

**PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA**

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT  
FIRST SESSION**

**WEDNESDAY, 8 JUNE 2022**

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The Honourable LINDA DESSAU AC

## **The Lieutenant-Governor**

The Honourable JAMES ANGUS AO

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Minister for Workplace Safety and Minister for Early Childhood . . . . .	The Hon. I Stitt MLC
Minister for Agriculture and Minister for Regional Development . . . . .	The Hon. M Thomas MP
Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs . . . . .	The Hon. G Williams MP
Minister for Planning and Minister for Housing . . . . .	The Hon. RW Wynne MP
Cabinet Secretary . . . . .	Ms S Kilkenny MP

## 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, Ms Lovell, Mr Meddick, Mr Ondarchie, Mr Rich-Phillips, Ms Shing, Ms Vaghela and Ms Watt.

### **Environment and Planning Standing Committee**

Dr Bach, Ms Bath, Dr Cumming, Mr Grimley, Mr Hayes, Mr Meddick, Mr Melhem, Dr Ratnam, Ms Terpstra and Ms Watt.

*Participating members:* Ms Burnett-Wake, Ms Crozier, Mr Davis, Dr Kieu, Mrs McArthur, Mr Quilty and Mr Rich-Phillips.

### **Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee**

Ms Burnett-Wake, Ms Garrett, Dr Kieu, Ms Maxwell, Mr Ondarchie, Ms Patten and Ms Taylor.

*Participating members:* Dr Bach, Mr Barton, Ms Bath, Ms Crozier, Dr Cumming, Mr Erdogan, Mr Gepp, Mr Grimley, Ms Lovell, Mr Quilty, Dr Ratnam, Ms Shing, Mr Tarlamis, Ms Terpstra, Ms Vaghela and Ms Watt.

### **Privileges Committee**

Mr Atkinson, Mr Bourman, Mr Davis, 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:* Mr Erdogan, Mrs McArthur, Mr Meddick, Mr Melhem, Ms Lovell, Mr Quilty and Mr Tarlamis.

*Assembly:* Ms Hall, Dr Read and Mr Rowswell.

### **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 Rowswell, Mr Taylor, Ms Ward and Mr Wells.

### **Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee**

*Council:* Ms Crozier, Mr Erdogan and Ms Shing.

*Assembly:* Mr J Bull, Ms Kealy, Mr Sheed, Ms Ward and Mr Wells.

### **Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**

*Council:* Mrs McArthur, Mr Barton and Ms Taylor.

*Assembly:* Ms Blandthorn, Mr Hibbins, Mr Maas, Mr Newbury, Mr D O'Brien, Ms Richards and Mr Richardson.

### **Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee**

*Council:* Mr Gepp, Ms Patten, Ms Terpstra and Ms Watt.

*Assembly:* Mr Burgess, Ms Connolly and Mr Morris.

## 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: Ms T Burrows

**MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**  
**FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION**

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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. GA TIERNEY

**Leader of the Opposition**

The Hon. DM DAVIS

**Deputy Leader of the Opposition**

Ms G CROZIER

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Atkinson, Mr Bruce Norman	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Maxwell, Ms Tania Maree	Northern Victoria	DHJP
Bach, Dr Matthew <sup>1</sup>	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Meddick, Mr Andy	Western Victoria	AJP
Barton, Mr Rodney Brian	Eastern Metropolitan	TMP	Melhem, Mr Cesar	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Bath, Ms Melina Gaye	Eastern Victoria	Nats	Mikakos, Ms Jenny <sup>8</sup>	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Bourman, Mr Jeffrey	Eastern Victoria	SFFP	O'Donohue, Mr Edward John <sup>9</sup>	Eastern Victoria	LP
Burnett-Wake, Ms Cathrine <sup>2</sup>	Eastern Victoria	LP	Ondarchie, Mr Craig Philip	Northern Metropolitan	LP
Crozier, Ms Georgina Mary	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Patten, Ms Fiona Heather	Northern Metropolitan	FPRP
Cumming, Dr Catherine Rebecca	Western Metropolitan	Ind	Pulford, Ms Jaala Lee	Western Victoria	ALP
Dalidakis, Mr Philip <sup>3</sup>	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Quilty, Mr Timothy	Northern Victoria	LDP
Davis, Mr David McLean	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Ratnam, Dr Samantha Shantini	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Elasmar, Mr Nazih	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Rich-Phillips, Mr Gordon Kenneth	South Eastern Metropolitan	LP
Erdogan, Mr Enver <sup>4</sup>	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Shing, Ms Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Finn, Mr Bernard Thomas Christopher <sup>5</sup>	Western Metropolitan	DLP	Somyurek, Mr Adem <sup>10</sup>	South Eastern Metropolitan	Ind
Garrett, Ms Jane Furneaux	Eastern Victoria	ALP	Stitt, Ms Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Gepp, Mr Mark	Northern Victoria	ALP	Symes, Ms Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Grimley, Mr Stuart James	Western Victoria	DHJP	Tarlamis, Mr Lee <sup>11</sup>	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hayes, Mr Clifford	Southern Metropolitan	SAP	Taylor, Ms Nina	Southern Metropolitan	ALP
Jennings, Mr Gavin Wayne <sup>6</sup>	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Terpstra, Ms Sonja	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Kieu, Dr Tien Dung	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tierney, Ms Gayle Anne	Western Victoria	ALP
Leane, Mr Shaun Leo	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Vaghela, Ms Kaushaliya Virjibhai <sup>12</sup>	Western Metropolitan	Ind
Limbrick, Mr David <sup>7</sup>	South Eastern Metropolitan	DLP	Watt, Ms Sheena <sup>13</sup>	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Lovell, Ms Wendy Ann	Northern Victoria	LP	Wooldridge, Ms Mary Louise Newling <sup>14</sup>	Eastern Metropolitan	LP
McArthur, Mrs Beverley	Western Victoria	LP			

<sup>1</sup> Appointed 5 March 2020

<sup>2</sup> Appointed 2 December 2021

<sup>3</sup> Resigned 17 June 2019

<sup>4</sup> Appointed 15 August 2019

<sup>5</sup> LP until 24 May 2022

Ind 24 May–2 June 2022

<sup>6</sup> Resigned 23 March 2020

<sup>7</sup> Resigned 11 April 2022

<sup>8</sup> Resigned 26 September 2020

<sup>9</sup> Resigned 1 December 2021

<sup>10</sup> ALP until 15 June 2020

<sup>11</sup> Appointed 23 April 2020

<sup>12</sup> ALP until 7 March 2022

<sup>13</sup> Appointed 13 October 2020

<sup>14</sup> Resigned 28 February 2020

**Party abbreviations**

AJP—Animal Justice Party; ALP—Labor Party; DHJP—Derryn Hinch's Justice Party;

DLP—Democratic Labour 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, 8 June 2022**

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon. WA Lovell) took the chair at 9.34 am and read the prayer.**

**Announcements****ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (09:34):** 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.

**Bills****HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION) BILL 2022***Introduction and first reading*

**Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) (09:35):** I move to introduce a bill for an act to amend health legislation in relation to contraception, abortion and voluntary assisted dying services provided by publicly funded denominational hospitals and for other purposes, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read first time.**

**Ms PATTEN:** I move:

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

**Motion agreed to.**

**Papers****PAPERS**

**Tabled by Clerk:**

Auditor-General's Report on Managing Body-Worn Cameras, June 2022 (*Ordered to be published*).

Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987—Variation of the Code of Practice for Timber Production 2014 (No.1/2022).

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994—Legislative instrument and related documents under section 16B in respect of the Variation of the Code of Practice for Timber Production 2014 (No.1/2022), of 6 June 2022, under the Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987.

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

Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021—Whole Act (other than Divisions 1 and 2 of Part 3, Part 6 and sections 61, 74, 199 and 208)—1 July 2022 (*Gazette No. S285, 7 June 2022*).

**Business of the house****NOTICES**

**Notice of motion given.**

**Committees****LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE***Membership*

**Ms TAYLOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That Ms Watt be a participating member of the Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Members statements****PORTLAND DISTRICT HEALTH**

**Ms CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:40): Last Tuesday I went to Portland on the invitation of local member Roma Britnell, and I attended a community forum with Matthew Guy, the Leader of the Opposition. We were hearing from concerned residents about the state of Portland health. In that forum we had members of the hospital committee, former board members and also clinicians. I was absolutely appalled to see that the Minister for Health slammed us for going down to Portland to hear from these residents about their real concerns about what is happening. Unbelievably he said it was a ‘closed-meeting politics’ meeting. I mean, seriously, a ‘closed-meeting politics’ meeting is what he said we were doing. It just shows you how out of touch he is. He flew in and flew out. He did not meet with members of the community. This health service is under huge stress. People are having to go for basic care to Mount Gambier. They cannot get appointments. I was told on Saturday night by a paramedic that I know down there that three babies had been delivered on the roadside in recent times within 48 hours. This is the state of what is happening around regional Victoria. It is a disgrace that the minister himself will not get out and speak to members of the community about how health services are failing them because of the failures of the Andrews Labor government.

**EMERALD RSL**

**Mr LEANE** (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (09:42): Last week I was more than delighted to visit the Emerald RSL with the Deputy Premier, James Merlino. The Emerald RSL—and I have spoken to Ms Shing about this; she would know—is an absolutely beautiful building in a beautiful area. They do some amazing things to embrace the area they are in, to the point where Puffing Billy parks behind the RSL and they utilise Puffing Billy during a number of their commemorative services, which is just fantastic. They have amazing carvings. They have a number of audio stations where you can learn about people that have represented Australia in different conflicts from that particular area. They have, amazingly, someone that is a Victoria Cross winner, and they pay tribute to that particular person. I really want to thank the president, Peter Maloney, for having us and showing us around. We discussed some funding from our government that will resurface their car park, and as Peter said, that is probably the last thing to get it completely done, and also some funding for more plaques. They want to pay tribute to a number of people that have been in conflicts since World War I and World War II in their memorial. James and I cannot thank them enough for having us, and I just want to say that we are really pleased that they are going to keep up the great work that they do.

**CHILDREN’S HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

**Dr CUMMING** (Western Metropolitan) (09:44): One in 10 children are being diagnosed with depression, anxiety or autism. Our children are our future. For the last two years our children were locked down. They were being schooled at home. They were locked out of playgrounds. They were stopped from doing sports. They could not see their family and friends. Some students have no physical or neurological impairment but have difficulty in concentrating, communicating or understanding. This obviously was not helped by masks. For many children this was made worse over the last two years because of disruption to their schooling.

Many children have gone undiagnosed, and the cost is outside the reach of many families. Teachers do not have the resources or the funds to diagnose them. Having been diagnosed with dyslexia myself, I understand how frustrating this is for children. They need our help. We need to ensure that there are more resources for families and for schools to help children with learning difficulties as well as the funds for helping them get diagnosed. We need to ensure that no child is left behind. This government needs to step up for our children. We could have during this pandemic put a beautiful bubble around them, making sure that they actually went to school—that they had a normal life. We need to do more.

### **BOWEL CANCER AWARENESS MONTH**

**Mr ERDOGAN** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:45): June is Bowel Cancer Awareness Month. In this month it is vital that we support the work of Bowel Cancer Australia by wearing the green apple ribbon and raising awareness about bowel cancer. Bowel cancer remains the third most common type of newly diagnosed cancer in Australia. It is a disease that has touched many families, including my own. There is a common misconception that it is an older person's disease, but this is simply not the case. Over 15 000 Australians of all ages are newly diagnosed each year, and 5000 Australians each year die from bowel cancer. However, long-term survival rates are dramatically improved amongst people who are diagnosed early. Ninety per cent of bowel cancer cases can be treated successfully if detected early enough.

Bowel cancer can be an awkward topic to discuss, but that is why this month is so important. It is an opportunity to encourage all Victorians to learn more about the risks for bowel cancer and the importance of testing when people notice changes in their own health. Testing can now be done in a non-invasive way. This test is one of the most important tools we have for preventing death from bowel cancer. On that note I would like to acknowledge their work and thank Bowel Cancer Australia for all the work that they do every month of the year to raise awareness, promote resources and support people and families affected by bowel cancer.

### **VICTORIA STREET ALIVE!**

**Ms PATTEN** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:47): I would like to congratulate Victoria Street Alive!, a terrific initiative in North Richmond. It has been run by the tireless Judy Ryan and Greg Hordacre, who have just been working so hard behind the scenes. Victoria Street Alive! opened the inaugural medically supervised injecting room artists exhibition, *My Community*, on Friday, 3 June, and its official opening will be tomorrow. The objective of Victoria Street Alive! has been to amplify the voices and achievements of young artists and the disadvantaged through a program of arts and cultural events and activities. This exhibition marks the end of their first successful year of community activation.

The people who visit the supervised injecting room are assisted to reduce the harms of injecting and are offered a range of clinical and social supports that are tailored to each client. This has given clients the opportunity to create art while at the centre, and it is that art that will be on exhibition tomorrow. The artwork will be offered for sale by silent auction, with the proceeds going directly to the artists. There are three Victoria Street Alive! events in June in North Richmond: the *My Community* art exhibition; the second makers market at Abbots Yard on 19 June; and an installation of street posters designed by our young residents in workshops held at the Richmond housing estate throughout May, and that commenced last week on 1 June. Well done.

### **FITZROY NORTH COMMUNITY BATTERY**

**Ms WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:48): Last Sunday was World Environment Day, and what better way to mark the occasion than accompanying the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Lily D'Ambrosio, to the launch of the inner-city community-led battery in North Fitzroy. The project is nearly entirely funded by the Andrews Labor government and is being delivered by the Yarra Energy Foundation. It will help lower carbon emissions and reduce energy prices for Victorians. Community batteries are solar powered and store energy throughout the day and release it

to the local community during the evening peak, when people are more likely to be using electricity. Might I make special mention of all the partners of this project who helped make this possible, including Yarra Energy Foundation chair David Anstee, who hosted the event; CitiPower; the Yarra City Council; Pixii, who designed and manufactured the battery; and last but not least, artist Hayden Dewar, who has produced a brilliant piece that features on the battery. This project is just one of the many ways the Andrews Labor government is taking action on climate, and Victoria is leading the nation in reducing emissions and in renewable energy. Only a Labor government can and will be able to take real action on climate.

### PLANNING PROCESS

**Mr HAYES** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:49): The government might not listen, but I will. Over the past few weeks I have met with over 30 different resident and community groups. From planning and transport infrastructure issues to environmental concerns, it is clear that the government does not want to talk to communities. At nearly every single meeting it has been the same feedback: communities are locked out of genuine and meaningful interaction. Community consultation is a tick-the-box exercise—one way, no real listening.

Take the Sunbury residents who have been excluded from any consultation with the EPA over toxic waste dumps next to their homes, a process that has now been slammed by the Ombudsman; Surrey Hills residents who have no idea what is being built next to their homes—a huge new train station where the design is apparently a secret and only the government is allowed to know what it is; fast-tracked planning applications with no avenue for appeal; inadequate time frames or approvals released the day before Christmas, like the Caulfield Racecourse debacle; Gippsland sand mining projects that have not been subjected to any environmental engagement prior to the project design; and riverside camping approvals with no direct engagement with the actual farmers.

Where is the due diligence? The process seems to be the wrong way around: 'Let's approve the project and then ask for input afterwards, or, even better, not at all'. Residents are being excluded. Where is the independence, transparency and accountability of the government?

### BULLEEN PARK-AND-RIDE

**Ms TERPSTRA** (Eastern Metropolitan) (09:51): I am excited to rise today to talk about the exciting Bulleen park-and-ride, which is part of the North East Link Program and is now scheduled to be completed four years ahead of schedule. I was very happy to go and visit the site of the Bulleen park-and-ride with Minister Jacinta Allan the other day so we could see firsthand how well the works are progressing, and it is looking fantastic.

The North East Link Program's \$69 million Bulleen park-and-ride, as I said, will be finished by the end of this year. It will have parking for up to 370 cars. It will have bike storage and pick-up and drop-off bays. This will make it easier for people to use the fast and frequent bus services that they need to get to and from the city. The new bus station is the first part of Melbourne's first dedicated busway, which will allow buses to travel uninterrupted along an overhauled Eastern Freeway, cutting commute times for the 17 000 passengers that use the Eastern Freeway buses each weekday. Also, new bike and walking paths will connect the park-and-ride with the Koonung Creek Trail and Thompsons Road.

More than 1000 bus services will use this facility each week, providing direct access for passengers from Bulleen, Doncaster, Doncaster East and Templestowe. As I said earlier, the new park-and-ride will open by the end of 2022, which is four years ahead of schedule, and will be used by Eastern Freeway bus services operating along Thompsons Road before the dedicated busway along the Eastern Freeway opens in 2028.

### TERRY FLOYD FOUNDATION

**Ms MAXWELL** (Northern Victoria) (09:53): It was a bittersweet moment last week when I met with Daryl Floyd in Wangaratta. Daryl is the founder of the Terry Floyd Foundation. Terry Floyd went

missing on 28 June 1975. The 12-year-old boy left the Avoca post office to find a ride back to Maryborough. This is a chilling story, one which highlighted for me a similarity with beautiful little Daniel Morcombe. To this day Terry's body has never been found. No family should ever have to suffer not knowing what has happened to their loved one. No-one should have to make it their personal responsibility to find a loved one they suspect has been murdered. No-one should have to fund people to assist them to continue the search and dig out mine shafts, wondering if each bucketload of soil will reveal the remains of their sibling. No-one should have to face this experience.

I had a long conversation with Daryl, and it was evident that after 47 years he is still highly emotional and devastated that his brother's remains have not been found. I have made a pledge to Daryl that I will seek to do whatever I can to have this cold case reopened so that Daryl and his family can finally find answers and put Terry's body to rest as it should be, and I hope the government will consider this request. I applaud Daryl and the foundation for the funds they raise to support vulnerable children in our communities and to provide scholarships for rural students in need.

### PRIDE MONTH

**Ms SHING** (Eastern Victoria) (09:54): I want to put on the record that Pride Month is a really important opportunity for members of our Parliament, as well as our community at large, to come together in support, love, friendship and solidarity with LGBTIQ+ people everywhere. The pride movement and Pride Month were not born out of a desire to celebrate being queer, they were born out of the need to reinforce that we as LGBTIQ+ people have the right to live our lives free from persecution. And we see in various changes around the world and more recently attempted changes in Australia voices that have threatened to drown out our dignity, our respect and our access to basic equality. We also see allies coming over the hill—a cavalry of people who gather around us and share their voices in maintaining and building upon our dignity. Happy Pride Month, everybody. I hope that you feel the love, and I hope that you know that you are supported.

### SEVERE WEATHER EVENT

**Ms SHING**: On another matter, I wish to acknowledge that on 9 June 2021 Victoria—in particular, the Yarra Ranges and right through Gippsland—sustained some of the worst storm damage in our state's history. Thousands of people are still working toward recovery. The work goes on. My love and respect goes to everyone who was there on the front lines, including SES, fire, police and so many volunteers across our community, to make and keep people safe in such terrible circumstances.

### ANIMAL WELFARE

**Mr MEDDICK** (Western Victoria) (09:56): The experience of animals in pounds and shelters across Victoria can be heartbreaking. While some are lovingly rehomed, others spend their lives trapped in a broken system. It has been two years since I learned about Dash the greyhound from his foster mum, Claire. Dash was killed at a Victorian shelter despite repeated adoption offers from Claire and her partner. He was rescued from greyhound racing, but he had anxiety. It is not uncommon, and it can be helped. Claire worked tirelessly and was witnessing remarkable improvements, but upon a routine return to the shelter Dash failed a behavioural test and was euthanised without warning. His story was not rare. Dogs and cats were dying every day in shelters and pounds because it was convenient. It was clear that this needed to change and that those working within the sector needed to be heard.

I was honoured to chair the first ever Taskforce on Rehoming Pets in Victoria. Alongside my fellow task force members, Maree Edwards and Gary Maas, and an entire community of dedicated animal carers, we made 17 crucial recommendations to improve companion animal survival rates and transparency. Last week the government supported every single one. We know that there is so much more work to do to improve the sector and that this is only the beginning. I want to thank everyone who has worked alongside me to ensure more animals are given the chance at a happy and healthy life.

**BURMESE WELFARE ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA**

**Dr KIEU** (South Eastern Metropolitan) (09:58): Last week I had the opportunity to attend the launch dinner for the Burmese Welfare Association of Victoria. It was a special event hosted by a wonderful organisation that contributes so much to the Victorian Burmese community. This group is integral to the advocacy for the welfare and wellbeing of Burmese Victorians. The night was filled with vibrant cultural festivities, including music, dance and great food. I want to send best wishes to the Burmese Welfare Association and Victoria's Burmese community.

**UBUNTU EMPOWERING MOTHERS PROJECT**

**Dr KIEU**: On another matter, I also received last week the opportunity to visit Afri-Aus Care with Minister Hutchins, where we heard all about how women from the group have been supported to find work, nurture their mental health and bring the community together. Ubuntu is a part of African philosophy, and it emphasises that 'I am because we are'. That is the guiding principle of the Ubuntu Empowering Mothers project, which supports and mentors mums from our African Australian communities and helps the whole community to thrive. I was blown away by the passion, determination and community spirit shown by the individuals from the Ubuntu mothers program. This is why I am proud to say that the Andrews Labor government has funded this project with more than \$1 million over two years, supporting mums in the south-east and the west of Melbourne.

**LEARN LOCAL PROVIDERS**

**Mr MELHEM** (Western Metropolitan)

**Incorporated pursuant to order of Council of 7 September 2021:**

Last week, I visited two of Melbourne's amazing Learn Local providers: Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Child and Family Centre and Olympic Adult Education.

Bubup Wilam provide an array of services to their local community. It was great to take a tour through the childcare centre and meet some of its dedicated educators.

They work to strengthen children's understanding of their Indigenous heritage and instil a sense of pride in their identity.

The centre delivers preaccredited ACFE courses in early childhood education and understanding Aboriginal perspectives.

By delivering these courses, Bubup Wilam is providing training to Indigenous Victorians, while also advancing the understanding of Indigenous practice and history in the community.

Olympic Adult Education provides a much broader selection of ACFE courses and its impact on the West Heidelberg community is huge.

Its courses provide learners with limited prior education a space to thrive, particularly learners from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

And they partner with local businesses to provide real-life work experience and pathways to meaningful employment for learners.

Every day, the staff at these Learn Locals are giving learners the skills they need for work, study, and life. That is why the Andrews Labor government will always support Victoria's adult and community education sector and encourage lifelong learning for everyone.

**Bills****MEAT INDUSTRY AMENDMENT (RABBIT FARMS) BILL 2021***Statement of compatibility*

**Mr MEDDICK** (Western Victoria) (09:59): I lay on the table the following statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with Section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (the Charter) I, Andy Meddick Member for Western Victoria (Animal Justice Party), make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Meat Industry Amendment (Rabbit Farms) Bill 2020.

In my opinion, the Meat Industry Amendment (Rabbit Farms) Bill 2020 as introduced to the Legislative Council is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

#### Overview of the Bill

The main purpose of the Meat Industry Amendment (Rabbit Farms) Bill 2020 is to amend the Meat Industry Act to remove rabbits - who are not living in the wild - as being consumable animals. This Bill permits current rabbit farms to continue until the end of their license but does not permit further licenses for rabbit farming in the future.

#### Human Rights

The Meat Industry Amendment (Rabbit Farms) Bill 2020 is compatible with the Charter as it does not interfere with any of the human rights set out in the charter. The Bill further supports the Universal Declaration of Animal Rights, that was solemnly proclaimed in Paris on 15 October 1978 at the UNESCO Headquarters, submitted to the UNESCO Director General in 1990 and made public.

Andy Meddick MLC

*Member for Western Victoria*

#### *Second reading*

**Mr MEDDICK** (Western Victoria) (10:00): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

I'm here to tell you a story. And I hope, with the help of my colleagues in this house, that we can write a happy ending together.

Once upon a time there was a rabbit. This rabbit's name was Buck, and he was apparently held in some affection by Shane Moodie. Moodie was a rabbit farmer who confined Buck at his enterprise, known as Southern Farmed Rabbits. There were whispers of cruelty at that farm and breaches to codes of practice. However, the animal welfare laws made it difficult—if not impossible—to charge anyone who was cruel to animals, let alone prosecute them. So it was up to the work of some citizens to find out what was going on and to see if the allegations of animal cruelty at this place were true.

As soon as the investigators entered the sheds, their eyes started burning. The ammonia levels were well over the legal limit. Imagine what this was like for the rabbits who were living in wire cages in this ammonia soup. It was difficult to witness, but the investigators overcame their distress to document the conditions at Southern Farmed Rabbits.

A short time later, an anonymous package arrived at my office. With some trepidation my staff and I watched the footage and looked at the photos. It was not easy. The rabbits were diseased, restless, sore, lame, and in some cases unable to move at all. They had the same amount of space as this piece of paper in which to spend their short and miserable lives. These rabbits were chewing endlessly on the metal bars of the cages. This repetitive behaviour is typical of many animal species—including our own—in response to severe and prolonged distress.

Some rabbits were struggling to breathe. Imagine that you're in respiratory distress. You can't fill your lungs. You simply can't breathe. Imagine. If it happens to us, we call an ambulance. If it happens to our dog or cat, we take them to the vet. If it happens to animals who are farmed for food, everyone looks the other way.

Along with respiratory distress the rabbits had physical injuries. We saw rabbits with broken bones, exposed bones, trapped limbs, bleeding sores and abscesses. They suffered foot infections, eye infections, and head tilt.

If some of my colleagues don't know what head tilt is, it is a serious neurological disorder where a rabbit's head becomes tilted to face upside down. Imagine—your chin is pointed up to the sky. You cannot right yourself. You feel that you are falling. You cannot stand straight, try as you may. And there is nothing you can do about it. No-one cares.

All of this drew the attention of one of Victoria's most senior vets, who is Australia's foremost expert in rabbits. We sat together watching rabbits move among piles of blood, urine, and faeces. Live rabbits were thrown on top of dead rabbits. Again, imagine for a moment if this was happening to you or someone you loved.

On 8 September 2021, the story broke in the *Age*. There was a public outcry. Less than 48 hours after the initial story broke, a 'government spokesperson' said, and I quote, 'the investigation was finalised, living conditions met code of practice requirements and health issues were being treated. No further action would be taken'.

My phone started ringing hot. People had read the paper and seen the news. No-one could believe such a finding. The spokesperson may deny any wrongdoing, but I won't.

We all know that our Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 (POCTA) does not apply to animals bred and killed for food. But rabbits are not defined in the act as 'farm animals'. So, unlike other farmed animals, rabbits should benefit from the protections of POCTA, just like our cats and dogs do. But, like so many animals, they aren't protected by anti-cruelty laws.

Breaches to POCTA's sections on cruelty and aggravated cruelty include rabbits living in diseased and injured conditions, and rabbits with their arms and legs trapped in cages, unable to free themselves.

This is happening today. This is happening right now.

Breaches of the Code of Practice for the Intensive Husbandry of Rabbits include extreme levels of ammonia causing respiratory disease and distress. Cages are rusted and some rabbits are unable to move. Rabbits have foot injuries from the hard wire mesh flooring, broken limbs, and protruding bones. They have cuts on their ears, abscesses on their heads, faces, eyes and necks. Many of them have mastitis, pus, and dried blood on them. Some of the rabbits' eyes are glued shut with pus. They have overgrown teeth so are unable to feed themselves properly, overgrown toenails so they are unable to walk. Diarrhoea and emaciation show they are suffering gastrointestinal diseases. Some have pus occluding their air passages, so they are struggling to breathe.

Breaches of section 32 of the Meat Industry Act 1993 include diseased animal flesh being sold for human consumption. The flesh of many of these rabbits is infected with pus, blood and excreta. The vet observed mastitis, pneumonia and pasteurellosis.

What humans do to non-humans does not happen in a silo. Not only are rabbits suffering at Southern Farmed Rabbits, as we speak, but so are humans. It is well established that humans who work in the animal exploitation system suffer from perpetrator-induced traumatic stress. So as well as disease and suffering going into the stomachs of our fellow Victorians, the stress experienced by humans who work there contributes to the levels of violence in our society. Everyone suffers.

This is one of the reasons that the government is rewriting our animal welfare laws. It's about time, since our international ranking is embarrassing, which I have noted before in this house. Australia scores a D in the world animal protection index and a dismal E for animals in agriculture. An E! The new voiceless animal cruelty index ranks Australia a G. The worst I got in high school was an F. I didn't know you could even get a G! That's because G is reserved for the worst in the world. It may be hard to believe, but believe it. Our government accountability for animal welfare is almost non-existent.

Countries that have good animal welfare laws offer five basic freedoms to non-human animals, internationally recognised:

1. freedom from hunger and thirst
2. freedom from discomfort
3. freedom from pain, injury and disease

4. freedom to express normal behaviours
5. freedom from fear and distress.

The rabbits at Mr Moodie's establishment did not receive any of these freedoms. These freedoms should be afforded to all animals, human or otherwise.

A recent study determined that Australian animal welfare laws are perplexing, ineffective, and fragmented. The result is—predictably—poor animal welfare. I hope the rewriting of our Victorian laws brings meaningful change in the lives of the animals. Removing rabbits as consumable animals would be a good-faith way for the government to demonstrate their genuine wish to reform animal welfare in Victoria.

Rabbit farms are untenable, unworkable and unprofitable. Rabbits, like so many introduced animals, should never have been brought here. The government of that time realised they'd made a mistake in bringing them here. So they shot the rabbits, blew them up and chased them with ferrets. That didn't work so they tried poisoning them with 1080, pindone and SAP. That failed, as did the rabbit-proof fence, as did introduced infections like rabbit scab, chicken cholera and the myxoma virus. All the government interventions have failed, caused more suffering and solved nothing.

Regardless of these failures, our colleague from The Nationals, which we know is the most anti-animal party in this house, had the bright idea in 1997 to start breeding rabbits. Imagine—against that backdrop I've just described.

Does it make sense to support a failing and fraught industry that breeds the very animal that generations of governments have been trying to get rid of—with guns, poison, traps, disease and dynamite for more than 100 years? It doesn't make sense to me. And the opposition are not generally known for their logic in such matters, but the government can surely see the nonsense in this.

There is one piece of good news. The rabbit meat industry is a dying industry. In 2001 there were 52 rabbit farms in Victoria. AgriFutures Australia estimates there are now only four to six in the entire country.

A recent Parliamentary Budget Office report states there may be three or four rabbit farms in Victoria and estimates its market value as between \$540 000 and \$800 000. Our stakeholders say there are actually only two. The PBO reports, and I quote, an 'uncertain growth trajectory, with flat-to-declining domestic demand and extremely limited export markets'. The two insurmountable problems are poor welfare and the spread of disease. There is no antidote to either RHD virus or myxomatosis. Do we really want these diseases spreading through our farms?

I hope this government will act sensibly and bring an end to this unprofitable, cruel and niche industry. Please, colleagues, do not turn away and assure our place at the bottom of the animal welfare barrel. You have the power to give these rabbits some relief. I just hope that you also have the will.

This bill removes rabbits as consumable animals, thereby removing the problems that come with farming them. This does not affect rabbits living in a wild state. For the sake of the good farmers out there, for the sake of the rabbits and for the sake of writing a happy end to this story, help me 'humanely slaughter' this dying industry as I commend this bill to the house.

**Ms TAYLOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:13): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for two weeks.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.**

**INDEPENDENT BROAD-BASED ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMISSION AMENDMENT  
(FACILITATING TIMELY REPORTING) BILL 2022***Statement of compatibility*

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (10:13): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

This Bill seeks to ensure the timely tabling of Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) reports in Parliament and to expedite their tabling while preserving relevant protections of the rights of those upon whom IBAC may comment unfavourably.

The Bill preserves the position of the Supreme Court of Victoria while informing the court of Parliament's view that applications be determined with as much speed as the requirements of the Act and proper consideration of an application permits.

It strikes an appropriate balance in preserving the rights of those on whom adverse comments may be made by IBAC and the risk that legal machinery, shenanigans and roadblocks are used to stymie the release of a critical IBAC report in a timely way thereby allowing corruption to thrive and wrongdoers to escape just exposure by IBAC.

It is my view the Bill is compatible with the Charter of Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Act 2006.

David Davis MP

Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

*Second reading*

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (10:13): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

This bill, the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Facilitating Timely Reporting) Bill 2022, seeks to ensure the timely tabling of Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) reports in Parliament and to expedite their tabling while preserving relevant protections of the rights of those upon whom IBAC may comment unfavourably.

It arises because the opposition has become aware of concerning delays in the tabling of a number of IBAC reports. These reports have been caught up in unnecessary legal delays and roadblocks.

It is in the public interest that these IBAC reports are tabled without undue delay and that any legal processes that may result from recommendations are commenced and that any learnings from the reports leading to legislative or educational steps are implemented expeditiously.

The Andrews Labor government is currently embroiled in at least three serious inquiries into corruption.

It is a matter of common knowledge now that the Premier of Victoria, Daniel Andrews, has been questioned by IBAC pursuant to at least two (Operations Watts and Sandon) and possibly a third current inquiry (Operation Richmond).

IBAC was created by the Baillieu government to clean up the mess left by Labor prior to the 2010 period.

The whole Victorian community understands the importance of IBAC having the resources and powers, with adequate balance, to manage corruption and root out corruption in Victoria.

