflect our current values as a nation and to address the inequalities in employment, especially for our young people.

In this place I intend to live my values and represent the values of those I represent. I enter this Parliament at a time when it is our moral duty to lift the most vulnerable in our community up as we recover from this pandemic. We must ensure that inclusion is front and centre of our recovery efforts, and I know that this Labor government will do just that. I am looking forward to being part of the Andrews Labor government led by a Premier who has shown unequalled leadership across this country. The Premier has shown leadership not only in responding to the coronavirus pandemic but as the Labor leader of this state in stepping up for First Nations Victorians by believing in the ambition of a treaty and putting it into action; in committing to self-determination in principles, practice and policy; and most recently in calling on our great party to live true to its values.

I stand here today as Labor’s first female Aboriginal MP in the Victorian Parliament and the first Aboriginal member of the Legislative Council. This moment will not soon be lost on me, and I look forward to working closely with all members of this place to serve the people of the Northern Metropolitan Region and all of Victoria. I feel entirely humbled and grateful for the overwhelming messages of support I have received from so many members of this Parliament, both past and present. I would like to conclude with a sentiment shared with me by Gavin Jennings: when you open doors, others will follow. I truly hope they do. Norn Goodjin. Thank you.

Members applauded.
Questions without notice and ministers statements

WRITTEN RESPONSES

The PRESIDENT (18:00): This afternoon there was a point of order raised by Mr O’Donohue about his supplementary question and the answer from the minister. I have checked the Hansard and checked the answer. I know Ms Stitt has gone for a way to explain the answer for a length of time, but unfortunately I will have to order one day for the supplementary, and that is for Friday, not tomorrow, because of the late notice.

Rulings by the Chair

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The PRESIDENT (18:00): Ms Lovell raised a question about the reinstatement of questions. These questions have been answered.

Ms Lovell: On a point of order, President, can I just explain something. I actually have the sheet where you reinstated the questions. I have not had answers to those questions. They are still on the questions paper.

The PRESIDENT: All right, we will follow it up.

Adjournment

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business) (18:01): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

AGRICULTURE WORKFORCE

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (18:01): My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Agriculture, and it concerns the massive labour shortage expected for the upcoming fruit harvest season throughout my electorate. The action that I seek from the minister is a commitment to work with regional Victoria’s horticulture industry to immediately implement strategies that will ensure sufficient workers are available to harvest our valuable produce this summer, including implementing strategies to specifically encourage overseas workers to travel to regional Victoria.

A massive labour shortage is looming for the commencement of the harvest season in regional Victoria’s horticulture industry. The lockdowns, border closures and other restrictions put in place because of COVID-19 have prevented overseas workers, including backpackers, embarking on their annual pilgrimage to help pick our country’s fruit and vegetables. Nationally there are normally around 200,000 backpackers already here for the harvest season, but this figure is currently just 16,000, with 1500 workers departing Australia each week. It is estimated that 7000 workers are required for the start of the harvest in around six to eight weeks time in the Shepparton and Cobram areas alone. Farmers throughout Northern Victoria are extremely concerned about valuable produce not being picked this season.

The Andrews Labor government has high hopes that its Working for Victoria scheme will attract our unemployed to harvest our produce. However, there is a worrying belief throughout the horticulture industry that the scheme will not be popular with those currently unemployed and will fail to attract the number of workers required to properly harvest this year’s crop. Our farmers are calling for state government assistance to help with the impending harvest labour shortage and believe that there are many strategies that can be implemented to assist them. It is hoped that the Andrews Labor government will remove restrictions and identify pathways to encourage and welcome overseas workers into regional Victoria to harvest our crops.

