

**PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA**

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT**

**FIRST SESSION**

**WEDNESDAY, 17 JUNE 2020**

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## **The Governor**

The Honourable LINDA DESSAU, AC

## **The Lieutenant-Governor**

The Honourable KEN LAY, AO, APM

## **The ministry**

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Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Minister for Mental Health..	The Hon. JA Merlino, MP
Attorney-General and Minister for Resources . . . . .	The Hon. J Symes, MLC
Minister for Transport Infrastructure and Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop . . . . .	The Hon. JM Allan, MP
Minister for Training and Skills and Minister for Higher Education . . . .	The Hon. GA Tierney, MLC
Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Industrial Relations . . . . .	The Hon. TH Pallas, MP
Minister for Public Transport and Minister for Roads and Road Safety .	The Hon. BA Carroll, MP
Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change and Minister for Solar Homes . . . . .	The Hon. L D'Ambrosio, MP
Minister for Child Protection and Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers . . . . .	The Hon. LA Donnellan, MP
Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services and Minister for Equality . . . . .	The Hon. MP Foley, MP
Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation and Minister for Fishing and Boating . . . . .	The Hon. MM Horne, MP
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Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development and Minister for Veterans . . . . .	The Hon. SL Leane, MLC
Minister for Water and Minister for Police and Emergency Services. . . .	The Hon. LM Neville, MP
Minister for Industry Support and Recovery, Minister for Trade, Minister for Business Precincts, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events and Minister for Racing . . . . .	The Hon. MP Pakula, MP
Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services and Minister for Creative Industries . . . . .	The Hon. DJ Pearson, MP
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Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Community Sport and Minister for Youth . . . . .	The Hon. RL Spence, MP
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, Mr Limbrick, Ms Lovell, Mr Meddick, Mr Ondarchie, Mr Rich-Phillips 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 Taylor and Ms Terpstra.  
*Participating members:* Ms Crozier, Mr Davis, Dr Kieu, Mrs McArthur and Mr Quilty.

### Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee

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

### Privileges Committee

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

### Procedure Committee

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

## Joint committees

### Dispute Resolution Committee

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

### Electoral Matters Committee

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

### House Committee

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

### Integrity and Oversight Committee

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

### Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

*Council:* Mr Limbrick and Ms Taylor.  
*Assembly:* Ms Blandthorn, Mr Hibbins, Mr Maas, Mr D O'Brien, Ms Richards, Mr Richardson, Mr Riordan and Ms Vallence.

### Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

*Council:* Mr Gepp, Mrs McArthur, Ms Patten, Ms Terpstra and Ms Watt.  
*Assembly:* Mr Burgess and Ms Connolly.

## Heads of parliamentary departments

*Assembly:* Clerk of the Legislative Assembly: Ms B Noonan

*Council:* Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Council: Mr A Young

*Parliamentary Services:* Secretary: Mr P Lochert

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

**President**

The Hon. N ELASMAR (from 18 June 2020)

The Hon. SL LEANE (to 18 June 2020)

**Deputy President**

The Hon. WA LOVELL

**Acting Presidents**

Mr Bourman, Mr Gepp, Mr Melhem and Ms Patten

**Leader of the Government**

The Hon. J SYMES

**Deputy Leader of the Government**

The Hon. 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>5</sup>	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Bourman, Mr Jeffrey	Eastern Victoria	SFFP	O'Donohue, Mr Edward John	Eastern Victoria	LP
Crozier, Ms Georgina Mary	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Ondarchie, Mr Craig Philip	Northern Metropolitan	LP
Cumming, Dr Catherine Rebecca	Western Metropolitan	Ind	Patten, Ms Fiona Heather	Northern Metropolitan	FPRP
Dalidakis, Mr Philip <sup>2</sup>	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Pulford, Ms Jaala Lee	Western Victoria	ALP
Davis, Mr David McLean	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Quilty, Mr Timothy	Northern Victoria	LDP
Elasmar, Mr Nazih	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Ratnam, Dr Samantha Shantini	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Mr Enver <sup>3</sup>	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Rich-Phillips, Mr Gordon Kenneth	South Eastern Metropolitan	LP
Finn, Mr Bernard Thomas Christopher	Western Metropolitan	LP	Shing, Ms Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Garrett, Ms Jane Furneaux	Eastern Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Mr Adem <sup>6</sup>	South Eastern Metropolitan	Ind
Gepp, Mr Mark	Northern Victoria	ALP	Stitt, Ms Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Grimley, Mr Stuart James	Western Victoria	DHJP	Symes, Ms Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Hayes, Mr Clifford	Southern Metropolitan	SAP	Tarlamis, Mr Lee <sup>7</sup>	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Jennings, Mr Gavin Wayne <sup>4</sup>	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Taylor, Ms Nina	Southern Metropolitan	ALP
Kieu, Dr Tien Dung	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Terpstra, Ms Sonja	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Leane, Mr Shaun Leo	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tierney, Ms Gayle Anne	Western Victoria	ALP
Limbrick, Mr David	South Eastern Metropolitan	LDP	Vaghela, Ms Kaushaliya Virjibhai	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Lovell, Ms Wendy Ann	Northern Victoria	LP	Watt, Ms Sheena <sup>8</sup>	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
McArthur, Mrs Beverley	Western Victoria	LP	Wooldridge, Ms Mary Louise Newling <sup>9</sup>	Eastern Metropolitan	LP

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

<sup>2</sup> Resigned 17 June 2019

<sup>3</sup> Appointed 15 August 2019

<sup>4</sup> Resigned 23 March 2020

<sup>5</sup> Resigned 26 September 2020

<sup>6</sup> ALP until 15 June 2020

<sup>7</sup> Appointed 23 April 2020

<sup>8</sup> Appointed 13 October 2020

<sup>9</sup> Resigned 28 February 2020

**Party abbreviations**

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

FPRP—Fiona Patten's Reason Party; Greens—Australian Greens; Ind—Independent;

LDP—Liberal Democratic Party; LP—Liberal Party; Nats—The Nationals;

SAP—Sustainable Australia Party; SFFP—Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party; TMP—Transport Matters Party



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**Wednesday, 17 June 2020**

**The PRESIDENT (Hon. SL Leane) took the chair at 9.36 am and read the prayer.**

**Announcements**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

**The PRESIDENT (09:37):** 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.

**Papers**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, LAND, WATER AND PLANNING**

*2018–19 Sustainability Fund Activities Report*

**Ms PULFORD** (Western Victoria—Minister for Roads, Minister for Road Safety and the TAC, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That there be laid before this house a copy of the *2018–19 Sustainability Fund Activities Report*.

**Motion agreed to.**

**PAPERS**

**Tabled by Clerk:**

Auditor General's Reports on—

Protecting Critically Endangered Grasslands, June 2020 (*Ordered to be published*).

Responses to Performance Audit Recommendations 2015–16 to 2017–18, June 2020 (*Ordered to be published*).

Environment Protection Act 1970—Sustainability Fund Guidelines, 2020.

Falls Creek Alpine Resort Management Board—Report, 2019.

Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board—Report, 2019.

Mount Hotham Alpine Resort Management Board—Report, 2019.

Planning and Environment Act 1987—

Amendment 123 to the Upper Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges Regional Strategy Plan, pursuant to section 46D of the Act.

Whittlesea Planning Scheme Amendment C203.

Southern Alpine Resort Management Board—Report, 2019.

**Business of the house**

**NOTICES OF MOTION**

**Notices given.**

**Ms TIERNEY having given notice:**

**Mr Davis:** On a point of order, President, consistent with our longstanding practice we would generally not oppose a widening motion, but the government may wish to explain at a briefing exactly why this has been brought in now and not as part of the bill initially.

**Ms Tierney:** We are happy to provide those briefings.

**Further notices given.**

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

**Ms SYMES** (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (09:44): I move, by leave:

That Ms Shing and Mr Tarlamis be participating members of the Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues.

**The PRESIDENT:** Is leave granted?

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (09:45): Leave is granted, but I want to make some—

**The PRESIDENT:** Point of order?

**Mr DAVIS:** No, commentary on the motion.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think that is quite unusual.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Well, I think the house is happy for you to have a go at that. Over to you.

**Mr DAVIS:** The opposition will support the motion, consistent with our long-term practice of ensuring the replacement or addition of people to committees in a reasonable way. But I do want to put on record on this occasion that Dr Kieu is the deputy chair of this committee, and we are very concerned about his involvement.

**The PRESIDENT:** That is not a point of order, sorry.

**Mr DAVIS:** No, it is not a point of order—

**The PRESIDENT:** It is a not point of anything, Mr Davis. The question—

**Mr DAVIS:** No, it is actually a debate.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Okay. Keep going.

**Mr DAVIS:** I just want to briefly make the point that we will support the motion, but we do have a concern with Dr Kieu's position as deputy chair of that committee when there is a clear breach of rules that has occurred and arrangements. In that circumstance, I want it recorded, with respect to this committee, that we do have concerns.

**Ms SHING** (Eastern Victoria) (09:46): Further to Mr Davis's comments by way of his debate on this particular motion, I note that he does not object to the addition of two participating members to the Legal and Social Issues Committee—yes, Mr Davis, including me. I object, however, to the way in which you have characterised the concerns as you have raised them and what you say are clear concerns and allegations as they relate to the deputy chair of that committee. If you wish to raise an issue in relation to a member of this house, you must do so by way of substantive motion, which you have not done in this instance. On that basis, I would remind you of the way in which this particular participating member convention actually operates and invite you perhaps to think about that around the way in which you raise these matters into the future.

**Ms PATTEN** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:47): Further on the debate, I would just like to make it clear to all members that any debate or discussion about the deputy chair or the chair of the Legal and Social Issues Committee is a matter for the Legal and Social Issues Committee, not the house.

**Motion agreed to.**

### Members statements

#### REFUGEE WEEK

**Ms VAGHELA** (Western Metropolitan) (09:48): In 2020 Refugee Week is being celebrated from Sunday, 14 June, to Saturday, 20 June. Originally celebrated in 1986, Refugee Week coincides with World Refugee Day, celebrated on 20 June. Refugee Week is Australia's peak annual activity to raise awareness about issues affecting refugees, to celebrate the positive contributions made by refugees to Australian society, to educate the Australian public about who refugees are and why they have come to Australia and to help people understand the many challenges refugees face coming to Australia. Refugee Week provides a platform where positive images of refugees can be promoted in order to create a culture of welcome throughout the country. It is a unique opportunity for us to experience and celebrate the rich diversity of refugee communities. Although this year many events are affected due to COVID-19, valuable sessions are still going ahead online to mark Refugee Week.

People who have come as refugees have been successful in their various fields. By definition refugees are survivors. They have survived because of their courage, ingenuity and creativity, and these are the qualities which we value in Australia. My area of Western Metropolitan Region is one of the most diverse regions and is also home to many migrants arriving in Australia as refugees. As we support refugees to recover from their persecution and rebuild their lives in Australia, Australia reaps the benefits of having them here.

#### FRANCES DEVLIN-GLASS, OAM

**Dr BACH** (Eastern Metropolitan) (09:49): I rise today to recognise the achievements of an individual with a passion for education that I share. Dr Frances Maree Devlin-Glass of Mont Albert was honoured with an OAM in the Queen's Birthday awards. An honorary associate professor at Deakin University, Dr Devlin-Glass received recognition for service to both education and the Irish community. Her commitment to the Irish community is unparalleled. Dr Devlin-Glass is a Joycean through and through. As the founding president and artistic director of Bloomsday Melbourne, devoted to celebrating James Joyce through *Ulysses*; co-editor of the *Australasian Journal of Irish Studies*; and a member of the Tinteán Editorial Collective, uniting the Irish diaspora in Australia, Dr Devlin-Glass is a stalwart of Melbourne's thriving Irish community. Priding herself on her independent research and multiple scholarly contributions, Dr Devlin-Glass is a fellow of the College of Distinguished Deakin Educators and founding member of the Melbourne Irish studies seminars. Her work ranges from insights into the development of the sacred in Australian literature to Irish-Australian history and provides historical perspectives through myriad frames not traditionally considered in our historical narrative. She joins a long list of passionate and community-minded people recognised for their unwavering commitment to education, research and the arts in the Eastern Metropolitan Region. I congratulate Dr Devlin-Glass and commend her for her ongoing service to Victoria.

#### SUBURBAN RAIL LOOP

**Mr BARTON** (Eastern Metropolitan) (09:51): I am pleased to rise today to talk about the community engagement currently underway for the Suburban Rail Loop project. An Engage Victoria survey and interactive map allow members of the public to have input into the project and submit ideas to help the authority plan designed enhancements to the precincts around Suburban Rail Loop stations. I would encourage anyone living in stage 1 station areas to take the opportunity to submit their ideas to improve the areas where they live and work and play and to consider the services and spaces they would like to access. I have also been encouraging constituents from the Manningham local council area to be involved in the community engagement and to take the opportunity to again push for the

Doncaster station to be included in stage 1 of this project. Manningham residents have waited over 128 years for the promised train link to the city. This rail loop finalises a promise of a rail link through Box Hill. That may be the closest that promise has come to being realised. Yet the first stage of this project stops just one station short. Communities do and should have a say on planning and development of major projects as they evolve, and I encourage people to take every opportunity to push for better transport services.

#### **BIOMELBOURNE NETWORK WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP AWARDS**

**Ms GARRETT** (Eastern Victoria) (09:52): Last week I had the pleasure of presenting the annual BioMelbourne Network Women in Leadership Awards. As we know, 2020 has presented some real challenges, especially in the critical areas of medical research, med tech, biotech and the pharmaceutical sector. The smartest and brightest in the world are racing to find therapies to both protect us and treat those infected by coronavirus. We as a state are also contributing our smartest and brightest to these critical areas, and that is what the BioMelbourne Network Women in Leadership Awards highlight. The recipients, Dr Andrea Douglas, Bronwyn Le Grice and Ewa Douroux, are all especially accomplished and received awards not just for the work they do in their business but for the commitment they have to do good business—good business advancing diversity, good business raising cultural awareness and good business being environmentally responsible. It is also good business to have women in leadership positions, and it is even better to hear the energetic women who received the awards being absolutely committed to mentoring and helping other women, particularly young women. It has never been more important to highlight the achievements of women, and the more we can highlight the achievements of women the more we can raise awareness for all women and hopefully inspire the next generation of female leaders. We need as many females in STEM as we can muster, with females only accounting for 20 per cent of undergrad completions. But things like these awards will help make that figure a lot more representative.

#### **KORUS CONNECT**

**Dr CUMMING** (Western Metropolitan) (09:54): The reduction of face-to-face meetings and the move to online learning brought new and significant challenges for those supporting young people and their families in the community. Korus Connect school chaplains work closely with the Department of Education and Training and principals to continue the frontline role of supporting school staff, students and families. They adapted and expanded the ways they offer support remotely and continued in-person support where required. Their aim is to ensure that everyone who may be feeling vulnerable at this time is provided with the necessary support or referral. Korus Connect school chaplains offer pastoral care to school communities across Victoria and New South Wales. In the Western Metropolitan Region they provided care at the Sydenham and Hillside campuses of Sydenham-Hillside Primary, Manor Lakes P-12 College, Sunbury Downs College, Keilor Heights Primary, Sunshine Special Development School, Ardeer Primary, Footscray High, Sunbury Heights Primary, Iramoo Primary, Altona North Primary, Jennings Street School, Kismet Park Primary, Little River Primary and Sunbury College. I thank them with all my heart.

#### **QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY HONOURS**

**Dr KIEU** (South Eastern Metropolitan) (09:55): On 8 June 2020 the Governor-General recognised 933 Australians for their contributions to their community and country and their achievements abroad. I would like to extend my appreciation to all recipients for their outstanding work, commitment and contributions to the community and country. Indeed the 933 Australians recognised in the Queen's Birthday 2020 honours list represent Australia's collective innovativeness, diligence, tenacity and compassion.

I am particularly proud to congratulate recipients from South Eastern Metropolitan Region, who include Mr John Mooney for his service to education and professional organisations, Mrs Judith Clarkson for her contribution to business through child- and aged-care projects, Mr Norman Farmer for his significant service to lifesaving at the national and international levels and to water safety

initiatives, and Mrs Debbie Grove for years of commitment and contribution to softball. I would also like to pay homage to the work of the late Mr John Wilson, who served as a board member for Freemasons Hospital and the Royal Freemasons homes for aged care. We give our thanks to Mr Wilson for his dedication to the community. Together we celebrate and thank all awardees for their tireless efforts and respected pursuits.

#### MINISTER FOR PLANNING

**Mr HAYES** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:57): When I was mayor of Bayside I joined an organisation called Planning Backlash, led by Mary Drost, OAM. We represented resident groups throughout Melbourne about poor development outcomes and proposed a greater say in planning matters for residents and councils. We regularly met with planning ministers, Liberal and Labor, until the present planning minister, who after one or two meetings refused to meet with us. Perhaps he is too busy to meet with lobby groups. So I was surprised to read on the website of the Urban Development Institute of Australia that the planning minister would meet with them by Zoom at an exclusive live event. This property developer meet and greet, given the pretentious title of a ‘virtual industry leaders lunch’, was open to anyone in the property industry at \$250 per table. I do not know what you eat at a virtual lunch, but the real item on the menu is access.

The IBAC inquiry into Casey council revealed the government is miles too close to property developers. They use fundraising lunches to push their agenda of high population growth, ever-denser cities and cutting back on so-called red tape, which is removing the rights of residents to have a say in the character of their street and their community, and we have a planning minister with consultation double standards who will meet with property developers but not with residents. It is not good enough.

#### MEN’S HEALTH WEEK

**Ms SHING** (Eastern Victoria) (09:58): This week is Men’s Health Week, and I want to make a few comments that I hope will draw attention to the importance of men and those who love them and care about them taking care good care of their physical health and their wellbeing. I know from very personal experience, having lost my brother Patrick to prostate cancer at the age of 42 after he was first diagnosed at 39, that it is all too easy for men to deny the changes that they may see or notice in their own bodies and to fail to seek attention, treatment, diagnosis and support. And too often the consequences can be, as they were with my late brother Patrick’s situation, fatal.

I would also urge people not just to make sure they are aware of changes to their bodies and that anyone with a prostate out there does take care to make sure that there are regular tests that take place and ongoing care and attention, should that be required, but also that people look after their mental health and wellbeing. We know that men are over-represented in the figures around suicide. We know that men aged between 19 and 45 are by far the largest cohort of people who take their own lives, and we know that more has to be done to equip the men in our lives with the resources, the care, the support and the tools that they need to get help and assistance for physical challenges, for mental disease and for ongoing support to save lives. Please take care out there—not just this week but every week.

#### ELDER ABUSE

**Ms MAXWELL** (Northern Victoria) (10:00): Older people offer so much to our societies. Our elderly are also vulnerable, often simply by the physical constraints of age. Sadly, elderly people are sometimes abused and exploited. When this happens the abusers are most likely a family member or somebody close to them. Elder abuse can take many forms of disturbing, distressing behaviours, including physical, psychological, financial or sexual abuse, or chemical abuse through interference with medications. During the COVID-19 pandemic our elderly are at an increased risk of elder abuse due to increased isolation and barriers to services and technology. Many organisations have adapted well, thankfully, and pivoted to ensure that our elderly people do not suffer at the hands of abuse. But it is something that we need to continue to discuss.

On the positive side to this very sombre topic are the people who dedicate their time fighting for the rights of victims of elder abuse. A great example of this is Maria Berry from the north-east of Victoria, who has spent many years campaigning and lobbying for their rights. Maria has a background in nursing, including experience in working with older people in residential care and community settings. Maria has worked on various advisory committees with the National Ageing Research Institute, Victorian Care of Older People Clinical Network, Elder Abuse Australia and with conferences. I thank Maria and other advocates like her for their experience, ideas and loud, insistent voices for people who suffer elder abuse.

### COVID-19

**Mr TARLAMIS** (South Eastern Metropolitan) (10:02): I rise to acknowledge and thank the residents of the South Eastern Metropolitan Region for their incredible resilience and compassion during the coronavirus pandemic. We have seen firsthand the best of our community in the worst of circumstances. Not surprisingly we have seen our neighbours, friends and families come together to support each other. But to see and hear of complete strangers stepping up like never before to carry out random acts of kindness, big and small, has indeed been inspiring. It has also been heartening to see our community unite with a shared sense of compassion, inclusion and solidarity. I want to acknowledge the amazing work of our healthcare and emergency services workers, our nurses and midwives, pharmacists, childcare workers, carers, cleaners, volunteers, delivery drivers, public transport workers, posties and many others who have continued to work hard for us throughout this unprecedented event.

I want to acknowledge all those employers who have supported their staff by working from home. I want to acknowledge all those school principals, teachers and support staff for their extraordinary efforts delivering remote and flexible schooling as well as the families and students who have been so patient and supportive in this new and challenging environment. I want to acknowledge and thank all Victorians who have made so many sacrifices in order to do the right thing and adhere to the advice of the chief health officer. I know it has not been easy and everyone has faced their own unique personal challenges as a result, but the measures have been necessary and have saved lives. You can all be proud of the role that you have played in getting us to the position that is envied by many other countries who have not been so fortunate. The recovery from this unprecedented event will be long and hard, and the government will continue to support our community and businesses and to take steps to stimulate our economy and to ensure that Victoria remains the best place it can be.

### PATH OF THE HORSE

**Mr GEPP** (Northern Victoria) (10:03): I want to continue on the health theme raised by Ms Shing in her contribution and by Ms Maxwell. I want to tell you about a fantastic good-news story in my electorate of Northern Victoria. It is about an equine assisted learning centre in Trentham that is called Path of the Horse. At Path of the Horse they aim to assist people of all ages and from all walks of life who seek better mental health and wellbeing. They support particularly veterans, emergency services personnel and their families and others to better manage conditions such as PTSD, anxiety and depression. They help young people to discover coping mechanisms and assist them to understand their feelings and make more aware choices. They work with people with autism and those battling addiction, self-harm, grief and many other conditions.

They are a not-for-profit, and they use horses. They use horses to assist with the healing of people from all walks of life who are struggling with their wellbeing. Dean Mighell, Karyn Jones, Jane Lincoln, Malama McCall and all of the wonderful volunteers who come together and form this community board provide such a wonderful experience to so many people who are struggling with mental health. If you do not know of the Path of the Horse, please get to see them. They are in Trentham. At this time of year I would wear my winter woollies—it is a little bit on the cold side. But they are a sensational group of people, and I would encourage everybody to go and visit them and say hello and pat a horse.

**FRONTLINE CHALK SUPPORT**

**Mr GRIMLEY** (Western Victoria) (10:05): I am sure members in this place are aware of my past life in the police force. When we were acknowledged by members of the community whilst on the beat it was especially humbling. The work of emergency services workers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has been admirable, as we could all agree. As a result of their dedication my office purchased a high-demand commodity, chalk, and launched a competition called Frontline Chalk Support. Families in my electorate were able to request some chalk to be sent to them on the proviso that they used their chalk to send a message of thanks to our emergency service workers. We were overwhelmed with the response and ended up sending over 300 packs of chalk out to the community, including to some schools, preschools and kinders who requested it.

After images of the amazing creations came back to us a fierce discussion between my staff and me was had to choose the winners, but ultimately artworks from two families kept popping up. I would like to congratulate siblings Mia and Xavier, and Zayne, Rhiley and Reegan, who were the winners of the Frontline Chalk Support competition. I hope through a bit of isolation fun a discussion was had between parents and kids about the great job our emergency services workers continue to do. I thank them, and I thank all of our emergency service workers.

**REFUGEE WEEK**

**Ms TAYLOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:07): In acknowledgement of Refugee Week, factoring in that in addition to all the very apparent challenges that refugees face these are being compounded—as so many other vulnerable people’s interests are being compounded—by COVID-19, which has only elevated the various challenges that they face, in particular I want to focus on how we break down barriers for refugees in our community. I am pleased to mention the inclusion of people seeking asylum in the recently announced \$500 million Working for Victoria initiative of our government, designed to provide employment to people who have lost work during the COVID-19 pandemic. There are many wonderful community groups who do terrific work to support refugees, and in particular the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre is receiving funding for 90 FTE positions, which will place up to 120 people in new roles within the organisation on a six-month fixed-term contract, of which 95 per cent will be filled by people seeking asylum. I think this is why we are all here at the end of the day—to help support vulnerable people, to break down the barriers and to give them meaningful work.

**Business of the house****NOTICES OF MOTION**

**The PRESIDENT:** We need to go back to notices of motion. There was a drafting error on a notice that Minister Tierney read out, so Minister Symes will correct that. When I say drafting error, believe it or not it was a drafting error at the clerks’ end. I cannot believe they would ever make a mistake. It is good to see they are human.

**Notice given.**

**Motions****MEMBER CONDUCT**

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (10:10): With a heavy heart I move this motion:

That this house:

- (1) pursuant to section 16 of the Ombudsman Act 1973 refers the following matter to the Ombudsman for investigation and report:
  - (a) allegations aired on *60 Minutes* and in the *Age* that the Honourable Adem Somyurek, MLC, and other ministers misused members’ staff and other budget entitlements against the provisions of relevant statutes, guides and rules of the Parliament of Victoria for internal Australian Labor Party purposes, including ‘branch stacking’;

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- (b) any other breach of applicable policies, laws or codes in relation to these allegations;
- (2) supports other relevant Victorian authorities, including the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) investigating these allegations for potential corrupt behaviour and breaches of the Crimes Act 1958 and other Victorian laws;
- (3) and requires the Clerk to write to the Victorian Ombudsman and the IBAC Commissioner to convey the terms of this resolution.

This is an important motion, members. It is very significant what we have seen over the last 48 hours or so. The revelations on Sunday, people will understand, have shocked not just Labor Party people but more broadly the Victorian community and have very serious ramifications for our democracy. It is important that this be investigated thoroughly by all of the relevant independent bodies. The government has—and I support the decision—written to IBAC, and IBAC has a significant jurisdiction for higher threshold misdemeanours and criminal activity. It is important to note that the Ombudsman has a separate jurisdiction for a range of administrative matters and other matters that are relevant in this case. It does appear, and again we cannot prejudge the final details, that on all levels this looks like corrupt behaviour that has occurred in members' offices and likely also in ministerial offices and elsewhere across the system. We have heard today revelations that multicultural grants may have been misused for party-political purposes as well. All of those should be thoroughly investigated.

In the case of the Ombudsman, the Ombudsman has particular expertise in this area, having conducted the work that was done in 2015 and beyond, following reference from this chamber under this exact section—and this motion is largely modelled on that exact reference, so I pay tribute to the drafters at the time. The Ombudsman did a very good job in that examination. The Ombudsman did very deep work and had a series of obstacles put in her way. Many of the Labor Party members in this chamber, including some ministers who are still ministers in this chamber, refused to cooperate with the Ombudsman, and in the other chamber there was a refusal to cooperate as well. Bear in mind the Ombudsman Act 1973 makes a very clear indication that it is a matter for a house—either house or indeed a single parliamentary committee—to make a reference to the Ombudsman and that that reference takes precedence over other matters that the Ombudsman may be undertaking, so this would give a very clear signal to the Ombudsman that this is something the house believes is important and needs to be dealt with expeditiously.

In the matter of the red shirts theft the Ombudsman said the government members, the Labor Party members, had 'crossed the line'. I could rehearse many of the words from that, but I say to members in the chamber who were not here at that time that they should read the summary of the Ombudsman on that case and they will see eerie parallels, frightening parallels. The Ombudsman has a set of knowledge now, having been developed through that period, that will be entirely applicable for an investigation as envisaged by my motion. The Ombudsman would be in a position to get witnesses and documents as required and would be in a position to make recommendations for administrative and other changes that would actually assist in preventing this happening again. So the Ombudsman of course has those administrative understandings and provisions, which I think are highly relevant in this particular case. We clearly in this situation have not as a Parliament and as a community got in place sufficient protections to ensure that there is not misuse, because there clearly has been misuse of staff and other resources for the purposes of Labor Party internal matters, including branch-stacking matters.

So my point here is that on one level it is a very straightforward reference. It is clearly within the scope of the chamber to do it, we clearly have the heads-up, in a sense, from the legislation to do this and there is clear precedent for doing that given what occurred in 2015 and that period. Indeed the chamber took the view that they needed to defend government attacks on the process that occurred at that time. The government exhausted every legal avenue—enormous cost, a million dollars, in the order of a million dollars spent in legal defence by the government—to prevent the Ombudsman doing the work.

Now, there was a parallel reference from the other chamber, from the Assembly, which was a tit-for-tat reference—let us be quite clear about what it was. Some people were named. I was not, but I was investigated nonetheless. There was nothing to investigate, of course, and the Liberal members and National members were exonerated—just the Liberal members, I should say, were exonerated from that reference that was sent by the Assembly. And I think it is important to contrast what occurred there, where we cooperated in every way—in every way—with the Ombudsman and her staff. We did. We provided invoices. We provided statements. We did exactly what we were requested to do, which in my view is the role of an MP or indeed any member of the public. When the police or other authorities come knocking, your answer is, ‘Yes, I will help in every way I can, because I want to see the law upheld and I want to see the law and the legal structure protected’. I say the reason Labor at the time did not cooperate is because they had a lot to hide. We had nothing at all to hide, and that is the very point: we were cleared.

Now, I make the point quite sharply here that Labor should support this reference. I have made modification to the original draft. The motion that is on the notice paper indicates that we support ‘other relevant Victorian authorities’. That was made at the suggestion of crossbenchers—and it is the correct modification, so I thank them for that—because the reference has been made to IBAC and we do support that, and the chamber can send a message there. Whether IBAC ultimately goes through with a full investigation is a matter, of course, for it. It can make that determination itself. But we can also add our weight as a chamber to say to IBAC, ‘We have a view, and we think you should undertake this investigation. We support that reference and we support that investigation’. So there is a clear role for the chamber here, without directing IBAC, because we have no power to do that. We can direct the Ombudsman by making a formal referral under section 16, but we have no power to direct IBAC. We can nonetheless make our view known to IBAC.

There is plenty of precedent for independent authorities that have investigatory powers having the views of this chamber made known to them. The Auditor-General is another case in point. The chamber has on regular occasions indicated its view about the Auditor-General’s work program and indicated that on occasion there have been resolutions passed in this chamber asking the Auditor-General, requesting the Auditor-General, and it is in that spirit that paragraph (2) of the motion is framed. We support the reference to IBAC, and we can make it, as a chamber, clear that we support that reference to IBAC.

We also, as I say, see the clear view and the clear significance of the Ombudsman’s work, and I think it was unfortunate in the extreme that in the last cycle, when she investigated the misuse through the red shirts system, the Labor Party did not at the time fully cooperate.

This is a chance to get some of that righted and to get the Ombudsman to do the work that is necessary to make sure that we put in place a robust system into the future to protect public resources and to build confidence in the public political process so that people can feel that their resources are being properly applied, that taxpayers money is not being misused for the wrong purposes and that it is for the purposes of assisting the public and not for assisting a narrow political party or any political party in doing its work. It is a task where the money has got to be properly applied, and that also equals resources and it also equals staff. If staff are being misapplied, well, that is a great concern in itself.

I think this is a very sensible, grounded and moderate motion. It is clearly within our legal powers to do so. It makes a declaration in effect about our views on the IBAC referral and supports that, and there is clear precedent for the chamber doing this, so we are actually in a strong position to send a message. Given what the Victorian and indeed Australian community has heard in the last two and a half to three days—I think everyone who watched the Sunday night show was shocked by what they saw. There are clearly three ministers gone—there are others potentially implicated as well—and this is a process that will strengthen the way forward.

Now, the government has said it has written to the police and requested that they intervene here. In truth, the letter to the police does not request that the police intervene; it simply advises the police that

an IBAC referral has occurred. It might be that that is a moot point, but it might not be. I leave that to the police themselves to make their decisions; they are more than capable of examining evidence that is currently in the public domain. I make the point that the Ombudsman's work in this area would potentially dovetail cleanly with the IBAC work. IBAC and the Ombudsman, through the legislation and through their protocols, have clear demarcation lines and they work together on these sorts of matters, so it is my view that this strengthens the oversight and strengthens the confidence that the public will have that we have reacted properly and seriously. I urge people to support the motion.

**Ms SYMES** (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (10:22): Following on in response to Mr Davis's motion this morning I put on record that the Premier's statement on Monday made it very clear that the Attorney-General has referred the allegations aired on Channel 9's *60 Minutes* on Sunday, 14 June, and the articles published in the *Age* to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and also to Victoria Police for investigation. Referring these matters to these bodies was the right thing to do. IBAC and Victoria Police are the appropriate bodies to assess and investigate serious allegations. IBAC's jurisdiction covers the most serious matters, and IBAC can refer a matter to the Ombudsman if there are allegations of conduct that more appropriately fit within her jurisdiction.

A parliamentary referral on these matters to the Ombudsman—it could be argued that it is duplicative, and there are a few things that I would just like to bring to the house's attention. The Ombudsman Act 1973 requires the Ombudsman not to perform her functions in a way that would prejudice criminal proceedings, criminal investigations or an IBAC investigation, so even if the Parliament does refer these matters to her, she may have to wait until Victoria Police and IBAC have dealt with these matters. Of course, as Mr Davis has pointed out, the Ombudsman has the power to investigate her own motion without a parliamentary referral, and she is certainly well placed as an expert to make these assessments.

In effect this motion seeks to commence another inquiry by another independent body, but for the above-mentioned reasons that may not actually be achieved in the first instance. Nonetheless, I certainly agree that the Ombudsman is able to consider these matters herself and to form her own judgements, and we are certainly not denying the seriousness of these allegations. On those grounds, the government will not oppose Mr Davis's motion.

**Mr GRIMLEY** (Western Victoria) (10:24): I would like to make a brief contribution to the debate on the coalition's referral motion to the Victorian Ombudsman. The Australian National University first began conducting a post-election survey of voters in 1960. In 2019 an Australian election study of more than 2100 Australians found that just 25 per cent believe that people in government can be trusted. Is it any wonder why?

As a relatively new member of Parliament and as a member of a minor party, I was equally shocked and appalled while watching *60 Minutes* on Sunday evening. It is little wonder more and more people are moving towards supporting minor parties over major parties. What I saw was the stuff of political soap operas, not the Victorian Parliament in 2020. The language used by Mr Somyurek was regressive, abhorrent and demeaning, in particular the language directed at Minister Gabrielle Williams. There is simply no place in the halls of Parliament, or indeed in any workplace, for behaviour like that demonstrated by Mr Somyurek. And to Minister Williams: yes, words do matter. My message to you is that we stand with you, we support you and we are here for you.

This is not a partisan or political motion. In fact, the coalition have been far more mild in terms of wording that I have come to expect. It is a perfectly reasonable motion which seeks to refer matters pertaining to the behaviour of ministers, misuse of staff, branch stacking and misuse of public entitlements.

You would be hard-pressed to find any Victorian who would say that there should not be greater clarity about any of these matters taking place. And while the Premier's leadership has been strong this week

and his justice has been swift, there is no such thing as too much accountability or transparency. This motion goes some way in shining a light on the dark corners of the corruption that has allegedly been taking place.

Finally, it should also be noted that the Premier has already referred the matters raised on Sunday evening to IBAC and to Victoria Police. I have full confidence in the ability of both organisations to complete a thorough investigation. This is after all what the Victorian public needs and deserves. Derryn Hinch's Justice Party fully supports this motion.

**Mr ATKINSON** (Eastern Metropolitan) (10:26): This is a very serious matter, and one that gives me no pleasure in having to have the house address on this occasion, particularly given the history of the matters of members' conduct over the last two parliaments. We have been on quite a journey, where there have been allegations and where there have been—clearly, if nothing else—misdemeanours by members of Parliament. We have seen resignations of members of Parliament who have done the wrong thing. We have seen investigations into the behaviour of members of Parliament. On every occasion those allegations that surface, those matters that are investigated and particularly those matters that have been shown to have some substance simply diminish every one of us in politics and in this place. They undermine the trust, as has just been indicated in the previous contribution, of the community in its members of Parliament—in its leaders in the community.

We are the lawmakers. We are the people who make the rules for society. We are the people who expect that those rules will be abided by by our citizens. We realise that there are constraints on what people think that they ought to be able to do, but we apply standards for the good of the community. And when we fail to live up to very basic standards, we set an example; we give permission to people in the community to actually go against the very laws that we set. So our standard of behaviour is extraordinarily important in terms of maintaining a trust and a confidence from the community and indeed cohesion in the community.