It is in the interests of all Victorians that state government corruption, corruption at municipal council level, corruption within state government agencies and corruption more broadly in the Victorian community be met with the strongest response possible because corruption impacts not only the moral position of our public officials but also the public's trust in government and also has a significant adverse economic impact.

IBAC has an important role in educating the Victorian public sector and sending clear signals that corrupt conduct will not be tolerated.

The opposition is concerned at delays in the tabling of IBAC reports and we have separately made commitments as an opposition to increased funding to the IBAC (and indeed to the Ombudsman).

We have also indicated that independent agencies need to be on a more secure funding footing long term. Of course, adequate funding is just one important factor in enabling IBAC to complete its work in a timely manner. We fully accept that there are in addition other factors, including legal processes, which have induced delays.

In addition to the increased funding already committed to and the more secure funding process, the opposition has also indicated it will restore the previous position with respect to tests for public hearings, effectively reversing the recent changes to IBAC legislation.

This bill seeks to expedite legal processes that may otherwise be used to unreasonably obstruct the tabling of an IBAC report by ensuring that timeliness is considered.

Clause 4 makes clear Parliament's intention that the determination of claims through application under section 59M be determined with as much speed as the requirements of this act and the proper consideration of the application permit.

The Supreme Court must be free to make its decisions unimpeded but should be aware of Parliament's intention that applications be determined with as much speed as is relevant within the requirements of this act.

Similar provisions apply to sections 100 and 147.

Clause 5 provides a three-month time period for a relevant principal officer of a public body or a person subject to a potential adverse comment or opinion in a report by IBAC to respond and enables IBAC to transmit its report to Parliament if such individuals fail to respond.

Clause 7 introduces a new transitional provision that ensures IBAC must give a relevant principal officer of a public body or another person an opportunity to respond to adverse material in a proposed report under section 162 and provides for a three-month period consistent with other changes in this act.

Clause 6 ensures that a special report may be transmitted to each house of Parliament under section 162 despite any proceedings that are pending in court in relation to the subject matter of the report or any other matter or thing that may be relevant to the report.

These provisions strike an appropriate balance in preserving the rights of those on whom adverse comments may be made by IBAC and the risk that legal machinery, shenanigans and roadblocks are used to stymie the release of a critical IBAC report in a timely way thereby allowing corruption to thrive and wrongdoers to escape just exposure by IBAC.

We believe that critical IBAC reports should not be denied to the Parliament and thereby the people of Victoria ahead of the November 2022 state election.

**Ms TAYLOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:19): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for two weeks.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.**

**Production of documents****INSIGHTSVICTORIA**

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (10:19): I move motion 779:

That this house:

- (1) notes that InsightsVictoria reports to the Premier's private office as the 'single source of truth', monitoring everything from social media sentiment to credit card transactions and beyond;
- (2) further notes that InsightsVictoria has been allocated \$4.4 million in the 2022–23 state budget;
- (3) in accordance with standing order 11.01, requires the Leader of the Government to table in the Council, within three weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution:
  - (a) a complete list of what the Premier and the Premier's private office has accessed via InsightsVictoria, including the:
    - (i) subject matters accessed;
    - (ii) dates of access; and
    - (iii) geographical areas upon which reports have been accessed;
  - (b) all correspondence, including emails, to or from the Premier's private office that relate to InsightsVictoria; and
  - (c) an organisational chart of the management of InsightsVictoria.

I want to be very clear on how this has come about. This is an FOI that the opposition did during the late 2020–21 period. The government fought the release of this information bitterly, and it was only after intervention by VCAT and orders that the government was prepared finally to release some of the information. Much information is still redacted and is still being fought at VCAT. I want to be quite clear that the government also sought to use a jurisdictional argument to initiate further proceedings on four important FOIs, the InsightsVictoria one being one of them. This relates to the minutes, which is the way we became aware of the way government was operating this so-called InsightsVictoria. It has now become the name that has been given to it but that was not the case at the time of the FOI. It came around through the FOI that sought the mission control or coordination committee of the state at the time, the establishment of the InsightsVictoria group and the collation of enormous quantities of data and information.

We are all familiar with the concepts of big data, and clearly that is part of what is going on here. But it is true to say that government also has access to additional information that is available in the public domain, so this is sensitive, personal information—information about medical records, information about a whole range of other detailed matters concerning individual areas of geography in the state. The collation of this information, I think, is something that needs very, very firm protections. Victorians deserve those assurances. They deserve to understand what is happening. They deserve to understand the purposes and uses to which this material is being put. They need to understand who can access it and why. A single FOI is not sufficient to understand that fully, although in the end the government was forced to release some significant chunks of information.

It is interesting to look at a chart that was provided to us. This is about frequently asked questions:

Where is the data sourced from?

... including departments across WoVG. See source notes on charts and metrics to see specifics about each.

...

- Insights Victoria is updated seven days a week with the mostly current available data. Data sources that are available daily (e.g. health COVID case numbers) are updated each day, whereas other sources are updated weekly (e.g. consumer transaction data) or monthly (e.g. a range of the Australian Bureau of Statistics data).
- Each chart and metric is marked with a date timestamp so users can see how current it is.

...

## PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

Wednesday, 8 June 2022

Legislative Council

1953

- InsightsVictoria has been designed to be the single source of truth across WoVG, and a central credible reference source.
- Data presented ... is undergoing validation and alignment with existing reporting processes—

this was in 2020 when this document was produced—

Approved figures can be provided by the identified accountable policy area.

- If you are seeing conflicting information ...

and it goes on. The access to this is laid out in a chart that was provided: attachment C, as it is called, 'Role-based access maintains security whilst enabling better decisions'. The Premier's private office is the only group in the state that has full access. They have standard access and all sensitive access. That is the Premier's private office and operational leaders. I understand that it has since been revealed that the chief health officer and the Chief Commissioner of Police are amongst those who also have access. But compliance and enforcement operational reports, health operational reports, compliance and enforcement domain and all other domains are available to the Premier's private office and the Premier. Ministerial offices are excluded from a number of domains, although the private office, Victorian public service senior executives and what is described as 'VPS with demonstrated need' are able under certain circumstances to access some of this, as can VPS with demonstrated need.

The real question is why the privileged access to the Premier and the Premier's office, why the concentration of this information at such a level. Clearly the government is investing more and more into this agency. It is investing more and more, kicking off in the COVID period but rolling over to a permanent state where the data is collected. It is quite interesting to see one of the printouts that I have access to—you can see enormous data down to quite local geographic areas. This data can be used quite malevolently if chosen. Obviously data collection can be used for good purposes too, but I think what Victorians would want to see here are proper checks and proper balances and to understand who has this privileged access. The Premier and the Premier's private office have this privileged, private access, the only group that appear to have unrestricted access other than the Chief Commissioner of Police and the chief health officer.

But it seems that highly privileged access needs to be seen in the context of the Premier's misbehaviour on a number of these points before. We saw the red shirts—the use of public money for campaigning purposes—and the government was forced to pay back almost \$500 000 of money that had been taken from the people of Victoria and misused for Labor Party campaigning purposes. I do not believe that any Victorian can have confidence that this data is not being used for campaign purposes. I do not believe any Victorian can have confidence that the Premier's private office staff are not accessing this data to inform electorate-level decisions by the Australian Labor Party. The closeness of the Premier's private office to the ALP campaign machine is well understood, and the fact is that the access to this data is not being vetted or controlled. They have unlimited, unrestrained access to this information, and I think that is chilling.

In a newspaper on the weekend I described this as a dystopian approach. I said that this has all the hallmarks of a brave new world. It has all the hallmarks of Big Brother looking down. It suits the Premier's personality to have all that control and power, but I think most Victorians would want to see proper checks and balances there. There are no such checks and balances on this, and that is why with this documents motion today we are seeking details, as I have outlined in the motion, of the subject matters accessed, the dates of access and the geographic areas in which reports have been accessed by the Premier's office.

This goes back to mid 2020 when the early versions of the agency were initially operating. It is clearly in the public interest for us to understand what the Premier and his office are doing here and what uses they are putting this data to. As I say, data of this type can be used for benevolent purposes, but it can also be used for malevolent purposes. I feel very strongly that the Premier needs to be reined in on this. We need to find out what is going on. I think most Victorians on the weekend found this a significant shock. People may laugh at this, but the fact is that the government has form on this:

misusing taxpayers money for party political campaigning. What protections are there that this data is not being used by the Australian Labor Party for campaigning purposes? I say that that is a legitimate question, and I think that the community are entitled to ask these questions. It is in the public interest that these documents be released, and I would ask for the house's support on this important matter.

**Ms SHING** (Eastern Victoria) (10:30): Following Mr Davis is always a curious challenge because on the one hand I am tempted to use the time that I have available to me to point out just how little he seems to know about data, but on the other hand I am driven to actually clarify the way in which data-sharing platforms operate and the way in which data is gathered, collated, stored and used. I am going to yield to the temptation of responding to Mr Davis's ignorance though on data before I move to the substantive nature of the motion itself, and I anticipate that Mr Davis will get to his feet to raise a point of order about the fact that this is a relatively narrow motion and in fact it relates to the provision of documents in the terms sought and as drafted. Before you do that, Mr Davis, I would like to in fact quote you back at yourself in the context of everything else you have said. You have quoted George Orwell. You have quoted yourself. You have quoted a range of other sources and primary documents, and what you have done is go right to the heart of this subject matter. So I would hope that with the time I have available you are not going to get to your feet and try on the standard line that you do around saying that this is actually just about documents provision.

I do, however, want to take you back, Mr Davis, to 2017—not that long ago, but we did have a data-sharing debate and discussion on data-sharing legislation in this very place. It was Mr Rich-Phillips, a colleague of yours, Mr Davis, rather uncomfortably for you I am going to suggest, who said at the time:

... the capacity for government to harness big data, be it government data or be it data brought in from outside to drive policy decisions within government, is incredibly exciting, is incredibly valuable for policy development, and should be encouraged.

So that is a really, I suppose, uncomfortable tension that exists with what you are saying here today, Mr Davis, what you have quoted back from yourself, and I am surprised you did not talk about yourself in the third person when you got to your feet today, just to bed down the validity of what you talked about in the *Herald Sun* over the weekend.

What I would like to do, though, is to invite you to go back to that particular debate and invite you to go back to the way in which that legislation was brought before this chamber and the way in which your colleagues stood here and praised the need for use of data in order to effect better decision-making—more efficient, more fair, more equitable and more transparent decision-making in the use of data. And if we were to listen to you here today, Mr Davis, we would be tempted to conclude that in fact data of a sensitive nature means that somehow somebody knows what it is that you are doing in your government car out of hours, where you are going, who you are meeting with and the sorts of activities that you are getting up to. That might be of concern to you—that in fact people have access to information about what you get up to in your spare time, perhaps using government resources. What I would like to do, though, is to clarify—just for avoidance of any doubt or any concern that you might have personally, Mr Davis, in that particular regard—that this is anonymised data. Much as you might like to think that this is about the use of your data, where you are going, who you are seeing and what resources you are using, this is actually about anonymised data to assist in decision-making.

When I listen to you talk about InsightsVictoria being an agency, what that does yet again is betray your abject ignorance of the way in which this framework works. InsightsVictoria is not an agency, it is a data-sharing platform. So when you can understand the difference between the two, maybe come back and let us have a conversation which indicates that you have actually done even a skerrick of homework around the way in which information is gathered and the way in which contemporary data-sharing platforms operate across the state. Let us talk about the way in which big data is in fact used by governments in best practice for pandemic response. Let us talk about the way in which this has enabled access by the emergency management commissioner. I note that you missed him when you

were talking about who has access to this data. Andrew Crisp has got access to it. The police commissioner has got access to it. The chief health officer has got access to it. Yet curiously you have ignored those elements of the use of data around large-scale movement, around the changes of patterns of collective movement and behaviour, in order to make decisions that meet resourcing needs and challenges associated with pandemic response and emergency management response.

What you have done, and it is so predictable, is you have just homed right in on your narrative about us living in some form of tinfoil hat universe where George Orwell runs the show and where in fact you could not backflip fast enough from what it is that your colleague said back in 2017 about these things actually being a really good idea for the purpose of enhanced, modernised, contemporary, transparent and respectful engagement with data.

One of the other things that I want to note just in terms of the height of irony is that Mr Davis has quoted himself as appearing in newspapers over the weekend, but when you go to access those articles in the newspapers, here is what you have to do. You have to agree to the use of information for various purposes that are determined by that newspaper outlet—by the platform which it uses to function—and to give over various of your personal details for other purposes. This is about targeted advertising. This is about behavioural advertising. This may in fact be about dark patterns. It may in fact be about promotion across various social media platforms. This is in fact a perfect example of how it is that we are looking at the distinction between industry and business on the one hand and the comparative lack of privacy regulation in that space and the emergence of a discussion and a discourse on how it is that the consumer law might be in a better position to address these issues, the way in which algorithms are developed and are modelled, the way in which test data is collected, the way in which troubleshooting occurs and the way in which evolutions of an algorithm over time can identify bias and discrimination and can identify breaches of privacy.

Mr Davis, you do not care about that because you do not know anything about it. What you do do, though, is quote from articles that people cannot access unless they agree to share their own data. Mr Davis, cookies are not just an item that is served in the cafe here at Parliament. Cookies are in fact a way of gathering information that you never seem to have had a problem with until now, in the form of a platform that has enabled people—both people out there, for all I know—to access what it is that you have had to say in quoting yourself and quoting George Orwell and talking about dystopia. It is breathtaking in the extreme that we have a motion here today drafted and brought by somebody who does not understand how data works; whose colleagues supported data-sharing legislation; who refuses to acknowledge the benefits, the efficiencies, the fairnesses and the equities occasioned by the use of data; and who refuses to acknowledge and is wilfully blind to the idea that anonymised data is in fact what we are talking about here—that it is not sensitive information, as you would have the world see, Mr Davis. This is not about *News of the World* bugging a dead woman's phone. This is not about the sorts of disgraceful behaviours that we have seen that have caught headlines around the world. This is about anonymised information for the purpose of ensuring better access to decision-making for governments, who have a responsibility to use tools available in a modern world where technology is evolving at the speed of light.

If we were to listen to Mr Davis in this regard, we would still have an environment where *Hansard* was recorded on vellum, where in fact the lights were candles and where in fact women were not able to be in this chamber. If we were to listen to Mr Davis, data would have no role in the way in which government does its work. Quite frankly he is living in la-la land, because if we are to keep pace with the large-scale demands of responses to pandemics, responses to emergencies, delivery of efficiency mechanisms in frontline emergency work and making sure that services go to the areas where they are needed, we need this data. And it is not just us, it is governments all around Australia. It is not just state and territory governments, it is the commonwealth government. It is not just about sitting on our hands and refusing to engage in the discussions about machine learning, AI and other platform evolutions to deliver and to develop algorithms around data, it is actually about doing the right thing. So if Mr Davis could for just one second put aside tacky motions like this and engage in the subject

matter of what data does, what it is capable of doing and the way in which it is able to improve the lives and opportunities of and reduce the risks, damages, dangers and losses for Victorians, he might be really well placed to have a say on how it is that we can continue the beneficial work around data and data use in this state. What a travesty, Mr Davis, you are. We oppose this motion.

**Ms BURNETT-WAKE** (Eastern Victoria) (10:40): I rise to speak on Mr Davis's motion 779. It was recently revealed that Premier Daniel Andrews has a data agency, InsightsVictoria, that monitors the everyday activities of Victorians, including their social media moves and credit card transactions. We knew about the Big Build, the big bill and the big budget blowouts, but Victorians did not know that the Premier has been spying on them like Big Brother. Victorians have been in a real-life game of *Big Brother* since August 2020, but the game is not one they signed up to.

InsightsVictoria is yet another initiative that the Andrews government have cooked up behind closed doors and kept from the people it impacts most. The government have come out and said that it is just about collecting anonymised data and that protections are in place, but before data is anonymised it is in raw form, and this raises questions about data sovereignty and where this data is stored. The servers—are they onshore, are they offshore, are they secure? There are very big questions about that.

Victorians deserve to know the government is collecting this data, and they deserve to know how it is being used. The only reason we have all learned about this database was a lengthy fight under freedom-of-information laws. The Premier would rather this be kept from Victorians, which really begs the question: what else is the government hiding? If it was really just about anonymised data, why was this kept from Victorians? The news of this database is quite astonishing. Why on earth does a government need to know what Victorians share on their personal social media accounts? Why does it need to know what Victorians are spending their money on? They have yet again cited the COVID-19 pandemic as why this database was introduced. Our social media posts and what we spend our money on has nothing to do with COVID-19 or our health.

The database is now said to be evolving to support government decision-making as we emerge from the pandemic. In other words, Big Brother is here to stay. What we do know about this platform is that the data is accessible by a range of public servants in the Premier's private office. The Chief Commissioner of Police, Shane Patton, also has access to this data, as does chief health officer Brett Sutton, emergency management commissioner Andrew Crisp and an array of Mr Andrews's private staff. This alone shows the data is much more than some innocent analytics. It is being shared across the board with agencies, and Victorians have no power over where their information is going. What is worse, this was kept a secret and we did not know this was happening.

These are not the actions of a transparent and ethical government. They are not the actions of a government for the people. Given they have been collecting all this data, it is unfortunate that they miraculously missed the parts about the 000 crisis, ambulance ramping and the strain on our hospitals. They refuse to acknowledge the data when the opposition asks questions in this chamber. The government's Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Ms D'Ambrosio, recently said in the media:

... all governments utilise anonymised data to inform their decisions, to inform their programs, to make sure that the best decisions are made in terms of government operations ...

If that were the case, our 000 service and ambulance delays would have been addressed long ago. This is not new data. We have lost 21 Victorians in the last six months. If this data were being collected to make the best decisions, we would have seen some significant changes for the healthcare system, for mental health and for small business. Instead Victorians got secrecy, spin and deceit.

The Leader of the Government should table in this Council a complete list of what the Premier and his private office have been accessing on this platform. Victorians will be particularly interested to know what subject matters have been accessed and when, and what areas of Victoria have been

targeted specifically. Victorians are over the secrecy and the cover-ups. They deserve to know what their government is up to. I commend this motion.

**Ms TAYLOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:45): I just want to clarify again for the opposition before I proceed to respond to this motion that InsightsVictoria is not an agency. You said it again, and we do need to be accurate as we are talking about facts. So just to be really clear about what InsightsVictoria is, InsightsVictoria is a secure digital reporting platform. It was established to provide anonymised reporting of public health trends in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. InsightsVictoria sits in the Victorian Centre for Data Insights under the Department of Premier and Cabinet. So if we can adhere to facts within this debate, that would be much appreciated.

It is no secret that data analytics is a central capability for any modern-day government. New South Wales and the ACT have data analytics centres. The federal government has a number of data capabilities within departments, including the Australian Bureau of Statistics. New Zealand boast that they are leading the world with their use of data integration for research and analysis, and the US government is reportedly undertaking one of the largest transformation initiatives in decades so federal agencies can utilise data-driven decision-making. The COVID-19 pandemic was unprecedented, and governments across the world had to move quickly to respond to public health and economic situations that were unfolding.

The *Harvard Business Review* did an analysis of the pandemic responses of Germany and Italy. The death rate in Germany was lower, and the article suggests that their use of a digital reporting registry allowed them to track the availability of beds and ventilators, easing the pressure on ICU beds. Many other countries used dashboard reporting to monitor the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic because the situation was volatile and wide reaching, meaning it was harder for governments to get an accurate picture of what was happening in communities.

To assist with the COVID-19 response, InsightsVictoria was established. The platform—not a separate agency, so let us just be clear about that and stick to the facts in this debate; I heard the word ‘malevolent’ used before, and I am not sure how it is in any way relevant to this debate—reports on a range of public health and mobility trends so senior government staff can make informed decisions assisted by timely and relevant anonymised data. InsightsVictoria does not monitor or report on the details of individual Victorians. For the opposition to characterise this as a dystopian Big Brother exercise is not only inaccurate but dangerous. It is a gross distortion. It is inappropriate. InsightsVictoria provides anonymised aggregate-level reporting only. It is not shared outside government and has very strict protocols around access and levels of access.

The opposition cannot have it both ways. One day they claim we are digital laggards and years behind New South Wales. The next day they say we are Big Brother with a powerful, deep-dive IT system. Maybe they should get their facts straight and deal with the conflicting opinions in their own party before making sweeping incorrect claims about the government. It has already been referenced, but I am going to reiterate this point because it is actually pivotal to the discussion and the debate that we are having here now. Back in 2017 the opposition said:

... the coalition regards the sharing of data within government as an incredibly important opportunity for policy development and the analytics that go along with the management of that data ...

true to your point, exactly. Does the opposition no longer believe that—that is the issue here—in 2022, when we rely on digital technology more than ever before?

The use of anonymised commercial data is not unique to the Victorian government. Using a range of aggregated datasets can provide more accurate insights. The COVID-19 pandemic was unprecedented, and our health response and recovery efforts needed to be informed by the most accurate information available. The use of commercial data ceased in 2021 as it was no longer required

in support of Victoria's COVID-19 response and recovery. This is again hypocritical of the opposition—yes, I am referring back to 2017—who said:

... the capacity for government to harness big data, be it government data or be it data brought in from outside to drive policy decisions within government, is incredibly exciting, is incredibly valuable for policy development, and should be encouraged.

It is a backflip, plain and simple. We take privacy and data protection very seriously, and that is exactly what Victorians expect from their government. These safeguards are in place to protect Victorians' data through the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 and the Victorian Data Sharing Act 2017. On top of this, InsightsVictoria operates under the Victorian Protective Data Security Standards to guide the safe, secure, lawful and ethical use of data. The Victorian Centre for Data Insights applies a range of measures to protect information from unauthorised access, use or disclosure. These measures include privacy impact assessments, stringent system and data access controls, activity logging, penetration testing and security reviews. The Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner plays an important oversight role in making sure the right checks and balances are in place. With the right checks and balances in place, data can be a valuable tool for governments to make better and fairer policy decisions to improve outcomes and services for their people.

If the opposition were serious about supporting our economic recovery and repairing our health system, they would read the room. Without data we would be making decisions based on hunches and anecdotal evidence. Governments are increasingly moving towards data-driven decision-making because people expect their governments to design policies and services based on facts and statistics and not on personal opinions.

**Dr CUMMING** (Western Metropolitan) (10:53): I do rise today about making sure that we get the information this new Premier's private office InsightsVictoria reports and making sure that we do get all the documents and information behind this. If this government has nothing to hide, it will quite happily provide all that information. If this government has been monitoring everything from social media sentiments and collecting that kind of data from Victorians, Victorians have the right to understand what information and data has been mined and to be able to bring that forward to understand why the government is using that.

For me, I know that the community want their privacy respected. They know that this government has used a massive propaganda campaign against them during these COVID times. I must say, having listened to some of the government's contributions today and the words that I have heard thus far, there are no Victorians that actually trust this Andrews government in the way of their having the information of their private data. They are worried about the way that they are monitoring Victorians' social media accounts.

So for me, we have witnessed that. We have witnessed people who have put Facebook posts up, talking against or dissenting—just normal dissent—against this government about issues and concerns that they actually have, having police knock at their door. And we know we have seen pregnant women in Ballarat being arrested during this time just for saying that they would like to protest. Now, we need to have the freedom to be able to actually voice our concerns on social media. We do not need to be shadow banned via Facebook. And we want to have that information, if the government actually is getting involved in our social media accounts, because we are concerned. Victorians are concerned; they wish to have an election in November that is free from government involvement via monitoring of everything in social media and where the government is not actually then banning and shadow banning people's voices on social media—and that has been occurring. My own Facebook account gets shadow banned quite often, and some of the things that have been pulled down are things that I have actually said in this chamber; contributions that I have made within this chamber that have been fact-checked—on Facebook they have been shadow banned. If I am a member of Parliament and Facebook as a platform can do that to me, I pity the general populace out there that just wish to have their voices heard and wish to just have their issues and concerns raised and to be able to make

comments and have conversations with other people within the community about what their concerns are about this government.

I would say, from what I have heard from my constituents, they have little faith in this government handing over their private information as well as in the monitoring that this government has done on them. They want to know the kinds of monitoring and why this government has used \$4 million from the Premier's department to actually somehow possibly gather people's private information and understand what they are doing. So for me, it is horribly concerning for my community. They want their privacy protected. They do not want to feel that the government is monitoring them.

I believe that this government should support this motion today to actually enable access. The community wants the transparency and the accountability, and if there is nothing to hide with the data that the government has been mining, why not show us? Because we have always felt—the community out there has always felt—that this government has spent a lot of time over the last two years pushing propaganda rather than actual facts, not being transparent and not showing the community where this information is actually coming from. It is not based in science and not based in common sense but is actually based on a propaganda campaign of trying to be popular and then pushing people in a certain direction, when really we would want it actually based in facts.

So for me, I hope that this government supports this documents motion. We want to have an understanding of why they have actually gone into people's private social media accounts and want to know why people are being monitored by this government and to what level and why they are using that data. They want to understand why this government feels the need to have a whole department called InsightsVictoria to monitor them, and they want to know that this is not going to be used during this election. What information have you gathered, and are you going to be using that against people for your own benefit during this election? That is what the community want to know. They want to know that they will have some kind of fair and free state election that is not corrupted by the data that this government is mining by way of their information. They want to feel that it is not being twisted as well as that it is free from being manipulated.

The community are sick to death of being manipulated via propaganda campaigns. They just want the truth. They just want facts. They just want the information out. They do not want to feel that they are being manipulated by being monitored and being banned and being shadow banned and having the information that you are gathering turned against them to make them go down the path that you want them to go down. I would hope that the government would be absolutely accountable and transparent and provide the information immediately.

**Motion agreed to.**

### WORKSAFE VICTORIA

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** (South Eastern Metropolitan) (11:02): I move motion 776 standing in Mr Davis's name:

That this house, in accordance with standing order 11.01, requires the Minister for Workplace Safety to table in the Council, within three weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution:

- (1) the minutes and agendas, including the titles of any attachments thereto, of the interdepartmental WorkSafe steering committee;
- (2) a copy of the Finity report provided to the interdepartmental WorkSafe steering committee; and
- (3) external advice and reports obtained by WorkSafe concerning its financial sustainability since 1 July 2018.

This motion goes to the sustainability of the Victorian WorkCover Authority. We have seen over the last two years the Minister for Workplace Safety come into this place and repeatedly plead ignorance as to matters related to the Victorian WorkCover Authority. We now know that the financial standing of the VWA is highly compromised. We know that the Victorian government has had to tip \$850 million of capital into the Victorian WorkCover Authority to keep it afloat. What we do not

know is why the Victorian government has taken that action. We do not know what advice the Minister for Workplace Safety has received and what the minister has done with that advice. The minister herself, on repeated occasions in this place, has demonstrated her inability or unwillingness to answer questions in respect to the WorkCover scheme and its sustainability and viability. We heard yesterday in this place the very clear indication that it was in fact the Expenditure Review Committee of Cabinet that directed the Victorian WorkCover Authority to maintain its current average premium rate of 1.272 per cent of payroll rather than adjust that premium rate to address sustainability and financial concerns within the WorkCover authority.

So there are a lot of things going on in the background that have not been transparent. We know that there is deep concern about the viability of the scheme. The people of Victoria, this Parliament—whose role is to hold the government to account—and the Victorian community that relies on a sustainable and viable WorkCover authority to provide compensation and rehabilitation services to injured workers are entitled to know the standing of that scheme and what has been occurring on this government's watch.

We know over the life of this government, the almost eight years of this government, that the WorkCover scheme has not been managed well. We can see that from successive annual reports. We know that over the life of this government there has not been a single reduction in average premium rates. Prior to the election of this government there was a long period where premium rates were able to be reduced with the VWA scheme because the scheme was operating efficiently and sustainably while delivering strong support to injured workers. We saw, year on year, that premiums were reduced, ending at a 1.272 per cent average premium rate. That rate has not shifted under the eight years of this government, but what we have seen over the life of this government is a deterioration in the economic performance, financial performance, of the scheme.

There are really two key measures of the viability of the WorkCover scheme. The WorkCover scheme obviously has a lot of assets invested to provide returns and to support injured workers as markets move, as the value of those assets move and returns on those assets move, and there is a lot of noise in the profit and loss for the WorkCover scheme. So in order to assess how the scheme is really performing—in the sense of how well it is being operated, how efficiently it is operating, as opposed to what market movements are doing to the bottom line—those market movements are stripped out. The scheme reports two key figures. One is actuarial release and the other is performance from insurance operations. Actuarial release is a measure of how well the Victorian WorkCover Authority is managing its long-term liabilities. To give an example, if there is a person who is badly injured in a workplace accident and will require lifetime support from the WorkCover scheme, the cost of supporting that person is brought to book on the WorkCover balance sheet. The actuaries assess that supporting that person for their whole of life might cost \$2 million or \$3 million. Then periodically the actuaries look at how the claim is being managed—and how all claims are being managed—and if the WorkCover authority is managing that claim well. For example, if they provide treatment or support early in the claim, which means the long-term cost of that claim is reduced, then there is a positive actuarial release. Recognising that an early intervention, maybe early treatment or early therapy, will mean that the long-term costs are reduced, that is a positive benefit to the scheme and is a positive actuarial release.

We have seen through the annual reports, though, of the WorkCover authority that over the life of this government, back to 2015–16, actuarial release every year has been negative, which means the claims have not been managed as well as was predicted. That has been a deteriorating situation year on year on year. In 2015–16 the negative actuarial release was \$135 million. By 2019–20 it had deteriorated to negative \$2.9 billion. In 2020–21 it was negative \$3.3 billion. These are major shifts in actuarial release—a major negative mark on how the government is managing the WorkCover scheme, is managing the long-term liabilities of the scheme, the long-term costs of providing for injured workers in this state. That in no way relates to what markets are doing—market movements; it is purely a reflection on how the scheme is being managed. Then that feeds into the overall result, net of market

movements, which is the performance from insurance operations—taking out the noise of markets, how the overall insurance business is operating. We have seen, again, over the life of this government a deterioration in the net position, which was \$211 million positive in 2014–15, deteriorating year on year on year to 2019–20, where it was a negative of \$3.5 billion, and 2020–21, where it was a negative of over \$3.8 billion. So this has been a long-term decline in the performance of the WorkCover scheme, in the management of the WorkCover scheme for which the government and the minister are responsible.

We know there are underlying reasons for this. We have seen a massive blowout in WorkCover claims from the public sector. We have seen a massive blowout in mental injury claims. This is partly driven by the COVID environment and the lockdowns that this government inflicted on the people of Victoria, but it is also a longer trend than COVID—it predates COVID.

One of the things we know about the WorkCover scheme is it is always evolving. It is necessary to continually actively manage it and to manage it in the interests of injured workers. One of the things we repeatedly see with Labor governments is less interest in managing the WorkCover scheme in the interests of injured workers and more interest in it being a honey pot for plaintiff lawyers. Plaintiff lawyers will always seek to find opportunities, will always seek to find new ways to interpret the scheme to get a payday, so the scheme has to be actively managed day in, day out by the WorkCover authority and the government to ensure the integrity of the scheme is protected and the financial viability of the scheme is protected, and we have not seen that from this government. That is one of the reasons we have seen the deteriorating performance over the life of this government.

Another measure of the deterioration of the scheme has been a decline in return-to-work rates—the proportion of people who are injured at work returning to work and returning to work as quickly as possible. If cases are not well managed, if the outcomes of injured workers are not well managed, they do not go back to work. If they are not encouraged back to work, if they are not supported by their employers, if they are not supported by the scheme—given appropriate treatment and given appropriate support—they will not go back to work as quickly as they can, which is obviously good for them as it is good for the scheme, and in some cases they will not go back to work at all. We have seen that decline in return-to-work rates over the life of this government.

There are a number of things that are running against the WorkCover scheme and have been running against the scheme over the life of this government. We have seen the government fail to actively manage the scheme to protect its viability and to ensure that it is there for the long-term interests of injured workers in this state. We know now it has reached such a critical point that the government has had to tip capital in. We know the government, through the expenditure review committee, has apparently directed WorkCover to maintain its premium rate at 1.272 per cent rather than set a rate which reflects what is happening in the authority, and we know that the minister comes in here time and time again and pleads ignorance as to what is going on.

This motion before the house today seeks to throw some light on what has been going on within the scheme, throw some light on the advice that the government has received—or the authority has received—as to the sustainability and viability of the scheme and provide some light to the Victorian community as to what is happening within the WorkCover scheme. It is apparent from the macro numbers that it is not being well managed. It is apparent from the responses in this house that the minister will not say or does not know what is going on. This house, and by extension the people of Victoria, should know. Therefore I urge the house to support this documents motion.

**Ms TERPSTRA** (Eastern Metropolitan) (11:14): I rise to make a contribution on this documents motion. This motion stands in Mr Davis's name, and of course it is a documents motion seeking all manner of documents. I can say in summary, in a nutshell, that this is nothing more than a fishing expedition, as we know. Mr Davis, I could quite comfortably say, and the opposition never care one iota about workers and particularly injured workers. Really what is at the heart of this motion is to just use cheap political pointscore to try and secure documents to attack the government. That is their

role as an opposition, but let us not kid ourselves that there is any scintilla of concern or care for the workers who are at the heart of what this government does in terms of the WorkSafe Victoria scheme, which is caring for injured workers and helping people get back to work. Let us not kid ourselves that this is anything Mr Davis wants to do that is going to help workers. It is just a cheap political stunt and nothing other than cheap political pointscoreing.