Industry leaders also believe the state government should launch a one-stop shop online portal dedicated to providing information to farmers on how to source workers, including details regarding
the Pacific labour scheme. The Pacific labour scheme is a federal government initiative that allows people from participating Pacific island nations the chance to come and find employment in jobs such as fruit and vegetable harvesting. In recent weeks the scheme has seen over 300 workers from the Pacific island of Vanuatu arrive in Darwin to help meet critical workforce shortages in the mango and citrus industries in the Northern Territory. I urge the minister to take the actions necessary to ensure our horticulture industry has the labour force needed to meet the requirements for the 2020–21 harvest season.

MELTON HOSPITAL

Mr GRIMLEY (Western Victoria) (18:04): My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Health, and it is in regard to the establishment of a new hospital in Melton. Melton is one of the fastest growing localities in my electorate of Western Victoria, and naturally population growth demands greater public services. In a recent meeting with members of the Melton council we discussed the recent study that was undertaken by the West of Melbourne Economic Development Alliance. The report published by WoMEDA details how Melton already needs a 250-bed hospital and how the need will double by 2035. Additionally, the construction of a new hospital in Melton will help address both an urgent health need and a growing unemployment challenge.

Employment and underemployment are significant issues in the Melton area. Using the 2016 census data I note that unemployment in Melton was more than 1 percentage point above the Victorian average at 7.6 per cent versus 6.8 per cent. COVID-19 may have increased this gap in recent times. The desired placement of this new hospital is to be located close to the Cobblebank metropolitan activity centre to maximise employment spillovers. It is expected that 375 jobs will be created during the construction phase of the new hospital, with some 2250 ongoing roles by 2035. Importantly—

Ms Maxwell: How many?

Mr GRIMLEY: That was 2250 ongoing by 2035—just clarifying the importance of why we desperately need this. Importantly this will add at least $300 million to the local economy by 2035. That is $300 million. Minister, given that the construction of the new hospital in Melton responds to both an urgent health need and a long-term economic need, the action that I seek is for the state government to commit to at least purchasing the land for this prospective hospital campus in the upcoming state budget.

JOHN FAWKNER COLLEGE

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) (18:06): My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education. It concerns John Fawkner College in the suburb of Fawkner in my electorate of Northern Metropolitan Region. Minister, I remind you that John Pascoe Fawkner, who the school was named after, was in 1856 elected to the first Parliament of the self-governing colony of Victoria. As a member of that Parliament, he remained a member of the Victorian Legislative Council, a seat he held until his death in 1869.

The John Fawkner College is in desperate need of funding. For many years it has missed out on capital funding compared to its neighbouring schools. Natalie Abboud, the school council president, has written to me about John Fawkner College and their need for a master plan. I know what it is like to be a school council president. I served on a school council for 11 years, nine of it as its president, and there are challenges in trying to get money out of state governments for schools. Natalie has advised me that the existing master plan has been deemed not to meet the requirements of the Victorian School Building Authority. If this is the case, then a new master plan for the school is needed as Melbourne will continue to grow post COVID-19 and John Fawkner College will be in trouble in terms of its needs for better facilities. So my call for action from the minister is that the government allocate at least $50 000 in the upcoming state budget so John Fawkner College can complete a new master plan that meets the requirements of the Victorian School Building Authority.
CHILD PROTECTION

Ms MAXWELL (Northern Victoria) (18:07): My matter is for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. It follows last week’s arrest through Operation Molto of 44 Australian members of an international paedophile ring, including 11 Victorians, on mass charges of possession of extreme child exploitation material. Given the punctilious work that led to those arrests, I want to express my admiration and gratitude to those involved in endeavouring to bring the alleged perpetrators to justice. In particular I want to thank the Australian Federal Police, who led the work, and the Department of Home Affairs, who coordinated the involvement of Australian governments, and locally the Five Eyes network in relation to these developments. I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation, who have been undertaking incredible work in this space recently and who, as it happens, opened their new headquarters in Brisbane last week with the incomparable Bruce and Denise Morcombe.