This is a very serious matter. I am very saddened by what has come out in the last few days, albeit members of this place will probably have an idea that I certainly knew that this branch stacking was going on, by Mr Somyurek in particular, over an extended period, and in fact I referred to those matters in a debate in this place on local government legislation.

On that occasion Mr Somyurek, by interjection, suggested that my glory days were past. Can I suggest that in the circumstances that may well be a situation that I share with him today. Nonetheless, it saddens me that Mr Somyurek put his considerable talents and efforts towards endeavours that were not in the best interests of the community. Like some other leaders, even around the world but certainly in this case, there was a misunderstanding that in fact being a member of Parliament was all about him. There is a real trap when we start to believe that being a member of Parliament is about us. The reality is that being a member of Parliament is about exercising a privilege that has been granted by the community to represent that community and indeed to preserve the institution of the Parliament.

We have been through a journey as a result of a number of unfortunate and sad incidents of misbehaviour by members of Parliament over recent times. As a result the government has brought down legislation to put in place a remuneration tribunal and has tried to codify and be more prescriptive about what members of Parliament should and should not do and to ensure that they understood what their obligations were—surprisingly, because it is common sense. It should not have needed to be codified, it should not need those prescriptive laws and so forth, because we all should know what it is to act ethically and in the interests of our community. But that has been done. If there was any grey area in the past as to what a member could or could not do or should or should not do, then there certainly should be no grey area now, having gone through that journey and having had that legislation, having had the remuneration tribunal set out its expectations and having received the Ombudsman's report on previous issues that has been quite clear in terms of the responsibilities of members of Parliament and what the community ought to expect of those members of Parliament. There should

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be no grey area, and yet this practice of misusing parliamentary staff, which is clearly no longer a grey area for any of us, has continued and in fact seems to have continued on steroids.

Do you know, I actually feel sorry for Mr Somyurek, Ms Kairouz and Robin Scott. A fall from grace like this is humiliating and I am concerned about their mental wellbeing at this time, as I have been for other members who have been under pressure in other circumstances over recent parliaments. I hope that they are given the support by Parliament that they deserve in terms of that mental wellbeing and their health, but I cannot excuse the behaviour that has led to us all being put in a position yet again of having the public cast a perception that we are all tarred with the same brush, that we are all in it for ourselves, that it is all about us and not about our community and our constituents and about the very important institutional value and significance in our democracy of this Parliament.

Now, the Ombudsman does have powers—and I acknowledge the Leader of the Government's statement and I recognise also and am pleased to see that Ms Hennessy and the Premier acted quickly to refer some of these matters to IBAC and to notify the police that that reference had been made to IBAC. I note also that the Ombudsman does have a power by herself to actually investigate these matters, but I acknowledge particularly what the Leader of the Government has said—that the government will not oppose this motion on the basis that the Ombudsman is alerted to the matter and will have the opportunity to exercise judgement.

I think it is important that the Ombudsman looks at this matter further, because her office has already considered matters that are pertinent to this current situation before the Parliament and to the behaviour of particularly Mr Somyurek. But I think also it is important in the context that I am not sure that IBAC would be as interested in some of the matters. I do not think that they would meet the threshold of an IBAC investigation whereas they would be matters that are certainly of importance and are matters that would be relevant from the Ombudsman's point of view. That particularly concerns the misuse of staff members of this Parliament, especially in the context of, as I said, the codified legislation that has been introduced by this government. So I think that when it comes to thresholds there is a quite separate investigation that the Ombudsman may well wish to pursue that will not cross over, that should not cross over, any matter that IBAC was to consider on the reference from Ms Hennessy.

This is, as I said, a matter that gives me no pleasure. I do not think that it gives any of us any pleasure. We do not like to see a situation where the Parliament is brought into disrepute. We do not like to see the sorts of things that aired on *60 Minutes* on Sunday night and were further exposed in the *Age*. There are issues as to how that investigation was undertaken. I must say it does seem to me this is probably one of the greatest take-downs in political history in Australia and I think it was an internal hit job. I do not believe that *60 Minutes* and the *Age* can claim all the credit for having made this exposure. I think the hit was a lot closer to home than the media. But nonetheless what we saw is something that none of us would ever want to see. It was the sort of behaviour that has brought us all under a cloud as far as the community is concerned, and it means again that every one of us has to work twice as hard now to try to regain the trust of a community that is increasingly wearied by some of these episodes—and sadly episodes that all too often are on the government benches at this time.

**Mr LIMBRICK** (South Eastern Metropolitan) (10:40): Like everyone else, I watched the *60 Minutes* story and read the *Age* reports about branch stacking with interest, but to me it was not always clear cut which activity was illegal. Recruiting people to political parties is not illegal, and I am not sure about paying for someone's membership. The existence of branch stacking in the Labor Party was less surprising to me than the fact that people seemingly allowed their offices to be bugged. The fact that this was done in the offices of a member of an important federal security committee is even more alarming. Some of the behaviour with the signing of forms looked dodgy, and if staff are busy doing Labor Party work rather than serving their constituents, that also should be condemned. No doubt more things will be looked at as investigations continue.

For the purposes of policymaking the Liberal Democrats often distinguish between victimless crimes, like recreational drug use, which should be decriminalised, and crimes where people are victimised

and laws and punishments are justified. Putting aside any legalities of Mr Somyurek's alleged behaviour, the question here is: who is the victim? I may have an answer for you. As a member for the South Eastern Metropolitan Region, from time to time I have met with people from a number of local communities with genuine grievances about issues in their area. I have been amazed to discover that they have Labor representatives with offices only a stone's throw away who simply do not care. More often than not people in the South Eastern Metropolitan Region do not even know their representatives in this place. I have also found that when I attend local events I am very often the only person from this place attending. It turns out that meeting constituents is not high on the agenda. However, at this point I would like to acknowledge Dr Kieu, who is an exception to this rule. I have seen him meeting and serving his community in the way that most people would expect.

The Liberal Democrats are constantly talking about what we believe in Parliament, so I am amazed how unusual it is for government members to talk about what they believe. It turns out the reason for this is that some of them do not seem to believe in anything other than the accumulation of power. So I put to you that whatever IBAC concludes, the victims of all this are our constituents, many of whom feel unrepresented—even apparently some who are members of the Labor Party.

I am also disgusted by the way that the Labor Party appear to use ethnic groups as pawns. Labor love to talk about their support for multicultural groups and women, but the hidden recordings demonstrate something altogether different. Regardless of what anyone decides about the legality of the activities by Mr Somyurek, more than anything *60 Minutes* revealed a disturbing vacuum of morality and a culture of entitlement.

I love my job. I am greatly honoured to serve the community I represent and privileged to come here and talk about what I believe. If Labor are to re-establish the trust of the community, they need to have members who understand this great privilege and who will serve the communities they claim to represent.

**Ms PATTEN** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:43): I rise to support this motion, echoing the previous members with a great degree of sadness and a great degree of disappointment. When I also watched this unfolding on television and then in the newspapers the next day, sadly I was not surprised and sadly I do not think the Victorian public was surprised—shocked, maybe, by the language, shocked that this was exposed but not surprised that it was happening, not surprised at all. That is why we often hear the disdain that our community has for politicians.

I feel very privileged to be here. I feel passionate about being here. I am passionate about representing my constituency. I am passionate about the policies that I want to advocate for. I feel very fortunate to have this extraordinary opportunity, and I take it very seriously. But that is not enough for our community now. We need to do a lot more, and I do not know whether an investigation by the Ombudsman or whether an investigation by IBAC will actually restore that faith that we should have and that we must try and restore because it is not there now.

To see the disdain that Mr Somyurek not only treated his constituents with but treated his colleagues with, the disdain that he treated this Parliament with, as a member of the crossbench—and probably, I have to say, as a woman—I felt it. When the minister could not remember my name in a committee process, when the minister would barely answer a question when I was seriously trying to further understand in the committee process about local government legislation that was going to affect my community, which were questions that my community were concerned about—the 'Yes', 'No' or non-answers that we received! This was someone who clearly treated this place with contempt.

Now, maybe that is something we should explore. Was he in fact in contempt of this Parliament? Some years ago I was actually charged with contempt of Parliament. Long before I was a member of Parliament—and certainly not as a minister—I threatened to take legal action against some senators when I thought what they were doing was not correct and was not within their duties. Now, that enraged the senators at the time, and I and my partner, Robbie Swan, were charged with contempt of

Parliament. Ultimately we were not found to have been in contempt, but I would say that the accusations against me were far less than what we have seen the accusations against Mr Somyurek are. I mean, talk about threats—my goodness. The threats he was making against his own members, against other ministers, were contemptible. It was worse than that: it was misogynistic. But I certainly think that we could consider whether in actual fact he was not only treating this place with contempt but he was actually in contempt of this place.

I am pleased that we are all in furious agreement about this motion, but I hope that we actually take this seriously. I hope that we actually do change the way that we act. I hope that we can bring the public with us with these changes. I hope that maybe this will lead to greater transparency. I know, sitting on the crossbench, that we are not about to be in power, as it were, and it is the power that has corrupted this. It is the power that became the only reason for him being here. It was not the policies; it was not the people. It was about the power.

Crossbenchers are not affected by that in the same way. We come here with passion. We certainly may not all agree with each other—and that is entirely evident in many of the debates that we have had in this place—but I respect everyone here because they are passionate and they are here for the right reasons, even if I may not agree with those reasons. However, they are here for the right reasons and they are here to represent the people of Victoria. They are not here to power play, which is what we have seen.

Maybe this does need a complete change. We are seeing the trust in our politicians, in our political process—even in our parliamentary processes—decline, decline, decline. That is the saddest thing—that this comes as no surprise to our constituents. It comes as no surprise to our community. That is the saddest thing about this motion. It is the saddest thing about what we have all been dealing with this week—and not only this week. In my short period in this place we have seen, consistently, these questions about, ‘Are we behaving in a proper manner? Are we behaving in an admirable and an honest and honourable manner?’. And I think time and time again we have found that we are lacking. I hope, yet again, that this might be a final wake-up call for us to change this—to really work hard to restore that faith. May this be a tipping point in this Parliament.

**Ms MAXWELL** (Northern Victoria) (10:50): I rise to endorse Mr Grimley’s remarks and to reaffirm that Derryn Hinch’s Justice Party will be supporting this motion, not because we particularly enjoy having to comment on or debate such issues or because we derive any pleasure whatsoever out of any aspect of what has come to light over these past few days. Mainly we do so because, as Mr Grimley has said, we would like to express our concern and revulsion at what has become apparent through the various revelations this week on *60 Minutes* and in the *Age* newspaper. I say that in respect of not only the corrosion of democracy itself but also the degradation of the basic purpose that every parliamentarian is meant to fulfil, which is not to build our own personal power and empires, as Ms Patten reflected on in her speech, but instead to represent and selflessly advance the views of others, especially our constituents.

In our party we were also disgusted, like many Victorians, at the appalling language used by Mr Somyurek about many others—about women and the LGBTIQI community in particular. As a woman I have to say whilst I also was not surprised to see that disgraceful language, I absolutely condemn it and find it very difficult to understand how anyone can speak like that about another human being. How on earth do we seriously expect Victorians as a whole to respect women and minority groups and to stop degrading them when so-called community representatives and leaders themselves do the opposite? Shouldn’t we in fact all be leading by example? I am obviously not the first to say it this week, but all such comments made by Mr Somyurek were completely intolerable and unacceptable to Mr Grimley and me, and we repudiate them.

I think this is a time for us all to reflect and it is a reminder to all of us that we are here elected to support and represent our constituents—and, as Mr Atkinson so eloquently said in his speech, we are here on behalf of those constituents. We are not here to seek our own power. We are here to behave

respectfully and to respect all others in this and the other place. On making all of those reflections I also acknowledge and accept Ms Symes's well-made point in question time yesterday that Labor Party MLCs also feel angry about these events and revelations of recent days. That indeed is the way we should all feel.

Specifically on this motion itself, Mr Grimley and I agree that it is appropriate that the Ombudsman also be asked to investigate these incredibly serious and wideranging allegations and matters that go straight to the heart of Victorian democracy. Whilst Victoria Police and IBAC are already being asked to investigate, we accept the view put by the coalition that there is also a place for the Ombudsman to undertake a further inquiry as well. The people of Victoria are owed nothing less here than full transparency and accountability, and the Ombudsman in our view has a very valuable and important role to play in this process. I therefore would like to indicate again that we will support the opposition on this motion and thank them for moving it.

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (10:54): I rise to thank members for their contribution and to thank the chamber for its support of this motion, particularly those members who have spoken so eloquently in favour of the motion. I want to acknowledge the wisdom of Mr Atkinson, having dealt with the processes through 2014 to 2018 as President and his knowledge base there, and thank him for his contribution too. The point is here this is a sensible referral that is in the interests of the community. As people have pointed out, we are here on behalf of our constituents, and in that sense ensuring better transparency, better openness and better accountability is critical. In this case I accept also the point that people have made about the terrible allegations and the terrible information that has come to light. We want to see this stopped in the interests of the state, and it is clearly something that is very much in the interests of the state. I thank members for their contributions.

**Motion agreed to.**

### Bills

#### WILDLIFE RESCUE VICTORIA BILL 2020

##### *Second reading*

##### **Debate resumed on motion of Mr MEDDICK:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

**Ms STITT** (Western Metropolitan) (10:57): It is a very good thing that this bill is back before the house today—Mr Meddick's private members bill on Wildlife Rescue Victoria. As we reflect on the unprecedented 2019–20 bushfire season it is clear to see that the impact of the fires on wildlife welfare was significant. I know that there are a number of other members in the chamber who wish to make a contribution in this debate so I will make my comments quite brief.

We witnessed increased public interest and concern from communities both here and overseas who deeply felt the impact of fire on our wildlife, revealing a strong community expectation that we increase our response to support fire-affected wildlife. The private members bill highlights this growing community concern and the significant challenges we face in responding to wildlife welfare during emergencies. The Andrews Labor government understands these challenges and is working on continuously improving its approach to these complex problems.

During the recent fire season we demonstrated our capacity to respond through a range of different actions, and for the first time in Victoria's history we stood up a state wildlife controller within the State Control Centre to support the coordination of that wildlife effort. As I am mindful that there are a number of government members who also want to contribute to this debate, I will leave my comments there.

**Ms BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (10:59): I am really pleased this morning to speak on the Wildlife Rescue Victoria Bill 2020. I would like to acknowledge that this is an area that certainly needs consideration. Our wildlife, our native fauna, were incredibly decimated in the eastern part of our state during the 2019–20 bushfire season, and I will go into that in depth in a moment. But what I would just like to flag for the house is that The Nationals and the Liberals will be moving, in my name, a reasoned amendment. I will go into the reason for that, but the reasoned amendment considers that this house should refer this bill to the Environment and Planning Committee for an inquiry—for its consideration and report on the failure of the government to provide adequate support and assistance to Victorian wildlife and wildlife rescue during the 2019–20 bushfires and that the second reading of this bill be deferred until a final report of the committee is presented to the house.

So that is the starting point of my contribution to the debate, but I would like to put some context as to why I am debating that point and I guess some of the reasons for the need for this and also some of the concerns I have with this bill. Now, those of us who live in the eastern part of the state and those who were glued to their TVs and radios listening to the expansion and development of these horrendous fires through late November, when lightning strikes occurred across the eastern part of the state, were horrified by the influence or effect that the fires had on our wildlife and our domestic animals as well.

One of the key factors that really frustrates me—there are two key factors—is what I felt was a lack of planning, and this will be reviewed in a number of investigations that are ongoing at the moment at both the state and federal level. There was a lack of planning in terms of fuel load build-ups and a lack of preparatory burns, and also there was a lack of motivation by Victorian government agencies to halt the fire and halt the spread of the fire as it crept easterly, in one case certainly across the Snowy River National Park. I had locals up there—local foresters who know the area intimately—who were forecasting what that would look like over the period of time, over a month, and telling me of their frustration that fire agencies in the Victorian government did not seek to halt that. Now, if that had happened, we would have seen far less collateral damage in terms of the destruction of our native wildlife—fauna—and flora.

One of the key factors that I also noticed, being on the ground on 1 January there, related to the many requests by volunteers for wildlife food supplies—birdseed and pellets for injured animals. Those injured animals were actually coming quite close to local towns and unburnt areas. I commend all of those volunteers for doing an amazing job and certainly also in relation to sourcing macropod pellets et cetera. As I said, there were some amazing people who provided support in the very real situation of vulnerable animals seeking shelter and food.

One of the things that we also noticed on the ground there was the poor government response and late government response. The aerial food drops were not actually implemented until late January—a month or more, really, after the fires came through. Indeed the Liberals and The Nationals certainly put out calls for food drops much earlier than this. The minister also, I understand from doing research for this bill, only conducted a full and comprehensive briefing to welfare organisations very late in January. And whilst the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) is the lead agency for fire rescue response in terms of Emergency Management Victoria, we also know that these wildlife assessment teams and wildlife triage field teams again came late and were limited and lacking in response, which was to the detriment of our native flora and fauna.

Now, this is no representation or commentary on the individuals—they did an amazing job. I saw some of them with guns in their kit when they were heading out to Mallacoota, and I thought this is not a job that is for the faint-hearted. I respect their work, but it was too late. In fact the Bairnsdale team did not start its operation until 12 January, and it ran until 2 February. That is a delayed response. It needs to be an improved response.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem):** Ms Bath, sorry to interrupt. Are you okay to move the amendment?

**Ms BATH:** I thought I did already.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem):** No, so we will do it formally now.

**Ms BATH:** Certainly. I am happy to move my reasoned amendment, and it can be circulated in the house. I move:

That all the words after ‘That’ be omitted with the view of inserting in their place ‘this bill be referred to the Environment and Planning Committee for inquiry, consideration and report, by 1 November 2020, on the failure of the government to provide adequate support and assistance to Victorian wildlife and wildlife rescue during the 2019–20 bushfires and the second reading of this bill be deferred until the final report of the committee is presented to the house.’.

In relation to this bill, the intent is to improve welfare outcomes for wildlife, which is an important intent, but the practical implications of this bill require further consideration. It certainly looks at establishing a wildlife rescue committee that is tucked into DELWP and will advise the secretary, and it also looks at stringent accreditation of volunteers to carry out those duties.

So in relation to the actual bill itself, clause 4 establishes the wildlife rescue committee, and clauses 5 and 6 look at the objectives and functions of that committee. Some of those responsibilities include the administration and governance of bodies, the coordination of volunteers and the education and training of volunteers. Now, we all would concur that training is an important aspect when dealing with wildlife and, importantly, in supporting the best outcomes for wildlife. So there is an endorsement of training and education, but is this misplaced in this bill for the reasons I will outline? This bill also looks at the secretary of DELWP being advised by this committee.

Clause 8 of the bill looks at establishing a seven-person committee. Our consideration is that it is almost impossible that a seven-person committee would achieve just a fraction of the stated purposes of this entire bill—that of being a first responder. How will this actually play out practically, and what difference will they make?

The other issue that I have that needs consideration in a formal committee and analysis response would be in regard to clause 18, where there seems to be a lot of penalties—and a lot of retribution, in effect. Clause 18 establishes offences relating to carrying out a wildlife emergency response. The person certainly must only carry out wildlife emergency response activities if they are accredited, or a penalty will apply. A person must not educate or train another person in wildlife emergency response activities unless they are accredited, or a penalty will apply. And the list goes on there. My feeling on this one—and I stand with The Nationals and the Liberals—is that there needs to be a greater consideration of the implications of that, and that is why I have moved this reasoned amendment.

At the centre of the bill there is a need for carers to be accredited. But, again, what will happen if people come out and assist as volunteers in a very spontaneous way without having these accreditations? Will there end up being a penalty system rather than assistance? Indeed all members will remember back in 2009 the Mirboo North CFA volunteer, Mr Tree, who spontaneously provided water to an injured koala. Certainly one would not want to see, in any capacity, somebody spontaneously helping an animal in an instance and having a penalty. I believe, therefore, that this needs further consideration.

There are other points that I would like to make in relation to clause 20, which provides consideration regarding accreditation, including volunteers receiving appropriate training, experience and qualifications. Again, training is important, but in terms of the bushfire response I note that DELWP already have qualified assessment teams to work in these affected areas. So is it a case of repurposing? I think there needs to be an investigation as to what is going wrong in terms of the DELWP model at the moment in response to the 2019–20 fires in East Gippsland and north-east Victoria and to assess how they can improve.

The other point I would like to make is that there are also other areas, other states, that are doing some good work, and we should potentially consider those regions. In South Australia there is an independent organisation who is engaged during emergencies. How would that benefit?

Finally, in relation to other investigations that are being considered at the moment, the government's wildlife review, which is intended to involve a broad range of stakeholders regarding these issues from the recent fires—that is an investigation that is being undertaken. The federal government's response in relation to the royal commission into natural disasters—that has an element of what is happening in relation to our native fauna as well as the whole ramifications around governance and implementation of a fire response. Victoria—the government—has instigated its own Inspector-General for Emergency Management's inquiry into this, and so it is very important that those responses and reports start to inform the importance of this bill as well, and they can be hopefully incorporated into the discussion and learnings.

In relation to my amendment, I am pleased to move a reasoned amendment. I think it is fair and reasonable. There are certainly a number of committees with workloads there, but this one, I believe, could be actually concurrent. We saw in the last Parliament where bills were sent off for review and they did not necessarily need a long-term assessment; they could be done concurrently, even with subcommittees. I think this is a wise position to take.

**Ms TAYLOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:11): Well, we heard some interesting reflections, some what I would purport to be outdated attitudes and opinions to bushfire management. That is interesting. That is not what we are here to discuss today. I am actually here to discuss wildlife welfare, so I think we will just put those outdated issues to bushfire management aside and get right down to the topic we are here to focus on.

Now, I have to say it has been quite heartening to see the profound response of our local community and the international community to our wildlife, to the welfare of our wildlife, during the recent unprecedented bushfires. It is most heartening. You can see that there has been an evolution over time as the community increasingly—and I say locally and internationally—recognises the very important nexus that we have to our local ecology and how important it is not only because wildlife are cute and because they are sweet and because we love looking at them but because they are actually a critical part of our survival, and our government is acutely aware of this nexus.

We know that through this unprecedented bushfire season what it has revealed is a strong community expectation to increase our response to support fire-affected wildlife, and this is a wonderful thing. This is a wonderful way forward, and I am buoyed by this. The private member is highlighting this growing community concern and the significant challenges we face in responding to wildlife welfare impacts during emergencies. But I think it is truly wonderful that, can I say, globally and locally we are actually recognising the true value of wildlife.

Our Andrews Labor government does understand these challenges and is working on continuously improving our approach to these complex problems from a proactive perspective. If we do reflect on this recent unprecedented bushfire experience, which was traumatic and devastating, anyone with any sense of compassion could not not be moved by witnessing the tremendous—and I mean not in a positive sense—the significant impact on our beautiful wildlife.

So what did our government do under these circumstances? Well, for the first time in Victoria's history, as mentioned by my colleague Ms Stitt, we stood up a state wildlife controller within the State Control Centre to support the coordination of wildlife emergency efforts. Our government also injected \$1 million specifically for wildlife welfare as part of the \$17.5 million in emergency response and recovery funding for the environment following the recent bushfires. In January our government also provided a further \$200 000 in emergency grants for wildlife shelters and carers. We also deployed wildlife triage units and wildlife assessment teams across the fire-affected areas. We

delivered supplementary food to support vulnerable macropod populations and assessed and relocated koalas to safer areas.

We also worked closely with partners across the sector to undertake emergency extractions of threatened wildlife, including Victoria's only population of eastern bristlebirds. I do not know about everyone else here, but I think I literally held my breath watching that process as it was reported, thinking, 'Gosh, I hope this works out'. I was so proud of the team that went in there and did that difficult and delicate work, the sacrifice that they made for our wildlife, and my understanding is that—touch wood—it has been a positive exercise. I hope I am correct in that. Yes! So I am really proud of the incredible work that they did, and it certainly is again what we are here for as a government at the end of the day—to be able to deliver real outcomes for our precious species.

From the launch of *Protecting Victoria's Environment: Biodiversity 2037* to the recent review and revision of the native vegetation regulations and Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988, our government continues to lead and deliver a pivotal change agenda to improve outcomes for Victoria's environment and its precious wildlife. But of course we can always do more. We must do more. That is what we are here to do. We cannot rest on our laurels; we have to keep on, keep on, keep on, because we know the threats that our precious wildlife face.

That is why we are pleased to announce and update this house that our government is holding a wildlife welfare round table in late July to kick off important consultation with the wildlife community. I note this is in part in response to advocacy from Mr Meddick, so can I note and acknowledge that as well. This round table will bring together key stakeholders and partners to acknowledge and understand the challenges presented by the 2019–20 bushfire season and to help design a path forward to improve our collective approach to wildlife emergencies. It is extraordinary the work of so many volunteer organisations and the incredible sacrifices that they make, so it makes good sense to have a truly collective approach on this very, very important issue. I am inspired by that myself, and I say that with absolute conviction. I care deeply about this issue, as does our government as a whole.

Importantly, in recognition of the value and expertise that Mr Meddick provides in the care of native wildlife and the response to emergency events, we will finalise the agenda and intended outcomes in consultation with Mr Meddick. By having a thorough consultation process, this will ensure that future response efforts are well informed and appropriate—and that makes sense, doesn't it, at the end of the day? If you consult appropriately, you will get a much better outcome.

So what I am pleased to say is that all options will be considered, including a public inquiry following feedback from wildlife support agencies, who are right at the front line, and the volunteers, who are critical to the emergency response effort. By having this collective approach we will surely get a much better outcome. The government is aware of Mr Meddick's suggestions, and we look forward on that note to hearing from all interested stakeholders, particularly experts and practitioners, as part of the round table.

We certainly have really important work to do in consulting with the wildlife community on the best way forward. So this wildlife welfare round table will support opportunities to develop a better understanding of the necessary actions to deliver improved outcomes for wildlife during emergencies through better planning, response and recovery.

I should also note that in addition our government announced the first-ever review of the Wildlife Act 1975 to strengthen this legislation for the protection and conservation of Victoria's wildlife. We truly do understand and acknowledge the impact on wildlife and the toll on community members who care for injured wildlife, knowing the risk that they take to go in and actually rescue wildlife. There are so many facets, and I am sure that I would completely underestimate just the extent of the sacrifice that they undertake in order to do the critical work that they do. I have to say, on a personal level, I am extremely grateful for their diligence and their care and their concern, and I think as a government we are truly grateful as well. Specifically we value and appreciate the 325 shelter operators and 261 foster

carers authorised to care for and rehabilitate wildlife in Victoria. If there is anything to elevate the human spirit, it is noting the incredible contribution that all these shelter operators and foster carers make to sustaining our beautiful wildlife. That is something to be truly proud of and reflects very well on them as fellow Victorians who are showing and reflecting on just how valued our wildlife is and must increasingly be into the future.

We know that, although there is a lot of great work that is being undertaken presently, we can do more, and that is why there is certainly an impetus to hold the wildlife welfare round table. We are truly committed to caring for and protecting our precious native wildlife and the wildlife sector. I mean, if they are going to be able to do the critical work that they do, they do need support along that journey, because I know that, without being negative in this connotation, it is extremely expensive to maintain the food and the proper support mechanisms for wildlife when they are in a vulnerable condition, needing veterinary support et cetera. These are all costs that are simply not going to go away. So certainly there is an unprecedented impetus, if you like, and I think I am pretty confident in saying that the community is with us on this journey. Wouldn't you say?

**Mr Gepp:** Absolutely.

**Ms TAYLOR:** Unequivocally. And whether it is in regional areas or, can I say, in my region of Southern Metropolitan Region—I am not speaking of every individual, Mrs McArthur—

**Mrs McArthur** interjected.

**Ms TAYLOR:** Yes, good. Oh, you are saying good things! Thank you. Oh, my goodness, we are in agreement. Yes, we all love our koalas and we love our kangaroos. I should have been listening a bit more closely. That is terrific.

*Members interjecting.*

**Ms TAYLOR:** These are good things being shared in the chamber, and it is nice to see a sense of unity in terms of wanting to preserve our wildlife. Certainly we are unequivocal in our commitment, but I do want to emphasise that it is very much upon us and it is certainly something we take very seriously. So that is why we are taking a proactive approach and we are continuously building in that space.

It is not news today; it is something that we are fully appreciative of and certainly want and have a full and unrelenting commitment to, supporting our wildlife, because we have to also think about generations that follow us. We have had the capacity, growing up, to see beautiful wildlife, even in metro areas. Certainly my parents took us out to the bush to make sure that we could see our beautiful wildlife in their native habitat and to see them as they should be, free and happy. But it is not only about us, and I think this has been mentioned in the chamber; it is about future generations and preserving a world that is worth living in, one that has the due respect and protection afforded to our magnificent wildlife into the future. So I wish all the very best for this round table. I think it is going to be really, really successful, and I commend discussion on this incredibly important topic today.

**Mr LIMBRICK** (South Eastern Metropolitan) (11:26): Principles matter to the Liberal Democrats, and when we approach any legislation or motion it is through the prism of our principles that we view it. Does any proposed legislation or change in regulation increase or decrease the rights of an individual? Does it increase or decrease the burden of tax and regulation? We believe in people and we believe that when people are given the opportunity to flourish it benefits the individual and the community. Volunteers are at the core of a healthy society, whether that be through a church, a community organisation or an advocacy group. Where would we be without the efforts of the CFA, the SES and countless volunteers that help our society function?

I thank Mr Meddick for bringing this bill to the chamber. I also thank his staff for answering questions from my office, of which apparently there were many, and I would also like to thank the minister's staff for answering our questions to get a better understanding of this issue. This is an important issue

to Victorians, as we saw highlighted in the recent bushfires, where concerned people wanted to help injured wildlife. The fact that there was not a clear pathway for them to do this highlights not just a failure of coordination and communication from the government but, worse, that laws and regulations specifically prevented people from being able to act.

Looking at the bill that Mr Meddick has brought forth, this does seem like a reasonable approach, given the constraints. While we do have some issues with the bill, these are mostly the same kinds of concerns that we would have with much of the legislation that the government itself brings forth. While we would prefer a system that allowed more freedom and was perhaps less restrictive in the way that volunteer workforces were trained and accredited, we can appreciate that this approach attempts a relatively light touch in terms of regulation. It is limited strictly to activities related to emergency response and creates a pathway to allow passionate volunteers to donate their time and expertise to a worthy cause. May we see more of this. The Liberal Democrats support volunteer activities, and while this bill would create a small burden in terms of government expenditure and regulation, its larger purpose would be to activate a volunteer workforce that is currently restricted by other laws and regulations. We will therefore support the bill.

**Dr BACH** (Eastern Metropolitan) (11:29): I also want to rise to make just a brief contribution on this bill today, noting that the Liberal Party has a proud and long-running history of environmental protection, and wildlife protection is a vital piece of that puzzle. Our founding principles explicitly highlight stewardship of the environment, and the Leader of the Opposition has taken up this mantle with alacrity. In the past few months we have announced a waste-to-energy policy, a container deposit scheme, a policy to plant a million trees and others. We have announced these initiatives more than two years out from a state election, and we have done that because we want these policies to be taken up by the government now, because this is about good outcomes for Victoria. Our plan to get Victoria back to work and back in business is a blueprint to boost Victoria's future, and the environment can and must be an essential part of that, so I commend these policies to the government for consideration.

Now, to the specifics of this bill, wildlife protection is something that many of my constituents tell me is a key concern for them. Well, I share that concern. Australia has a biodiversity that we must jealously guard. In the eastern and north-eastern suburbs of Melbourne we have the endangered Eltham copper butterfly, the vulnerable southern toadlet and the common long-necked turtle, just to name a few local vulnerable species. The beautiful wildlife is one of the reasons why people love living in Melbourne's north-east and east. Our parklands and wetlands provide locals with a chance to escape the city, if only for a short time. This has led many in Melbourne's east and north-east to become advocates for vulnerable animals and for the environment more broadly. I spoke about one such advocate just last night in this place.

The cause of wildlife rescue was brought to the fore recently during our shocking bushfire season. Through this period we saw video after video of everyday yet upstanding, heroic Victorians risking their own safety to save wildlife. Whether it was collecting burnt and thirsty koalas from the side of an ashen road, wallabies being supplied water by firefighters or kangaroos being escorted away from the fire front, volunteers did not think twice before assisting vulnerable animals.

This bill provides for a number of mechanisms to be established that seek to regulate volunteers. Now, we are a country and a state of volunteers—though this government continuously seeks to regulate our volunteers also. I refer to briefly, and ask members to contemplate briefly, the decimation of the CFA by this government. To accept this legislation as it stands would invite regulation that limits volunteers to the extent of constructing an offence when so-called unaccredited volunteers save dying animals or animals in pain. Not only that, an individual with relevant experience who informs a volunteer about how to do likewise would also be guilty of an offence. In short, in times of emergency an unaccredited person would be better to leave an at-risk animal than to make an attempt to save or support it for fear of prosecution. Accreditation is all well and good, and I want well-informed individuals with relevant training taking action when it comes to supporting wildlife. Agencies like Wildlife Victoria have trained volunteers who do remarkable work throughout the state and are always on hand to be called

into action. But making the work of good-willed volunteers in the right place at the right time to save the life of an animal an offence is not something that I can support.

Additionally, this bill would seek to establish an agency under the department to play a key role in emergency wildlife response. This is intended as a remedy to the failure of the government to properly protect wildlife during the most recent bushfires. However, this agency would still fall under the department. The agency would report to the same minister, with important responsibilities held by the minister. There is little to suggest that an extra tranche of this kind of regulation would directly improve the situation.

Elsewhere in government, as has been noted in this debate already, there are reviews commencing or currently underway that have the capacity to provide insight into the issues we faced during the recent bushfires. These will undoubtedly provide possible alternatives. Consequently I note that the opposition is moving a reasoned amendment to refer this matter to the Environment and Planning Committee to ensure that proper assessments can be made.

As I finish, let me come back to the thing that I started with: that volunteers are key to our state's and our country's success. Neighbours, families and friends provide countless hours of service throughout the community. My colleagues and I on this side of the chamber respect that. We always have, and we always will. We honour volunteers for their continued service, and we will do all that we can to stand up for them so that they can continue their selfless work.

**Mr ERDOGAN** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:34): I am pleased to rise in relation to the private members bill in relation to wildlife rescue. When I saw this bill I, from a philosophical aspect, tried to look through the lens of an ecological perspective. For those of you who might not be familiar with it, ecology is not just a study of the environment but a study of different life forms and how they interact, the foundations of which are—

**Mr Finn**: That's why you're in the Labor Party.

**Mr ERDOGAN**: Yes, but Minister Mikakos just left the room, or else you would get a bit of appreciation.

My interest in an ecological future actually began in my high school studies at Alphington Grammar, because I got to study Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Hippocrates, who laid the foundations of the study of natural history. They could observe and see how different beings existed, and there is an element of essentialism which for me is a foundation of importance. If we only value human life or place human lives above all else and leave other beings in our ecosystem and do not support them and protect them, then I think we will create an unbalance in nature which will result in us all being worse off collectively. So from a foundational perspective the protection of wildlife is crucial to our own human being—our own existence. If we look at it from that perspective, then we understand the importance of this bill.

At the outset I just want to thank Mr Meddick, because in my short time here I have been observing how passionate he is—and it is undeniable, his commitment to the animal welfare cause. He has even taught me one or two things about possums and different types of kangaroos in interesting discussions—and I have never had the time to really indulge in that area of study, because I have got other interests such as sport and other passions such as trade unions and workers rights and equality. But Mr Meddick's undeniable passion in this area and his expert knowledge is something that I do value, and I look forward to continuing to learn from him. In my short time here I have already learned a lot, but I continue learning from him about this area.

So taking from the beginning my interest in ecology, our balance of different life forms and energy and how we all intersect, it is important that we protect wildlife. That is the foundation of why this private members bill is important.

There is obviously growing community concern after the bushfires. We saw the bushfires ravage the regions affected, but I think our government was prompt in our response from a number of perspectives. But in the face of growing community concern—constituent concern is what prompted Mr Meddick to bring this bill—it is important that this area is given the important reflection it deserves. We understand that this area is complex because it intersects with so many other government policies, but we need to not shy away from complex problems but deal with them as best we can.