It is really tiresome to hear the constant line from the opposition. I was talking to Minister Leane earlier about the use of the term ‘malevolent’ when we are look at data. You know: ‘The government is bad, government bad, we want to get the data, we want this, we want that’. I mean, you would think that we were the devil incarnate with some of the things that are said by those opposite. It is quite laughable and disingenuous of Mr Davis and the opposition to claim that there is any intent in this other than just political pointscoreing.

The Andrews Labor government is absolutely committed to ensuring that we do everything in our power to prevent workplace injuries before they occur and when injuries do occur that we have a strong WorkCover scheme to support injured workers when they need our support. When the Liberals were last in government they oversaw budgets that ripped \$641 million of WorkSafe funds from the scheme. I will repeat that because that is not an insignificant amount of money: \$641 million ripped out of the scheme. And there was nothing to show for that, certainly not major projects or infrastructure—absolutely nothing to show for it. That was just about cost-cutting, and who bore the brunt of that? Injured workers. Again, let us not be mistaken about what the intention is over there. They do not care about workers; they never have. They profess to be the workers’ friend all of a sudden, but let us remind ourselves again: \$641 million ripped out of that scheme—\$641 million that did not go into more WorkSafe inspectors, that did not go to improving outcomes for injured workers and that certainly did not go toward measures that prevent workers from being injured in the first place. As I said, they do not care about workers, and they certainly do not care about the WorkCover scheme either.

In saying that, as a former union official and representative of workers, I just want to thank the many health and safety representatives in the workplace for the vital work that they do on the ground and their steadfast commitment to safety not only in our everyday workplaces but certainly throughout some of the most difficult times in the last couple of years through the COVID-19 pandemic. Health and safety representatives perform an important function in the workplace. I myself as a former union official have had the pleasure of supporting many workplace health and safety representatives in dealing with health and safety concerns. Whether that has been in the manufacturing sector—in the last place I worked with the nurses union—or certainly in our hospitals there are often many challenges in workplace settings, and without the important and critical role of workplace health and safety representatives these issues cannot be brought to the attention of management and resolved. It is critical to have well-supported health and safety representatives to help keep our workers safe. Without them we would see more issues with workplace health and safety. There would be more injuries, more accidents, those sorts of things, so HSRs have such an important role.

I note that the Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister Stitt, has been absolutely up front about the challenges that the WorkCover scheme is facing. I have sat in here and heard this in question time and heard her answer those opposite when they ask questions about the scheme. She has been absolutely up front about the challenges the scheme faces, as this government has, due to the impacts of COVID-19 and the significant increase in the number and complexity and costs of claims, particularly mental injuries. As I just said, sometimes injuries can be complex, particularly mental injuries. They can be complex, they can be difficult and lengthy sometimes to overcome, but the point is that we are with workers for the long term. We are not just going to give up on people because they have a complex claim. We are going to be supporting people. That is what the scheme does. It is very easy just to walk away from people and say, ‘Well, bad luck. You’ve had your X amount of weeks support and that’s it’, you know?

That is one of the really great reforms that this government has made, to bring in that early intervention to give people access to payments earlier, because we know that that early intervention and early support for workers really pay dividends. When they get that early intervention, their recovery can be far better but also their return to work can be earlier. So by taking some of those steps we know what works, and we know that that has got a better trajectory for injured workers. We know also that external factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, have had a significant impact on WorkSafe's resources and sources of premiums—so premium payments and investment returns. That is why the government has invested in a scheme including measures to better support people returning to work, as I said, and a focus on injury prevention and tailored claims handling. This is critically important because you cannot just have a cookie-cutter approach to managing injury claims. We know it has been much harder for workers who are injured to return to work as a result of COVID-19, and where someone is injured or falls ill at work or as a result of work it is essential that they get the support that they need and help getting back to work.

As I said earlier, the government has made the decision to keep WorkCover premiums at one of the lowest rates in Australia so that Victorian businesses can keep recovering and rebuilding as we emerge from the pandemic, and on top of this we know the pressure is from increasingly complex claims, especially complex mental injuries and claims that arise from those injuries. So it is precisely for these reasons the board and senior management of WorkSafe have prioritised the better prevention of workplace psychological injuries and earlier intervention when they do occur. We are working together to confront these issues, and we have a comprehensive reform agenda to address complex claims.

Just in regard to provisional payments, reforms like our provisional payments legislation which passed through this Parliament last February mean that workers can start receiving the support they need for mental injuries without waiting up to 38 days for their compensation claims to be determined. That was that early intervention strategy that I just mentioned earlier, so getting that early support means that people are not waiting. Can you imagine being injured and not being able to support yourself and not having any income for up to 38 days? If you had a mental injury, that would certainly add more stress to your worries. But having that early support means that you know you will be able to at least continue to support yourself, keep the roof over your head and have food coming in, and that is really critically important.

At the core of this landmark reform was a pilot program for emergency workers and volunteers to access these payments for medical and life expenses from the moment they lodge a compensation claim for a 13-week period, regardless of whether their claim is ultimately accepted. So they do not have to wait to get the help that they need when they need it. These reforms mean that workers will be able to receive that urgent medical treatment for their mental health concerns sooner and recognise the importance of early intervention and the better health outcomes in enabling a return to work. So we know these reforms will make a real difference to Victorian workers who need that urgent care.

The Andrews Labor government has sharpened the focus on improving mental health for all Victorians as well, and the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System challenges all of us to redouble our efforts to tackle the longstanding risk factors of poor mental health in our workplaces. Our government has committed to implementing all the recommendations from that report, and with the adult population spending about a third of their lives at work, there is a vital role for workplaces in improving the mental health of all Victorians.

I might leave my contribution there. There are many other points that I know other speakers will be wanting to comment on in regard to this debate, but I will just close my remarks by reiterating what I said earlier: this is nothing other than a stunt from those opposite. They do not care about workers. They have never cared about workers. The only time they care about anything to do with workers is when they can look at political pointscoring. This documents motion is nothing other than a stunt to try and eke out some kind of weird conspiracy theory that we are up to no good. But again I condemn this motion as nothing other than a political stunt.

**Mr ERDOGAN** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:24): I am pleased to rise on this motion before the house, because to build on the contribution made by my colleague Ms Terpstra, it gives me an opportunity to reflect on Labor's record in terms of workplace safety and the opposition's. Obviously the current WorkCover system we have, the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013, is a legacy of the Cain government. It was the Accident Compensation Act 1985 that John Cain Jr, when he was Premier, implemented in our state system. It is a compulsory insurance scheme that provides entitlements to compensation—weekly payments and medical and like expenses—for injured workers in our state. It is a fantastic scheme and a scheme that I had the honour and privilege of working with in my previous career as a plaintiff lawyer. On that point I think it is important to explain my concern and also my displeasure at the mischaracterisation of plaintiff lawyers by Mr Rich-Phillips earlier in this chamber. Plaintiff lawyers do important work in ensuring people have access to justice and making sure that their clients get the compensation they deserve. I do not think they should be besmirched in this place for doing their job and carrying out an important function of our justice system. The plaintiff lawyers out there and the barristers that work in this jurisdiction work very hard to get a fair outcome for their clients, and that is why we set up this WorkCover system.

The motion before the house moved by Mr Davis is quite ironic, especially because it comes from an approach from the state opposition that they are in fact concerned about workers rights and workers entitlements to compensation. When the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council was elected to Parliament in the mid-1990s they abolished common-law rights for workers in our state, so workers had no avenue to broad compensation for pain and suffering and economic loss. I think it was a Labor government, the Bracks government, which reintroduced those rights for injured workers. I do not want to digress too far into past history, but I think it is important to state that Victorians know and Victorian workers understand which party will fight for their rights in the workplace. It is Labor, because we have got a proven track record and we are continuing to invest in and build upon what we built initially.

Our government's record in this place can be put into a number of sections that I want to talk about, but I think it is about making sure we have a progressive agenda—an agenda which means that workers have the most support they can get. Provisional payments have been touched upon. I think that is a legacy-making reform because it builds upon the reforms we have done with the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. It is about injured workers having access to mental health and like expenses as soon as possible—not after waiting for their claim to be processed, which could take up to 38 days. The moment they have suffered an injury, the moment they put in their claim, they can get the treatment they need, because obviously we know that early treatment is the best way to ensure workers have a successful return to work—because that is what we want. The majority of workers do return to work within, say, 30 days, 90 days, 120 days. If you look at all the statistics, the broad majority of workers have a successful return to work in that time frame—but it is important that they get the medical care they need.

Obviously in terms of costs in relation to the WorkCover system, yes, there has been an increase in costs. Another topic that the opposition like to bandy around, as if we do not recall the last time they were in government, is about transparency. Our government has always been transparent about the challenges the system faces. I think the Minister for Workplace Safety has done a fantastic job of explaining that. Maybe they could read some of her press releases in this regard and they will get a number of answers to the questions they are continually putting in this place about transparency. I recall the transparency of the previous government and their legacy in terms of the workplace act. They went for an expensive and time-consuming process of rewording the act instead of actually making any substantive improvements to it.

If you have got limited government resources, because we know how precious public funds are, instead of actually trying to make improvements like we are doing with provisional payments, instead of making legislative changes that introduced our WorkCover manslaughter laws which protect workers and ensure those employers that do the wrong thing are appropriately punished, they spent a

time-consuming exercise of rewording the accident and compensation act, which was called the Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act. They just renumbered the sections and paragraphs in the act instead of actually making substantive changes to it. I am not sure how that materially benefited the safety of workers in our state. Like I said, in talking about legal costs, as Mr Rich-Phillips tried to allude to—he was moving in the direction of legal fees—I wonder how much in legal fees was expended to renumber the act without making any substantive changes. If you are going to spend that money and go through that exercise, wouldn't you want to make improvements to make sure more workers have the support they need? But obviously that is the legacy of the previous coalition government in our state—so four years, wasted money, wasted time. All we are left with is just a reworded act with no actual improvements. Whereas, yes, we have spent more in this space. We are not hiding away from that.

As I said, the minister has been transparent and open about it. The claims are more complex. People have greater awareness of the mental health supports that workers need. Workers spend about a third of their time in their workplaces in their lifetimes, so you would understand that a lot of us spend a lot of time at work—a third of our lifetimes in the workplace—so it is just natural that there are going to be mental injuries suffered due to workplace stresses and strains. Obviously those supports are essential, and obviously that has led to an increased number of claims in this space in the WorkCover system and increased costs.

But I am proud to say that our WorkCover premiums are not the highest in the nation; they are actually in the middle band, at about 1.2 per cent approximately at this point in time. I think that is a good measure considering how expansive our system is and the comprehensive cover that we have. There is a pathway to common-law damages as well, which many states and jurisdictions do not provide a pathway to. I think that is an important pathway that workers get compensation and they can elect to go down that path. Obviously they still have the option of a no-fault benefits scheme—impairment benefits, the weekly payments, the medical and like expenses—but on a case-by-case analysis I think common-law benefits being an option for workers is good. Many workers say that their day in court is their closure, so if that is what they want and that is the avenue they want to pursue, they should have that avenue. As I said, when Mr Davis was in this chamber in the mid-1990s he voted to abolish that right. I think Victorian workers need to remember that. When the state opposition moves motions like this, understand the political overlay to them bringing them before the house. I do not accept the premise of this motion that the government is not being transparent, it is not being open. I think our government have always been open about the challenges the system faces, and we have taken a progressive approach to addressing those challenges one by one.

There is an Ombudsman's review which talks about the activities that agents have engaged in. We were shocked, and we had a review run by Peter Rozen QC, who conducted an examination into those issues. The investigation told us—as a plaintiff lawyer, I could see this; we were making submissions in this space—that unfortunately some agents were not doing the right thing by injured workers in complex cases, and 22 recommendations were handed down. Our government straightaway committed to supporting in full or in principle 19 of those 22, and we have gone about, one by one, implementing those changes. Those changes have had a transformative effect on injured workers and their families, because when someone is injured it is not just themselves who are injured but also their family, their friends and their workplace colleagues that are affected. The trauma continues, and we need to make sure that people with complex injuries are provided with the full support that the system was set up for.

Obviously we are making landmark reforms in terms of psychological injuries. We are making regulation changes under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004. Anyone that has worked not just as a plaintiff lawyer but as a union official—as I look around this room there are a lot of people that were union officials and health and safety representatives in their workplace: Mr Melhem, Ms Pulford and many others did this important work in managing union members and workers to navigate their way through the process and the system. I think occupational health and safety standards

which address psychological injuries, not just manual handling, are important. Like I said, in many ways they are revolutionary. They are transformative, and I look forward to their implementation.

As I have said, our government continues to build upon the frameworks we have in our state. One of the changes was the workplace manslaughter laws which came into effect in July 2020. There is obviously a lot more to do and a lot more challenges that we will face. The pandemic is not over. As people return to work we will see I guess an evolution of the way workplace injuries take place, and we will need to develop policies. But it is important that the agencies that are doing that work are well resourced and that we have a collaborative approach between employee and employer groups to make sure we get the best outcome for all Victorians. As I said, on this point I think Victorians know which party supports workplace safety—that is the Labor government.

**Ms WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (11:34): I am of course very proud to be a part of the Andrews Labor government, which is protecting and supporting Victorian workers. We are a government that is committed to delivering key reforms to uphold workplace safety standards that ensure there is support for injured workers.

Workplace safety is an issue that I hold dear to my heart. In my professional life I have worked in the workplace health and safety arena for the then-named Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union, who now make up the United Workers Union, as well as in one of my earlier jobs in workplace health and safety in a call centre for the state government where I took calls each day from injured workers in the workplace—those that had fears about potential injuries and also, sadly, those that were right there on site having just injured themselves. I still carry the stories I heard in this role with me today, and that is why this issue is still one that hits so very close to home. Indeed, that is before I even talk about how my own family has been impacted by workplace safety inadequacies.

I am of course part of a team, and only Labor governments actually back in WorkSafe. When those opposite were last in government over those four long, dark years the coalition oversaw a budget that ripped \$641 million of WorkSafe funds from the scheme, and there was nothing to show for that, certainly not for major projects or infrastructure—\$641 million that did not go into more WorkSafe inspectors, did not go into improving outcomes for injured workers and certainly did not go into measures that prevent workers from being injured in the very first place. Now all of a sudden they pretend to care about the WorkCover scheme. I acknowledge and thank the many workplace health and safety representatives for their vital work on the ground and their steadfast commitment to safety, particularly through the most difficult times with the COVID-19 pandemic. I am just going to also take a moment to acknowledge and thank the workplace health and safety inspectors, who have done a truly marvellous job in going all over this state protecting and defending workplace safety.

Safety at work is one of the most important things. It is far more important than a scoring board for cheap points. If those opposite really cared about workplace safety, then they would have done something about it when they were last in government. It is this government, the Andrews Labor government, that has made the real legislative changes to make workplaces safer and deliver for all Victorian workers. I am extraordinarily proud of the workplace manslaughter laws that this government enacted on 1 July 2020. The creation of this new offence will help prevent workplace deaths by providing a strong deterrent for workplaces that might seek to breach health and safety obligations. Employers owe duties under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 to provide a safe and healthy workplace. If an employer breaches their duties under the Occupational Health and Safety Act and negligently causes the death of a worker or a member of the public as a result, then they could potentially face significant fines and jail time under our new workplace manslaughter laws. If convicted of workplace manslaughter, body corporates face fines of \$16.522 million, while individuals face up to 25 years in jail. No person deserves to die at work. Nothing is more important than every worker coming home safely every day, and that is exactly what this reform ensured.

In fact, as I take a moment to reflect on the importance of workplace safety, can I acknowledge Acting President Melhem, who joined me for International Workers Memorial Day, a very significant day in

our community where we stop, acknowledge and for a moment reaffirm our commitment to making sure that every Victorian workplace is safe each and every day. It is something deeply felt, and I just need to acknowledge that very special day on our calendar that we almost wish did not exist.

But as I go on to talk about other things, I would like to talk about the comprehensive action plan to ensure workers are protected from exposure to crystalline silica and provide support to those affected. There is a silica action plan, and it includes a specialist WorkSafe team focused on silica-related hazards, a statewide ban on uncontrolled dry cutting of this engineered stone, a tough new compliance code for businesses, free health screening for Victoria's 1400 stonemasons, an Australian-first licensing scheme for businesses working with engineered stone, treatment and support for workers affected by silica and an awareness campaign to highlight the risks of working with engineered stone.

WorkSafe has a range of initiatives in place to support workers and employees to address the work-related factors that impact on the mental health of Victorian workers. These include WorkSafe's \$50 million five-year WorkWell program to promote mental health and prevent mental injury in Victoria's workplaces. There are over 500 participating organisations that partner with the WorkWell Mental Health Improvement Fund and Learning Networks program and over 31 000 direct participants and links to more than 200 000 Victorian workers. Reforms like our provisional payments legislation, which passed through Parliament last February thanks to this Labor government, mean that workers can start receiving the support they need for mental injuries without having to wait up to 38 days for their compensation claim to be determined. Indeed I do recall making a contribution on that landmark reform, which included a pilot program for emergency workers and volunteers to access payments for medical and like expenses from the moment they lodge a compensation claim for a 13-week period, regardless of whether their claim is ultimately accepted. They do not have to wait to get the help that they so vitally need. These reforms mean that workers will be able to receive the urgent medical treatment for their mental health sooner and recognise the importance of early intervention in better health outcomes and enabling return to work. We know that these reforms will make a real difference to Victorian workers who need urgent care and will help those workers recover and return to work sooner.

Throughout our time in office the Andrews Labor government has demonstrated time and time again that we are a government committed to delivering on our promises and delivering important reforms to keep Victorians safe. In saying all of that, we know that there are challenges facing the WorkCover scheme at the moment. We have been up front about it. The impacts of COVID-19 and the resulting significant increases in the number, complexity and costs of claims have placed pressure on the scheme. We also know that external factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic and other external factors, have had a significant impact on WorkSafe's sources of revenue—premium payments and investment returns. That is why the government has invested in the scheme, including measures to better support people returning to work, a focus on injury prevention and tailoring claims handling. We are working together to confront these issues and have a comprehensive reform agenda to address complex claims.

The Andrews Labor government has made significant reforms to ensure the safety of workers in this state. There is nothing more important than workers coming home safe each and every day. Workers need a government that works consistently and constantly to achieve this, and that is exactly what they have. Further—and I have only got a few more remarks on this, but I could probably go on for just about forever really—the government is already undertaking significant reform to improve the WorkCover scheme and workers' mental health, giving workers the confidence to seek support if they are struggling and helping to ease pressures on the scheme, but we also know that there is more work to be done with these challenges. We have been truly up front about that. But we also call this for exactly what it is: a political pointscore exercise. For them, the opposition, they really do not care about what this is. It is just politics, and while they are busy playing politics with workers' safety, we are each and every day getting on with the job. We are delivering the important reforms that keep Victorian workers safe and support them if they are injured at work.

I want to finish up my remarks by again reaffirming my thanks to health and safety representatives right across our state in workplaces big and small, complex and less complex, and thank them for stepping up for the health and safety of their fellow workers, including in some really, really challenging circumstances. Thank you to health and safety reps. I was one for a very, very long time and I took it upon myself to learn as much as I could about making our workplaces safe each and every day for workers, and I still, with great pride and deep commitment to them, thank them for what they do. I just thank them, and I will also say thank you to the unions that support health and safety reps. I am just going to take a moment to acknowledge them. That was also one of my gigs back in the day. Health and safety people in unions are extraordinary people, and they too stand up each and every day for workers, they too make sure that their members come home safely.

**Mr MELHEM** (Western Metropolitan) (11:44): I will be very brief—only a couple of minutes—as I am mindful that we are going to move to the next motion, but I am just going to make a few points. We have got an opposition, the Liberal Party and National Party, coming here with another motion by Mr Davis about getting more paperwork and more stuff but really trying to paint a picture that they do care about workers and injured workers and what really happens with WorkSafe Victoria. But let me make a number of points. When they were in government they took \$641 million out of WorkSafe. We put in \$300 million not long ago to make sure WorkSafe continues to operate. Mr Davis yesterday in question time asked a question, basically criticising the government, ‘Why haven’t you put the premium up? Why haven’t you done that?’. And Mr Rich-Phillips, I think, made reference to the possibility of that, but he was a bit more responsible than Mr Davis was yesterday. Mr Davis was a bit disgusted that we have not put the premium up. Well, the reason we have not put the premium up is that we want to look after injured workers, we want to make sure they are taken care of, and as well we want to look after businesses, particularly small businesses. We do not want to just slug them with an increased premium. We are about balance, and we give no apology that mental health workers and people with mental illness have now got access to workers compensation. Yes, that is one of the reasons the funding is going up.

Mr Rich-Phillips talked about the public sector and how COVID has increased some of the claims et cetera. We are facing COVID situations that have put a lot of strain on the investment and payment of WorkSafe. Yes, they are under strain. But we had a choice: do we support WorkSafe when it needs support? We did that by injecting \$300 million. Do we support small businesses by not putting up the premium? Yes, we did. Do we continue to look after injured workers? We did, and we will continue to do that. That is why we give no apology about supporting WorkSafe. But what we will not do is what the Liberal-National governments will do. Let us not forget what Jeff Kennett did in the 1990s when these people were in charge. They ripped the heart out of WorkSafe, and basically they ripped all the benefits from injured workers. Really, what did they do? They drove injured workers to the wall. We will not do that. We will support injured workers day in and day out, and we will support small businesses as well. We think we have got the balance right, and we will continue to do that to continue to support all these people. That is why I think this motion is nothing but a witch-hunt—nothing but a political stunt—again by Mr Davis and his colleagues.

**Motion agreed to.**

### Motions

#### PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA WORKPLACE SAFETY

**Ms MAXWELL** (Northern Victoria) (11:48): I rise to speak on my motion 729, and I move:

That this house:

- (1) acknowledges the unacceptable history of bullying and harassment in workplaces;
- (2) understands the important role the Victorian Parliament can play as an exemplar of best practice in the prevention and response to bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault in workplaces;

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- (3) recognises that the Victorian Parliament is a workplace for members of Parliament, electorate officers, parliamentary advisers, ministerial staff, parliamentary officers and precinct employees and contractors;
- (4) directs the Presiding Officers to jointly write to the Victorian equal opportunity and human rights commissioner requesting that the commission inquire into and report to the Presiding Officers on:
  - (a) the adequacy of existing laws, policies, structures and complaint mechanisms relating to bullying and harassment in the Victorian Parliament;
  - (b) improvements that may be made to existing laws, policies, structures and complaint mechanisms relating to bullying and harassment in the Victorian Parliament;
  - (c) whether an independent complaints body should be established to provide a mechanism to manage and respond to complaints about bullying and harassment within the Victorian Parliament, in the context of a confidential and supportive environment;
- (5) requires the commissioner to commence such an inquiry by consulting with the following employers affected by these terms of reference:
  - (a) Presiding Officers;
  - (b) Clerk of the Legislative Assembly;
  - (c) Clerk of the Legislative Council;
  - (d) Secretary of the Department of Parliamentary Services;
  - (e) Parliamentary Budget Officer;
  - (f) executive government;
  - (g) any other relevant employers identified by the commissioner;
- (6) requires the Presiding Officers to table the report in both houses of Parliament;  
and requests the agreement of the Legislative Assembly to the terms of this resolution.

Hopefully I can get through this prior to question time. As a place of high importance, as a place of high office, parliaments are expected to be a place of best practice and high standards. Unfortunately the reality is that sometimes it is quite the opposite, reflected in the poor public perception of politicians. This extends to a perception, and sometimes the sad reality, of bullying and harassment being prevalent within the parliamentary workplace. By and large, people conduct themselves respectfully within the context of the robust and diverse exchange of ideas that is our vibrant democracy, and that is integral to parliamentary and political processes. We know our positions are a great privilege and honour, so many of us in the parliamentary workplace are heavily invested in serving our communities as part of our role, whatever that is, within this Parliament.

The parliamentary workplace is certainly unique, with a diversity of employment settings, including members, electorate and parliamentary staff, ministerial staff, parliamentary officers, precinct employees and contractors. These roles are covered by multiple working arrangements and enterprise agreements, and there is a complex intersection of roles and power. It is also a workplace that can include a lot of pressure, long hours and complex issues, interactions and negotiations. At a very basic level, safe and respectful workplaces help attract and retain the best people, drive performance and manage reputational and legal risk. This is essential to public confidence.

At its most serious level we need to ensure that people within our workplaces are safe and that when that safety is breached there are appropriate mechanisms for support. The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission is an established and funded independent agency that conducts reviews and investigations into a range of settings. VEOHRC could be well positioned to conduct an independent review of matters relating to bullying and harassment within the parliamentary workplace and recommend improvements. A review of the parliamentary workplace should be conducted with the bipartisan support of the government, the opposition and the crossbench in a spirit that takes the important opportunity to review and improve our workplace rather than focusing on individual allegations. In making this point I am not saying that those individual allegations are not important, but there does not seem to be a structure in place for these to be managed.

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It is in the spirit of this bipartisan support that this motion directs the Presiding Officers to jointly write to the Victorian equal opportunity and human rights commissioner to request that the commission inquire into and report on the adequacy of existing laws, policies, structures and complaint mechanisms relating to bullying and harassment in the Victorian Parliament. The commission would also be asked to report on any improvements that may be made and whether an independent complaints body should be established to provide a mechanism to manage and respond to complaints about bullying and harassment.

A similar review was conducted with respect to the federal parliamentary workplace, led by the Australian Human Rights Commission, and another on the South Australian parliamentary workplace. The South Australian review found that complaint-handling procedures in the parliamentary workplace were almost non-existent and inconsistent with modern workplace standards. We are probably dreaming to think that our situation is really dissimilar. The South Australian report noted:

... that political institutions are far from immune from unacceptable, unlawful behaviours—

but are—

... the places that can and should lead change ...

The same was said of the federal review, with the covering page of the Jenkins report containing a quote from one of the contributors:

This is Parliament. It should set the standard for workplace culture, not the floor of what culture should be.

The federal independent review into commonwealth parliament workplaces was initiated in 2021 after very serious public allegations of sexual assault but also in the context of a broad shift in our community expectations around equality, safety and respect. Engagement in the federal review was very encouraging and demonstrated that people very clearly wanted to share their views. The review survey was responded to by almost a quarter of people working in commonwealth parliamentary workplaces, and the final report provided a pathway through a proposed framework for action, including 28 recommendations.

When our now Prime Minister spoke on the report in February this year, Anthony Albanese said:

No-one deserves to feel unsafe or disrespected in any workplace, let alone our national parliament.

He said:

... we cannot ask the people we represent to make change without also making real and lasting change in this very building ...

and that they needed to be:

... the example ... that the ... parliament ought to be.

That should ring as true for our Victorian Parliament as it does for our federal one. We should not balk at doing this, and I would hope that, rather than this being used for political points or punches, it is used as an opportunity to initiate some protections for those who work here now and into the future. Nobody is perfect, and this process may require us all to consider carefully how we act and react in different circumstances and what we can do better. When it comes to bullying and harassment, this can be only a good thing.

This motion requires passage through the Legislative Council as part of the non-government business program and then support from the Legislative Assembly before the Presiding Officers write to the commissioner to initiate this review and report back to the Parliament. I hope the support of this chamber will commence this process and that the agreement of the Legislative Assembly will then follow. Our country is going through a time of reckoning in how we respond to bullying and harassment. We cannot make improvements if we do not shine the light. I hope this provides an opportunity to reset, to review in a safe, trauma-informed way what is in place now and what is missing

and to determine what we can do to make parliamentary workplaces safe for everyone. I thank the house.

**Ms TAYLOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:55): I think it is very important to acknowledge first and foremost that our Andrews Labor government takes bullying, harassment and the treatment of women very seriously. Neither bullying nor harassment are acceptable, and they have no place in any workplace. Let me be very, very clear about that. We know that Victorian employers face serious consequences under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 if they fail to provide a safe working environment. We are also undertaking a massive program of reform in the workplace safety portfolio to better prevent gendered violence and sexual harassment in the workplace. Last year the Minister for Workplace Safety, along with the Acting Premier and the Minister for Women, announced that the Victorian government is developing a workplace sexual harassment reform agenda in Victoria which aims to put an end to sexual harassment in Victorian workplaces.

I want to unpack certain elements of this motion, and I thank Ms Maxwell for bringing it to the chamber. The second point goes to the issue of understanding:

... the important role the Victorian Parliament can play as an exemplar of best practice in the prevention and response to bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault in workplaces ...

To address that point, outdated notions of Parliament and MPs being exempt from basic standards which are expected in every other workplace definitively belong in the past. The public is entitled to expect the highest standards from their elected representatives; that goes without saying. There are basic standards of decency, respect and safety that the public now expect parliamentarians to adhere to. The Presiding Officers are to be commended for their leadership, and I will speak further to that point shortly. We can say that they are very much leading the way and taking definitive action in this space, because obviously we are in a contemporary society where attitudes about the behaviour and demeanour of everyone—and we are not excluded from that domain—mean that there are certain standards that simply have to be met, and it is in the best interests of all of us to reflect the broader community. Also for young children, teenagers and the like who are looking to the future and thinking about what employment they will undertake, we want to give them confidence that this is a good workplace—just the same as any other workplace—where their rights are respected by everyone, regardless of gender or otherwise.

A further point that I will speak to is with regard to the third element of this motion, which:

recognises that the Victorian Parliament is a workplace for members of Parliament—

it is indeed a workplace—

electorate officers, parliamentary advisers, ministerial staff, parliamentary officers and precinct employees and contractors ...

Yes, absolutely, it is a workplace. To speak to that particular point, staff working with MPs have every right to expect safe workplaces that are free of bullying and harassment, sexual assault and victimisation. I do not think there is anything particularly novel in that. I think that is basic and decent and should be required. When members of Parliament fail to meet those standards, there should be transparent and independent processes in place to address inappropriate behaviour.

Coming back to the point that I referred to a little earlier with regard to the Presiding Officers, I would like to commend the leadership of the Presiding Officers and the cross-party working group for developing and proposing an independent process to resolve complaints about inappropriate behaviour by members of Parliament. That is absolutely to be commended, and we can see that there are significant initiatives well underway.

**Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.**

**Questions without notice and ministers statements**

**DRUG HARM REDUCTION**

**Mr BARTON** (Eastern Metropolitan) (12:00): My question is for Minister Tierney, representing the Minister for Police. During the second-reading debate on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Decriminalisation of Possession and Use of Drugs of Dependence) Bill 2022 it was said that the government will convene an infringement trial working group to give advice to the Minister for Health and the Minister for Police on possible trial options. I have been led to believe that this working group has already been formed, so I ask: could the minister share with us the membership of that working group?

**Ms TIERNEY** (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (12:01): I thank the member for his question and his ongoing interest in this area. What I can confirm is that the working group has met and work is underway, just as the Attorney-General on 9 March indicated. The working group does have representatives from the Department of Justice and Community Safety, the Department of Health and Victoria Police. There are also justice partners, such as Victoria Legal Aid and the Victorian Drug Court. There are also representatives from health partners, representing people who have lived experience, and also Aboriginal health services, youth support agencies and the Pennington Institute. I am not in a position to disclose the individual names of the working group, but I would like to reassure you that they are senior members from their relevant organisations and experts in their respective fields. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank them for agreeing to be part of the working group. I look forward to following the progress of this group, and I am sure that if you want to follow that up even further the Minister for Police, the Minister for Health and the Attorney-General would be happy to take your questions.

**Mr BARTON** (Eastern Metropolitan) (12:02): Thank you, Minister. Has the government decided on the terms of reference for this working group, and if so, could you share them?

**Ms TIERNEY** (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (12:03): I thank the member for his supplementary. There are terms of reference. They cover primarily four areas of work. One is approaches to drug offending that divert adults, children and young people away from the criminal justice system and their current operation in Victoria. The second is around opportunities to improve cautioning and diversion programs in Victoria to better support the efforts to address low-level drug offending as a health issue as well as a justice issue. The third is options for using infringements as an additional enforcement tool for low-level drug offending in Victoria. The fourth is recommendations for steps in implementing advice should the working group's preferred options be accepted—for example, the timing and phasing of changes. But again, if you are wanting further information or indeed a copy of the terms of reference, I am sure that the Minister for Police, the Minister for Health and the Attorney-General would be willing to provide that.

**YOUTH JUSTICE STAFF SAFETY**

**Dr BACH** (Eastern Metropolitan) (12:04): My question is for the Minister for Workplace Safety. Minister, on 12 April my colleague the member for Ferntree Gully in the other place and shadow minister for workplace safety and I wrote to WorkSafe Victoria and the principal commissioner for children and young people regarding the ongoing violence occurring in Victoria's youth justice facilities, requesting that they consider conducting a joint inquiry. The commissioner responded two days later, on 14 April, and we subsequently had a meeting with her. To date the CEO of WorkSafe Victoria, to whom my correspondence was directed, has not responded. Will you intervene, Minister, and request that he responds to our communication regarding the very serious workplace issues occurring in these facilities?

