

AFP charge Victorian man after alleged antisemitic phone calls to political organisation in Canberra – as it happened



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Highlight: This blog is now closedAlbanese and Coalition continue to back two-state solution despite Trump's vow to 'take over' Gaza StripGet our breaking news email, free app or daily news podcast

Body

block-time published-time 7.19am GMT

What we learned today, Wednesday 5 February

And with that, we are going to put the blog to bed. Before we go, let's recap the big headlines:

The AFP [charged a Victorian man](#) after he allegedly called a political organisation in Canberra and made antisemitic comments.Labor and the Coalition [continue to back a two-state solution](#) after the US president, Donald Trump, [announced the US would "take over" the Gaza Strip](#) and "level" it.Anthony Albanese spoke with the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, ahead of the third anniversary of Russia's war in Ukraine. Zelenskyy [posted to X](#) after the meeting, saying he was working to expedite defence aid, and "we must establish all the circumstances surrounding the case of Australian citizen Oscar Jenkins ".Victoria's police minister is [considering reintroducing bail offences](#) the government scrapped in 2023 after the coronial inquest into the death of First Nations woman Veronica Nelson, denying the coroner's finding they had a role to play in her death.The independent senator Lidia Thorpe heckled a press conference by pro-nuclear energy group Nuclear for [Australia](#) featuring a former Miss America, [yelling that they had "no consent" for the power source](#). Labor's promised federal environment protection agency was officially killed off today, with the motion to formally "discharge" the bill from the Senate notice paper. As we [reported on Sunday](#), Albanese intervened to shelve the EPA indefinitely.The prime minister said the \$1.7bn Medicare boost would increase [federal funding to 12% – a record](#). The PM was asked repeatedly by Peter Dutton in question time about when he first knew about the planned terror attack in Sydney. He shot back – accusing the opposition leader of [playing politics over antisemitic attacks](#). Tasmania's famous overland bushwalking track was closed and walkers were evacuated as a [large bushfire burned in the area](#).

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Thank you for spending part of your day with us. We will be back tomorrow to do it all again.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.36am GMT

block-time published-time 6.45am GMT

Australians hold the first Extreme Heat Awareness Day

Today more than 100 organisations and hundreds more individual community members around the country participated in the first-ever Extreme Heat Awareness Day, launched by the Australian Red Cross and Sweltering Cities.

The initiative aims to raise awareness of heatwaves – **Australia**'s deadliest natural hazard – provide essential resources, and promote community safety in the face of extreme heat.

In recent weeks, most capital cities have experienced extreme heat events. With 2024 recorded as **Australia**'s second hottest year, research shows 65% of Australians find heatwaves increasingly disruptive, while 26% feel unprepared for weather-related emergencies.

Sweltering Cities' executive director, Emma Bacon, said:

This is the first Extreme Heat Awareness Day, but not the last. We know that climate change is driving higher dangerous temperatures, but that heatwaves are preventable disasters.

Extreme Heat Awareness Day is a chance for everyone – individuals, organisations, and communities – to take action. Reach out, share advice, and help create safer, cooler spaces for all.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.10am GMT

block-time published-time 6.38am GMT

Telstra blocks its staff from using DeepSeek AI app

Telstra has blocked staff from using the Chinese AI app DeepSeek after the federal government banned it from government devices.

On Sunday, a spokesperson for **Australia**'s largest telecommunications company told Guardian **Australia** the app was not approved, but not banned for staff, but on Wednesday, after the government ban was announced, Telstra had changed its mind and the app was now restricted.

A spokesperson said:

Microsoft Copilot is our chosen AI tool for our people.

There are privacy and security risks associated with any new AI tool and we have made the decision to limit access to DeepSeek.

The government's ban has been welcomed by the opposition and cybersecurity firm CyberCX.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.05am GMT

block-time published-time 6.29am GMT

AFP charges Victorian man after alleged antisemitic phone calls to political organisation in Canberra

The AFP has charged a Victorian man after he allegedly called a political organisation and made antisemitic comments.

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The Toorloo Arm man, 64, was charged today with one count of using a carriage service to menace, harass or cause offence.

The man allegedly called the Canberra office of a political organisation on two occasions on 21 January, making antisemitic and abusive statements both times.

AFP Special Operation Avalite investigators, with the assistance of Victoria police, arrested the man after a vehicle stop in Lakes Entrance this morning.

He was granted conditional bail and is expected to appear before Bairnsdale magistrates court on 26 March. The offence has a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment.

The AFP's counter-terrorism and special investigations command assistant commissioner Stephen Nutt said:

It is abhorrent that parliamentarians and members of our community are being targeted and threatened because of their race or religious views.

If you engage in antisemitic conduct, you will be investigated and prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.42am GMT

block-time published-time 6.24am GMT

Insurers start taking claims from flood-hit residents in north Queensland

Insurers have begun taking claims from affected residents in parts of north Queensland, AAP has reported.

Flood waters are beginning to recede in some areas with residents now taking stock of the damage to their properties and homes.

Insurance **Australia** Group had received 192 claims since 26 January, while Suncorp registered 665 claims from customers, with almost 500 homes affected up to 8am today, mostly in the Townsville suburbs of Garbutt, Kirwan and Burdell.

Suncorp's executive general manager of home claims and customers, Alli Smith, says:

Our assessing teams are already deployed and ready to start the rebuild in those communities.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.00am GMT

block-time published-time 6.12am GMT

School students grill PM in special press conference for ABC show

Anthony Albanese has held a nearly 40-minute-long press conference with students from a Canberra primary school, as part of a special event for the ABC children's show Behind the News.

We won't bust BTN's scoop by revealing all the details of the questions and answers, as we understand the program will air before too long. But the PM was peppered with questions about the environment, the Middle East, Donald Trump, education, and even his hobbies.

It was Albanese's second press conference of the day, and it lasted a bit longer than the one he did around lunchtime with the federal press gallery.

The BTN event was revealed when Albanese spoke at the end of parliament's question time, in remarks which were televised nationally, about the "major press conference I'm about to have with probably future budding journalists with Behind the News" – inviting members of the press gallery to come and watch.

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Albanese's office let journalists into the back of the room to listen in.

It was a lighter little moment amid some other heavy news coming today, but it does speak to a wider trend being seen across world politics, with politicians seeking non-conventional ways of getting their messages out at election time.

It's been well covered that Albanese and Peter Dutton are leaning heavily into podcasts and podcasters at the moment, and we're expecting to see some social media influencers tapped as well by the major parties; Albanese has made appearances on lighter entertainment programs such as Spicks and Specks, and a lighter moment with children on Behind the News seems to fit neatly into this strategy.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.35am GMT

block-time published-time 6.00am GMT

And we now have video of the fire that has closed Tasmania's overland bushwalking track.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.04am GMT

block-time published-time 5.45am GMT

Here is Anthony Albanese responding to Peter Dutton on antisemitism:

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.50am GMT

block-time published-time 5.22am GMT

And here is the Australian Council of Social Service CEO, Cassandra Goldie, calling on the government to raise the rate:

More than one million people in **Australia** are trapped in poverty by these woefully inadequate payments. It is unacceptable that in one of the wealthiest countries in the world, people are skipping meals, sleeping in cars, or going without medicine because jobseeker and related payments are so far below the poverty line.

Australia has the lowest unemployment payment among wealthy nations. We can and must do better.

Across is calling for jobseeker and related payments to be lifted to at least the pension rate of \$82 a day without further delay.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.32am GMT

block-time published-time 5.17am GMT

MPs call for urgent boost to welfare payments amid cost-of-living pressure

Earlier today, MPs from across the political divide and community sector leaders came together to call for an increase in the rate of payments.

MPs Bridget Archer, Kate Chaney, Helen Haines, Monique Ryan, Zali Steggall, Kylea Tink and Andrew Wilkie and senators Penny Allman-Payne and David Pocock called for the parliament to ease cost-of-living pressure.

Currently, jobseeker is just \$56 a day and youth allowance just \$47 a day. Both rates are less than half the minimum wage.

Archer said:

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There's no doubt that many people in our community are being left behind by this government. My office is repeatedly contacted by constituents experiencing severe disadvantage and it has only continued to increase.

It's not acceptable in a country like **Australia**. More urgently needs to be done to support the most vulnerable in our society.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.32am GMT

block-time published-time 5.07am GMT

Tasmania's overland bushwalking track closed amid bushfire threat

Tasmania's famous overland bushwalking track has been closed and walkers have been told to evacuate as a large bushfire burns in the area.

The fire, which was sparked by dry lightning, is burning south-west of the track near Mount Pelion West and Canning Peak.

The Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service north-west regional manager, Nic Dekka, said the track had been evacuated safely, with other bushwalkers out of harm's way allowed to finish their hikes.

Dekka said:

The fire grew significantly overnight and is now just 5km south-west off the track.