Closer to home, I am sure Victorians would also be interested to know any details that our police minister might be able to share about our state’s involvement in Operation Molto. More directly the action I seek from her is an indication of how police and other law enforcement resourcing in Victoria has been strengthened during 2020 specifically to deal with the rapidly escalating spread of child abuse material. As the minister will know, the former Chief Commissioner of Police, Graham Ashton, revealed in 2019 that Victoria was then facing a tidal wave of violent child pornography activity. Sadly, it is now only getting worse, including through an astonishing explosion in such activity during the COVID lockdown months. Minister Dutton spoke last week, for instance, of a 163 per cent increase in dark web child abuse material from April to June this year. These types of trends have worried many of us for a considerable amount of time, and that is why I specifically raised an adjournment matter on child exploitation for another minister in February. In that matter I asked about the work the Victorian government is undertaking to proactively target child pornography offenders. Unfortunately, after more than eight months, there has still been no response. Those issues and the ones I have raised this evening are all extremely serious and increasingly urgent, and I therefore hope the police minister considers it appropriate to give this adjournment matter a timely reply.

POLICE CONDUCT

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) (18:10): I wish to raise a matter this evening for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Reignite Democracy Australia is an organisation that has been particularly active lately in campaigning against the lockdown and some of the more severe aspects of the lockdown that have been forced on us by Premier Andrews. It also has a bus which carries messages, and I am sure many of you will have seen that bus. It carries messages which are, well, perhaps not all that complimentary towards the Premier. And I have to say, it is rather catchy.

Mr Ondarchie: The omnibus!

Mr FINN: No, no, no, no. What you would call it is harassment by police. It involves constantly being pulled over, the driver being drug tested and being tested for alcohol, and it even got a canary at one stage. This has been a constant feature of this campaign bus, which is what it is, now for quite some time. It would seem, from what I am told, that there are grounds for the belief that this is a systematic campaign of harassment against this particular campaign. This concerns me enormously.

I have always been a very, very strong supporter of Victoria Police. As members of this house will know, I have been very vocal in supporting the thin blue line here in Victoria, and I have the greatest admiration for those men and women who every day put themselves on the line to protect us. What
concerns me enormously is the politicisation of the police force here in Victoria that has been going on now for 20 years. I think what we have seen this year is a sure sign that it has pretty much peaked—hopefully it has peaked. Hopefully it will not get any worse. What I am asking the minister to do is give me a guarantee that this bus to which I refer has not been targeted by police for political purposes. A very simple guarantee from the minister would be appreciated.

COVID-19

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (18:13): My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Small Business, and the action that I seek is for the state government to reconsider the current restrictions that apply to home-cleaning service providers. Home cleaners are often amongst the most vulnerable in our community, often working as cleaners as they are unable to gain employment in other areas due to their lack of qualifications or experience or needing to work hours around their families. The majority are women, and it is women that have been the most affected throughout this pandemic. They are often sole traders who are working long hours at minimal rates.

The need for home cleaning has never been greater than during this pandemic. We have been working from home and learning from home and have been in our homes—previously for 22 hours a day—for months. I feel that this is a bit like gardeners. A while ago we had council gardeners working, yet we could not get gardeners to our home. Cleaners have been operating in work premises, including high-risk settings. Laundries and drycleaners have been able to operate. Why couldn’t we click and collect laundry services such as dry-cleaning, and why with COVID-safe plans couldn’t we have had cleaners in our homes while we were out exercising or shopping? Cleaning is essential during a pandemic, and cleaners are essential for our future to be able to fight this pandemic and the virus.

COVID-19

Mrs McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (18:15): My adjournment matter is for the Premier. On Monday the Premier announced we will be wearing masks at least until the end of the year and maybe into next year. This is deeply disturbing. The face mask mandate is made under the state-of-emergency powers. This statement is proof that the government has no intention of winding back its extraordinary powers when the public health crisis subsides and their excruciating, clandestine goal of elimination is achieved, a goal which many believe is unattainable.