**Ms STITT** (Western Metropolitan—Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for Early Childhood) (12:05): I thank Dr Bach for his question regarding matters in relation to our corrections facilities and in particular youth justice facilities. Dr Bach would be aware that the portfolio minister, Minister

Hutchins in the other place, is deeply engaged over these issues in terms of the safety of both our youth in our youth justice facilities and the staff that work there. And can I take a moment just to acknowledge the difficult and challenging work that those workers in our youth justice facilities are doing and commend them for their efforts.

I am aware, Dr Bach, that there has been correspondence regarding these matters requesting that WorkSafe and the Commission for Children and Young People consider conducting an inquiry into Victoria's youth justice facilities. I note that WorkSafe has already contributed to previous inquiries into Victoria's youth justice facilities. The most recent, *Inquiry into Youth Justice Centres in Victoria*, was tabled in Parliament on 6 March 2018 and highlighted the workplace changes needed to provide a safe workplace for employees and detainees, and that work has been ongoing. WorkSafe certainly supports the recommendations set out in the inquiry and notes the development of a new adult corrections facility due in 2022 and new youth justice facilities due in approximately 2023. And as you would be aware, both of those facilities will be run by the Department of Justice and Community Safety.

As to the specifics of whether or not the CEO of WorkSafe or indeed the commissioner for children and young people have responded to your correspondence, that is not a matter that I am advised on. I have got no issue with taking that part of your question on notice, but I do note that there has been significant work underway by the government and significant work, which I have already detailed in the house previously, by WorkSafe to support these issues.

**Dr BACH** (Eastern Metropolitan) (12:07): I thank the minister for her response and note of course that she is correct that WorkSafe has engaged in previous inquiries. However, since then, workers themselves report that the environment at our two youth justice facilities has become increasingly 'toxic'—the word they use. Others have reported that they fear for their lives at work. For example, just in April at Malmsbury two senior managers were very seriously assaulted. One may never work again. Minister, will you support an inquiry, as I have called for, into the full state of affairs in the dangerous workplace that youth justice workers in Victoria are currently subjected to?

**Ms STITT** (Western Metropolitan—Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for Early Childhood) (12:08): I thank Dr Bach for his supplementary, which does draw a pretty long bow from his substantive question, and I would just point out that I am not the portfolio minister responsible for youth justice. That matter is far better directed to my colleague Minister Hutchins in the other place. I have also indicated in some detail in the house—directly to you, Dr Bach, I believe—in relation to the significant work that is underway in terms of WorkSafe's role as the independent safety regulator, that I do not direct their enforcement and compliance activities. It would be completely inappropriate for me to do so, and I do not see that the example that you are outlining in the house today is any different to that.

#### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: EXTRACTIVES INDUSTRY

**Ms PULFORD** (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Resources) (12:09): It is my pleasure to update the house on how the government is supporting the extractives industry to supply Victorian businesses and families with the affordable sand, gravel and hard rock that are needed for construction. Victoria's population is set to reach 10 million by 2050, requiring 1.6 million new homes, an unprecedented amount of new infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, and investment in a well-connected transport network.

Quarry operators, large and small, play an absolutely vital role in ensuring affordable and accessible material is available close to where it is needed. The best lever government has to address the rising cost of building materials is to support the expansion of supply, and I am proud to inform the house that the Andrews Labor government is committed to funding and delivering regulatory reform for a responsible industry that will keep the cost of construction down for Victorians. This includes

\$2 million in the recent state budget that will go towards the reform of regulation and approvals processes for minerals resources.

Excitedly, some reform is already underway. The earth resources regulator from my department is one of the first regulators in the state to have participated in the Better Approvals for Regulators program. The program will develop immediate work plan assessment improvements for quarry operators. The program aims to create a more efficient regulatory process and improve transparency for industry and community alike. This will get quarry materials to market in a more efficient manner while maintaining stringent environmental and safety standards. I have recently met with key representatives from the Cement, Concrete and Aggregates Australia group to discuss the outcomes of the program and the important role of the extractives sector in keeping a growing Victoria affordable for the community—

**Mr Ondarchie** interjected.

**Ms PULFORD:** something Mr Ondarchie clearly has a problem with. I would like to take this opportunity to once again thank all our quarry operators for their continued support of Victoria's construction industry and my department and regulator for overseeing the safe extraction of Victorian materials— *(Time expired)*

### COVID-19

**Mr QUILTY** (Northern Victoria) (12:11): My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Health. Minister, what is this government waiting for before it ends the pandemic declaration? The continued use of emergency powers shows that this government does not understand what an emergency is. It shows once again that government cannot be trusted with these powers and that reform of emergency powers is essential to protect Victorians against their government. Once a government has power it holds onto it as long as it can. The current use of emergency powers is having a marginal effect at best, and it has been that way for months. We have zero effective oversight of the use and abuse of the powers; the Independent Pandemic Management Advisory Committee is still asleep at the wheel. There is no reason the government could not put rules before the Parliament and have us vote on them instead of relying on the emergency powers. It is time to end the pandemic declaration and go back to government as normal.

**Ms TIERNEY** (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (12:12): I thank the member for the question. Whilst it would be, I think, very tempting to deal with some of those very wild allegations in the lead-up to his question, I will resist on this occasion and will refer this question to the Minister for Health.

**Mr QUILTY** (Northern Victoria) (12:12): Almost all Victorians have been vaccinated, yet the government insists that we are still in a COVID emergency. Clearly the vaccine is not as effective as we had hoped. With an effective vaccine a 95 per cent vaccination rate would have ended the emergency, but if the vaccination is not very effective then it destroys the justification for continuing to persecute the small unvaccinated minority. The current primary use of the emergency powers is to ban unvaccinated Victorians from working. At this point the only effect of these powers is to punish people out of spite. The health advice held up as Holy Scripture to justify all the emergency measures for the last two years now says there is no longer a justification—

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Order! I cannot hear the member's question. Can we have some quiet, please.

**Mr QUILTY:** The health advice held up as Holy Scripture to justify the emergency measures over the last two years now says there is no longer a justification for these work mandates. Mandates should not be continued for the sake of spite, and they should not be allowed to become permanent. Minister, tell us when you will end the COVID vaccine work mandates.

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** I interrupted his question to try and quieten people down. I did not notice the clock run out, so Mr Quilty did ask his question.

**Ms Tierney:** Can I have the question again then?

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Yes. Can we have the question without assistance so that we can all hear it, please.

*Members interjecting.*

**Ms Pulford:** On a point of order, Deputy President, can we have some consistency around interjections? I had constant interjection from Mr Ondarchie and other members during my ministers statement, so if Mr Quilty gets another go, I would not mind one either.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** I call Mr Quilty to rephrase his question.

*Members interjecting.*

**Mr QUILTY:** Perhaps if people listened, they would hear the question. Minister, tell us when you will end the COVID vaccine work mandates.

**Ms Shing:** On a point of order, Deputy President, you were asked through Minister Pulford to actually rule on a point of order that she has raised. You have not done so, and I would ask that perhaps you would turn your attention to that before Mr Quilty gets back to his question.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** If we could have quiet for everybody's contribution, it would help and we will have consistency. I will continue to call people to account. It was extremely loud during Mr Quilty's question. I could hear Minister Pulford; I could not hear Mr Quilty. We will seek to have consistency by asking everyone to be heard in silence. I call Mr Quilty to just ask the question part of his question, please.

**Mr QUILTY:** Minister, tell us when you will end the COVID vaccine work mandates.

**Mr Gepp:** On a point of order, Deputy President, I thought a supplementary question was supposed to be a bit different from the substantive question, but I am not seeing any difference between the initial question that Mr Quilty asked and his supplementary.

**Mr QUILTY:** On the point of order, Deputy President, perhaps if Mr Gepp listened he would be able to hear the difference between them. Apparently not.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** The questions have to be related, and they do seem to be related.

**Ms TIERNEY** (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (12:17): They are related—not just once, not just twice but triple the wild allegation doses before you actually get to a question. But given that you finally did get to a question, the answer is that I will refer it to the Minister for Health.

#### WORKSAFE VICTORIA

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:17): My question is for the Minister for Workplace Safety. Minister, isn't it a fact—

*Members interjecting.*

**Ms Stitt:** On a point of order, Deputy President, I thought we just had a ruling on being able to hear what is going on, and I cannot hear Mr Davis's question that is directed to me.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** I was just about to actually call that to account, because I was having trouble hearing Mr Davis as well. I ask for silence for the questions.

**Mr DAVIS:** My question is to the Minister for Workplace Safety. Minister, isn't it a fact that WorkSafe has proposed to increase employer WorkSafe premiums from 1.272 per cent to 1.8 per cent this year, a 42 per cent increase, and had also proposed to slug businesses further by increasing the employer premium cap from 30 per cent to 70 per cent?

**Ms STITT** (Western Metropolitan—Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for Early Childhood) (12:18): Thank you, Mr Davis, for that question. I completely reject your attempts to misrepresent what is occurring here. As you very well know, premium decisions are made by government each year, and as I explained at some length in the house yesterday, they are made taking a range of factors into consideration, not least of which are the economic circumstances in which those decisions are made. It was very important from the government's point of view to ensure that businesses could recover from the impacts of the pandemic and get back to what they do best, and that is employing Victorians and having thriving businesses in our communities, and at the same time keeping premiums competitively low. You would be aware, Mr Davis, if you took the time to look at any of the facts in relation to these matters, that Victorian businesses enjoy the second-lowest WorkSafe premium rates in the country. But, as well as that, it is incredibly important that the scheme is financially sustainable in the interests of injured workers and in the interests of preventing workers from being injured in the first place. You might pretend that you care about these things, but nothing could be further from the truth. When you were in government, in the short time that you were in government, you ripped \$650 million out of the scheme.

**Mr Davis:** On a point of order, Deputy President, my question was highly specific about what WorkSafe had proposed. It was not a general question; it was a very specific question. I have asked the minister to confirm that. She can make a contextual statement—

**Ms Shing:** On the point of order, Deputy President, how many times does Mr Davis have to be told that the standing orders do not permit a minister to be directed as to how to answer a question?

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Mr Davis, as you know, I cannot direct the minister. She has 1 minute and 26 seconds left, and perhaps she will answer your question in that time.

**Ms STITT:** In the context of Mr Davis's question it is important to point out that premiums are a decision for government each year, and that is why I am going to those issues about what considerations occur when government is making a decision about whether premiums increase or not each year. So I stand by my original answer to Mr Davis's question.

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:21): The minister has not answered the question directly. It was a question about what was proposed—

**Ms Stitt:** On a point of order, Deputy President, Mr Davis thinks he is on a roll in this place this week with getting his questions reinstated by inferring that they have not been answered, but I am correcting the premise of his question and rejecting the premise of how he is trying to frame his question.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** It is not a point of order.

**Mr DAVIS:** As I stated, the minister has not actually answered the question that I asked, which was about what WorkSafe had proposed. I therefore ask very simply: given that you have rejected what WorkSafe has proposed—that is a government policy decision, I understand that completely—isn't it a fact that the Andrews Labor government has shelved the proposal until after the state election, intending to introduce it if re-elected?

**Ms STITT** (Western Metropolitan—Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for Early Childhood) (12:22): And here we have it. There it is, the scare campaign. I reject that completely. I am absolutely steadfastly committed to making decisions about the financial sustainability of the WorkSafe fund, because I care about injured workers in this state. You can sit there and pretend that this is all some

big conspiracy, but it is very simple: our government stand by our record of supporting injured workers, and we will continue to do so.

#### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: TAFE GIPPSLAND

**Ms TIERNEY** (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (12:23): I would like to highlight another outstanding development in the support of TAFE students and regional communities that occurred last week at TAFE Gippsland, Lakes Entrance. This campus is home to a state-of-the-art marine research and education centre. It focuses on providing training and assessment services for commercial maritime and recreational boating and is one of only two facilities in Australia licensed to provide industry-specific training. It attracts students from all across the country.

Last week Minister Horne launched the 12-metre catamaran *Bar-ba-ka*, which means ‘porpoise’ in the local Indigenous language. This is another fantastic example of delivering fit-for-purpose equipment to ensure our TAFE students learn the right skills now and into the future. Thanks to funding provided through the Regional and Specialist Training Fund, TAFE Gippsland has purchased not only a modern fit-for-purpose vessel but additional equipment that will enable training not just in maritime qualifications but in laboratory skill qualifications and training in STEM and conservation.

The importance of strong maritime training in this region cannot be overstated. TAFE Gippsland is the sole provider of maritime training delivery in eastern Victoria, and maritime qualifications deliver employment outcomes for regional employers in emergency services, public safety, oil and gas, commercial fishing, tourism and new and emerging energy, and meet the needs of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, the water police and the EPA. I am proud that the Labor government has further strengthened the capacity of TAFE Gippsland to meet the needs of its region.

#### BROADMEADOWS TRAIN STATION

**Ms PATTEN** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:24): My question is for the Minister for Suburban Development, Minister Leane, and it relates to Broadmeadows. Broadmeadows train station is rated 245th out of 249. It is dark, it is dangerous, it is covered with graffiti and it is really symptomatic of the whole of the precinct of Broadmeadows. We have got the shopping centre and we have got the train station, and it is in desperate need of development. I was at a terrific volunteer event out there on the weekend, and volunteers do not want to come to events in the evening because the precinct is dark and it is not connected to the train station. While I understand you are not the minister for train stations, I am wondering if you can give me any indication of whether there are any plans for suburban development for the Broadmeadows central district.

**Mr LEANE** (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (12:26): I will get in first on the Fat Controller interjections. I beat you all to it. Ms Patten, you are correct in saying that I am not the minister for that particular infrastructure, but in saying that—

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Can we hear the minister’s answer, please.

**Mr LEANE:** I am doing my best. In saying that, we have had a program as far as a revitalisation board in Broadmeadows goes. I have been really lucky to see some of the outcomes of that particular board. I was really proud of that board recently when they allocated close to \$900 000 to Brite. It is a group that employs a lot of people with disabilities. Part of Brite has a nursery, which that board, with the leadership of Frank McGuire, allocated, like I said, close to a million dollars to, which means they can employ about 14 more people with disabilities. There are a number of other activities, particularly around some of the public housing. There is a project to beautify the central part of it—a garden with fruit, linked with a social enterprise. I have got to say that the Broadmeadows train station has been

something that the board has brought up, so I think you are not out of whack with a lot of other people around that particular project.

I am happy to see if I can get any further information given that it does not necessarily fall in this role. But I really appreciate the question from you as I think this might be the first question I have ever had as the Minister for Suburban Development; I could be corrected if I am wrong. I think suburban development does some fantastic work in supporting good people that are doing a lot of good work in our community, so thank you.

**Ms PATTEN** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:28): Thank you, Minister. I am pleased to offer that inaugural question to you. Broadmeadows missed out on the Big Build as well, so our social housing and public housing out there is just in desperate need, but again I know you are not the minister for that. By way of supplementary, could I ask that you advocate on behalf of Broadmeadows, as part of that suburban redevelopment, for the train station to be upgraded? From what I heard on the weekend they have been told it will be upgraded in 2052, so could I ask you to advocate for an earlier start date?

**Mr LEANE** (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (12:29): Thank you, Ms Patten. As I said—and I appreciate your advocacy for me to put my advocacy towards that particular project—it is not out of step with what that revitalisation board has asked me to do, so I am happy to do that. I am not too sure about that—was it 2052?

**Dr Cumming:** 25 would be nice.

**Mr LEANE:** I am not too sure about that; maybe 2025 would be nice. But I am happy to get my head more around that particular process and get you any details. Like I said, I am really proud that we have a revitalisation board, and I can tell you the member for Broadmeadows has been very, very passionate in advocating for investment in Broadmeadows.

### WORKSAFE VICTORIA

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:30): My question is again to the Minister for Workplace Safety. Minister, the minutes of the 23 February 2021 meeting of the board of WorkSafe show:

The Minister for Workplace Safety, (the) Honourable Ingrid Stitt and the Minister's Chief of Staff, Enrico Burgio attended (Board) Quiet Time for a portion of the session.

Minister, you have repeatedly claimed WorkSafe to be an independent agency where intervention on your part would be inappropriate. In this circumstance I ask: what was discussed in the quiet time?

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Order! I call Minister Stitt, without any assistance, please.

**Mr Leane** interjected.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Minister Leane, I have asked for quiet for Minister Stitt's answer. Can we have Minister Stitt without any assistance, please.

**Ms STITT** (Western Metropolitan—Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for Early Childhood) (12:31): Thank you, Mr Davis, for that question. You are quoting from what you purport to say are the minutes of a WorkSafe board meeting. I have not seen those minutes. I am not familiar with the term 'quiet time', so I cannot enlighten you in respect to the terminology used in those purported minutes that you are quoting from. But what I can say is that I have a constructive relationship with the senior management and the board of WorkSafe, as you would expect me to have. There have been a number of times since I was sworn in as the Minister for Workplace Safety where I have met with the board to discuss various issues, usually issues that are absolutely focused on some of the challenges facing modern workplaces when it comes to prevention of injury and when it comes to the increase

and the prevalence of mental injury in Victorian workplaces and the need to make sure that the WorkSafe authority have got a very responsive and sophisticated approach to managing complex claims.

You would be aware that there has been a lot of reform going on by the Andrews Labor government in the workplace safety portfolio, including the government's response to the Rozen review, which was an independent review into how complex claims are managed—and that was obviously the subject of some discussion between me, my office and WorkSafe, including the board—and also issues relating to the government's priorities and expectations of WorkSafe when it comes to what they ought to be focusing on. I do not make any apology whatsoever for regularly—

**Mr Davis:** On a point of order, Deputy President, again this is a highly specific question. It is a specific day, it is a specific meeting and it is a specific point in the minutes that it recorded. I have asked the minister what was discussed on that day, 23 February, during that period.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Mr Davis, as you know, I cannot direct the minister to answer. That is not a point of order.

**Ms Shing:** On the point of order, Deputy President, again, if Mr Davis had listened to the very first opening sentences of the minister's response, he would have actually noted that in fact the question was directly addressed. The minister is well within her rights within the terms available to expand upon her answer in the course of the time that is available to her.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Ms Shing, that is not a point of order.

**Ms Shing:** It was further to the point of order, Deputy President.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Mr Davis's point of order is not a point of order. I cannot direct the minister to respond in a manner that he wants. The minister has 45 seconds left in which to respond.

**Ms STITT:** Thank you, Deputy President. I was in the process of indicating that it will be my practice to regularly speak with both the board and the senior executives at WorkSafe to talk about the priorities of the Andrews Labor government when it comes to the safety of all Victorian workers.

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:35): Further, the minutes of the 25 August 2021 meeting of the board of WorkSafe refer to 'the weekly meetings that the (WorkSafe) Chair and CEO have with the Minister for Workplace Safety'. Minister, isn't it a fact that your claim that WorkSafe is not directed by you and is an entirely independent agency where intervention on your part would be inappropriate is only applied when it suits you and the reality is very different? You give them direction and you make it very clear to them what the government wants, isn't it a fact?

**Ms STITT** (Western Metropolitan—Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for Early Childhood) (12:36): Thank you, Mr Davis, for that question. I just find this staggering. Are you actually suggesting that ministers are not engaged with the agencies that they are responsible for in their portfolios? That would invite all sorts of criticism, I am sure, if it was a situation where we were not engaging regularly, professionally and constructively with the agencies and departments that we work with day in and day out. What I have said in this house consistently is that I do not direct the enforcement and compliance activities of the independent safety regulator. That is a very different question to whether or not I engage with the WorkSafe management and board about priorities in this portfolio. It is an absolute nonsense to suggest that that is not appropriate in every way.

#### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: KINDERGARTEN FUNDING

**Ms STITT** (Western Metropolitan—Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for Early Childhood) (12:37): I am very pleased to provide an update on this government's investment in kindergartens. It was my privilege to announce yesterday that six kinders will share in \$8.8 million worth of funding from the Andrews Labor government to create new kinder places across metropolitan—

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Can we please have some quiet so we can hear the ministers statement? I am really interested in kindergartens, as the minister well knows, so I call the minister to start from the top without any assistance from either side, please.

**Ms STITT:** Thank you, Deputy President, and I note your interest in this important issue. I am very pleased to provide another update on this government's investment in kindergartens. It was my privilege to announce yesterday that six kinders will share in \$8.8 million worth of funding from the Andrews Labor government to create new kinder places across metropolitan and regional Victoria.

These Building Blocks capacity-building grants will create more than 300 new funded three- and four-year-old places, helping more families access early childhood education. \$2.25 million will fund a new kindergarten as part of a brand new Alfredton community hub in Ballarat with three 33-capacity kindergarten rooms, and another \$2 million will be used to deliver a new early learning facility in Drouin. These new early learning centres will create 187 extra funded places for local families across two growing communities in regional Victoria. Additionally, kindergartens in Boronia, Traralgon, Dingley Village and Cheltenham will expand their existing centres to create more than 130 new places.

These new projects are just another example of our government's commitment to building and expanding kinders across our state, making it easier for families to access kinder programs. Overall it is estimated that we have funded more than 7500 new kinder places through the Building Blocks capacity grants since the program began. These reforms are the largest early childhood investment in our state's history, and of course these investments are also assisting our growing communities to keep up with demand for four-year-old kinder. By improving and expanding the learning environments of our kinders, I am proud that we are giving children right across the state the ability to enjoy learning in modern, fit-for-purpose environments, giving them the very best start in life.

#### ANIMAL WELFARE

**Mr MEDDICK** (Western Victoria) (12:40): My question is for the Minister for Agriculture in the other place. We are in our second week of winter and already temperatures have dropped to below 4 degrees in my electorate. Rain, hail and icy winds are expected for the next two months. Whilst for us this can be uncomfortable, for animals in paddocks without shelter it is life threatening. Industry figures estimate 10 to 15 million lambs die annually across the country during winter lambing, most within the first 48 hours of life, from starvation, neglect and exposure to the elements. Downed ewe mothers and their struggling bubs attract predator species, which leads to further death and destruction. Can the minister advise why lambs are born in the coldest months of the year?

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Can we have some quiet please? Can we please have some quiet? Minister Tierney, you are Western Victoria, aren't you? You might actually know about lambs. You might all learn a thing or two, so can we please have some quiet while we hear her answer.

**Ms TIERNEY** (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (12:41): I thank the member for his question. Indeed I have witnessed many, many new lambs in many paddocks across Western Victoria in the last couple of weeks. But I have got to say, Mr Meddick, this almost takes the cake in terms of a question in question time, and I am quite happy to refer this to the Minister for Agriculture for her to highlight what might be an answer to your question.

**Mr MEDDICK** (Western Victoria) (12:42): Thank you, Minister, for doing that. My supplementary is that existing provisions under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 make it an offence for an owner or person in charge of livestock to not provide proper and sufficient shelter, but codes of practice made under POCTA provide examples of shade that include trees and fence lines. With the winter death toll of lambs reaching 15 million per year, does the minister acknowledge that fence lines in paddocks do not provide sufficient warmth for newborn and often orphaned lambs?

**Ms TIERNEY** (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (12:42): Again I thank Mr Meddick for his question, and again I will refer this to the Minister for Agriculture as per the standing orders.

#### LATROBE VALLEY MINE REHABILITATION

**Ms BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:43): My question is to the Minister for Resources. Minister, you have flagged that it is your intention to increase Latrobe Valley mine rehabilitation bonds. Does the government have modelling on the impact of this decision on electricity prices for households and small businesses, and if so, what cost increases will be generated?

**Ms PULFORD** (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Resources) (12:43): Thank you, Ms Bath, for your question on rehabilitation bonds. The legislation requires that rehabilitation bonds are reviewed every five years, and it is that year in the five-year cycle, so that process is underway. The bonds assess the actual cost of rehabilitation of the mines, so the inputs into that are around the costs of rehabilitation rather than going to the question of the impacts on the companies that have those liabilities. But the companies that have those liabilities obviously well understand what they are and what their legal responsibilities are and have been, and their responsibilities in terms of safe, stable and sustainable rehabilitation have been a consistent legislative provision for a very long time.

**Ms BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:44): Thank you, Minister. I do not actually think that you addressed my question that related to electricity prices. Minister, will you—will the government—guarantee Victorians that increasing Latrobe Valley mine rehabilitation bonds will not lead to increased household and small business electricity prices?

**Ms PULFORD** (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Resources) (12:45): I thank Ms Bath for her supplementary question. Ms Bath is seeking to conflate two processes and two matters. Whilst there is some relationship between them, I think she is suggesting that A plus B equals C in a way that is just simply not true. As members will know—and it has been on the front page of every national newspaper in the country for some time and particularly so in recent weeks—there are a number of factors impacting the cost of living in this country and indeed in a whole lot of other places around the world, including energy costs, particularly when Mr Meddick in the warmest part of Western Victoria reckons it is only getting to 4. I could show him a thing or two about how cold it gets where I am. But I did answer your question in the substantive, which is the nature of the inputs that are considered as part of those reviews, which is a well-established process and is running its usual course.

#### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: LIVING LIBRARIES INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

**Mr LEANE** (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (12:46): Today I would like to update the house on the Living Libraries infrastructure fund. Applications for this funding program are now open for new libraries, library upgrades, expansions, redevelopments and mobile libraries to service remote communities. One of the many great things about this fund—just one of the many great things—is that small rural councils are not required to provide matching funding in order to apply, which is a very good thing.

Last week I was at two brand new libraries, at Rainbow and Jeparit—beautiful towns, great communities. This program helped Hindmarsh Shire Council to deliver the two new libraries and also upgrade the Nhill library, and this is on top of the new library which was opened recently at Dimboola. It was great to meet the local library staff, who are fantastic people that do a wonderful job. It was also great to be with the Deputy Premier, James Merlino, at the Emerald library opening, which was supported by the Cardinia Shire Council of course, the local mechanics institute and Federation University, and we thank them for their support. It is a great renovated library with some fantastic new

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spaces, particularly for young people. Also at the Maryborough regional library during the week it was great to speak to staff. They had a recent upgrade and they are very, very proud of it, on top of being very, very proud of the work they do for residents of all ages, but in particular assisting older residents. They do a fantastic job there. I thank all those libraries for hosting me.

### WRITTEN RESPONSES

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT** (12:48): On questions that need to be referred or answered, for Dr Bach's first question, his substantive question, Minister Stitt did offer to take part of that on notice, so one day for that. On Mr Quilty's question to the Minister for Health, it is to the lower house, so two days for both the question and the supplementary. On Mr Davis's first question to the Minister for Workplace Safety, I am satisfied that the minister answered the supplementary but I would like to review the first one. I am not making a ruling now; I will come back later in the day with a ruling on the substantive question. On Mr Meddick's question to the Minister for Agriculture, both the substantive and supplementary will be referred to the Minister for Agriculture for an answer within two days.

**Ms Patten:** On a point of order, Deputy President, I just also mention that Minister Leane offered to provide further information in regard to my questions, both substantive and supplementary.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Were your questions actually to Minister Leane or were they to the Minister for Workplace Safety? They were straight to Minister Leane, so I do not need to rule on those. If he offered to provide you something additionally, he can.

### Constituency questions

#### WESTERN METROPOLITAN REGION

**Mr FINN** (Western Metropolitan) (12:50): (1826) My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. In 2020 the government strengthened the Queen Street bridge in Altona Meadows. Unfortunately, despite a strong local campaign, the project did not include provision for a safe and accessible crossing for cyclists and pedestrians. Surprise, surprise—the Andrews government ignored the local community yet again. The Queen Street bridge carries over 19 000 vehicles a day, and it poses a major threat to pedestrians and to cyclists attempting to cross it. This is a significant safety issue for many of my constituents. Hobsons Bay council has confirmed the detailed design work is ready, and I commend Cr Daria Kellander for her ongoing pursuit of this issue. The only thing missing is a funding commitment from the state government. Minister, this is an urgent matter. When will the government provide the necessary funding for the Queen Street crossing to be built?

#### NORTHERN METROPOLITAN REGION

**Mr ONDARCHIE** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:51): (1827) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Residents of Melbourne's outer north are frustrated with the traffic. I hear about it all the time, as did my good friend Richard Welch, the candidate for McEwen at the federal election, who committed \$109.5 million to the upgrade of Mickleham Road. Every morning Attwood residents experience choked roads and frustration on Mickleham Road. They have told me it is a nightmare trying to get to work and trying to get home, especially in the evening to try and see their families. The action I seek from the minister, by way of directing the Department of Transport, is to do an investigation of the intersections of Haddon Hall Drive, Alanbrae Terrace and Mickleham Road; Elizabeth Street and Broadmeadows Road; and Hillcrest Drive and Mickleham Road, including the roundabout joining Broadmeadows Road.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Mr Ondarchie, can I just give you a moment to rephrase? You asked for an action; you did not ask a question.

**Mr ONDARCHIE:** The question I have for the minister is: will he direct the Department of Transport to do an investigation into the intersections of Haddon Hall Drive, Alanbrae Terrace and

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Mickleham Road; Elizabeth Street and Broadmeadows Road; and Hillcrest Drive and Mickleham Road, including the roundabout at Broadmeadows Road?

### WESTERN VICTORIA REGION

**Mr MEDDICK** (Western Victoria) (12:52): (1828) My constituency question is for the Minister for Planning. Residents of the Bellarine Peninsula in my electorate have engaged in a fight to preserve and protect their surrounding environs from developers, with all the same processes that the residents of the Surf Coast have recently gone through with Spring Creek Valley—the same consultations, the same distinctive area landscape hearings and submissions—in a fight to protect Ramsar-listed wetlands and other wetlands that are currently under Ramsar consideration. The communities of Barwon Heads, Ocean Grove, Point Lonsdale, Queenscliff and St Leonards are united in their desire to stop inappropriate development, fix firm town boundaries and prevent run-off into the wetlands. They are also located or partially located adjacent to state significant landscapes and living Wadawurrung country cultural heritage sites. Will the minister hear their concerns and hand down a decision to protect the Bellarine from developers?

### EASTERN VICTORIA REGION

**Ms BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:53): (1829) My constituency question is for the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services. As a young single mother my constituent was called upon by the Victorian child protection service and given only 15 minutes notice to take over the care of her three traumatised nephews. When the children arrived at her doorway there was limited conversation between the workers and my constituent. The only words were, 'They are a handful, and we're wondering how you're going to manage them'. Following this placement many calls were made and emails were sent to the department by my constituent pleading for support, but all communications were ignored. The Victorian foster carer charter sets out a commitment to establish regular channels of communication. My constituent wants to know why this is not extended to kinship carers.

### WESTERN METROPOLITAN REGION

**Dr CUMMING** (Western Metropolitan) (12:54): (1830) My question is to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change in the other place, and it is from a group of Deanside residents. Will the minister ensure that those impacted by the Kororoit Creek regional park proposal are given fair compensation and that genuine consultation that addresses their concerns is undertaken? These residents say their voices are not being heard by the Victorian government, that the consultation has been a box-ticking exercise and their concerns are not being heard. Deanside is a major growth area, but these residents have seen their land devalued while neighbouring properties skyrocket in value as developer interest in the area has grown. One family is facing losing 80 per cent off their property's value with the proposed boundaries unnecessarily removing access to the road and all utilities. They want a fair go.

### NORTHERN METROPOLITAN REGION

**Dr RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:55): (1831) My constituency question is for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence. Hume in my electorate continues to report high rates of family violence. In 2020–21 there were more than 4100 family violence incidents recorded in Hume, the third most for a local government area in the state. Hume City Council have been advocating for additional family violence support in their area, including a family violence refuge, but are yet to see any new commitments from the government. Will any of the new funding in this year's budget for family violence services and new refuges be allocated to Hume?

**NORTHERN VICTORIA REGION**

**Mr QUILTY** (Northern Victoria) (12:56): (1832) My constituency question is for the Minister for Police. I have been contacted by a constituent from the small Northern Victorian town of Myrtleford with the following concern, and I will read her words verbatim:

I have been trying many many times to speak to someone at the station. It is never open. I have a major concern needing to be addressed regarding safety, health and wellbeing. I have tried police no sirens. Big wait. I have tried police online reporting. No option to voice my concern.

There is a sign on the door that says station is not open. This sign seems to always be on the door whether a vehicle is there or not. When you ring the buzzer Wangaratta answers and says the officers are out on patrol. I very rarely see a police vehicle in the town let alone an officer. I believe Myrtleford need extra police staff or police officers.

Minister, it sounds like the Myrtleford township and its residents have been forgotten about, like many other understaffed police stations across Northern Victoria. Minister, can you tell me how often the Myrtleford police station is unmanned due to police shortages?

**Motions****PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA WORKPLACE SAFETY****Debate resumed.**

**Ms TAYLOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:57): I think it is important within this debate to point out some of the vulnerable elements, can I say, of the actual motion. I take this point that the motion has a misguided element insofar as it seeks to direct the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission to investigate Parliament about its policies and structures relating to bullying and harassment, and I also understand that Ms Maxwell has not consulted with the VEOHRC or the commissioner on her motion or the feasibility of the proposed inquiry. There are some real concerns with that, and perhaps if those steps had been taken and Ms Maxwell had consulted she would have realised that there are actually some significant issues with what is being proposed by the motion. In fact there are serious legal complexities about the motion and the VEOHRC's powers that create real concerns about whether Parliament or the Presiding Officers can direct the VEOHRC to conduct an investigation in the way that is contemplated by Ms Maxwell. So I am not trying to diverge from her sentiment or intent, but there are legal issues with it and they have to be acknowledged in this debate if we are going to be factual about the situation and what is being intended.