We did take a number of different steps. Some were mentioned by my colleague in Southern Metropolitan Nina Taylor, who reflected on the fact that we stood up a state wildlife controller within the State Control Centre to support and coordinate wildlife emergency efforts recently. More importantly, we announced \$17.5 million in emergency response and recovery funding for the environment following the recent bushfires, and \$1 million of that was specifically targeted for wildlife. In January we also provided a further \$200 000 in emergency grants for wildlife shelters and carers. We deployed wildlife triage units and wildlife assessment teams across the fire-affected areas. We delivered supplementary food to support vulnerable macropod populations and we assessed and relocated koalas to safe areas. This was quite interesting to me because we used helicopters and we dropped different pods down. It was the first time I had seen something like that. But that was a prompt response by this government, so it was fantastic to see.

I guess our response to wildlife and the environment and the ecological aspect I was talking about—how all life forms intersect and we rely on each other—was further enhanced when we launched *Protecting Victoria's Environment: Biodiversity 2037*. With the recent review and revision of the native vegetation regulations and the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988, the Andrews Labor government has proved it has continued to lead in this pivotal agenda in terms of Victoria's environment and precious wildlife. But obviously there is always more we can do, and we need to listen and be prepared for future disasters in a better way. That is why, as my colleague Nina Taylor mentioned, we are taking action and we will be holding a wildlife welfare round table that will kick off in a few weeks time. It is important that we consult the wildlife community. They are one of the most important stakeholders in this sector.

The round table will bring together a number of key stakeholders and partners and acknowledge and understand that there are challenges due to the bushfires and we need to design a path forward together. We are all in it together. That is important—the collective, not the individual. Dr Bach has left the building, but it is not about him; it is about the collective. We are all in it together; that is what I am trying to emphasise here.

**Mr Gepp:** There should be a song about this—we're all in it together.

**Mr ERDOGAN:** That is right. The wildlife welfare round table will support opportunities to develop a better understanding of the necessary actions to deliver improved outcomes for wildlife during emergencies through better planning, response and recovery.

But it is not just in this area that we are taking action. Recently we also did the first-ever review of the Wildlife Act 1975 to strengthen this legislation for the protection and conservation of Victoria's wildlife. We understand and acknowledge the impact on wildlife and the toll on community members who cared for injured wildlife. I can imagine for many of those in the sector it would have been quite a traumatic experience. We all saw the footage ourselves of burnt koalas and native species. It touched us all. I think all Victorians were deeply affected.

We value and appreciate the 325 shelter operators and 261 foster carers authorised to care for and rehabilitate wildlife in Victoria. This government is committed to caring for and protecting our precious native wildlife and is doing so in step with the wildlife sector as we continue to improve the outcomes for wildlife across Victoria. There are many more steps that need to be taken in this area, but in making my remarks I am so pleased to get up and speak on this bill, because I think it is important. It gives us all an opportunity to reflect on our place in the ecology and in our environment

and the importance of preserving our biodiversity. I will leave my remarks there today, but it has been a pleasure to speak on this bill.

**Mr GRIMLEY** (Western Victoria) (11:43): I would like to make a brief contribution to debate on Mr Meddick's bill, and I would like to start by stating that Ms Maxwell and I will be supporting this legislation. Derryn Hinch's Justice Party strongly supports this legislation, not just because it is a good bill but because we have a long history of pursuing animal justice. In the Senate, Derryn raised issues about cosmetic testing on animals, incidents of animal cruelty abroad and the primitive culling of native species. In 2019 he introduced the Environment Legislation Amendment (Protecting Dugongs and Turtles) Bill, which would triple prison sentences for illegally killing or injuring protected marine species. In short, our party has a longstanding interest in animal rights.

As Mr Meddick has stated, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning is legally responsible for wildlife protection and conservation in Victoria. However, in some cases members of DELWP are not best placed to retrieve wildlife from disaster areas. As shown in the recent fire season, we need highly trained and skilled individuals to assist and rescue wildlife during disasters. This bill will ensure wildlife volunteers accredited with Wildlife Rescue Victoria can enter firegrounds or other emergency zones and do so safely by creating a legislative framework to include the care of wildlife during emergencies into our emergency response.

Importantly DELWP, as a government agency, will retain the role of secretariat to WRV and retain accrediting and licensing powers for wildlife volunteers. All functional and operative duties and roles of WRV will be independent of DELWP. Under this legislation this will be achieved through the establishment of Wildlife Rescue Victoria. This new body will fulfil three core functions: one, establish the Wildlife Rescue Victoria committee; two, create a new accreditation process for wildlife rescue volunteers; and, three, outline an operational framework for the committee to achieve things such as improving public education about wildlife during non-emergency periods.

The need for similar legislation was also brought to my attention by a local constituent just after the devastating fire season. Tehree from Jirrahlinga Koala and Wildlife Sanctuary explained to me, whilst I was adopting a koala back then, that prior to the Black Saturday fires in 2009 the state government funded the training of hundreds of rapid response carers who were equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to retrieve sick or injured wildlife that were still alive in fire-affected areas. Despite the government providing this training, when the carers had the opportunity to purchase approved boots, clothing, equipment and extensive training, in most cases, and certainly following this fire season, most have never been called to service, which has potentially contributed to the needless loss of native Australian wildlife. Some estimates point to the loss of 1.25 billion native Australian animals nationally, further reinforcing the need for support from rapid response carers. I cannot understand why this is the case.

If passed, I hope Mr Meddick's bill goes some way to ensuring that there is greater clarity about who is responsible for caring for animals, particularly in the wake of a disaster. It is vitally important that these people are well trained and can provide the needed care for animals. I commend this bill to the house.

**Mrs McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (11:47): I rise today to speak on the Wildlife Rescue Victoria Bill 2020. Like everyone else in this house, I love wildlife, I love all animals and I love livestock—they were also seriously affected in fires. But just about every week in this place someone from either the government or now the crossbench insists on establishing a new taxpayer-funded level of bureaucracy, committee or—my favourite—quango. For those who do not know, that is a quasi-autonomous non-government organisation. It is an animal of significant—not merit, but it is—

**A member:** It's a breeder.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** It is a breeder; it gets legs very easily, that quango. In fact it has probably been happening every week for the last 170 years in this chamber. But do all these committees and

quangos—and now we have even got round tables; that is a new form of animal—achieve an outcome? That is the question. We need outcomes in this area, not just committees and bureaucracies and new feel-good round tables.

Here we are in this state over \$170 billion in debt, but we are going to create another bureaucracy—more government programs, more public servants and more unaccountable bureaucrats telling Victorians how to live their lives. This legislation is one of the worst examples of it, with the proposal to establish a new Wildlife Rescue Victoria committee to educate, train, accredit and impose policies and conditions upon Victorians who want to save wildlife. It is unthinkable that anybody would believe that in order to save wildlife legally you must first be given accreditation to do so by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), with conditions imposed upon you by seven state government-appointed committee members. It beggars belief.

Under section 18 of this legislation you can be fined up to \$10 000 for saving wildlife without approved accreditation from the state government. This is ludicrous. Country people should be free to humanely save any wildlife under any circumstances without having some bureaucrat give them permission first. This is the nanny state on steroids.

Now, many of us in country Victoria do a lot for wildlife. I know on many farms wildlife corridors are planted all the time. On our particular farm we plant hundreds of thousands of trees specifically for wildlife corridors. Let me tell you, wildlife corridors are far better on farms than on roadsides because that leads to roadkill and then you have got another situation where somebody wants to go and save the joey out of the kangaroo that has been run over—let alone the impact that wire rope barriers have on wildlife.

Besides, if this is about saving more wildlife in response to emergencies, as I am sure it is nobly intended, it is illogical. If there was a bushfire in my electorate tomorrow, would you not want all Victorians to have the ability to save any wildlife in that emergency without the threat of a \$10 000 fine? Or are nearby constituents expected to undergo a lengthy application process to acquire a DELWP-approved accreditation first while the bush is burning around them? Restricting the number of people who can save wildlife will save fewer wildlife, not more. Worse still, you cannot even teach someone how to save wildlife unless you have been given the green light by the government, let alone doing so during an emergency.

In his second-reading speech my fellow member for Western Victoria Region Mr Meddick contended that this bill is vital because too many animal lives were lost in the past bushfire season as a consequence of rescuers being precluded from entering the fire-affected areas. This legislation will not fix that issue. This legislation will reduce the number of people who are able and willing to perform wildlife rescue. If you want animals to be saved, it should be made easier to do so lawfully, not by creating new obstacles and disincentives in the way of those who desire to do so. Many of us save wildlife regularly. We have had baby owls fall out of trees. We look after them until wildlife rescue can take them. We do it every day in country Victoria. But, gosh, from now on if this happened, we would have to be registered or we would be fined \$10 000.

Mr Meddick spoke of those who sacrifice family work, downtime and personal comfort, safety and income to rescue, care for, rehabilitate and release our precious wildlife. I do not disagree with commendation of these Victorians. They are fabulous people. However, it leaves out another large class of Victorians who actively save our wildlife who may not be hobby or professional rescuers. We do it because we care. We see a need at the time; we act quickly. We have not got time to go and get accreditation to save the koala or the joey on the side of the road or the owl that falls out of the tree. Local rural Victorians are often the first ones in times of emergency to save wildlife where possible. Perhaps it is their dependence on animal food and fibre production for their livelihood that makes the member so desperate to exclude them from the ability to legally do so. If Victoria's wildlife rescue is broken, as Mr Meddick claims, it should be made easier—not more difficult by handing out fines to

those who participate in it without the government's approval. I commend our reasoned amendment to the chamber, but I cannot support Mr Meddick's bill.

**Mr GEPP** (Northern Victoria) (11:54): When I first came into this place, people always said to me, 'Be careful of Wednesdays'. Maybe that is the contrast between the last Parliament and this one, because it is wonderful to actually come here to discuss and debate some really good public policy propositions. I congratulate Mr Meddick on bringing this bill before the house. Since he first set foot in this place, Mr Meddick has been very true to his convictions and the reasons that drove him to seek a position in this Parliament. It is magnificent to be able to walk into the chamber and have a piece of public policy which excites debate, which engages people and which is really designed at its very, very core to do some real good in our communities around this wonderful state.

Of course we know that we are just still going through this pandemic of COVID-19 and some of our communities—the communities in Ms Lovell's electorate along with my electorate and Ms Symes's and Ms Maxwell's—were devastated by bushfire only a few short months ago. That has been lost a little bit I think as the world has been grappling with this very difficult pandemic that has affected the entire globe. We saw, if we cast our minds back to that time, those communities were dealing with those horrendous bushfire scenes—not just here in Victoria of course. Who can forget some of the images that we saw from places in New South Wales? At the core, we saw people responding as they always do in these circumstances—not just to the circumstances that were confronting other humans but also our wildlife. And some of those images, both in the newspapers and on our TV screens, were just so, so powerful.

As I was looking through some of the media clippings going back to that time recently, there was an article that was actually produced in the *New York Times* in January and it was headed 'How many animals have died in Australia's wildfires?'. A professor estimated in that article that 1 billion animals died in Australia's wildfires. That is a staggering number when you think about it—just staggering. This was an article on 11 January, and they broke some of those figures down:

Some 25,000 koalas feared dead ... consumed by flames. Ten thousand feral camels—  
impacted by fires. And as I said:

... a whopping one billion animals estimated to have perished across Australia.

The contributions so far have touched on the animals that immediately come to mind when we think about bushfires. We talk about kangaroos and we talk about koalas. I have mentioned camels and we talk about livestock—cattle, pigs, sheep, for example—but of course there are so many more that are impacted by the devastation of bushfires.

That article actually quoted, for example, Kate Umbers, who is a biologist at Western Sydney University who, believe it or not, studies the Australian alpine grasshopper. She is worried about the fate of the nation's grasshoppers, and not just the grasshoppers but the 250 000 insect species that we have in the country and the impact the bushfires had so dramatically on many of those species. We have got snakes, we have got all sorts of marsupials that were impacted by the devastation of bushfires, and it is so heartwarming to know that we do have so many volunteers, so many very well intentioned volunteers, who go into those places searching for animals that have been impacted by bushfire and are doing their best to rescue them and provide a humane solution for those animals.

So I am really pleased to be able to speak on this bill that has been brought before us by Mr Meddick. My colleagues that have gone before me have talked about the round table, and whilst that has been a bit disparaged in other contributions made today, I think it is an important part of continuing the conversation, continuing the discussion, on this very, very important piece of public policy. I commend Mr Meddick for bringing this debate to the house. It is a quality piece of public policy that is very worthwhile for this chamber to be considering, and I look forward to further contributions.

**Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.**

**Questions without notice and ministers statements**

**MEMBER CONDUCT**

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:01): My question is to the minister representing the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and I refer to newspaper reports that directly implicate Adem Somyurek and other ministers, including Robin Scott, in the misuse of public funding through the allocation of grants to multicultural groups with dubious links to the Labor Party. Are you able to assure the house that Dr Kieu and Ms Vaghela were not involved in influencing any of the corrupt multicultural grants allocated while Robin Scott was minister?

**Ms MIKAKOS** (Northern Metropolitan—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for the Coordination of Health and Human Services: COVID-19) (12:01): The Minister for Multicultural Affairs is actually, as the member would be aware, Minister Spence, and I would anticipate that all of those decisions would have been made by the minister acting on advice.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Members of the opposition, your leader wants to ask a supplementary.

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:02): Minister, you are the minister representing the Minister for Multicultural Affairs in this chamber. You may well be called upon to answer questions about the propriety and legality of these multicultural grants. Will you guarantee that you will cooperate with IBAC and the Ombudsman fully if called upon to do so, given you refused to be interviewed by the Ombudsman or the police in the red shirts fiasco?

**Ms Mikakos:** On a point of order, President, Mr Davis knows full well that these matters are now subject to investigation by IBAC and Victoria Police, and obviously those matters relate to the ministers who hold those portfolio responsibilities. I am obviously happy to answer questions representing Minister Spence in this chamber, but I have absolutely no involvement in other ministers' portfolios. I am focused on my own portfolios.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! I uphold the minister's point of order. Mr Davis, if you are directing a question to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, then address it to that minister and this minister can pass on your question and you can get a response as per the standing orders.

**Mr DAVIS:** On the point of order, President, it may well be that a minister representing does manage matters in portfolios from time to time, including matters through this chamber. In that circumstance she may well be called upon to answer questions.

**Ms Mikakos:** Further to Mr Davis's point of order, President, he knows full well that that is not how the Victorian government operates. He is a bit confused with Canberra. That might be how Canberra operates. You have held a public office. You know much better than that, Mr Davis. That is absolute nonsense.

**The PRESIDENT:** My advice stands that, Mr Davis, if you want to get a response from the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, then you can direct it through Minister Mikakos, who represents her in this house. She will pass it on as per the standing orders, and you will get a response in writing in two days, which is the standard practice of this house.

**Mr DAVIS:** In that context then I ask the minister, on behalf of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs: will the Minister for Multicultural Affairs cooperate fully with IBAC and the police if they seek her assistance?

**Ms MIKAKOS** (Northern Metropolitan—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for the Coordination of Health and Human Services: COVID-19) (12:06): I refer the member to the Premier's comments in relation to this matter.

**1080 POISON**

**Mr MEDDICK** (Western Victoria) (12:06): My question is for the Minister for Agriculture. The use of 1080 poison is entrenched across Victoria, despite almost every country in the world banning its use because of its incredible cruelty, because it indiscriminately kills non-target species, including many that are endangered and domestic animals, all in prolonged and horrific circumstances. 1080 cannot be contained. Whether baits are buried, aerially dropped or delivered by bait-ejector units, the science proves it cannot be confined to either an area or a species. The native apex predator of our environment, the dingo, is the target of most programs, and that is in itself a mistake of tragic proportions. Will the minister and the government join the rest of the civilised world, ban this cruel poison and instead invest in research into more humane methods of invasive species control and those that are already proven?

**Ms SYMES** (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (12:07): I thank Mr Meddick for his question. I do not agree with all of the assertions in your question, Mr Meddick, but I do agree with some of it. In terms of efforts in finding other methods for pest control of wild dogs in particular, which are the main target of 1080, it is something that we are certainly looking at. But in the absence of an effective eradication treatment for wild dogs, the devastation that wild dogs cause to farmers is pretty horrific, and I speak to farmers regularly about the impact of wild dogs on their properties. This is not about animals just going to find food; this is about slaughter of lambs and the like, and it is pretty distressing.

I would say that the use of 1080 is strictly regulated. It is undertaken in accordance with the product label and Victorian directions for use. As I have said, none of the current other methods available would be a suitable alternative to 1080 at this time. Alternatives that are in existence may actually be less humane, pose increased risk to the health of users or pose greater risk to non-target species.

I note your call for the banning of 1080. I cannot agree to that, Mr Meddick. It would result in a less effective control of pest animals, increase costs and potentially cause harm to agricultural, environmental and other animal welfare outcomes. I do repeat that we would love to find some better alternatives that have good outcomes for humane purposes, and I am committed to ensuring that our efforts are focused on that. We are certainly looking at other control methods. We have increased the funding available for fire-affected areas to have better fencing to keep wild dogs out and the like. I would commend the work of our wild dog trappers. They are a pretty amazing cohort of people—a very talented, specialised cohort of people—who are very targeted in their approaches and very much supported by farmers.

The pest bait products containing PAPP that are available for foxes, wild dogs and feral cats are certainly included in the options of looking at all of the products that are under development so that we may reduce our need on 1080, but at this point in time I cannot commit to reducing 1080, given its importance for the agricultural sector.

**Mr MEDDICK** (Western Victoria) (12:10): Thank you, Minister. Will the minister and the government truly recognise the dingo's protected status in Victoria by eliminating the excuse of calling dingoes 'wild dogs' and thereby allowing them to be baited? It seems to be the problem that there is no definition between the two and dingoes are unnecessarily killed as opposed to the wild dog, which has been deemed to be an invasive species.

**Ms SYMES** (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (12:11): I thank Mr Meddick for his supplementary question, which is probably better directed to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. However, I would probably note that there is a lot of conjecture about the status of a dingo versus a wild dog and where the line is drawn. I acknowledge that there are disputes over that, but your specific question would be better directed to Minister D'Ambrosio.

**MINISTERS STATEMENTS: COVID-19**

**Ms MIKAKOS** (Northern Metropolitan—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for the Coordination of Health and Human Services: COVID-19) (12:11): I rise to update the house on the Victorian government’s very clear message to all Victorians to keep their health in check during the pandemic. I encourage all Victorians to continue to seek medical care when they need it and to keep up with general health checks and routine screening. Putting off a visit to the doctor or hospital if you experience any lumps or unusual symptoms or delaying routine tests could put your health at risk.

Last week I had the pleasure of visiting the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, where I met Sanji, a father and chef from Boronia. Earlier this year Sanji went to his GP and had a routine PSA test. He was fit and healthy, with no symptoms to complain of. That routine test may very well have saved his life, because Sanji was diagnosed with prostate cancer. His surgery was able to go ahead in May, despite coronavirus restrictions being in place, and his follow-up consultations, including physiotherapy, have been done via telehealth, minimising any risk of spreading infection. Sanji wanted to share his experience to urge Victorians not to neglect their health during this pandemic, and I thank him.

The Victorian government is investing \$1.9 billion as part of its coronavirus health system preparedness response. Victoria’s world-class hospital system is well prepared to deal with any further spikes in coronavirus cases alongside its everyday operations, with strict infection control processes in place to manage the additional risk. Victoria’s cancer screening programs have resumed, and they have strict infection control measures in place to make sure staff and patients are safe. So if you are due for breast, bowel, prostate or cervical cancer screening, do not put your health at risk. Make an appointment now. Whether it is a regular screening appointment or you have a worrying symptom, coronavirus should not put you off seeking medical care. If you are concerned about any aspects of your health, it is important to visit a GP, and in an emergency do not hesitate to call 000 for urgent assistance. It may just save your life.

**COVID-19**

**Ms CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:13): My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, genomic testing undertaken has confirmed that the first case at Cedar Meats on 2 April was linked to the second case at Cedar Meats. Minister, on 6 May, you said, and I quote:

Unless the virus got into a car itself and went to Cedar Meats, there is no way that virus could have been connected to that worksite.

So I ask: what advice did you receive on 6 May to make such a definitive statement?

**Ms MIKAKOS** (Northern Metropolitan—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for the Coordination of Health and Human Services: COVID-19) (12:14): I thank the member for her question, because she needs to understand what genomic sequencing is all about and its benefits and also the limitations of genomic sequencing. Genomic sequencing is very important, and I want to commend my public health team in the Department of Health and Human Services, who have been working very closely with the Doherty Institute around the development of this genomic sequencing work. Professor Sutton made some media comments confirming the genomic sequencing link between those cases very recently. I know there was a media reference to the fact that that information had not been provided. In fact Professor Sutton had disclosed in a media conference the genomic sequencing link, but that postdated the comments that I had made that the member referred to, where she is actually misquoting what I did say at that time.

The point that I want to make to the member is this: there being a genomic sequencing link between a case that the public health team still has no reason to believe was at the Cedar Meats worksite and the first case where a person was confirmed to have worked at Cedar Meats does not mean that the first person did in fact go to Cedar Meats for that infection to have taken place. And in fact Professor Sutton

has made it clear that there may well have been social events and other gatherings that may have occurred whereby that link may have occurred. There has not been a conclusion drawn by this genomic sequencing link that that first case did in fact travel in a person as a person went to that worksite, so the member is incorrect in her assertion. Professor Sutton has been very clear in his remarks about these issues, and I refer her back to those comments.

**Ms CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:16): Oh dear. I think, Minister, you said it; they are your words. Cedar Meats is a Kairouz family business—donors to the Australian Labor Party. And in this context, I ask: can you confirm that the Department of Health and Human Services is investigating the 2 April case as the origin of a chain of transmission to other related cases, including at hospitals, nursing homes, schools and Myer stores? And can the minister assure the house there has been no political interference in the state’s biggest coronavirus cluster?

**The PRESIDENT:** Ignoring the preamble, because it is actually in the administration of the Labor Party realm, I will allow the question on its own.

**Ms MIKAKOS** (Northern Metropolitan—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for the Coordination of Health and Human Services: COVID-19) (12:17): This is a very predictable question from the member—very, very predictable. In fact Professor Sutton made it clear in public comments he made about this particular outbreak that the decision not to name the company in that early period was in fact the department’s advice to me about the fact that they believed that that issue could be contained because it was a contained worksite and therefore did not present a wider risk to the community. That was their clear advice, and he has made it very clear publicly that that was in fact his decision. And I absolutely reject any assertion—any assertion—that there has been any political interference by me or anyone in the government in relation to how this outbreak has been managed. I have been taking this pandemic very seriously, unlike you.

*Members interjecting.*

**Ms MIKAKOS:** You have tried to politicise the response to the pandemic at every opportunity.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Thank you, Minister.

**Ms MIKAKOS:** This is an issue that—

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** Minister, please, you have gone past your time. Can I suggest to members that Minister Mikakos and Ms Crozier do not need help. They do all right by themselves, so it would be good if others did not join in and other people could hear the answers.

### COVID-19

**Mr LIMBRICK** (South Eastern Metropolitan) (12:19): My question is for the Minister for Health, and I would like to continue discussing coronavirus. We are currently moving from a phase that might be accurately described as ‘the hammer’, where drastic government action is sought to suppress the virus, to the phase that some have described as ‘the dance’. The national cabinet and the Premier have confirmed that we are not aiming for an elimination strategy and will have to accept that there will be some level of virus in the community, with local outbreaks and clusters being inevitable. Several countries in Asia have skipped the lockdown and gone straight to the dance. These countries have generally managed to contain the virus successfully, with less impact on their economies than we have experienced. However, regular wearing of masks is also a key factor in these countries. I understand that the current advice is that, with low levels of virus in the community and while we are socially distancing, wearing of masks is not advised, which is fair enough. But with the states slowly beginning to reopen and with the prospect that our public transport network and other areas of society may have increased numbers of people, my question for the minister is: will the advice on mask wearing be

updated as we open up to allow more Victorians to resume some degree of normal life while still constraining the spread of the virus?

**The PRESIDENT:** The question went well past the time limit, but that is fine. But with all answers and questions, if we can keep them to the time limit, that would be terrific.

**Ms MIKAKOS** (Northern Metropolitan—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for the Coordination of Health and Human Services: COVID-19) (12:20): I thank the member for his question. The member may well be aware that this is an issue that has recently been looked at by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC). This is the committee chaired by Professor Brendan Murphy that Professor Sutton also sits on, representing Victoria, and has all of the state and territory chief health officers represented. They provide advice to the national cabinet about these matters; they have done so recently. If the advice was to change in relation to these issues, then obviously that advice would be taken into consideration in terms of how the Victorian government would respond to the issue of masks on public transport and more broadly.

I know that there has been some advice by the WHO recently about these issues, and that needs to be understood in the global context that the member has alluded to. We have exponential growth in cases in many countries. Just today, this morning, I was referring to the fact that we have had 15 cases in hotel quarantine overnight diagnosed as positive. Many of those people are coming from the Subcontinent, and those countries are experiencing exponential growth in cases at the moment. We are very mindful of these issues going forward. The WHO's comments obviously take in that global context.

In terms of the assessment of risk by our AHPPC officials, the advice at this point has been that widespread use of masks is not necessary, but I would certainly not discourage people if they voluntarily wanted to wear a mask, whether it is in public or on public transport. That is a matter for them. I am aware that there have been situations where people have been personally vilified because they have worn a mask, and that is something that is abhorrent to me. I certainly do not want to see that kind of behaviour continue. We continually review all of the new evidence that emerges in relation to these issues. As I said, if the advice were to change, then we would certainly convey that advice to the community, but at this point in time there is no advice that, I guess, widespread use of masks is necessary.

**Mr LIMBRICK** (South Eastern Metropolitan) (12:22): I thank the minister for her answer, and I apologise for going slightly over time. It seems that there might be some misunderstanding in the community about the role of gloves in reducing their risk of infection. All the expert commentary, reporting and advice I have seen has stated that they can give you a false sense of security and potentially increase risk of infection. Indeed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the USA, where the virus is widespread and there is a much higher risk of infection, state that there are only two coronavirus-related scenarios where they advise wearing gloves, which are when cleaning and disinfecting your home or when caring for someone who is sick. For the benefit of people who are enthusiastic about following the official recommendations of health officials and particularly for those who want to avoid a false sense of security, could the minister please clarify the role of disposable gloves, as there seems to be some confusion on this matter?

**Ms MIKAKOS** (Northern Metropolitan—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for the Coordination of Health and Human Services: COVID-19) (12:23): I thank the member again for his question, and I hope that that was not intended to be a bit of a dig at any particular individual. But I do want to make the point that the use of gloves, as with masks, is a matter of personal choice. I would have thought the Lib Dems would embrace that philosophical principle. As I said, the advice around these issues relates really to targeted risk. If we are talking about healthcare settings, of course there is a higher risk there for healthcare workers, and they take a lot of precautions around gloves, around masks and around other PPE. We as a government have provided hundreds of millions of dollars worth of funding to our health services to ensure that they get that level of protection. But

in terms of the broader use by the community, it is a matter of personal choice. If someone has a person in their home who has been diagnosed with coronavirus, then we give them advice to use PPE and not to take those additional risks, because we have seen the virus spread within family household groupings.

#### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: DELIVERED LIVE

**Ms SYMES** (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (12:25): I would like to update the house on the enormous success of the Delivered Live initiative. This was set up to help get country communities back on their feet and highlight their experiences following drought and dry seasonal conditions, bushfires and now COVID-19. It was produced weekly from a purpose-built stage to comply with COVID-19 restrictions. Government investment has supported the delivery of nine live-streamed shows, with the final show this Saturday night. Each production has streamed on YouTube and Facebook and has consisted of around 3 hours of entertainment, helping to keep country Victoria socially connected. The gigs have helped to highlight regional towns, producers and businesses while also hosting conversations about regional mental health. This is particularly important given the multiple challenges of, in some instances, the double whammy, the triple whammy or the quadruple whammy of crises that have hit country areas.

Delivered Live has been superbly hosted by Henry Wagons and special guest Myf Warhurst. Each performance has streamed for free, but viewers can purchase a ticket to support artists, their crew and nominated venues or indeed support artists through purchasing merchandise. Country Victorian venues to benefit so far include the Bridge Hotel and Theatre Royal in Castlemaine and the Meeniyah town hall.

**A member:** Go to Meeniyah.

**Ms SYMES:** Yes, it is a great little place. Every week has started with a welcome to country by a different elder, and there has been a particular focus on gender equity and a focus on featuring Aboriginal artists. Delivered Live has been a regular Saturday night fixture at my house. I particularly enjoyed the performances of Alex Lahey, the Jezabels and the DMA's. There has been a regular cast of other big acts, and there have been performances from over 62 artists and 13 comedians. Over 10 000 tickets have been sold, and approximately \$430 000 has been directly injected into the gig economy. The platform is just one of a suite of online initiatives supported by the Victorian government that are helping our creative artists and country communities. I thank everyone involved in this fantastic initiative and recommend that people tune in this Saturday night.

#### MEMBER CONDUCT

**Mr O'DONOHUE** (Eastern Victoria) (12:27): My question is to Mr Melhem, and I refer him to notice 270 on the notice paper, where he raises the benefits of multiculturalism for Victoria, which we strongly support. Mr Melhem, are you aware of any multicultural grants, whether issued by then Minister Scott or other ministers, which were allocated to advance the interests of the Labor Party or a faction of the Labor Party?

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr O'Donohue, you know—you have been around as long as me—that you can only ask Mr Melhem when he will bring on that motion, but you look like you have got a point of order.

*Members interjecting.*

**Mr O'DONOHUE:** I look forward to questions from the crossbench on my motions. I look forward to that, crossbench colleagues.

**Ms Pulford:** You'll find you have the same standing orders problem that you have now.

## QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS

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**Mr O'DONOHUE:** Thank you, President. Thank you, Minister. Mr Melhem, are you aware of any multicultural grants, whether issued by then Minister Scott or other ministers, which were allocated to advance the interests of the Labor Party or a faction of the Labor Party, and when will you bring on for debate your notice of motion so these issues can be ventilated and discussed in the Parliament?

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr Melhem, I rule the first part the question out, the preamble. 'When will you be bringing on this motion?' you can answer.

**Mr MELHEM** (Western Metropolitan) (12:28): Thank you, President. I think we should send them back to school. They should know better. Mr O'Donohue, I thought you might be better than Mr Davis; you know the rules and the standing orders. I am looking forward to debating that motion, and I shall advise you and the house at the appropriate time and date.

**Mr O'DONOHUE** (Eastern Victoria) (12:29): Mr Melhem, given the allegations around corruption in the Labor Party, the appropriate time would be urgently and as soon as possible, and I am disappointed that you have not brought your motion on for debate during this sitting week. I would encourage you, Mr Melhem, to bring your motion on for debate in government business tomorrow or later today. I ask by way of supplementary: Mr Melhem, would you consider an amendment to your motion which condemns the use of multiculturalism, multicultural communities and multicultural grants for corrupt internal Labor Party political purposes?

**Ms Pulford:** On a point of order, President, none of that was in order, and the member knows it.

**Mr O'DONOHUE:** Further to the point of order, President, the matter was in order. It was responsive to the question and pertained to the debate of motion 270, which is squarely in order of the standing orders.

**Ms Symes:** Further to the point of order, President, my concern with this flouting of the standing orders is that we are going to create a precedent in this place where you are going to use your opportunity to ask a question and abuse that right if we enable this to continue when we know it is out of order. I would urge that any members that try to do this in the future should be stood down prior to being able to complete their point.

**The PRESIDENT:** Let me address that point of order. I uphold that point of order as a precedent. I think the Leader of the Government is right. I might have just let Mr O'Donohue go on because we were all a little bit entertained by it, but I probably should not have let him do that. I do not reckon there is any more, Mr Davis. Is this a point of order or is it not going to be a point of order?

**Mr Davis:** It is a point of order in the context of rulings, President, to be aware of standing order 8.01(1)(b) about questions to ministers and other members, which states that questions may be put to:

Other Members relating to any matter connected with the business on the Notice Paper of which the Member has charge.

Mr Melhem clearly has carriage. It is on the notice paper, number 270. Timing is clearly in, and questions about amendments are also clearly related to the matter of which he has carriage.

**The PRESIDENT:** No. There are precedents, so I think that is it.

**Mr O'DONOHUE:** Further to the point of order, President, in our collective time, questions have been asked of backbenchers and of non-ministers in the chamber in question time on several occasions over several parliaments and multiple presidents, so there is clear precedent for the question that I just asked.

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr O'Donohue, I am not denying there are precedents for the question asked. The question you asked a member that is not a minister and that has got a motion on the notice paper

was: when will you be bringing that motion to the house? And I agree with you that in our collective time we have witnessed that before. But you used it, I assume, for a preamble. I allowed the question; I did not allow the preamble. I think we will move on, because I am sure Mr Barton wants to ask a question now.

### COMMERCIAL PASSENGER VEHICLES VICTORIA

**Mr BARTON** (Eastern Metropolitan) (12:33): Indeed, Mr President. My question is to Minister Pulford, representing the Minister for Public Transport. Last week it was reported to me that our taxi regulator, Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria, refused Wodonga police access to camera footage after a stolen credit card was used to pay a taxi fare. The regulator determined that the offence was not serious enough to pursue and it would require two CPVV safety compliance staff to travel to Wodonga for two days, including an overnight stay, and they would consider the request if the taxidriver involved was prepared to drive to Melbourne. Surely they cannot be serious. I am sure the ex-coppers in this room would agree. Sometimes small investigations turn into large ones. But this is not the first time this has happened. It happened again in March when police investigations were halted by the regulator's refusal to hand over footage after a taxi was used unbeknown to the driver as a getaway car for several alleged burglaries in Wodonga. So I ask the minister: is the taxi regulator role to dictate when Victoria Police may access evidence for their inquiries?

**Ms PULFORD** (Western Victoria—Minister for Roads, Minister for Road Safety and the TAC, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (12:34): I thank Mr Barton for his question. For the drivers involved in those incidents that you have referred to that must have been very distressing indeed, and so I thank you for bringing those to the government's attention. I will seek a written response in accordance with our standing orders from Minister Horne for you.

**Mr BARTON** (Eastern Metropolitan) (12:35): Thank you, Minister. In other states cutting-edge technology is used to protect both the passenger and driver, with video and audio recordings that can be downloaded by an authorised officer. In Victoria we have the same systems that were back in the cars when I drove taxis. As a Parliament we are able to securely store and share files and information and hold live video meetings securely, and we have seen the amazing technology that can be rolled out in an instant to facilitate sharing of information for our Parliament teams working remotely during this time, yet it still takes two safety compliance officers two days and an overnight stay to access car footage of a crime being committed in our regions. So I ask: does the Victorian regulator have any plans to implement improved systems to protect passengers and facilitate access to evidence for police investigations?

**Ms PULFORD** (Western Victoria—Minister for Roads, Minister for Road Safety and the TAC, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (12:36): Again, I thank Mr Barton for the question, and I will take the question on notice for Minister Horne but in general terms respond in the interim by saying that the government is very much committed to our regulators being both modern and effective. On the specific question about this regulator and what technological innovation they may be considering or developing to support their work, I will ask Minister Horne to provide that for you.

### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: BIRREGURRA-FORREST ROAD ROUNDABOUT

**Ms PULFORD** (Western Victoria—Minister for Roads, Minister for Road Safety and the TAC, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (12:36): I am delighted to inform the house that yet another high-risk intersection has been made safer for all road users, with the completion of a new roundabout. One of the very first things that I did in this portfolio was to visit the intersection of Birregurra-Forrest Road, Colac-Lorne Road and Deepdene Road to announce the funding for this new roundabout. I am sure it is one Mrs McArthur and other members know well. At the time I noted that there had been seven crashes at the site over the preceding five years, including one incident in which an individual tragically lost their life. This life-saving work and upgrade is now complete.

Major construction commenced at the intersection near Birregurra last year, with up to 30 crew members on site each day to complete this important project as quickly as possible. The new roundabout will improve safety by controlling and lowering the speed of vehicles on approach to the intersection while also reducing the risk of cross-traffic and rear-end crashes. Significant earthworks on all approaches have also improved the line of sight for drivers. Around 45 000 tonnes of clay and road base was cut and re-used on site, while an extra 17 000 tonnes of material was imported from local quarries. A new asphalt surface will ensure the road pavement is strong and long lasting, and a new kerb and channel have been installed, as well as new lighting, line marking, guardrail and signage.