Conditions are challenging and there is potential for the fire to impact the Overland Track within the next 24 to 48 hours.

Walkers scheduled to depart today have been stopped and those north of Windermere have been instructed to return to Cradle Valley.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.33am GMT

block-time published-time 4.49am GMT

Hello everyone – this is Cait Kelly.

First up, for those who want the visuals, I have the video of the prime minister supporting a two-state solution after the Trump presser on the Middle East this morning:

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.52am GMT

block-time published-time 4.39am GMT

Thanks for joining me on the blog today, I'll leave you now with Cait Kelly for the rest of the day's stories.

I'll be with you again bright and early tomorrow.

block-time published-time 4.35am GMT

PM's refusal to provide detail on Dural caravan 'doesn't pass the pub test', Paterson says

The attempted suspension of the standing orders in the Senate has failed.

As expected, Labor and the Greens voted against, winning on the noes 32 to 29.

The opposition's home affairs spokesperson, James Paterson, stands up to speak on the issue right after.

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To give you a quick recap, the question is around when the prime minister was briefed, and what he was briefed on, regarding the caravan of explosives in Dural in January.

The opposition is keen to make this a political win but Anthony Albanese has rebuffed its calls to provide that information.

Paterson says Albanese's refusal to give further details "doesn't pass the pub test", adding:

He only responds to political pressure. He never leads, and he's shown weakness and equivocation every step of the way when it comes to this crisis of antisemitism, which has festered and grown out of control on his watch.

block-time updated-time Updated at 4.39am GMT

block-time published-time 4.33am GMT

Tldr: what did we learn in question time today?

All of the opposition's questions – largely from Peter Dutton and Sussan Ley – were singularly focused on [when the prime minister was made aware](#) of a caravan that was found full of explosives in Sydney. Anthony Albanese [refused to bite on when](#) he found out, and there was a lot of argy-bargy from both sides with the speaker, Milton Dick, on the PM's answers. Government MPs focused their dixer on the cost of living – first touting their [\\$1.7bn announcement](#) of additional funding for state and territory health systems for the next year. They then branched into childcare subsidies, and fee-free Tafe. We also got a few questions from the crossbench, including one from the Greens on [gambling reform](#) which they've been trying to push forward in the Senate.

block-time updated-time Updated at 4.37am GMT

block-time published-time 4.22am GMT

PM needs to be 'upfront' on when he found out about Dural caravan, Cash says

Over in the lesser-watched Senate question time, the opposition is attempting to suspend the standing orders over why the prime minister won't say when he found out about the caravan carrying explosives in Dural.

The new opposition Senate leader, Michaelia Cash, says Anthony Albanese needs to "be upfront and accountable with the parliament and the Australian people" but is instead "playing politics".

Cash says:

The prime minister needs to start thinking very carefully. He should not use a claim of confidentiality on national security as an issue when it suits him ... he refuses to tell the Australian people the simple detail of when he or his government knew about this sickening incident.

It's an interesting position for the opposition to take because, generally, on issues of national security, politicians of all stripes are supposed to take the high road.

Labor obviously won't be supporting the motion, and it seems unlikely the Greens would either, so we'll find out shortly whether it is successful or not.

block-time updated-time Updated at 4.28am GMT

block-time published-time 4.14am GMT

And with that, question time is over for another day.

block-time published-time 4.13am GMT

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The dixer have now moved on to energy bills – but all have been in the frame of the cost of living.

The energy minister, Chris Bowen, gets the question and spruiks the government's \$300 energy subsidy for households.

He then goes to how much renewable energy they've added to the grid.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.21am GMT

block-time published-time 4.09am GMT

Rowland pushes back on Greens over gambling ads

The next question from the crossbench is from Greens MP Elizabeth Watson-Brown, who puts a question to communications minister Michelle Rowland on gambling reform:

Gambling reform is unfinished business in this parliament and parents are angry their kids are bombarded with gambling ads online and when they watch sports and other shows. After three years, your government has still refused to ban gambling ads. Will you accept the Greens compromise offer to ban gambling ads online that target our kid and during sport when families are watching?

The Greens were debating their bill on gambling in the Senate earlier this morning, but it doesn't have support from either of the major parties to go further.

Rowland highlights that the Queensland Greens have accepted donations from a "high-rolling gambler".

I find it interesting that the honourable member who is a member of the Greens political party from Queensland should ask this, when the Queensland Greens have accepted over nearly half a million dollars in donations from a high-rolling gambler, despite pushing for a ban on political donations from the gambling industry.

Rowland won't go to when Labor will act on banning or putting a partial ban on online gambling advertising.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.14am GMT

block-time published-time 4.04am GMT

Earlier today the government's fee free Tafe bill passed the house (no surprises there, they hold the majority). And now skills minister Andrew Giles is up spruiking it with the help of a dixer.

There is more to do to support Australians and that is why we are making free Tafe permanent. The Liberals continue to call it wasteful spending.

block-time published-time 4.00am GMT

Dutton 'playing games' over Dural caravan discovery, PM says

Peter Dutton asks again, with a shorter question: when was the PM first asked about the planned terror attack in Sydney?

Seventeen seconds in, the opposition stands up, on relevance, but Albanese isn't budging and won't give a day or time on when he was told, and is accusing the opposition again of "playing games". He answers:

I was asked a question about the police and agencies and I was speaking about the police and agencies. I am for them. We on this side are for them. Simple as that. We have confidence in them to do their work and we will back them in doing their job. That is what we will do.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.58am GMT

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block-time published-time 3.57am GMT

The government has focused its dixer today to health and childcare.

The next one goes to education minister Jason Clare on expanding early education to the outer suburbs and regional areas (and asks about alternative approaches).

Clare is milking the lunch policy in his answer.

To get [centres] in the childcare deserts, they want to fund long lunches and bosses desserts. As the minister mentioned, they are also opposed to the legislation that she introduced this morning that guarantees three days a week of early education to prepare Aussie children for school. Why? The shadow minister, the shadow treasurer told us why, he said **Australia** can't afford that.

block-time updated-time Updated at 4.18am GMT

block-time published-time 3.54am GMT

Next Peter Dutton returns to the mic, again asking:

Will the prime minister be honest with the Australian people and advise why he didn't receive a briefing for at least seven days after the New South Wales premier had been advised of the alleged planned terrorist attack in New South Wales?

This time the answer from Albanese doesn't garner as much shouting from the benches.

There are a range of assertions in that question, that the leader of the opposition chooses to raise because that is the point – just to play politics. Not to try to find and hunt down the perpetrators, not to make sure that the perpetrators are held to account, not to find out who is behind the front people, not to discuss or get a briefing of intelligence.

block-time updated-time Updated at 3.56am GMT

block-time published-time 3.53am GMT

The next dixer goes to **Anne Aly** on the government's childcare policy. She introduced a bill into the house this morning to enshrine universal subsidised childcare for three days per week.

You can find a few more details on that [here](#).

She quickly manages a reference to long lunches as her time expires.

block-time published-time 3.51am GMT

Some photos of question time so far...

block-time updated-time Updated at 3.57am GMT

block-time published-time 3.48am GMT

PM accuses Coalition of 'playing politics' over antisemitic attacks

Albanese finishes his answer:

There are two choices you can make here. One, to prioritise getting to the bottom of what is happening here, supporting the police and intelligence agencies; or you can choose to play politics and play these games. That is

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precisely what you are doing. No asking for a briefing of the security agencies, when I offer a briefing of the security agencies to others, no taking up of that, indeed an objection to a point of order to that as well.

AFP Operation Avalight have successfully made one arrest. They have joint counter-terrorism teams operating. There has been 180 arrests in New South Wales. Twelve people have been charged in Queensland, 13 in South **Australia** and two in Western **Australia**. That is the hard work that is conducted by our police and security and intelligence services.

The idea that that is not the priority and that that should be not my focus is quite frankly absurd. Absurd and irresponsible.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.09am GMT

block-time published-time 3.46am GMT

Dutton pursues Albanese over Dural caravan discovery

Opposition leader Peter Dutton is back asking the next question, and he's again gone to when the prime minister knew about the van filled with explosives. Dutton says Albanese has been "embarrassed" by not being briefed.

The government has called for Dutton's question to be ruled out of order, and Dutton then re-asks the question. He says:

The prime minister has been asked on multiple occasions to be honest, open and straightforward with the Australian public as to why he was notified. The prime minister has previously advised dates he was notified of series events by the AFP. Why can he not be honest with the Australian people?

Albanese brings up a previous occasion when Liberal senator and shadow home affairs minister James Paterson "rebuked" the opposition leader for referencing classified information in parliament.

That brings on more debate on relevance, and Milton Dick says he's "not having this".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.22am GMT

block-time published-time 3.40am GMT

Labor cheers Chalmers on economic results

Treasurer Jim Chalmers has gone straight to the long lunches, in answering a dixer on the cost of living.