The first problem is that the motion seeks to direct the VEOHRC to investigate matters that are outside the scope of the VEOHRC's remit, so that is a problem. The VEOHRC's powers are concerned with prohibiting discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation, but Ms Maxwell's motion is directed towards bullying and harassment more generally, which is beyond VEOHRC's jurisdiction under the Equal Opportunity Act 2010. So that is certainly a realistic concern. The second issue of concern is that the motion seeks to direct the VEOHRC to conduct an investigation into Parliament. The EO act provides for a person to request the VEOHRC to review the person's programs and practices with agreement of the VEOHRC, but there is no power in the legislation to direct the commission to do anything absent its agreement. So that is another vulnerability.

It is also not clear if the Parliament or the Presiding Officers are relevantly 'persons' for the purposes of the statutory provision who can make a request of the VEOHRC or whether the statutory criteria which enable the VEOHRC to investigate potential contraventions of the Equal Opportunity Act have been satisfied. For example, section 127 gives the VEOHRC the power to investigate any matter relating to the operation of the Equal Opportunity Act but only if there are reasonable grounds to suspect one or more contraventions of the act have occurred.

These are all complex matters relating to the VEOHRC's powers and jurisdiction and the basis on which it might lawfully engage in a review which need to be carefully considered. It is not something that should be done on the run or in the absence of consultation with the VEOHRC or the

commissioner, so when you look at it that way there are some legitimate concerns with regard to the actual premise of the motion per se that could significantly impede this motion from actually delivering what perhaps Ms Maxwell is intending. I do not want to speak for her or anticipate what she is trying to achieve, but as we can see, there really are some significant issues with this motion. I just think it is important that we have that on the table when we have a debate on an issue, which is a very serious issue, but at the same time you have got to make sure that the motion is fit for purpose, so to speak, as well. So I might leave the matter there.

**Sitting suspended 1.01 pm until 2.04 pm.**

**Ms CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:04): I am pleased to rise and contribute to Ms Maxwell's motion which she has put before the house this afternoon. It goes to some issues that have been raised at the commonwealth level. I want to acknowledge her comments. I think she reflected very well in her contribution what has happened at the commonwealth level. Ms Maxwell referenced the independent review into commonwealth parliamentary workplaces, which was established under the former government in March 2021, and that was after some very serious issues had arisen at the commonwealth level. The report of the review that was handed down talks about a whole range of issues and has provided recommendations to the federal Parliament. The executive summary that was provided in relation to that review talks about the context. It talks about understanding the parliamentary workplaces. Ms Maxwell also referenced the nature of parliamentary workplaces. They are quite unique in many ways in terms of how we operate, the hours we operate, who we engage with, the staff we have, everyone working in the precinct and how that expands out right across Victoria. It is a unique environment in many ways. I acknowledge that and I acknowledge the intent of what Ms Maxwell is saying in her motion.

The motion talks about bullying and harassment in workplaces and acknowledges that it is unacceptable. I agree with that. I totally agree with all of those statements. I know that the commonwealth review did look into other things, including sexual harassment, sexual abuse and some other issues which this motion does not go to.

I do want to make some comments because we know that there have been some allegations that have been in the public domain over recent months, and I do want to comment on Ms Vaghela speaking out about her experience. She is a former member of the Labor Party, and in particular she made some comments around the Premier not apologising to her and said she had lost her self-esteem and felt worthless. She feared for her safety. She said the culture was toxic and that she was scared of the Premier.

I do not think Ms Vaghela is the only one who feels intimidated by the Premier in some of his actions and some of his conduct. I know that even in former parliaments he commented on the physical size of a former colleague, Andrew Katos—it was quite a disgraceful comment in relation to his physical characteristics. We all have our own characteristics. As a tall woman I have been called various things over the years, even as a child. We all have different physical characteristics, but coming from the leader I think it backs up exactly what Ms Vaghela was saying and that she was believed. The references to Ms Vaghela as being 'that woman'—'that person', I should say—were just very demeaning and unnecessary comments. I do think that there are many people that believed what she was saying even though she was dismissed and questioned by the Treasurer—her mental state was questioned by the Treasurer—and she did have all of those issues that she was subjected to. They are real. That has happened in this Parliament, by the Premier himself. Now, he is the leader of this state. He should be leading by example, not taking on this type of systemic bullying that was found. Ms Vaghela called it a systemic bullying campaign that sought to undermine, isolate and exclude her and said that he was hostile. These are comments that she said on the public record; I am not saying anything else. But I do think that one of the worst things was about feeling worthless—she felt worthless and her self-esteem had sunk. It does show the extent of that torment that she suffered.

There is certainly room for improvement in terms of workplace bullying and the way that we need to be conducting ourselves. I think there are issues around how people perceive what we do in this place, how we are leaders and how we should be conducting ourselves. Obviously in question time and in the chamber it is a competitive environment and there are things that are said in the chamber that are often said in the heat of the moment, and there are rules and procedures through the Presiding Officer, the President, that will draw us all into line. That is a good thing. That needs to happen, and those standards need to remain so that we all can have that robust debate in a manner that enables us to put different points of view. I mean, we are here to have a contest of ideas and to challenge those in this environment, but when it gets down to the comments Ms Vaghela said when she was speaking out—the spiteful revenge, misogyny and being frightened by the Premier—then I think we are going to another level.

Ms Maxwell's motion goes to a number of issues around directing the Presiding Officers to jointly write to VEOHRC, the Victorian equal opportunity and human rights commissioner, requesting that the commission inquire into and report to the Presiding Officers on a number of things—the adequacy of existing laws, improvements that may be made to existing laws and whether an independent complaints body should be set up—which I think mirror a lot of what has happened at a commonwealth level.

I do understand that some amendments are going to be moved to Ms Maxwell's motion, but I have not actually seen any of the amendments to it. We only got those 10 minutes before question time, before we came back in here. I do think this motion does need to reflect the entire Parliament and both Presiding Officers need to be included. Clearly the federal review does reference the Presiding Officers on a number of occasions, and I do think we need to not exclude the Speaker from this process. It needs to be the entire Parliament, and both the President and the Speaker need to be included in any of these issues.

I note Ms Taylor's comments around the concerns the government has—obviously it has looked into this—on issues around whether VEOHRC is the right body and that it does not have the remit to undertake it. I think Ms Taylor's words were that it was 'outside the scope' of VEOHRC to undertake what the motion is attempting to achieve. There is certainly excellent intent with this motion—that is not the issue—but if it is outside the scope or beyond the jurisdiction of what VEOHRC can actually do, then possibly there will be some issues around how the motion has been submitted.

Again I say these are very serious issues. I think Parliaments are looking at them and governments are looking at these issues. I again reference what I said earlier in terms of the work that was done at a national level and how that can be an example of what other parliaments need to do. But I raise those points that I have made here on this part of the motion in terms of how it would actually work and how Ms Maxwell's motion would be able to be implemented. With that, I say again I am concerned about the allegations that have come into this house, especially around the Premier and what he has said about certain members within his party and others. I think that is hardly becoming, and I do think there is a culture of toxicity within the Labor Party. That is obviously evident with some of those comments that have come out in the public domain. I will leave my comments there, as I have now run out of time.

**Mr GEPP** (Northern Victoria) (14:14): I rise to speak on Ms Maxwell's motion and to thank Ms Maxwell for bringing this to the chamber. This is an issue that certainly during your time in the Parliament, Ms Maxwell, you have been passionate about, and it certainly reflects many of the views that you have espoused over the last few years. I am very pleased to see that the Minister for Workplace Safety is also in the chamber, because she has said on many, many occasions that behaviour in a workplace that compromises the health and safety of any worker is unacceptable. There must be a standard that we must all uphold in every workplace in Victoria. That does not just go to the physical of course. It goes to all aspects of workplace behaviour, and bullying and harassment can occur in many forms, as we know. You may not need to physically harm somebody to engage in such behaviour. It is unacceptable, and the minister, to her credit, has said on many occasions that she will

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always strive for the complete and total eradication of any form of bullying and harassment and any practice in any workplace that would compromise the health and safety of any worker.

Of course this does not come to this place lightly. Historically—I am not just referring to Parliament here, I am talking about all workplaces—we know that there has been for many, many years entrenched bullying and harassment in many workplaces, particularly for women, who have been on the wrong side of this for so long. Finally, in the last few years there has been a concentrated and considered effort across the board and the very general acceptance that any behaviour of this sort is intolerable. Of course Ms Crozier just touched on some of the things that we have all seen and heard about Canberra in recent times in the federal Parliament. Of course we do not have to cast our minds back too far. Too often here, Parliament and the parliamentary precinct, it was a different type of workplace to any other in the state or in the nation. Whilst that may be true, in many respects it does not excuse any behaviour which is outside of the accepted norms in terms of workplace behaviour. We should all follow those rules, and Parliament in particular should be seen as an exemplar of best practice in terms of the prevention of and response to bullying and harassment and sexual assault in workplaces. We should not be seen as anything different.

I am very pleased of course—and I think it is important to quickly place this on the record—about the work that was done by Speaker Brooks and President Elasmar in this place back in 2020 when they engaged Lander and Rogers to review the existing laws and policies, which found that standing orders that govern MP behaviour when Parliament is sitting are a framework that could be developed to apply to members outside the chambers. It was recommended that Parliament establish a framework to provide a clear pathway for individuals to make complaints to an independent body which would have a power to investigate, resolve and escalate complaints where necessary. So it is important that we recognise the work that has already been done in this space and the very positive work already undertaken by the Speaker and the President to address some of these important matters that Ms Maxwell's motion addresses.

We do say, however, that the motion in some parts also challenges some legal advice that we have received, especially around the concept of exclusive cognisance, and we think it is not applicable for the motion to compel the Speaker to write to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission under that principle. Legal advice also suggests that VEOHRC may not have the jurisdiction or the legal framework to conduct an investigation within some of the terms that are proposed. So to that end, the government will be moving an amendment. Perhaps it might be a good time for that to be circulated.

Perhaps if I might, whilst that is being circulated, just say that the amendment has been discussed with Ms Maxwell. I will not speak for Ms Maxwell, but my understanding is that there is support for the government's amendment; Ms Maxwell will speak for herself on that matter of course. The intent of this amendment is to streamline the process that was proposed by Ms Maxwell and to provide an element of simplification overall. I move:

1. In paragraph (4) omit the words 'Presiding Officers to jointly' and insert 'President to' in their place.
2. In paragraph (4) omit the words 'to the Presiding Officers' and insert 'to the President' in their place.
3. In paragraph (5) omit subparagraphs (a) to (g) and insert the following in their place:
  - (a) President of the Legislative Council;
  - (b) Clerk of the Legislative Council;
  - (c) Secretary of the Department of Parliamentary Services;
  - (d) Parliamentary Budget Officer;
  - (e) executive government;
  - (f) any other relevant employers identified by the commission; and'
4. Omit all the words in paragraph (6) and insert the following in their place:

'(6) requires the President to table the report in the Legislative Council.'

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In essence, as I said, the amendment attempts to simplify and streamline the process. It omits references to ‘both Presiding Officers’ and instead inserts ‘the President of the Legislative Council’. We believe that does add that layer of simplification, that streamlining. It does not require both Presiding Officers. It also addresses that legal matter that I talked about earlier in my contribution of exclusive cognisance. I will leave my contribution there, but I again thank Ms Maxwell for bringing this motion to the house, and I commend the amendment to the house.

**Ms PATTEN** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:21): I am pleased to rise on Ms Maxwell’s motion. When I was reflecting on this motion I immediately went to Brittany Higgins and the bravery of that young woman in standing up in a very daunting place. These can be daunting places. Many of us would remember our first days in these places, and they are daunting. You are not quite sure what sort of behaviour you are to accept and what you cannot accept. We are told that we are jumping into a bearpit and that we should accept the rough-and-tumble of this place, but that is not true and that is not right. When we see the extreme offences, the criminal offences, against someone like Brittany Higgins, even then the pathway for her to seek justice was not clear. In fact the pathways just ended up as dead ends for Brittany during that process. I believe that Ms Maxwell is absolutely right, that we do need to ensure that we have the correct pathways not only for our staff but also for members ourselves. This is growing, and I agree that this is really important.

I am hoping that we will see real change in the federal Parliament. Certainly what that ignited and what that is continuing to fuel I can only think is positive and will only be positive for workplaces like this one but also for other workplaces. Ms Maxwell is absolutely right: we should be setting the example. We should not be ignoring it. We should not be saying, ‘Well, Parliament’s Parliament; you know, these things happen’. That should not happen. We cannot do that. We cannot walk past this.

I think back to last term when we went through the White Ribbon accreditation for Parliament House and for the organisation that is Parliament. I was fortunate to be on the task force for that accreditation process. I can tell you, part of that process—and it was an interesting process—was we started with sending out a survey to all of the members and to staff about attitudes around sexual harassment and around attitudes to a whole range of issues. And it was startling, some of the attitudes that came back. I mean, it was an anonymous survey, but when you saw the things that people thought were acceptable behaviour it was astounding. It made me really look at people differently in Strangers after that, wondering who had answered those surveys in the way that they had been responded to. But then as part of that process we went through some education. We were trying to bring people forward and raise people up. And I was pleased to see that when we did a follow-up survey some things had improved and a few people had figured out that, no, sexual assault is not acceptable in the workplace and a whole range of other things which it astounded me that they did. So this Parliament was actually the first parliament, I think—certainly in Australia but possibly in the world—to get that White Ribbon accreditation. Since then White Ribbon has obviously had its own issues, and I do not know whether those accreditation processes are still there.

This motion is absolutely right. I think we do need to do something, and it is correct. We have talked about it. We have got a code of conduct. We have talked about the fact that we do need some independent adjudicators or an independent person for people to go to, but we have not got there. So I think this motion again urges us, nudges the government and nudges the Parliament to actually achieve this. I accept the amendments that the government has put to this as a more direct way of doing this, because in some ways the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) cannot look at bullying. It cannot look at some of those things that are outside the commissioner’s remit there. But we should be an exemplar of best practice, and that is what this motion calls on us to do. I think that is entirely right.

Women have been dealing with this for centuries. We have been trying to work out pathways, trying to deal with it and trying quite often to not upset people in the process of doing that. So in 2022 we do need to draw that line, and we need to say, ‘That’s not acceptable’. And I would not just say it is for women, I would say it is for all people. We want to see a respectful workplace. Yes, in here we

probably say things that we would never say outside this place and outside this actual chamber. There is that. But bullying is not acceptable. Harassment is not acceptable in this workplace ever. This is where this motion goes. People keep saying, 'Oh, this is a real women's problem'. It is not. It is not a women's problem. If I was going to say anything, it is a men's problem. But I do not actually think that this is gender specific, because I think bullying happens across the board. I think men and women are both guilty of that.

I commend the motion. I suppose my issue is that I am not sure that VEOHRC is going to be able to do much with this, but I think it certainly raises the issue again. It reignites the need for us to do something in this place and for us to lead the community and to lead by example. I hope that this does achieve what Ms Maxwell has set out to do.

**Ms BURNETT-WAKE** (Eastern Victoria) (14:28): I rise to speak on the motion moved by Ms Maxwell, and I thank Ms Maxwell for bringing this before us today. It is a conversation that is very, very important. We should have it, and we should always continue to have a conversation about this subject.

The Victorian Parliament is our workplace, and just like any other workplace, we all deserve to be able to go to work without being subjected to bullying, harassment or intimidation. That has sadly not been the case for everybody who works here. We have heard of systemic bullying, issues with the complaints process and complaints not being taken seriously or followed up by people in this place. I also want to echo the sentiments raised by Ms Maxwell, Ms Crozier and Ms Patten that we should be exemplars. The community looks up to us, and we should behave appropriately. The people of Victoria look to us as leaders, and we have the opportunity to set an example for other employers and employees in our community. We have the opportunity to show them what a respectful workplace looks like. Many people look up to us, as I said, and we have a diverse range of employees here, from members to contractors, parliamentary staff and electorate officers. Regardless of one's role, whether in this Parliament or elsewhere, no-one deserves to be bullied or victimised at work. We can show Victorian businesses how they should respond to all claims of bullying, sexual harassment and assault in the workplace. Our behaviour would go some way towards setting a standard for Victorian workplaces to aspire to.

Those of us who work here and indeed people in every workplace should be able to feel safe and secure at work. Our workplaces should be places where we thrive, where we work together and learn from each other and where we do our best to make a positive change for the Victorians we represent. Our work should not be tainted by situations of bullying or harassment. The Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 requires employers to eliminate risks to health and safety. This includes identifying risks to psychological health and other risks that may lead to workplace bullying. Employers need to control these risks and revise risk control measures. Any bullying that occurs in this place is not only a breach of the occupational health and safety act but also a breach of human decency.

No-one deserves to be bullied or put down. Bullying and sexual harassment ruin lives and they take lives. They do. They lead also to increased absenteeism, increased rates of depression and anxiety and lost time and productivity. A 2020 survey by Safe Work Australia found that 60 per cent of workers experience bullying in their careers. One in three women and one in five men make claims for mental disorders that stem from bullying or harassment. Almost 20 per cent said they had experienced discomfort due to sexual humour. These are awful figures—terrible. Workplace bullying is proven to cause anxiety, panic attacks and physical illness. It impacts directly on relationships with colleagues and on family and friends when those workers head home at the end of the day. At its absolute worst, workplace bullying can be deadly. People go to work every day to make a difference in their own ways, whether it be working towards company objectives or in our case to represent our communities. It is disgusting that some people think they can bully and put down others who are just trying to do their job.

Speaking out against bullying takes courage. When someone comes forward with a complaint of bullying, harassment, sexual harassment, intimidation or victimisation, they should be listened to and that complaint should be immediately acted upon to mitigate risks. No-one deserves to be bullied, harassed or intimidated in the workplace, and workplaces should continually review and refine their complaints mechanisms and policies.

**Dr RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:34): I am pleased to rise to speak on Ms Maxwell's motion and thank her for bringing this important matter on for debate in this chamber. The community was rightly shocked at the revelations coming out of our national Parliament and the toxic culture of harassment and bullying that has been revealed in the last few years. Brittany Higgins showed enormous courage to speak out about the appalling way she was treated in the aftermath of an alleged sexual assault and together with Grace Tame has shifted the conversation around the country on the treatment of women and girls. It is a vitally important and ongoing discussion we all need to be having, and the reality is our parliaments are not exempt. The Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Kate Jenkins, undertook a comprehensive investigation into the culture of the federal Parliament, and her report, *Set the Standard*, has lessons for all of us. She found parliaments and MPs have an important leadership role to play in setting the standards of appropriate behaviour. I quote:

Trust is lost in the institution of Parliament when—

parliamentary workplaces—

... do not meet these standards that are expected of the rest of the Australian population—whether that be in their workplaces, community groups, sporting clubs or other contexts. As the Commission heard from participants, '[t]his is Parliament. It should set the standard for workplace culture, not the floor of what culture should be'.

The reality is we work in a strange place. Power dynamics swirl around us and our staff constantly, and as we know, power imbalance is at the heart of bullying and harassment behaviours. The *Set the Standard* report also comments on problems created by unclear and inconsistent standards and the structure of employment as contributing factors to be addressed. The report found, for example, that:

The insecurity of employment has a chilling effect on people speaking up about bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault.

These are concerns that apply as much to our situation as to the federal Parliament.

The report also put an emphasis on improving gender and diversity representation in Parliament and amongst our staff. I believe it is an excellent idea for the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission to undertake a similar review and in particular to look at the potential for an independent complaints body for all staff. Parliament is a strange workplace. It is an exciting workplace—we are all here making a difference in the lives of Victorians—but it also needs to be a safe workplace.

In conclusion, I hope debates like this usher in a renewed commitment by all of us to address these issues and a recognition that we all have a responsibility to act. This may be a complex working environment, but that does not mean that responsibility should be shifted to others and be thought of as for others to fix. If we do not address bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault in this workplace, it will continue to be an unsafe workplace for women and it will mean more and more people will not want to work here and represent their communities in this place at a time when we urgently need more diversity, more gender representation and more representation from Victoria's diverse communities in our Parliament to grapple with the issues that we collectively face. I commend this motion and look forward to a commitment across this chamber and across this institution to addressing this issue, because if we leave it unaddressed, it will continue to foster a very dangerous and unsafe workplace for women and people from diverse backgrounds.

**Ms MAXWELL** (Northern Victoria) (14:37): In summing up, I would just like to say that whilst not everybody always agrees in this chamber, my motion has started the conversation, and that was the pure intent of this motion. If we do not start the conversation, we have no way to implement change. I also just want to reiterate that, as Dr Ratnam so elegantly put it, we as members of Parliament have to be responsible for this change. It is not up to us to expect others to do it for us, and I do want to say that a behaviour you walk past is a standard you endorse. I would also like to thank everyone for their contributions today, particularly those that were given in the spirit of the intent of this motion, which is to provide a respectful and considered review of the adequacy of the existing laws, policies, structures and complaint mechanisms within this Parliament as a workplace.

We know that people's definition of bullying and harassment varies, but if that is how somebody else has made you feel, you should have an avenue to be able to discuss that privately with somebody who is independent and to be able to seek the support that you need. As a number of speakers have also conveyed today, this is a place of vibrant democracy, and the operations of this bring together an incredible array of people that contribute in many varied ways, whether you are a member of Parliament, a Clerk, a ministerial staffer or a parliamentary adviser; whether you work in the precinct or at an electorate office; whether you are part of security, the property team, the Parliamentary Budget Office, the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel or any other role that contributes to the work of Parliament and parliamentarians. I have always tried to work from a very solutions-based perspective, and I certainly put this motion forward with that intention. Safe workplaces are important for everyone, and the complex nature of the parliamentary workplace can make it quite an isolating place for people if they need support.

I would like to clear up a couple of matters suggested earlier by Ms Taylor during this debate and just put on the record that I indeed wrote to the Victorian equal opportunity and human rights commissioner in March and provided a copy of this motion. A member of my staff also spoke with someone at the commission's office, and the commissioner responded in a very simple way, noting that they would watch with interest.

The motion includes the word 'requests', and this is in line with the wording in section 151(1) of the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, which says:

On request of a person, the Commission may enter into an agreement with the person to review that person's programs and practices to determine their compliance with this Act.

It is also in line with other reviews, such as when the commission reviewed matters relating to Ambulance Victoria; the terms of reference note that the chair of the board of Ambulance Victoria requested the review.

I think Ms Taylor indicated a belief that some of the parameters in the motion could be out of scope for the commission. I would imagine if that were the case, then the review would simply say so. While the wording of this motion may have some components in it that some people might want to nitpick over perhaps, I stand by the extensive process that I undertook in drafting this motion.

I would also like to thank my parliamentary adviser, Karen Rourke, who devoted many hours, weeks and months to researching and drafting this motion. I also acknowledge broader work that the government indicates it has undertaken or is undertaking around workplace safety in general. I also note that some work has already been done in developing a framework for the behaviour of members of Parliament, because as members we are quite unique in that we are not employees. I do consider that a wider review could certainly complement the development of this framework.

Wherever this motion and other actions lead to from here, I hope there is some positive action to ensure that the mechanisms in place are fair and reasonable and that they provide adequate and appropriate support when needed for any member of this workplace. I thank the chamber for this debate.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** The question is that the amendments proposed by Mr Gepp be agreed to.

**Ms Maxwell:** On a point of order, Deputy President, just for clarification, I thought it was Mr Gepp. Is it Gepp or Gepp? Could I have that on the record?

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** I have a problem with it because it has a G in it. If it is Mr Gepp, it is Mr Gepp. But it is a frivolous point of order.

**Ms Crozier:** On a point of order, Deputy President, I understand as there is a motion we do not have an opportunity to speak to the amendments put by Mr Gepp.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Ms Crozier, because it is a motion we just vote on the amendments, but there is no speaking to the amendments.

**Mr Gepp:** On a point of order, Deputy President, I do not want to take time up in the chamber on this matter, but I have pointed out on numerous occasions the pronunciation of my name. It is ironic that again it was mispronounced during this particular debate. But the characterisation of somebody correcting the pronunciation of another member's name as frivolous is frankly offensive.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Sorry, Mr Gepp. I apologise. I did not mean to mispronounce your name. It just came out that way. I am just saying that we are in the middle of actually voting, and I did not think it was the right time to raise that particular point of order.

**House divided on amendments:**

*Ayes, 21*

Barton, Mr  
Erdogan, Mr  
Finn, Mr  
Gepp, Mr  
Grimley, Mr  
Hayes, Mr  
Kieu, Dr

Leane, Mr  
Maxwell, Ms  
Meddick, Mr  
Melhem, Mr  
Patten, Ms  
Pulford, Ms  
Quilty, Mr

Ratnam, Dr  
Shing, Ms  
Stitt, Ms  
Taylor, Ms  
Terpstra, Ms  
Tierney, Ms  
Watt, Ms

*Noes, 8*

Atkinson, Mr  
Bach, Dr  
Crozier, Ms

Cumming, Dr  
Davis, Mr  
Lovell, Ms

Rich-Phillips, Mr  
Vaghela, Ms

**Amendments agreed to.**

**Amended motion agreed to.**

**Business of the house**

**NOTICES OF MOTION AND ORDERS OF THE DAY**

**Ms MAXWELL** (Northern Victoria) (14:52): I move:

That the consideration of orders of the day, general business, 3 and 4, and notices of motion, general business, 706 to 781, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Bills**

**FIREFIGHTERS' PRESUMPTIVE RIGHTS COMPENSATION LEGISLATION  
AMENDMENT BILL 2022**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Ms MAXWELL:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

**Mr MELHEM** (Western Metropolitan) (14:52): I rise to speak on the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. I want to thank Ms Maxwell for raising this very important issue. However, the government at this point in time will not be supporting this bill, not because of the intention of the bill—I think we all support the intention, what the bill is trying to do—but we do not believe, in the way it is currently constituted and put together, it has fully addressed the issue. It seeks to rush to a solution without proper research and consultation.

I want to take the opportunity today to thank first responders—it is Thank a First Responder Day—and I want to thank all the female firefighters and indeed all our amazing first responders who are across our state right now keeping us safe. The government does recognise the contribution of and the great work that is done by our first responders, particularly firefighters, the dangerous work they do and their susceptibility to certain types of cancer. That is why we developed and passed the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Act in 2019 after incredible work by the sector to identify the risks of certain cancers.

Now, the cancer types and qualifying period in Victoria's presumptive rights scheme are based on the commonwealth legislation and are consistent with other Australian jurisdictions. That is why I made the point earlier that before we put that bill in place a fair bit of research needed to be done to make sure we got it right. I remember the debate here not long ago in relation to the amendments in relation to the presumptive rights, when we wanted to include some 90-odd mechanics into the presumptive rights, and that caused a bit of tension. So it is important that whatever scheme we design—or if we are expanding an existing scheme—further research is done. And as I said, by no means should it be taken that we are not supporting the intent and the issue itself in making sure we actually get that right.

Our government is committed to increasing the number of women in our fire services and making those spaces safer and more welcoming for them. We are also fiercely committed to the landmark presumptive rights scheme that we passed, as I said earlier, so people who contracted cancers known to be caused by firefighting are able to access the help they need when they need it.

While we support the intention of this bill, we have been doing a significant body of work already on the expansion of the presumptive rights to further cancers. Ms Maxwell knows this very well because we had these discussions in this place a few months ago during the passage of the Workplace Safety Legislation and Other Matters Amendment Bill 2021, which included vehicle and equipment maintenance workers, as I mentioned earlier, in the presumptive rights scheme due to potential exposure at fires. I remember that that went through a committee of the whole, and a lot of questions were asked, and rightly so, and that issue itself was actually discussed in some detail.

Now, these changes did include further employees in the scheme. It did not change the fundamentals of the scheme but rather prevented the exclusion of people who regularly attend fires. I think that is very important. While we made that amendment to cover the 90-odd maintenance workers who should have been and are now covered by the scheme but were not covered under the 2019 legislation, extending the list of cancers has some implications for both the existing list of covered cancers and any future inclusions. During that debate we undertook directly to members of this house to do the work on the issue of including female cancers, and we are doing that.

The minister is not in today—she is recovering—but hopefully she will recover and be here, maybe tomorrow or next sitting week. I am aware that she has asked the department to look into this issue and is working on an effective and lasting solution to bring back to the house at the proper time. So it is very important that the house is aware of what the minister has done already and will continue to do by instructing the department to make sure we address this issue properly and bring in the appropriate amendment or legislation to the house to address the very issue Ms Maxwell has raised. So this work is ongoing and will involve broad consultation on the proposed changes once they have been drafted. We have kept Ms Maxwell up to date on the progress of this work, and we will gladly also update any other member interested in knowing more.

One of the major obstacles rightly identified here is that having low numbers of female firefighters impacts the ability to sufficiently study the cancer risk and to obtain statistically significant results. I think it is very important to make sure that whatever decision we make in relation to these presumptive rights is based on some proper research, and statistics have to back whatever decisions we might arrive at. Again I go back to the decision we made to include the 90-odd maintenance workers, and that in itself has caused a lot of angst amongst the existing members of our firefighting teams, who basically thought including just 90 people could actually compromise the system. I do not believe that would be the case. But the point I am making is I think in order to expand the definition we need to make sure it is based on proper research and statistical support, and any change we make should not compromise other schemes we might have in place.

We are now working hard as a government to get more women in our firefighting services, and unfortunately that will not happen overnight. But it will happen, and I encourage more women to actually join the service. I am sure over time we will have more female members of the firefighting services, whether that is in the career firefighting service or the CFA and the volunteer fire services. We know, however, there is some emerging evidence coming out of North America about these female cancers, and this is one of the things we are looking at closely when developing our policy on that issue. So it is important to get these changes right and not to try to pass legislation on this in bits and pieces or in a form that will require amendment later. Female firefighters need certainty about their eligibility and coverage. Rushing into these changes without proper process risks having to amend the changes later.

It is my understanding that there have also been other cancers added to other international schemes beyond the three female-specific cancers of uterine, vaginal and cervical cancer. Additional cancers that could be considered for inclusion in Victoria in the presumptive rights scheme include lung, ovarian, cervical, penile, thyroid, pancreatic, skin and uterine cancer. Some of these have been included in the presumptive rights schemes in Canadian provinces and some states in the United States, and we are also aware that different cancers have different onset qualifying periods for them in relation to the scheme needed to accurately reflect these differences. So that is why we want to get these qualifying periods right, to make sure that women get the coverage of their cancers at the right time and none are excluded unfairly. The reason I mention some of these experiences in North America is to actually demonstrate that the government is not dismissing what Ms Maxwell is trying to put into legislation. The fact is we are working on making sure that we look at what happens in other jurisdictions around the world, where they are researching, to make sure we are developing more comprehensive legislation to address that very issue. With some of the issues we have here today we are not there yet, but hopefully we will get to a point where we are able to bring a bill to the house to address these issues.

The other thing is we need to encourage more women to actually join the firefighting services, as I said earlier. For example, the 2022–23 budget provided \$9 million for gender-inclusive upgrades at 40 priority CFA stations and our three major training campuses. Women who want to sacrifice their time to keep Victorians safe deserve facilities to match, and we know that the lack of proper change rooms, for example, bathrooms and turnout facilities has been a major obstacle. So that is why it is very important that we actually put in the right investment to make sure we encourage more women to join the services.

I want to conclude by saying this. We in the Andrews government are supportive of having—and we already have demonstrated that we want to have—more and more women in the fire service, whether it is Fire Rescue Victoria or the CFA, because we believe that the door should be open, actually double doors should be open, to make sure that we give women the opportunity to participate. I know there are a lot of women who would actually love to be firefighters. If we look at the other first responders—whether it is paramedics, whether it is nurses, whether it is doctors or whether it is people from SES—the number of women participating and part of emergency services is actually increasing, and firefighting is one other example. As another example, in the forest firefighting space there are a

significant number of female participants, and now we need to spread that to other services like the CFA and Fire Rescue Victoria.

The Andrews Labor government will work hard to make sure that all the protection afforded to their male counterparts is actually afforded to female firefighters. More importantly, we will continue to consult with these women in the sector to make sure we hear from them so that whatever proposal we put in place has the support of our female firefighters. As I said earlier, we look at the experiences in North America and other jurisdictions around the world. If we learn from them, hopefully, sooner rather than later the Minister for Emergency Services will be able to come back to the house with comprehensive legislation or an amendment to the current legislation to address the very issue Ms Maxwell is trying to address in these amendments.

I commend Ms Maxwell for bringing this bill to the house and raising it as an issue, but I can assure Ms Maxwell and the house that the government have actually started work on putting together a process to basically bring that to the house, hopefully, one day.