Victorians should be extremely concerned about their government’s insistence on retaining the powers it has accumulated during a crisis. The masks mandate is problematic for a number of reasons. In regional Victoria it is often nonsensical. A gathering of workers in a field on a farm in the blistering hot sunburnt country should not be forced to wear masks. A gentleman walking alone on an empty country road with no person in sight and no COVID-19 case within hundreds of kilometres should not be forced to wear a mask. A couple bushwalking or hiking in the Grampians in the summer heat should not be forced to wear masks. Even in metropolitan Melbourne in many circumstances masks are unnecessary.

The federal Department of Health says where there is low community transmission of COVID-19, wearing a mask in the community when you are well is not generally recommended. The community transmission of COVID-19 is now low in Victoria. Face masks should become voluntary across the state. Victorians should be encouraged to be responsible for their own welfare and that of their fellow citizens, particularly in high-risk environments, but continuing to mandate them is wrong and unjustified.

By all means ensure the best available masks are provided to health workers who appear most at risk. If masks are not working in the government health system, why does the government force citizens to wear them? Many people have legitimate reasons for not wearing masks but are singled out for abuse and threatening comments while this government insists on wasting police resources having them implement the Labor Party obsession with fining Victorians. Masks should be optional, as they are in the rest of the country. The action I seek is for the Premier to remove the face mask mandate in Victoria.
COVID-19

Mr LIMBRICK (South Eastern Metropolitan) (18:18): My adjournment debate matter is for the Minister for Education. Whilst the Victorian government has committed to bringing all kids back to school throughout October—I have been very happy about this fact—I have been contacted by numerous members of the community who are feeling left behind. Those parents who chose to homeschool their kids have had their cooperatives classed by the government as community groups and have been unable to resume.

A common misconception is that they run these co-ops in their own homes. This is false. The majority are run in large facilities such as churches and community halls. There is adequate space to abide by social-distancing guidelines. Most already collect their members’ contact details and therefore can easily follow contact-tracing procedures. They would be more than happy for COVID-safe procedures to be in place and abided by. Some have even indicated their willingness to run co-ops outside to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

One of my constituents who contacted me about this matter sits on the board of an academic cooperative with 75 children who attend. These co-ops get split into four different age groups and have a full class schedule for the Fridays that they gather together. The classes have syllabi, textbooks, tutors and helpers. They have a website for the group and a handbook as well as other documents providing evidence of their academic nature.

Another constituent contacted me and was extremely disappointed about the government’s decision to classify co-ops as community groups. She told me her kids’ mental health has been negatively impacted throughout all the restrictions. The worst part for them, though, was knowing that their friends who are not homeschooled get to go back to school. They get to socialise with their peers and teachers and get the social interaction they have been lacking since schools shut down. This is not the case for her kids.

The government needs to listen to the families and boards of these co-ops to hear about the current emotional, mental and educational stresses homeschooled children are experiencing due to the harsh lockdown restrictions. School-aged children have been allowed to return to school so their education is no longer interrupted. I ask that the same attitude is applied to homeschool cooperatives in Victoria. Therefore my request to the minister is that the government review homeschooling co-ops and the restrictions that they are currently under and allow them to return to their regular co-op sessions in a COVID-safe fashion.

WALHALLA GOLDFIELDS RAILWAY

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:21): My adjournment debate for this evening is for the Premier, and it relates, not unsurprisingly, to COVID restrictions in my electorate. It is in relation to a fantastic local tourist attraction, the Walhalla Goldfields Railway. They are stuck between a rock and a very hard place. The rock is the granite rock that the actual railway line was cut through decades and decades ago but the hard place is the fact that they cannot operate. They do not fit into the categories.