The other side of the house is focused on long lunches and cuts and conflict and culture wars. This side of the house has maintained a focus on the cost of living and because of that focus, inflation is down, wages are up and unemployment is low.

There's plenty of shouts of support on the government side, before the opposition stands up saying Chalmers isn't being relevant.

When Chalmers gets back up to speak, you can barely hear him in the chamber, at first, from the shouting on both sides.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.44am GMT

block-time published-time 3.35am GMT

Government watching 'concerning' 3G shutdown closely – Rowland

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The first crossbench question goes to the independent member for Indi, Helen Haines, who asks about the 3G shutdown. Haines says some in her electorate in regional Victoria have lost the ability to make calls in some areas.

Does the minister recognise some people are worse off after the 3G shutdown and what will the government do to fix it?

Communications minister Michelle Rowland says the Haines has mentioned are “concerning”. She says she met with industry regulators, mobile carriers and consumer groups in December, and is monitoring the situation “closely”.

It is true that there are multiple complaints from customers, particularly in regional areas, who have seen gratuitous coverage diminish and who have seen their services overall being challenged. The question is how can I be improved? I'm happy to inform the member that while obviously it is concerning to hear those reports happening in regional areas, I am monitoring this very closely. I've made it clear to service providers the expectation that the 3G switchover will deliver on these benefits.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.40am GMT

block-time published-time 3.30am GMT

Labor ‘determined to be a reliable partner’ on hospital funding – Butler

The next dixer goes to Mark Butler on Medicare. So far there are two key themes to this question time.

Butler talks again about the additional funding commitment with the states and territories.

In terms of public hospital funding, wage and activity pressure for hospitals means that right now the commonwealth share of hospital budgets is declining. It is going to fall well below 40% if we don't do something. We are determined to be a reliable partner.

He then goes into other “approaches”, where he talks about Peter Dutton 's health record, and also gives a nod to the tax-free lunch policy.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.32am GMT

block-time published-time 3.26am GMT

Coalition playing ‘political games’ over Dural caravan – PM

Albanese gets up again, still in response to Sussan Ley 's question, and accuses the opposition of playing “political games” on the issue.

The priority of those opposite is to play political games. I met with, I engaged regularly with leaders in the Jewish community and what they are interested in is keeping their community safe and you know what, that is what my priority is too. The way you keep them safe is by having confidence in our national security agencies.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.30am GMT

block-time published-time 3.23am GMT

PM asked about Sydney caravan carrying explosives

Deputy opposition leader Sussan Ley is up next, and asks Albanese again when he was first informed of the caravan in Sydney [carrying explosives](#).

Albanese says:

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I refer to my previous answer. I note the characterisation of the deputy leader of the opposition. I am happy to provide a brief through the security agencies if requested by the deputy leader of the opposition...

That's followed by some back and forth on whether the prime minister is being relevant and should be directed to provide the house with the exact date and time.

Speaker Milton Dick says that on relevance, as long as Albanese is remaining directly relevant to the topic, he's on solid ground.

I do not have the powers under the standing order to direct the prime minister to give you the answer you wish.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.29am GMT

block-time published-time 3.19am GMT

Albanese says Medicare boost will 'save lives'

The first dixer goes to the PM on Medicare, which he and health minister Mark Butler just made a new announcement on.

Albanese is spruiking the \$1.7bn one-year funding announcement for the states and territories.

That is our priority, not long lunches – helping people with the health care they need. This funding will help to cut waiting lists. It will reduce waiting times in emergency rooms and it will manage ramping. This will save lives and all of the states and territories that we have engaged with over recent days have welcomed this announcement.

Like yesterday, the government uses the dixer to also question Peter Dutton on his record as health minister.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.22am GMT

block-time published-time 3.16am GMT

Question time begins

We're now into questions. The opposition starts, asking Albanese when he knew of the van carrying explosives in Dural.

It's a question that's been thrown at the PM by the Coalition for a few days.

Albanese says the national security agencies need to be "allowed to do their work".

The government has two priorities, the first is keeping Australians safe, the second is making sure that the ongoing investigation, which is ongoing, prioritises not just capturing those people who have been involved – and there are at least two people who are in custody publicly – but in order to ascertain who is behind this, it is absolutely critical that the AFP, that the state police agencies, the Asio and the intelligence agencies be allowed to do their work, and the federal government will provide every support for them.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.18am GMT

block-time published-time 3.13am GMT

PM offers condolences over woman, 82, killed in Queensland floods

The prime minister has also offered his condolences at the second loss of life in the north Queensland floods.

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I want to, on behalf of the house, express our sincere condolences at the second loss of life that we have seen in this floods, an 82-year-old woman who was found outside Ingham and we express our condolences to her family and her friends in their bereavement.

Dutton follows, extending his condolences to the friends and family of the woman and those impacted by the floods.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.16am GMT

block-time published-time 3.08am GMT

Leaders pay tribute to the late Liberal Anthony Messner, a ‘person of conviction’

Before questions begin, the leaders are paying tribute to former Liberal senator Anthony Messner, who died on 11 October last year.

Anthony Albanese says Messner was respected by “all in the house”.

From the moment he was elected as a senator for South Australia in the double dissolution election of 1975, Tony Messner was regarded as a person of conviction.

We honour his contribution to our parliament and to our nation and we offer our sympathies to his loved ones, friends and colleagues. May he rest in peace.

Peter Dutton stands up next and says Messner “championed” small business.

Not only did the former banker and chartered accountant understand small business but the new senator saw it as his duty to champion small business.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.12am GMT

block-time published-time 2.58am GMT

The politicians are quickly walking into the house and Senate now for question time. Let’s see how many times lunch is mentioned today.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.59am GMT

block-time published-time 2.50am GMT

Queensland government working to secure supplies for flood-hit areas – minister

Emergency management minister Jenny McAllister did a press conference a little earlier from north Queensland with an update on the floods.

She said she was working with the state, emergency services and volunteers supporting the region.

The government has announced financial support for families in impacted regions, but there are also concerns around ensuring residents stuck in flood waters or around them are able to get access to food and essential supplies. McAllister said:

Today our government is convening a meeting of the key private sector in the food supply chain so we can start exploring with them steps that need to be taken to secure supplies into Queensland and far north Queensland.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.57am GMT

block-time published-time 2.28am GMT

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Australia 'will be consistent' on Gaza – PM

Albanese is asked again on Trump's comments, and whether **Australia** would be prepared to send Australian defence personnel into Gaza.

The prime minister reiterates **Australia**'s diplomatic position hasn't changed.

When it comes to our position, we have not received any request regarding the rebuilding of Gaza. What we have said, though – clearly, we've supported a ceasefire. We've supported hostages being released. And we've supported aid getting into Gaza. There is a need to do that, and **Australia** is willing to assist getting aid into Gaza to provide that support. We have done so. That is consistent with what Australian governments have always done, which is to provide support.

There are more questions here on whether the government should be calling out Trump's statement. Albanese says the government will be consistent.

We will be consistent, as we are. I've also said that I'm not going to, as **Australia**'s prime minister, give a daily commentary on statements by the US president. My job is to support **Australia**'s position.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.37am GMT

block-time published-time 2.23am GMT

PM: **Australia**'s position on Gaza unchanged in wake of Trump comments

We've moved away from health, and Anthony Albanese is immediately asked about Donald Trump's statement that the US would take over and own the Gaza Strip.

Albanese says he doesn't do "running commentary" and continues to support a two-state solution in the Middle East.

Australia's position is the same as it was this morning, as it was last year and it was 10 years ago and it was under the Howard government.

Another reporter tries to draw him out further on Trump's comments but Albanese doesn't want to bite.

He also asks whether the government is considering mandatory minimum sentences for terrorism offences. Albanese says:

On the issue of antisemitism, we have a very clear position. I want to see people who are perpetrators of ... [these] crimes hunted down, put in the clink and dealt with. We will provide the authorities all of the resources to do so.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.40am GMT

block-time published-time 2.20am GMT

Federal funding growth caps 'encourage efficient delivery' of hospital services: Butler

NSW has also been dealing with resignations of its psychiatrists in public hospitals. Butler reiterates his concerns that a mass resignation would be "catastrophic".

Encouraging all parties to get back to the table and try to resolve this – but also, at the same time, voicing my enormous admiration for the work of public psychiatrists. This is one of the toughest jobs in the health system that we have.

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He's then asked whether there's a risk the federal government will have to front up more cash, as credit ratings agencies threaten to downgrade states.

A tenet of our hospital funding agreements, going back to the agreement struck by prime minister [Julia] Gillard, has been funding growth caps that the commonwealth insists on. So that gives us control in terms of our fiscal exposure, but also ensures that there's a lever there to encourage efficient delivery of public hospital services by states.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.32am GMT

block-time published-time 2.16am GMT

'Constructive engagement' from states and territories on disability services

Asked about the [disability services known as foundational supports](#) which the commonwealth has been working on with the states and territories, Anthony Albanese says there has been "really constructive engagement" on the reforms.