This safety upgrade is one of literally hundreds occurring as part of our government's \$1.4 billion investment in reducing road trauma—significant infrastructure projects in communities right across the state. This is a very popular touring route, and it will be safer for all road users.

### MEMBER CONDUCT

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:38): My question is to the Leader of the Government. Minister, yesterday in answer to my questions regarding Dr Kieu and his staffer Jacob Cripps you said:

There is an investigation. Referrals have been made to Victoria Police and IBAC.

However, this is not quite true. There has been no formal government referral to Victoria Police, given the letter does not ask Victoria Police to investigate these tawdry matters, and I therefore ask: why did the Andrews government not ask Victoria Police to investigate the corruption aired on *60 Minutes*? I am happy to give you a copy of the letter if you would like.

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr Davis, I believe that would be a question better directed to the Premier.

**Mr DAVIS:** President, I am actually responding to words that the minister said yesterday, so I am entitled to ask her about assertions that she herself made—perhaps erroneously, perhaps without intent—yesterday. So my question is about the words she said and thereby if she has got it wrong.

**Ms SYMES** (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (12:40): I thank Mr Davis for his question. I do not have the copy of the referral, but I can assure Mr Davis that the referral from the government to both the IBAC and Victoria Police is intended to cover all elements covered off in the *60 Minutes* episode and also any allegations that were made through the *Age*. It is certainly not the intention of the government to confine that inquiry in relation to the serious allegations in relation to this matter. So in relation to your specific questions, I can take it on notice and get some further advice from the Premier's office, but I can assure you there is no dispute here. The inquiry is supposed to be broad ranging, and that is the intention of the government.

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:41): This is an important point. I have a supplementary question. I have read both letters, and the one to IBAC requests an investigation but the one to Victoria Police does not request an investigation. Again, you may be making the comment in error. The letter says:

Given Victoria Police's interest in these matters, I am writing to inform you that I have referred these matters to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission under ...

the relevant section and so forth. But it does not at any point in the letter ask Victoria Police to investigate. So can you please explain why? You either got it wrong, perhaps, and I accept that—and quite innocently, perhaps—but I am asking why it does not actually ask—

*Members interjecting.*

**Ms SYMES** (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (12:41): Mr Davis, I will confirm that the government's intention is to refer a wideranging matter involving all allegations that have been

reported—any allegations that you wish to raise. There is no intention of the government to fetter any inquiry made by anybody. But if you are suggesting that the government has the power or indeed it is appropriate to seek to direct Victoria Police, that would be indeed inappropriate. The Premier has made it very clear that the referrals to both of these bodies are asking them to exercise their jurisdiction. Asking them to engage in a broad inquiry is a very appropriate thing. Directing them specifically in relation to Victoria Police is not something that I think you should ask the government to do.

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:42): On a point of order, President, the minister keeps repeating an error, haplessly or otherwise, that there is a request for an investigation. It does not request an investigation. I will give you a copy of the letter. I thereby move:

That the minister's answers be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

### TIMBER INDUSTRY

**Mr BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (12:43): My question is for the Minister for Agriculture. We have one of the most tightly controlled logging industries in the world, producing top-quality products. Despite it being on the chopping block, we still have a problem with illegal protesters. Recently there were a couple of protesters illegally, let us call it, holidaying in a logging coupe, and it took eight days for someone to come and remove them. Minister, why does it take eight days to remove some people from a logging coupe?

**Ms SYMES** (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (12:44): I thank Mr Bourman for raising this important issue. I too have serious concerns with illegal protesting activities in our timber coupes. Getting in the way of these workers going about their lawful business earning an income is completely unacceptable. Not only is it placing them in danger; they are putting themselves at risk of being unintentionally injured or killed by the dangerous machinery that these specialised workers engage in.

I had a meeting last week which was organised through the Committee for Gippsland with representatives of the timber industry, including mills and the contractors' representatives and the like, and they certainly raised similar concerns. What I have undertaken to do is provide more regular updates of the authorised officers' responses to protests, because the responses are very timely. We have had around about 28 forest protesters reported this year. The majority have been responded to on the same day. There have been further incidents that have involved false alarms, protesters dispersing before Victoria Police arrive or indeed protesters abandoning them in the absence of ongoing forest operations. I am advised that in responding to the protesting activities a lot of charges have been laid, including breaches of the COVID restrictions that were in place. I have also had contact from contractors that ask the same things.

I guess what I am saying is that we have increased authorised officers' activities since the forestry plan announcement. We are continuing to increase those efforts over the next three months by having more people dedicated to those activities. It seems to be a little bit of a misunderstanding about when and how we respond, so I have committed to both the Victorian Association of Forest Industries and the contractors' representatives that I will start to provide more regular updates on our response, because there seems to be a mismatch between the actions and the perceptions that the authorised officers are not acting. I can assure you they are. We have them going into coupes at 3.00 am to deal with tree sitters and the like. It is something that I take very seriously. We are looking at how to further support our timber industry through our authorised activities, and I am awaiting advice on that. I have given a commitment to that group that I met with last week that I am interested in bolstering those activities for the safety of our timber workers.

**Mr BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (12:47): I thank the minister for her answer. Whilst there is obviously a lot going on, I would suggest the protesters really do not care, because they keep on coming back. If the government cannot get onto these things quicker—and I am not casting aspersions

here on the authorised officers, as there is obviously a lot for them to do—will the government commit to providing financial compensation to those who have to sit there waiting for the authorised officers to come and remove the illegal activities?

**Ms SYMES** (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (12:47): In terms of the responses, they have been timely. We did have an incident earlier in June where we had six protest operations at the same time, which also coincided with the search and rescue of the boy at Mount Disappointment, which took some of our efforts away. There have been instances where the action has not been immediate, and there are usually genuine reasons for that, such as diversion of activities. However, I have committed to beefing up the operations. We are increasing our authorised officers, and I am certainly looking for ways to provide a greater deterrence for such inappropriate behaviour.

#### MINISTERS STATEMENTS: TAFE GIPPSLAND

**Ms TIERNEY** (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (12:48): I rise to update the house on the critical work of the Andrews Labor government in opening a brand-new state-of-the-art campus at TAFE Gippsland's port of Sale site. I recently unveiled the new designs for the TAFE Gippsland port of Sale campus, and it truly looks fantastic. This is a \$25 million project that will bring together most of TAFE Gippsland's local facilities and services in Sale. The facilities will truly be world-class, and when completed students will be able to study courses such as early childhood education, engineering, automotive trade and carpentry right on the doorstep of Sale—courses aligned to the local needs of the local community. I strongly encourage members to view the new designs for TAFE Gippsland on the TAFE Gippsland YouTube page. I know that my colleagues in Eastern Victoria, Ms Garrett and Ms Shing, are incredibly proud of this project and what it means to Sale. When we came to office TAFE Gippsland was barely on life support. It is this government that has seen our TAFE system re-engage with local communities. Look at TAFE Gippsland now. It is delivering outstanding training in Gippsland, and people once again have pride in their local TAFE. I look forward to seeing this project progress, and a big thankyou to everyone who has helped to get this project to this point.

#### WRITTEN RESPONSES

**The PRESIDENT** (12:50): Minister Pulford is going to get written responses in line with the standing orders for both of Mr Barton's questions. I thank Minister Mikakos for offering to get written responses for both of Mr Davis's questions to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. The Leader of the Government made an offer to Mr Davis that she might get some more advice from the Premier on his first question than his last question.

**Ms Crozier:** On a point of order, President, in the minister's response to my question she indicated that Professor Sutton made it clear that there was no government interference. I would ask that—

**A member** interjected.

**Ms Crozier:** On 3AW he actually said, and I quote, 'No, it is both, really'. When he was asked on 3AW—

**Ms Mikakos** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Ms Crozier is raising a point of order, I believe.

**Ms Crozier:** The minister is actually bringing this to my point, because on 3AW he actually said, when asked if it was the government's or his decision, 'It is both, really', so I am wondering whether the government—

**Ms Mikakos:** No, he said it was his decision. He has made that very clear.

**Ms Crozier:** No, in April when he was asked about government interference in relation to another issue he said, 'It is both, really', so I ask the minister: has she misinformed the house in relation to this particular question?

**The PRESIDENT:** During questions I believe both the question and the supplementary were answered, so I think that is it.

**Questions on notice**

**ANSWERS**

**Ms SYMES** (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (12:52): I have 46 answers to questions on notice: 1755, 1824, 1859, 1868, 1938, 1985, 1988–9, 1992–3, 1995, 1999, 2010, 2012, 2014–15, 2018–22, 2024, 2026–8, 2030–1, 2038–9, 2056, 2076, 2084, 2087, 2090–1, 2094–5, 2115, 2123, 2130, 2161, 2198, 2216, 2317–18, 2325.

**Mr Davis** interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** No. Just to clarify, the Leader of the Government offered to get extra information, outside the standing orders, for Mr Davis from the Premier if there was any—just to make that clear.

**Mr Limbrick:** On a point of order, President, I would like to seek an explanation for question on notice 1149, which was on 26 November 2019, to the Minister for Health, please.

**Ms Mikakos:** I will endeavour to follow this up.

**Constituency questions**

**NORTHERN VICTORIA REGION**

**Ms LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:53): My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and it concerns the current conditions of the Strathbogie fire station. The station was built in the late 1970s and is located in the heart of the Strathbogie township, which has a population of just over 300 residents. The station is simply unfit for use, and quite frankly the dedicated Strathbogie volunteers deserve better. The current station is so small that when both trucks are parked in the shed the volunteers cannot open storage cupboards to reach equipment. There are no toilets at the station, and members are forced to use amenities at the town hall across the road. The station has no meeting room, and the brigade is forced to park its ultralight tanker off site at a neighbouring property. Land has been secured at the Strathbogie Recreation Reserve for the construction of a new three-bay station with a meeting room and appropriate amenities. Will the minister provide a commitment to allocate funding to construct a new station that includes the necessary amenities for the hardworking volunteers of the Strathbogie CFA brigade?

**EASTERN VICTORIA REGION**

**Mr BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (12:54): My constituency matter is for the Minister for Agriculture. I have been contacted a number of times by people from out in far-east Gippsland who, as has been noted a few times, have had the triple whammy of bushfires then the COVID-19 issue. They want to know when they can start getting some more help from the government to get over the bushfire issues, now that we are starting to relax the COVID-19 restrictions.

**WESTERN METROPOLITAN REGION**

**Ms VAGHELA** (Western Metropolitan) (12:55): My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Child Protection and Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, the Honourable Luke Donnellan. My question relates to the minister's portfolio responsibilities for disability, ageing and carers. The COVID-19 pandemic represents the most significant challenge to Australia's economy,

## CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

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the impact of which will last for decades. As industries and businesses find new and innovative ways to adapt, the Victorian government is rolling up its sleeves and playing its part to drive new economic activity and with it create thousands of new jobs across the state. The government has launched the first part of the Building Works package, which will provide \$2.7 billion towards shovel-ready projects, big and small, to get thousands of people back to work. As part of this effort the public sector residential aged-care services across our state will also benefit. My question to the minister is: can the minister advise if aged-care facilities in my area of Western Metropolitan Region will also benefit from this boost?

### WESTERN METROPOLITAN REGION

**Mr FINN** (Western Metropolitan) (12:56): My constituency question is to the Minister for Planning, and I refer the minister to the application of the Hi-Quality Group to expand the existing eco-hub on Sunbury Road between Bulla and Sunbury to accept toxic soil from the West Gate Tunnel Project. This site is close to homes and schools and is on a road that is used by thousands of motorists every day. The impact on the health of people living in Sunbury and Bulla of the dumping of soil containing carcinogens is not being considered at all in this push to destroy the edge of what is a green wedge. This is not the place for millions of tonnes of poisonous, PFAS-infected soil. I am sure those building homes nearby—just down the road, in fact, in new housing estates—would readily agree. Minister, will you hold the health of locals as a priority and veto this or any other application to dump toxic soil in the Sunbury or Bulla areas?

**Sitting suspended 12.57 pm until 2.04 pm.**

### WESTERN VICTORIA REGION

**Mr GRIMLEY** (Western Victoria) (14:04): My question is to the Attorney-General. Geelong and its surrounding regions have seen unrivalled population growth. Naturally, a growth in population has led to greater demand on Geelong's courts. Melbourne has had great success with its night courts, which operate seven nights a week. The Magistrates Court in Geelong operates during normal business hours, but there is undoubtedly a need for it to also sit at night to consider any outstanding bail applications, particularly before weekends, and to get more cases moving to try to reduce our clogged-up court system. My question is: given the Attorney-General's focus on creating new court initiatives to make our legal system more efficient, why is the government holding back from expanding night courts to Geelong, at least for a few nights anyway?

### WESTERN VICTORIA REGION

**Mrs McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (14:05): My constituency question is for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and concerns the devastating reforms inflicted upon the CFA by the Andrews government. All CFA career firefighters will transfer to Fire Rescue Victoria on 1 July 2020, and I am told that discussions surrounding their secondment back to the CFA are going badly. CFA volunteers believe their organisation has been completely marginalised, and I have been contacted by one who feels, quote, 'ignored and bulldozed aside'. The one I am quoting is resigning from the CFA after more than two decades of dedicated volunteer service. He believes the promises made on consultation and the deeper statutory obligations have not been met. I ask the minister to assure me that the dedication of volunteers is being properly recognised, that genuine consultation is being done, that staffing levels will be maintained and that despite the transfer of staff the service to the people of Western Victoria will be maintained.

### NORTHERN VICTORIA REGION

**Mr QUILTY** (Northern Victoria) (14:06): My question is for the Minister for Health. A number of my constituents in Wodonga have asked me to tell them what the government's next steps will be with regard to COVID-19. The concern my constituents have expressed most often is that they are not sure what is going on. Many have used stronger language to express this point. They feel communication has been muddy and confusing, they do not know what is allowed and what is not and

they do not know what the government is thinking and planning. Being on the border with different rules across the river only makes the confusion worse. They have asked me to ask some reasonable and straightforward questions, like ‘How long does the government think this will last?’, ‘How long until we can get back to normal?’, ‘What’s the risk of a second outbreak?’, ‘What actually is the government’s strategy for dealing with the disease?’ All these questions deserve an answer, but my question to the minister is: how can northern Victorians be expected to comply with restrictions when they are unsure what they are?

### NORTHERN VICTORIA REGION

**Ms MAXWELL** (Northern Victoria) (14:07): My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Unfortunately the capacity of the North East Multicultural Association—or NEMA, as it is called—to continue the very important work it has undertaken since 2005, primarily in supporting existing and new migrants in north-east Victoria, is currently under a cloud. This is because its existing quadrennial grant through strategic partnerships program funding to the Ovens and Murray multicultural regional area partnership—a mouthful—is set to expire in September. Although it has generally been expected that the application process for new funding under the program would be opened earlier this year, this has seemingly still not happened. I therefore ask if the minister would be able to clarify whether NEMA will receive access to urgently needed renewed funding under this or any other multicultural grants program, and if so, how and when this would occur.

### SOUTH EASTERN METROPOLITAN REGION

**Mr LIMBRICK** (South Eastern Metropolitan) (14:08): My question is for the Minister for Resources. I recently met with representatives from a community group who have serious concerns about the operations of the Hanson quarry in Lysterfield. The quarry sits amongst a dense residential area and is currently planning an expansion, bringing it closer to houses. While the residents do not seek to close the quarry, they do have serious concerns about the stone blasting, late-night noise, dust, trucks and gravel that affect the area. Therefore my question for the minister is: will she listen to the valid concerns of these community members by meeting with them or sending a representative from her department to meet with them?

### Bills

### WILDLIFE RESCUE VICTORIA BILL 2020

#### *Second reading*

#### **Debate resumed.**

**Ms LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (14:09): To quote Mr Quilty, I will be brief. I rise to speak on the Wildlife Rescue Victoria Bill 2020, which was brought before the house by Mr Meddick. Whilst I would reiterate what all my colleagues have said—we all support the protection of wildlife in this state—I have a great fear that this bill may actually have some perverse outcomes where wildlife are no longer protected. I refer particularly to part 3 of the bill, clause 18, subclause (1), which says:

A person must not carry out a wildlife emergency response activity as a volunteer unless that person is accredited to do so by the Secretary under this Part.

My colleague Mrs McArthur, or Mrs Mac as the President has dubbed her, raised this issue also. In the country we all do wildlife rescue when it is necessary, and we do it at the time when it is needed to be done. We do not have time to go off and get permits before it is done. In fact we are all encouraged if we see a wombat hit on the side of the road to stop and check its pouch. Now, if we are doing that, we are volunteering. We are not authorised by the secretary so are we going to see wildlife die because people stop these types of activities. I am surrounded on three sides of my property by a regional park. We often have injured animals coming into the yard that we either assist if we can or call the vets. I can remember taking a possum to the vets when I was younger, because it had impacted teeth. His head was swollen, he had impacted teeth and it cost me about \$300 as an 18-year-old to get the

possum's teeth extracted. But we do what we can to help wildlife that are stranded, wildlife that are affected, and particularly after bushfires wildlife that are seriously injured. This particular clause, which carries a penalty of almost \$10 000, may prevent many people in country Victoria from actually carrying out those activities, so I am concerned about that having a perverse outcome.

I am also concerned that it might actually be detrimental to many of our other animals that are not native wildlife and at the moment are not listed but could be listed in the Wildlife Act 1975, and it might stop them being rescued. I refer particularly to the brumbies, and everyone knows I have been very strong on the protection of the brumbies. At the moment we have a whole lot of riders going into the national parks who are herding up brumbies and taking them to safe havens on their farms or to rehome them. Brumbies are not currently listed under the Wildlife Act, but they could be because this legislation of course lists all indigenous animals to Australia but it also lists 'wildlife' to mean:

all kinds of deer, non-indigenous quail, pheasants, and partridges and any other ... animal which the Governor in Council by Order published in the Government Gazette declares to be wildlife for the purposes of this Act ...

This government, that does not support the brumbies, that does want them eradicated, could suddenly declare them wildlife under the Wildlife Act 1975, which would prevent people from going into the national parks, rounding up those brumbies and taking them to safe havens and rehoming them. I do fear that this will have perverse outcomes for some animals, whether they be indigenous or non-indigenous animals. Therefore I do have concerns about this piece of legislation.

**Ms PATTEN** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:13): I am very pleased to stand up to speak to the Wildlife Rescue Victoria Bill 2020. Again, it is a crossbench bill that is born out of the passion of the person who brought it to the house. This is a bill that really exemplifies why Mr Meddick is in this place today. It is the reason why he was elected by his supporters, and I am very pleased to support this bill. As we have heard, amongst other things it coordinates wildlife rescue, rehabilitation and relief as part of Victoria's emergency response, and I will get to that in a minute; it removes public confusion and uncertainty about what to do to help wildlife in an emergency circumstance, and I will get to that later; and of course it improves governance and transparency in relation to the care, protection, rehabilitation and release of wildlife.

Now, as someone who owns a wildlife reserve and has done for nearly two decades I feel very passionate about protecting wildlife, and as someone who also had a wildfire, a bushfire, go through that reserve I understand the devastation that a fire can bring to our wildlife, to our native fauna. It is devastating and it is horrific, and this bill will assist us in providing appropriate care in those circumstances. It will enable those volunteers to be well trained and to understand the best ways to assist at that time of emergency.

And I think I would just like to possibly put Ms Lovell's mind at ease and Mrs McArthur's mind at ease that this bill does not affect members of the community who want to help animals. It does not affect neighbours, friends, relatives and good Samaritans who want to help wildlife. It only affects volunteers deployed under the Emergency Management Act 2013 as wildlife rescue volunteers. So that is what the bill does. It is about the volunteers that are deployed under the emergency services act as wildlife rescue volunteers. It ensures that when they enter a danger zone they do so safely. It ensures that the volunteers who want to help animals in those emergency situations know what they are doing, but it keeps any legislative hands off good Samaritans, friends and neighbours performing those spontaneous acts of care and kindness to animals in need. It fills, I think, a necessary part of—

**Ms Lovell:** Where is that in the bill?

**Ms PATTEN:** If you read the whole bill, Ms Lovell, I think from the beginning this bill is really specifically directed at emergency—

**Ms Lovell:** It just says 'volunteer'; it doesn't define 'volunteer'.

**Ms PATTEN:** The bill is about volunteers in circumstances of emergency. It is about volunteers deployed under the emergency services act.

**Ms Lovell:** Isn't a wombat by the side of the road an emergency?

**Ms PATTEN:** I just yet again clarify for Ms Lovell that this is about volunteers deployed under the emergency services act. This is not about someone seeing an animal that needs assistance on the side of the road. This is sensible and practical, and it is confined legislation. It is for a very specific task, and it will make a difference to that wildlife. So I am very pleased to support this bill, and I commend it to the house.

**Dr CUMMING** (Western Metropolitan) (14:17): In rising to speak about this very important bill I would like to acknowledge the Animal Justice Party and to say that it is great that animals here have a voice. I do appreciate Andy Meddick's hard work and his team in organising this bill, and it is an important bill, the Wildlife Rescue Victoria Bill 2020.

My knowledge of animals and animal rescue would come from my 20 years of experience in local government and around what most local governments do and most people in Western Metro would do. When they actually find a dog or a cat they would contact their local council. What normally occurs is if you go to any local government website in your area, you will see that they have information on pets and animals and the number of animals allowed, and there is the Local Government Act 2020, where it allows that your local council will look after domestic animals—where you can actually report a found cat or dog, where you register your pet, where you report a nuisance animal and where you would organise your pet registration renewals. When you actually find a dead animal on the side of the road and you would like that to be removed, you normally would contact your local council, but you also would talk to your local council about dangerous and restricted breeds.

But there is also that other option on your local government website. If it is Maribyrnong, if it is Hume, if it is Brimbank, if it is Hobsons Bay, if it is Melton, there is that other option when you actually come across wildlife. And I had just that recent experience. I had a small little ringtail possum, a little baby ringtail possum, found in my backyard in Yarraville. It was so cute. It actually allowed me to pick it up, and my children were just absolutely mesmerised by this baby ringtail possum. I of course googled 'What do you do with a baby ringtail possum in the Western Region?', and I had the options of going to either the 24-hour vet in North Melbourne or the 24-hour hospital in Werribee. What I did was I took that little baby ringtail possum very late at night and I went down to my options. Only just three months ago, probably—just at the start of this year—also I had a lorikeet that I found at night, a native little lorikeet, sitting in the gutter in Williamstown. I put him in a little box and I took him to the Werribee hospital. Why I wish to relay my story is because I have been listening to the debate, and it is not about the good Samaritans like me picking up small little wildlife in urban areas. I am explaining to my community in the Western Region what you would normally do if you find a little rainbow lorikeet or if you find a little ringtail possum, where you would actually take it.

When I arrived at those facilities with my little ringtail and my lorikeet very late at night, they took my details. I virtually said, 'I would love to take this little ringtail possum home and care for it ourselves. My children would adore being able to have that ability to do that', to be told, 'No, no, no. It is 24-hour care. You need someone who is expert in that little ringtail possum. Don't you worry'. My children were like, 'Oh, please, Mum, can we have it?', and I said no. And it went off with the vets and then it was handed over to a volunteer or otherwise in my area to make sure that that was getting the specialised care that that animal needed. But also I knew when I filled out that form that once that bird was back in good health it would be returned back to Williamstown and the possum would have been returned back to Yarraville at that time, and it gave me that sense. Everybody in my community has a strong love for their native wildlife, and when we do come across injured wildlife we do want to know what we should do and how we can actually care for them.

There are some other examples of native wildlife in the urban metro area—you know, around the tram tracks. You just recently heard of a report of a kangaroo jumping through Keilor. Because the Maribyrnong River is such a pristine area so close to the city, we still get in the Maribyrnong River platypuses. I have seen echidnas in Braybrook. We get rock wallabies in the Maribyrnong defence force site. It is a 10-square-kilometre fenced defence force site that has large grey kangaroos and rock wallabies along the Maribyrnong River and the rockface that faces the Maribyrnong River. If you go into Keilor and Brimbank, you will see mobs—mobs!—of kangaroos still in Brimbank.

I know there are others that might feel that the only wildlife or native wildlife is in country Victoria. No, we do have a lot still of native, indigenous wildlife—flora and fauna and wildlife—in Western Metro, and my community know where to see it. They will go down to the Maribyrnong River or Werribee River or the other waterways. They are still there, as well as in the wetlands around in Williamstown. You get to see native bird life and you do come across those injured animals. My community, as good Samaritans, will not leave an injured animal there and will take it to the appropriate local vet, and those local vets will actually refer you on to the 24-hour hospitals that are available.

This also leads on to last year when I led the debate on animal registration and the importance of animal registration nationally. Rather than having 79 councils doing 79 pet registrations, I would love to see a Victorian pet registration; I would like to see a national pet registration. Because, as I spoke about in the debate last year, it is important to not have to re-register your animal from Brimbank City Council when you move to the City of Maribyrnong or if you move to Kensington. To actually have that statewide animal registration is vitally important when you move, as well as when you actually lose your pet. You might lose your pet when you are holidaying in Torquay or visiting relatives in Lilydale—and we need that registration.

One of my biggest gripes is 79 councils doing 79 different things. I know the government is working tirelessly to make sure that animals—domestic or wildlife—are being looked after. If you go on to—I will just pick one—say, the Maribyrnong website and you hit ‘other wildlife’, you will see that some examples of wildlife you might encounter in the municipality include echidnas, possums, platypuses, seals, frogs, kookaburras, koalas, galahs, lorikeets, snakes, lizards and foxes. Now, that is native and non-native, correct? Then, if we look at snakes, we would all know in the west one of our famous snake wranglers, Cr Jarrod Bingham. Jarrod has actually brought to my attention and to Andy’s attention his need and his want as a snake rescuer and snake catcher that he would love to be able to have the ability to have yellow lights on his ute when he is travelling very late at night or otherwise, so that when he is rescuing animals he is able to do that safely.

Also, we all know that when you contact your council for, say, a possum problem, Peter the Possum Man will turn up, so it is not necessarily the council officers that are the animal welfare officers that we have at our council and who look after the local registration of animals or that are attending your property when there is a nuisance barking dog or a nuisance animal. Your local council is also there to make sure that they are educating the community on responsible pet ownership, and that is where the importance of having a statewide approach, rather than individual councils—79 councils, 79 education campaigns, 79 ways of registering your animal, 79 different fees for animal registration.

I am hoping that someone is going to adjourn me off. I understood that this debate was going to 25 minutes past and that I might be adjourned off.

**Mr Davis:** Do you want to sit down? We can’t stop you while you’re standing.

**Dr CUMMING:** Can I adjourn off my feet? Can I adjourn myself?

*Members interjecting.*

**Dr CUMMING:** Give me the notice. I was told 25 past, not 25 to. Have I got that wrong?

*Members interjecting.*

**Dr CUMMING:** My apologies, everyone. I would like to be adjourned off, so I can sit.

*Members interjecting.*

**Dr CUMMING:** I adjourn my debate until later today?

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman):** If you have finished your contribution, take your seat. If you want to continue, you have still got 17 minutes and 30-something seconds.

**Dr CUMMING:** Would you prefer that? Okay, I could do that.

**Mr Davis** interjected.

**Dr CUMMING:** Sorry. Okay, I will sum up, because I understand that the opposition have their time. I hope when I am on my feet on later motions at the end of this year that they show me the same respect when we have agreements about time—that that will occur in the future—because I would like to do the right thing by the opposition, and also I would like to work with everyone in this house. I cannot wait, and I hope for this Wildlife Rescue Victoria Bill’s passage, because my community is extremely passionate about their animals.

**Ms SHING** (Eastern Victoria) (14:31): I move:

That debate on this matter be adjourned until later this day.

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

### Production of documents

#### WEST GATE TUNNEL

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (14:31): I am pleased to move this motion, although I wish I did not need to do so. I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes:
  - (a) the difficulties in identifying a suitable and safe location for the permanent storage of the PFAS-contaminated waste spoil from the West Gate Tunnel Project;
  - (b) the identification as part of the project’s environment effects statement process of potentially contaminated soil, including PFAS-contaminated soil;
- (2) requires, in accordance with standing order 11.01, there to be tabled in the Council on or before Wednesday, 22 July 2020, any documents in the possession of the Minister for Planning or his office, the Minister for Transport Infrastructure or her office, the Department of Transport, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning or the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) relating to:
  - (a) policies, scientific papers and assessments on the disposal of contaminated soil, specifically soil/spoil removed from tunnelling works including PFAS-contaminated spoil from the West Gate Tunnel Project;
  - (b) any and all assessments and examinations of contaminated soil/spoil, including those relating to the West Gate Tunnel Project and the Metro Tunnel project;
  - (c) correspondence, including emails, to and from government, including ministers, to the EPA on these matters in the last 18 months, including but not limited to:
    - (i) soil and re-use management plans including the:
      - (aa) West Gate Tunnel Project: west zone PFAS data summary;
      - (bb) West Gate Tunnel Project: all zone PFAS classification application;
      - (cc) West Gate Tunnel Project: east zone PFAS classification to EPA Victoria;
      - (dd) *Soil and Spoil Management Plan: West Gate Tunnel Project*, dated January 2018;
      - (ee) West Gate Tunnel Project: zone 400 east major project classification process stockpile management;

## PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

Wednesday, 17 June 2020

Legislative Council

2029

- (ff) West Gate Tunnel Project: major project classification process storage management: cat A;
- (gg) West Gate Tunnel Project: zone 302 sampling analysis quality plan attachment 1 tunnel spoil management plan;
- (hh) JC201 tech memo 010 tunnel spoil management framework;
- (ii) waste soil classifications;
- (iii) internal assessment reports which document the justification for issuing classifications;
- (iv) supporting emails, drafts and reviews of each assessment report and classification prior to issuing of the classification document; and
- (v) the EPA, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and the Department of Transport planning assessments, including impacts on homes, agriculture, waterways, schools and other community facilities, of proposed locations for the permanent storage of PFAS-contaminated spoil, including at the Maddingley Brown Coal site near Bacchus Marsh, the Ravenhall site and the Bulla site.

It is a straightforward documents motion that seeks documents surrounding the West Gate Tunnel soil, documents that relate to the material that is to be dug out of that tunnel and is to be dumped at a zone yet to be decided, according to the government. For background, for the community, I have an FOI request that is in strong dispute with the Environment Protection Authority Victoria (EPA). It is now more than six months old. It is a rolling legal dispute which I think will end in VCAT in very short order, likely this week. The motion says:

That this house:

- (1) notes:
  - (a) the difficulties in identifying a suitable and safe location for the permanent storage of the PFAS-contaminated waste spoil from the West Gate Tunnel ...
  - (b) the identification as part of the project's environment effects statement process of potentially contaminated soil, including PFAS-contaminated soil;
- (2) requires, in accordance with standing order 11.01, there to be tabled in the Council on or before ... 22 July 2020, any documents in the possession of the Minister for Planning ... the Minister for Transport Infrastructure ...

or their offices, and so forth, including the EPA and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. It relates to assessments and other matters and examinations around the contaminated spoil or soil from the West Gate Tunnel.

There are a number of documents that are precisely listed and others that are not listed by name but by category, and those categories are ones that we think are important. The documents that we have listed by exact title are documents that we know exist, and those documents, we believe, should be in the public domain.

We believe that this is a very significant project—an almost-\$7 billion project. It is as a matter of fact in some difficulty and has been formally delayed at least a year; the government and Transurban have made that announcement.

But one of the key sticking points with the project, as people will know, is that there is no solution for the toxic soil. We have been critical of the government and have said the issue with the toxic spoil should have been solved and dealt with by providing a secure, safe containment facility before the project commenced. But that process has not been concluded, and there are a number of sites where there are concerns about it. The Maddingley Brown Coal site near Bacchus Marsh is one of those; the communities around that are very concerned. Around the Ravenhall site there are also significant concerns. And the Bulla site is another site where there is significant community concern about the dumping of this toxic soil.

Now, it is not my process today to examine the West Gate Tunnel in detail. This is in fact a straightforward documents motion that says, 'These documents should be in the public domain. Please

provide them in a graduated way to the chamber, in a way that is laid out by standing order 11.01'. It is my contention that it is in the public interest that these documents be released. Those communities, in my view, have an absolute right to see these documents. This PFAS material is a significant contaminant. It is potentially a very lethal substance, and the communities, for example, at Bacchus Marsh are very concerned about it being dumped near schools, near homes and near agricultural land. The assessments, the scientific papers and the steps on which the government is basing its decisions, particularly at the Environment Protection Authority Victoria, are matters that should be in the public domain. The public should be able to see this. The public has a right to know. The public is going to be affected by this material. They should be able to see these documents. I mean, it is extraordinary that the government is holding them back.

The key point here today—and I implore the chamber to recognise that this is a sincere attempt—is to get these documents into the public domain. We can assess them. People can assess them. There are very smart people across the community who have got the scientific capacity to assess some of these, and communities have got the right to see them. So I say: please support this motion to enable the release of these documents. This will inform public debate. It will enable proper analysis. It will enable the community to make decisions and to actually advocate more intelligently on the basis of the information that is held by the government. These assessments are held by government. They are not in the public domain. They should be in the public domain. For goodness sake, please release them.

**Ms SHING** (Eastern Victoria) (14:36): This is not new ground that we are on here today. It is not untrammelled territory that we are going to seek to walk across. This is in fact the latest chapter in an ongoing soap opera from those opposite which has been persisting since they first moved from government into opposition in 2014. I wish I could say that getting to my feet on this production of documents motion fills me with joy, but unfortunately that would not be the truth.

To those couple of people who are following the procedural debate anxiously at home and looking forward to the result of this particular motion here today, I am sorry to disappoint you. This particular set of contributions is not going to contain terribly much new material, because the motion itself—for the umpteenth time—does not do anything for a proper purpose. It seeks the production of documents in a fashion which is now perhaps Mr Davis's calling card—florid, voluminous, expansive—something which might in fact be impossible for a court, let alone a department, agency or multiple staff, to be able to get to the bottom of as far as scope and breadth are concerned.

Again, Mr Davis's calling card as Leader of the Opposition and also whilst working with Ms Wooldridge when she was Leader of the Opposition in the last Parliament is consistently such as to massively overshoot the mark, to miss the target, to hopelessly fail in an attempt to try to confine the search terms to something even vaguely navigable and to in fact move something which takes up over half a page of the notice paper. And that is a summary of the classes of documents which are being sought, let alone the actual documents which may in fact be yielded as the result of a search within the terms specified of the motion on the notice paper.

It is a shame that this is only listed for one day. Mr Davis participated in an extensive discussion in the last Parliament where the opposition under the leadership of Ms Wooldridge put a motion around production of documents that in fact sought to expel the Leader of the Government in this place, Mr Jennings, and achieved that outcome, despite the fact of the opposition's own record of a stubborn refusal to provide documents in the terms which it was seeking and despite the operation of very, very clear privileges that attach to cabinet in confidence, to commercial in confidence and to the lofty aspirations of the coalition around economic activity and opportunity for the state of Victoria and the way in which disclosure of such commercial-in-confidence and contractual documents might well jeopardise our competitive advantage as it relates to major events and to important infrastructure projects in Victoria. That was of no import to those opposite. It did not matter, and under the guise of the public interest—it was a really thin guise, it was not any sort of legitimate claim of public interest and it was not any sort of bona fide interest in transparency or accountability—it was simply a blatant

attempt to secure information as an opposition on the commercial activities of a government which has delivered record investment, record attraction and record economic growth since being elected in 2014.

Now, we know that events have changed significantly since then, but what has not changed since then is the opposition's persistent attempt to secure the production of documents which it, were it in government, would never agree to provide in a million years. It was, as I referred to in my contribution on the suspension of Mr Jennings from this house in the last Parliament, such a vast scope of documents and classes of documents being sought so as to be an intergalactic frolic, I think is how I described it at the time back in 2016. Yet again we see that this same frolic is being embarked upon by Mr Davis because he thinks he might be on a bit of a winner, and the winner that Mr Davis thinks he might be on here in this instance as it relates to this motion is in fact not about the production of documents. It is not about a proper purpose and it is not about the public interest; it is about the extent to which Mr Davis might find his way to a public event or to social media or to some confected outrage purportedly on behalf of communities across the state in relation to a subject matter which is actually important, which is actually serious and which does actually warrant fulsome discussion, consultation and the provision of information.

But that notwithstanding, we see a motion which, at paragraph (2), goes to any documents in the possession not only of the Minister for Planning or his office but also the Minister for Transport Infrastructure or her office, the Department of Transport, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning or the Environment Protection Agency. So already we have two ministers and their offices, we have two departments and we have an agency which fall within the scope of this particular request for the production of documents.

