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SITTING DAYS—2013

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FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—EIGHT PERIOD

Governor-General
Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, Companion of the Order of Australia

House of Representatives Office holders

Speaker—Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke MP
Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Mr Steven Georganas MP

Members of the Speaker’s Panel—Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry Adams MP, Mr Darren Cheeseman MP, MP, Ms Sharon Joy Grierson MP,
Dr Andrew Keith Leigh MP, Ms Kirsten Fiona Livermore MP,
Mr Geoffrey Raymond Lyons MP, Mr Robert George Mitchell MP, Mr John Paul Murphy MP,
Mr Robert James Murray Oakeshott MP, Ms Deborah Mary O’Neill MP,
Ms Amanda Louise Rishworth MP, Mr Michael Stuart Symon MP,
Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP, Mr Anthony Harold Curties Windsor MP

Leader of the House—Hon. Anthony Norman Albanese MP
Deputy Leader of the House—Hon. Stephen Francis Smith MP
Manager of Opposition Business—Hon. Christopher Maurice Pyne MP
Deputy Manager of Opposition Business—Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP

Party Leaders and Whips

Australian Labor Party
Leader—Hon. Julia Eileen Gillard MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Wayne Maxwell Swan MP
Chief Government Whip—Hon. Joel Andrew Fitzgibbon MP
Government Whips—Ms Jill Griffiths Hall MP and Mr Ed Husic MP

Liberal Party of Australia
Leader—Hon. Anthony John Abbott MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP
Chief Opposition Whip—Hon. Warren George Entsch MP
Opposition Whips—Mr Patrick Damien Secker MP and Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP

The Nationals
Leader—Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP
Chief Whip—Mr Mark Maclean Coulton MP
Whip—Mr Paul Christopher Neville MP

Printed by authority of the House of Representatives
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<td>Washer, Malcom James</td>
<td>Moore, WA</td>
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<td>Wilkie, Andrew Damien</td>
<td>Denison, TAS</td>
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<td>Windsor, Anthony Harold Curties</td>
<td>New England, NSW</td>
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<td>Wyatt, Kenneth George</td>
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<td>Zappia, Tony</td>
<td>Makin, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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**PARTY ABBREVIATIONS**

ALP—Australian Labor Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia; LNP—Liberal National Party;
CLP—Country Liberal Party; Nats—The Nationals; NWA—The Nationals WA; Ind—Independent;
AG—Australian Greens

### Heads of Parliamentary Departments

- Clerk of the Senate—R Laing
- Clerk of the House of Representatives—B Wright
- Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—C Mills
- Parliamentary Budget Officer—P Bowen
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<td>The Hon Julia Gillard MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Digital Productivity</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Asian Century Policy</td>
<td>The Hon Dr Craig Emerson MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Social Inclusion</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Mark Butler MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Mental Health Reform</td>
<td>The Hon Mark Butler MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for the Public Service and Integrity</td>
<td>The Hon Gary Gray AO MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet Secretary</td>
<td>The Hon Jason Clare MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Centenary of ANZAC</td>
<td>The Hon Warren Snowdon MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Jan McLucas</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Treasurer</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Wayne Swan MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Deputy Prime Minister)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Bill Shorten MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon David Bradbury MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon Bernie Ripoll MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy</td>
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<td>The Hon Stephen Smith MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon Warren Snowdon MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Defence Materiel</td>
<td>The Hon Dr Mike Kelly AM MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Defence</td>
<td>Senator the Hon David Feeney</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Simon Crean MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for the Arts</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Simon Crean MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Sport</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon Kate Lundy</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Leader of the House)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Infrastructure and Transport</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Anthony Albanese MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport</td>
<td>The Hon Catherine King MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Jenny Macklin MP</td>
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<td>The Hon Julie Collins MP</td>
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<td>The Hon Julie Collins MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Senator the Hon Jan McLucas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Homelessness and Social Housing</td>
<td>The Hon Melissa Parke MP</td>
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<td>The Hon Dr Craig Emerson MP</td>
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<td>The Hon Richard Marles MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon Richard Marles MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Trade</td>
<td>The Hon Kelvin Thompson MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon Tony Burke MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Vice-President of the Executive Council)</td>
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The Hon Chris Bowen MP

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Minister Assisting for Industry and Innovation  
The Hon Greg Combet AM MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Higher Education and Skills  
Senator the Hon Kate Lundy  
The Hon Sharon Bird MP

Minister for Finance and Deregulation  
Senator the Hon Penny Wong  
The Hon Gary Gray AO MP  
The Hon David Bradbury MP

Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth  
The Hon Peter Garrett AM MP

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Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development  
The Hon Kate Ellis MP

Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Workplace Relations  
The Hon Julie Collins MP  
Senator the Hon Jacinta Collins

(Manager of Government Business in the Senate)  
Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  
The Hon Sid Sidebottom MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  
The Hon Martin Ferguson AM MP

Minister for Resources and Energy  
The Hon Martin Ferguson AM MP

Minister for Tourism  
The Hon Greg Combet AM MP  
The Hon Yvette D’Ath MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency  
The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP

Minister for Health  
The Hon Mark Butler MP

Minister for Indigenous Health  
The Hon Warren Snowdon MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing  
The Hon Catherine King MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Mental Health  
The Hon Melissa Parke MP

Minister for Immigration and Citizenship  
The Hon Brendan O’Connor MP

Minister for Multicultural Affairs  
Senator the Hon Kate Lundy

Attorney-General  
The Hon Mark Dreyfus QC MP

Minister for Emergency Management  
Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig

Minister Assisting on Queensland Floods Recovery  
The Hon Jason Clare MP

Minister for Home Affairs  
The Hon Jason Clare MP

Minister for Justice  
Senator the Hon Kim Carr

Minister for Human Services  

Each box represents a portfolio. **Cabinet Ministers are shown in bold type.** As a general rule, there is one department in each portfolio. However, there is a Department of Veterans’ Affairs in the Defence portfolio. The title of a department does not necessarily reflect the title of a minister in all cases.
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<td>Senator Arthur Sinodinos</td>
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<td>The Hon Julie Bishop MP</td>
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<td>The Hon Julie Bishop MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance</td>
<td>The Hon Teresa Gambaro MP</td>
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<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Transport</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Warren Truss MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Leader of The Nationals) Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Regional Transport</td>
<td>Mr Darren Chester MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon Eric Abetz</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) Shadow Minister for Employment Participation</td>
<td>The Hon Sussan Ley MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Attorney-General</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon George Brandis SC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for the Arts (Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate)</td>
<td>Senator Gary Humphries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Justice, Customs and Border Protection Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Shadow Attorney-General</td>
<td>Mr Michael Keenan MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Treasurer</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Joe Hockey MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Treasurer and Shadow Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation Senator Mathias Cormann</td>
<td>The Hon Tony Smith MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Tax Reform Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Education</td>
<td>The Hon Tony Smith MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Deputy Chairman, Coalition Policy Development Committee)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training</strong></td>
<td>The Hon Christopher Pyne MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Hon Sussan Ley MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Universities and Research Shadow Minister for Youth and Sport (Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House)</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Brett Mason</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Education Senator Fiona Nash</td>
<td>Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs</strong></td>
<td>Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Deputy Leader of the Nationals) Shadow Minister for Indigenous Development and Employment Senator Marise Payne</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Water</strong></td>
<td>Senator Barnaby Joyce</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Leader of the Nationals in the Senate) Shadow Minister for Regional Development</td>
<td>The Hon Bob Baldwin MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern and Remote Australia Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald</td>
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<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government</td>
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<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Murray-Darling Basin</td>
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<td>(Chairman, Coalition Policy Development Committee)</td>
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<td>Shadow Special Minister of State</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for COAG</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources</td>
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<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Environment</td>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Productivity and Population</td>
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<p>| Shadow Minister | Mr Don Randall MP |
| Senate Simon Birmingham |
| Shadow Minister for Finance, Deregulation and Debt Reduction | The Hon Andrew Robb AO MP |
| Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing | The Hon Bronwyn Bishop MP |
| Shadow Minister for Mental Health | Senator Marise Payne |
| (Mr Jamie Briggs MP) |
| Shadow Minister for Primary Healthcare | Dr Andrew Southcott MP |
| Shadow Minister for Regional Health Services and Indigenous Health | Dr Andrew Laming MP |
| Shadow Minister for Families, Housing and Human Services | The Hon Kevin Andrews MP |
| Shadow Minister for Seniors | The Hon Bronwyn Bishop MP |
| Shadow Minister for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector | Senator Mitch Fifield |
| Shadow Minister for Housing | Senator Marise Payne |
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| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Status of Women | Senator Michaelia Cash |
| Shadow Minister for Climate Action, Environment and Heritage | The Hon Greg Hunt MP |
| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Environment | Senator Simon Birmingham |
| Shadow Minister for Productivity and Population | Mr Scott Morrison MP |
| Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship | The Hon Teresa Gambaro MP |
| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Citizenship and Settlement | Senator Michaelia Cash |
| Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry, and Science | Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP |
| Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation, Industry, and Science | Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck |</p>
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<td>The Hon John Cobb MP</td>
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<td>The Hon Bruce Billson MP</td>
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<tr>
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Wednesday, 13 March 2013

The SPEAKER (Ms Anna Burke) took the chair at 09:00 made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

**BILLS**

**Export Finance and Insurance Corporation Amendment (Finance) Bill 2013**

Reference to Federation Chamber

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter—Chief Government Whip) (09:01): by leave—I move:

That the bill be referred to the Federation Chamber for further consideration.

Question agreed to.

**Aged Care (Living Longer Living Better) Bill 2013**

First Reading

Bill—by leave—and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Butler.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr BUTLER (Port Adelaide—Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, Minister for Housing and Homelessness, Minister for Social Inclusion and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Mental Health Reform) (09:02): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Today I am delighted to introduce five bills that give effect to this government's $3.7 billion commitment to aged care, a commitment described in the Living Longer Living Better aged-care reform package that the Prime Minister and I announced in April last year that provides a 10-year plan for building a new aged-care system—a system for a 21st century Australia.

This government has recognised that we must address head-on the challenges and opportunities of an ageing population and that we must implement reforms now that prepare the aged-care system for the needs of the future generations of older Australians.

These bills deliver on these reforms.

This is not change for change's sake but change that will make a real difference to older Australians, to the people who love them, to the people who care for them, and to the aged-care workers who look after them.

Since the government asked the Productivity Commission to report to us on caring for older Australians, I have consulted widely with consumers, workers and industry. I have talked and I have listened, so that we can build a better, fairer and more nationally consistent aged-care system.

Getting the right aged care will no longer be left to chance. People will be able to get the aged care they want and need, no matter where they live and what their financial means.

People will have more choice, more control, more support and more independence. They will be helped to stay in their own home for as long as they possibly can and will have better access to residential care should they need it.

They will be able to make their way more easily through what, to now, has been a complex and fragmented system.

Older Australians will be able to make more informed decisions knowing the aged-care services that are available, the fees they may be expected to pay, and the quality of services they can expect to receive.

They will be serviced by a stronger workforce, a skilled, well qualified workforce, and, so importantly, an appropriately paid workforce. There will be better access and support for people with dementia and veterans with certain mental
health conditions as well as for a range of other people with special needs.

We are supporting aged-care providers to deliver the quantity, the quality and the diversity of care that we need now and that we are going to require even more of into the future.

With these bills we are laying the foundation for a new era of aged-care delivery for this nation.

Since the Aged Care Act 1997 first came into effect, the needs, demands and expectations of Australia's ageing population have changed markedly. So too has the network of aged-care providers across residential and home care.

The pressures on the system to provide quality, affordable and appropriate care are far greater than ever before and will only increase over coming decades. The system is now at a tipping point, faced with the pressure that comes from a population that is ageing and one which, quite rightly, has significant expectations and ideas about the aged-care services they will receive. Doing nothing is not an option.

Making these changes to aged-care legislation will better enable aged-care providers to tackle these pressures and prepare with certainty for the future. It establishes the foundation that enables older Australians and their families to enter aged care, knowing that what they get will be quality care at the right price, and delivered where they want it, either in the home or in a residential setting.

These five bills comprehensively address the major areas of change.

The changes included in the Aged Care (Living Longer Living Better) Bill 2013 and related bills implement reforms in four key areas:

- reforms that focus on end-to-end aged care;
- reforms that provide greater choice and control for consumers;
- reforms that provide more sustainable and modernised financing arrangements; and
- reforms that ensure independent advice and oversight to support the changes.

Starting with the focus on end-to-end aged care.