Walhalla is the most gorgeous town. It is a town of a bygone era. It is a town that once saw thousands of people there digging gold. It is also a place that at the turn of the last century was nude of trees, devoid of trees because they chopped them all down. Now, if you go there today, you will see the most magnificent specimens of a large variety of trees, just showing how trees recycle and regrow and are important for our agriculture industry as well. But the railway station and the goldfields railway crew do an amazing job. It exists on only 4 kilometres between Thomson and Walhalla, through Stringers Creek and over the Thomson River. It is a treasure. I had the absolute pleasure of paying for my ticket and taking my niece there last year in the middle of winter. You go along the track, you see spectacular sites, you hear birdsong and you can feel the distant echo of a bygone era.
I thank Philip Milbourne, who is the president of the Walhalla Goldfields, for getting in touch with me in relation to this sticky position that they are in. With 45 active volunteers and 100 in total, they donate an enormous amount of time and money to support this wonderful tourist attraction that has a great and positive influence and impact on the local economies of Walhalla, Erica and Rawson. People do travel there. Indeed it was impacted by the 2019 fires and the 2020 fires. There are other such railway stations and railway tourist attractions throughout the state. Mornington–Queenscliff, Castlemaine–Maldon and Mildura–Red Cliffs are also in the same predicament. If they were considered to be tourist attractions, they would be okay, but they are not tourist attractions and they are not considered public transport trains. As I said, they need to be able to open. They have an enormous amount of safe conduct and COVID-safe guidelines and practices implemented and ready to go, so I ask the Premier to reclassify them as tourist attractions and allow visitation and tourists to come and enjoy them and for them to survive into the future.

BUSHFIRE PREPAREDNESS

Mr QUILTY (Northern Victoria) (18:24): My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. Home owners in bushland areas are damned if they do and damned if they don’t. If they clear land around their homes, they risk enormous fines for environmental damage. If they leave it uncleared, they risk having their homes destroyed by bushfires. These rules need to change. Everyone should be allowed to take reasonable steps to protect their homes from bushfires. In some ways I am surprised that this government—a government that forces us to wear helmets when we ride pushbikes and requires a safety course for everything—not only allows us to have bushfire fuel on our doorsteps but punishes us when we clear it. We are yet to see a land-clearing amnesty so that residents living in bushfire-prone areas can remove fuel from around their homes and protect themselves from bushfires without risking fines for damaging vegetation. This amnesty would be long overdue. It should have been called during or after the last bushfire season.

Those who live near the bush know that they cannot rely on the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning to protect their homes for them, and many have learned that they cannot rely on the CFA when the conditions are catastrophic. All they can do is prepare ahead of the fire, removing what will burn from around their houses. We are still waiting for fuel load maps to be released. If these maps were made public and an amnesty declared, residents would be able to assess their bushfire risk and take real measures to reduce it. Instead this government hides the fuel load maps and bans preventative action.

It is not just my opinion. Experts have determined that fuel load reduction is a vital bushfire mitigation strategy. For the five-year rotation they recommend that Victoria should be burning 6 to 7 per cent of its protected forests annually. The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission echoed this position, citing a 5 per cent target as a minimum. Last year the government failed to meet hazard reduction burn targets and hid the bushfire fuel load maps. I call on the minister to improve bushfire preparedness by declaring a land clearing amnesty and regularly publishing fuel load maps that show progress from hazard reduction burns.

FIREARMS LICENSING

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (18:26): My matter tonight is for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and is in regard to the cost of a shooters licence versus the cost of a fishing licence. The five-yearly cost, CPI indexed, of a shooters licence is about $280.60, and it has an indefinite lifetime cost. Now, I understand there are various pension concessions and such made, but when you have a look at a fishing licence, you do not need a fishing licence if you are under the age of 18 years or over the age of 70; if you have a Seniors Card, a Veterans Affairs pensioner card, a Veterans Affairs repatriation health card or a commonwealth pensioner concession card with some various parts to it; or if you are a person that identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. And by the way, it costs $100 for three years. What I would like the police minister to do is to at least roughly align the costs of the licences so that it is a bit fairer. Now, I am all for licensing—I do not have a problem with that—
but I do believe it is patently unfair that you pay one amount for one and another for the other. And I will also just point out that if the answer is that it is a user-pays system, the user who pays is actually Victoria Police, not the shooter.