It is probably an opportune moment before I get into subparagraphs (a) through (c)(v) of the motion to note that when those opposite were in government and documents were sought from them they failed to produce them. In four years—let us be very, very clear here—those opposite, who were in government at the time, who were elected to provide the sort of transparency and accountability that they now maintain is of paramount public importance, provided documents in response to only three requests in total.

In relation to the mantra we heard from those opposite—including Ms Wooldridge, who was in fact a minister who ended up in VCAT more times than I would care to count for failing to provide responses to freedom-of-information requests—when those opposite were in government, it was apparently too onerous a diversion of office resources to provide the information being sought. So when Mr Jennings, who as we know was in fact kicked out of this place as the Leader of the Government in the last Parliament, sought information in relation to ambulance response times—despite the fact that was in the public interest, despite the fact that that was something which warranted careful and important consideration, transparency and accountability of the kind that Mr Davis is now saying is of vital importance—that was ignored. When Mr Tarlamis, who was then a member for South Eastern Metropolitan Region and is now happily again a member for South Eastern Metropolitan Region, moved an order to produce documents as they related to the Patrick Stevedores relocation from Webb Dock East those opposite provided—guess what, for those viewing at home—no documents. When Mr Tee—he of Miley Cyrus, Phillip Island fame—sought information and moved an order to produce the east–west link business case we all know how that turned out, don't we?

**Mr Melhem:** We got four pages.

**Ms SHING:** I think you say four pages, but it was, as I recall, a six-page summary if you count the pictures, Mr Melhem, which was a dot point document. I recall the dot points were triangles. Because I had nothing else to focus on in the document as far as verbiage was concerned, I had to look at the shapes that were being provided. That business case, which was of vital public importance in the same way as these documents are claimed by Mr Davis in this and other documents production motions, was something which those opposite fought tooth and nail to avoid providing. I mean, there was very good reason as to why they refused to provide it in their own political interest, because it showed such

a woeful return on investment—I think it was 46 cents in the dollar—that there was no way that it could or would stack up economically.

But no matter. Suspend your belief, home viewers, because I am about to take you on a further journey as it relates to the former government’s activities and the three-word slogans that they are really, really good at producing until it comes to delivering the detail and the outcomes that people are looking for. I see Mrs McArthur smiling wryly across the way, and it is good to see that you are so entranced by this, Mrs McArthur. It is a disgrace, I agree with you. It is an important abrogation of responsibility that I think we all need to be mindful of, and to that end I am very glad that you are here for the purposes of this particular documents motion.

When we go to the subparagraphs of paragraph (2) of the motion, it is there where we really get into the weeds. This is where Mr Davis again cannot help himself. There are:

- (a) policies, scientific papers and assessments on the disposal of contaminated soil, specifically soil/spoil removed from tunnelling works including PFAS-contaminated spoil from the West Gate Tunnel Project;
- (b) any and all assessments and examinations of contaminated soil/spoil, including—

so that is not limited to, it is an inclusive list—

those relating to the West Gate Tunnel Project and the Metro Tunnel Project—

and then we move to subparagraph (c):

- (c) correspondence, including emails, to and from government, including ministers, to the EPA on these matters in the last 18 months—

and then again, an inclusive list—

but not limited to—

and that is where we really, really, really get into the weeds. Follow me, dear listeners, because it is an intriguing and rocky path:

- (i) soil and re-use management plans including the—
  - (aa) West Gate Tunnel Project: west zone PFAS data summary;
  - (bb) West Gate Tunnel Project: all zone PFAS classification application;
  - (cc) West Gate Tunnel Project: east zone PFAS classification to EPA Victoria;
  - (dd) *Soil and Spoil Management Plan: West Gate Tunnel Project*, dated January 2018;
  - (ee) West Gate Tunnel Project: zone 400 east major project classification process stockpile management;
  - (ff) West Gate Tunnel Project: major project classification process storage management: cat A;
  - (gg) West Gate Tunnel Project: zone 302 sampling analysis quality plan attachment 1 tunnel spoil management plan;
  - (hh) JC201 tech memo 010 tunnel spoil management framework—

and that is just subsection (c) subclause (i). It continues:

- (ii) waste soil classifications;
- (iii) internal assessment reports which document the justification for issuing classifications;
- (iv) supporting emails, drafts and reviews of each assessment report and classification prior to issuing of the classification document; and
- (v) the EPA, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and the Department of Transport planning assessments, including—

again but not limited to—

impacts on homes, agriculture, waterways, schools and other community facilities, of proposed locations for the permanent storage of PFAS-contaminated spoil, including at the Maddingley Brown Coal site near Bacchus Marsh, the Ravenhall site and the Bulla site.

But it is only listed for one day, so what I am going to do in the time that I have available is in fact talk about what has actually been provided, because when we reach into the detail of this particular production of documents motion and we compare that with what has actually been done and undertaken and provided, that is where the public interest and the proper purpose test which those opposite loftily claim to be the driving purpose behind this motion fall away. And time and time again I am on my feet, others on this side of the chamber are on their feet, asking not what it is that the opposition is seeking by way of the production of documents motion but why. And today, dear listeners, those opposite are bringing this motion simply to do the bidding of Transurban and its builders.

The West Gate Tunnel Project will slash 20 minutes off a trip from the west to the city and provide an alternative to the heavily congested West Gate Bridge. It is going to take more than 9000 trucks off local roads in the inner west, and unfortunately there is literally nothing the Liberals and National—because there is only one of them here—will not do to try to stop important projects like the West Gate Tunnel from going ahead.

They did this in the last Parliament. We had a revocation of a planning approval—and in fact they were supported in that revocation by The Nationals and the member for Euroa, an electorate that contains Benalla, which contains a Benalla concrete manufacturing plant—which stopped work at that plant. The member for Euroa in the other place was content to let these jobs go off the back of a cheap political pointscoring exercise, and now we see that history has, conveniently for her in the other place, rewritten itself to the point where all of a sudden she has been championing this work. Well, you know what? This work is going ahead. It is a vital generator of jobs and employment and economic prosperity in regional Victoria, and the Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture and Leader of the Government in this place, Ms Symes, has worked tirelessly to make sure that those in Benalla are benefiting from this and other economic opportunities despite the best efforts of the member for Euroa in fact to nobble those efforts.

Those opposite are using a disgraceful scare campaign to frighten people in the Bacchus Marsh community and across other parts of the state. They know and others know that the sites they are talking about are already licensed to accept soil with in fact much higher levels of PFAS than is proposed.

**Mr Finn** interjected.

**Ms SHING:** Mr Finn is getting angry, so you can tell that you have hit a sore spot. But those opposite do not mention this and they will not mention this—that sites are already licensed to accept much higher levels of PFAS than is proposed. They do not want to accept that because it is not convenient to their narrative. It is not convenient to their three-word slogans, social media ranting or cobbled together political stunts by the side of a road with people holding placards and at the same time holding the mistaken belief that there is a serious issue here because the coalition has said so.

When you are talking about contamination, those in communities across the state deserve accurate information, and they are certainly not getting it from those opposite. Contaminated soil is actually a really common issue on civil construction projects, and it is safely managed at sites across our state every single day. There are reasons why we have such strict rules and regulations as they relate to the handling of contaminated materials. I have seen this time and time again as it relates to soil testing and as it relates to improvements and site management requirements that are examined, imposed and implemented by the Environment Protection Authority Victoria (EPA) in conjunction with local councils, stakeholders, industry, business, workers and their representatives in the union movement.

I see this time and time again, and yet for the purposes of this production of documents motion and this subject matter we will see Mr Davis and those opposite be prepared to stoop to the lowest of every possible level in order to make this cheap political point based on misinformation, based on a scare campaign and based on nothing more than trying to be relevant to a project which is in fact going to deliver and will deliver and is already delivering jobs and economic benefit and improved amenity by way of an infrastructure investment the likes of which this state has never seen before. Those opposite would in fact understand if they had ever delivered a major infrastructure project that there are very clear rules in place for the way in which soil must be managed and the way in which spoil must be managed. There was no soil to manage when those opposite were in government in those four years when it was too onerous to provide responses to document requests any more than three times in four years. There was no soil to manage, because they did not turn a shovel. They were too busy digging themselves into holes of inaction based around a complete inability to deliver on padding out a three-word slogan into something meaningful that would enable them to actually fulfil their election promises.

Extensive testing conducted in the planning and environmental approvals phase of the West Gate Tunnel Project showed the presence of PFAS contamination. The groundwater testing also shows that the levels are low. Let us be really clear about this: the levels are low, and the sites that have been identified are licensed to accept soil with much higher levels of PFAS than is proposed. The levels are low, and they can be safely managed with the appropriate controls in place.

These reports—and here is the clincher—are publicly available, and they have been for many years. These issues were well known to Transurban and also to its builders when they signed up to build this particular project. There is no nasty surprise lurking in what has been uncovered that was not either known or reasonably foreseeable to Transurban at the time that the contract was entered into. This is Transurban's problem to fix, and they should do so immediately. The Premier has been abundantly clear on this issue, as has Minister Allan in the other place. Those opposite should explain, however, why they are on the side of Transurban and are prepared to throw accuracy of information, transparency and accountability under a bus in order to make these sorts of cheap political points.

Let us have a look at soil disposal sites. Transurban and CPB-John Holland are considering a range of sites and backup options. A number of options are being considered, and no decisions have been made. The proposal will not be approved unless Transurban, Maddingley Brown Coal, CPB-John Holland and the West Gate Tunnel Project can demonstrate that the proposal is safe. That is a condition precedent for the project continuing. For the project to be approved, safety must be demonstrated and the EPA must be positively satisfied.

Let us just understand for a moment what that means for safety: based on the government's conduct, based on the process of providing information, based on the discussions which have been undertaken, based on the sites that have submitted proposals to accept soil from the tunnel-boring machines and based on the licensing arrangements that exist to accept soil with PFAS at much higher levels than that which has been uncovered, we do see that we have and can demonstrate a substantive, strong and consistent approach to managing safety concerns, managing safety risks and in fact managing the flow of information to make sure that people have what they need in order to understand the reality of soil and spoil across this major infrastructure project.

We have by way of our own track record on this side of the house a very conservative approach to PFAS. Unlike those opposite, we were the ones to close Fiskville. And no rewriting of history can undo the fact that those opposite were either actively or complicitly aware of the dangers that existed when they were in government and failed to act. Those in the coalition paid lip-service to the importance of safety as it related to PFAS exposure and did nothing. Theirs is a shoddy and shameful track record, which again, to come back to the terminology I used earlier, is coated in a very thin veneer of legitimacy. And when they are in opposition, there is nothing that they can do but craft motions like this with a level of piety which is extraordinary in its endurance to claim in fact that the

government should be acting in a different fashion than the way we have in providing the information that we have.

There is a massive amount of information publicly available in relation to this particular project and in relation to the management of soil on the West Gate Tunnel Project specifically. For those interested—and again there is such a paucity of interest from those opposite when I am talking about the substance of soil contamination that it beggars belief and in fact reinforces the point that they are not actually here to do anything other than play cheap politics—there are hundreds of pages of technical reports included in the West Gate Tunnel Project environment effects statement (EES).

**Mr Ondarchie** interjected.

**Ms SHING:** I will take up the interjection, Mr Ondarchie: ‘You’re not saying anything interesting, Ms Shing’. Do you know what? If you do not find the issue of PFAS contamination, soil and spoil and the management of public health and safety risks important in relation to this particular issue, then shame on you. I would just hope that the communities that you purport to represent are aware of your abject disinterest in this issue.

We have the following ground conditions reports prepared by Golder Associates for their client Transurban as part of the environment effects study: technical report B, which is contaminated soil and spoil management; technical report C, on groundwater; and technical report D, on ground movement. If for those opposite there is a belated level of interest that crops up—and I can hope for a miracle and I will in fact not hold my breath but remain optimistic that the level of interest may rise at some point in the future—the West Gate Tunnel Project EES documents can be found on the West Gate Tunnel Project website. Expert witness statements on ground conditions were prepared for the inquiry and the assessment committee hearing, including by Andrew Kalitsis, from Golder Associates, on contaminated soil and spoil management, Trevor O’Shannessy, from Golder Associates, on ground movement, and Jonathan Medd, also from Golder Associates, on groundwater. Again, those expert witness statements can be found on the Engage Victoria website, and what a contrast they make to the scare campaign being run by and on behalf of those opposite.

The Minister for Planning’s assessment report on the West Gate Tunnel Project EES provided in addition to this a very detailed assessment of ground conditions and soil management plans, and should those opposite have an epiphany to the point where all of a sudden they are actually interested in the substance of this issue for a change, the assessment is available on the [planning.vic.gov.au](http://planning.vic.gov.au) site.

These are not the documents sought through this motion. The documents being sought through this motion are, however, likely to be commercially sensitive to advance the legal position of Transurban and its builder against the state. So in effect those opposite are not interested in the substance; they are interested in cheap political pointscore, in games and in an opportunity to hop into bed with Transurban and its builder in relation to a matter that might kick along its relevance in the state, which at the moment is languishing right at the bottom of anyone’s understanding of what the political play looks like in Victoria at this point in time.

**Ms Terpstra:** The bottom of the sock drawer.

**Ms SHING:** The bottom of the sock drawer, Ms Terpstra—what a fantastic way to describe it. I mean, that is where all the socks belong that do not in fact have pairs, and we saw that pairs are not really a big deal for those opposite either.

Now, those opposite are happy to front the cameras, and I am sure they will. I cannot wait to see what comes out of Mr Davis’s Twitter feed, his Facebook posts or indeed the nightly news front-up when we see him talk about the government’s relationship with Transurban. But let us judge those opposite by their actions. Let us look at what those opposite have done, have authorised, have prioritised and have understood to be important when they have been in a position of authority to make decisions around the release of documents.

What we see is the release of the response to three requests for information in four years. What we see is a failure to provide any level of transparency. And what we see is that everyone knows who created Transurban and everyone knows who did the deal on CityLink. Today we see the party that created Transurban doing their bidding yet again. It is a consistent track record. It is consistent and it is boring. It is boring because it does not actually address the substance of what people are here to deliver, and that is information for communities, it is detail, it is accountability—along the lines of those documents which are already publicly available.

Transurban's builder is going through a tender process. Transurban and its builder are considering sites. There has been a lot of technical work done, and sites are discussing their proposals with local councils and other stakeholders. We are looking to hold Transurban to the contract it signed with the Victorian government to deliver the road, and this follows on from extensive community consultation in relation to the proposal—consultation which is ongoing but has included a vast array of meetings, community round tables and information stalls, along with meetings with all affected proponents. What a disgrace of a motion.

**Dr CUMMING** (Western Metropolitan) (15:07): In rising to speak about Mr Davis's motion today, yes, I firmly believe there are difficulties in identifying suitable and safe locations for permanent storage of PFAS-contaminated waste soil from the West Gate Tunnel Project. I do understand that—as I have raised in any other debate when we have talked about the West Gate Tunnel Project—it is under contract that Transurban must organise where the soil goes that comes from the tunnel. I have said to Transurban, that great billionaire Texan, 'I'm quite happy for you to stick it on a ship and take it back to Texas'. Why not? We understand that the sand in Hawaii comes from Australia. When I knew that this Texan billionaire was signing this Transurban deal—and he was in my council at Maribyrnong at that time—I had said to Transurban, 'You understand that you are digging underneath and very close to Coode Island? You understand this, don't you? And you'd better put those figures into the cost of this project, because where that soil goes, it will not go in the west, and I do not mind you digging it out, sticking it on a ship and taking it to Texas and cleaning it up there, because that is what is going to be part of this contract'.

I understand that this government made it very clear to Transurban that they are not responsible for that soil. It is in that contract; it was built in. They are going to be making multimillions of dollars, and that should be factored into this project. So we understand that. And when I was on Maribyrnong council and when I was briefed about Transurban, I said it very clearly to the Transurban briefing that I had, 'You'd better make sure, Transurban, that you can fill your ships and take it to Texas, just like the beautiful sand of Australia that ends up in Hawaii'. When you are in Hawaii, when you are sitting at the beach, you are actually sitting on the sand of Australia. Truly.

**Mr Ondarchie** interjected.

**Dr CUMMING**: Because it gets washed away, Craig. That is what happens. And of course, because we have the best sand in the world in Australia, it actually gets exported. Seriously, as good as sending sugarcane anywhere, we sell shiploads—you know, like Ship Creek—all around the world because our sand is that wonderful. Seeing that our wonderful sand ends up on the beaches of Hawaii—and they are beautiful, and I know I am sitting on my little sand of Australia—I am more than happy for shiploads of contaminated soil to go wherever they need to go in America to be treated accordingly as part of this multimillion-dollar project, because I have told them very clearly it will not end up in the west.

I do thank—because I remember this debate, not recently—Mr Finn, my other colleague in Western Metro. In the last debate that we had, with Ms Stitt and others that were here—and I remember that day very distinctly because it was the day I spent, I think, the whole week, about 25 hours, talking about the Local Government Bill 2019—Mr Finn left this chamber to go to a protest rally. He was not interested in listening to the debate about the local government bill. He actually went, and that was the first I actually knew that when you have got a sitting week you can just disappear for a few hours and

come back. That was the first time I actually learned that. I did not know that, because I as a new member thought when you are sitting, you sit and you stay here till the end and you debate the bills to the very end. You just do not disappear. But that is what I learned last time we debated this.

I am really thankful to Mr Davis for spending the time of actually listening to what I said last time and making such a detailed, detailed, detailed, detailed request for documents, because as I said in the last debate—and what we all know in the way of the community—the government have currently actually made all that information available on their websites, because from what I understand, they have got nothing to hide. Why would they have anything to hide, seeing that the deal with Transurban is the exact same contract that Jeff Kennett signed?

**Ms Shing:** Say that again. What?

**Dr CUMMING:** Yes, the CityLink project. I remember that. I was 18, driving my Ford Anglia, going, ‘Ooh, look at this tunnel! When you come to Brighton, you have to slow down at night because they’ve got to sleep in Brighton. We have to drive along the freeway at 80 kilometres at night. Shh!’. And then during the day you could go 100.

**A member** interjected.

**Dr CUMMING:** Don’t you remember back then, Bernie? I remember being 18, driving my Anglia in through that tunnel. It was the Burnley Tunnel. Wowee! Not like England. England had a subway, but here in Victoria, finally, pow, we actually got a road project and got a tunnel. I remember that. I just thought, ‘Wow!’.

**A member** interjected.

**Dr CUMMING:** Well, you know, because, Mr Finn, when I was studying my Chinese medicine, the first year—

**A member** interjected.

**Dr CUMMING:** Mr Finn, I will take up that interjection, because my first year of Chinese medicine was at a college in Camberwell called the Australian Acupuncture College, and that course was actually taken up by Victoria University at that time, during the Joan Kirner days, because Joan Kirner at that particular time said we need a university in the west. That is where Footscray TAFE turned into Victoria University. There was a distinct need for children in the west to have the opportunity to go to university, because they were missing out on getting into Melbourne University. They were missing out on getting into uni, so good old Joan at that particular time got us Victoria University.

But I remember driving into that wonderful tunnel in my 1962 Ford Anglia—that used to be an old police car—and I cannot tell you how many times my car broke down and some nice rich guy from Toorak had to push it to get it off the side of the road so I could actually get to college at that time. But when I was 21, Mr Finn, I was accepted as a mature age student at Victoria University, and my course became a bachelor degree. I appreciate Mr Finn wanting to know the history of why at times I have driven through the tunnel and gone to the eastern suburbs.

**A member:** In your Ford Anglia.

**Dr CUMMING:** In my 1962 Ford Anglia. It was pink at the time, and my numberplates were ‘DR CAT’. I do not drive it anymore, but I did when I was on council. I had even the executive management team pushing me out every now and again.

**A member:** The documents are online.

**Dr CUMMING:** It is online. I have got photos to prove it—another time. I know I am not allowed to show photos here, but another time, Mr Finn.

But, yes, a lot of these documents are online. But the level of detail the Leader of the Opposition here in this house has put into his motion I do very much appreciate, and I do understand why he would want a documents motion. I am very pleased that in the previous debate that we had on this topic the opposition has actually heard what I have said and has added some more detail. Last time I mentioned the Maddingley Brown Coal site in Bacchus Marsh and the Ravenhall site, so it is nice that you have actually heard and you have actually expanded on the debate. But I will allow others to speak to this motion.

**Mr FINN** (Western Metropolitan) (15:16): Well, I have to say that Dr Cumming's contribution was significantly more interesting than the one that preceded hers. That is a sad reflection indeed on the contribution of Ms Shing. Some have very unkindly suggested she is a sanctimonious windbag, but I would not do that. I would not do that, but I would suggest to her very, very strongly that the only reason that her political masters allow her to run loose in here is to fill in a hole when they need one, and they have just done it again. Now, one of the first comments that was made by Ms Shing—

**Ms Shing**: On a point of order, Acting President, I have considered what Mr Finn has said, and I thought about not pressing this point of order. Mr Finn has in fact referred to me in a way which, despite some clever verbiage and an attempt at trickery, is in fact seeking to cast unfair aspersions which are entirely unparliamentary and deeply offensive. I would seek that he withdraw that gratuity.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman)**: Thank you, Ms Shing. I uphold the point of order. Mr Finn, can you just withdraw the comment?

**Mr FINN**: I am happy to withdraw, Acting President. I am not sure whether Ms Shing is upset by being called a windbag or sanctimonious, but anyway we will move on. One of the things that Ms Shing began her contribution with this afternoon was referring—

**Ms Shing**: On a point of order, Acting President, Mr Finn was asked by you to withdraw his comment, and he did so before going on to qualify. I would ask for an unreserved withdrawal from Mr Finn.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman)**: The point of order is upheld. Mr Finn, can you give an unreserved and uncommented withdrawal?

**Mr FINN**: I will even go down on the knee if you like. I withdraw.

**Ms Shing** interjected.

**Mr FINN**: I withdraw because the last thing I would want to do is upset Ms Shing, because God knows she needs every bit of help she can get. But the contempt for the western suburbs that Ms Shing has shown is a bloody disgrace.

**Ms Shing**: On a point of order, Acting President, we have heard the word 'misogyny' bandied around in this chamber a little bit today, and for the third time Mr Finn has made a comment which is disparaging and offensive and carries on from the conduct of his earlier two remarks. I would seek that he refrain from any further remarks of this nature, which I find offensive and unparliamentary.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman)**: Thank you, Ms Shing. Mr Finn, can you just withdraw without any commentary, without any add-ons, without any anything.

**Mr FINN**: What is she upset about now? I did not say anything. What is she upset about? I mean, can you say anything? Making a reference to a member is offensive now, is it?

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman)**: Mr Finn, could you just withdraw.

**Mr FINN**: We might as well go out in the street and close the Parliament altogether. We might as well do that. What a joke! What this member has done—

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman):** Mr Finn, I am on my feet. Mr Finn, I need you just to withdraw, and we can move on.

**Mr FINN:** I am happy to withdraw whatever you want me to withdraw. I have no idea what it is, but I am happy to do it. It is just the most ridiculous bloody thing I have heard in years. But anyway, that is the way this government operates. The contempt—

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman):** Mr Finn, just back to the motion.

**Mr FINN:** The contempt Ms Shing showed for the western suburbs during her contribution today was despicable, was disgraceful. All we want from this motion, all my constituents want from this motion, is some answers. I have been asking questions of the Premier, of the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, of the Minister for Health, of the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change—of various ministers—for months and months and months. We want to know what is going on with this PFAS stuff. We want to know what is going on with this contaminated soil that they are committed to dumping in the west of Melbourne. This mob over here are giving the middle finger to the people of the west—

**Ms Shing:** On a point of order, Acting President, I have just seen Mr Finn make an obscene gesture in my direction when he referred to the comments he made. I would seek that you examine the video footage of this particular contribution and Mr Finn's gesture and that a ruling be made in this regard. This is absolutely inappropriate, particularly in light of the earlier discussions and the exchanges we have had with you, Acting President, about Mr Finn's course of conduct this afternoon following my contribution and the references he has made to and about me.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman):** Thank you, Ms Shing. I am going to refer this to the President.

**Mr FINN:** Well, look, I am not sure why Ms Shing is in here, because she seems to take offence at anything and everything that anybody ever says. It is just extraordinary—

**Mr Ondarchie:** Except the Labor right.

**Mr FINN:** Indeed, Mr Ondarchie, except the Labor right and what they say. She seems to be happy to cop that. Perhaps *60 Minutes* will give me an hour on Sunday night on the tribulations of Ms Shing. Well, God help us! The fact of the matter is that Ms Shing and her government have given the middle finger to the people of the western suburbs—and the finger, by the way, was pointed over there. Not everything is about you, Ms Shing. That will come as a huge surprise to you, but that is the truth.

**Ms Shing:** On a point of order, Acting President, again, there have been multiple rulings from the President in relation to pointing. Again, please stop pointing at me, Mr Finn, whether it is with your middle finger or with two raised index fingers. I am finding it really offensive, and I think that you can make a contribution without involving me personally in the things that you have got to say.

**Mr FINN:** I think you need a psychiatrist—

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman):** Mr Finn!

**Ms Shing:** On a point of order, Acting President, Mr Finn has just suggested that I need a psychiatrist.

**Mr FINN:** I did not suggest it; I said it.

**Ms Shing:** Oh, sorry, Mr Finn has now just said on the record that I need a psychiatrist. I take extreme offence to the fact that you would seek to stigmatise that particular issue. I take extreme offence to this unparliamentary conduct and the fact that it has been a pattern from Mr Finn this afternoon. I would seek that action be taken to address Mr Finn's behaviour and conduct, because I find it utterly offensive and completely unparliamentary. I seek an absolute and unconditional

withdrawal from Mr Finn in relation to the comment that he has just made on top of the withdrawals that you, Acting President, have sought and obtained in various qualified and later unqualified ways.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman):** Thank you, Ms Shing, I do actually uphold it. Mr Finn, I need you to withdraw, without commentary or additions.

**Mr FINN:** I withdraw, I withdraw, I withdraw. And let me say—

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman):** And please, let us—

**Mr FINN:** I will continue to fight for the people of the west despite what anybody here—

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman):** Mr Finn!

**Mr FINN:** I am pointing that way, despite what anybody—

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman):** Mr Finn, take your seat. Also, I need you to just get on with the motion and stop getting personal.

**Mr FINN:** Well, that was what I was trying to do, and I have been trying to do it now for about 8 minutes. And if what's-her-name over there lets me do it, I will. I did not mention her name, and that should be enough.

**Ms Shing:** On a point of order, Acting President, again, this is about the fifth or sixth time that I have gotten to my feet—

**Mr Finn** interjected.

**Ms Shing:** I beg your pardon, Mr Finn? This, Acting President, is now to the point where this pattern of behaviour is entirely unacceptable. Mr Finn has targeted me through repeated comments, personalisation, 'what's-her-name over there' and a flippant gesture, following on from a raised middle finger and repeated pointing. That is something that I think constitutes entirely inappropriate, vicious and personalised behaviour of a type which I think falls into the category of misogyny, and again I would like this addressed and escalated to the relevant formal levels for decision-making.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman):** All right. Mr Finn, I need you to start to just get on with the motion. I may not be able to throw people out—

**Mr FINN:** I am endeavouring to do that, Acting President.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman):** Mr Finn, I am still talking. I may not be able to throw people out, but I know someone who can do that, so can we just move on with the motion itself. Speaking of that—

**Mr FINN:** G'day, Shaun. How are you? I am delighted to speak on this motion, because I am here to defend the people of the west. I know that there are many members of this house who do not give a stuff about the western suburbs. Members on the opposite side of this house have shown time and time and time again that, despite the fact that the people of the west vote for them at every election, they have total contempt for the western suburbs—the people in Wyndham, the people in Ravenhall, the people in Bulla. These are the ones who are suffering as a result of the policies of this government. All this motion is seeking to do is to get some information that these people want and these people need. That is all that it is asking for. You would think that we were trying to rewrite history. Certainly members opposite are trying to rewrite history. There are no two ways about that at all. But I am standing here saying that I have been trying for months and months and months to get answers. This motion will, hopefully, provide those answers.

Now, if the Labor Party want to continue to treat the people of the west with total contempt, that is up to them, and we will be pointing that out to the people of the west at the appropriate time. But as far as I am concerned, when you are talking about toxic soil that is 200 times more carcinogenic than is

safe; when you are talking about that material being dumped in residential areas, near houses, near schools; when you are talking about the people of the west being put in physical danger by this material, then we need some answers. Members opposite can carry on like two-bob watches as much as they like, but the fact of the matter is that is not going to give us the answers that the people of the west demand. This motion will hopefully do that, and I urge the house to support it.

**Mrs McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (15:27): I also rise in support of Mr Davis's motion and in support of the communities of Maddingley and Bacchus Marsh, who I can assure you feel red-hot anger towards this government and its agencies over the mismanagement of this potential dumping of toxic waste in their area. This is not a trivial matter in any way, shape or form, as some might have sought to argue. This is a life and death issue for the people of Bacchus Marsh and Maddingley. They feel their entire life is being threatened by the potential dumping of toxic waste from the West Gate Tunnel in their backyard. This anger comes not just from the potential result of this process, which could see PFAS-affected soil dumped in close proximity to schools, housing, water courses and prime agricultural land; it comes also from the secrecy and the lack of information released despite not only questions from me and my colleagues but from the people of Bacchus Marsh and Maddingley, who have sought on numerous occasions and in every way possible to get the information they require to be assured that this dumping of toxic waste in their backyard is not going to contaminate their lives.

At every stage the residents in these areas have felt they have been left in the dark on the detail and their representations have been totally ignored. The local members of Parliament out there just do not respond to them, and there is extraordinary feeling and anger and concern about the fact that they cannot get the information that we are seeking today to enable them to be assured that what is going to happen to them potentially is not going to threaten their lives. I heard that there has been extensive consultation. I can tell you that is not the case. Local people have not been consulted; they cannot get the documents. I also heard that councils have been consulted. That is also not the case. They have been left in the dark as well, and they have sought masses more information that they are entitled to seek from this government and it has not been forthcoming. That is unacceptable. All we are trying to do is to gather the information that is needed for the people of Bacchus Marsh and Maddingley to be able to live their lives that they have been living without toxic PFAS waste being dumped in their backyard.

It is easy to understand this feeling of powerlessness. It has grown from this lack of public consultation and a lack of the vitally important information that they sought. It has grown from the removal of the planning decision from the Moorabool Shire Council, from the resigned attitudes of local Labor MPs in both houses and finally from the government and its agencies who have consistently failed to release full details of the potential consequences of the dumping. What ministers here need to understand, however, is that failing to engage will not make the problem go away. They cannot simply continue to ignore local feeling and to press on regardless. At every stage their failure to respond makes the anger greater and makes the determination of the Bacchus Marsh residents to fight stronger. As I said, I have spoken to many, emailed many and surveyed thousands, and the message is clear: their greatest fear is that this decision has already been taken and that any further processes are simply window-dressing.

We have been told repeatedly by officials, ministers and even the Premier that this is not the case. Why then the failure to engage? Why then the secrecy? Why then the reluctance to release the information that we are seeking today? From the beginning it has been utterly extraordinary that a site in close proximity to a residential community and a site which includes watercourses irrigating food crops of state significance could be chosen to receive contaminated soil. There are 227 000 square kilometres in Victoria; why at Bacchus Marsh in the Maddingley brown coal site? The obvious conclusion is mismanagement. Despite adequate warning of the potential dangers—several years in fact—no suitable site has been developed for this waste from the tunnel.

And how are they trying to fix their bad management? By cutting corners and overriding communities in a desperate attempt to get the project back on track. It seems clear to me that the state government

and their contractors would be entirely content to ignore all of the environmental arguments and the concerns raised about community proximity in order to dig themselves out of their hole and their mismanagement that is the West Gate Tunnel construction project. They have not done the work ahead of time, so they now need a quick solution. To them, it is Bacchus Marsh. Well, I will not stand for it.

I join Mr Davis in demanding that all the documentation be released. If everything is in order, if all the processes have been followed and if this truly is a suitable site, there should be no difficulty in doing so. Indeed it is essential for the community trust that this be done. We need to see the information Mr Davis has outlined: the policies, the scientific papers, the assessments, the waste soil classifications, the internal assessment reports and the planning impact studies on homes, agriculture, waterways, schools and other community facilities. We need full disclosure from Environment Protection Authority Victoria, from the ministers for planning, transport infrastructure, environment, land, water and their departments. This is the least that the community facing such a blight deserves. I have my own doubts about what this material will say, but I stand ready to be corrected. It is time for the secrecy-addicted government that is the Andrews government to come clean and to treat the people of Bacchus Marsh and Maddingley with the respect they deserve. I ask members to support this motion.

**Ms STITT (Western Metropolitan) (15:34):** I do want to make a brief contribution to this motion. I know there have been a number of speakers already and that this has been a lengthy debate, so I will try to keep my comments succinct and in relation to the West Gate Tunnel Project itself. Whilst I concur with the contribution made by my colleague Ms Shing in terms of her very thorough examination of the merits of Mr Davis's fishing expedition in terms of the documents motion requests, I do think it is important to reiterate a few comments about the West Gate Tunnel Project itself. And I think I have spoken on a number of occasions in the chamber about the significance of this project and the importance of it to not only the people of Melbourne's west but Victoria's west and of course our metropolitan freeway network across our city.

It is important that this project continue and be delivered, and there are contracts. As you are all aware Transurban and its builders CPB and John Holland are considering a range of solutions and a range of sites and backup options for the safe storage of soil from the West Gate Tunnel. Whilst there are a number of options being considered, there has been no decision made yet and those opposite would know very well that the Environment Protection Authority Victoria have got a role to play in this process in terms of ensuring the safe disposal of any soil from this project and more importantly the safety of communities in our region and beyond.

In terms of the project itself, everybody knows that this is such a significant project, and I think one of the reasons for that is that so many plans have come and gone in relation to creating a second river crossing from Melbourne's west to the CBD. Many projects, as colleagues would know in this place, have been talked about but never delivered. This is why our government is determined to see this project come to fruition, because it is the missing link, basically, to get that second tunnel—that second river crossing—because we all know that the traffic volumes on the West Gate Freeway have increased exponentially. We have seen population growth in Melbourne's west, particularly in the Wyndham growth corridor, explode. That has meant more pressure on our road networks and more pressure on public transport, and that is why our government is making record investments in relation to these important projects.

In terms of the West Gate Tunnel, when it is delivered it will cut 20 minutes off a trip to the city from the west for places like Point Cook, Tarneit, Geelong, Melton and Ballarat. It will take 5000 cars a day out of the south of the city, relieving congestion on King Street and Spencer Street, and take 9300 trucks per day off residential streets, with 24/7 truck bans giving local streets back to local residents in the inner west. I know that I am not the only member in this place who has wanted to see that delivered for years and years and years—to get those trucks off our local streets in the inner west so that people can have a much better amenity and they can be free from those truck fumes, particularly as the rat runs are shut down.

Victorians know that when the West Gate stops, the city stops. I know myself, as a long-term resident of Melbourne's west, that if there is an accident on the West Gate you can forget it. It is basically gridlock from Werribee all the way around to Melton, and any way that you can try and negotiate your way around the West Gate Freeway into the city will be gridlock. This project must and will be delivered because we cannot continue to have the situation we have seen on the freeway networks. It means that people in Melbourne's west are impacted significantly whenever there is an accident on that road.

In terms of the documents that Mr Davis's motion calls for, there is already a massive amount of information that is publicly available about the management of soil on the West Gate Tunnel Project. This includes hundreds of pages of technical reports included in the West Gate Tunnel Project environment effects statement. The following ground condition reports were prepared by Golder Associates for their client Transurban as part of the EES: technical report B, which is a contaminated soil and spoil management report; technical report C, which is in respect to groundwater; and technical report D, which is in respect to ground movement. All of these can be found on the West Gate Tunnel Project website, Mr Davis. So there is a plethora of information publicly available already.

Expert witness statements on ground conditions were prepared for the West Gate Tunnel Project inquiry and assessment committee hearings, and these include Mr Andrew Kalitsis, Golder Associates, contaminated soil and spoil management; Trevor O'Shannessy, Golder Associates, ground movement; and Jonathan Medd, Golder Associates, groundwater. These expert statements can be found on the Engage Victoria website.