This agreement – to put it in real dollar terms of what it means – commonwealth funding, the current financial year, is \$30.19bn to the states. Next year, it will be \$33.91bn.

Albanese emphasises all jurisdictions are engaged on the foundational supports.

Mark Butler adds to his answer:

The commonwealth's very satisfied with progress on NDIS reform and also the development of foundational supports. But states and territories understand that the conclusion of a five-year deal – which is what they're after and what was committed by the prime minister at the national cabinet meeting in December 2023 – remains tied to that NDIS reform process continuing as it would.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.28am GMT

block-time published-time 2.12am GMT

Demand and pressure on hospital system increasing, health minister says

The health minister, Mark Butler, says this is a "landmark" deal between the commonwealth, states and territories.

He said the hospital system was under very serious pressure around the country, particularly as the population got older.

Because of increases in activity and demand for public hospitals and very big increases in the prices – largely due to wage pressure in the public hospital system – under existing arrangements, the commonwealth share of public hospital funding is dropping, and without intervention, would drop substantially below 40% of the total hospital budget of our system.

He added the PM had committed to reaching a five-year deal for hospital funding with the states and territories, but wasn't able to conclude the deal in time:

In part, because I think the WA government has now gone into caretaker [mode] and, unlike schools funding arrangements, we are not legislatively able to do separate hospital funding agreements with separate jurisdictions. It is an all-in arrangement.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.25am GMT

block-time published-time 2.09am GMT

AFP charge Victorian man after alleged antisemitic phone calls to political organisation in Canberra – as it happened

PM says \$1.7bn Medicare boost will increase federal funding for hospitals by 12%

States have been calling on the commonwealth to increase their share of public hospital funding.

That's also come under pressure more recently, after the federal government negotiated to put foundational supports on to the states to reduce some of the federal funding burden on the NDIS.

Albanese says the new agreement means a “double digit increase in commonwealth funding” for public hospitals.

Under this new agreement, the commonwealth contribution to state-run hospitals will increase by 12% to a record almost \$34bn in 2025-26. To give you some idea of what that means, in the Northern Territory, it gets the largest increase – a 30% increase as a result of the fact that they need this investment.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.11am GMT

block-time published-time 2.05am GMT

Anthony Albanese announces an additional \$1.7bn in funding for public hospitals and health services.

This funding will be delivered to states and territories to help cut waiting lists, to reduce waiting times in emergency rooms, and to manage ramping.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.08am GMT

block-time published-time 2.03am GMT

PM offers condolences to family and friends of woman who died in Queensland floods

The prime minister, Anthony Albanese, is up, and begins offering his condolences on the two people who have died in the Queensland floods.

Sincere condolences for the family and friends of a woman who was found outside Ingham, 82 years of age. This is the second loss of life that we've seen in the Queensland floods. The Australian government continues to provide every support possible.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.07am GMT

block-time published-time 1.56am GMT

The prime minister will be standing up shortly in Canberra with the health minister, Mark Butler.

We'll have more details on that soon, before we enter the slide down into question time.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.58am GMT

block-time published-time 1.43am GMT

Voters have choices outside 'uninspiring red tie, blue tie' system, Zoe Daniel says

The independent MP Zoe Daniel is speaking at the National Press Club today, on the role the growing crossbench has played in this parliament.

Daniel says to voters there's now a “choice” that goes beyond the “uninspiring red tie, blue tie” two-party system.

She says the crossbench have been instrumental in pushing the government to act more on climate, gambling, antisemitism and social media restrictions.

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The community independents on the crossbench have become the literal and figurative spine of the house. We have not been cowed by name-calling and mansplaining, by those heckling like schoolyard bullies in Question Time, nor by the outsized dirty tactics outside it. We have stuck to our promises to our voters that we would listen to our communities and do what was in their best interests based on the evidence and the best outcomes for most people.

... Anyone who says what have you done, well, how long have you got?

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.04am GMT

block-time published-time 1.25am GMT

'Not a policy we've put forward': Leeser responds to Trump's Gaza comments

Julian Leeser, the opposition's assistant foreign affairs spokesperson, says the party's policy on Gaza hasn't changed after US president Donald Trump [announced the US will "take over" the Gaza Strip](#) and "level" it.

Appearing on Sky News on Wednesday, Leeser said the opposition's policy still ultimately backs a two-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians but only after hostages are returned and Palestinian authorities recognise Israel's right to exist.

When pressed on whether Leeser believed that position was now redundant if the US takes control of the strip, he said:

Our policy is – we note that the president's put this policy forward, but it's not a policy we've put forward.

In a [joint press conference with the Israeli prime minister](#), Benjamin Netanyahu, Trump said the "US will take over the Gaza Strip" and relocate Palestinians living there to a "beautiful area with homes and safety ... so that they can live out their lives in peace and harmony".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.51am GMT

block-time published-time 1.17am GMT

Mortgaged households record steepest living cost increases

Workers experienced the steepest living cost increases over the past 12 months, while self-funded retirees recorded the smallest rises, according to new inflation data released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

The annualised data for the December quarter is similar to the ABS's benchmark consumer price index, although it also calculates the cost of mortgages on a household.

Given workers are more likely to have mortgages than other cohorts, their living cost increases have been more extreme during the prolonged period of elevated rates.

Worker households recorded a 4% increase last year, according to the ABS' selected living cost indexes, released today.

"The most significant contributor to increases in employee households' living costs was mortgage interest charges," the ABS said.

Mortgage interest charges rose due to higher mortgage debt levels and the continued rollover of expired fixed rate to higher variable rate mortgages.

The [official CPI was 2.5%](#) for the same period.

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Self-funded retiree households saw costs rise by 2.5% in 2024, in line with the benchmark CPI, with the increases linked to price rises for recreation and cultural activities.

Government-funded energy rebates helped keep a lid on living cost increases, with the cohort consisting of pensioners and government payment recipients recording a 2.8% rise.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.20am GMT

block-time published-time 1.13am GMT

Senior Victorian MPs 'don't even understand' bail law review, opposition says

The Victorian Liberal shadow attorney-general, Michael O'Brien, also weighed into the confusion this morning between the premier and her police minister on whether a review is taking place into the state's bail laws.

Jacinta Allan on Tuesday announced a review, to be led by the attorney general and police minister, while Anthony Carbines today told reporters: "I wouldn't even say that there's particularly a review."

O'Brien said the two senior government MPs were "at odds". He said:

They don't even understand what this bail review is all about, and the reason is because it's not a review driven by protecting the community, it's a review driven by polls, politics and panic, and that's all Labor has to offer.

O'Brien said the government should reverse the "wrong-headed, dangerous changes" it made to the Bail Act in 2023.

Unbelievably, it's now no longer an offence to breach a condition of bail. It used to be an offence. Labor took that away. No wonder we're seeing people on bail ignoring their conditions, because there's no sanction for them.

(The government, however, introduced a new offence for committing a serious crime while on bail last year, which came into effect in December.)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.26am GMT

block-time published-time 1.04am GMT

Victoria's opposition swipes at Labor after Melbourne stabbing

The Victorian opposition spokesperson for police, David Southwick, has accused the government of failing to keep people safe following a stabbing in South Yarra.

Police say they are investigating the stabbing of a man by an unknown person on Chapel Street just before 8am this morning. It is believed the alleged offender is known to the victim, who was taken to hospital with non-life-threatening injuries.

It comes just days before the Prahran electorate, which takes in Chapel Street, goes to a byelection. Labor is not contesting, meaning it is a race between the Greens, who currently hold the seat, and the Liberals.

Southwick told reporters outside parliament:

The Allan Labor government is failing to keep Victorians safe, and we're seeing that from a lack of investment in law and order in this state, whether it is police being underfunded, courts being overcrowded, prisons being empty, and ultimately, criminals on the streets committing absolute havoc.

When will this end? We're seeing today a violent attack in Chapel Street Prahran. And our thoughts are with the victim and their families right now we saw also overnight, two cars stolen... These are offences that ultimately will

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lead to the loss of lives, and we are pleading with the other Labor government to do more and make law and order an absolute priority in this state.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.12am GMT

block-time published-time 12.56am GMT

This morning, Anthony Albanese attended an event celebrating the 50th anniversary of the SBS at Parliament House, and posed for some photos:

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.02am GMT

block-time published-time 12.42am GMT

Cybersecurity agency welcomes government decision to ban DeepSeek from its devices

CyberCX, the cybersecurity agency that [last week](#) called for the federal government to ban Chinese AI DeepSeek from government devices, has welcomed the news today that the government is doing just that.