COVID-19

Mr O’DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) (18:27): I raise a matter for the attention of Minister Pakula in his role as Minister for Industry Support and Recovery, but I am pleased the Minister for Small Business is at the table because I have been contacted by a small business operator in my electorate, Ms Joanne Staindl-Johnson, who runs a very well respected and well known local touring company. It has been operating for over a decade, 12 years. Ms Staindl-Johnson used to be the president of the local Pakenham chamber of commerce and has an excellent reputation in the region for her tours, the way she manages her business and the work that she does.

She has contacted me in the last 24 to 48 hours happy that retail and restaurants and other activities can now open but concerned that under the road map tour operators like her still have potentially more than a month before they can operate. Of course we are coming into a period when it is a very busy time for tour operators. Some schools will be finished in a matter of weeks. In December people will be looking to do activities like this. Indeed the Premier himself is encouraging Victorians to make plans to get out and see Victoria rather than spending money in other states. Ms Staindl-Johnson makes the excellent point that on her buses they have a record of who is on board and they make sure people sanitise before and after getting on the bus. In other words, the contact tracing and the hygiene is much better than it is on public transport, but the public transport network continues to operate. Obviously there are other public policy drivers and reasons for that, but the point she makes about the ability to manage the COVID risk for herself and similar tour operators compared to the COVID risk on a tram, a train or a bus—on public transport—is an excellent point.

There is also the mental health aspect that Ms Staindl-Johnson raises in her emailed representations to me that people are able to get out and see parts of Victoria in a coordinated way—people who perhaps do not have the ability to do that themselves—under the safe guided tours that she operates.

The action I would seek from Minister Pakula is that he give consideration to these points that Ms Staindl-Johnson is making, acknowledge the work that tour operators like her and others have done to be COVID safe and COVID prepared and review the timetable for businesses like hers to operate again.

MADDIE RIEWOLDT’S VISION CENTRE OF RESEARCH EXCELLENCE IN BONE MARROW BIOLOGY

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (18:30): My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Health, and it relates to the Maddie Riewoldt’s Vision Centre of Research Excellence in Bone Marrow Biology. As Victoria looks to rebuild an economy that has been brought to its knees due to the COVID-19 pandemic, investment in our health system and our medical research sector is vital to underpinning the renewal of the Victorian economy. One such organisation that has undertaken important work in the health research space is the Maddie Riewoldt’s Vision Centre of Research Excellence in Bone Marrow Biology. This centre, which received funding in 2018, has published 17 manuscripts, delivered 64 scientific presentations and, very importantly, provided, through its ongoing work, quality-of-life-changing services to patients and families who suffer from bone marrow failure syndrome.

I have been made aware that the original funding from the state government is set to cease at the end of next year, but Maddie Riewoldt’s Vision and organisations like it need to have ongoing security to continue with their forefront of work. Maddie Riewoldt’s Vision does not only cultivate the local health research sector but acts as a conduit to international research, and in this pivotal role, as it does now, it will be putting Melbourne into the international scene to a greater extent—Victoria’s global hub of medical research. The organisation wishes to continue this work, its very vital work, that
supports so many people and so many families with bone marrow failure syndrome and is seeking to extend funding from the state government beyond 2021.

So the action I seek is for the minister to make provision for funding in this year’s state budget so that the Maddie Riewoldt’s Vision Centre of Research Excellence in Bone Marrow Biology can continue with their vital work for so many Victorians and indeed so many Australians, that very, very vital work that they are doing not just in Victoria and Australia but around the world, with funding from 2021 onwards.

**Following matter incorporated pursuant to order of Council of 15 September:**

**PUBLIC LAND USE**

**Dr RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan)

My adjournment today is for the minister representing the Minister for Planning.