The Minister for Planning's assessment report on the West Gate Tunnel Project EES provided a detailed assessment of ground conditions and soil management plans, and this is also publicly available at [www.planning.vic.gov.au](http://www.planning.vic.gov.au). I would encourage those opposite to actually do a little bit of research and read those documents. But these are not the documents that have been sought by the motion, and I will not go into and repeat the significant contributions that my colleague Ms Shing has already made in relation to the quite creative way in which Mr Davis's motion seeks to dress up a docs request. What he really is doing here is trying to advance his political attack lines on this project.

In terms of investment in the west, I do get quite irritated when I hear those opposite accusing this government or members of this government from the Western Metropolitan Region of not caring about the people of the west. Nothing could be more offensive to me as a proud western suburbs person myself. This government is investing more in the west than any government in our state's history, including the \$6.7 billion West Gate Tunnel Project. We are getting rid of 15 level crossings, and anyone who has actually been to the west would know that it is not just the freeway network that is at issue here. We have some of the most dangerous and congested level crossings in the state in Melbourne's west, and we are addressing them. We are funding the removal of 15 of the very worst and most congested. Five have already gone. We are building new train stations as part of both our level crossing program and the Ballarat line upgrade.

In the four years of the Liberal government there was absolutely no investment in the west. At least in the eastern suburbs they pretended to promise you train lines to Doncaster and Rowville, but they just did not get about actually building them. They did not fund the removal of any level crossings in Melbourne's west—not one. Not a single new train station was opened by them. So we are actually overseeing the western roads upgrade at the moment, which is the biggest ever investment in the west—eight massive new road projects plus huge upgrades to walking and cycling paths—and these projects are all on track to open next year. We are currently removing level crossings at three locations on the Werribee line: at Werribee Street and Cherry Street in Werribee and at Old Geelong Road in Hoppers Crossing. All three will be gone in 2022. Construction is to begin later this year to remove the Gap Road level crossing in Sunbury.

And I know that Mr Finn will be very familiar with that level crossing in Sunbury. I know that it is hard for him to express his true feelings about the removal of this level crossing by our government, but I can assure you that no-one is happier than Mr Finn in relation to the removal of that level crossing.

**Dr Cumming** interjected.

**Ms STITT:** Okay, I will not take up that interjection, Dr Cumming. The mere suggestion from those opposite that anybody from our side of the chamber is taking the west for granted or treating the people of the west with contempt I utterly reject. There is also the Ferguson Street, Williamstown, level crossing construction beginning later this year, and that will be gone by 2022. There are three new hospitals that have been constructed in the west and 16 new schools in the western suburbs, so I really do think it is important—even though I do not know that I am winning any friends opposite by actually busting a few myths about what it is our government is doing for the people of the west and for the infrastructure projects in the west that are so vital. Do you know what? It is also about creating jobs for our people in the west, because all of these projects have prioritised employing locals and employing young people in apprenticeships, and the list goes on.

So in relation to some of the more outrageous statements that have been made in this chamber today I can categorically state that when it comes to the western suburbs of Melbourne I know that I, along with my Labor colleagues in the other place and here in the Council, will continue to strongly advocate for the west to get its share of important infrastructure projects. I will leave my contribution there.

**Motion agreed to.**

### Committees

#### JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE

##### *Establishment*

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (15:47): I am pleased to move:

That:

- (1) a joint select committee of nine members be established to inquire into, consider and report to both houses, no later than 30 September 2020, on the relevance, acceptability and process by which the government has adopted international agreements, treaties, memorandums and other similar arrangements with foreign governments since 2015, and in particular:
  - (a) whether the two agreements between the People's Republic of China and the Victorian government, also known as the Belt and Road Initiative, are in the interest of Victorians in all circumstances, including in the long-term financial interest of the state and with respect to its sovereignty;
  - (b) the details and background of the proposed further agreement linked to the Belt and Road Initiative and whether these are in the public interest of all Victorians;
  - (c) the appropriate consultation with the commonwealth of Australia government and its agencies on the likely impact on Australia's foreign affairs and trade;
  - (d) through until the end of this Parliament examine and report on any further international agreements, treaties, memorandums or other similar arrangements the government may seek to sign and report to the Parliament in a timely way to keep the Parliament of Victoria informed of whether these are, on balance, in the view of the committee, in the public interest;
- (2) the committee shall consist of:
  - (a) five Assembly members, comprising three members from the government nominated by the Premier and two members from the opposition nominated by the Leader of the Opposition;
  - (b) four Council members, comprising two members from the government nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Council, one member from the opposition nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Council and one member from among the remaining members in the Council nominated jointly by minority groups and Independent members;

- (3) a majority of the members appointed pursuant to paragraph (2) will constitute a quorum of the committee;
- (4) the chair of the committee must be a non-government member;
- (5) in addition to exercising a deliberative vote, when votes on a question are equally divided, the chair, or the deputy chair when acting as chair, shall have a casting vote;
- (6) the committee may proceed to conduct business notwithstanding that all members have not been appointed and notwithstanding any vacancy;
- (7) the committee may conduct all or any part of a meeting or public or private hearing by audio or audiovisual link;
- (8) the committee shall operate under the provisions laid out under joint standing order 15;
- (9) the foregoing provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the standing and sessional orders or practices of both houses will have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing and sessional orders or practices of both houses; and
- (10) a message be sent to the Assembly informing them of the resolution and requesting their agreement.

I will not read the full machinery details. They are on the notice paper, but they are the standard format and would set up a committee that has a balance between the chambers, a balance between government and Independent members and a balance between government and opposition members.

I want to be quite clear here: this is about a series of agreements that Daniel Andrews and his government have signed with the Chinese Communist Party. This is not about trade with China. It is not about the arrangements that we have had in place over many years to further our trade, cultural educational connections and indeed our social connections and personal connections with the Chinese people and the Chinese community.

What we are concerned about with this recent period is that the government has signed a number of these agreements against the advice of the national government. They have signed these agreements without proper input from the national government. They have more recently released the documents of the actual agreement, but they have not released many of the background documents which have been sought through FOI.

It is also true to say that there is a weakness in the Victorian scrutiny system. We do not have a committee structure or an arrangement in the Parliament that actually scrutinises formally many of these arrangements. I think there was once a federal-state relations committee, and that would be an interesting way forward, but that does not exist at the moment. So my point clearly is that there is an oversight here, a weakness in our system to scrutinise these arrangements.

The state government has signed these agreements, as I say, against the advice of the national government, and we are very aware of the impact of certain links into the Australian community and certain decisions that have been made by the Chinese Communist Party. Now, I have very strong respect for the need to trade. I can mention somebody who I was very fond of, now dead, a former Premier of Victoria, Sir Rupert Hamer, my friend, who signed the first arrangement with the Jiangsu Province, the sister-state relationship, in 1979—the first of those signed under a Liberal government with a focus on building relationships, community, educational, cultural and indeed trade arrangements with the Jiangsu Province. Those sorts of arrangements have a clear and sensible purpose. What is important here is to recognise that the state government has proceeded on this frolic, signing these agreements without proper assessment, without the risks being properly analysed, and it seems very much that these arrangements are very much one-sided. They appear to be heavily weighted in favour of Chinese business interests.

When you read the agreement it is clear that there will be additional opportunities for Chinese construction firms, but on the other hand when it comes to our agricultural products there is no guarantee that these processes will advantage our agricultural products. The decision of the Chinese government to put an 80.5 per cent tariff on barley—and this was debated in this chamber so I will not go over the details of that again, and people can see the contributions made by many in the chamber—

is going to have a very significant impact on Victorian barley producers and our exports into China. There is no question of that.

There are threats on other levels too. So a trading relationship that has that sort of decision-making by the Chinese communist government is very much a concern. I think there is every reason why the Parliament ought to properly, soberly and with the full evidence available to it thoughtfully examine this trade arrangement, and certainly before the third leg of this treaty is signed make sure that the arrangements are actually in the public interest.

We have said as a matter of policy that we would step away from that agreement; we would remove Victoria from that agreement if elected in 2022, but that in no way diminishes the need for this inquiry. It means that in the period between there is every need to properly examine these arrangements to get to the understandings and the documents that have been denied by the government and to make it clear which aspects of the relationship are in Victoria's interests and which parts are not.

Obviously as we go forward with China—it has been growing so fast with, until very recently, a very significant growth trajectory, and with our country also growing very fast there was a very strong synergy—I think now we face significant challenges to know how to push forward our trade. We have obviously got to broaden our trade links, and I think this is probably common policy across the Parliament. I think everyone would agree on stronger links with Indonesia and South-East Asia in general and India in particular as well as the opportunities that are opening up in the EU and in Britain after its decision around Brexit. So there are a lot of opportunities around the world, but none of them are things that will occur in a day. They do require long-term policy focus and long-term decision-making.

However, this inquiry offers a simple and straightforward way forward to enable the Parliament to formally examine these treaties, these arrangements—whatever you want to call them. Whether they are treaties, whether they are memorandums, whether they are agreements, whether they are handshakes—whatever—we need to understand precisely what has been agreed.

There are genuine risks that occur at the moment with the state government mismanaging many of our large projects. The West Gate Tunnel has just been talked about in the last motion, but it is equally true of the Metro and other major projects around the state. John Holland, for example, a major Chinese company—formerly an Australian company but now a Chinese company—is involved in those contracts. We have always welcomed external knowledge and capacity, but we also need to understand that where there are huge contractual disputes there are significant risks to the state's finances. The West Gate Tunnel—there is a significant dispute there, and Holland and CPB and Transurban are engaged in a significant dispute now.

What role does the Chinese government, the Chinese Communist Party, play in the decisions of John Holland? What role do they play? That is not clear. They are a wholly owned firm whose decisions are made in China in the end about the trajectory of that firm in Australia. The same with respect to the Metro Tunnel, a project which is nearly \$4 billion over budget now, and there is a huge contractual dispute. It is my view that the state government will sign a deal with the Metro Tunnel consortium, the Cross Yarra Partnership, in coming days—before 30 June in fact I think is the likely trajectory. Again, John Holland is involved in that decision. What arrangements have been struck between the government and the Chinese Communist Party, which controls that massive construction firm? We need to understand who is pulling whose strings and why and how that is operating.

The Belt and Road agreement is a significant agreement internationally by China. It seeks to use infrastructure and transport projects around South-East Asia and across Asia into Europe and indeed into other parts of the world to build trade links—perfectly laudable—and transport and infrastructure links of various types. Those aims in themselves are laudable, but it really concerns people that there is a measure of control that comes with this. There are questions of sovereignty, and there are questions of the ability of weaker governments, indebted governments, to make the decisions that are required.

Now, the state government here, in its recent bills that went through, sought parliamentary authorisation to borrow \$24.5 billion to build on the \$50 billion state debt—to add to a debt of almost \$75 billion. That is a huge, new, extraordinary debt that the state will be carrying, and Victorians are entitled to know how that will be spent. They are entitled to know if that money will be used to backfill previous cost overruns on major projects. Will some of the \$10 billion allocated for this year be used to backfill with an agreement on the Metro Tunnel and thereby dig the government out of its hole, or will it be new money creating new jobs, as the Parliament was led to believe? My view is that the difficulties they face with external control of firms that have now got major stakes in Victoria, in Melbourne in particular, are I think a genuine concern. We have got the North East Link coming soon and the three bidding consortiums there, again with significant Chinese Communist Party involvement.

We have seen the high-capacity metro trains. The Evolution consortium, the Evolution group, have a range: Plenary—a well-known firm to people in Victoria, of course—and others, but including CRRC, the Chinese train constructor, the largest in the world. They are the ones who have largely constructed the high-capacity metro trains. Those trains are two years late. They are not going to be delivered, it seems, until late this year or early next year. They were due to be delivered in November 2018. They are the contractual arrangements. My question is: what arrangements have been struck by government, what lax winks and nods have been given to the consortium on this, to allow them to deliver so late, so far behind time?

In any event, this committee would provide the ability for the Parliament—both chambers, a joint select committee, because there is no committee that has oversight over these matters formally—to provide the appropriate consultation and oversight. I believe a committee like this should engage with the commonwealth and perhaps some of the commonwealth security agencies and understand closely what is very much in the public interest. I also make the point here that the weaknesses that are there in our system need to be remedied. We actually need proper oversight so that we know what is going on, what arrangements have been struck between this government and the Chinese Communist Party. We know that there are a number of memorandums and so forth that are beyond the Belt and Road, and they too would be proper targets for analysis for this committee.

This is a very moderate and reasonable step that enables us to get in a position as a Parliament—not just this chamber but as a Parliament—to actually examine closely these points and to act in the interests of the Victorian people, the long-term financial interests and sovereignty of the Victorian people.

**Mr MELHEM** (Western Metropolitan) (16:02): Again I have the pleasure of speaking on another motion moved by Mr Davis about—I think it was last sitting week we were talking about more or less the same thing—the anti-China propaganda by Mr Davis, basically trying to keep that issue going, to spread all this stuff about. The truth does not really matter, really! Let us make things up as we go. He is making things up. Let me quote some of the fear stuff Mr Davis said in his contribution. He said, ‘Oh, we’ve got no problem trading with China, but there’s a problem with the MOU about promoting trade’. The first agreement between Victoria and China was done by my good friend a former Premier of Victoria.

**Mr Davis:** Sir Rupert.

**Mr MELHEM:** It is true. He was the first.

**Ms Crozier** interjected.

**Mr MELHEM:** An honourable Premier. He did a great job and was very well respected by a lot of Victorians. And he did the first agreement between Victoria and a Chinese province—it is not much different—to promote the relationship. I am again quoting Mr Davis, maybe paraphrasing, but more or less that is the gist of what he was saying: promote the relationship between the state of Victoria and China in relation to trade and cultural things et cetera, et cetera, et cetera—and good on him.

Premier Andrews—which he made no secret about—strengthened the relationship between Victoria and China when we got elected into government in 2014. I recall he said, ‘I’m going to make it my business. I’m going to go to China once a year and my ministers need to work with Chinese officials to make sure we actually strengthen the relationship because they are our biggest trading partner’. So we are happy to trade with them. We are happy to have their business, and they are now happy to have our business.

Since the relationship started between us and China, under the direction of Premier Andrews, the two-way merchandise trade, for example, has come up to about \$37 billion a year now, which is an increase of about 60 per cent since 2014. The international education sector, which is our target export, generated \$12.6 billion in revenue for Victoria and supported 79 000 jobs. Last year we had more than 87 000 international students from China, an increase of 51 per cent over the past five years, and almost 30 per cent of students in Victoria are Chinese. So we are happy to do the trade and we are happy to accept their business, but I think there is a fair bit of a racism element in that area. There is a fair bit of that.

Now, I get it; you might have a view about a communist party versus a democracy. Well, that is a different debate altogether; I get that. Let me tell you, I would not wish the Communist Party to run this country. I do not like them. But what the system of government should be in China I do not think is any of our damn business. It is the business of the Chinese people. They are the ones to determine it. We do not want the Chinese to determine what sorts of governments we have in Australia, and vice versa. Those opposite talked about some of the major projects and investment and said, ‘John Holland is a Chinese company. If it was an American company, it would be okay’. I have got no issue with the Americans—we have a lot of common cultures and common interests and allies—but these are the Chinese. Well, if they are the enemy, then let us declare China as the enemy. Let us declare China as no longer our partners. We are happy to have them as partners; we are happy for them to buy our iron ore and exports and to do business with them. Let us make our mind up. What relationship do we want to have with China? Do we want to have a partnership and work with them? And it is two-way traffic, I get that. I agree with Mr Davis that any relationship between countries or states or individuals has to be a two-way street. It should never be a one-way relationship. I accept that totally.

We talked about the tariff. I agree there should be no tariff imposed on barley. But I have not heard Mr Davis actually criticising the federal government’s lack of action about addressing this issue. I have not heard it. I stand to be corrected, but has the federal government—your colleagues, your brothers and sisters—gone to the World Trade Organization to take on China to get that lifted? No they have not, have they? Have they, Mr Davis? That is their job. You run away! Mr Davis just left the chamber because he does not like the truth; he does not like the facts. I have not seen him once mentioning what the federal trade minister has done to fix up the tariff issue with China. Yes, he talked about it, he whinged about it, but I have not seen an application to the World Trade Organization to actually take China on. That is what he should have done and that is what we should be doing. There is a process, there is a system in place—and that is what we should be doing. Instead, we want to make political points. People will be listening to this debate and trying to denigrate people of Chinese background and destroy our relationship with China—and the timing is just appalling.

Now I said earlier I totally disagree with, strongly oppose and think we should do everything possible to take on China and the Chinese government in relation to their tariff on barley. We need to do that. If we cannot fix it, let us go to the World Trade Organization and take them on and get that lifted, because there is no justification for it. So let us agree on that.

But then we talk about the memorandum of understanding and the arrangement of Premier Andrews, who is a great leader. He has managed to get the state to a situation where we are the envy of Australia. We are creating jobs better than any other state. We are talking about level crossings. We are talking about infrastructure. I can go on with the list, on and on and on and on. I might come back to that later on. But there is no secrecy about what the MOU and the arrangement in place are. It is not secret. You

can google it, actually. You can go on Google, and I said that last time. You can jump on Google and then basically punch in 'MOU Victoria China' and bang, you have got the full document.

My understanding is Mr Davis and his colleagues have read the document. What is in the document? One, it is not a legally binding document. It is not a treaty. It is a document basically stating intent—that both parties would like to work together cooperatively to promote employment, job creation, trade and cultural links between two nations or between two provinces or between the state of Victoria and Chinese provinces and Chinese governments. That is what it is. It is not talking about, for example—I would be a bit worried if that was the case—the state government of Victoria basically signing a defence agreement with China or an agreement with this sort of effect. That is not the case.

It is basically no different to when your former Premier did a similar thing by putting together an agreement to promote a healthy relationship between two countries or two states. That is what it is. Let us call it what it is. You find me one thing in that document—I have not got a copy here, but I had a copy of it last week and I read the document; there is nothing in that document—committing Victoria to things which might contradict or undermine our federal system of government or the national interest of our country. Let me tell you, I would be the first one to be standing here attacking my own government if that was the case. Let me tell you—I am saying on the record—that that is not the case. The case is about promoting a healthy relationship.

There was all sorts of talk about 5G. That is not in the space of the state government to do. It is the federal government. And even in some of the news, about there being some grants given to the China group to do some advocacy work, they forgot to mention they have got similar grants from the federal Liberal government. But we do not talk about that. We do not talk about Robb and we do not talk about their side of politics.

I think it is about time to start talking about real stuff. They are saying there is no committee to basically scrutinise what the government is doing, the MOU et cetera. Well, we have got the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC). We had the same arguments about the COVID-19 accountability process: 'How are we going to hold these ministers accountable? How are they going to rule us during COVID-19? We're going to lose our freedom. They're going to rob us. They're going to jail us. They're going to do all sorts of horrible things to the citizens of Victoria, this Labor government. They're going to do all these sorts of things'. Well, guess what? If you talk to Victorians, they will say, 'Thank God we had a Premier like Daniel Andrews, who was prepared to lead from the front, who led from the front along with his cabinet'. And now we have got through or are getting through COVID-19, and he is not just leading Victoria; he actually led nationally. He managed to establish a good relationship with the Prime Minister and other premiers to make sure we got an excellent response to COVID-19.

We had the Parliament, and people were saying, 'This Parliament will never come back and sit again—never, never, never. It's not going to happen. The Parliament's going to be shut down, and we'll probably come back one day. We won't be back this year'. We had a sitting in May, and we are now sitting pretty much as normal. And then the accountability—PAEC. We then, or the Premier did, added an additional person to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee from the crossbench so we could have some non-government people added to it. We did not have to do that, but we did that so we give an opportunity to other members to participate in the process and hold the government and ministers to account in various departments. And that committee met on a regular basis, not just for 2 hours or 3 hours, Tuesday to Thursday, like the house was sitting, and there have been a lot of good things carried out during that process. Members were able to ask questions; they were able to quiz ministers and department heads in relation to how we handled the COVID-19. Well, it is the same thing: nothing is stopping you on PAEC to go and ask the responsible minister to come and talk about the MOU. There is nothing stopping you doing that.

But there is a thing you really need to appreciate about this place. It is called the David Davis method of madness. As you have seen today, he will not even give a go to his other colleagues to actually have

a go at speaking on something. He wants to speak on everything. And he wants a committee to basically sit for the rest of the Parliament and report every few months. He did exactly the same thing in the last Parliament when he was the chair of the Environment and Planning Committee with the rate capping, because that was part of his portfolio. So he said, 'Okay, we're going to have a resolution. We're going to have six-monthly reporting on rate capping', and he turned the committee to become basically his shadow portfolio-type resource so he could use that every six months—'There's a report'. And then in the last 12 months he moved on to a different portfolio. He got bored with that. He was still the chair of the committee, but he got bored with that; he was no longer interested in it. So we really did not do much reporting on rate capping in the last 12 months of that Parliament because he lost interest.

It is the same thing here: 'Let's establish a committee, a joint committee. It'll be the David Davis committee'. Basically, with that issue, he is fair dinkum about that. He is not happy with debating the issue. We debated it a second time in this place. PAEC I think, unless I am wrong, could be the appropriate vehicle to call in the appropriate minister, maybe the Premier, and I am sure the government will be more than happy, because transparency is very important. They will come in and explain it. Because the government will never run away from the arrangement we have got in place with China in relation to the Belt and Road Initiative.

They are trying to paint a picture that Australia and Victoria—and I said that last time—are like a Third World country where we are going to go with handcuffs to China and say, 'Give us \$5 billion to do that project and we're not able to pay in five years time'. And that is what happens. Look, there is some concern. I get that in some other countries there is an allegation that the Chinese may say, 'Look, in five years time if you can't make the repayment on the loan, don't worry about it. Give us some political favours here and there and so forth and we'll maybe rape you and pillage you and so forth. We will forgive you for the \$5 billion'. Guys, grow up. We live in Australia. We are a First World country. If we borrow money, we pay it back. We are not such a Third World country where we cannot meet our obligation to repay our loans.

But let me tell you this: if I can get an interest rate on a loan for 0.5 per cent from person X versus I have to pay 5 per cent from person Y, where would I borrow the money from? I mean, it is simple common sense. And sure enough, it is another argument altogether about the fact that you do not want to borrow something you cannot repay. I get that. And Mr Davis talked about how he welcomed investment, even Chinese investment and Chinese trade, but for some reason he has got this fixation about why the MOU exists. And by the way, that MOU was signed a long time ago, in 2018. And it has been around for a long time.

The federal government do not want to do Belt and Road. Well, good on them; that is fine. But call it for what it is: it is simply a memorandum of understanding which states the intent of both parties to cooperate, to work together, basically, for mutual benefit. Yes, the Chinese want to have some benefit out of it. Of course they do. Why else would you do any agreement between two parties, especially a commercial arrangement? It has to be two-way traffic, and both sides need to benefit. But also there is a benefit for Victoria, which is jobs.

Are we giving our sovereignty away? Of course not. I know some commentators would say we are, but I would like you to prove it. I would like you to actually tell me where in the document—one, it is not a legally binding document; two, where is it in the document? It is basically being said that we are giving the farm away. Alternatively, let us say that is not in the document. Let us get an example or a real case where that thing actually happened. No-one actually has come up yet with an example where as a result of the MOU any of that has occurred—not in writing, not in the document and not in real life. So simply because it is convenient the coalition raise that issue.

COVID-19 started in China. COVID-19 swept through the world. And I believe probably the Chinese should have handled it a bit better with sharing information. I do not know—I am guessing here—but that is what the international WHO investigation and inquiry hopefully will tell us so we can handle

that better next time. But our brave Prime Minister suddenly decided, 'I am going to be brave and relevant. I'm going to attack the Chinese and demand that the Chinese carry out an investigation and take on China', because finally he felt—maybe he had a chat to Donald Trump, I am not too sure—he has got a bit of steroid in him and said, 'Okay, well, I'm now a superpower. I'm going to take on the Chinese'. Seriously? I mean, that resolution was going to get up with or without Morrison—with or without him. With the European Union, who are the main sponsors of that, it was going to get up. But no, let us go and upset our biggest trading partner, and now we are paying the price. Now we are paying the price. I think it is just bad advice. I am not saying, by the way, that he should not have talked about it or that an inquiry should not actually start in relation to the COVID-19 outbreak. If the Chinese government did not handle that properly, that should be exposed and we should learn from it. I think hopefully the Chinese government itself will want to get to the bottom of it as well.

Let me tell you this: you can have all these theories about it—if you listen to Donald Trump about all these conspiracy theories and stuff—but I do not think there is. You are saying to me that the Chinese government decided they wanted to go and kill their own people. Is that what we are saying? I do not think that is the case. You can say as much as you like about how bad they are. Well, I do not agree with you. There is no evidence of that, so let us stop denigrating the Chinese state and government and people. Now, their system of government—that is another debate. But I think it is time we grew up. To me this one has served a political purpose. It has wedged the government, the Labor Party, because Scott Morrison put his foot in it and now we are sort of paying the price with the tariff. That sounds really well with some of our constituents, for example, that, 'Oh yes, let's bash them and then we might get some brownie points'.

I think that is dangerous. That is dangerous to do that. You should not play the race card like that.

**Mr Finn:** Nobody is playing the race card.

**Mr MELHEM:** Well, you are. I am sorry, you are—like when Mr Davis said that John Holland is running the biggest project, but it is owned by the Chinese. So if it is owned by the Americans, it is okay. If it is owned by the Germans, it is okay. If it is owned maybe by the Russians, it may be okay. I mean, come on. If that is not racism, what is it? We should call it out.

I would love to see less and less foreign-owned companies doing major projects in Australia. If that is the argument, that is a great argument. I would support it 110 per cent. But unfortunately the horse has bolted a long, long time ago. We have got two major construction companies, possibly three, who are seeking to do work in Australia, and unfortunately they are not owned by us. John Holland was owned by us at one stage, 25 years ago, by Holmes à Court, who sold it. Then the last owners were the Spanish, and they got themselves in trouble and the Chinese came in and bought it. Lendlease? God knows who owns Lendlease. CPB Contractors? It is all over the place. Unfortunately that is what we have got.

What I think the debate should be about—maybe from both sides of politics as a bipartisan approach, and this challenges probably my own government—is the need to start encouraging more and more of the second- and third- and fourth-tier construction companies to grow, help them to grow and fill the void. Maybe that could be a bipartisan approach, so we would not have to be faced with a CPB-John Holland arrangement or even a company owned by a foreign country. But unfortunately you have got to deal with what you have got, because they are the companies who actually have the capability to build these projects. Maybe that is something we can put in a notice of motion and start debating about: what we can do to start encouraging our second- and third-tier companies to actually do more and more of those projects.

I actually really believe in this. I think we have got a significant capability with second-tier and third-tier construction companies, if we actually help them to grow gradually—because if they grow too fast we know what happens, and I have seen that they crumble reasonably quickly—and encourage them more, give more contracts to them and less to the big players. The big players will just suck you

dry and bleed you because that is what they do—because of ‘market forces’, they say. It is basically take it or leave it: ‘No-one else can do the job; we’re the only one’.

We need to achieve our infrastructure programs, to make sure we continue with our level crossing removal program, rail programs and the Metro Tunnel. The Metro Tunnel is progressing really well—we have got the four boring machines now working at a reasonable speed and the project progressing really well. Yes, the West Gate Tunnel has got its problems with the PFAS and the soil. Hopefully that will sort itself out, and then we will have the two boring machines lowered into the ground—they are halfway down now—and they can start digging and getting that job done. We have got the North East Link about to start, and that is a 16-something-billion-dollar project.

Yes, you need a lot of money. Whichever company is going to come and bid for that project, they need financing, so they have got to get the finance from somewhere. Let me tell you, they probably will not be able to get it from the state, because they are bleeding, themselves. I get it: whatever the finance, we should probably have some ethical program where when we borrow it has to have some ethical thing attached to it, and I think we do as part of our procurement policy to make sure we are doing things in an ethical manner. It is actually part of the state government criteria now. We adopt that already; there are certain criteria. Social responsibility, certain ethics, have to be put in place. You do not just go and award a contract to someone just because they are the cheapest. They have to actually demonstrate a number of things, including their labour relations, their ethics and their track record—all these sorts of things. All these boxes need to be ticked.

I did not hear Mr Davis talking, for example, about one of the things we are doing, where we are mandating Australian-made steel in our projects in Victoria. That would have been a real concern, for example, if John Holland had said, ‘Oh, we want to get our steel from China’. They did this initially—a small part—because they could not source it here. But then they were told in no uncertain terms that it has to be Australian-made cement, which it is now—cement and so forth. Ten per cent of trainees and apprentices, encouraging local contractors to be involved in the project and Indigenous workers to be a part of the program, so that we can give them a go and we can actually then help these people to get jobs instead of ending up on the streets. We are now being faced with one of the biggest challenges in our time with Black Lives Matter. The best thing you can do for any race, for any group of people, for any human is to actually give them an opportunity and to give them a job, and that is something that we have been doing as part of our major projects.

With my last 1 minute and 30 seconds—this one is nothing but a witch hunt, a political stunt and a low act; it is not short of racism what is being presented here. We have our other MOU treaties with other countries—we do. We have a list of them on a regular basis in this chamber. I have not heard Mr Davis and his group complaining and launching an investigation into any of those—not a single one. So it is an absolute disgrace that they continue this crusade against the arrangements that this government has made with China, which I think have delivered for both the state of Victoria and China. Soon, hopefully, we can welcome Chinese students back into the great state of Victoria. The Chinese government is saying now to their people, ‘Don’t go there’, because they’re scared. That is a perception. The sooner they come back, it is better for them, for their families and better for Victoria, because I will be welcoming them with open arms. With these comments, I totally reject the premise of this motion.

**Mr HAYES** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:32): We should be especially careful in engaging with foreign governments without the advice—or acting in this case against the advice—of our federal government. I think that that is a major problem with some of the trade deals, and particularly the one mentioned in the motion. Any agreements with foreign governments need to be especially open and transparent, and the contents have to be available for public scrutiny. I think this is absolutely in the public interest that these sorts of deals are available to be looked over very carefully by the public and by the Parliament too, of course. The one referred to in this motion was kept very quiet.

Unfortunately many who have criticised any perceived problems with international treaties have been rather nonchalantly smeared as ‘racist’ by members of the government. Using this term really and truly undermines the real and very present issues these days to do with racism—to just label opponents who question things as racists. We need to have a wider discussion about the values and costs of transnational deals with any country, especially when there are those that have raised significant concerns.

One of the lessons we have learned all through the coronavirus pandemic is that we in Victoria, and in Australia generally, need to become more self-sufficient, as Mr Melhem was talking about. Relying to the point of dependency on foreign governments for access to trade deals is not going to make us more self-sustaining; we need to put our local industry and local manufacturers first. We should own our own companies. We should look after our own manufacturing and source our products locally as much as we can. There should be a requirement on governments for local and national procurement policies.

Now, I note here the outrageous steel deal, with the West Gate Tunnel as an example. The Premier promised Victoria that at least 92 per cent of the steel used in this project would be Australian. He later reneged on that promise, sourcing 17 per cent of the steel from China, and we must ask why now. I think much of this comes back to the issue that the government has become so hell-bent on turning Victoria into a concrete jungle that it needs to cut some corners cost-wise to make it work. If we did not have this relentless, state-sponsored population growth, then we would not need to keep desecrating our environment, destroying our open space to build more and more infrastructure and development and encouraging foreign investment with deals whose hidden costs will not serve our people and our environment well—allowing such foreign interests to buy residential property here if they immediately build a new building,

You know, we have got a real problem in my electorate—it is Ms Crozier’s electorate too; we are seeing heritage housing bowled over one after another, and this has just been accelerating over the last few years. Now, there are two reasons in my mind for why this is happening. One is because the minister interfered with the residential zone protection in these areas. Instead of the areas being restricted to two-unit developments or ‘dual-occs’, as they say, he upped it so 10 units on each block was allowed, therefore making it a much more profitable arrangement for the developers. As I have mentioned many times in here before, the government is miles too close to their influence. They have a lot of influence in this area, and they are making it more profitable in that way. And secondly, the rules that now apply—

**Ms Terpstra:** On a point of order, President, I have been listening intently to Mr Hayes’s contribution, and I know he is speaking on Mr Davis’s notice of motion 316 on the notice paper, but I do not know that planning committees or developers are relevant to the notice of motion. I would ask that Mr Hayes direct his comments directly to the matter at hand.

**Mr Finn:** On the point of order, President, having heard Mr Melhem’s contribution at length, I would have to say it was very rare that he actually touched on the subject of the motion itself. I think that in fact Mr Hayes is being far more relevant to the motion than was Mr Melhem, so on that basis I would suggest that the point of order should be struck down.

**Ms Terpstra:** On the point of order, President, Mr Finn did not make that objection during Mr Melhem’s speech, and so it is very trite to try and make that objection now post it. So what I would suggest is that Mr Hayes confine his comments to the motion that is being debated in the house at the moment. Planning and suburban development is not part of or relevant to this motion.

**The PRESIDENT:** I apologise: I have not been in here and—I am sorry, Mr Hayes—when I was here, I was not intently listening to your contribution. Sorry, I will from now on. Look, I suppose there are a few things, taking the further point of order from Mr Finn. If Mr Hayes is responding to some of the comments that Mr Melhem made, then it opens the door for Mr Hayes to respond to that. But also

Mr Hayes being the first speaker for his party—and I know he is the only speaker for his party—the first speaker for any party does get some latitude on debate, but I will, Mr Hayes, if I can, call you back to the motion as well. That would be great.

**Mr HAYES:** Well, I am talking about it in the way that it does talk about international agreements and memorandums, and I do think that the agreements that we have made have affected development issues in Melbourne. This is the point I am coming to: that the deal that has been reached with foreign investment in this country is that you are not allowed to buy freehold land in the suburbs if you are a foreign citizen except if you buy it and bowl it over immediately and put a new dwelling on it.

That is part of the foreign agreement that we have, and this has rapidly escalated the destruction of our residential amenity and heritage. To that point, I am saying that with foreign interests buying residential property here, if they immediately build a new building this has encouraged the rapid destruction of historic and heritage buildings, and this is not serving our people and our environment well. It might serve a certain section of the population—the development industry—well, but not everybody else.

The government has fallen and continues to fall into dependency on foreign countries and foreign money—and, with that, foreign influence. The Premier has been personally pursuing Chinese involvement in Victoria's multibillion-dollar Big Build, as it is called, since at least his May 2018 visit to China, and in October of that year he signed up to the Belt and Road Initiative in a memorandum of understanding with Beijing. Now, he refused to make the agreement public, only doing so after intense pressure during the last Victorian election campaign. So that is not a very good start, the secretive nature of that.

Is the so-called Big Build the best policy for a post-COVID environment in Victoria? Wouldn't it be best to be looking at smaller scale local infrastructure and local investment, which would have greater employment opportunities? Now, Mr Melhem was talking about foreign-owned construction companies. We pay a lot for these deals with foreign-owned construction companies because they have got access to big machinery and it is very capital intensive, with a lot of money spent on it, but because it is all about big machinery it does not employ many people. I think we would be much better pursuing local industries. It would be better for our people if we were spending money on our wellbeing, homelessness, full employment, local schools, hospitals, child care, education, rather than building super-freeways for endless expansion out and out and out for more and more and more.

Victoria is the only state that has signed up to this particular deal, and that undermines cohesive national policy. As I mentioned before, I am concerned about the potential for foreign influence on governments, and our government in particular, on their decisions, and I am concerned about foreign ownership of freehold assets and residential property and also our farmland. I do not think there is anything wrong with foreign money going into Australian companies. That is welcome, absolutely. But there is no need for people to be buying our land and us giving away control and sovereignty over very important assets.

Further, these sorts of deals should not be made against the wishes of the federal government when they involve dealing with foreign governments, and they cannot and should not be shrouded in secrecy. There is too much at risk with secretive deals and agreements like this. So I support the opposition's motion to be able to inquire into and to get information about the nature of such deals.

**Ms CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:44): Thank you very much, President, for the opportunity to speak to Mr Davis's motion. I think it is a very important motion and a timely motion in relation to the situation for Victoria. I want to just congratulate Mr Hayes. I have been listening to the debate and the commentary that he has made in relation to the very succinct and real impacts of this through the points of view that he provided through debate. In relation to some of those challenges that we have as a state and indeed as a nation in relation to the pandemic that we are currently experiencing, and in talking about some of those local projects and homegrown manufacturing, it is

part of the coalition's policy to get back to work and get back to business and look at those issues. As you rightly point out, Mr Hayes, the Premier did promise a degree—90 per cent—of local content in relation to some of these infrastructure projects, and he has reneged on that promise.