**Ms Taylor:** Nicely done.

**Mr MELHEM:** Well, thank you. With those comments, I will leave my comments at that.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** (South Eastern Metropolitan) (15:07): I am pleased to make some remarks on the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, which seeks to expand the range of cancers for which presumptive rights are available to firefighters. To provide some context for this debate, the WorkCover scheme provides that where a person is injured at work they are entitled to compensation and rehabilitation for their injuries, and those injuries can include contracting a disease—obviously cancer, and there are many respiratory diseases which can be contracted in the work environment. Under the WorkCover scheme a worker, or in some cases a volunteer, in a work environment or a volunteer environment is entitled to compensation and rehabilitation where they contract a disease or an illness as a consequence of their work. That is obviously a well-established principle of the WorkCover scheme, and it extends to—in this instance—firefighters who contract cancer as a consequence of their work as a firefighter. This bill specifically calls out primary site cervical cancer, primary site ovarian cancer and primary site uterine cancer as examples of cancers which may be contracted by firefighters as a consequence of their work as a firefighter.

Under existing legislation, if a firefighter was to contract one of those three cancers listed in the bill, they would be entitled to compensation and rehabilitation, if possible, under the WorkCover scheme, just as anyone else making a WorkCover claim for an illness would be entitled to seek compensation and rehabilitation under the WorkCover scheme. What the bill seeks to do is shift those three cancers into a special category where the onus of proving that the cancer or the illness was caused by the work activity is shifted from the person seeking to make the claim to the employer who in a common-law sense is defending the claim. This is something which has been used sparingly in the past where there is a strong recognised link between a particular illness and a particular workplace.

One of the earliest examples of where presumptive rights were created in respect of illness is the disease of Q fever. Q fever is a disease which is very rare in the general population. It is most commonly associated with people who work in the meat industry—people who work in abattoirs. Because Q fever is very rare in the general population and its occurrence is most common among people who work in the meat industry, it was very easy to establish the link between working in the meat industry and contracting Q fever. Because that link was very clear between the workplace, the type of work and the disease, Q fever was included in the scheme as an illness for which presumptive rights were available. That is to say that a worker who brought a WorkCover claim as a consequence of Q fever did not need to prove that Q fever was contracted as a consequence of their work; it was deemed to be the case because incidents of Q fever outside people working in the meat industry are very rare. There is a very clear causal link between that illness and that workplace, and for that reason

people with Q fever making WorkCover claims were deemed to have contracted Q fever as a consequence of their work. If there was a belief that that was not the case, the onus was on the insurer or the employer to disprove the link between the illness, Q fever, and the workplace.

As the scheme has evolved we have seen more recently a similar presumptive mechanism put in place for 12 different types of cancer in relation to work as a firefighter. Those cancers, which are now listed in the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation and Fire Services Legislation Amendment (Reform) Act 2019, have been introduced into the presumptive framework, so again a person who is working as a firefighter and contracts one of those cancers is able to make a claim against the scheme for compensation for having that cancer without having to prove the cancer was contracted as a consequence of their work as a firefighter because the legislation deems that causal link to be there.

The reason those particular cancers were identified, and work was done at the commonwealth level as well as in other jurisdictions, was on balance it was believed there was a sufficient causal relationship between the 12 listed cancers and work as a firefighter. Consequently, earlier in this Parliament the decision was taken to insert those cancers into the schedule as deemed illnesses arising from the activity of firefighting based on evidence which existed in Australia—a body of evidence which also existed in North America—showing a higher incidence of the 12 listed cancers in people who participate in firefighting activity over a long period of time. The legislation also specifies the period of service as a firefighter that is required in order to access the presumption of cause for the particular cancers.

The bill we are dealing with today does, as I said, seek to add three cancers to that list—cervical cancer, ovarian cancer and uterine cancer—each after a 10-year period of service as a firefighter. The difference with these three cancers, though, as the second-reading speech acknowledges, is the evidentiary base to support their inclusion as having a causal link with firefighting activity has not yet been established. In the second-reading speech the proposer of the bill, Ms Maxwell, acknowledged that at this point in time that causal link has not yet been established. That is one of the challenges with a proposal such as this. Where the other 12 cancers were adopted into legislation on a presumptive basis it was where there was a long body of evidence that showed higher instances of those cancers among the firefighting population. What we do not have yet with the three cancers in the bill is evidence of that causation. It is important, in saying that, to recognise that where these cancers are believed to have occurred as a consequence of firefighting activity a person who contracts those cancers is entitled to make a claim under the WorkCover system and to have that claim tested and to receive compensation and treatment accordingly, as anyone else making a claim which is not within the presumptive framework can do.

The coalition appreciates the intent of this legislation. This is an evolving field, and we look forward to seeing over time where the evidentiary basis for these additional cancers is established and where consideration can be given to whether they be within the framework of presumptive rights.

**Ms SHING** (Eastern Victoria) (15:16): At the outset I want to thank Ms Maxwell for the work that she has done. I do not mean to talk about you in the third person; you are sitting directly opposite me. Ms Maxwell, you have done a power of work to really bring some sunlight to the issue of injury faced by workers in the course of their work, whether or not causation is established. It is a small point but one that I want to pick up on, following Mr Rich-Phillips's contribution. I do not think that it was intentional, but he said that in the event of a cancer that was caused by attendance at a particular fire there would be a presumption that it had occurred in a way that connected the attendance with the presence of a number of listed cancers. The very nature of presumptive legislation is that you do not need to prove causation, that the very existence of one or more of a number of listed cancers in that legislation is sufficient to overcome any evidentiary requirements that might otherwise have been in place but for the attendance at certain types of fires, including structural fires. So I think that that is a really important thing to outline and just put onto the record in the course of this discussion, and so is the work that you have done, Ms Maxwell, in seeking to advance the conversation that we are having

around presumptive legislation and around the inherent risks associated with frontline and first-responder work.

As Mr Melhem has indicated, it is poignant and it is also directly relevant that today is Thank a First Responder Day. We know that our first responders time and time again put themselves in harm's way in order to protect life and property and that every year we see that time and time again at great personal cost, not just physically but psychologically, to our first responders and also to their families. I know, from various discussions we have had over the years around the impact of work-related injury on families, that is a source of ongoing devastation and of trauma, and I think that is worth noting in the context of Thank a First Responder Day and then also in bringing it back to the conversation we are having here today around the bill, which is proposed to address those female-specific cancers, including as they arise within a range of circumstances listed in the bill.

Again, I want to touch on a range of other cancers as they have been flagged in other jurisdictions and what that looks like as far as ongoing work is concerned. The three specific forms of cancer being proposed in this bill are uterine, ovarian and cervical cancer. We know though that there are other forms of cancer which do in fact as a primary presentation have a propensity, from looking at other jurisdictions, to occur in similar circumstances to that exposure or a reasonably anticipated or concluded exposure through attendance at a fireground or in another hazardous circumstance. Those cancers that I think are really relevant to this discussion include lung cancer, ovarian cancer, cervical cancer, as I have referred to, penile cancer and thyroid, pancreatic, skin and uterine cancers. We have got those three that are already proposed by this bill, but then there are others. I think that we really need to make sure that this work continues to create a scheme which does the right thing by those who are exposed in a range of circumstances, including as those cancers may arise in other presentations beyond the three set out in this bill.

I know from discussions with the Minister for Workplace Safety's office and indeed with the minister that this is an issue which does require ongoing work and that there is a commitment to working with Ms Maxwell on progressing these issues so that we can give this the same level of attention and interrogation that it deserves to fill these gaps in policy and also to correct the wicked problem that we face here, which is the disproportionate application of protection and recognition for work-related injury and for first responder related injury, whether or not that causative link has been established. I think that that probably underpins the basis upon which the bill will not be supported, noting that the purpose and the objectives as they have been put in this private members bill are in fact the starting point for the work which government is undertaking to do this and to do it properly. So it should not be concluded—and I would hope that it would not be concluded—that government is not committed to this work and is not putting in the work at a departmental level, at a ministerial level, at an agency level and of course at a level which includes members like you, Ms Maxwell, who have fought really hard for these additional issues to be recognised.

We have had a long journey in relation to presumptive legislation, and we have had a number of significant inquiries. The Fiskville inquiry was a really important part of the discussion around the exposure of firefighters to PFOS and PFAS and the way in which hazardous materials were stored, deployed, managed and indeed addressed in the event of spills. This is something which, again, I would hope, Ms Maxwell, you can recognise as having been a key focus of the government across a number of different portfolios, not just since you came to the chamber but also in the years preceding. There are a range of things which this government is particularly resolute on when it comes to workplace health and safety. I am really pleased that Minister Stitt has been able to drive such an ambitious agenda around recognising the risks associated with certain industries, certain occupations, and the fact that all too often we turn away from having these conversations and amending law because it is too hard or it might cost money or indeed it might not serve some form of political narrative. The Andrews government has worked really tirelessly to lean into these conversations and to have them in a way that reflects various inquiries, various reports and the forensic examination of injury, of risk, of cause, of systems of work that exist and indeed should be improved and of the nature of education, of

prosecution and of deterrence in encouraging and indeed pushing people toward best and indeed better practice that is safer and that means that people can get home to their loved ones and can in fact live their lives without the spectre of exposure following attendance at a site such as a structural fire.

Work is ongoing as it relates to the mechanisms by which these additional protections can be incorporated into a presumptive rights scheme. This will be a scheme that is brought back as a fully developed proposal once that development and consultation are complete. We are in really complex territory as it relates to what other jurisdictions have done, in particular the way in which Canadian provinces and some states of the US have looked at this set of concerns and issues as they relate to further refinements to presumptive legislation. But in the meantime we are also really keen to invest in women in firefighting and what that means across the board in culture, in safety, in training and in career opportunities, volunteering opportunities and the respect and the recognition that women in particular deserve over and above what is being done in this space.

I hope that gives you both some comfort around the level of seriousness with which this government, our government, is approaching these issues, I hope that these conversations that you are driving and that you are a key part of will continue and I hope that that will then culminate in a proposal which does not only meet the challenges that you have identified in the bill but provide a full consideration of the incidence of cancer or exposure that should, by the operation of a presumption, be recognised to have been caused by or contributed to by attendance at a frontline response situation.

With those few words I am going to sit down and perhaps enable one of you to sum up. But thank you for bringing this bill. Thank you for your ongoing advocacy. I look forward to this work being completed so that more Victorians can get the respect and the recognition that they deserve through investment in safe and healthy workplaces and frontline response locations.

**Mr GRIMLEY** (Western Victoria) (15:27): I move:

That debate be adjourned until later this day.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until later this day.**

### Motions

#### GAS SUPPLY AND PRICES

**Mr ONDARCHIE** (Northern Metropolitan) (15:28): On behalf of Mr Davis, I move:

That this house notes the:

- (1) Victorian gas supply crisis;
- (2) upward pressure the gas supply crisis is putting on Victorian gas prices and its impact on Victorian households and businesses;

and calls on the Andrews Labor government to act immediately to ensure adequate gas supply and manage the cost impacts on Victorian businesses and households.

Before I get into the substantive part of this motion, I want to note how delusional this government is when it comes to power and gas prices. They know absolutely nothing. Under a month ago those opposite were congratulating themselves while staring down the barrel of this crisis. Industry was warning them. Constituents were warning them. The market operator warned them, as did the ACCC. And the response from the government at the time is best summed up by the Treasurer in his own budget speech, when he said:

Some said our strategies would increase power prices! How wrong they were.

Well, well, Mr Treasurer, guess what, the power prices have increased, and the ramifications for every Victorian are going to be felt for months and years to come. The Victorian government sat back and watched this crisis unfold. The minister has been sitting back for several years as everyone around her was warning her that a day would occur just like this. Now she wants to blame everybody else but

herself. Victorians do know who is responsible for this crisis, and it falls squarely at the feet of Minister D'Ambrosio.

It took them years to lift the moratorium on gas exploration. In fact I recall a call by the then Shadow Minister for Energy and Renewables, Ryan Smith, on 16 June 2020, two years ago, when he said that 'Daniel Andrews' failed gas policy leaves Victorians out in the cold'. They were let down on that day, Victorians were, because Labor failed to support the Liberal-Nationals amendments to the Petroleum Legislation Amendment Bill 2020. Those amendments were aimed at getting industry back on its feet as quickly as possible and showing respect to landowners by recognising they have ultimate rights over their own land. By voting against those amendments at the time, the Andrews Labor government showed that they have no regard for rapidly escalating gas prices, which continue to be an ever-increasing burden on Victorian businesses and Victorian households. That is what they did two years ago.

While the Liberals and Nationals have been calling for this moratorium to be lifted for years, the Andrews government sat on its hands appealing to environmental groups, and they were demonising gas as a vital energy source. Only after being dragged to the table did Minister D'Ambrosio finally act, noting multiple warnings from the ACCC and the industry experts. Every single day that this minister fails to act is another day Victorians are paying higher gas prices. Those opposite think you can just pull the trigger on a day like today and everything will be fine. The moratorium on gas exploration is the first of many bad decisions this government has taken, and we are now feeling the repercussions of them.

If we look at the budget, the latest budget that those opposite have been talking about just this week, there is no money for gas infrastructure or investment. As I said earlier, the government were congratulating themselves on the budget. 'What crisis?', they were saying on the other side of the aisle, 'What crisis?'. Well, it is no surprise the government allocated no money in this budget for gas infrastructure, because they did not think there was a crisis. But look here today at the front page of one of the biggest selling daily newspapers in the country. Victorian businesses and Victorian households are feeling this gas crisis and gas pricing increases. They put in the budget a power saving bonus. They will say in their responses to this motion today, 'But we're providing \$250 for the power saving bonus', or 68 cents a day, and I agree it will assist some households. Unfortunately it has been absorbed by the high gas prices right now due to their years of incompetence.

But on top of that there are some pretty big unintended consequences of doing this in the current environment. If you ask industry experts about one of the worst things you can get during a gas shortage, they will say it is the mass migration of customers to a new retailer. For those who do not know how this works, let me just explain it to you. Gas retailers are able to supply the gas that they sell to customers once they sign up a new customer. They source that from a gas wholesaler, and the gas shortfalls in this state make it almost impossible for companies to compete for the minimal amount of gas that is available. So what happens? The price goes up. The government are encouraging 1 million households to change gas supplier at a time when the gas suppliers cannot even get the gas supply they need and, as it has turned out, a lot of these retailers do not even want these new customers.

Unlike this minister I have some experience in the energy industry. I have been engaging with stakeholders, and they have told me the same thing time and time again: October this year will be the D-day when people start to get their bills for the July quarter, and they are expecting there is going to be a huge spike in customers going to hardship plans or indeed not even able to pay their bills. All we have to do by way of example is look to the UK to see what that means. Over 30 gas retailers went out of business in one year. That had a massive knock-on effect on customers and the market as a whole. If we think it was bad there, imagine how it is going to be here where this Labor government has created this regulatory minefield. So in good faith I will propose something to the government: focus on the cost-of-living support; give every household the \$250 regardless of whether they compare and switch. Once October comes around, it is already going to be too late and Victorians will hold this government to the fire—that is, if we have got any gas left to be able to do that.

The gas substitution road map is something that the minister and the government have been talking about for such a long time: 'The gas substitution road map—we're going to electrify the state. We're taking gas away from your hot-water service, we're taking gas away from your cooktop and we're taking gas away from your ducted heating, and we've got a plan to do that'. That gas substitution road map was due in December 2021. It was due in December 2021, and there were lots of excuses about why it has not been able to be released. In fact they were going to release it in June this year—now—as part of an update. Well, guess what has happened: they know they are in trouble, and just like they jump at any crisis—in the health system, in the education system—they have jumped again today and they are going to hold back the gas substitution road map until after the November election.

Let us just clarify what I mean by that: they are not going to tell Victorians what they are going to do with the gas system until after the election. Well, let me warn you now, Andrews government: if Victoria is unfortunate enough to have you re-elected in November this year, you will not have a mandate. You do not have a mandate to do anything with the gas system. This is typical of this government—the same government that went to an election saying if they broke a contract it was not going to cost Victorians any money; \$1.3 billion it cost them to break that contract. Now Minister D'Ambrosio is saying today, 'We might just tell you all about this—the final report into gas substitution in this state—after the election'. What have you got to hide, Minister? What have you got to hide, Premier? There are some things in that road map they will not tell us about. They want to turn off people's gas ducted heating. They want to turn off their hot-water services. They want to turn off their cooking. They are nervous today because they have played games with Victorians, and what is going to happen? More and more, because of the ineptitude, because of the lack of experience and because of the lack of planning from the government, Victorians will see higher power prices—because this government continues to play politics with energy.

This secret plan they are not going to release will increase the cost of living for households and for small businesses and put a signal to the market, put a signal to energy suppliers, to reduce supply, because they will wait for the price to spike up. You can imagine that from suppliers: 'Let's just wait and see what this government will do. We might hold back some capacity and watch the price go up'. This government are not thinking about Victorians. They are not thinking about the cost of living for householders or for older Victorians who rely so heavily on heating. You know, there are stories around that people cannot afford to turn on their gas heating, because the price has gone so high, and elderly people are going to bed at 12 midday because it is the only warm spot in the house.

**Ms Stitt:** Have you done a survey about that?

**Mr ONDARCHIE:** This is irresponsible. Minister, to pick up your interjection, I do not need to do a survey about this. Victorians are suffering because of the ineptitude of your energy minister, who today, if you will pardon the pun, has gone cold on the gas substitution road map because she knows and Daniel Andrews knows this is going to hurt them. Higher gas prices, lack of supply, lack of forward planning—we have been telling them this for years, the industry has been telling them for years, small business has been telling them for years. People have been writing to them and households have been writing to them about this, and they have not been listening. And suddenly they have woken up, saying—like in every other crisis they have had to deal with—'We need to do something today'. So what are they going to do? Shelve the secret plan: 'We're not going to say anything about this until after the election'. And they can run around blaming everybody they like, but we know that because they have failed to act Victorians are paying higher gas prices. This Labor government have been asleep at the wheel for a long, long time. Despite being warned by the energy market operator, Daniel Andrews did nothing. He did nothing to encourage new investments. Instead he chose to actively campaign against it. Delaying this road map is going to increase gas prices. It was always going to. As they cut off barbecues, as they cut off stove tops, as they cut off hot-water services, as they cut off ducted heating, it is going to hurt.

One of the other sad things about this is the minister for energy supports developing gas resources in Queensland but not here in her own state. But we know the consequences of that decision-making: the

gas line is full and Victorians are paying more for their gas. It is a lose-lose scenario brought on by the member for Mill Park. The truth is developing gas resources closest to the market is the cheapest and most efficient way of getting gas to market. It is a no-brainer. The Premier and the minister want a national gas reserve, but they refuse to develop Victoria's own abundant gas resources. This state was built on gas—and they cannot commit to backing Victorian industry by backing Victorian resources. It is outrageous. They have no plan to fix the gas crisis in Victoria. They are trying to hedge their bets and sit on the fence when it comes to gas. They admit that gas is vital for Victorians, yet they have no investment for gas exploration, for gas storage or for gas infrastructure. The only plan this government has is to set ridiculous legislated demand targets which will drive up the price of gas and disincentivise new investment—a clear tax on low- and middle-income families.

Dan is of the view—the Premier is of the view, before Ms Shing gets excited—that even with the early closure of coal-fired power stations, solar and wind will satisfy all of our energy needs in a cold winter. That is his view. The Premier's lack of decision-making and planning has stymied any new gas exploration in this state, any new investment in gas production and any new investment in gas infrastructure. I am calling for further gas exploration, more gas storage and more gas production, as is the energy market operator. And because the Premier was so late to the table, it has left this state in a very precarious position.

We are working with the gas industry and business to ensure there is a well-defined path to keep prices stable as we transition away from coal to cleaner energy sources. This Labor government will blame everybody else for their crisis, as they do with every crisis in this state. It is always somebody else's fault. But they are the ones who refuse to allow new investment. It is now too late, and every Victorian is going to feel the repercussions of this decision. But there is more to this, and it is very sad. It would not be an expectation in 2022 in Victoria that hypothermia would be a killer in a state like Victoria. As a First World country we still record deaths from hypothermia, predominantly of those who are unable to afford gas and electricity. The situation is now a lot worse, and our hospitals are seeing people present with hypothermia, particularly older Victorians who are financially unable to turn on the gas heater. That is ridiculous in Victoria in 2022. These are all avoidable circumstances. I do not have the data, but there has been some suggestion made to me today that people have died from hypothermia living in homes where they have been unable to turn on their heating source. If that is the case, these are avoidable deaths—and they are certainly not helped by a government who says people should just use less gas and electricity. How about some interest from government? How about you do your job and ensure there is adequate supply of energy to those Victorian households and businesses that need it? These are all issues that stem from nearly a decade of this Labor government's failed state policy—policy they congratulated themselves on until it caused this mess. Now they hide and they blame everybody except themselves. Well, I am here today to call on the minister to actually do something to stem the bleeding for so many households and businesses across Victoria, but the reality is that she probably will not.

This is a time when Victorians actually need this government—in a time of crisis when it comes to the health system, when it comes to education and certainly when it comes to the energy system, but what do they do? The first thing they do is engage a PR team to spin it a different way. Victorians are sick of this government's spin. They are sick of this Victorian government's blame. They are sick of this government not making appropriate decisions because they are too busy trying to put a spin on how they position themselves. We cannot trust this government to manage the gas market in Victoria. They have failed time and time again, and they will lie straight to the faces of Victorians while holding a knife in their other hand. Holding the gas substitution road map back again and again is an admission that this government has failed. It is an admission that they are up to something behind the door. It is an admission that they have failed, and Minister D'Ambrosio should be held totally accountable for this—something that she has been talking about for a long, long time. It was originally due in December 2021, and then she said that it would be presented in June 2022; they are now going to hold it back until after the election. Clearly they are up to something, clearly they are conning Victorians, clearly they have mismanaged the system and clearly this minister has failed. She has failed all

Victorians, and she has failed this government. If there is one substitution that should be made in this state, it should be replacing this energy minister. Only a Matthew Guy-led government after November this year will implement practical measures to ensure Victorians have access to clean, affordable energy as we transition to our 2050 goal.

This government are inept, this government have failed Victorians and today we see, as we have seen time and time again, they will try and spin their way out of this one. They cannot spin their way out of this. Victorians are suffering with higher costs of living and no heating, businesses are hurting as a result of this government and this minister's ineptitude and suddenly today they pack everything away in a cupboard—and she will say, 'It wasn't our fault'. I commend the motion to the house.

**Ms SHING** (Eastern Victoria) (15:48): I am going to correct a number of the outrageous slurs that Mr Ondarchie has put onto the record today, and in doing so I want to give a little bit of an explanation and some context for the way in which the gas market operates in Australia and the way in which Victoria provides gas to the energy market across the eastern states. I want to put in context the role of Victoria as a producer of gas for other parts of Australia and the way in which spot prices operate, as has been the case for a really long time. I also then want to address the fact that Mr Ondarchie seems to want to actually attribute to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Ms D'Ambrosio in the other place, the war in Ukraine, the reluctance of global markets to purchase and acquire liquefied natural gas from Russia, the challenges associated with a particularly cold autumn and winter, outages in coal-fired power stations around Australia and indeed challenges associated with retailers and large-scale producers not doing the right thing around default offers, around pricing and around retail offerings to consumers.

So Mr Ondarchie would have us believe that it is in fact the energy minister's fault—that is his cute line of attack here today—that we see a complete disintegration of global gas markets, that we see continuous exporting of gas to other jurisdictions from Australia, that we see a shortage in Victoria and higher prices and upward pressure on prices being occasioned by, somehow, an intransigence from Victoria and from the government here, and that indeed it is up to government to fix global and national issues of significance on energy market pricing and availability. What a sloppy, sloppy narrative from Mr Ondarchie. What an easy, easy race to the bottom he has on contributions like this.

I note that it was only yesterday we heard a contribution from the other side of the chamber, albeit a different party, seeking to impugn the same minister and her reputation in relation to a completely different matter. This is something which those opposite are really, really good at, and that is scapegoating, because scapegoating is far easier to do than turning your mind to resolving the problems. What we did not see in the federal space before the election, before the change of government, was any commitment to resolving this burgeoning gas crisis, this issue of supply. What we did not see was any proposal to actually effect a mechanism that would take place and could take place sooner than six months into the future—which was the mechanism developed by the Turnbull government back in 2017. What we did not see from the former Liberal government was any preparedness to actually do anything to apply downward pressure on energy markets around Australia.

We saw that through a range of different shortcomings: (1) the abject failure to develop a national energy policy, (2) a refusal to engage in any sort of discussion around reducing the volume of export in order to meet domestic supply issues and (3) any sort of preparedness to discuss the importance of renewable energy to meet the challenges occasioned by climate change but also to make sure that we have a more reliable mix—through a greater uptake, for example, of PV, of hydro and of wind energy. We have seen a litany of failures from a government in Canberra that has refused to even look at the problem.

It is really interesting that we are on our feet today talking about this particular motion, which of course we oppose, when I think about a tweet—I am going to bring it up because it is worth actually quoting

verbatim—from the new Leader of The Nationals, Mr Littleproud. He has just today tweeted the following:

I've written to the Prime Minister asking him to consider nuclear power as part of our energy mix.

Can we make it safe, affordable and reliable in Australia?

We need to have this conversation and if opportunities exist—back ourselves.

Right? That is from one-half of the flailing federal opposition, the former government, the ones who pulled the strings again and failed to do anything in relation to energy policy, failed to do anything associated with investments in renewable energy and failed to talk—unless you are talking about the former member for Brighton—about the importance of renewable energy in the context of climate change until, what, a handful of days out from the poll when figures showed that they were disastrously at risk of complete annihilation, annihilation which of course, as we know, happened for reasons which include their denial of climate change and their inaction on renewable energy and support for renewables overall. So now we have a commitment in writing from Mr Littleproud, the bloke who is heading up the Nats, saying that nuclear energy really should be considered.

Well, here is a little bit of a ready reckoner on nuclear energy: it is consistently falling out of favour across global markets. It has been overtaken by renewables in relation to cost, time frames, social licence and efficiency. It is, again, something that I would like to put as a hypothetical to people listening today. Because of its reputation—and we only have to look at various sites around the world to know that there are grave concerns around sites which previously were areas where nuclear power was developed, delivered and generated—nobody wants it in their backyard. Mr Quilty has stood here in this place and he has talked about how it is that we should be building nuclear power plants. He would not be prepared to have one in his backyard, and I wonder if Mr Littleproud would be prepared to have one in his backyard.

The point that I am making with all of this is that everybody is happy to talk from the opposition benches about what it is that is not being done well or right. And when I think about what it is that Minister Chris Bowen has said around needing to commit to freeing up supply and needing to commit to putting downward pressure on gas prices, that to me constitutes the first meaningful sign of a commitment to facing the very real challenges of skyrocketing gas bills alongside the idea of providing long-term supply and indeed reliability across the network. But renewables are another really big part of this equation.

Mr Ondarchie was quivering at the thought of anyone from this side of the house raising the power saving bonus, and well may he do so, because this is a bonus which applies for concession card holders between now and 30 June and for every Victorian from 1 July to the tune of \$250. This is not everything, but it is something. And it is part of a jigsaw of responses to energy supply issues and the price of these commodities. It is things like retrofitting houses to become more energy efficient. It is things like incentives and rebates for solar power, for batteries and for storage. It is things like working alongside industry to incentivise them to embrace and indeed invest in renewable energy. It is projects such as Star of the South. It is work such as Solar Victoria. It is discussions such as creating pathways for people to get into renewable energy industries to be able to provide the services that consumers are looking for, and there is appetite and there is social licence for these sorts of initiatives. They will demonstrate a reliability and a capacity to form a useful part of an energy mix now and into the future. Shame on those opposite for being so grubby as to raise these issues in a context which does not recognise the contribution we have made and indeed seeks to rewrite history around the LNP's last-minute commitment to renewables.

**Debate interrupted.**

**Questions without notice and ministers statements**

**WRITTEN RESPONSES**

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT** (15:58): Before we break, and while the minister is in the house, I have reviewed *Hansard* from question time today and I will order a written response from Minister Stitt for the substantive question asked by Mr Davis. That is the substantive question only, and could the response be prepared in one day, please.

**Sitting suspended 3.59 pm until 4.18 pm.**

**Motions**

**GAS SUPPLY AND PRICES**

**Debate resumed.**

**Mr HAYES** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:18): Of course I share the concerns of many about this energy crisis. The domestic gas shortage is a fundamental threat to our economy and people's wellbeing. If not resolved, and soon, it threatens to feed into already surging inflation figures. It also threatens thousands of jobs in our manufacturing industry. A lot of these workers would also be mortgage holders. The seriousness of this situation cannot be overstated. Our industries are closing or only operating on certain days because of the high price of gas in particular. At the heart of it is the Ukraine war. We saw back in 1973 that a war in the Middle East also caused a surge in energy prices and inflation, and we are seeing it again here today.

I thank Mr Davis for his motion to discuss this today. We do need an adequate supply of energy, as Mr Ondarchie said, but we cannot use this as an excuse to turn the clock back and think that we can rely even more on fossil fuels. I encourage the government to keep going with this program of energy substitution. We have just got to be better at it and get faster at it and transition to renewables as quickly as possible. So I call on the Andrews government to take whatever action it can. And it may well have taken action, because I just heard news that Mr Andrews has called for some sort of intervention in the market. I have not got the details yet. I call on the government to take whatever action it can, but the main game is in Canberra of course. But that is not to rule out room for action by the states, like Victoria.

I refer to statements this week by Mr Andrew Liveris, who was previously appointed by the former Prime Minister Scott Morrison to direct a gas-led recovery during the COVID-19 pandemic. While I do not agree with relying on a gas-led recovery, he did speak strongly about what to do now, and I do agree with him. Mr Liveris called on the federal government to intervene in the gas market and establish a domestic gas reservation scheme to deal with the energy crisis. He pointed out that our gas exporters are making an absolute fortune out of the Ukraine war, as gas prices are linked to skyrocketing oil prices and our gas here is a cheap source of energy. Australia is also the largest producer of gas in the world, yet we are supposedly short of gas for our people and for our industry. Mr Liveris said he does not favour price setting or subsidies for manufacturers; instead, he favours 15 to 20 per cent of gas produced across the east coast of Australia being reserved for the domestic market. In Western Australia they do that and just that. Their gas is far cheaper than ours, and they are not having the same sort of skyrocketing price problems that we are having here. Victoria could do the same. I quote Mr Liveris. He said:

You just do an allocation and cap the amount ... you export because this is the problem. We export 95 per cent of our gas ... I wouldn't subsidise. I don't think you have to.

I'd rather set some export controls, allocate a percentage of the gas domestically, do a reservation scheme and get us through this temporary issue.

Maybe that is what the Victorian government is doing. I hope so. Western Australia went it alone, and they endured quite a bit of a fight to do it. Mr Liveris did say our government would probably cop some heat from international oil companies. Indeed we would cop a lot of heat, but we are in a crisis,

and there is no easy way out of a crisis. This is the best sustainable way in the long term. So I call on the state government to do what it can. It is possible to do this. Look at clever Western Australia. We do not want to be dumb on the other hand. It has a 15 per cent gas reservation for domestic use. But I believe the best thing this government can do is to pressure the government in Canberra to take the advice of Mr Liveris. And if they can do something on their own, well and good. That would be great.

That someone from the corporate sector like Mr Liveris is recommending government intervention in the gas market should be proof enough that this is a really serious situation. It threatens our economy and our manufacturing industry, puts upward pressure on interest rates and inflation and therefore threatens mortgages—all for international companies, many of whom do not pay tax here and are making huge profit at the expense of Victorians. So let us get behind this. I agree with statements that if we had invested more in renewable storage and grid upgrades in the last decade we would be in a much better position. But we did not, and this is where we are. So I call on the government to fight this battle in Canberra or to do something in our own gas market. The gas is extracted here, and as much gas as our economy and Australian households need should stay here.

**Ms BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (16:24): I am pleased to rise to speak in support of Mr Ondarchie's motion today and flag the very real need we have for energy in this state and the very important role that gas plays as a peaking energy fuel to counter when peak demand comes on, also as a feedstock for a whole raft of industries—indeed the medical industry and manufacturing of medical equipment—and indeed in heating our homes and cooking our food through the normal channels. I know in country Victoria many gas users are not on connected gas. They use bottled gas, and my constituents and indeed I have certainly recognised that bottled gas has gone up significantly over the last few years.

When I first came to this place one of the first inquiries that I was involved in on the Environment and Planning Committee was the inquiry into unconventional gas. We tripped around the state, heard from various stakeholders and had a very broad ranging discussion on that. What we know on this side of the house is that back in 2010 to 2014 The Nationals and the Liberals put a moratorium on fracking and the other associated fairly serious and potentially carcinogenic substances that were involved in that type of gas extraction. Very sensibly we put that moratorium on. In effect, previous to that, in the Brumby-Bracks era, we know that there were a number of fracking licences—I think it was up around the hundred mark—and also exploration licences. We put the brakes on to look at the science and see the appropriateness—or in this case the inappropriateness—of using that as a mode, and really it did not have a public licence, it did not have a social licence. The jury is out; it is still widely used, I think, overseas, certainly in America. But it was felt, wisely I think, that we needed to put the brakes on, and subsequently in the Andrews government there has been not only a moratorium but a complete ban, and we certainly endorse that. So I would just like to put on record—when those across on the other side of the house start gallivanting about on their virtues—that generally and reasonably it was that previous government that put those brakes on to assess, and then ultimately we have seen the banning of unconventional gas.