Alastair MacGibbon, chief strategy officer at CyberCX, said the government should now “instruct operators of critical infrastructure to ban DeepSeek on their devices too”.

This isn’t the first time we have had this conversation and it won’t be the last. Chinese EVs, security cameras, TikTok and now DeepSeek show that we are playing whack-a-mole with new technology products and services from high-risk nations.

Any smart device or software that requires an ongoing connection with the manufacturer in an authoritarian state like China raises difficult questions for western policymakers. These technologies are invasive in their data collection practices and can be weaponised against Australians by nations that might seek to do us harm.

We need to move the debate forward in [Australia](#) towards a high-risk foreign vendor framework for critical infrastructure, democratic institutions and government.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.45am GMT

block-time published-time 12.38am GMT

Australians ‘deeply shocked’ at Sweden mass shooting – Albanese

The prime minister has expressed condolences for the victims of a mass shooting overnight in Sweden, where 11 people were killed. Anthony Albanese wrote in a post to X:

Australians are deeply shocked by the shooting in Örebro, Sweden. Violence like this is as senseless as it is abhorrent, and our thoughts are with the victims and their loved ones.

Related: [Swedish police say 11 people dead in Örebro campus attack](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.42am GMT

block-time published-time 12.32am GMT

Senate to confirm death of national environment watchdog

Labor’s promised federal environment protection agency is poised to be officially killed off today, with the motion to formally “discharge” the bill from the Senate notice paper.

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As we [reported on Sunday](#), Anthony Albanese intervened to shelve the EPA indefinitely. The prime minister claimed Labor simply didn't have the numbers to get it through the upper house, blaming the Greens and Coalition for torpedoing a 2022 Labor election promise.

But the Greens and environment groups saw things differently, accusing Albanese of capitulating to vested interests after Western Australian premier Roger Cook and the mining industry lobbied him to abandon a pillar of the “nature positive” reforms.

In a motion to formally “discharge” the bill from the notice paper, Labor will take one final swing at the Greens and Coalition for teaming up to “block” the legislation.

The motion moves that the Senate note the Liberals and Nationals “teamed up with the Greens and One Nation to block” a number of measures – including faster environmental approvals for businesses – and that under the last Liberal government, “the Liberals cut 40% from the federal environment department”.

The motion also calls on the Liberals and Nationals to “rule out any future cuts to the environment department”.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.43am GMT

block-time published-time 12.24am GMT

Faruqi condemns Trump moves on Unrwa and UN rights council

Greens senator Mehreen Faruqi has condemned US president Donald Trump's decision to stop funding for the UN aid agency for Palestine (Unrwa) and withdraw the US from the UN human rights council.

Faruqi is urging Labor to condemn Trump over the decision, and says foreign minister Penny Wong should be calling her counterpart in the US to reverse it.

She's also calling on the government to increase its funding to the aid agency.

Trump's decision is an unprecedented attack on global human rights, international aid and the Palestinian people in their time of greatest need.

Slashing Unrwa funding will deepen an already dire humanitarian crisis, while walking away from the UNHRC sends a dangerous signal that human rights abuses will go unchallenged.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.03am GMT

block-time published-time 12.19am GMT

PM says fee-free Tafe bill is key to boosting Australian productivity

Anthony Albanese is up in the House of Representatives while it debates fee-free Tafe legislation.

The bill's pretty likely to pass, and it's a key pillar of the government's cost-of-living and education platforms. You'll notice it almost always gets a mention in speeches or press conferences by the prime minister when those issues come up.

Albanese says the bill is “one of the key mechanisms that we have to boost productivity” in [Australia](#).

We know that public Tafe is so important – of course, the private sector have an important role to play as well. But if you don't have a public Tafe system that is effective, then the system simply won't be able to deliver what is needed for our economy.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.26am GMT

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block-time published-time 12.01am GMT

Farrell says he'll stay on message with US over tariffs

Trade minister Don Farrell, believes he'll be "amongst the first" of countries to speak with Howard Lutnick, who is yet to be confirmed by the US Senate as the secretary of commerce.

Speaking to Sky News, Farrell says he'll stick to the message we've been hearing that the US runs a trade surplus with [Australia](#). He also says he wants to put forward the argument that all trade tariffs can have global impacts.

Interestingly, he mentions the World Trade Organisation (WTO), to which [Australia](#) brought a complaint against China's trade tariffs on barley and wine in 2021. Farrell says:

One of the reasons, I think, that we were able to negotiate an outcome, a satisfactory outcome, [with China] particularly as it relates to wine and barley, was that we were prepared to withdraw our World Trade Organisation disputes in return for a fast review of those tariffs.

I think the World Trade Organisation will be important in this, in this process. The other thing I think we've done over the last couple of years is to diversify our trading relationship. So in that three-year period, we've got a new trade agreement with the United Kingdom. Our trade with the United Kingdom has doubled.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.11am GMT

block-time published-time 11.56pm GMT

Victoria's police minister contradicts premier on bail law review

Following from the last post...

Carbines' comments also directly contradicted the premier, Jacinta Allan, who yesterday announced a review into the state's bail laws. He said:

I wouldn't even say that there's particularly a review. We're always working on what more we can do to keep the community safe.

Carbines said he was "always looking at proposals" brought to him by police: "We're not talking about some long-winded piece of work. This is stuff we're talking about all the time. We've got plenty of stuff from the bottom drawer that I can pull out that will hold offenders to account. I'm doing that."

He said he did not plan to consult with stakeholders as he knew their views.

Later in the press conference, Carbines admitted the government needed to work "carefully" on bail reform because they did not "want to make errors that have been made in the past".

We've been held to account as a government and as a parliament from the coroner, from the courts, around what we need to do to not have collateral damage in the work that we do to hold serious offenders to account, but we can find a balance. We can walk and chew gum at the same time.

Carbines also said he was not "chasing shoplifters", in an apparent reference to Veronica Nelson, who had been remanded in custody at the time of her death after being arrested for shoplifting and refused bail.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.17am GMT

block-time published-time 11.53pm GMT

Victorian Labor flags reintroduction of scrapped bail laws

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Victoria's police minister is considering reintroducing bail offences the government scrapped in 2023 following the coronial inquest into the death of First Nations woman Veronica Nelson, denying the coroner's finding they had a role to play in her death.

Speaking outside parliament on Wednesday morning, Anthony Carbines said he wanted to bring an end to a "merry-go-round" of people committing an offence, only to get bailed and to reoffend. He said:

What we have is unique. [The number of] offenders are down, but the repeat offenders who churn through our crime rate, who continue to reoffend... that's our focus. I want to support police members who tell me that they're tired of seeing the same people that they're re-arresting, they're on this merry-go-round. They get bailed time and again and we need to deal with those people who don't respect the courts and don't respect the opportunities they get and their freedom.

Asked whether he was considering reintroducing the bail offences the government repealed following the coronial inquest into the death of Nelson – "breaching bail conditions" and "committing further offences while on bail" – Carbines said:

Everything is on the table here.

When told the offences had been repealed by his own government because they were having a disproportionate effect on First Nations people on women and on young people, Carbines replied: "Nup, I don't accept that."

Another journalist then [read the speech](#) made at the time, where he said: "We know that the changes we made have had a disproportionate impact on people who were already experiencing significant disadvantage, with a particular impact on Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, children and women. Ultimately, the net was cast too wide.

Asked if his views had changed, and if the 2023 law changes were a mistake, Carbines said:

We're constantly trying to find the right balance that supports the community, that's what we're striving to do at all times. And at the heart of the work we do is keeping the community safe.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.38am GMT

block-time published-time 11.49pm GMT

Lidia Thorpe heckles pro-nuclear group in Parliament House

Independent senator Lidia Thorpe has heckled a press conference from the pro-nuclear energy group Nuclear for **Australia** featuring a former Miss America, yelling that they had "no consent" for the power source.

The group was setting up for a press conference in Parliament House, in the mural hall area which is a main thoroughfare for politicians and other workers moving around the building, near conference rooms.

There was a large crowd of journalists waiting for the nuclear press conference, as well as a number of politicians and NGO representatives mingling after a prior press conference. There was a larger crowd than usually expected for this kind of event, with the pro-nuclear group boasting an appearance from advocate and former Miss America, Grace Stanke.

Thorpe, the Victorian senator, was moving past the scene when she noticed a banner for Nuclear for **Australia**.

"No consent," she called out from the back of the group as she walked past.

You have no consent for nuclear in **Australia**.

Getting into an elevator nearby, Thorpe yelled again that nuclear energy would "poison your children's children".

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block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.55pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.39pm GMT

Dowton says Macquarie academic's comments 'very disturbing'

Following from our last post...

Josh Burns accused Macquarie's vice-chancellor of "protecting the staff member and not your students" in his response to Abdel-Fattah 's anti-Zionist statements.