During my extensive conversations with older Australians, their families and carers—more than 4,000 of them in total—one of their clearest messages I received was that we need a system that serves them consistently and seamlessly across the spectrum of aged care.

We need an end-to-end aged-care system.

When the Aged Care Act 1997 was introduced over 15 years ago it recognised the emergence of community care as a viable alternative but residential care was one dominant form of care. Twenty-first century consumers now have a clear preference for care delivered in their home and tailored to their needs, care that is consumer directed and that enables and supports recovery as well as long-term care needs. And if, or when, the time comes, they want to be able to move to residential care with minimum fuss.

This is why we have established a new type of care, home care, to replace community care and certain types of flexible care currently delivered in the home.

As part of these reforms, this government has already increased the number of home care places, with over 5,800 additional places available just this year. This will continue to increase each year with the total allocation of home care places rising from around 60,000 to almost 100,000 over the next five years.
From 1 July 2013, four levels of home care will enable consumers to access the packages that best suit their needs. In addition, there will be two new supplements: a dementia supplement and a veterans' supplement. These supplements will be available across all care levels for consumers whose care needs might be greater due to dementia, and for veterans with mental health conditions who may also need greater support.

A new workforce supplement will also provide additional funding to eligible home care providers so that the workforce can better meet the needs of consumers. The new supplement will mean more workers can access more appropriate pay and improved training and development. The aged-care workplace will be better and it will be safer.

We will seek to ensure that the increasing numbers of elderly people remaining in their homes are not socially isolated by extending the Community Visitors Scheme from residential care to home care as well.

Whilst Australians have sent us a resounding message of wanting to age at home, the need for residential care will continue to grow. To support this, from 1 July 2014 the different treatment for low-level and high-level residential care will be removed. There will only be one type of approval for permanent residential care.

Anyone assessed as needing permanent residential care will be able to access any residential care service that meets his or her needs at the time of entry into care. These approvals will not lapse, unless expressly time limited, so there will be fewer reassessments and it will be easier for consumers to access the care that they need.

These changes will mean continuity of services being available from home care through to residential care. They will make it easier for people to move through the system.

I turn now to the second major area of reform: greater choice and control for consumers.

As I mentioned, the message I received from consumers was that they really want to be able to exercise choice and have more control as their care needs change with age.

In this context, I will highlight a few major reforms.

Firstly, we are ensuring, by 1 July 2013, that all new home care places allocated to providers are offered on a consumer directed care basis. And from 1 July 2015 all new and pre-existing home care places must be offered on this basis. Consumer directed care is the future of aged care.

This means that consumers will work with their home care provider to choose the elements of care that best suit their needs and their home care package budget. This does not require legislation but will be a condition of the allocation of home care places.

Secondly, in residential care, care recipients and their families will be able to purchase additional amenities or supplementary care.

Through the bills, we will continue to allow residential care places to be offered on a dedicated extra service basis, whereby an agreed set of extra services are paid for under one fee. Importantly care recipients, whether or not they are in an extra service place, will also be able to opt in and opt out of additional amenities offered by the provider.

Thirdly, the bills change the arrangements relating to accommodation payments for residential care. For the first time, consumers will have real choice and real control.

Approved providers will continue to be required to enter into an agreement with each
care recipient in relation to accommodation payments.

Importantly, care recipients who can afford to contribute to their accommodation costs will have real choice regarding how they pay for their accommodation. They will be given the choice to pay either a fully refundable deposit, a periodic payment, or a combination of both. They will also be able to draw down periodic payments from that refundable deposit.

The amounts of the refundable deposits and periodic payments will be financially equivalent from a provider's perspective.

From 1 July 2014, aged-care providers will not be able to distinguish between care recipients on the basis of how they elect to pay for their accommodation. Instead, care recipients will have 28 days upon entering the aged-care service to decide how to pay their accommodation payment or contribution. Providers will be paid the agreed periodic payment during this election period.

If a care recipient cannot make a contribution towards the cost of their accommodation, the government will contribute the amount of the accommodation supplement applicable to that facility.

The next major area of reform is the creation of more sustainable and modernised financing arrangements.

Older Australians and their families have very clearly told me that fees and charges across the aged-care system are complex, confusing and often lead to inequities. Understanding how much they have to pay, for what and why, is a major concern for them.

It is also true that the current arrangements for government subsidy and user contributions for home care and residential care differ greatly.

The Aged Care (Living Longer Living Better) Bill moves to better align these arrangements. For both residential care and home care, the maximum amount of government subsidy will comprise calculation of a basic subsidy amount plus any supplements.

Three new supplements will be available in residential care. These are the dementia supplement, the veterans' supplement and the workforce supplement. I mention these supplements in the context of home care and I am pleased to confirm that they will also be available in residential care from 1 July 2013.

In addition to reforming the way that government subsidy is calculated, the reforms also herald greater clarity in relation to the fees payable by consumers. Care costs and accommodation costs are much more clearly delineated.

In relation to care costs, the bills ensure a more sustainable future for aged-care funding by reforming the means testing arrangements. People who can afford to help pay for their care will be asked to do so, and those who cannot afford to pay will still be able to access care.

In home care, the bills introduce new income-testing arrangements from 1 July 2014. In summary, all home care recipients may be asked to pay a daily fee of up to 17.5 per cent of the single basic age pension amount as is the case now. In addition, those who can afford to may also be asked to pay an income tested care fee. There is already an income tested care fee in community care. The new arrangements will ensure consistency and will embed protections for consumers.

While some home care recipients will need to contribute more to the cost of their care through an income tested care fee,
safeguards are being introduced. For example:

- no full rate pensioner will pay an income tested care fee;
- no care recipient will be asked to contribute more than the cost of their care;
- no care recipient's home or other assets will be included in assessing their capacity to pay an income tested care fee for home care; and
- there will be both annual and lifetime caps on income tested care fees. Once a person reaches the applicable annual or lifetime cap, they will pay no more income tested care fees. The annual cap in home care will be $5,000 or $10,000—depending on the income of the person. The lifetime cap will be $60,000 and all caps will be indexed.

Appropriate changes will also be made, in line with the changes to home care, to implement new and fairer means testing arrangements in residential care from 1 July 2014.

The standard resident contribution to cover meals, utilities and the like of 85 per cent of the basic age pension amount will continue. In addition, a new means tested care fee will replace the existing income tested care fee. This addresses current inequities in the system and ensures that people with similar means are treated alike regardless of whether their wealth lies in income or assets.