Over recent months residents across Northcote, Thornbury, Brunswick and Coburg have enjoyed the rolling plains and open green vistas of the Northcote Public Golf Course. This usually quiet, relatively unknown green refuge with just a few putters on it has been opened up to become a vibrant community space, with kids playing and exploring, couples meandering and people jogging.

The Greens are proud to have led local calls for retaining walking access to the golf course beyond the coronavirus lockdown, with a special acknowledgement to Cr Trent McCarthy for committing to take this up as his first piece of business when the new councillors are elected.

This open-space transformation is just one example that shows just how important local green space is to our communities and how we have embraced and cherished it, particularly during the coronavirus restrictions.

With 76 per cent of Victorians living in greater Melbourne, open space is critically important to the livability of our suburbs. Parks improve physical and mental health and provide ecosystem services and urban biodiversity.

Yet as urban infill and development marches on, more and more of our garden and green space is lost. While there are many significant benefits of medium-density neighbourhoods, it is critically important that the livability of our neighbourhoods is not lost.

At the heart of this is having an abundance of greenery and open space.

Successive state governments have provided little oversight, overall direction and strategic planning for the provision of public open space across metropolitan Melbourne. Responsibility for providing open space is allocated to local governments under Victorian planning laws.

But there are no safeguards as to minimum levels and no targets, and few guidelines for councils to work towards. As a result, established inner-city municipalities generally have less open space per person than outer and growth municipalities.

Successive governments have exploited the lack of Victorian overarching open-space protection laws to try to ram through major projects like the east–west tollway and the North East Link, which would see a permanent loss of open space in the affected local communities.

Back in 2014, the first iteration of Plan Melbourne recommended an overarching strategy for protecting and enhancing public open space in Melbourne. This recommendation also survived the 2017 Plan Melbourne revision and is apparently to be delivered in the medium time frame of the five-year implementation plan.

But six years on we are still waiting.

The action I seek from the government is that they deliver the open-space strategy for Melbourne urgently and that it sets strong targets and protections for open space that can’t easily be undone or sidestepped.

**RESPONSES**

**Ms PULFORD** (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business) (18:32): I was just conferring with Mr O’Donohue, and we were just trying to track down an answer to a question from a website that has got the answers to, I think, half the questions that people raised on the adjournment tonight. But it is a tricky business for people to find, so we will take a few of these and refer them to the relevant ministers.

I have adjournment matters raised by 13 members—a number to the Premier, many relating to various...
COVID restrictions and how people can start to get back to normal activity—and I will seek written responses from the relevant ministers in relation to all of those.

I think Ms Bath’s and Mr O’Donohue’s matters, indeed so too Dr Cumming’s matter, which I think I can dispatch now, probably are all in that challenging spot where the circumstances have very recently changed or are just about to change. So I think if we have got the details of those, as Ms Bath and Mr O’Donohue have provided, we will happily provide the most contemporary information to assist them to provide accurate information to those in their communities that want to get back to work.

I note the comments that have been made through a number of adjournment contributions, Mr O’Donohue’s particularly, picking up his point about the business for which he was advocating today and their preparedness to operate in a COVID-safe way and their willingness to get back to work. We thank them for that and recognise that, and hopefully we will be able to find a path back for them either now or very soon. So thank you.

On Dr Cumming’s adjournment matter, which was about cleaners returning to work in people’s homes, this too is something that has changed very recently. So I would acquit that adjournment matter this evening by indicating to Dr Cumming that cleaners are indeed able to return to work in people’s homes. This is a very recent change, just since midnight last night, but it will be wonderful for people in that industry to be able to return to work, and of course for those who benefit from the good work that people in that industry do in their homes. It will be greatly beneficial to them as well, I am sure.

I also have three written responses to adjournment matters raised by members on various dates.