"Excuse me", Dowton replied:

Let me make it very clear in this public hearing as an individual... I do not support the statements that have been made. I find them to be offensive, and I can certainly understand how they have caused harm in the communities that they may have been directed towards.

My role as the leader for the university is to interpret the complexity in between the variety of value statements in our policies and our contractual obligations to any staff member, and at my best, as the leader of the university, to ensure that we stand well if a matter is ultimately tested at the law.

But make no mistake, at a personal level, I find the statements to which you've referred here and which are on the public record to be very disturbing.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.44pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.27pm GMT

Macquarie University VC rejects campus is unsafe

The vice-chancellor of Macquarie University, Prof Bruce Dowton, has rejected claims his campus is unsafe following negative reports in some media outlets about one of his staff members.

Appearing before a federal parliamentary inquiry into antisemitism on university campuses, Dowton faced fiery questioning on the tenure of Macquarie academic Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah, who is a research fellow under an Australian Research Council grant to research Arab and Muslim Australians social projects.

The chair of the committee, Labor MP Josh Burns, asked if actions had been taken against "any staff" if they had called for university spaces to be unsafe. When Dowton replied there had been "no specific action" taken against any staff member, Burns squared in on Abdel-Fattah.

Dr Randa Fattah ... has said publicly, if you are a Zionist, you have no claim or right to cultural safety. It is the duty of those who oppose racism to ensure that every space Zionists enter is culturally unsafe for them. Do you agree with those statements?

Dowton replied he did not agree with those statements on a personal level but he respected the rights of privacy and confidentiality with regard to the law.

In the event that a staff member makes a statement that raises concern ... What we have done is address that concern with the staff member at the local level in the first instance ... urging them to restrain themselves and to comply with the university's policy framework.

We do have regard ... about the rights, and I believe, privileges of academic staff, around freedom of speech and academic freedom ... the definition of anti-Zionism is ultimately a matter for the law on which the law is silent.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.36pm GMT

AFP charge Victorian man after alleged antisemitic phone calls to political organisation in Canberra – as it happened

block-time published-time 11.19pm GMT

Student housing and Melbourne road drive Future Fund past targets

Investments in toll roads and student housing added a hefty \$26n to Australia's sovereign wealth in 2024, AAP reports.

The 12.2% return on the Future Fund was well in excess of the 6.4% mandated target and brings the 10-year return to 8.1%, the fund's board of guardians announced today.

Since its establishment in 2006, investment returns have added \$177bn to put the fund at a record \$237.9bn in value. Chief executive Raphael Arndt welcomed the result:

This was a strong result that reflects the work we have done over the past few years... to understand significant and lasting changes in the world.

New investments made by the fund during 2024 included a stake in Melbourne's Eastlink toll road and a national portfolio of student accommodation facilities.

Chief investment officer Ben Samild said strength in investments in the United States also drove growth in value.

This was an extremely pleasing result driven by the strength of the US economy.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.27pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.53pm GMT

Jousting in Senate over Greens bill to ban online gambling ads

In the Senate, debate is continuing on the Greens bill to ban online gambling advertising

The bill proposes a ban on online gambling ads across television, radio, online and print via a three-year phase-in approach.

Shadow communications minister Sarah Henderson says it's "ironic" that the Greens are pushing for a vote on their bill, as the Coalition had put up its own bill in 2023. That was after Peter Dutton, in his budget reply speech, had put forward a ban on gambling advertising during sports matches, as well as an hour before and an hour after them.

We delivered a bill just six weeks later... our bill would have drawn a line in the sand and put an end to gambling advertisements during live sport. That was 20 months ago, and guess what has happened – when that bill went before parliament the Albanese government opposed our bill, and guess who else voted against our bill? Yes, it was the Greens.

A note here – the bill itself didn't go to a vote.

The Greens have previously argued the Coalition's policy wouldn't go far enough to tackle the harms of online gambling advertising.

Independent senator David Pocock is also up – he's been a strong proponent of reform on gambling advertising. He also brings up the Coalition's policy, which he says wouldn't work.

It's a landmark report, it is historical, and when she [Peta Murphy] released the report she said 'gambling is grooming young children to gamble'.

...All the experts gave evidence that a partial ban doesn't work.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.15am GMT

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block-time published-time 10.38pm GMT

'Take them out to the pub': Hume on Coalition's business lunch policy

Sky News is having another go at trying to tease out some more details on the tax-free lunch policy, this time with shadow finance minister Jane Hume.

Hume says:

This will help them build their businesses, and it helps them reward and retain staff, bring them back to the office after working from home, making sure that after they've had a successful and productive week.

After they've had a productive week, take them out to the pub, buy them a chicken schnitzel. It's not that complicated. It's very modest.

Host Laura Jayes calls the policy "small fry", and Hume says the Coalition will announce "more" on tax policy in the lead-up to the election.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.43pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.22pm GMT

Minns defends Haylen after resignation as transport minister

The NSW premier, Chris Minns, has just wrapped up a press conference in Sydney after Jo Haylen quit as the state's transport minister yesterday.

This followed revelations about her use of a ministerial car for private purposes. Elias Visontay has all the details below:

Related: [Jo Haylen quits as NSW transport minister after 446km chauffeur trip for winery lunch](#)

Minns defended her character and said she had paid a "big personal and professional price" for what happened.

I've made it clear when it comes to my colleagues around the cabinet table that I expect them to follow the rules and to follow the new directions ... I expect all ministers to treat this process and their positions in office with respect.

He said that roads minister John Graham would be acting in the transport portfolio "almost immediately".

It's a huge, huge portfolio, but John does have extensive experience in his previous jobs ... We've made a decision late yesterday that he can do it, but we'll be putting all the help in place to make sure he can.

Minns also said he hadn't "ruled out anyone potentially being a cabinet minister".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.38pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.13pm GMT

Aly introduces childcare subsidy bill in parliament

Over in the house this morning, **Anne Aly**, minister for early childhood education, has introduced legislation for a three-day guarantee on subsidised childcare.

The bill partially abolishes the activity test to guarantee three days of subsidies for families earning up to \$530,000.

Aly says the bill provides support for First Nations families and is a "cost-of-living measure".

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Aly quotes Snaicc CEO Catherine Liddle :

This can be a game changer for our babies ... setting them up for a thriving future. It's a significant commitment towards closing the gap.

The Greens have said they'll push for the activity test to be scrapped entirely but will ultimately support the bill.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.32pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.09pm GMT

Key event

Greens debate gambling legislation as parliament resumes

The bells are ringing ... you know what that means – parliament has begun sitting.

In the Senate, the Greens are debating their legislation on gambling.

It's been close to two years now since the release of the Peta Murphy review, which made 31 recommendations, and the government hasn't officially responded to it.

Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young says she wants the government to support their legislation and bring in a ban on online gambling ads before the next election.

I am hopeful that over the next week and a half this parliament, this government, will show the strength of courage to do the right thing, to ban gambling advertising before the election, as you promised to do.

The crossbench has been agitating on this issue, and Labor backbenchers have been pushing for reforms.

Hanson-Young says it shows Labor's "loyalties" lie with the gambling industry.

It was revealed that the Labor party had received \$188,000 and the Liberal party \$167,000 from the gambling lobby just in this last financial year alone. No wonder there isn't a will to ban gambling ads.

Last year, the prime minister cleared his schedule for a day to meet with the gambling lobby and the sports code CEOs back to back. We know that because it's been revealed by Fol [documents].

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.21pm GMT

block-time published-time 10.03pm GMT

Union calls on junior doctors to protest over manager's misfired email

The doctors' union calling is calling for junior doctors to take a stand Thursday morning outside the hospital where a medical administration manager accidentally sent them an email calling them a "workforce of clinical marshmallows [sic]."

As [Guardian Australia first revealed on Friday](#) , the local health district apologised for the incident which the union representing doctors, the Australian Salaried Medical Officers' Federation (Asmof), called "tone-deaf" and "unacceptable."

The NSW branch of Asmof has announced the protest to take place at 11am for a safer workplace on on its Instagram page:

Junior doctors, aka clinical marshmallows, are saying enough is enough. They've had it with the Minns Government and how it treats healthcare workers.

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block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.12pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.55pm GMT

Wong says 'deep concerns' for Yang Hengjun a year after suspended death sentence in China

Foreign minister Penny Wong has released a statement this morning on the continued detention in China of Australian writer Dr Yang Hengjun.

Today marks one year since Australian citizen Dr Yang Jun received a suspended death sentence in Beijing.

The past year, and the five years of detention before his sentencing, have been a difficult and dark time for Dr Yang. Throughout, he has demonstrated his inner strength and remarkable resilience.

Today, my thoughts are with Dr Yang, his family and his many loved ones.

The Australian government has made clear to China that we remain appalled by Dr Yang's suspended death sentence. We hold serious concerns about Dr Yang's health and conditions. We continue to press to ensure his needs are met and he receives appropriate medical care.