As for home care, important safeguards will exist also in residential care.

For example:

- many full rate pensioners will not pay a means tested care fee;
- we will maintain current arrangements to exempt the principal residence from means testing if occupied by a spouse or other protected person; and
- here too there will be annual and lifetime caps on means tested care fees payable by the care recipient. An annual cap of $25,000, indexed, on means tested care fees will protect care recipients with higher than average care fees. A lifetime cap of $60,000, also indexed, will protect care recipients who receive care for a longer than average period of time. These caps apply across both residential and home care, so any fees paid in home care count also towards the lifetime cap.

A hardship supplement will also be available to care recipients who are unable to pay their fees in either home care or residential care.

So how will all of these changes to subsidy, fees and payments affect people who are in care when the changes take effect?

If a person is in residential care on 30 June 2014, there will be no change to the way their fees are calculated.

If the person moves to another aged-care service within 28 days of leaving the first service, their fees will continue to be calculated in accordance with the methods and calculators as at 30 June 2014 unless the person chooses to have the new rules apply to them. Again, this offers real choice and real control for consumers.

These changes reflected in the bills provide for a much fairer system. They will address the issue of asset-rich, income-poor residents paying for all of their accommodation and none of their care; and income-rich, asset-poor residents paying for their care but not for accommodation. They will also ensure equitable payment for care received at home.
I am pleased to advise that the bills introduce a new Aged Care Pricing Commissioner. The commissioner will make decisions where required on pricing issues, for example, regarding accommodation payments and extra service fees. This will increase the level of transparency and will ensure that aged-care recipients are charged fairly for their accommodation.

Further, and consistent with the government's commitment to increase transparency in the quality of aged care, I commend to the House the two new bills establishing a new Australian Aged Care Quality Agency.

This body will replace the existing Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency from 1 January 2014. The new quality agency will be established under the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997 in line with the recommendations of the Uhrig Review. It will be a single body to assess quality across home care and residential care leading to greater efficiencies, reduced costs and a further commitment to an end-to-end aged-care system.

Finally, the bills require an independent review of the reforms within five years. This ensures that the momentum is maintained in those areas identified by the Productivity Commission as essential reform foundations. The review must include consultation with a broad range of people including approved providers, consumers, workers, carers and families of care recipients. We want to know what works and we want to know what does not. The review will need to consider whether further steps can be taken to move the system more towards a consumer entitlement model.

Given the significance of the amendments to the legislation that are required by the reforms, this government is also taking the opportunity to make minor and technical changes to the legislation. This includes, for example, improving terminology or consistency, repealing redundant provisions, and consolidating existing delegated legislation, so the regulatory framework is more readily accessible and able to be understood. Even these minor changes have been the subject of consultation with stakeholders.

Subject to the passage of the bills through parliament and the development of associated changes to delegated legislation, it is proposed that the first package of reforms take effect from 1 July 2013, with a subsequent package effective from 1 January 2014, and the final package effective from 1 July 2014. This graduated introduction will ensure that aged-care providers and consumers are able to prepare for, and become familiar with, the changes. It will also give certainty to the industry to assist in business planning, knowing well in advance the changes that will take effect in mid-2014.

For some years now the sector has come together under the rubric of the National Aged Care Alliance (NACA) and has worked together to present to the parliament, the community, the Productivity Commission and others a united view about the major building blocks of aged-care reform. NACA, as well the expert group of people in the Productivity Commission—whom I must thank for having conducted such a comprehensive inquiry—helped frame the conversations I held directly with older Australians. This consultation has helped shape these bills.

Consultations and collaborations will continue through the strong governance structure the government has developed to support and guide the implementation of the Living Longer Living Better aged-care reforms.
As the House can see, these are historic changes that aged-care recipients, workers and providers alike want and need to develop a modern, fit-for-purpose aged-care system.

This is just the start. We are building a new system that will have the capacity to provide quality, affordable, accessible and appropriate care to a rapidly growing population of older Australians over coming decades.

These changes will benefit both those who provide aged care and those who receive it.

They strike the right balance: They support aged-care providers to deliver the right quality, quantity and type of care. And they meet the increasing expectations of older Australians and their families to be cared for as long as possible in their own homes, moving into residential care if they need to, and all the time having choice and control over their decisions.

These bills will fundamentally help to define our nation in the 21st century as a decent, dignified Australia, a socially inclusive Australia and an Australia that truly cares about its older citizens.

Debate adjourned.

**Australian Aged Care Quality Agency Bill 2013**

**First Reading**

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Butler.

Bill read a first time.

**Second Reading**

Mr BUTLER (Port Adelaide—Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, Minister for Housing and Homelessness, Minister for Social Inclusion and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Mental Health Reform) (09:23): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Today I am delighted to introduce the Australian Aged Care Quality Agency Bill 2013, which contributes to this government's $3.7 billion commitment to aged care, a commitment described in the Living Longer Living Better aged-care reform package that provides a 10-year plan for building a new aged-care system, a system for a 21st century Australia.

Consistent with the government's commitment to increased transparency in the quality of aged care, this bill and the Australian Aged Care Quality Agency (Transitional Provisions) Bill 2013 establishes the new Australian Aged Care Quality Agency.

The quality agency will replace the existing Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency from 1 January 2014. It will be the sole agency for approved providers of home care and residential care to deal with quality assurance of their services. This will lead to greater efficiencies, reduced costs and a further commitment to an end-to-end aged-care system.

This bill:

- establishes the quality agency and proposes that it will become a prescribed agency under the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997;
- describes the functions of the CEO of the quality agency and its advisory body, the Aged Care Quality Advisory Council;
- describes the appointment processes for the CEO and for council members; and
- describes important operational matters relating to the quality agency including reporting requirements.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.
Mr Butler, Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, Minister for Housing and Homelessness, Minister for Social Inclusion and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Mental Health Reform)

(09:26): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Today I am delighted to introduce the Australian Aged Care Quality Agency (Transitional Provisions) Bill 2013, which contributes to this government's commitment to aged care, a commitment described in the Living Longer Living Better aged-care reform package that provides a 10-year plan for building a new aged-care system—a system for a 21st century Australia.

Consistent with the government's commitment to increased transparency in the quality of aged care, this bill and the Australian Aged Care Quality Agency Bill 2013 establish the new Australian Aged Care Quality Agency.