However, as I said, gas plays a very important role, often in regional Victoria, as a manufacturing component. In specialised types of manufacturing you need gas. For one of my constituents in Morwell I spoke with a few years ago, their gas bill had gone up absolutely exponentially. They were manufacturing extrusion plastics that were used in playgrounds, and they were actually exporting them overseas and around our country. They were made in Morwell, which was fantastic to see. But it puts pressure absolutely on our manufacturing industries when they have got their feedstock and preferred supply getting up to these huge, huge costs.

We see in the media and we know that the Australian Energy Market Operator, AEMO, has certainly flagged a gas supply shortfall trigger event, and this will occur across Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania and be in effect from June this year, so we are in the middle of it. AEMO has identified a gas shortfall trigger in these states. Again, when I first went into that inquiry we were talking about petajoules in very low values, and we can see here in the media that it is absolutely nuts in terms of

the gas price and how to deal with that. There are exports, without a doubt, and they are adding to the complexity.

I note the new Minister for Climate Change and Energy in the federal Parliament has put out media and discusses in the media the need for coal-fired power stations to stop their planned shutdowns and come back on. It is like putting pressure on those productions, and it just struck me as somewhat strange that often for various reasons we are casting aside the coal-fired power stations when we need them to power the country. The minister is now saying, ‘Stop your shutdowns, and come back on very quickly’. So we need to have a sensible debate about this, but certainly the need is real.

Moving forward, in terms of our policy at the previous election, going in in 2017 the Liberals and Nationals very much put forward a commonsense plan around keeping prices low, working with landholders about safe access to conventional onshore gas and doing those negotiations to ask to the landholder, ‘Are you happy with this?’, and say that they have the right of veto and that there would be a positive association and recompense for them. That original inquiry that I was involved in certainly showed that there are still reserves of onshore gas in Victoria to tap into. Again, all things need to be sensible. One of the interesting outcomes of the recent renewables inquiry—and I know that there was a high degree of consensus about the need to move to renewables—is the fact that we have seen an increase in energy market prices of around 7 per cent per annum over the period of the last 10 to 20 years. So it is increasing, and that certainly has, as I said, played a role in manufacturing.

The other thing that is quite challenging for our Victorian consumers and for manufacturing is that Australia as a whole really sits in the lower third quartile for our energy costs, so it is hard to be competitive on the world stage when our input costs are so high. I certainly agree—and I think we have heard people in this house concur—about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which we all condemn, but that is again putting pressure on the system.

Finally, in relation to the inquiry that we have just had on renewables and the need to move to a sensible transition to renewables over time when there is the capacity there and when there is the stability and reliability—and these are some of the very sincere words that those in the profession spoke—one of the committee recommendations, and this is one thing that I really was most concerned about, was the need to move away from gas in new homes. Certainly I think the thing that the Andrews government frequently do is not think about what happens outside the tram tracks, because rural and regional people do not have that luxury sometimes of the flexibility of electricity supply, and I think the government get so focused on Melbourne that they do not see that in rural and regional Victoria.

Finally we see—and I know Mr Ondarchie brought this up in his commentary—that the government is shelving its plan on this very topic. It is shelving its plan to cut gas heating, stovetops and hot-water heaters by 50 per cent until after the state election. We have seen that today in the media. Again it is, ‘Trust us, we’ll get to the other side’. Victorians need that steady supply. We need a transition that works and is sensible. Gas is certainly an aspect of that, and indeed it is incumbent on the Andrews government to be straight with Victorians and to come to the party and help solve this very serious issue.

**Ms TAYLOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:35): There are many aspects to this debate and I am happy to explore a number of them, noting that Ms Shing has already acquitted many of the significant and critical factors that are causing some of the acute issues with gas supply and making it very clear that it is not Ms D’Ambrosio’s fault about the war in Ukraine and the global gas shortages. If you listen to the opposition, it is her fault for everything to do with energy supply across the globe. Can we just clarify that Minister D’Ambrosio is not to blame for the global shortage in gas supply and issues with Russia and Ukraine and the like. I am glad that we have got that clear and on the table.

The simple reality is that we are sending too much gas overseas. We have long advocated for a domestic gas security mechanism to restrict LNG exports in the event of an export-driven shortfall. I should further note that we are now happy to have a federal government that cares about driving down

the cost of living and addressing climate change, because if you want to have a go at our government about action, we are happy to tell you about all the action that has taken place on this side of the chamber. If we think back to the dark, dark ages, the Baillieu government absolutely strangled the wind industry and had them on their knees, costing thousands of jobs and billions of dollars of investment. That is the thing that I never quite understand with those opposite: they do not realise the economic advantages of investing in renewables. You often hear the expression—I even heard Mr Littleproud in one of his debates talk about it—‘Oh, when the sun don’t shine’ and those old debates. That is why you have batteries. That is why you have energy efficiency. I do not have confidence in the current federal opposition, but that is okay because we now have a federal Labor government and they are absolutely getting on with things. We now feel much more confident that we have a partner when it comes to the acute and I should say the longer term issue of gas supply but also truly a partner in supporting further and more profound investment in renewables, above and beyond what we have already done in Victoria.

Let me tell you, no government in Victoria’s history has done more to bring on line clean energy than the Andrews Labor government. Let that be clear. This has never been more urgent. I did hear that discussion around coal, because the simple reality is that right now we have about 20 per cent of our coal generation off line, and this is simply a reflection of the fact that our coal generators are getting old and less reliable, which is why the Andrews Labor government has worked so hard to bring on line new sources of renewable energy.

Let me go to that as well, because I heard some comments about regional Victoria—that renewables may not mean so much for those areas. But a lot of the investment in renewables is in regional Victoria, and that actually drives jobs and investment in regional Victoria. So again I do not understand why those opposite do not understand the economic aspects of investing in clean energy: jobs and investment. It makes a lot of good common sense even if you are a complete climate sceptic. I do not understand why they are not attracted to at the very minimum the economic advantages of investing in clean energy.

So let us look at the action on this side of the chamber. It really peeves me and it is a slight against Ms D’Ambrosio, the minister, because she has done an enormous amount, a Trojan amount, since we have been in government to invest in clean energy. I think it was you, Mr Ondarchie, just to be clear, that was misleading the house. Let me tell you, because obviously you have not paid attention to what has happened. Since we were elected 55 projects providing 3991 megawatts of new capacity—and let me tell you, this is clear and this is classic, he is not interested in renewable energy. It is all a furphy. That side of the house pretend to care about renewable energy, but they could not care less. Fossil fuels all the way!

As I was saying, new capacity has come on line and is providing clean energy to the grid. Five renewable energy projects, which will provide 502 megawatts of capacity, are also under construction—action, action, action. These are driving down energy prices right now and are providing low-cost, clean, renewable energy. We have run the largest reverse auction in Australia’s history, and we are running another auction to bring on line at least 600 megawatts of new renewable energy to power the entire government’s operations. Look, I can understand why this irritates those opposite. You know, they are mystified by it because this is just not their show, this is not their thing, this is not their schtick. We set ambitious targets to bring offshore wind on line—2 gigawatts by 2032, 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040; really solid, good long-range plans now underway. This game-changing technology will create tens of thousands of jobs, billions of dollars of investment and a vital source of new renewable energy.

We are also making sure that every Victorian household can take part in the renewables revolution, with over 200 000 households installing solar thanks to our Solar Homes program. And let me tell you how popular that is. I mean, the uptake is clear, isn’t it? It shows just how popular it is, because I know based on this uptake Victorians want to be part of the clean energy revolution. They want a future for their kids; they also want downward pressure on power prices. They know a good thing when they see

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it, and these households would simply have missed out if it were not for our program, plain and simple, because we made it accessible. That is it. We have built the biggest battery in the Southern Hemisphere with the Victorian Big Battery—get this—in Moorabool.

**Mr Ondarchie:** On a point of order, Acting President, I ask you to draw the speaker back to the motion. The motion talks about gas pricing and gas supply in this state, and not once has she talked about that in her contribution—

**Ms TAYLOR:** I did!

**Mr Ondarchie:** so I ask you to bring her back to this, please.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Ms Patten):** Thank you, Mr Ondarchie. I certainly did hear Ms Taylor discussing gas. But yes, please, we will stick to the motion, Ms Taylor.

**Ms TAYLOR:** This is the whole point. If we are talking about energy supply, then surely—

**A member:** There is more than one source.

**Ms TAYLOR:** See, there is more than one. But see, those opposite do not want to know about renewables. Classic; he walked right in. He took the bait because he does not want to talk about renewables because they do not have a story there.

We are installing neighbourhood batteries across Victoria, and did you hear about the first big battery that opened in North Fitzroy on Sunday, in the north? This will soak up solar power and make it available in the evenings when we need it most—

**A member** interjected.

**Ms TAYLOR:** Sorry, was there something?

**A member** interjected.

**Ms TAYLOR:** Yes, I am aware of this, but we are talking about energy. We are bringing it back to energy. So if you are talking about costs and you are talking about energy supply—

**Mr Ondarchie:** On a point of order, Acting President, your directive was very clear to the speaker to talk about gas supply and gas prices. It was very clear, and I put to you that she is in fact ignoring your directive.

**Ms Tierney:** Further to the point of order, Acting President, I clearly heard you mention that you had heard Ms Taylor actually mention gas, and then she was going on and talking about other forms of energy. You asked her to continue.

**Ms TAYLOR:** Well, I can repeat what I said at the beginning. The simple reality is that we are sending too much gas overseas. We have long advocated a domestic gas security mechanism—he obviously did not hear me say that at the outset—to restrict LNG exports in the event of an export-driven shortfall. I said that at the outset, and he can check *Hansard* if he does not believe me.

Now, we are also helping households reduce their bills with energy efficiency and reducing their gas usage. I mentioned the word ‘gas’. Hey, I mentioned the word ‘gas’. Is he happy now? Because he does not want to talk about renewables, because they do not believe in them. That is why he is objecting. He took the bait again. Twice he has taken the bait and proven they do not like renewables. They did not want to talk about it. So thank you very much, you have actually done me a favour. I really appreciate it.

Our highly successful Victorian energy upgrades program is ensuring that every household can take advantage of lower energy bills. Now, factoring in the different forms of energy supply that people may be reliant upon, energy efficiency is also incredibly important for putting downward pressure on power bills. So are they opposed to energy efficiency as well? Am I going to be objected to as well for

that? No? Okay, I get a tick for that one. I am allowed to talk about energy efficiency, fantastic. So our targets will deliver emissions reductions that are the equivalent of taking 8.5 million cars off the road. Victorians participating in the program and implementing energy upgrades will see annual average savings of at least \$120 and \$510 for households and businesses respectively. Even those who do not participate will save on their bills, with households saving \$150 and businesses saving \$870 over the next 10 years. *(Time expired)*

**Mr QUILTY** (Northern Victoria) (16:45): I will be brief. Before I get started, in response to Ms Shing, I would be thrilled to have a nuclear reactor in my backyard, but then I am not a nimby. If Ms Shing had been listening to the residents of eastern Victoria during the recent inquiry into the closure of the coal-fired power stations, she might have discovered a lot more people who would be happy to have nuclear power plants in their backyards. The real problem is the NIABYs—not in anyone’s backyard. They want to stop everyone from having them. People who want real jobs, economic growth and cheap, reliable energy are the ones who want the reactors. But I digress.

The energy market is a chaotic disaster of regulation piled on top of regulation. It is a train wreck. Governments like to pretend that privatisation is the problem, but the truth is the energy market is subject to strict government regulatory control from top to bottom. There are price caps, bans on production, a national price-setting body, large subsidies for various types of production, enormous regulatory risk and many restrictions on retail practices. This is not a free market. It is what a government-run system looks like—chaos, shortage and looming disaster, a train jumping off the rails.

The most recent outcome of the government’s management of the energy market is a gas shortage where prices have surged as much as 8000 per cent. Politicians complain that evil profit-seeking corporations are the problem, so I am eager to hear them explain why an 8000 per cent surge in prices is not creating enough profit to incentivise new gas production and domestic sales. If anything, it looks like these companies hate profit. Why else would they pass up more sales at these prices? The situation is so bizarre that some energy companies are asking their customers to switch to a competitor. Is there anyone silly enough to think this sounds like a free market?

Anyone who has been paying attention knows that gas supply is heavily restricted in Victoria. In the previous few years the government has even put some of these restrictions into the constitution. Free speech apparently is not important enough to make it into the constitution, but restricting the gas supply somehow makes the cut. The reason ReAmped Energy is trying to get rid of its customers is that the government-controlled market is now subject to a price cap. The CEO of ReAmped explained that the more customers the company keeps, the higher prices would need to go because it has no choice but to pass on the wholesale cost. He expects other small retailers to follow suit and mentions that the bigger players might be better placed to handle the conditions. The ticket operators are closing their booths because the network is falling apart. When the government intervenes in a market, things start to go wrong. When a government interferes as much in a market as they have done in the energy market, ultimately the wheels will fall off, as they are falling off now.

The government thinks Victoria is going to switch from gas to green energy, but green energy is useless without gas to firm the load. If we were to switch to nuclear energy baseload generation instead of wind turbines, we would have a workable solution, but Ms Shing and her nimbys will not let us do that. There is a band name for you—Shing and the Nimbys. In the real world, to solve the gas crisis we need to drill for more gas. This government does not solve problems; it slaps a bandaid on and tries to cover up the problems, kicking the can down the road until after the next election. That works for a while, but eventually the wheels fall off, as we are now seeing right across the Victorian economy, so we will get to watch this energy train derail.

**Mr GEPP** (Northern Victoria) (16:49): I rise to speak on Mr Ondarchie’s motion. I was a bit worried this morning when the whip was reading out the list of motions that were on the books today and she looked at me and said, ‘Gepp, you’ve got gas’. I thought I was being discreet, but it would appear not!

I am not sure how one follows Mr Quilty's contribution, because it was absolutely full of gas. It was full of the hyperbole that we have heard for a number of years now from those opposite. I would say to those opposite, if you actually want to know why the number against your name nosedived at the federal election, just go back and read some of these speeches—because they are so weird, so wacky and so out of line with just about every person that I speak to. I do not know where your constituents are. I do not run across them very often, and thank goodness, because these are just crazy, crazy, crazy themes that you keep on and on about. Your contributions are nothing more. You know, earlier in this chamber today we talked about bullying and harassment, and all we hear constantly from the Liberal Democrats whenever they stand up in this place is that they want to be abusive, they want to talk violently and they never offer any real solutions, but they just ramp it up again and again and again and again and again so that they can continue to appeal to their ever-diminishing base. Well, keep it up. Keep it up, I say, because your esteemed leader will one day—well, I do not know who their leader is, I have got to say. I am not sure they know, but when he comes back I am sure this will be amped up again as we get closer to the election.

I want to just talk very briefly about Ms Bath's contribution. What we hear frequently from those opposite when we are talking about most things on a Wednesday—at least once, if not on multiple occasions—is that this government forgets about regional and rural Victoria. I do not know whether they have actually looked at the composition of this Parliament. This government has more regional and rural MPs on our side than those opposite have. In fact, you talk to the people in our caucus and they say the growing number in caucus is our regional caucus. They all want to get in because we are the biggest cohort. It is just illogical, isn't it? Isn't it illogical that we would then forget about those electorates and say we will just shelve those because, according to those opposite, we only think along the tram tracks?

You ought to go back and you ought to think about how we got to this state in this state in relation to energy. Of course Mr Quilty dismissed the argument about privatisation, but as somebody who has been around the public service for all of my working life I can tell you that every time something is privatised by a government there are consequences. There are consequences further down the track, and surprise, surprise—the then Premier, Jeffrey Gibb Kennett, privatised in this space. We said at the time, 'If you do this, inevitably the market will be in such control that they will continue to chase the dollar; they will continue to offshore this very valuable natural resource to the extent that it would harm domestic supply'. And we are here, but apparently that is not the reason. It is not the reason, and yet we have the Australian Energy Market Operator who says that we produce enough gas here in this state for our domestic demands. We produce enough, but of course far too much of it is sent overseas. It is sent to other jurisdictions and that puts pressure here on supply, and of course we know when there is pressure on supply through demand then prices go up. I do not know why they do not understand that. But of course they want to wash their hands of the decisions that they took, that they were responsible for, that have ultimately led to these sorts of consequences.

I want to join Ms Shing and Ms Taylor in their praise of Minister D'Ambrosio in the other place, who has been an out-and-out champion of clean energy and renewables in this place. Certainly under her watch I can tell you from personal experience in my own electorate of Northern Victoria how she has driven the change in industry across Northern Victoria. You go up there and you ought to see the panels out in the paddocks. They are everywhere, and Minister D'Ambrosio does not stop. She continues each and every day to pursue cleaner, renewable energy for consumption here in this place, and she will not stop.

I want to talk about, very briefly, privatisation. When we came to government in 2014 the subsequent impact of privatisation was energy prices were out of control. Let us just have a look at what happened. Let us have a look at gas and residential disconnections, just as one indicator of what would happen ultimately after you privatise. Residential disconnections in 2019 were 15 473 in this state; in 2013–14, before we came to government, there were 24 007; and in 2019–20, 8606. We dropped from 24 000 when they were last in office to 8606.

When we came in we recognised that there was a significant problem, and one of the first things that we did, understanding that there was an enormous imbalance in the market, was commission the independent review into the electricity and gas retail markets in Victoria, headed by a former Deputy Premier of this state, John Thwaites—

**A member:** A good man.

**Mr GEPP:** He is a very good man—to examine how the market was operating and to deliver recommendations on making energy fairer and easier to understand. That review was released in August 2017, and it concluded that the competitive energy market in Victoria was not delivering outcomes in the best interests of consumers. It was a searing indictment of our privatised energy sector—a sector privatised by those opposite. The report made 11 recommendations as a part of the review, and we accepted every single one of those recommendations and we are supportive of them.

We have done much in this space to make energy consumption more available and more competitive for consumers, particularly with a number of the initiatives of late. We have the Victorian Energy Compare website. We have had the \$50 power saving bonus scheme, and we had nearly 400 000 applications and paid \$98 million to those who need it most in this space. And from 1 July—and I know Mr Leane is very excited about this—we are going to move to the third phase of the PSB program by providing another \$250 to every Victorian household that accesses the Victorian Energy Compare website. That is all you have to do: go to the website. You just have to access the website, and 250 bucks is coming your way to assist you with your power bills.

As Ms Taylor said, we are very, very pleased that we now have a partner at the federal level who is very, very interested in not only clean and renewable energies but also addressing the current imbalance in our gas supply system. We look forward to working closely with the federal government to continue to deliver for all Victorians. I reject the motion.

**Dr KIEU** (South Eastern Metropolitan) (16:59): With pleasure I rise to speak to Mr Davis's motion, which is about the Victorian gas supply crisis. There are a few things in here. First, the gas supply crisis. It is well known in economics 101 that demand and supply go together, and the demand for gas, particularly in our state of Victoria, has not changed that much over recent times but supply has been affected so much, so severely by what has happened elsewhere. We know about the Ukraine war; we know about the short supply of gas. But the problem is that the short supply not only puts pressure on the supply of gas but also puts pressure on the prices of gas that we are paying, because there is a price parity. We are paying the international price of gas that we produce and then export. And how much do we export? Eighty per cent of the gas produced here is being exported overseas. That is the first part of the equation. The next part of the equation is about Victoria. Why Victoria? It is a national crisis at this very moment. The minister for energy in the newly elected federal government—thankfully we have had a change of government—is having a conference nationally with all the ministers for energy from all the states. So this is not a crisis only for Victoria, this is an international crisis impacting nationally, not just Victoria.

We, as the Victorian government, have long advocated for a domestic gas security mechanism, and that is to have a gas supply security mechanism to preserve and reserve enough gas for domestic consumption. So by implication we talk about gas, but we have to talk about energy in general and what this government has done—plentiful. Let me start by talking about support for consumers. In 2018 we had the energy fairness plan and we introduced the Victorian default offer. That is still very much a strong mechanism and a way of helping the consumer to pay reasonable prices for the energy that they have to consume. Even with the recent energy price increases, the VDO—Victorian default offer—is still much lower than the standard offers were in 2019 before the VDO was introduced. Typically annual bills are around \$440 lower for the typical residential consumer and \$2370 lower for an average small business customer.

We can talk about the very successful and well-received power saving bonus. There are three different phases. In the first one we gave \$50 to people who visit Victorian Energy Compare; they will be and have been entitled to \$50. And then we extended the power saving bonus by providing a one-off \$250 payment to vulnerable Victorians who have a concession card and those who are receiving JobKeeper or JobSeeker. That has already been taken up by 400 000 applicants, and the government has paid out \$98 million to those who need it most. Now this has been extended further from 1 July to all Victorians who come to Victorian Energy Compare; they will be entitled to \$250. So potentially a household could get up to \$550—\$250 and \$50, plus the \$250 from 1 July. We also help those having difficulty paying through the payment difficulty framework.

**A member** interjected.

**Dr KIEU:** As my colleague has just mentioned, in the Kennett and previous Liberal governments the disconnection rate was skyrocketing, and since 2019 we have reduced by half the disconnections of electricity and energy from households. In fact during the difficult COVID time in the last two years we banned disconnections so that people would be protected.

We cannot talk about energy without talking about renewables. They are very much an important component of the energy supply. One megawatt typically is sufficient for about 400 to 900 households, so on average 700 households per 1 megawatt. We have 55 projects providing nearly 4000 megawatts. Particularly with offshore wind, by 2040 we are aiming to get 9 gigawatts. What is the equivalent number of homes that can be supported by that? The number is a staggering 7 million homes for that amount of power. It is not only power generated by renewable sources; with creative and new renewable energy technology we will have tens of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars of investment and also help the climate change pressure that we are facing.

**Mr Finn** interjected.

**Dr KIEU:** I know you do not believe in climate change. But look at the weather and the scientific evidence that we have had. I just have to mention in particular that only last Sunday we had the very first neighbourhood battery being opened in North Fitzroy, and that is going to be the first of many neighbourhood batteries rolled out across Victoria.

We also have to talk about the Victorian Energy Upgrades program that helps households and also businesses with \$420 savings for households and \$510 for businesses per year. The program also creates and supports 2200 jobs. We are the only state to do this kind of vital work, with many different approaches supporting renewable energy and several schemes to help households as well as business, as we have done with decarbonising the electricity sector. Our intent is to deliver economic growth and investment and also good jobs and greater affordability for all Victorians as we carefully lay down the policies along those critical pathways.

**Mr LEANE** (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (17:08): I think I have got 5 minutes.

*Members interjecting.*

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Gepp):** We only need one Chair, thank you. At 10 past 5 I will throw to Mr Ondarchie to sum up. Mr Leane, who has now got a minute: go.

**Mr LEANE:** I need to be very brief, so I will just make one point. After you have been a little bit unkind to me, Acting President, I will be kind to you and say that part of your contribution and Dr Kieu's spoke about how all of a sudden there is this amnesia around privatisation—I think particularly Mr Davis was part of that Kennett privatisation—and how that affects private companies actually prioritising where they send their gas to make some money. That is fair enough. And it kind of strikes me that there is this amnesia or this being really slow on what is actually happening around them, particularly in the Liberal Party. A perfect example just recently was when Mr Davis and others all of a sudden, only a couple weeks ago, kind of hit their foreheads and went, 'Wow, Bernie Finn has

some really extreme views on anti-abortion'. They hit their heads. So when did that happen? Only 24 years ago.

**Mr Davis:** On a point of order, Acting President, this motion is about gas policy, perhaps energy policy, but I think we are into social policy here, which—

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Gepp):** Thank you. I think Mr Leane was just about to finish his contribution, so I can throw to Mr Ondarchie to sum up.

**Mr ONDARCHIE** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:10): It is interesting that we are talking about gas, because there has been a lot of hot air coming from the other side of the chamber today. We, the Liberals-Nationals coalition, believe very firmly in reliable, affordable and clean energy. We do. This government, with Labor having been in power 19 of the last 23 years, have failed Victorians on their gas supply, and Victorian families and small businesses are going to be hit harder with higher gas prices because they continue to play politics with energy. Today there are clear reports that their plan to turn off the gas ducted heating, to turn off the gas hot water and to turn off the gas stove is being shelved by Minister D'Ambrosio until after the election. 'We've got something up our sleeves', the government is saying, 'but we're not going to tell you till after the election'.

One thing is very clear in this state: there is a gas supply crisis. We know it, the public know it, business know it and the government know it. There has been upwards pressure on gas prices because of this government's failure to act. Do not forget that between 2014 and halfway through 2020 this government banned onshore gas supplies, banned resourcing of critical supplies through conventional gas exploration—

**Mr Leane:** You want to frack now?

**Mr ONDARCHIE:** Not fracking, Mr Leane, to correct the record—through conventional gas supplies. This government refused to. Once again they are late to the table. It does not matter whether it is health, it does not matter whether it is ambos, it does not matter whether it is education, it does not matter whether it is lockdown; this government are always late to make decisions. And how is it that every other Victorian knows there is a problem except for the government? You know why? Because it is more about their spin and politics than it is about the care and wellbeing of Victorians. I commend this motion to the house.

**Motion agreed to.**

### **Business of the house**

#### **NOTICES OF MOTION AND ORDERS OF THE DAY**

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (17:13): 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**

#### **DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

##### *Documentation on the making of pandemic orders implemented on 22 April 2022*

**Dr CUMMING** (Western Metropolitan) (17:13): I rise to speak on the documents tabled under section 165AQ of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 in relation to the making of the pandemic orders implemented on 22 April 2022. There is really no surprise in any of the orders. This is just simply more of the same restrictions that we have had to put up with from this government in the last two years. There is no science to be seen, no real medical advice, nothing to say why the government is still hanging on to the last little bit of power that they have got in the way of mandating workers and

not allowing all workers to go back to work. Under the act the Minister for Health has to ensure that all of the relevant documents are published on a department internet site within seven days. The minister also has to ensure that the same documents are tabled in Parliament within four days of the orders coming into force. They were tabled on 25 May. That is over a month since they came into effect and five sitting days after they came into effect. The minister could have had the documents published on the internet within a week but chose to take nearly four more weeks to table them in Parliament. This demonstrates the contempt that this government has for the Parliament and process.

In looking at the documents themselves, there are some contradictions. In the record of the meeting with the chief health officer, which is the minutes of the meeting, the minister states:

I note that cases are currently plateauing ...

and goes on to say that:

... it may be appropriate to consider further easing of Orders given that plateau.

Again, in paragraph 33 of the minister's statement of reasons he says:

The advice provided by the Chief Health Officer is in consideration of the current plateauing of cases ...

Yet in paragraph 51 he says:

From 9 January 2022, Victoria had been experiencing a downward trend in case numbers from a peak of 51,356 new cases on 8 January 2022. However, since 15 March 2022 case numbers have been steadily rising again.

Were we plateauing or were we increasing? The day before the new orders came into force the rolling seven-day average of new cases was 9327. In mid-May the seven-day average was 11 764, and at the beginning of this week it is actually 11 892. Everyone knows that I am not a fan of the pandemic orders, and nor is the majority of the Victorian community. I have not exactly been silent on that. But these documents show that the very basis for changing the orders is false.

Last October we were in lockdown, 70 per cent of Victorians were double dosed, we were wearing masks as it was mandatory and contact tracing was in full swing and the total number of active cases was under 23 000. Today we have 49 788 active cases. These orders are more about political pointscoreing, they are about control. Last year we were subjected to lockdowns, unable to leave our homes, unable to see our family members and friends—why? Why, why, why? Why did we go into lockdowns? The numbers? Okay. It shows me that when you actually do the numbers and there is a so-called plateauing of cases there was no justification for the lockdowns back then and there is none now.

Why is the government continuing to enforce the mandating of people who are working, especially when we know the same people who cannot work here in Victoria are going interstate, plus they can still walk into shops. They can still walk into any venue, they can still go to the football. Why? Why hasn't the government let go of worker mandates? Why, when we continually have worker shortages, is this government, the Victorian government, the only government in Australia that continues with the mandates? Again, I have looked through the report and I cannot see the rationale, cannot see the science and cannot see the medical advice for this government not letting go of the mandates for workers.

## ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

### *Inquiry into the Closure of the Hazelwood and Yallourn Power Stations*

**Ms BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:19): I am really pleased this afternoon to speak on the inquiry into the closure of the Hazelwood and Yallourn power stations, and particularly the minority report that I wrote on behalf of The Nationals and the Liberals. If you turn to the back of the report, on about page 165 you will find the minority report.

I moved the motion for this inquiry in Parliament back in March last year. EnergyAustralia came out and said that they would close Yallourn by 2028 in the transition out of coal-fired power stations. What happened in here was that Dr Cumming, Mr Meddick and the Labor members decided to vote against that inquiry—it was an inquiry to unpack and to let local business, industry and community group voices have a say about the future of their region—which is astounding, but there it is. I thank the other members of the crossbench and indeed my team here for passing it, and we had that subsequent inquiry, with approximately 60 submissions. Again I thank people from all walks of life and all opinions for their very interesting submissions, and I thank them for also coming forward and putting themselves forward to speak at the inquiry. I would have actually liked to have seen more hearings, but we will take what we are given.

Now, I wrote a minority on behalf of The Nationals and the Liberals because there were some major flaws. First of all, and not surprisingly, even though the government did not want the inquiry they then stacked the inquiry, and there was an imbalance in the material presented in the committee report. It ignores a large proportion of expert evidence. Experts can be people who live in the valley; they also can be people who have worked in industry there for many, many years. It lacked expert advice.

Anything or anyone that was particularly critical of the Andrews government, guess what, did not get a run in the committee report. And if there was an unpacking of the way the Latrobe Valley Authority ran either its worker transitional services or the worker transfer scheme or about some of the grants that went out, rather than looking at these and analysing what went wrong and how things could be done better, because there is going to be a need for those sorts of services and future investments and collaborative work with industry and business to establish new jobs, the government shut it down and voted them out.

The committee also really did not look at the information, the data and the practical experience and positive suggestions made in some of these submissions. They just put them to the side. As usual, the government will always speak to what it has done well. When challenged on the number of jobs that it created, 4000 jobs—well, we know over the last 10 years the Latrobe local municipality, the LGA, has lost in that vicinity of jobs. So at the moment it is net, but the problem that the committee report did not look into was that in actual fact they said that they have created them but they have not been able to substantiate whether they are long-term jobs or whether they are one-off construction jobs for social infrastructure. Social infrastructure deserves to be on the plan too, deserves to be in our region and deserves to be there from a bucket of money, but we need a plan, Latrobe Valley needs a plan. We need a plan, and we need it to be rigorous. The government have put \$292 million so far through the Latrobe Valley Authority through various programs, and they do not have a plan.

Now, our region is transforming. We want it to transform. We need it. There will be a multitude of transformational jobs as we come on. What about recycling of renewables and manufacturing of solar panels? These could be some of the things they look at. The government has brought out smart specialisation. It is a wonderful, trendy word, and the person that spoke to us about it spoke about growing algae in East Gippsland. Well, how does that relate to transitioning jobs in the valley? These people are really important. They have driven our economy in the past, and I certainly will have more to say. I suggest that the committee and this house take a little time and have a look at it. I have not been political; I have been constructive. On this side of the house we want to be constructive about how we move forward, and I am really pleased with and I call on the house to read this minority report.

### ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

#### *Inquiry into the Health Impacts of Air Pollution in Victoria*

**Dr RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:24): I am pleased to rise to speak to the report of the parliamentary inquiry into the health impacts of air pollution in Victoria, tabled in November 2021. I rise to speak to it now following my initial comments back then, because it has been six months since the report was tabled yet the government has not formally responded to the inquiry report as it was

required to. This only compounds the government's extraordinary delay in releasing its air quality strategy that was due for release in 2019 after community consultation occurred in 2018.

This air pollution inquiry was one of the most important this Parliament has conducted, because it exposed the really serious issues with air pollution that communities in Victoria have been asked to endure despite very strong evidence that this pollution is making people sick. It also exposed the lack of government action for decades, despite mounting evidence and pleas from the communities to act. The inquiry found amongst a range of findings that there is a need for improved governance, including the need to release the air quality strategy and review conditional licences for heavy industry. Consultation was often poor with communities and must improve. Also an area for improvement was the need to improve ongoing communication with communities.

It found that communities in the Latrobe Valley and inner west of Melbourne suffer with poor air quality and high pollution, and this leads to adverse health outcomes. It found that there is a need for clean air shelters and clean air zones, and it found that wood smoke from domestic heaters is a significant polluter and there is a need to phase them out. Vehicle emissions are a highly polluting source of air pollution in Victoria, and we need to transition to low-emissions transport such as public, active and electric transport. We also need improved air quality monitoring in this state.

As I mentioned in my minority report, evidence provided throughout the inquiry:

... told the story about what happens when people are ignored and forgotten by governments, representatives and agencies who are supposed to care for them. It also told the story of how unequal health outcomes are created and worsened by government inaction. The people of the Latrobe Valley and Melbourne's Inner West are being asked by the Victorian Government to continue to put up with more air pollution because the Government refuses to legislate and regulate strongly enough to prevent damage to their health and wellbeing.

Further quoting from my minority report, I mentioned that while I supported the majority report, it:

... fails to acknowledge the disease burden that these communities are asked to carry and the—

recommended—

... types of interventions that could improve air quality. There are also several gaps in the majority report in terms of findings from the evidence submitted. I am disappointed that the committee did not appreciate that making strong and clear findings was an important way of evaluating and reflecting the strength of some of the evidence presented.