Dr Yang is entitled to basic standards of justice, procedural fairness and humane treatment, in accordance with international norms and China's legal obligations.

In his communication with the government, Dr Yang has made clear he knows he has the support of his country. We want to see him reunited with his family. The government will continue to advocate for Dr Yang at every opportunity.

Dr Yang has been detained since January 2019 on national security charges.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.16pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.50pm GMT

'A complete train wreck', Labor MP says of Coalition lunch policy

Labor MP Julian Hill and Liberal MP Keith Wolahan are sparring on Sky News over the Liberals' tax-free lunch policy and debating how much it will cost.

The Coalition hasn't yet publicly released the figures but has said it will cost under \$250m, far below costings from the government – done by the treasury department – that have come in at \$1.6bn. Hill says:

Peter Dutton said on the weekend there would be no costings before the election. Sussan Ley came on TV this morning, the deputy leader, and said they'd already released the costings. None of those things can be true – like, it's a lie. There are no costings that have been released.

Wolahan comes back to the argument the treasury department was "politicised" by doing those costings, and that small businesses are supportive of the policy.

The council of small business welcomes this, and our home state of Victoria is particularly bad. Small business operators have to pay all of the property taxes that everyone else has to pay, so they are closing at a rate that is higher in the rest of the nation. So as Victorians, we really welcome small hospitality that has been given this leg up.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.46pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.38pm GMT

Victoria announces free virtual health clinic for women

AFP charge Victorian man after alleged antisemitic phone calls to political organisation in Canberra – as it happened

The Victorian government has announced a free virtual women's health clinic to help reduce barriers to services such as contraception and abortion.

The health minister, Mary-Anne Thomas, has announced the new clinic will launch in the middle of the year to offer free medical advice, treatment and care for a range of women's health needs.

Available via telehealth or online, it will offer an initial health assessment and some treatments.

Thomas says it will reduce barriers to care, including for women in regional and remote Victoria where access to services like contraception and abortion is hard due to distance from major towns.

I know that there are women and girls too that need access to both medical or surgical termination of pregnancy and they don't know where to start. The virtual women's health clinic will be able to provide MTOP services to women and girls with this assistance of GPs.

This is a really great initiative, and it's all part of our government's commitment to ensuring that sexual and reproductive health care, including access to both medical and surgical termination, is more readily available for women and girls wherever they live.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.50pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.32pm GMT

Oscar Jenkins to be added to Ukraine's PoW list, envoy says

Ukraine's ambassador to [**Australia**](#), Vasyl Myroshnychenko, has spoken to ABC News Breakfast and said Australian Oscar Jenkins will be added to Ukraine's list of prisoners of war, meaning Ukraine could negotiate with Russia to include him in a prisoner swap.

Jenkins was captured by Russian forces, and Myroshnychenko confirmed he had signed a contract with Ukrainian defence forces, so international law on prisoners of war would apply to him.

There was no evidence of him being allegedly killed, as it was widely reported in the Australian media, and in a way some of my concerns got confirmed later on when the Russian ambassador and Russian embassy confirmed [he] is actually alive, which is good news and I'm sure it was uplifting news for his family. Now he will get on the list as a prisoner of war.

The Ukrainian government will negotiate his exchange ... We have exchanged previously lots of prisoners of war and we swap them for Russian prisoners of war, which we have in Ukraine.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.11pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.20pm GMT

Victorian bail law move 'another step backwards', legal centre says

Following from our last post...

Human Rights Law Centre's director of First Nations justice, Maggie Munn, has also expressed concern over the review, saying:

Children belong in our communities, not locked up in a prison cell. The [Jacinta] Allan government has today flagged bringing back bail laws which were a labelled a 'complete and unmitigated disaster' and led to Veronica Marie Nelson, a strong Gunditjmara, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wiradjuri and Yorta Yorta woman, dying in custody.

AFP charge Victorian man after alleged antisemitic phone calls to political organisation in Canberra – as it happened

This is another step backwards and directly contravenes the recommendations from the Yoorrook justice commission, the 2022 parliamentary inquiry and the coronial inquest into Veronica Nelson's death, all of which recommended urgent and widespread reform to bail laws which were found to be unjust, punitive and entrenched disadvantage.

Instead of buckling to fear-mongering by the Liberal opposition, the Allan government should implement Poccum's law, developed by the family of Veronica Nelson and endorsed by over 70 community, human rights and legal organisations, which will make Victoria's bail laws safer and fairer for every person in Victoria.

Here's our analysis on the announcement:

Related: [Labor's hasty review of Victoria's new bail laws smacks of byelection panic](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.59am GMT

block-time published-time 9.18pm GMT

Indigenous leader says Victorian review of bail laws 'premature'

The Victorian government's review into the state bail laws – despite the most recent reforms having only come into effect in mid-December – has sparked concern among Aboriginal community leaders and legal experts.

The co-chair of the First People's Assembly, Ruben Berg, says the move is "premature":

The laws were only just passed by parliament. It's hard not to question the underlying political motivations driving this decision.

We've seen the damage knee-jerk reactions to bail reform can have to our community. We cannot forget that it was a death of Veronica Nelson, an Aboriginal woman in custody, that prompted the recent reforms in the first place.

Bail reform was a key focus of recommendations from the Yoorrook justice commission who heard extensive evidence about the disproportionate impact the laws are having on First Peoples in Victoria. Any attempt to walk back from those latest reforms would fly in the face of this testimony.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.59am GMT

block-time published-time 9.16pm GMT

Coalition says Labor's \$1.6bn pricing of tax-free lunches are 'fake costings'

As expected, there have been more questions to the Coalition this morning on its policy for tax-free lunches for small businesses.

The treasurer, Jim Chalmers, yesterday released costings done by the treasury department, putting a \$1.6bn price tag on the policy.

Sussan Ley says those are "fake costings".

We have released the parliamentary budget office costings of less than \$250 million. So that's out there that's on the table, we've done everything that we would normally do when it comes to costing a policy and the full details or costing of policies, comes out before an election.

Shadow Treasurer Angus Taylor also said that number yesterday, but it hasn't yet been publicly released.

AFP charge Victorian man after alleged antisemitic phone calls to political organisation in Canberra – as it happened

Jane Hume was then asked about the policy on RN Breakfast, attacking Chalmers again for getting the policy costed by his department. She said businesses support the move, despite the number of small businesses facing insolvency.

It's a win win. It helps more businesses to do something for their teams or do something for their clients, but it also helps those hospitality businesses that have been at the pointy end of Labor's cost of living crisis.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.32pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.06pm GMT

Parliamentary inquiry into antisemitism on campus to question QUT

A parliamentary inquiry into antisemitism on university campuses will question the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) this morning after it received backlash over a controversial anti-racism symposium hosted on its campus.

On Tuesday, QUT appointed former judge John Middleton KC to lead an independent review into the content of the symposium, run by QUT's Carumba Institute, and its broader program of events and activities.

The university has received widespread backlash from some Jewish groups and political leaders, including the education minister and former treasurer Josh Frydenberg, over the symposium, which included a comedy event prior to the symposium with a cartoon image of a character dubbed "Dutton's Jew".

The slide, presented by the head of the Jewish Council of [Australia](#), Sarah Schwartz, criticised what she described as [stereotyping of the Jewish community by the Coalition](#), providing a "human shield" to talk about "hating on migrants ... protecting everyday Aussies from leftwing anti-war protesters and ... bolstering support for Israel".

QUT vice-chancellor Margaret Sheil said she appreciated Middleton had agreed to independently assess the symposium and awaited his findings, which would be made public once the review was completed.

Macquarie University officials will appear before the inquiry at 9am, followed by Sheil and QUT vice-president Leanne Harvey at 9.45am. The hearing will adjourn at 10.30am.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.11pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.01pm GMT

Hanson-Young worried Labor not doing enough to regulate technology

Earlier this morning Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young was on ABC News Breakfast and also weighed in on home affairs minister Tony Burke's announcement that DeepSeek would be banned from government devices.

Hanson-Young says she'll take the security agency's advice on the AI app, but is concerned about the government not doing enough to regulate technology, including establishing a "duty of care" on large social media platforms.

The duty of care was recommended in a review of the online safety act released this week, and communications minister Michelle Rowland has said she intends to act on it, but the timeline is unclear. Hanson-Young says:

I am worried that despite being able to move fast on something like this in relation to this Chinese-owned chatbot, that we're seeing the government and seemingly the opposition starting to crab walk away from stronger regulations against the big tech companies and billionaires like, of course, Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.06pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.56pm GMT

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Coleman on US and China tariffs

Sticking with China, David Coleman was asked about its intention to fight back against US tariffs – and how exposed [Australia](#) is amid this.

The shadow foreign minister said it was important for [Australia](#) to ensure “our relationship with the United States stays strong”.