This quality agency will replace the existing Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency from 1 January 2014. It will be the sole agency for approved providers of home care and residential care to deal with quality assurance of their services. This will lead to greater efficiencies, reduced costs and a further commitment to an end-to-end aged-care system.

This bill will facilitate a smooth transition from the current arrangements to the new quality agency. This includes:

- transferring of assets and liabilities;
- transfer of custody of records of documents;
- transfer of office holders and staff; and
- handling of transitional matters.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

Aged Care (Bond Security) Amendment Bill 2013

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Butler.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr Butler, Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, Minister for Housing and Homelessness, Minister for Social Inclusion and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Mental Health Reform)

(09:28): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Today I am delighted to introduce the Aged Care (Bond Security) Amendment Bill 2013, which contributes to this government's commitment to aged care, a commitment described in the Living Longer Living Better aged-care reform package that provides a 10-year plan for building a new aged-care system—a system for a 21st century Australia.

This bill amends the existing Aged Care (Bond Security) Act 2006 to:

- change the name of the act to the Aged Care (Accommodation Payment Security) Act 2006; and
- extend the existing Accommodation Bond Guarantee Scheme for bond balances to refundable accommodation deposits and refundable accommodation contributions, which will be new types of lump sum accommodation payments from 1 July 2014. This ensures protection for all lump
sum payments made by care recipients, regardless of whether the lump sum payment was made before or after 1 July 2014.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

Aged Care (Bond Security) Levy Amendment Bill 2013

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Butler.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr BUTLER (Port Adelaide—Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, Minister for Housing and Homelessness, Minister for Social Inclusion and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Mental Health Reform) (09:29): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Today I am delighted to introduce the Aged Care (Bond Security) Levy Amendment Bill 2013, which contributes to this government's commitment to aged care—a commitment described in the Living Longer Living Better aged care reform package that provides a 10-year plan for building a new aged care system, a system for a 21st century Australia.

This bill amends the Aged Care (Bond Security) Levy Act 2006, firstly to change the name of the act to the Aged Care (Accommodation Payment Security) Levy Act 2006 and also to ensure that if the Accommodation Bond Guarantee Scheme is triggered and the Commonwealth repays accommodation bonds or the new types of payments—collectively known as accommodation payment balances—the Commonwealth is able to recover its costs, via a levy, from approved providers.

I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

Foreign Affairs Portfolio

Miscellaneous Measures Bill 2013

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Marles.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr MARLES (Corio—Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs and Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs) (09:31): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I rise to introduce the Foreign Affairs Portfolio Miscellaneous Measures Bill 2013. This bill amends two acts, the Intelligence Services Act 2001 and the Work Health Safety Act 2011.

The staff of ASIS

The amendments to the Intelligence Services Act will create a mechanism for Australian Secret Intelligence Service employees to move to an Australian Public Service agency in the same way that Australian Public Service employees can voluntarily transfer from one Australian Public Service agency to another under section 26 of the Public Service Act 1999.

These amendments will better facilitate the protection of an ASIS employee's identity as an ASIS officer and broaden the mobility opportunities for ASIS employees in the Australian Public Service.

ASIS employees are not Australian public servants. Instead, they are Commonwealth officers employed under the Intelligence Services Act.

ASIS officers perform difficult and, at times, dangerous tasks in distant locations. Information about their work and their identities is closely held in order to protect them, their activities and the people they interact with. Indeed, it is an offence under
section 41 of the Intelligence Services Act to identify a staff member of ASIS, other than in a few prescribed circumstances.

In order to protect their identity ASIS officers are typically identified as public servants. However, this may have unintended consequences when an ASIS officer seeks to move to a public service agency as there is no obvious reason why a person identified as a public servant would not transfer under the Public Service Act like any other public servant.

The amendments include mechanisms by which the Public Service Commissioner and the Director-General of ASIS will agree on how the ASIS classifications correspond to the APS classifications. This will ensure that ASIS levels have an equivalent Australian Public Service level for operation of this new provision and the other related aspects of the Public Service Act—for example, the special requirements in respect of merit that apply in relation to promotion.

This proposal does not detract from the Australian Public Service merit principle in engagement. Under section 35 of the Intelligence Services Act the Director-General must adopt the principles of the Public Service Act in relation to employees of ASIS to the extent to which the Director-General considers that they are consistent with the effective performance of ASIS’s functions. In accordance with this obligation, ASIS’s recruitment and promotion policies are based on merit.

**Work health and safety**

This bill also contains amendments to the Work Health and Safety Act 2011. These amendments will enable the Director-General of ASIS, with the approval of the minister responsible for the Work Health and Safety Act, to make a declaration that specified provisions of the Work Health and Safety Act do not apply, or apply subject to modifications, in relation to persons carrying out work for the Director-General.

These amendments clarify rather than amend existing work health and safety policy with regard to national security. The amendments make clear that in administering ASIS and in the exercise of the power to make a declaration the Director-General must take into account the need to promote the objects of the Work Health and Safety Act to the greatest extent consistent with the maintenance of Australia’s national security.

The Work Health and Safety Act already recognises that national security may not always be compatible with full compliance with the Work Health and Safety Act and the need to ensure that national security is not prejudiced. However, currently there is no mechanism to modify the operation of the act to people who perform work for the Director-General of ASIS.

This is in contrast to the position of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation and the Australian Defence Force. Both of these agencies have mechanisms for modification of the Work Health and Safety Act under sections 12C and 12D of the act, respectively.

The environments in which ASIS operates overseas are very similar to the environments in which ASIO and the ADF operate.

In these environments the requirements of national security may not always be compatible with full compliance with Australian work health and safety obligations. Indeed, full compliance could in some circumstances place people who work for the Director-General of ASIS at risk and prejudice national security.

Therefore, there is a similar need for the Work Health and Safety Act to be modified in its application to ASIS in appropriate circumstances. Any modification will only occur with the agreement of the minister.
I commend this bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

**Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards (Registration Fees) Bill 2013**

**First Reading**

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Burke.

Bill read a first time.

**Second Reading**

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities) (09:37): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards (Registration Fees) Bill 2013 will provide the necessary legal basis for cost recovery for the WELS scheme.

**Background**

When the WELS scheme was established by the Council of Australian Governments in 2005, the scheme was intended to recover 80 per cent of its costs through registration fees.