This motion goes to the heart of the Belt and Road initiative (BRI), of course, but it also looks to having a joint committee—a committee made up of government MPs, coalition MPs and the Independents from both houses—so that we can have a look at this in greater detail because there has been an enormous amount of commentary around this issue. I will go to some of those points in a moment from a national perspective that have been spoken about by the Prime Minister.

I listened to Mr Melhem's debate as well. Mr Melhem's debate was myopic and narrow and really quite concerning because it did not go to the heart of what is in our nation's interest, in Victoria's interests and in our overall community's interest. If I could just move to that point in relation to what has been said by those who have got far more experience, dare I say, than we in this chamber have, I want to directly speak to that. But I would like to make a couple of comments about the concerns that have been raised at a national level. Indeed the Prime Minister himself said:

... all states and territories should not be entering into agreements inconsistent with Australia's foreign policy.

This is a strategic agreement with the Victorian government, a state jurisdiction, and a national government, the Chinese Communist government. That is the issue. That is what we want to understand and want to look into. That is what this committee would do. The Prime Minister went on to say:

It is a program that the Australian foreign policy doesn't recognise ... because we don't believe it is consistent with Australia's national interest ...

There are many security issues the government addresses on a day-to-day basis and they're addressed in a very secure way ...

It is not a program that the Australian government has signed up to, it is not the Australian government's foreign policy. And all states and territories should not be doing things that act inconsistently with the federal policy.

I think that is the point Mr Hayes was speaking to and what the concerns are. I have read many articles on this, because it has generated a huge amount of interest within our community. It has generated a huge amount of commentary from experts within those national agencies, whether it is the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade or our foreign policy area. Those people have got real expertise in this issue. They are the ones we should be looking to for guidance, and yet we have got the Premier, who thinks that he can just hand over this issue to one of his backbenchers, the member for Essendon, and give him an enormous role to play in the initiative.

Mr Pearson, who has just been elevated in the shambolic situation that we have in Victoria with the current government, with branch stacking and ministers just resigning in droves or being sacked and goodness knows what—what a disgraceful situation the state is in—is named in the China-Victoria BRI 'framework agreement' that was signed by Mr Andrews last year as the deputy chair of the joint working group on jointly promoting the Belt and Road Initiative. His co-deputy is somebody who is very senior in the Chinese government—China's National Development and Reform Commission deputy secretary-general Su Wei, and I apologise if I have mispronounced that. But the point is that you are dealing with very senior bureaucrats of a foreign government—of a national government. We have got a backbencher whose experience, to my understanding, includes working as a researcher for the Labor Party and for a number of Labor Party lobbyists and then as an adviser to a former Premier. That is what the concern is. I think that is why people are so concerned about this agreement and what has gone on.

We have got the Premier, who is arrogantly digging his heels in on this issue. Why is he digging his heels in on this issue? Has he really got the interests of Victorians at heart or is he just so hell-bent on pushing his way through, saying, 'Look at me. I'm Bob the Builder building things'? But at what cost

to Victorians and at what cost to our national security and our sovereignty? And these are the real issues that Victorians and Australians and experts around this country have raised their eyebrows at. In fact they have done more than that. They have put their concerns on paper, and they continue to raise them.

Now, I did mention that I have been reading a number of articles on this, and I did pick up one article from a Mr Varano. This very succinct article has the headline ‘The State of Victoria and China’s Belt and Road Initiative: Where Does it Leave Victorians?’. Without going into the depth of the article, he made some excellent points. He raised the point that the framework that I have spoken about and that Mr Pearson is party to:

... intends to promote “connectivity” of infrastructure, innovation, ageing, trade development, and market access—

and a number of other things but that it is written in generalities. His point in this article is that it is not generalities that we should be looking at; we have got to be looking at far more detail. I think these are the concerns from the national government. You cannot be going off and signing these strategic agreements with foreign national governments around generalities. This is a very dangerous process to undertake. It was a fascinating article, and he is a very experienced individual—his experience in the commercial world—who is very highly credentialled. I think you have to look at these people who understand how these agreements are actually undertaken. As he says, the real focus of what the government is trying to do is to reach into regions. It is to use influence and reach into jurisdictions and regions and have the influence. That is the point, and that is the concern that so many people have raised. He also says that:

... the BRI is primarily designed as a unilateral mechanism to expand China’s regional and global influence and cater for its domestic industrial overcapacity.

These are really relevant points made by these experts who have got so much expertise in these areas. I think we need to understand we cannot brush this off so lightly, as Mr Melhem and others have done, saying, ‘There is nothing to see here’.

That is the point of this motion: so we can as a Parliament understand what the government is doing on behalf of all Victorians. The other point this article makes is that:

Through the BRI, Victoria is predominantly leveraging China’s capital and resources to support the state’s major projects approach as it has no other economic avenue to fund its massive \$107 billion infrastructure program as it heads towards significant budgetary deficit.

Well, we know we are heading that way. We were heading that way before the COVID pandemic, and the government will try to use COVID as the excuse for running up our debt and deficit. The Premier and this government have increased Victoria’s debt by \$50 billion in the past two years. And when asked about this, the additional borrowing of \$24.5 billion, in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee recently—the audacity that the opposition should ask a question about that borrowing of taxpayers money and where it is coming from—we were virtually told, ‘How dare you ask such a question?’.

**Mr Finn:** How much was it again?

**Ms CROZIER:** It is \$24.5 billion in additional debt, Mr Finn, so there are enormous concerns with the government, Daniel Andrews and his backbenchers and ministers. You know, they talk about diversity in the government. If you look at the diversity of experience on the government benches, it is very narrow. It is incredibly narrow. It is union official, union official, union official, union official. There is no commercial—

**Ms Stitt** interjected.

**Ms CROZIER:** Well, you might be proud of it. I am not saying you are not, Ms Stitt, and I am not saying there is not a role for it. I am saying that the expertise and the commercial reality of what this

state needs to do is undermined by the lack of diversity and experience. Expertise and experience are lacking in diversity on the government benches, and you are entering Victorians into these big agreements with foreign national countries and we do not know what they are. They—these experts that I have just quoted and referred to—are the people that the government should be taking notice of. Instead they have ignored everything. They have ignored the advice from DFAT. They have ignored the advice from our national government.

**Ms Terpstra:** That is rubbish.

**Ms CROZIER:** Ms Terpstra says it is rubbish that the government has ignored it.

**Ms Terpstra:** No, you are making it up.

**Ms CROZIER:** I am making it up? Ms Terpstra says I am making it up. You obviously did not hear what I read out in terms of what the Prime Minister himself has said and in terms of what others have said about other issues and state clearances. I will bring this into the argument:

Very few state officials have security clearances or the need to access information from our intelligence agencies and the national security establishment. The result is state and territory governments tend to be incredibly naive when it comes to dealing with the PRC.

Now, that is what this is about. Your government has entered into these agreements on a very naive basis. I do hope it is naive. But nevertheless you, the government, have done this. And you have got these backbenchers in this chamber saying, 'You're making it up'. No, these are the officials that are saying this, Ms Terpstra, and that is the problem. Your government—through you, President—and the backbenchers who are just chirping away think this is okay. It is not okay. And if you had any semblance of caring for the community of Victoria, you would agree to this joint parliamentary committee because it is about transparency. It is about understanding what the government is doing on behalf of all Victorians. It is about not being secret. And look what we have seen in the last few days. We have seen this government in disarray because of what they have been doing, too focused on branch stacking and the self-indulgent manner in which they have gone about—

**Ms Terpstra:** On a point of order, President, I ask that Ms Crozier focus on the motion rather than talking about any extraneous matters that she just mentioned. It is of no relevance to the motion, and I ask that you focus your comments on the substance of this motion.

**The PRESIDENT:** Can I draw you back to the motion, please. I uphold this point of order.

**Ms CROZIER:** I am very happy to be drawn back to the motion because it is an important motion. It goes to the heart of your administration—of this government's administration. We have just seen how you administer branch stacking and all sorts of other things, and this is exactly what we need to do. We have to have transparency, openness and understanding of what is going on. Victorians deserve that. They are losing their jobs in droves—127 000 lost their jobs last month—and your government is too self-obsessed and self-indulgent, branch stacking for your own gains. What an absolute disgrace. Victorians deserve better from their government than to see the shambolic display that we have seen over the last two or three days: ministers flying left, right and centre, getting the boot, being sacked; hollow weasel words from the Premier, saying, 'I didn't know anything'. Of course he knew something. So you government members should stand proud and agree to this very important joint parliamentary committee so that we can understand exactly what the government has done and is doing on behalf of all Victorians and stop being so secretive.

**Ms TERPSTRA** (Eastern Metropolitan) (16:58): Wow, what a contribution. I rise to speak in opposition to Mr Davis's motion 316 on the notice paper that calls for a joint select committee to be established to inquire into—and I might just read this and put this on the record:

... consider and report to both houses, no later than 30 September 2020, on the relevance, acceptability and process—

now, ‘relevance, acceptability and process’ I find fascinating—

by which the government has adopted international agreements, treaties, memorandums ...

et cetera, and then it goes into talking about Belt and Road. And of course this is what it is all designed to be about—looking at whether we have secretly signed up to some kind of sweetheart deal with a foreign entity or a foreign government, which is just preposterous. So again, these words ‘relevance, acceptability and process’—by whose standards? What, by those opposite?

Of course, as we heard in the previous contribution today by Mr Melhem, if anybody wants any public scrutiny of anything that a government does, or any deal signed up to, funding committed or agreement made, the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) is the appropriate committee for that. So again having this motion to create a joint select committee just wastes parliamentary resources to form the basis for policy development or argument for those opposite. They have got nothing to contribute to this in a positive manner other than racist dog whistling and junk politics, quite frankly. I am really saddened to have to stand and speak in opposition to this motion, because quite frankly we have better things to discuss in this Parliament and in this chamber than this kind of racist dog whistling politics from those opposite. So let me spell it out again for those opposite. Of course none of them are here, except for Mr Finn. I appreciate you sitting through this, Mr Finn, I do. Thank you very much. But I just want to point out again to make it clear on the record: for those opposite and anyone else who might be listening or playing along at home—

**Mr Finn:** You’ve got to buy me a few beers afterwards.

**Ms TERPSTRA:** Maybe, if you are nice. Maybe Chinese beers. How about that?

**Mr Finn:** I’ll drink anything.

**Ms TERPSTRA:** Well, there you go. You are not fussy after all, are you, Mr Finn? Let me make this clear: the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is not a contract for works. It is a memorandum of understanding. It is a symbolic gesture whereby the Victorian government has reached an understanding with the People’s Republic of China in regard to trade. It is in regard to saying: how can we, the Victorian community and the Victorian government, work with the People’s Republic of China to explore, to develop any trade initiatives that might be available to us? This is really critically important to the Victorian economy, and I find it really contradictory and oppositional by those opposite to criticise this aspect because, quite simply, in terms of trade China is our number one trading partner in Victoria. They are an important trading partner. Why would we not want to work more closely with them and develop better relationships with them in doing this? For example, the international education sector is our largest export market. It has generated \$12.6 billion in revenue and it supports 79 000 jobs in Victoria. That is so incredibly important to our economy and to Victorians who are benefiting by being able to work in jobs in Victoria.

Last year 87 000 international students came from China, and that was an increase of 51 per cent over the past five years, because people internationally recognise what an outstanding product our education system has to offer. Whether it is in the public education system in our schools, whether it be independent schools or our government schools, or in our universities, we offer excellent educational standards in this country and it is no wonder people in China want to come or want to send their children to this country to be educated. Also our visitation from China increased by 70 per cent in the last five years, so people are coming here on holiday to spend money in our economy, and that is a welcome development. We welcome people from China to come and holiday in this country because our economy benefits from that. Victorian businesses benefit from that. A number of different sectors benefit from that but also the more that people spend money in our economy, the more dollars that are spent, that contributes to our tax base as well. So all of those things are important.

Again the idea that Belt and Road is about signing up to secret deals—I know that this was said before—but if you want to go and have a look, you can google it; it is all available on the website.

There is nothing secret there. It is all there hiding in plain sight for everyone to see. Go and have a google; you will very easily be able to find it.

Just back to the business aspect for a minute—and you would think that the business community would be part of the Victorian community that would form part of the base of the Liberal Party—I can say this: in 2018, 63 Victorian companies participated in the 2018 China International Import Expo. That tells you the level of confidence that Victorian businesses have in undertaking trade with the Chinese community. The following year 70 Victorian companies participated in the import expo. That was 2018, so you are talking two years ago, and then 2019.

So you can see that business confidence in trading with China as a trading partner is also increasing because people want to do business with the Chinese community, and I know everyone in this chamber would most likely agree that we have a significant Chinese community in Victoria, not to mention in my own electorate of Eastern Metropolitan Region. We have significant Chinese populations in the Glen Waverley area, in the Box Hill area and also in the Manningham area, and it is critically important that people who live in Australia do not feel like they are being marginalised, attacked or criticised simply for having any ties to or being from China or emigrating here from China and the like.

So it is disappointing to me that this debate is framed in such a way that, as I said earlier, draws upon the dog whistling, racist nature and junk politics around race which we see from those opposite. And I was disappointed to hear Mr Hayes's contribution around trying to imply and to say that the overdevelopment of our suburbs or how the suburbs are being destroyed is somehow linked to this and development money and all the rest of it. I mean, that is just one of the weirdest conspiracy theories I have heard, and I am disappointed that Mr Hayes made such a contribution. I have to say that I wonder and question whether the Liberal Party actually wrote those notes for him. Sometimes Mr Hayes comes up with some pearls of wisdom, but not today, unfortunately—quite disappointing.

But back to this motion, again we have so many international visitors coming to our state. Twenty-one per cent are from China, and they represent almost 40 per cent of the total international visitor spending in our state. Again, the BRI is just one part of our relationship with China, as I have demonstrated by talking about trade and the rest of it. I have talked about our international students, which the Victorian economy benefits from. Again, just to try and calm people down on the opposition benches and to make this clear: this is nothing more than a symbolic gesture that is designed to enhance the trade relationship between Victoria and China, as it has a huge benefit to both countries. And again the Belt and Road Initiative is part of a much broader relationship with China. Look, no relationship can be defined by just simply one piece of paper, but our engagement with China is important. It has seen our exports grow by 62 per cent and, as I said earlier, our visitation grow by 70 per cent and our international student base from China grow 50 per cent in the last five years. So it is critically important that we support good international trade relations and, as I said, China is our biggest and largest trading partner, and everything is publicly available online.

For Mr Davis to propose a resolution that calls for moralistic judgements, really, pseudo-moralistic stances about what is relevant to the Victorian economy, what is acceptable and a process—again, weasel words from those opposite, who call for moralistic judgements from anybody sitting on a committee to inquire into these things. As I said earlier, PAEC is a much more relevant and appropriate body to scrutinise any agreements that the Victorian government might enter into, and those opposite have members who are on that committee. They are quite able to ask questions and to have anything the Victorian government does be scrutinised in that regard.

Proposing this motion to have a joint select committee of nine members would simply duplicate and in fact possibly take away resources from the Victorian Parliament that could be better directed elsewhere to looking at any matters of this nature, so again it is something that is just a grandstanding waste of taxpayers money, quite frankly, trying to support this committee. And again there is nothing to hide. There is nothing to see here. It is all on the public record and, as I said earlier, you can google it. There is nothing secretive about this at all. It is simply trying to, I do not know, recreate or duplicate

what PAEC is already very well capable of doing—and possibly has a greater scope than what might be being suggested by this motion, I might add, because this committee seems to be restricted to talking about or inquiring into the relevance, acceptability and process.

PAEC again can ask questions around commitments to spending and all those sorts of things and entering into agreements. Again, this is not an agreement; this is simply a memorandum of understanding. It is an important symbolic gesture whereby the Victorian government can signal its intent to the People's Republic of China that we are prepared to do business with them in a range of ways.

One thing I might add just in terms of infrastructure: you can see the benefits that some of these relationships are creating for Victorians. Things like the level crossing removal sites, the Metro Tunnel—we can see these important works and upgrades that are happening, and these projects that we will be continuing to work on will create local jobs for Victorians.

Mr Melhem talked earlier about some of these Australian companies that have been taken over by foreign ownership. Realistically that is a function of this trickle-down economics globalisation approach that those opposite and capitalists have wanted to see. It was not good enough to have Australian workers and Australian companies in the past working on these sorts of projects; they wanted to make it competitive. We had people flying in from overseas countries to undertake works and all the rest of it. It has undercut the Australian business sector so dramatically that now businesses simply cannot compete, and it has destroyed Australian business. So those things are all things that have happened in the past. It has been an aggressive competition-type policy framework, if you like. Now, competition is a good thing, but it has had dramatic impacts for Australian business and certainly for Australian workers. We can see a race to the bottom.

I made a contribution yesterday on wage theft whereby now you might have unscrupulous businesses and contractors who will undercut the market to ensure they successfully win jobs, which makes it difficult for Australian companies to compete on a level playing field. So there have been consequences, and this is why we see now it is quite difficult for Australian businesses to compete—because of the history and the landscape that has been created as a consequence of unfair competition and a lack of regulation in the marketplace.

Again, I will wrap up my contribution there. As I said, I will continue to oppose this motion proposed by Mr Davis. It does nothing other than duplicate an existing process. It will do nothing other than encourage people to look to pseudo-moralistic stances or moralistic stances or irrelevant stances about deciding what is relevant for the Victorian community and economy—what is acceptable. Who defines what is acceptable on behalf of the Victorian people in regard to signing a memorandum of understanding as a gesture of goodwill to the People's Republic of China? Again, this motion to form a joint select committee does nothing, and I will state this just as I wrap up: it is disappointing that this debate has been framed along racist dog whistling and junk politics lines. I will leave my contribution there and oppose this motion.

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr Quilty, you will have to be brief. At 5.15 we have to quit debate.

**Mr QUILTY** (Northern Victoria) (17:13): Well, I will be brief. The Liberal Democrats believe in honest government. We are wary of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) because we are being asked to trust the Labor Party to sign us up to an agreement with the Chinese Communist Party. We do not really trust the Labor Party, and we do not trust the CCP at all. Both governments have earned the suspicion they are viewed with. Labor routinely manipulates Victorians, and recent events have shown they even manipulate other members of their own party. I encourage Labor members not to take these comments personally. The Liberal Democrats are naturally suspicious of all authoritarians.

However, the CCP is in an entirely different league. It is a brutal and authoritarian regime that routinely uses deception, propaganda and soft power to deliberately manipulate naive foreign governments. Despite this, the Chinese government is separate from the Chinese people. We have a lot to gain from

trading and engaging with China even if the government is untrustworthy, as the Chinese people have much to gain from trading with us. We are happy to enter into further trade agreements. A committee that would investigate agreements with foreign governments would provide additional transparency and would better allow Victorians to vet agreements with foreign powers.

If China wants to support Victorian infrastructure for the mutual benefit of all, then we would be happy to receive the assistance. However, there are more than a few questions to be asked. Both our own commonwealth government as well as the US Secretary of State have warned against the BRI on natural security grounds—

### **Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.**

#### **Statements on reports, papers and petitions**

#### **MEDICALLY SUPERVISED INJECTING ROOM REVIEW PANEL**

##### *Review of the Medically Supervised Injecting Room*

**Ms PATTEN** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:15): I am really pleased to speak on the *Review of the Medically Supervised Injecting Room*, which probably comes as no surprise to many of you in here, given my long interest in this. I must say that for many of us the announcement in this report for a second injecting room was more of a relief than a surprise. The report found that the North Richmond centre is becoming one of the busiest in the world. It is twice as busy as the Sydney centre, which really shocked me. It is now providing services for 4350 people, and that centre has seen people 120 000 times in 18 months. Let us not forget that when this centre opened we were and we still are riding a wave of heroin, not just in Victoria but globally.

The statistics are coming out of the European drug statistic agency, which is one of the most reliable in the world. It said in their drug market report just last year that international opium production has been at an all-time high. Victorian heroin deaths have increased by 225 per cent since 2012—225 per cent. So while this centre has been deemed controversial—and this report does not hold back—it is critical where it needs to be. In this report it shows that there is room for improvement; there are problems. But trends are our friends, and what we are seeing in this report is a trend down on ambulance call-outs, we are seeing a trend down on overdoses in North Richmond and we are seeing a trend up on people accessing treatment. Now, this has occurred since the new centre has been built, and this report, sadly, only really got to report on the first three or four months of the new centre, so I am very pleased that this report recommended an extra three years for the centre, because we do need more time for analysis and we do need more time to assess this.

Let us also remember for a minute that these are acute medical centres. The people who enter these centres are in acute medical ill health. Most of them have experienced homelessness or are experiencing homelessness. Most of them have mental health issues, most of them have overdosed numerous times before, 13 per cent of them have an Aboriginal background and almost all of them have a history of childhood trauma and abuse, so this is a cohort of people that we should not be shunning. We should care about them. We should care, and I am very pleased that we will be caring so much that will be opening another centre for more people like this. Because for some people in this chamber those lives do not matter, but for me they matter and for their families they matter. We know—and I have personally seen it—that if we can keep someone alive long enough, they will find treatment, they will come out the other end and they will be able to be reunited with their families.

If the Reason Party had anything to do with this, we would be opening five more, and the evidence is there—in fact the evidence has been there for 20 years. The ambulance call-outs show us that if we wanted to really address this, if we wanted to address the misuse of drugs and the sad, sad drug addiction of people with mental health issues, we would be opening centres in St Kilda, Dandenong, Brimbank and Geelong, to say the least, and you only have to look at the ambulance statistics that bear that out.

Now, there are lots on my wish list, but I would certainly like to see more centres. I could talk about this report for a long time. Some of the recommendations in this report are about doing things differently; they are about connecting with the community. I appreciate that for the community in North Richmond this has been tough, but it is getting better. Crime is changing there. The crime is not related to the centre, and I do not think we should always look at North Richmond through the prism of that centre. North Richmond is a space of its own, and I am very pleased that we are seeing a second centre. I commend this report. It has got some excellent work in it, and I look forward to talking about it at another time.

### CHANNEL 31

#### *Community petitions*

**Mr BARTON** (Eastern Metropolitan) (17:20): Last sitting week I tabled a document containing the signatures of almost 4000 people asking for support from our state and federal communications ministers for the renewal of Channel 31's broadcasting licence. These were collected through online petitions at Change.org and on my own website and represent a small section of a very concerned group of creative industry professionals and community individuals who are supporters and viewers of our last remaining community television station, Channel 31 (C31). I have written to our commonwealth minister for communications and asked him to renew the licence.

Recently the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Ros Spence, announced a broadcasting package of \$500 000 to enable multicultural outlets to continue to deliver high-quality news, entertainment and information while also increasing their engagement with readers, viewers and listeners. Sadly, from the end of this month they will have nowhere to broadcast and must compete for airtime with mainstream production houses. Channel 31, the local television station for Melbourne and Geelong, will be gone for good. It will be replaced with white noise.

There is no other use for this broadcast spectrum at this time. The axing of the licence for community television was announced in 2014 by then communications minister Malcolm Turnbull when the broadcast spectrum was needed for testing mainstream channels. The testing was completed years ago, and our two remaining channels in Melbourne and Adelaide are now broadcasting on extended licences, with this uncertainty hanging over their future for the last six years. This is the end of the line, but I see no sensible reason why it should be. Other than the licences there is no government ongoing funding for the channels, which rely on volunteers and community sponsors for income.

There is no reason why we would scrap a service that is still being used and enjoyed, is sustaining itself and is so obviously needed and valued by the community. C31 in Melbourne has helped launch the careers of countless media professionals, such as Rove, Hamish and Andy, Waleed Aly, Nazim Hussain and Corinne Grant, and has provided valuable experience for TV and film students and production professionals.

It really stings that we are about to lose this valuable community broadcasting service right in the middle of a pandemic that has proved how valuable it is to minority ethnic communities. During the COVID-19 pandemic this channel has been able to air content for local community groups who are no longer able to meet in person. Local television has been quick to respond to needs in their communities, streaming live masses over Easter and providing COVID-19 information in minority languages. Channel 44 Adelaide and C31 Melbourne supported cultural and religious groups affected by the current COVID-19 pandemic by providing over 40 hours of historic live-to-air TV broadcasts for their services. With 2.5 million Australians without access to the internet to watch online services, these broadcasts provided an essential service during Easter week and Ramadan and have continued through this extended period of social isolation.

Australia had five community channels in 2014, and when the Sydney and Brisbane stations closed mainstream testing was able to take place. In 2016 the licences for the remaining three were extended, and the Perth station has since closed. I am calling on our state government to intervene and to ask its

federal counterpart to extend these licences and give these communities certainty that local television and the many benefits and opportunities it brings has its place in Australia.

### ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

#### *Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture*

**Ms BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:24): This afternoon I would like to pick up where I left off a couple of weeks ago in relation to speaking on the *Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture*. There was a report produced by me and a number of other members—multiparty members—and released in February of this year. Now, the Nationals and the Liberals constructed a minority report that really holds some very sensible and very practical directions and recommendations that the farming community have been calling for.

We saw last sitting week the Minister for Agriculture come out with the government's response to the bulk of the committee report. Within that, the government—Minister Symes as the agriculture minister—accepted recommendation 5. Now, recommendation 5 very sensibly was about the one great sensible thing that came out of that report, the one recommendation that there was unity on. It entailed a new biosecurity offence, which included on-the-spot fines for those perpetrators who go on to a farm or go on to a livestock location and breach biosecurity measures or breach biosecurity plans. Now, that did include that plans had to be in place by the owner—the farmer, the livestock owner—and they were to be in line with the New South Wales government. The Nationals certainly in the New South Wales Parliament were the architects of that, whereby the New South Wales government updated their biosecurity act.

Now, the reason I raise this is on a number of fronts. First of all, just because the government has provided that acceptance of recommendation 5, that they endorse that recommendation, does not mean that the farmers are any safer today or last week than they were a year ago—over many years but certainly last year—when the Gippy Goat farm incident occurred and activists stormed onto the property in absolutely normal clothes. There were no biosecurity measures, and there was footage to prove that, so that occurred. Even though the minister has endorsed this recommendation, our farmers are no safer, so I am calling on the Minister for Agriculture and the Andrews government to implement and upgrade the Victorian Biosecurity Act to put in those measures. Those measures are very important. They need to have on-the-spot fines of approximately \$1000 per person, \$220 000 if you are the organiser—and there is certainly some great leverage, I guess, or not great but forceful leverage that some of those animal activist groups can come up with—and also \$440 000 if there is a corporation deemed to be responsible. So they need on-the-spot, immediate fines. We have seen cases like the Tyabb chicken farm, where a farmer was woken and his wife was woken in the early morning by 70 activists coming on farm and storming into the sheds, resulting in the death of 300 chickens. Now, not only is that poor for their animal welfare—and that is an absolute—but it also can be a source and a conduit for disease as well, costing more and more thousands as well as the emotional stress.

So I am putting the government on notice. It is important that this recommendation was accepted, but it is also timely that the government come, make those changes, do their homework and put this through the Parliament as soon as absolutely possible.

### WHITTLESEA CITY COUNCIL

#### *Municipal Monitor's Report on the Governance and Operations of the Whittlesea City Council*

**Mr QUILTY** (Northern Victoria) (17:28): I will be brief. This report describes the state of the Whittlesea council after a monitor was appointed in December 2019 following the council sacking of the CEO, disgraced former police chief Simon Overland. In the report we hear about a council struggling under the weight of factional infighting between Labor councillors. We hear about a power struggle for the position of mayor, merely for the accompanying \$100 000 salary, mayoral car and local prestige. Deputy Mayor Cr Joseph, a member of the old-guard faction had clearly expected to become the new mayor, and it was a shock to him when Emilia Lisa Sterjova was elected mayor with

the help of a non-Labor vote. This led to a spiral of verbal attacks, antagonism and confrontation at council meetings. This culminated in an intervention by the then Minister for Local Government and Labor powerbroker, the Honourable Adem Somyurek. Labor expelled Mayor Sterjova and then the local government minister began moves to dismiss Whittlesea council.

The message is clear: state Labor will sack councils for party-political reasons. The Honourable Adem Somyurek, as the local government minister, was the architect of this: the transfer of power away from local voters and into government custody. The Honourable Adem Somyurek was also the architect of single-member wards and several other reforms that were clearly intended to give the ALP a leg-up in local government elections.

We now know that this man ran a sophisticated political operation intended to bypass and subvert democratic safeguards. The evidence of corruption was strong enough that the Premier had no choice but to sack him from the portfolio and the government. This is just one example that supports the Liberal Democrats call for a stronger anti-corruption body. The Honourable Adem Somyurek was the architect of the Local Government Bill 2019, a bill that has compromised local government independence in the pursuit of furthering Labor Party interests. Surely the taint of corruption now permeates its legislation. We hear that everything this government does is scrutinised by the Premier and cabinet, so nothing dubious will slip through. This is the same Premier and government leader in this house—

**Ms Stitt:** On a point of order, President, I think Mr Quilty is straying into territory that is unwarranted and unwise. He may or may not be aware that there is a process that the executive of government go through in order to approve in principle bills that come before this house, so I would ask him to stick to the substance of the report and not make wild assertions.

**The PRESIDENT:** I would just call Mr Quilty back more to the report. He has been straying a bit. I will just let members know that there is not long left and I am trying to get a couple more people up. Mr Quilty, you promised to be brief, so over to you.

**Mr QUILTY:** These are the same Premier and government leader who had no idea of the industrial-scale branch stackings underway, so making them possibly the only people in this Parliament and maybe all of Victoria who were unaware of it. I am not sure—

**Ms Stitt:** On a point of order, President, in relation to Mr Quilty, he has completely disregarded your request that he come back to his statement on the report at hand. What he is suggesting is that this government has corrupted the legislative process, and I would ask you to ask him to withdraw that statement and return to his statement on the report.

**The PRESIDENT:** There is no point of order other than a little bit that indicated its irrelevance. So, Mr Quilty, over to you to be brief.

**Mr QUILTY:** Getting back to it.

**The PRESIDENT:** And relevant.

**Mr QUILTY:** Earlier this year the Liberal Democrats put forward a motion requesting proper resourcing for IBAC. Now more than ever the government must fulfil that request. I implore this house to revisit these decisions—the sacking of Whittlesea council, the introduction of single-member wards and the new Local Government Act 2020 itself—and to undo them before corruption, patronage and cronyism take further hold of our governance.

**ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE***Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture*

**Mr MEDDICK** (Western Victoria) (17:33): I rise to make a statement on the government's response to the *Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture*. You will recall I spoke against holding this inquiry, which was designed by the National Party to attack the whistleblowers who are active in documenting the suffering of animals in Victoria. How wrong was I. I must thank them for allowing us to have the opportunity to highlight the range of terrible animal cruelty that is routine in Victoria.

We heard about and were supplied video of the maceration of day-old chicks; gas chambers in all pig slaughterhouses, where every pig who enters that chamber screams and thrashes in desperate agony; the routine mutilations of piglets, lambs, goats, calves, chickens and turkeys without pain relief, and their prolonged and extreme confinement; the common failure of stunning methods that are seeing fully conscious pigs, chickens and ducks drowning to death in the scalding tank; the routine cruelty of killing animals using blunt-force trauma. We listened to accounts of violent and threatening behaviour towards activists by those in the industry as well as members of the public.

I thank the members of this house who attended this inquiry with an open mind and who were able to see for themselves the problems that occur for animals in agriculture. I thank them for listening to the experience of animal activists firsthand. I have a feeling that many committee members enjoyed meat-free meals following those hearings. We heard from a farmer that:

I am not in the habit of being cruel to animals, but I have neighbours who are a little bit doubtful ... I ... suggest to the department of ag they go for a little drive down the road and have a look.

Time and again we heard of cruelty to animals in their keeping, their transport and their slaughter. The terms of reference were to somehow suggest that activists pose a biosecurity risk to animal agriculture businesses, whereas what the evidence showed is the reality that animal agriculture poses a biosecurity risk to all of society, and doesn't society know all about that now. We have a shutdown globally for yet another zoonotic disease outbreak, as I foretold last May.

We note that the government accepts in principle a recommendation which would distinguish the difference between animal rescue and livestock theft. They support recommendations that improve biosecurity across the industry and recognise the need to more actively inform the community about standard practices in animal agriculture. Importantly, the government now supports the creation of an Australian commission for animal welfare at the commonwealth level, and I welcome that. The government now supports the end to chick maceration in the egg industry and the use of blunt force trauma on goats, pigs and cows. They now support the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 having more significant and effective penalties in order to reduce offending against animals. The government now supports the recommendation to look at the mandatory installation of CCTV in abattoirs, just as they do in England and just as the Animal Justice Party calls for. Most importantly, the government have reaffirmed their commitment to modernise the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, and I want to be clear that this commitment must involve ensuring that farm animals are also properly protected under animal protection laws, including duties of care and mandatory codes of practice.

In summary, an inquiry initiated by the lone National in this chamber has resulted in the government committing to Animal Justice Party policy. I will now ensure their commitments are enacted as soon as possible.

## ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

*Inquiry into Recycling and Waste Management*

**Mr HAYES** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:37): I wish to speak to the government's response to the Parliament's inquiry into waste and recycling management. I was deputy chair on this committee, with Mr Melhem as chair. I welcome the government's response to the inquiry. They have wholeheartedly embraced the direction of our report and supported in full or supported in principle all of the committee's recommendations. This is such an important inquiry at this time. We are in the midst of a recycling crisis and there is an immense loss of faith in the recycling system by the public. It is even more urgent now, with the restrictions brought about by the virus encouraging people to get more and more takeaway food, takeaway coffees—and all of that coming in plastic containers—and we see this going into the existing waste streams, some into recycling, some into general rubbish. I would say the system is broken. Hopefully more of this plastic is not at present going out into the sea.

But there were great things in the government's response. First and foremost, I would like to mention the government making waste and recycling an essential service—long overdue. The government is keen to take up the committee's suggestion in regard to the expansion of our recycling industry, and I quote:

... to make Victoria a leader in recycling innovation—creating new products from recycled materials like glass, plastic, organic waste, electronic waste, concrete, brick and rubber.

Great news. There is overall support for absolutely reducing waste to landfill. We wanted 100 per cent by 2030 and the government is aiming for 80 per cent, so that is good. And there is a fantastic response on burning rubbish—the waste-to-energy option. While recognising a role for waste to energy, Recycling Victoria will ensure that we reduce, re-use and recycle waste in the first place before we resort to energy recovery through burning. I think that is so important, because some were pushing just to send it all to burning, and that is good news that we are not going there without extracting valuable resources.

In the area of waste avoidance the government is supporting a national product stewardship scheme and supporting right-to-repair and local repair initiatives, including repair cafes. When it comes to packaging, though, the government's response is positive but does have weak points. It supports national legislation where appropriate. The committee took a firm line on packaging. The report called on the government to require major supermarkets to reduce their use of single-use plastics. The government talked about working collaboratively with Coles and Woolworths, and the government also says it will not support this measure:

... without evidence that the costs to industry and government of such an approach are outweighed by the benefits. Voluntary actions can deliver significant progress in reforming a practice ...

Well, I say—and we have all seen examples—self-regulation rarely works. The supermarkets would not give evidence or testify at the committee, so I do not know how fair dinkum they really are. Are they making the mistake of putting short-term inconvenience or even profit before care for the environment? That would be a big mistake. The government paying companies to re-use containers, as the response mentioned, is unsustainable. However, the introduction of a container deposit scheme is welcome and long overdue. All the responses on municipal waste reduction were positive and welcome, but the rollout for glass and food organics and garden organics is too slow. I maintain that, as I said, we are in a waste stream emergency right now.

Our committee's recommendations were big on a statewide recycling education program. The government says that has already started and is ongoing, but I have not seen or heard much of it at all yet. It is very important that such a campaign—and it says this in the report—should be similar to continuing public education campaigns, such as the Transport Accident Commission and WorkSafe campaigns. Those campaigns really do capture public attention. All in all, despite these issues, it is a fantastic response by the government to our report.

**Business of the house****NOTICES OF MOTION**

**Ms SYMES** (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (17:42): I move:

That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 268 to 276, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Motions****PLANNING SCHEME AMENDMENTS**

**Ms SYMES** (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (17:43): I move:

That:

- (1) pursuant to section 46D(1)(c) of the Planning and Environment Act 1987, amendment 123 to the Upper Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges regional strategy plan be approved; and
- (2) pursuant to section 46AH of the Planning and Environment Act 1987, Whittlesea planning scheme amendment C203 be ratified.