There’s lots of good reasons why [Australia](#) shouldn’t be [hit with tariffs]. We’ve got a strong trade surplus with the US, investing very heavily in the US through the Aukus deal and through the significant increase in defence expenditure from the Coalition.

So this, frankly, should be something that [Australia](#) can manage successfully. That’s what we expect, that’s what we want to see, and that’s what we want the government to deliver.

The host said Chinese tariffs would increase taxes on American coal and gas, and asked whether there was an opportunity for Australian producers to exploit this. Coleman said the key priority was “to make sure that tariffs are not slapped on Australian goods and services”.

There will obviously be bumps in the road and ups and downs in the global situation, but the government’s job is to keep [Australia](#) out of these tariffs, and that’s what they need to do.

Related: [China unveils US tariffs and Google investigation in response to Trump levies](#)

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.27pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.55pm GMT

Coleman backs banning DeepSeek from government devices

Shadow foreign affairs minister David Coleman has also backed a move by the government to ban Chinese AI chatbot DeepSeek from all federal government devices – citing unspecified national security risks.

Related: [DeepSeek banned from Australian government devices over national security concerns](#)

Speaking on Sky News just earlier, Coleman said it was “sensible for the government to act on that security advice, which seems to be quite clear cut”.

We fully support that decision.

Asked if he has concerns about [other Chinese apps, such as Rednote](#) , Coleman said the Coalition hadn’t called for any further bans on apps:

This DeepSeek ban that the government’s announced today is about government devices, it’s about the retention of information in China, and we support that. But we’re not calling for further bans.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.59pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.52pm GMT

‘Much tougher penalties’ on terrorism offences needed – Hume

RN host Sally Sara moves to antisemitism, which will likely be debated further in parliament today.

Jane Hume says the opposition is pushing for stronger penalties, like mandatory sentencing, for some terror offences.

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We need much tougher penalties, which is why I think James Patterson and Michaela Cash have been very clear on the Coalition's determination to bring in mandatory sentencing for terrorist offences, up to six years for terrorist offences, and also one year for those that are brandishing the symbols of hate, which at the moment we simply don't have.

Sara pushes her on the fact that the Coalition tried in 2014 to change Australia's Racial Discrimination Act, which would have controversially peeled back protections for vulnerable groups. Then attorney general George Brandis famously said at the time that people had a "right to be a bigot".

Hume in response says that was a debate "of some time ago" and "I think that what we've seen here is a specific rise in antisemitism".

block-time updated-time Updated at 8.57pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.43pm GMT

Hume on the 'influence of big money from political donations'

Shadow finance minister Jane Hume is speaking to ABC RN Breakfast on the electoral reforms.

We're still yet to see a deal between the government and the Coalition or the crossbench, but Hume says there's only a "small proportion" of the legislation that is controversial.

We want to make sure that there is an opportunity for all parties to run on an even playing field. Minister [Don] Farrell has been pretty clear about removing that influence of big money from political donations, and I can understand exactly why that might be.

I think when we saw the rise of the teals and also United Australia party, we can see where big money was influencing political outcomes, and that's something that I know Mr Farrell has been concerned about from day one of this government.

block-time updated-time Updated at 8.47pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.33pm GMT

Farrell: 'no reason' for US tariffs on Australia

Trade minister Don Farrell has been very busy – he's dealing with electoral reform in parliament, and trying to deal with the possibility of trade tariffs from the US.

On the tariffs, Farrell, speaking to ABC AM, makes the argument that Australia buys "almost twice as much" from the US. He also points to the Indo Pacific economic framework that Australia and the US signed last year in Singapore.

Why would you impose a tariff on a country where you've got a surplus. And of course, that was the argument that former prime minister [Malcolm] Turnbull used with Mr Trump last time. So I think we've got a very strong argument.

Then moving onto electoral reforms, Farrell says he's talking to "everybody" but won't say whether he's reached a deal.

A reminder – the crossbench are not happy with this bill as it limits the amount individual candidates could spend, which they say would have a huge impact on independent candidates trying to get elected.

Some on the crossbench – including Kate Chaney and David Pocock – are calling for the bill to be split, as they support parts of the bill that deal with donation transparency.

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block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.21pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.22pm GMT

Coalition supportive on DeepSeek ban from government devices

Deputy opposition leader Sussan Ley has spoken to Sky News this morning, saying her party is supportive of banning Chinese AI app DeepSeek from government devices.

She says the government has access to “detailed technical national security advice”.

This is about information, sensitive information that belongs in our Australian government with our officials, finding its way – if we are not careful – into the hands of foreign governments. It’s as simple as that.

She also bats away criticism the ban could have an impact on the Chinese community in [Australia](#).

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.24pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.17pm GMT

Zelenskyy backs Oscar Jenkins investigation after call with Albanese

Overnight Anthony Albanese spoke with Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy ahead of the third anniversary of Russia’s war in Ukraine.

Zelenskyy [posted to X](#) following the meeting, saying he was working to expedite defence aid, and that “we must establish all the circumstances surrounding the case of Australian citizen Oscar Jenkins”.

Albanese has released a statement this morning on the call:

The prime minister spoke to President Zelenskyy last night as Ukraine approaches the third anniversary of Russia’s illegal full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Prime minister Anthony Albanese underlined [Australia](#)’s ongoing support for Ukraine through military equipment and other assistance including our action through sanctions to hold Russia to account.

President Zelenskyy expressed his gratitude for [Australia](#)’s support, both material and otherwise.

The prime minister raised the welfare of Australian citizen Oscar Jenkins.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.42pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.08pm GMT

Good morning

Krishani Dhanji here with you as we continue on the first sitting week of the year.

Yesterday [was all about lunch](#), so what’s the government’s main meal going to be today?

You can expect some of that chatter to continue, but we’re expecting some debate on the hate crimes legislation today, after independents Allegra Spender and Jacqui Lambie introduced a motion on antisemitism to the house and Senate yesterday.

And Martin has already flagged the governmental DeepSeek ban announced overnight – we’ll likely see more discussion on that today too.

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Let's get started.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.15pm GMT

block-time published-time 8.01pm GMT

Prediction: house prices to rise in 2025

Most real estate professionals expect a continuing climb in house prices ahead of anticipated interest rate cuts and a federal election where home ownership will remain a policy priority, Australian Associated Press reports.

Queensland is expected to continue its rise in 2025, buoyed by interstate migration, while Melbourne's subdued performance could turn around, as falling values stoke renewed demand.

But the pace of growth may slow with affordability constraints remaining.

The predictions come from a CoreLogic survey, released today, of more than 2,400 real estate professionals across the property and finance industries.

"While we do expect values to finish 2025 higher, the pace of increase will probably be softer than the 4.9% achieved in 2024," the firm's head of research, Eliza Owen, said.

Almost two-thirds of those surveyed expected prices to increase, with a quarter of them expecting growth to exceed 5%.

Only 12% of respondents expected a decrease and the vast majority of them expected values to fall less than 5%.

CoreLogic earlier reported a slight downturn in prices in the nation's most populous cities – Sydney and Melbourne – and slowing growth in other capitals to end 2024, but it is expected to be short-lived.

Possible interest rate cuts before the election could fuel an uptick in demand by boosting borrowing capacity but there remains a need for more homes to be built.

The federal and state governments have an agreed target to deliver 1.2m new homes by mid-2029, but figures for the December quarter show construction activity remains considerably below the 60,000 required every three months.

Funding for projects that could support construction is another part of the government's plan, while the Coalition has also promised \$5bn in grants and concessional loans to fund development-enabling infrastructure if elected.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.13pm GMT

block-time published-time 7.59pm GMT

Welcome

Good morning and welcome to our live news blog. I'm Martin Farrer with some of our best overnight stories before Krishani Dhanji takes the reins.

Amid a scramble by Australian officials to reorientate policy in the wake of Donald Trump's election win, Kevin Rudd seemed to sum it up best. "Interesting times. Too interesting," he said in an email which is part of a Fol cache obtained by our reporters. [Our full report reveals](#) how Australian officials grappled with the incoming US president's "unclear" trade proposals in the wake of his November win and what impact they might have on **Australia**.

With immigration likely to be a key issue in this year's federal election, [we report on a new study today](#) that shows voters have a nuanced view of the issue. While the majority would like lower levels of migration, they support more

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skilled migration and change their views when given more information about how more migrant workers could help build more houses and therefore ease the housing crisis. It comes as a new report by the data analysis firm CoreLogic suggests lack of supply will continue to push house prices higher this year. More coming up.

The federal government [has issued a ban](#) on all products, applications and services made by the China-based AI company DeepSeek and has ordered that they must be removed from federal government systems and devices. Australian users have been encouraged to review any company's privacy policies to understand how their data is used. In a statement last night, the home affairs minister, Tony Burke, said the government "will not hesitate to act" against a national security risk.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.33pm GMT

Load-Date: February 5, 2025

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