In practice, this level of cost recovery was never achieved. The Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Act 2005 provides for charging of fees in relation to a service. The effect of this is that only the costs of registration related activities may be recovered through WELS registration fees. Other activities of the scheme, including compliance and enforcement, communications and product standard development, may only be taken into account in scheme fees when authorised by a cost recovery taxing statute.

The COAG Standing Council on Environment and Water has sought changes to the scheme to allow the realisation of its cost recovery target.

**Purpose of the bill**

The bill provides the necessary legal basis for the WELS scheme to recover costs for all its activities. Consequential amendments to the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Act 2005 provide for the collection and administration of the fees, and are made in the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Amendment (Registration Fees) Bill 2013, which we will get to in a moment.

This bill is enabling and mechanistic in nature. It does not itself set the amount of the fees or affect the intended outcome for the scheme registrants. The fees will be set in a ministerial determination, which is a disallowable instrument and which will be made following consultation with the states and territories. The bill does not allow the scheme to recover more than 100 per cent of its costs.

**Conclusion**

The bill enables recovery of the full suite of scheme costs, supporting a directive of the COAG Standing Council on Environment and Water that the capacity of the scheme to recover costs should be strengthened to ensure the long-term viability of the scheme.

Debate adjourned.

**Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Amendment (Registration Fees) Bill 2013**

**First Reading**

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Burke.

Bill read a first time.

**Second Reading**

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water,
I move:
That this bill be now read a second time.

The Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Amendment (Registration Fees) Bill 2013 amends the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards (WELS) Act 2005. This bill complements the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards (Registration Fees) Bill 2013.

Background

The Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards, or WELS, scheme was established in 2005 as part of the Council of Australian Governments’ National Water Initiative.

The WELS Act 2005 provides for charging of fees only in relation to a service. The effect of this is that only the costs of registration related activities may be recovered through fees charged in relation to registration of WELS products.

Other activities of the scheme, including compliance and enforcement, communications, and product standard development, may only be taken into account in scheme fees when authorised by a cost-recovery taxing statute.

Purpose of the bill

This bill is complementary to and introduced with the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards (Registration Fees) Bill 2013.

The bill makes the necessary consequential amendments to the WELS Act 2005 to ensure that registration fees set under the Registration Fees Bill will be able to be collected and appropriately administered by the WELS regulator.

Conclusion

This bill is integral to the success and long term viability of the WELS scheme, as it makes essential amendments to the WELS Act to allow the proper collection and administration of WELS administration fees, which will be able to recover any or all costs of the WELS scheme.

Debate adjourned.

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment Bill 2013

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Burke.
Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities) (09:42): I move:
That this bill be now read a second time.

The government has now introduced amendments that will create a new matter of national environmental significance under national environmental law. This amendment will enable the Commonwealth environment minister to take into account significant impacts of coal seam gas and large coal mining development on a water resource.

These amendments are the product of a long period of engagement with the community, as well as with members of this parliament—including yourself, Mr Deputy Speaker Oakeshott—who have been strong in their advocacy of this issue.

The challenge we have had up until now is that people quite reasonably expect the minister for the environment and water to take into account, by law, the impacts of coal seam gas and large coal mining on water resources. They want to know that I am considering: if there is an irreversible depletion and contamination of our surface and groundwater resources; the impacts on
the way critical water systems operate; and the related effects on our ecosystems.

But, under our current national environment law, I cannot take these concerns into consideration directly, because the Commonwealth does not directly regulate projects that are likely to have an impact on a water resource—either surface water or groundwater. This is because water resources are not currently a matter of national environmental significance.

Under our current laws, the only way the I can take these issues into consideration is where there is a connection to an existing matter of national environmental significance.

For example, that connection may be to a threatened species which is legally listed but may be a hundred kilometres away downstream of the project. If there is an impact on that species downstream, only then can I take account the impact the project is having on that water source, to the extent that it affects the listed species.

The Australian government has already taken steps to provide more certainty for regional communities around coal seam gas and large coalmining developments, and the protection of water resources.

Last year we established the independent expert scientific committee under national environment law, to provide independent expert scientific advice to all governments on the water related impacts of coal seam gas and large coalmining.

The independence of the expert committee provides the community with the confidence they need that the scientific work being done has the integrity that people want.

However, when that advice comes back to me, I can only take that information into account if it is having that flow-on effect to an existing matter of national environmental significance.

**Proposed amendments**

The amendment does not seek to invoke the Commonwealth in all water decisions. The trigger will not capture small projects such as farm dams. The amendments will create a new matter of national environmental significance for coal seam gas and large coalmining developments which are likely to have a significant impact on a water resource. It will provide the strong legal basis for protection that the community wants.

This is not a broad trigger. The Australian government has already established independent expert scientific committee, which considers coal seam gas and large coalmine developments. This amendment provides the appropriate gateway for federal approval, and should continue to do so.

The amendments also deal with the transition to the new trigger.

There are a number of projects that have already been referred under national environment law which are already undergoing assessment. The government thinks it would be a perverse outcome if every project already in the system was finished without taking account the new matter of national environmental significance.

This is why the amendments provide that, for any project that is already undergoing assessment, provided the independent expert scientific committee has not yet given me its final advice, the new trigger will apply.

This does not mean that the assessment will need to begin again and completely restart for those projects that are captured.

We know that the sort of information that would be needed to make a decision for the new matter of national environmental
significance already gets collected in different ways for state approvals, and for the work of the independent expert scientific committee.

The Commonwealth environment department is contacting proponents to advise them of any additional information requirements which may apply, the same way we frequently seek additional information, so that the full impacts of those projects on water resources can be assessed.

**Conclusion**

Up until now Australia's environment minister has not been able to take into account this information, which is already being collected. The information is provided and analysed but does not currently form part of the decision-making process. Under the new trigger, it will.

It means that when an approval is given or an approval decision is made, the community expectation that I have taken into account the impacts on water resources will match up with the legal obligations of environment minister.

At the same time, the Australian government is making sure that the administrative processes for the transition are done in a way that delivers better scrutiny and gives better-quality and more thorough decisions, without needlessly adding to time frames. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

**Financial Framework Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2013**

**First Reading**

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Bradbury.

Bill read a first time.
companies are not administrative decisions impacting on the interests of individuals, the government considers that it would not be appropriate for such decisions to be subject to administrative review.