Furthermore, I noted in my minority report, and I quote:

For communities that have attempted to increase awareness for years about the air pollution risks they face, this inquiry was an opportunity to acknowledge their concerns and document the evidence they provided. Their attempts to do this are too often minimised and dismissed by those who either don't wish to take strong action or refuse to accept the evidence. I felt it especially important to document in this minority report the concerns raised by the communities of the Latrobe Valley, Melbourne's Inner West and those who have been advocating for reducing the harms of wood smoke exposure because the majority report did not adequately capture the evidence they submitted and presented.

I urge the government to release the long-overdue air quality strategy immediately, as well as its response to this parliamentary inquiry. To delay it even further is to treat the community and the parliamentary committee process with contempt, and once again I reiterate my thanks to the incredible community organisations, advocates and individuals who presented to the inquiry. They provided such rich and compelling evidence about the need to improve air quality in Victoria now.

#### OMBUDSMAN

##### *Investigation into Environment Protection Authority Decisions on West Gate Tunnel Project Spoil Disposal*

**Mr FINN** (Western Metropolitan) (17:28): I rise to speak on the Victorian Ombudsman's *Investigation into Environment Protection Authority Decisions on West Gate Tunnel Project Spoil*

*Disposal.* I want to thank the Ombudsman for the work that she has done on this and commend her most strongly for officially confirming what many of us have known in the western suburbs for some time, and that is that the Andrews government has been bullying and has been unduly influencing the EPA and various other bodies for quite some time on this issue. I refer to Ms Deborah Glass's foreword in this report, where she says:

While senior officials denied there was any government interference, there is little doubt the EPA was under pressure to 'fix' the problem to get the project back on track.

And that is the bottom line. What we are seeing in Sunbury Road at the moment, what we are seeing between Sunbury and Bulla, is a direct result of a decision made by the Andrews government, not the EPA. The EPA is a useless organisation that is being told what to do by government and it just meekly follows whatever it is told, and that is clear. It is clear from this report. The EPA might as well be wound up. I do not know how many millions of dollars it spends every year or how much it costs the taxpayer, but it might as well be wound up for all the good it does. This report clearly indicates that the people really making the decisions in the EPA are the Premier's office and the minister. And that is something that I think we are all infuriated about, particularly those of us who live out that way. The Ombudsman said:

Residents ... were 'left in the dark'.

People expressed concerns about 'toxic soil', including fears it might increase the risk of birth defects and terminal illness in the community, and worries about dumping it close to schools and waterways.

My very word we did, and we still do. And what did the EPA do? The EPA did nothing. They said, 'Oh, well, we know what the community thinks. We won't bother asking them', and they did not. It is beyond a joke. It is reprehensible behaviour from the EPA, and in my view the chairman of the EPA should resign over this. I think this is just disgraceful. It is deplorable behaviour, and I refer again to Ms Glass's foreword, where she said the EPA:

... plainly failed to convince the community ... The EPA told us consulting the community would be a 'waste of time' and that discussions 'could not be fruitful because of the level of anger in the community'. In effect, the EPA thought there was no point in consulting because it knew—

it knew—

what the community thought. Instead, it took the approach of 'putting factual information on the website', but much of it was redacted.

Fair dinkum. That is just not good enough. It is not good enough for a government organisation to say, 'The people are angry. We will just ignore them. We will pretend that this community consultation has been done, that it's finished, that it's over with', when in fact it never really was conducted in the first place. This, unfortunately, I have to say, is a trend of the Andrews government, to use government bodies to promote their policies and to push through the particular projects that they might have.

But on this particular occasion there is absolutely no excuse for the EPA not to do its job. It is a clear dereliction of duty. It is a clear failure on the part of the EPA on this particular issue. The people of Sunbury and the people of Bulla and the people who use Sunbury Road have every right to be furious at the way that they have been treated, the fact that they have been taken for granted and the fact that they have been dismissed by the EPA and indeed by the Andrews government. This is just despicable behaviour, particularly when the health and the lives of people in that part of Melbourne are directly impacted. The EPA will not tell us what impact this will have on our health. They are not interested. They just want to do what they are told by the Premier, and on this occasion they have. I will speak again on this report at the first opportunity.

## ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

*Inquiry into Renewable Energy in Victoria*

**Ms TAYLOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:33): I am very happy to reflect on the renewable energy inquiry and the report that was recently handed down. I did attend a number of the hearings. I will concede that I did move on to another inquiry so was not involved in the writing of the report, but I commend all those who contributed to the report.

Having said that, I thought it would be nice to reflect on the report in any case. And what really came through to me, and there were many aspects to this comprehensive inquiry, was just how far our government has come in a very short space of time in terms of driving the transition to renewables. If we go back to 30 May 2013, I will give you one of the headlines under the Baillieu government ‘Welcome to Victoria, no wind farms allowed’:

The Australian state of Victoria is now one of the most difficult places in the world to build a wind farm.

I am very happy to say that our government did not rest on its laurels. It took action immediately when it came in to invest in clean energy, noting that this was really a game changer. No government in Victoria’s history has done more to bring online clean energy than the Andrews Labor government. And this has never been more urgent, because the simple reality is that right now we have about 20 per cent of our coal generation offline. This is simply a reflection of the fact that our coal generators are getting old and less reliable, which is why the Andrews Labor government has worked so hard to bring on line new sources of renewable generation.

*Members interjecting.*

**Ms TAYLOR:** That’s right, oppose renewables. Oppose, oppose, oppose—that is all we hear from those opposite. The key is to keep investing in new renewable energy and bringing on line new projects. Since we were elected—get this—55 projects providing 3991 megawatts of new capacity have come on line and are providing clean energy to the grid; and five renewable energy projects, which will provide 502 megawatts of capacity, are also under construction. These are driving down energy prices now by providing low-cost, clean, renewable energy. We have run the largest reverse auction in Australia’s history, and we are running another auction to bring on line at least—get this—600 megawatts of new renewable energy to power the entire government’s operations. We have set ambitious targets to bring on line offshore wind—2 gigawatts by 2032, 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040. Those opposite: hey, are you listening? This game-changing technology will create tens of thousands of jobs—get that—because that is what Labor governments do. We drive clean energy; we drive jobs. This is a vital source of new renewable energy.

We are also making sure that every Victorian household can take part in the renewables revolution, with over 200 000 households installing solar, thanks to our Solar Homes program. These households would simply have missed out if it was not for our program. We have built the biggest battery in the Southern Hemisphere with the Victorian Big Battery in Moorabool, and we are installing neighbourhood batteries across Victoria. Did you hear—actually I think it was Ms Watt who spoke very recently—about the wonderful new community battery being opened in North Fitzroy, right in the community, because that is what Victorians want? This will soak up solar power and make it available in the evenings when we need it most. We are also helping households reduce their bills with energy efficiency, and this reduces their gas usage as well. Our highly successful Victorian energy upgrades program is ensuring that every household can take advantage of lower bills.

So you can see that we are really driving the renewable energy revolution. Why? We want to put downward pressure on our power bills. That makes good common sense. Victorians get that. That is why there was such a fabulous uptake of the solar rebate program. And the Solar Homes program is continuing because Victorians want it. They said yes, we said yes. We are working together with them on the community battery and Victoria’s biggest battery. What is not to love? We are doing it—action, action, action.

## DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY AND FINANCE

*Budget papers 2022–23*

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (17:38): I want to change the tone in the chamber, if I can, and refer to the veterans output in the budget and note the importance of this year and a number of the commemorations that have occurred this year. There may be a number in the chamber who will agree with my points on these matters.

I want to first of all draw attention to the Mediterranean campaign. I have been to a number of important commemorations over recent weeks. The Hellenic Presidential Guard was present at the Kalamata battle commemoration. This was an important battle, as people will be aware. The Nazis invaded Greece on 6 April 1941 and pushed through Greece to drive out New Zealand, British and some Australian troops as well as the many Greek brigades that fought for their homeland through that period. By 29 April, the end of the Battle of Kalamata, they were forced off the Greek mainland and the Nazis were in control of the Greek mainland.

I think it is important to note the work of the Society of Kalamata in commemorating these points and the presence of the Hellenic Presidential Guard at the commemoration that occurred recently—on 23 April in fact—and to remember too that Kalamata is very important to the Greek community, remembering back to 1821, 23 March, and the important work that occurred in freeing Greece and providing it with an independent national status.

It is also important to note the Battle of Crete and the 81st commemoration of that important battle. Many of the 50 000 evacuees—there were 8000 captured from Kalamata—were removed by the Royal Navy, largely to Crete. The 81st commemoration of Crete was on 22 May, again at the shrine, and I was very much moved by some of the discussion at that commemoration. The Battle of Crete was a very hard-fought battle. Again, there was a significant evacuation between the end of May and early June. Australians, New Zealanders, British troops and a number of the brigades from local areas in Crete were evacuated at that time. The Nazis also took control of Crete. It is important to think what this meant for local people. It is important to remember the heroic response of locals but also the commonwealth forces that fought alongside those people in Crete and in Greece in 1941 and beyond.

I also want to note that through this period there has been the very significant 80th anniversary of the very important Battle of the Coral Sea, which for Australia is such a seminal moment in terms of defending our country and understanding the importance of the American alliance. It was significant in a historical context, but also looking forward and seeing the risks in the Asia-Pacific region that we face at the moment. I was again fortunate to attend the commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea. I saw Greg Mirabella speak there, and indeed the minister in the chamber, the Minister for Veterans, was present.

Sam Muscat from the Australian American Association was instrumental in ensuring that this commemoration received the significant focus that it actually deserved, reminding people here of the period between 4 and 8 May in 1942 when Australia was in a very desperate position. A Japanese armada, aircraft carriers and significant troop ships were heading towards Port Moresby. Although in some senses the Battle of the Coral Sea was a tactical loss, it was a strategic victory because Australia's future was assured. The ships were turned back. Japanese aircraft carriers were sunk. I was very happy to sit next to Bruce Cowell, a World War II veteran from the *HMS Australia*. He was a very impressive man—*(Time expired)*

## ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

*Inquiry into Renewable Energy in Victoria*

**Ms WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:43): I rise today to speak on the Environment and Planning Committee's report on the inquiry into renewable energy in Victoria. If this report brings attention to one thing, it is that when it comes to renewables and climate action the Andrews Labor

government is delivering. This report highlights not only the critical investments we have already made to support a transition to clean, reliable and affordable energy but also the incredible achievements of government-led initiatives such as the Solar Homes program, which has seen Victoria attain one of the highest levels of solar uptake in the world. Over the lifetime of this government Victoria's share of renewable energy generators has risen from around 12.2 per cent in 2013–14 to 29.4 per cent over the 2020–21 financial year—a remarkable increase that has well and truly surpassed the targets outlined in our climate change strategy. Though there is still more work to be done, we have clearly created the foundational structures and policy that will turn this state into a renewable energy powerhouse, the benefits of which will be enormous.

One thing that stood out for me was the incredible projected jobs growth outlined in the report. As ClimateWorks noted in their submission, direct and indirect job creation in the renewables sector is estimated to be more than 2½ times that of the fossil fuel industry. This will include job opportunities in the construction, operation and maintenance of renewable energy infrastructure. We have already seen the effects of this, with 7800 jobs created in the Victorian renewables sector in 2020 alone.

The government is also working to address future workplace needs in the renewable energy sector. We have invested \$1 billion to upgrade our TAFE infrastructure and provide over 80 000 new training places to educate the renewable energy industry workers of tomorrow. This is further supported by the Clean Economy Workforce Capacity Building Fund and the clean economy workforce strategy, which will enhance curriculum design, learning resources and VET workforce capability. These initiatives will also play a vital role in facilitating a just transition for those currently working in the fossil fuel sector, providing them with the upskilling and training necessary to move to the renewable energy industry. In this area, as the report suggests, the Victorian government has a strong track record, evidenced by the success of our Latrobe Valley support package. This \$266 million package includes the establishment of the Latrobe Valley Authority and the worker transition scheme, enabling the government to work with the Gippsland community to assist those affected by the closure of Hazelwood power station and create a plan for the region's economic future. Through this we provided workers with opportunities for job transitions, training, personal and financial counselling, and retirement, which helped 79 per cent of the 736 workers impacted by the closure to find new employment.

Coming from a health background, the positive impact that moving to renewables will have on the health and wellbeing of all Victorians is not lost on me. This report indicates that around 3000 people are killed each year by the effects of air pollution, with scores more suffering from fossil fuel related respiratory illnesses, cancer and heart disease. If done swiftly, our move to renewables will help mitigate these health risks, improving air quality and saving lives in the process. Clearly the Victorian government's commitment to moving away from fossil fuels is not just about doing what is best for the environment but also about doing what is best for the health and wellbeing of Victorians.

Of course these significant achievements would not have been possible without the tireless work of the Honourable Lily D'Ambrosio, Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change and also Minister for Solar Homes in the other place. As this report notes, the Victorian government has emerged as a national leader in the fight to combat climate change, and this is largely due to Minister D'Ambrosio's passion, dedication and commitment to achieving climate justice for all Victorians. It is truly easy to make noise from the sidelines, but talk is cheap, and this Labor government is getting on with the job of delivering real climate action with real results.

### Adjournment

**Ms PULFORD** (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Resources) (17:47): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

### YARRA RANGES PLANNING

**Ms BURNETT-WAKE** (Eastern Victoria) (17:47): (1966) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Planning. The action that I seek is for the minister to do all things necessary to speed up the planning permit process to allow residents to live in temporary accommodation on their own land after losing their homes in natural disasters. Storm-affected residents of the Yarra Ranges should be able to live in their own properties in temporary accommodation while they wait for their homes to be rebuilt.

At the outset I would like to thank the Liberal candidate for Monbulk, Gareth Ward, for raising this issue with me after attending a storm anniversary media event early this week. Many residents of the Yarra Ranges lost everything in the 9 June storm. They sat awake, helpless, while the storm ripped through. In the days following the storm, as strong gusts of wind continued, these residents were left to process the fact that their homes were no longer habitable. They were cut off from the rest of the world by road and reception. The Deputy Premier, who is also a member for the area, was nowhere to be seen. The community often expressed to me and to Gareth just how abandoned they felt and still feel by Mr Merlino and the Labor government. Many families who lost their homes have spent the last year living in a rental through their insurance company. However, most insurance companies only offer 12 months rental cover. This means there are many storm-affected residents who are now on the verge of homelessness as we approach the one-year anniversary tomorrow. Their homes have not yet been rebuilt. Some are yet to even receive insurance assessment reports. This has been caused by a mix of planning permit delays and building industry uncertainty. The number one concern for my constituents is having some certainty about where they can live while they go through the rebuilding process.

After the 2019 fires the Victorian government put in place an exemption that allowed residents to bypass some requirements of the planning scheme. This fast-tracked the issuing of permits and allowed people to live on their own land in caravans or tiny homes while they rebuilt. Clause 52.07 of the planning scheme provides an exemption that allows other parts of the planning scheme to be turned off so that bushfire recovery activities can be undertaken without a planning permit in certain circumstances. This allows people to live on their properties in temporary accommodation for up to three years, which reduces the stress and financial burden. These exemptions should not be confined to just bushfire. Although the government have not treated the 9 June storms as an emergency, this storm caused just as much damage and should be classified as an emergency. These residents have been through enough. I call on the minister to do all things necessary to fast-track the planning permit process and enable these residents to live in temporary accommodation on their own land while they rebuild.

### ALBION TRAIN STATION

**Dr CUMMING** (Western Metropolitan) (17:49): (1967) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure in the other place, and the action that I seek is for the redevelopment of Albion station to be given priority. Albion station is long overdue for revitalisation, and the airport rail link via the Sunshine and Albion corridor provides the perfect opportunity for serious investment.

Albion station is regularly identified as one of the most neglected and lowest ranked train stations across Victoria, with amenity issues, overcrowding and concerns about access and safety. The *Sunshine Priority Precinct: Vision 2050* identified the development of the Albion quarter and the SunRISE district—which stands for research, innovation, science and enterprise—as critical for the priority precinct’s ability to create thousands of new jobs. This can be achieved by connecting the Victoria University campus with Albion station through the coordination of urban renewal and precinct planning. Supported by Victoria University, the Sunshine priority precinct has earmarked the SunRISE district as a new university city with a focus on research, innovation, study and enterprise.

Upgrading Albion station will unlock major urban renewal land parcels surrounding the area and along Ballarat Road. Brimbank City Council has developed an Albion station, Albion quarter and SunRISE

master plan that identifies and facilitates surrounding investment and development opportunities. The council urgently needs the reconstruction of Albion station into a fit-for-purpose public transport interchange acting as a second Sunshine CBD station. The station needs to be integrated into the surrounding precinct in a way that unlocks development opportunities, especially in the Albion quarter. New direct physical connections between Albion station, the Albion quarter and SunRISE district are needed for walking, cycling and a new light rail. A new St Albans Road extension could also create development potential in the Albion quarter while establishing high-amenity pedestrian walkways between Albion station and the Sunshine CBD. The council would also like the government to reconsider its plans for the airport rail flyover and adopt a staged approach by identifying and utilising existing at-grade tracks. The upgrade of the Albion station is essential not just to address the access and safety concerns but also to unlock the potential of the surrounding area of Albion.

### DRUG HARM REDUCTION

**Ms PATTEN** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:53): (1968) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health and relates to drug checking. It was only a short while ago that I asked a question without notice of the minister with respect to the coronial inquest into the tragic death of Mr S, who died on 28 June 2020 at 20 years of age of mixed drug toxicity. So it saddens me greatly to be standing here today raising a separate inquest into the death of Mr P, who died on 21 September 2020, aged 26, also of mixed drug toxicity. Mr P was a young man. He was an apprentice mechanic. He was a keen soccer player. He was a keen footballer. He was loved by his family. He was living a young man's life in a group house, and sadly he died. He died, as did Mr S, of synthetic cathinones—as did 33 other people in Victoria in 2020. Thirty-three people died of synthetic cathinones not knowing that that is what they had taken. Coroner Sarah Gebert recommended with respect to both:

That the Department of Health, as the appropriate arm of the Victorian Government, implements a drug checking service in the State of Victoria as a matter of urgency, to reduce the number of preventable deaths (and nonfatal harms) associated with the use of drugs obtained from unregulated drug markets.

The recommendation mirrors that of Coroner Paresa Spanos with respect to five preceding overdose deaths. These deaths are preventable, so the action I seek is that the minister accept the recommendations of these inquests and implement a drug-checking service in Victoria.

### RENEWABLE ENERGY

**Ms BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:55): (1969) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, the Honourable Lily D'Ambrosio in the other place. The action I seek from the minister is in line with a minority report that I wrote and indeed the minority report's recommendation 13 from the inquiry into the closure of Hazelwood and Yallourn and the assessment of the Latrobe Valley Authority. It goes to, I think, a very important point about stewardship of the environment and the passage of renewables through that landscape in the environment. The action I seek from the minister is to investigate world's best practice on the introduction of bonds—and I am going to say similar to those of retiring coalmines and coal-fired power stations—for large-scale solar energy, wind farms and large-scale battery facilities to ensure that there are sufficient funds available for site rehabilitation at the end of the working lives of those renewables.

Now, being on that inquiry and also on the Environment and Planning Committee one on renewables, we heard about the push and the need to go to solar and wind. Whilst I endorse that, if we want to be truly, truly carbon neutral we have to look at a cradle-to-grave analysis of how we produce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions at the manufacturing point and in the mining of the various materials all the way through to the decommissioning and recycling of those renewables.

Indeed the Clean Energy Council in Australia has put out some information, and it shows that we in Australia only produce 11 per cent of the onshore components in those renewables sectors. So I think there is a huge opportunity in Victoria and in my patch in Eastern Victoria Region to look at

component manufacturing and recycling. But one of the key things with those large-scale solar farms that are covering the earth, the ground—all the renewables—and the on-land and even offshore wind turbines is what the government is going to do about ensuring the proper remediation of those structures to return the environment, the landscape, back to good working order in a full stewardship cycle. So I call on the minister to investigate the way that bonds are put down in world's best practice and report that back to the community in my Eastern Victoria electorate.

### WILLAURA HEALTHCARE

**Mr GRIMLEY** (Western Victoria) (17:58): (1970) My adjournment debate is for the Minister for Health, and the action that I seek is for the minister to investigate possible funding opportunities for the Willaura hospital, which has not had significant building upgrades for decades. Last year a constituent contacted my office regarding the Willaura hospital. She said her husband was in the hospital and was requiring ongoing assistance. In her email to me she said, and I quote:

My husband was a patient recently and while the staff and the food were wonderful I was aghast at the state of the hospital.

Patients who are quite elderly shared one toilet in the wing my husband was in. The rooms were in a very poor state with no bedside light which is an accident waiting to happen.

After receiving this email I asked a constituency question regarding a safety audit and funding for any part of the hospital that did not meet safety standards. The response from the minister was not satisfactory, in my opinion. The Willaura hospital was not mentioned once in the short reply, and no information was given as to what funding the government has provided the hospital. Instead the answer was regarding the East Grampians Health Service, with most of the funding that was discussed in the response given to Ararat hospital.

After the letter to my office and the question to the minister, I met with interim CEO of the East Grampians Health Service Peter Armstrong. I made a commitment that when I was in the area I would visit the Willaura hospital. I did this last week and spoke with the new CEO, Nick Bush, and Peter, who is the director of clinical services. I toured the hospital and saw the old building that is being held together with paint and patchwork. There are eight acute beds with only two bathrooms to be shared between everyone. The building itself was built in 1935, and there are stories of Weary Dunlop performing surgeries in the same rooms that are due for an upgrade, I kid you not.

The staff at the hospital are exceptional. Each nurse, administrator and other support staff does a phenomenal job to make sure all the patients are cared for with compassion and that the residents in the 10-bed aged care facility are happy as well. I understand applications for the Regional Health Infrastructure Fund will be open in the coming weeks. Any application by Willaura hospital should be considered with urgent regard. I reiterate that the action that I seek is that the Minister for Health investigate possible funding opportunities for the Willaura hospital, which has not had a significant building upgrade for decades.

### PARKDALE ELEVATED RAIL

**Dr BACH** (Eastern Metropolitan) (18:00): (1971) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and it concerns the level crossing removal project in Parkdale. The action that I seek is for her to finally meet with Parkdale residents who are desperate to meet with her and to consider alternate solutions to the level crossing removal.

Back in July last year the Andrews Labor government announced the removal of several more level crossings across Victoria, and that announcement was very welcome. That was including the level crossing at Parkers Road in Parkdale. Now, Parkdale is a small community down in Melbourne's south-east. It has a quiet, village feel and a tight-knit local community. Without consulting the residents or local businesses the government announced that this level crossing would be removed with a rail-over-road solution—sky rail. This is something we have seen at other places across Melbourne.

In Parkdale this has caused understandable angst and frustration for the tight-knit community. They have seen this solution thrust upon them. These residents love the feel of their local community, yet they have had this solution thrust upon them, which is in my view highly inappropriate. In particular the sky rail will be so high and so close to many residences and businesses. As a result there has been a local campaign, Save Parkdale. A rally was organised against the government's design, with over 1000 residents attending, late last year. Residents are angry, in particular at the lack of engagement.

I was fortunate enough to head down to Parkdale recently to meet with local residents and indeed with this group. When I was there I gave a commitment that if the Liberals and Nationals have the honour to be successful at the upcoming election, we will remove the Parkdale level crossing but without sky rail. This commitment is informed by a huge amount of feedback that I have been very pleased to receive from the local Liberal candidate for the seat of Mordialloc, Phillip Pease. Since his preselection, Phillip has been incredibly active. He has been out doorknocking, he has been holding listening posts, he has been engaging with the local community and he has received a crystal clear message from them: 'Remove the level crossing, of course, but do it with a rail-under-road solution'.

I was really disappointed to see that just last week the minister in fact went to Parkdale. She went to Parkdale; she met with the member for Mordialloc, Tim Richardson, who was invited to the rally I recently attended but did not bother coming. She had some photos taken in a hard hat and hi-vis, but she did not bother meeting with one single local. People in this part of the world are not antagonistic to the government; they want to work with the government for a solution. I am calling on the minister to meet them halfway.

### ENERGY POLICY

**Mr FINN** (Western Metropolitan) (18:03): (1972) I wish to raise a matter this evening for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. Can I express my very, very deep concern about the impending energy crisis that is about to hit us and say that I am very distressed by reports that I am receiving of elderly people who are hard up for dollars going to bed at lunchtime just to keep warm. I think it is deplorable that we have a situation where the best we can offer somebody who has worked all their life and has paid taxes all their life, the best we can do in their twilight years, is say to them, 'You go to bed at lunchtime and stay in bed for the rest of the day just to keep warm'. That to my way of thinking is just not acceptable in a civilised society. This impending energy crisis is really going to hit the west of Melbourne very, very hard. There are a lot of battlers out in the west, people who work very hard. They pay their taxes, they raise their families, they live very close to the wind in terms of finances. They are good, honourable, decent people, and they are going to be hit by this thing.

The thing that really annoys me more than anything else is that this crisis that we are talking about is man made. You do not have to look too far to see that this can be avoided very, very simply, and I am asking the minister tonight to do just that. The fact that we do not have enough electricity and the fact that we do not have enough gas can be solved very quickly. You do not need a meeting of the great minds of Australia to come up with a solution to this particular situation. We have over 300 years worth of coal down in the Latrobe Valley. If we use that to make more electricity, then that obviously is going to help the situation. If we allow drilling for natural gas, then obviously that is going to help. So what I am asking the minister to do tonight is put aside this nonsense of a climate emergency, which does not exist and I doubt ever will, and take on board the very real concerns of average Victorians—Victorian families as well as Victorian workers—who are absolutely terrified of what is coming. Use the resources that we have, and this so-called crisis will go away. It is not a difficult proposition for the minister to understand—even she should be able to.

### MILDURA PASSENGER RAIL SERVICES

**Ms MAXWELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:06): (1973) My adjournment is to the Minister for Public Transport, and the action I seek is for the minister to heed the call of communities in the north-west of our state and undertake a feasibility study on the return of passenger rail services to this region. I first raised the absence of passenger rail services in June 2020, noting that Mildura is the only major centre

in Victoria that remains condemned to very limited public transport options. Ironically the response from the minister at the time was to decline this call because the government was focused on completing the Murray Basin rail project. Well, here we are two years later, and this region has neither.

Mildura's scoping brief, commissioned in 2019, was the basis for developing this study. I met with the CEO of Mildura rural city very recently, and I congratulate them as one of five councils that formed the *North West Victoria Regional Passenger Transport Study*. This report notes the population of the region is forecast to grow to 94 000 residents by 2031 and identifies 19 initiatives to improve the region's passenger transport system. Reinstating the Mildura passenger train service is number one on the list of their priorities. This study notes the heavy financial burden that north-west Victoria shoulders compared to other geographical areas, including not having the economies of scale to encourage private investment and the relatively small revenue base of local government to manage the expensive maintenance of roads, transport networks and infrastructure. Yarriambiack and Buloke shires, which also formed part of this study, know these issues only too well.

Specific to public transport, people in the north-west have lower access and service levels but pay proportionately more, and the subsidy schemes and accessibility provisions available in metropolitan areas may not be available for people with a disability. Typically public transport, via either coach or a combination of coach and train, can take around 9 hours to go from Mildura to Melbourne. A plane is markedly quicker, taking around 80 minutes, but five times the cost. Since passenger rail services were removed from Mildura in 1993, residents have been further challenged by the lack of affordability and access to health services. We are not a Third World country. This delays people seeking treatment, including preventative treatment for minor ailments before they become more serious, and ultimately contributes to poorer health outcomes. We have seen this on the north-east line as well, with more than a decade of delays and track work. Residents finally welcomed the rollout of one new VLocity train this year, only to see it pulled from service a month before the whole fleet was due to be replaced.

At the very least stakeholders are calling for the government to revisit feasibility studies and ensure this process includes consideration of the social equity benefits, remembering that Mildura is one of the five most socially disadvantaged local government areas in our state and geographically remote.

#### WESTERN METROPOLITAN REGION HEALTH SERVICES

**Ms VAGHELA** (Western Metropolitan) (18:09): (1974) My adjournment matter is directed to the Honourable Martin Foley MP, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services and Minister for Equality in the other place. Currently Victoria is facing an acute healthcare crisis. The Victorian emergency services system once again failed due to increasing demand and a malfunctioning dispatch system. As a result, Ambulance Victoria issued a code red on 27 May 2022. Though the crisis was addressed within an hour, this is still a tremendous catastrophe for the government. Code red alerts from Ambulance Victoria have become a common occurrence. When it is a matter of life and death, the element of trust plays an important role. Here the trust factor stands missing, as people have lost a great deal of confidence in ambulances. According to Victorian Health Services Performance, one-third of urgent code 1 ambulance patients had to wait longer than the target time in the first quarter of this year; therefore this lack of stability in the system is costing people their lives.

The issue is exacerbated in the Western Metropolitan Region, since the healthcare infrastructure in the region is lacking. This system is meant to respond to emergencies, so it must be subjected to rigorous testing. While there is no denying that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused enduring effects to the healthcare system, the government must do better. During the whole COVID-19 pandemic the paramedics have done an excellent job, and they continue to do so. Paramedics and our healthcare staff should be free from such stress and strain and deserve a lot better. In Wyndham there was a 30.8 per cent increase in the code 1 case load from the same time last year. Cases in Wyndham make up 3.52 per cent of the statewide code 1 demand, the fifth-busiest LGA in Victoria. It is time to rethink the healthcare system, and it is important to provide the support that the community in Western

Metropolitan Region deserves. The action I seek from the minister is to update me on the government's efforts to better the healthcare systems, which continue to be under huge pressure in Western Metropolitan Region.

### **RIDESHARE SAFETY**

**Mr BARTON** (Eastern Metropolitan) (18:12): (1975) My adjournment this evening is for the minister for transport. A man pretending to be an Uber driver has been sentenced with a jail term only last week after sexually assaulting a 17-year-old girl. This man pretended to be an Uber driver, and that is how he tricked the young woman into his car. In the young woman's victim statement she said:

I still find myself asking 'why?', maybe if I wasn't wearing a dress or if I was careful enough.

We all know in this place it is never the victim's fault. Unfortunately the absence of proper regulation in the rideshare sector has left the industry wide open to be exploited by sexual predators. We have seen this too many times. The only requirement for a rideshare driver to identify their vehicle is to have a small sticker on the corner of their front windscreen. This is easily copied and easily removed. Yes, the apps provide the numberplate of the vehicle that is arriving. Anyone who thinks this is enough is kidding themselves. I worked as a taxi and hire car driver for over 30 years. Often people order a taxi or a rideshare as they have had a few drinks and cannot drive themselves. Many have over-refreshed and for a number of reasons may not be capable of identifying the numberplate of the vehicle they are getting into. This is the reality. We do not create regulations in a perfect world. The reality is that many drunk and vulnerable individuals will order a rideshare vehicle and will not double-check the numberplate.

Prior to the reforms of 2017 this was not an issue. Taxis have permanent branding on their vehicles that passengers can easily identify. Not only that, but taxis—not rideshare—are required to have a tamper-proof, permanent camera in their vehicle that can only be accessed by police and the regulator. A rideshare vehicle is a taxi. They should be forced to comply with the same stringent safety regulations that apply to taxi vehicles. The regulators, Transport Safety Victoria and Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria, must ask themselves: how many more sexual assaults have to occur before we take action? Minister, will you instruct Transport Safety Victoria to conduct a review of the identification requirements for rideshare vehicles, with the view of eliminating the ease with which predators can pretend to be a rideshare driver?

### **INDEPENDENT PANDEMIC MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**Mr QUILTY** (Northern Victoria) (18:15): (1976) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health. Under the current pandemic legislation the government is supposed to convene an Independent Pandemic Management Advisory Committee. The committee was formed back in February and is supposed to provide advice to the government regarding the use of pandemic powers. Since then it has been radio silence. We have not heard a thing from the committee. The Liberal Democrats were sceptical about the value of this committee. We guessed that the committee would be stacked with government-friendly appointments and would exist only to provide justification for government use of emergency powers and to pretend this justification was independent. It is safe to say we had low expectations, yet somehow the pandemic management committee has managed to sink below even those. The committee website takes care to note the committee is not conducting any community or stakeholder consultations. One wonders if they are doing anything at all. Their ceramic turtle impersonation continues.

We have had vaccine mandates, mask requirements and isolation orders for months since the committee was formed, and we are yet to get a shred of evidence on how any of these policies are working. The committee say that it is not their job to interrogate the evidence supporting health directions and instead it is their job to provide contemporary advice to help the minister make decisions. This is worrying on two counts: (1) it shows the committee does not consider the evidence to be relevant to the advice that they give around health directions; and (2) it shows that the committee

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thinks that the advice provided for emergency decisions made three months in the past is contemporary advice. Minister, the action I seek is for you to inquire into and report back to the Parliament on what the Independent Pandemic Management Advisory Committee has been doing.

### RESPONSES

**Ms PULFORD** (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Resources) (18:17): I thank all members for their contributions on the adjournment debate this evening. We will make sure that the appropriate ministers provide responses in accordance with our standing orders and our customs and practices. I wish everyone a nice evening.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** The house stands adjourned.

**House adjourned 6.17 pm.**