I will be speaking to notice of motion 330 today in my capacity representing the Minister for Planning in the other house. This is in relation to some amendments, and they are consistent with state policy and local green wedge policy. The amendments have been through a proper process, including public consultation, and I am advised that the relevant councils are indeed extremely supportive of these proposals.

Commencing with the Whittlesea City Council amendment, which is C203, the subject site is located at 280 Bridge Inn Road, Mernda, and straddles the urban growth boundary. In summary, the amendment seeks to subdivide the land for a vineyard, winery and function centre as well as a portion of residential development within the urban growth boundary (UGB) and to gift a parcel of land to the council known as Quarry Hills Regional Parkland. The site in its entirety is 109 hectares and currently contains one homestead. Fifteen hectares of this is to be rezoned to general residential zone 1 and is inside the UGB and directly adjacent to existing residential areas; 64.1 hectares of land will be transferred to the council for the purposes of adding it to the wider Quarry Hills Regional Parkland to be utilised as public open space. The remaining 30 hectares, which sit outside the UGB, will be converted to a vineyard and a winery. It is the current owners of the property that are proposing this redevelopment and indeed will create an opportunity for job creation in that area.

The extension of the park, it is good to know, is supported by and consistent with the *Whittlesea Green Wedge Management Plan* of 2017. The *Whittlesea Green Wedge Management Plan* seeks to protect and facilitate the continuation of agricultural uses at the urban periphery, and as such the use of the land for a vineyard and winery is certainly consistent with this proposal. Presently the landowner, it should be known, could actually seek to develop the land within the urban growth zone through a regular permit process, and the landowner could currently seek a permit through the council to develop and use the land as a vineyard and winery et cetera. However, in gifting the large parcel of land it means that the landowner no longer meets the requirements for subdivision under the green wedge policy.

It is the council's view that the gifting of the parkland results in a net community benefit in a proposal that is otherwise consistent with state and local policy. The amendment does not open up the potential for further development or urban development. Any expansion of or changes to the proposal would be required to come back for the ratification of both houses of Parliament. The amendment maintains Labor's election commitment to protect the green wedge by preventing residential development and provide greater open spaces. It is certainly a win-win amendment for council, for housing availability,

for an active community, for those who appreciate wine and certainly for those who would be looking to have a local job in a local area.

In relation to the Yarra Ranges regional strategy plan there is an amendment C123, and it proposes changes to the Yarra Ranges regional strategy plan and is required to be consistent with amendment C159, which allows for a more diverse set of uses for eight particular properties in Launching Place and Wesburn. During the amendment process an anomaly was discovered: a local policy had been inadvertently deleted and is required to be reinstated, and that is 15.03, extractive industries. Amendment C159 proposes to rezone the eight existing properties from rural living zone to a combination of neighbourhood residential zones, low-density residential zones and township zones. This amendment will allow sensible retail use such as real estate offices or doctors clinics and the types of retail facilities that communities expect these days in their communities.

Both of these proposed changes are quite minor. They were put forward out of more extensive work undertaken by the particular councils to clean up local planning policy frameworks. It is a good outcome for these communities. It is supported by local member Cindy McLeish in regard to the Yarra Ranges one and local member Danielle Green in relation to the Whittlesea one. In relation to Launching Place, it will see the properties able to adapt to meet the current needs of those residents and that community.

So this is pretty minor. I know that we do not often do these types of things. It has been a while since we have done one, so I appreciate the opportunity to be involved and put this motion to the house seeking agreement from the chamber.

**Mr DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (17:48): I want to make a few points about this motion and some about the process that is involved here. This is notice of motion 330, which is:

That:

- (1) pursuant to section 46D(1)(c) of the Planning and Environment Act 1987, amendment 123 to the Upper Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges regional strategy plan be approved; and
- (2) pursuant to section 46AH of the Planning and Environment Act 1987, Whittlesea planning scheme amendment C203 be ratified.

If I go backwards, the ratification process came about when the urban growth boundary and the green wedge changes were made in 2003. Changes to those require a ratification of both houses. But I might say that this process of springing it on the chamber is entirely unsatisfactory. There is actually a history of this, but it has continued on this occasion. A motion is put on Tuesday; there is a briefing at 2 o'clock on Tuesday afternoon—

**Ms Symes:** I told you on Monday.

**Mr DAVIS:** You did tell me Monday, but as I think you now understand, these planning things are relatively complex and take a little while to get your head around to actually understand the impact of them on a local area. It takes a little while longer still to actually consult with the local community. So, with respect, I do not think from Monday through to now is very long indeed—it is about 48 hours—and the briefing was yesterday at 2. I am thankful to the minister for the briefing, but I do not think this is an ideal process. I just want to get on the record that I think, if you are going to do a ratification of this type of change, you do need to give more notice.

These amendments have been kicking around, it turns out—I was completely unaware of them until Monday—for a number of years. Now, there is no reason why they could not have been put on the notice paper last sitting week and a proper briefing arranged in a timely way and people actually could have talked to the local communities. Tim Smith, our shadow, has actually done quite a deal of work consulting with people locally in the short period of time that was provided. The conclusion is that on this occasion we will not oppose these matters. We do have reservations about one of them, and I will

come to that in a moment, but on balance we do not want to oppose it. The one that is occurring in the Upper Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges regional strategy, which is in the Yarra Ranges shire, does appear to be a genuine tidy-up on an error that has occurred. We concede that, and in this circumstance I think it is reasonable to make the change.

I should just say that that strategy is a very old one. It goes back to the 1970s and Dick Hamer, who we mentioned in the chamber before. His government drove some of these protections that were put on the Yarra Ranges at the time, and this planning amendment goes back to that time, those planning changes, and I think that is something that many of us have a high regard for. But this is a genuine tidy-up, and in that sense our information is, not just through the briefing but through other mechanisms, that this is a legitimate step that is being taken.

The Whittlesea planning scheme amendment C203 is a more obscure beast in the sense that there is a lot more at stake. There are a series of swaps and changes on the edge of the urban growth boundary and impacting green wedge land. That always makes me very cautious. Some of us will remember the process by which that wedge was put in place, again a Hamer government initiative originally but later advanced under the 2003 changes and the ratification processes that were put in place after that.

There are still a lot of questions around the edges of those boundaries. One of the things we did at the briefing was to ask for the relevant smart growth committee documents that related to that urban growth boundary change that was made in 2003. Those documents have never been released. The smart growth committees were a series of committees that met around the edge of the city. The documents that they received from the public and elsewhere and the decisions and the recommendations that they made around the snaky path and the jagged edges of the urban growth boundary were all bundled up and hidden by the then Bracks government and have never been released to this day. One of the first questions I asked and will always ask on one of these edge-of-the-city changes is: who benefits? Why is the boundary where it is and why do we want to tamper with the boundary? Who will get the golden lolly, the windfall, on this particular change?

I always say let us be quite clear about what is going on here. We need to have a better process for this ratification process, and I talked to Mr Hayes about this yesterday at some length. It might be not on this occasion but on a future occasion if a more substantial one of these comes forward that we may well look to refer this to the relevant Environment and Planning Committee for a longer and more detailed examination to actually get to the bottom of precisely what has gone on here.

The City of Whittlesea is a place that has got lots of history. Mr Quilty made some points about this just a few moments ago, and Mr Ondarchie also has views about the City of Whittlesea and what has gone on up there. We have got a council that has been sacked for a range of misbehaviours. They are recommending this change be made. We have got Mr Overland, who was the CEO there for a while. He was dismissed but later has been in and out of royal commissions. I am told he was lobbying actively for this particular change here.

Now, again it does appear on balance—and I am going to be quite clear here—that this change is reasonable and probably right. But it is very hard to make that set of decisions in 48 hours, with the City of Whittlesea on the edge of the city, no smart growth committee reports—still not released—Mr Overland actively lobbying for it and the Whittlesea council, now dismissed, having supported the change. It does not sound ideal to me.

Having said that, the inquiries that we have made locally have been such that we will not oppose this because we think that there probably is some merit in the change that is being made. The officers at the council may well have been heading in the right direction on this, and in that sense we will not oppose it. But I put on record clearly—and this is a conversation Mr Hayes and I had yesterday—that if there are more substantial ratifications that require deeper investigation, the chamber should not be afraid to refer it for a short, sharp, detailed committee examination to take evidence, to bring witnesses in and to understand what is actually happening in this circumstance. As I say, I do not believe that a

48-hour process is sufficient, and certainly it is really just slightly over a 24-hour process since the detailed information has been available. So I make those two points: we will not oppose it, but we are troubled by the process that has been indulged in here by the government.

**Mr HAYES** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:56): I thank the minister, and thanks, Mr Davis, for your contribution. I am very concerned that these planning scheme amendments are being rushed through the house with undue haste. I have not had a briefing on them, and I suspect that most members simply have not had time to get their head around the detail here. We have not had time to consult, as Mr Davis said, with potentially interested members of the public or people concerned about green wedge intrusions. It may be that it turns out that these amendments are okay, but I am not happy with the way they are being rushed through. We simply do not know. I did speak to Mr Davis earlier, and I did think that we may have been heading this off to an inquiry. I would have been happy with that.

**Mr Davis:** In this circumstance it might have been premature, and I have not had a chance to consult with the crossbench on this yet.

**Mr HAYES:** Sure. However, in the limited time I have had to consult with people who know something about the Whittlesea amendment it has been put to me that neither the winery, the vineyard nor the function centre should be permitted on this future regional parkland. Now, the information that was supplied to me tells me that this land was set aside for parkland as an offset for Whittlesea's share of the 43 600 square metres of green wedge land that was more or less grabbed by the Brumby government back in 2010. That is what I am told. This was a release of farmland from the green wedge requirements. However, no encroachment into the current green wedge should be allowed.

There is always pressure on these green wedges, and I have heard more and more stories of green wedges not only here but round in Cranbourne—and there is the Yarra Valley instance talked about too—where there is still intense developer pressure and developer expectation that Melbourne's sprawl outwards will continue. Mr Davis talks about the golden egg. There are huge profits to be made and, as we have seen, a lot of undue influence by developers on councils in this area and also on government and opposition members and candidates. I brought this up in the anti-corruption bill motion that I tried to get through, unsuccessfully.

Most of this property that we are talking about is within the Whittlesea green wedge, near its southern end. This proposal seeks to facilitate the subdivision of the site into three lots, including one lot inside the urban growth boundary of 15 hectares and two lots located outside the urban growth boundary—30 and 64 hectares respectively. The proposed lots of 15, 30 and 64 hectares respectively do not meet the minimum subdivision requirements of 80 hectares under the green wedge zone. The 30-hectare lot is proposed for a vineyard, winery and function centre. The 64-hectare lot will be transferred into the Quarry Hills park, a significantly sized park which contains all this green wedge land in Whittlesea. The Quarry Hills bushland park master plan shows that this property, apart from the 15-hectare eastern portion, as being within the bounds of the future park. The master plan document lists the property as one of the key sites for early inclusion into the park footprint. So why is the use of this winery, vineyard and function centre being allowed on land that has been clearly designated for the regional park?

Now, Mr Davis raises a lot of information that I have not heard so much about before, but given the fact that it was supported by the Whittlesea council back in the days when Mr Overland was the chief executive and there was a lot of controversy about decisions made there and improper influence in the Whittlesea council—and maybe some improper influence, I would say, in the way that council was removed—I still think that this is a decision that should be properly reviewed by this house, which is the proper function of the Legislative Council. So in the absence of any motion to refer it to a committee, or the Environment and Planning Committee, I will oppose these amendments going through.

**House divided on motion:***Ayes, 34*

Atkinson, Mr	Grimley, Mr	Patten, Ms
Bach, Dr	Kieu, Dr	Pulford, Ms
Barton, Mr	Leane, Mr	Rich-Phillips, Mr
Bath, Ms	Lovell, Ms	Shing, Ms
Bourman, Mr	Maxwell, Ms	Stitt, Ms
Crozier, Ms	McArthur, Mrs	Symes, Ms
Davis, Mr	Meddick, Mr	Tarlamis, Mr
Elasmar, Mr	Melhem, Mr	Taylor, Ms
Erdogan, Mr	Mikakos, Ms	Terpstra, Ms
Finn, Mr	O'Donohue, Mr	Tierney, Ms
Garrett, Ms	Ondarchie, Mr	Vaghela, Ms
Gepp, Mr		

*Noes, 4*

Cumming, Dr	Limbrick, Mr	Quilty, Mr
Hayes, Mr		

**Motion agreed to.****Adjournment**

**Ms SYMES** (Northern Victoria—Leader of the Government, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Resources) (18:10): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

**GRAND BOULEVARD—HUME HIGHWAY, CRAIGIEBURN**

**Mr ONDARCHIE** (Northern Metropolitan) (18:11): My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads. It concerns the intersection of Grand Boulevard and Hume Highway in Craigieburn. My office has recently conducted a community survey in Craigieburn, and I am very grateful to those residents who have responded. Every morning Craigieburn residents—

*Members interjecting.*

**Ms Pulford:** On a point of order, President, I cannot hear Mr Ondarchie and I cannot imagine Mr Ondarchie can hear Mr Ondarchie. So could we have a little order in the house, please?

**The PRESIDENT:** I uphold the point of order, and I call Mr Ondarchie from the start.

**Mr ONDARCHIE:** Thank you, President, and good evening. My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads, and it concerns the intersection of Grand Boulevard and Hume Highway in Craigieburn. My office has recently conducted a community survey in Craigieburn, and I am very grateful to those residents who responded to my survey. Every morning Craigieburn residents experience choked roads and frustration as traffic is banked up. Residents have reported to me that the intersection is congested and the bank-up of traffic makes it very difficult for those exiting Mount Ridley Road onto Grand Boulevard and then onto Hume Highway. Residents have told me it is a nightmare trying to get to work on time in the morning peak hour, and some of them, frustratingly, are late as a result. The action I seek from the minister is to talk to VicRoads about investigating the light sequencing at the intersection of Grand Boulevard and Hume Highway in Craigieburn to increase the traffic flow and provide a much safer passage for road users.

**GOULBURN VALLEY HEALTH**

**Ms LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:12): My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and it relates to the redevelopment of Goulburn Valley Health (GV Health) in Shepparton. The action that I seek from the minister is that she provides a funding commitment to complete the entire

redevelopment of Goulburn Valley Health in line with the hospital's master plan currently with the Department of Health and Human Services.

Members in this place will be aware of my continued advocacy for the Andrews Labor government to provide a funding commitment to complete the redevelopment of Goulburn Valley Health. I have previously called for a funding commitment from the minister to ensure a continuous build from the completion of stage 1 to the commencement of stage 2 of the redevelopment. I have highlighted the need for the establishment of a residential mother and baby unit as part of the hospital's redevelopment, citing the various statistical data that reinforces the importance of such a facility within the GV Health patient demographic. I have advocated the need for expanded mental health services at GV Health, seeking assurances from the relevant minister that the redevelopment will include a much-needed integrated mental health facility.

I continue to advocate for Goulburn Valley Health because all that the people in the Goulburn Valley seem to get from this minister is continued silence, no further funding commitments and a refusal to release the hospital's master plan. It has been over two years since the GV Health master plan was reviewed by the Department of Health and Human Services, yet we are still to see the results of the review or the master plan itself. The most recent state budget, in May 2019, revealed that stage 1 of the GV Health redevelopment was at that time six months behind schedule, with completion due in June 2021. There is a growing unrest in the local community regarding funding to complete Goulburn Valley Health's redevelopment, and the minister's continued silence has done nothing to allay fears that they are going to be left with half a hospital.

This uncertainty is exacerbated by the minister's repeated refusal to release for public scrutiny the hospital's updated master plan, currently hidden within the bureaucracy of the Department of Health and Human Services. It is now imperative that stage 2 deliver the entire remaining redevelopment and not be broken down to only some components. It is way beyond time for the minister to stand up for the Goulburn Valley community and commit funding to complete the entire redevelopment of Goulburn Valley Health. The action that I seek from the minister is that she provide a funding commitment to complete the entire redevelopment of Goulburn Valley Health in line with the hospital's master plan currently with the department of health.

#### **COUNTRY FIRE AUTHORITY BEECHWORTH BRIGADE**

**Ms MAXWELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:15): My matter is for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. This is the Parliament's last sitting week before the establishment on 1 July of Fire Rescue Victoria and the CFA's accompanying reconfiguration. I have previously expressed my unease a number of times here about those impending changes.

Along related lines, I want this evening to raise various matters that are of great concern to a number of members of the Beechworth CFA, which is one of the CFA brigades in my electorate. I will not get to anything like all of those concerns in the limited time available to me this evening unfortunately, but at least I will start by saying that one of the biggest problems there is and has been is the brigade's lack of appropriate firefighting equipment. Currently it continues to possess only three firefighting vehicles, all of which are more than a decade old. In keeping with the fact that Beechworth is situated on hilly countryside and between pine and eucalyptus forests, the vehicles are also not particularly well suited to the local terrain and enjoy only very limited access to most of the town's many high fire risk areas. None is even capable of accessing the critical area around the local gorge, for instance, and two privately owned vehicles, one of which is actually 40 years old, must be used for these and related purposes instead.

Local members are also saying to me that, like in many other brigades, the recent and imminent changes to Victoria's firefighting model are contributing to growing internal disputation and a sidelining of what should be highly valued corporate knowledge and experience. They also consider that these changes are weakening morale and minimising the opportunity for feedback and meaningful input into decisions from volunteers. Whilst I obviously hope the fire services restructure on 1 July

will not accentuate these problems, I am not especially confident at this point that this will be the case. It is also worth noting that Beechworth will apparently be the last station to be amalgamated under the new structure, and I am advised that this will not happen until around mid-2021. I am therefore not sure what, if anything, will substantively change there in the intervening period to address the current difficulties.

Given all of this, the action I seek from the minister is that she accept an invitation to join me, as long as it is safe in a COVID context to do so, in a visit to the Beechworth fire station to meet with local firefighters and talk with them directly about their many needs and concerns.

### COVID-19

**Dr BACH** (Eastern Metropolitan) (18:18): My adjournment matter today is for the Minister for Education in the other place, and the action I seek is for the minister to share with the Parliament all feedback provided by teachers and other stakeholders during his department's current consultation regarding the lessons learned through the needlessly protracted period of online learning. This year has seen an unprecedented change in education. Our fantastic teachers have risen to the challenge, delivering lessons online unencumbered by Spring Street busybodies who expect them to be experts on everything, as faddish government-mandated programs abound in our schools. Now kids are back in the classroom we should get off teachers' backs and let them do what they do best. To inform this change, I ask the minister to require the department to share the entirety of the feedback received from teachers and other stakeholders during consultation rather than just the mooted summary report.

### LIQUOR LICENSING

**Mr LIMBRICK** (South Eastern Metropolitan) (18:19): My adjournment debate item is directed to the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. In response to coronavirus we have seen changes in nearly all reaches of society. Life as we know it has changed: the things that we love like sports and social gatherings came to a halt, workplaces closed their doors and thousands locked themselves inside. Although it sounds like the start of the apocalypse, it is not all bad news. In fact it has been a time to adapt, to overcome and to innovate. Some of the biggest changes have taken place in the hospitality industry, and many of these changes and practices are likely here to stay. When we go out to a restaurant we often enjoy our meal with a glass of wine or beer, and it is evident that this fact would not change even with the shift to takeaway meals. I was extremely pleased to see the government deregulate the sale of takeaway liquor from licensed venues. We have set a new precedent in allowing bars and restaurants to provide takeaway alcohol with the purchase of a meal, and there is no reason why it cannot remain this way.

For small businesses, the opportunity to sell alcohol means a little extra profit, which is essential in helping them through this pandemic. For customers, it is also a new convenience and will encourage buying takeaway meals from already licensed restaurants. If an individual can walk into a bottle shop, purchase a bottle of wine and then head round the corner and pick up dinner from a restaurant, there is no reason the products cannot come from the same location. The risks are no different; the individual is no more likely to drink and drive, they are no more likely to binge drink and they are no more likely to engage in any alcohol-related issue than if the products were purchased from two separate businesses.

This also opens up the doors to a new type of take-out service. We already have a variety of food delivery services, such as Uber Eats, as well as services which deliver alcohol to our door. Is there really a difference if they come from the same venue? I think not. My request to the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation is: will you ensure that all licensed Victorian restaurants can continue to provide takeaway alcohol with meals?

**WESTERN METROPOLITAN REGION POLICE RESOURCES**

**Mr FINN** (Western Metropolitan) (18:21): I wish to raise a matter this evening for the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. In doing so, I express my very deep sadness at the passing of Solomone Taufeulungaki, a 15-year-old, in Brimbank last night. It was a tragic case, and I would like to offer my most sincere condolences to his family, to his friends and to his immediate community. An incident like this is something that nobody ever wants to see. One would hope that something positive will come out of it, although at this point you would have to wonder what could. I would like to offer my condolences to his mum and his dad and to his nine siblings and extended family.

I do not wish to comment on the case itself because of course charges have been laid this afternoon and it would be something most improper if I were to comment on that—that is a matter for the courts—but what it does tell us is that gang violence is still alive and well in Melbourne’s west. Now, I have been talking about this now for I think about six years—six, maybe seven years. I have seen some dreadful cases of gang violence, and I have seen some truly despicable acts as a result of this gang violence. I suspect that it may have fallen off the radar just a tad, and I think it is about time it went back on the radar. What I am asking the minister to do tonight is to ensure that the police, in the western suburbs in particular, are fully equipped—that they have the resources and the manpower and the ability to fight this scourge on our streets.

It is something that is a threat to every young person. I mean, I have got teenage daughters and I have got an older daughter as well and a teenage son, and I do not want to see them caught up in something like this. I do not want to see anybody caught up in anything like this. So I ask the minister as a matter of priority to provide the resources necessary for the local police in the west of Melbourne to ensure that these gangs are stopped in their tracks, to ensure that our young people—and indeed our older people—are safe on the streets again.

**ROWVILLE RAIL LINE**

**Mr BARTON** (Eastern Metropolitan) (18:24): The matter I raise tonight is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. I ask the minister for an update on the progress of the planning and design works for the Rowville public transport extension. In April 2018 the Labor government announced \$3 million for a 12-month design and planning project for a train or rail extension between Caulfield and Rowville. The 2018–19 federal budget also promised \$475 million over a five-year period towards construction of a heavy rail line to service Monash. When pressed on the project in July last year, the minister’s office said the Rowville project was now tied to the location of the Monash station on the Suburban Rail Loop. We wait patiently for news of this station’s final location.

However, it has been two years since project funding was announced and some 60 years since this much-needed link in our public transport was first floated. It is high time that people along the proposed route had some news. Commuters in the eastern suburbs are car captives. The public transport offerings to move between these areas are minimal, which contributes significantly to increasing congestion on our freeways and our roads. The businesses along the proposed extension in Knox and Monash generate almost \$27 billion to our state and national economy. These business communities are expanding rapidly, offering jobs, apprenticeships and educational opportunities to local residents and those travelling from new suburbs further out. So I ask the minister to release the findings of the planning and design works through to Rowville and to release the time line for construction to begin.

**VICTORIA POLICE FIREARMS**

**Mrs McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (18:25): My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. In February last year the Labor government announced that \$25 million from the taxpayers purse would be spent on 600 new semiautomatic long-armed rifles for use by the Victoria Police operations response unit. This works out to be approximately \$41 000 per firearm. I have done a bit of research, and I have found that the Smith & Wesson Military and Police

Sport II, which is a .223-calibre centre-fire semiautomatic rifle capable of taking a 30-round magazine, apparently the most likely candidate for the purchase on the taxpayers' behalf, costs just \$1099 from Cleaver Firearms in Queensland. These are really quite cheap mass-produced items. You can go and buy them off the shelf if you like. I am no gun expert; however, I presume that, like most other items, when ordered in bulk they will cost even less.

The National Shooting Council wrote to the minister on 2 December last year asking the minister to clarify where the rest of the money is being spent. In the minister's response she informed the NSC that the remainder of the \$25 million was spent on ancillary equipment, including optical sighting systems, tactical lights, slings and carry cases, and the rest on specialist user training, organisation-wide awareness training and firearm part replacements. The Labor government appears always willing to shove innumerable zeros behind any announced government expenditure to further deprive future generations of taxpayers of important infrastructure and government services. However, this particular expenditure cannot go unexplained. The numbers simply do not stack up. Even if you included all the expensive ancillary equipment, it would be difficult to envisage each firearm costing more than \$6000, given the \$1099 estimated unit cost. Even if we are being generous and say that each heavily equipped rifle costs \$10 000, where did the remaining \$19 million go? Is the \$19 million for training programs? The minister's explanation was patently absurd. The action I seek is for the minister to provide Victorian taxpayers with an in-depth breakdown of costs for the \$25 million expenditure on 600 rifles.

#### HORSE-DRAWN VEHICLES

**Mr MEDDICK** (Western Victoria) (18:28): My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads, and the action I seek is for her to finally take horse-drawn carriages off Melbourne city streets. Because of this antiquated non-industry, the complaints books at Melbourne City Council, VicRoads and Victoria Police are overflowing with reports of harassment, illegal trading and touting, constant disregard for traffic laws and even assault. Their violation of laws surrounding where they can and cannot be is also routine, as is their highly dangerous but routine practice of illegal U-turns in front of traffic, including taxis and trams, which has resulted in distressing collisions, with the horses coming off second best, or even delaying emergency services vehicles—all this on top of working their horses in excess of agreed heat limits. Horses and cars on busy city streets do not mix. It is that simple. The lives of horses should be uppermost in our minds, not the livelihoods of those who put them at risk. The public wants them gone, the council wants them gone and now it is up to the minister to make the call. I am calling on her to make the right decision.

#### COMMUNITY SPORT

**Ms BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (18:30): My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Premier, and it relates to his announcement recently about allowing community sport to resume contact training on 13 July and competitions to start in full on 20 July. The action I seek from the Premier is to allow spectators to return to our community sporting competitions and allow canteens to open in regional Victoria, and particularly in my patch of Eastern Victoria Region.

Community sport, as we all know, forms the very heart of the fabric of our small towns and our communities. In my home patch of Gippsland our clubs are certainly the heart and soul of our towns—and I mean all clubs, from soccer to netball, football and hockey, and the list goes on. They are an important part that contributes to the interweaving of health, mental health, wellbeing and connectedness. For local sport to occur, though, and for clubs to be sustainable in this very challenging COVID environment, we need to have spectators back on the ground—or around the grounds—and we need to also have canteens open. Without family and friends and spectators and without canteen sales, the clubs will really struggle financially to meet all of their costs.

Many clubs in my patch have said that they need to have somewhere between 350 and 500 people to make a game day financially viable. By the very nature of our clubs, quite often in sport you can practise social distancing. There can be space around the grounds and around the courts. Supporters often sit in their cars or stand quite a way from the fence, and we know that wet and windy weather

occurs in Gippsland more than in most places. Our canteen volunteers can certainly still manage sales and physical distancing. They really are another form of takeaway premises, which operate normally now. The Andrews government must also trust the community to undertake the required physical, social and hygienic distancing.

By way of example, 15 of our netball and football clubs across Victoria have already pulled the pin, citing financial strain. Others are keen to play this modified season, but there has been a lack of detail in relation to how crowds and spectators can occur—and canteens. The greatest cost to football and netball clubs are umpires' fees, which are set at approximately \$1000 annually. That is an AFL charge which will not change. So the importance in relation to the cash-strapped clubs is that they have lost sponsorship so far, they have lost revenue, they have lost membership and they have lost canteen and bar sales, and some will not survive. So I ask the Premier to really provide some specific times in which spectators can again attend games from 20 July and to also enable canteens to open so that these great communities can fund these really important sporting events.

### COVID-19

**Mr QUILTY** (Northern Victoria) (18:33): My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Victoria is a fine state. More specifically, Victoria is a state that loves to issue fines. In fact Victoria Police have issued 6000 fines to Victorians for doing things as innocent as going outside. Victoria has issued more COVID fines than any other state. In fact Victoria has issued more COVID fines than every other state combined. Overall, Australian governments have issued more fines than the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19. Are Victorians safer for it? Victoria has suffered from more COVID cases than any other state except for New South Wales, and that is only because New South Wales suffered additional infections due to the *Ruby Princess* affair. The Northern Territory has only issued a mere 50 fines and Tasmania and the ACT have not issued any, yet these three states have had the fewest COVID cases across the nation.

All of this suggests that COVID restrictions did not have to be heavy handed and that COVID fines are little more than a revenue-raising measure. We never needed police patrols and bombshell fines. The Andrews government chose police and punishments when simply asking Victorians to act safely would have been enough. I call on the police minister to withdraw every COVID-related fine that Victoria Police have issued and to apologise to Victorians for the heavy-handed approach this government took in implementing the COVID-19 response.

In future I encourage the government to work with Victorians, not against them. For anyone who has received a COVID fine, I strongly encourage you to request a review through the Fines Victoria website. These fines are unnecessary, and there is a strong chance your fine will be overturned. The Liberal Democrats do not see the Victorian public as naughty children that need a firm hand; we see Victorians as thinking adults that are open to reason.

### CHILD PROTECTION

**Mr GRIMLEY** (Western Victoria) (18:35): My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Attorney-General and is about the need for child sex offenders to feel the full force of the law. Recently I was impressed to hear that the federal Labor Party had defied its national platform and supported a government bill that introduces mandatory minimum sentences for the most serious child sex offences. The federal opposition leader went on to say that his party will assist in any way possible to stop the crime. Under the government's legislation recidivist child sex offenders would also face minimum sentences from one to four years. While Labor's national platform states that the party opposes mandatory sentencing, opposition legal affairs spokesperson Mark Dreyfus said on Wednesday that there was a lot that this bill gets right.

The bill also included a new maximum penalty for child sex offenders of life imprisonment and a presumption against bail to keep offenders in custody while they face trial. While the legislation applies to commonwealth offences, many other sexual crimes—such as sexual assault and the

penetration of a minor—fall under the jurisdiction of state government. Of course we have seen similar moves by the Victorian Labor Party to depart from its opposition to mandatory sentencing in order to protect emergency services workers. The Andrews government has proven that it is capable of departing from party policy in order to meet public expectation.

I was disgusted to read that 39 per cent of convicted commonwealth child sex offenders did not spend a single day in prison last financial year. This statistic is as shocking as the statistic that I raised in an adjournment matter last sitting week about the reality that in 2017–18 only 51 per cent of people sentenced for sexual penetration of a child aged 12 to 16 were given a term of imprisonment. This is simply sickening and out of step with public expectation. Therefore the action that I seek is for the Attorney-General to explain why the state government does not mirror federal Labor's approach and impose mandatory sentencing for sexual crimes against children.

### DEFENCE SITE, MARIBYRNONG

**Dr CUMMING** (Western Metropolitan) (18:37): My adjournment is to the Minister for Planning in the other place, and the action that I seek is for the minister to inform the community when the redevelopment of the defence site Maribyrnong will finally recommence. The defence site Maribyrnong is a 127-hectare parcel of land in Maribyrnong owned by the commonwealth. It is 10 kilometres from Melbourne's CBD and has 3 kilometres of frontage onto the Maribyrnong River. From 1908 until 1994 it was a major Australian base manufacturing and testing site of explosive mine detonators and hand grenades and a research facility. As a result the site is contaminated with highly toxic materials and requires extensive remediation—not unusual for the west. For a sense of perspective, the land is slightly larger than nearby Seddon. According to the 2016 census, Seddon has a population of over 5000 people, 2355 private homes and very few green public spaces due to its density.

There is a shortage of family housing and public open space in the inner west, and this land has been fenced off from the community since 2002. Realising the potential back then, I continually lobbied for its redevelopment, highlighting the need for sustainable infrastructure, including new parks, community centres, sporting facilities and public transport. Finally, in 2017 the Liberal federal government acted and the Maribyrnong City Council was visited by the then defence minister, Marise Payne. Marise Payne unveiled a temporary memorial dedicated to Sandy the Light Horse and the Australian Light Horse Brigade. The plan was for the lasting memorial to be positioned on the redevelopment once it had been finished. A joint project was launched between the Victorian Planning Authority, Maribyrnong City Council and the Department of Defence.

Phase 1, community engagement, was completed. However, there has been no update on the Victorian Planning Authority website since 2018—that is, two years ago. Today only a small section of the land has been cleaned up. It appears that the project has been stalled by the state government, and the community wants to know what the hold-up is. In these challenging times when people need homes and jobs more than ever, why is the site not a priority of this state? What is the hold-up? My community is concerned that this project has been abandoned by the state.

### RESPONSES

**Ms PULFORD** (Western Victoria—Minister for Roads, Minister for Road Safety and the TAC, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (18:40): I have adjournment matters raised this evening by 13 members; for 11 of those I will seek a response from the relevant ministers. Mr Ondarchie would like me to speak with the Department of Transport about a set of lights at an intersection in Craigieburn, and I am happy to undertake to do that. Mr Meddick is keen to see a change to the rules for horse-drawn carriages. Mr Meddick and I will discuss that offline.

Also, there are two written responses to adjournment matters this evening.

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

**House adjourned 6.41 pm.**

**Written adjournment responses**

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

**Wednesday, 17 June 2020**

**FIREARM AND AMMUNITION SALES**

**In reply to Mrs McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (3 June 2020)**

**Ms NEVILLE** (Bellarine—Minister for Water, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for the Coordination of Environment, Land, Water and Planning: COVID-19):

The Government recognises that the vast majority of licensed firearm owners and dealers exercise a high degree of care when complying with their obligations. However, during this extraordinary COVID-19 period Victoria Police believed it necessary to temporarily limit the sale of firearms and ammunition to prevent any unforeseen circumstances. The variation to the conditions of dealer's licences to prohibit all firearms transactions, including the sale, hire and loan of firearms and the sale of ammunition, applied only for the reasons of Sport or Target Shooting, Clay Target Shooting and Recreational Hunting.

This was a temporary measure and the decision was made in response to the observation of a significant increase by Victoria Police in firearm Permit to Acquire applications and additional ammunition sales at a time when recreational hunting was not permitted under Chief Health Officer's directions. The number of applications for Permits to Acquire category A and Category B firearms jumped from 5,059 in February 2020 to 7,290 in March 2020.

While licensed firearm dealers are not required to report on ammunition sales, in March 2020 Victoria Police received advice from dealers and intelligence that there was a surge in demand for ammunition that coincided with the measurable increase in applications for permits to acquire and the Victorian Government response to the COVID-19 emergency.

During this unprecedented period, the Government and Victoria Police considered this measure essential to prevent stockpiling of firearms and ammunition. There are many unintended consequences of stockpiling including the potential of organised crime groups targeting licensed firearm holders and weapons, increasing risk factors in domestic violence situations and ammunition being inadvertently stored incorrectly.

A demonstration of this is where Victoria Police received intelligence regarding large purchases of ammunition by an individual licence holder. A storage inspection was conducted and upon entry to the licence holder's home, an unsecured longarm firearm was found, along with ammunition that was also unsecured.

With many Victoria Police resources allocated elsewhere, any increased numbers of firearms in the community would have placed strain on the need for more essential storage inspections. The temporary variation to firearm dealers, along with other benefits, allowed Victoria Police to focus their efforts on more urgent duties.

The Government and Victoria Police have been vocal about the risk of family violence while emergency measures are in place. Increased strain and stress on those already at risk is magnified by the effect of the pandemic on the community.

Neither the government, nor Victoria Police have suggested that licensed firearm owners or dealers are more likely to commit family violence. We know that the presence of firearms and weapons in family violence situations is a risk factor assessed by police. Firearms and weapons are used to intimidate victims and while most perpetrators do not have access to firearms and weapons, a proportion do.

The measures undertaken to reduce the numbers of firearms and ammunition being introduced into the community was just one of the approaches aimed at reducing risk during this unprecedented period and was not a comment on licensed firearm owners or dealers.

**COVID-19**

**In reply to Mr QUILTY** (Northern Victoria) (3 June 2020)

**Mr DONNELLAN** (Narre Warren North—Minister for Child Protection, Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers):

Thank you Mr Quilty for raising this issue. My department has been guided by the instructions from our Chief Health Officer on how contact can be managed in a manner that does not compromise the health of children, their parents, their carers and child protection staff.

I can advise that as of 1 June 2020, face to face contact between children and their families is being re-established, when assessed as safe to do so.