The second set of amendments in the bill would establish a framework for dealing with overpayments within the Judges’ Pensions Act 1968, the Remuneration Tribunal Act 1973 and the Social Security Act 1991 in relation to Australian government disaster relief payments. These changes are technical in nature and address instances where payments are made by the relevant agency from a special appropriation to recipients that are not, in practice, consistent with the requirements or preconditions imposed by these acts and risk breaching section 83 of the Constitution. The proposed amendments are similar in nature to the amendments delivered by the Financial Framework Legislation Amendment Act (No. 2) 2012.

Finally, the bill allows deferred tax asset relief to the Commonwealth Superannuation Corporation in relation to the transfer of assets from the military superannuation and benefits fund to the ARIA Investments Trust that occurred in May 2012. This is an operational amendment and follows the government’s decision to consolidate the trustees of the Commonwealth’s main civilian and military superannuation schemes.

The bill is, accordingly, another step to help ensure that specific areas of the Commonwealth’s financial framework remain effective and up to date.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Oakeshott): I am sure we look forward to learning more in this House about the concept of earned autonomy, which is a part of that legislation, I understand.

Debate adjourned.

Health Insurance Amendment (Extended Medicare Safety Net) Bill 2012

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Minister for Health) (09:52): I move:

That, in accordance with section 10B of the Health Insurance Act 1973, the House approve the Health Insurance (Extended Medicare Safety Net) Amendment Determination 2013 (No. 1) made on 27 February 2013, and presented to the House on 12 March 2013.

The Health Insurance (Extended Medicare Safety Net) Amendment Determination 2013 (No. 1) introduces extended Medicare safety net benefit caps for 11 Medicare benefit schedule items, with two items for radiofrequency ablation of varicose veins. These caps are in line with advice from the Medical Services Advisory Committee formed during their review of the proposal for public funding of this service in August 2012. This changes affects no patients as the items and caps will commence at the same time. The caps on audiology services are in line with the government’s 2012-13 budget announcement that all allied health services would be subject to extended Medicare safety net benefit caps. This change is also unlikely to impact patients as very few people are expected to reach the cap.

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights

Report

Mr JENKINS (Scullin) (09:54): On behalf of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights I present the committee’s third report of 2013 entitled Examination of legislation in accordance with the Human Rights (Parliamentary Scrutiny) Act 2011: bills introduced 5–28 February 2013 and legislative instruments registered with the
Mr JENKINS: In this third report for 2013 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, the committee has considered 29 bills introduced during the period 5 to 28 February 2013 and 300 legislative instruments registered between 5 January and 15 February 2013. One bill and a number of instruments were introduced without statements of compatibility and the committee proposes to write to the relevant ministers seeking advice as to the reason for this. The committee has decided that 17 bills require further examination and has written to the relevant ministers seeking further information. The remaining 12 bills do not appear to raise human rights compatibility concerns.

The committee has sought further information in relation to four legislative instruments before forming a view about their human rights compatibility. It has decided to consider one instrument as part of the package of legislation relating to the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act 2012. The committee has also deferred its consideration of another instrument to allow closer examination of the issues raised. The committee will write to the relevant ministers in a purely advisory capacity in relation to 83 legislative instruments that do not appear to raise any human rights compatibility concerns but are accompanied by statements of compatibility that do not fully meet the committee's expectations providing guidance on the preparation of statements of compatibility. I note that the Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism is in the chamber, and I hope that he takes his letter in the spirit in which it is sent to him—that is, very much in an advisory capacity. It is not a punishment and I hope he learns something from the exercise. The remaining 211 instruments do not appear to raise any human rights compatibility concerns and are accompanied by statements of compatibility that the committee considers to be adequate.

The committee has considered 16 ministerial responses to comments made in previous reports and has concluded its examination of seven of these pieces of legislation. In its comments on one bill the committee has suggested some modifications to the explanatory memorandum and has suggested the inclusion of safeguards for two bills.

Generally speaking, the responses received have been both timely and comprehensive. Unfortunately a few have not addressed the questions posed by the committee and two responses have been received well after the legislation in question has been passed. This is a source of some frustration to the committee as it would prefer to conclude its examination of legislation while the legislation is still before the parliament.

A number of the bills considered by the committee in this report have prompted it to reflect on some fundamental principles with regard to its role in the scrutiny of legislation. The first of these is scrutiny of the human rights impacts of appropriation bills. In commenting on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2012-2013 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2012-2013 the committee has noted that it does not anticipate that it will generally be necessary for it to make substantive comments on such bills. Nonetheless, the committee has set out its expectation that the incorporation of human rights considerations into the underlying budgetary processes, where appropriate,
would provide the most practical approach to ensuring that human rights are taken into account in the development of policy and legislation. The committee has stated that it would find it helpful if the statements of compatibility that accompany appropriation bills identify any proposed cuts in expenditure that may amount to retrogression or limitations on human rights.

The next principle is the role of principal acts in the committees scrutiny of bills and instruments. The committee has noted that where an amending bill incorporates the provisions of an existing Act, there is a tendency for the proponent of the legislation to focus purely on the extent to which the amendments engage human rights, and not consider the human rights compatibility of provisions in the act that are to be applied or extended by the amending legislation.

In its comments in this report on the Royal Commissions Amendment Bill, the committee has set out its expectation that, in such circumstances, the statement of compatibility should include an analysis of the human rights implications and compatibility of the provisions of the existing or parent act as they are applied or extended by the amending legislation. The committee expects that this practice will be adopted even where the parent act commenced operation before the commencement of the Human Rights (Parliamentary Scrutiny) Act 2011.

This approach is consistent with the committee's functions under that act in two respects. First, the operation of amendments have to be analysed in terms of their legal effect and practical impact, which can only be done by reviewing their operation in the statutory framework of which they form part. Second, such a review contributes to the committee's performance of its mandate 'to examine acts for compatibility with human rights, and to report to both houses of the parliament on that issue'.

The committee has iterated this view in its comments on the Marine Safety (Domestic Commercial Vessel) National Law Amendment Bill 2013, which amends the Marine Safety (Domestic Commercial Vessel) National Law Act 2012, which was passed on 23 August 2012. In the case of this bill, the committee has also taken the opportunity to set out its expectation regarding the human rights scrutiny of national cooperative or uniform schemes of legislation resulting from intergovernmental agreements. While the minor amendments proposed by the Marine Safety (Domestic Commercial Vessel) National Law Amendment Bill 2013 do not give rise to any human rights concerns of themselves, the committee considers that the Marine Safety (Domestic Commercial Vessel) National Law Act 2012 does. The bill for this act was not subject to scrutiny by this committee as it was introduced before the committee had commenced its work examining bills. The committee has therefore taken the opportunity to consider the amending bill in the context of the principal act.