Rulings by the Chair

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The PRESIDENT (18:35): Further to the point of order raised by Ms Lovell, I have checked and I am satisfied that the minister has responded to her request. Therefore there is no point of order.

The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6.36 pm.
Written adjournment responses

Responses have been incorporated in the form supplied by the departments on behalf of the appropriate ministers.

Wednesday, 28 October 2020

ST KILDA JUNCTION

In reply to Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (29 October 2019)

Mr CARROLL (Niddrie—Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Roads and Road Safety):

The movement and place improvement study for St Kilda junction was commissioned by the Department of Transport and has been shared with the Inner Metropolitan Partnership members.

The Inner Metropolitan Partnership was established in 2017 with membership from eight community and business representatives and the CEO of each local council, as well as representatives from the Victorian Government. The partnership allows local communities to engage directly with government, helping to ensure a community voice in government decision making.

The Inner Metropolitan Partnership will remain the primary forum through which its members are able to discuss the future of the St Kilda junction. Providing the partnership with access to the movement and place improvement study ensures that the community can have appropriate input.

Further plans for St Kilda junction will be considered in future, and with careful consideration of community feedback.

COVID-19

In reply to Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) (15 September 2020)

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier):

Victoria’s clubs are an important part of our local communities and make a significant contribution to Victoria’s economy and culture. The Victorian Government recognises the importance of community sports. Our $40 million Community Sport Sector Short-term Survival Package provides grants to support the operational viability of community sport and associated active recreation organisations that have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Government has also provided more than $6 billion in support to businesses and to help keep Victorians in jobs. We have also delayed the March 2020 gaming machine tax for hotels and clubs, and have delayed the gaming machine supervision charge until January 2021. Additionally, to support Victoria’s clubs we have:

• provided a $30 million dedicated fund for Victoria’s night-time economy, the outdoor eating and entertainment package, and the waiving of liquor licence fees in 2020 and 2021.
• fast-tracked and provided free temporary licences for takeaway and delivered alcohol sales.
• provided $40 million from the Business Support Fund towards rent relief for licensed venues with a turnover of up to $50 million.
• established a dedicated $251 million Licensed Venue Fund to support bars, restaurants, pubs, clubs, hotels and reception centres through grants of $10,000 to $30,000.
• deferred payroll tax for businesses with payrolls up to $10 million for the 2020-21 financial year.

For our state to recover, we need our businesses to recover too. As we move towards COVID Normal, the Victorian Government will continue to help make sure we get through this together.

BALLAN ROAD DUPLICATION

In reply to Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (16 September 2020)

Mr CARROLL (Niddrie—Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Roads and Road Safety):

To reduce congestion and improve safety in the outer west, the Victorian Government’s $1.8 billion Western Roads Upgrade program is underway and will deliver eight high priority road upgrades that are either within or benefit residents of the City of Wyndham. These upgrades will be completed in 2021.
The Victorian Government is also moving ahead with level crossing removals at Werribee Street and Cherry Street in Werribee. The Werribee Street level crossing removal will improve journeys for the 20,000 motorists that travel through this crossing daily, many of which travel along Ballan Road, and is expected to be completed in 2022.

Major Road Projects Victoria (MRPV) recently undertook resurfacing works on Ballan Road between Spring Plains Road and Springhill Road, these works were completed in June 2020.

The Department of Transport (DoT) is working closely with Wyndham City Council and MRPV to plan for Ison Road, a new road which will connect Ballan Road with the Princess Freeway, providing an alternative to travelling through the Werribee Town Centre to access the Freeway.

DoT is also working with the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR) to review how the Wyndham Strategic Extractive Resource Area (SERA) will integrate with the transport network.

DoT will continue to work with its road safety partners including Wyndham City Council and Victoria Police to monitor the operation and safety along Ballan Road and the surrounding network. The timing for any future improvements to Ballan Road, such as road widening, will be considered in a state-wide context under a future funding program.