In its discussion of the two pieces of legislation, the committee has noted the challenges for human rights scrutiny posed by national cooperative schemes of legislation. In particular, the committee has noted that, as such legislation is formulated following the conclusion of an intergovernmental agreement, there may be very limited possibility or no possibility for a legislature which has the function of assessing human rights compatibility to do so at a time when such consideration may influence the final content of the legislation. The committee has stated that, in its view, the issue of compatibility with human rights should be an integral part of the development of any national scheme legislation. The
committee is concerned that this does not appear to have been the case on this occasion. The committee has stated its view that draft national scheme legislation should be accompanied by a human rights analysis, both during intergovernmental negotiations and during any public consultations undertaken. The committee intends to seek information on whether existing procedures or agreements relating to the negotiation of intergovernmental agreements ensure that compatibility with human rights is an integral and explicit part of the design of such schemes and implementing legislation.

I recommend the report to the House.

Constitutional Recognition of Local Government Committee

Report and Reference to Federation Chamber

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (10:03): On behalf of the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Local Government, I present the committee’s final report entitled Final report on the majority finding of the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Local Government: the case for financial recognition, the likelihood of success and lessons from the history of constitutional referenda, incorporating dissenting reports, together with the minutes of proceedings and evidence received by the committee. I seek leave of the House to make a short statement in connection with the report.

Leave granted.

Ms ROWLAND: The committee was established on 1 November 2012 to inquire into and report on the majority finding of the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Local Government. A majority of expert panel members concluded that financial recognition is a viable option within the 2013 time frame. In this final report the committee recommends that a referendum on the financial recognition of local government be put to Australian voters at the 2013 federal election.

The committee's recommendation follows from its major finding that: there is a strong case for recognition; lessons from past successful referenda in Australia support a 2013 referendum; the prospects for success are good, due to existing bipartisan support at the federal level and the readiness of the Australian Local Government Association and local governments to campaign in support of change; the prospects for success will rely on the strong commitment and campaigning by ALGA and its member bodies; and the prospects for success will be greatly improved by the support of state governments.

During the course of the inquiry, the committee held two public hearings and received 252 submissions, seven supplementary submissions and four exhibits. The overwhelming majority of the evidence gathered supports an amendment to section 96 of the Constitution to shore up certainty around the direct federal funding of local government. The committee heard from many representatives of local government bodies from around the country which detailed why achieving constitutional certainty of direct funding has become a critical issue affecting day-to-day operations in their local areas.

Councillor Paul Bell of the Central Highlands Regional Council said:

It comes back to the reality of what might happen if Roads to Recovery was proven to be unconstitutional and we had to pay back the $3 billion that has already been given to local government.

The risks of delaying this decision are significant. Mayor Tim Laurence of Darebin City Council commented:

I think delay is very dangerous.
Mr Andrew Crankanthorp, Planning Director of the City of Wagga Wagga, put the case very simply and convincingly when he said:

I think there is enough time and enough will and that it is way too important for us not to proceed with a referendum.

The committee carefully considered the difficult question of the likelihood of success of a proposed 2013 referendum, and the committee's major finding reflects the evidence that we received during the inquiry.

Overall we found that the referendum has a good prospect of success and we noted that the support of state governments would greatly improve that prospect. The Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government has already commenced negotiations to secure the support of the majority of state and territory governments for the referendum. Representatives of individual local governments showed great enthusiasm for campaigning for the referendum, and repeatedly referred to the strengths of 2013. The committee was heartened to hear from the Mayor of Mount Isa, the Honourable Tony McGrady, who commented:

... you are going to have an army of local councillors right across the continent all advocating a 'yes' vote—

and:

When this army goes into action, you will see a different environment.

We investigated the lessons to be learned from referenda held in 1974 and 1988 on recognition of local government and the committee noted that a lack of bipartisan support was a significant reason for the failure of these questions when put to the people.

The committee found that in 2013 there is strong support for this change from all sides of politics at the federal level, from constitutional law experts, from peak bodies such as the Australian Local Government Association, from local government bodies and from some state governments. A national civics education program, created under the guidance of a panel of referendum experts and key public figures, would also maximise the chances for a successful referendum this year. Taking the major finding into consideration, the committee recommends that a referendum on the financial recognition of local government be put to Australian voters at the 2013 federal election.

That concludes the work of this committee. Under its amended terms of appointment, we have completed our tasks and I thank all of my committee colleagues for their participation and cooperation in fulfilment of our duty to the parliament on this matter. My thanks go to all those who provided evidence to the inquiry and to the hard-working committee secretariat, including Thomas Gregory, Dr Glenn Worthington, Leonie Bury and Elly Cotsell.

I commend the report to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Are there other speakers on this matter?

Ms ROWLAND: I move:

That the House take note of the report.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The debate is adjourned and a resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting day.

Ms ROWLAND: by leave—I move:

That the order of the day be referred to the Federation Chamber for debate.

Question agreed to.
Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (10:09): On behalf of the Joint Committee on the National Broadband Network, I present the committee's fourth report incorporating a dissenting report entitled *Review of the rollout of the National Broadband Network*, together with the minutes and proceedings.

In accordance with standing order 39(f) the report was made a parliamentary paper.

Mr OAKESHOTT: by leave—I present the fourth report of the Joint Committee on the National Broadband Network, entitled *Review of the rollout of the National Broadband Network*, covering the period from 1 January to 30 June 2012, as well as other current issues reported after this period.

Under its terms of reference, the NBN committee is required to report to the parliament every six months on the rollout of the NBN, including such items as the achievement of take-up targets, including premises passed and covered, and services activated, as set out in NBN Co.’s corporate plan; network rollout performance, including service levels and faults; the effectiveness of NBN Co. in meeting its obligations as set out in its stakeholder charter; NBN Co.’s strategy for engaging with consumers and handling complaints; NBN Co.’s risk management processes; and any other matter pertaining to the NBN rollout that the committee considers relevant. The committee’s fourth report therefore covers a comprehensive range of matters.

Chapter 1 of the report provides important introductory information about the committee's fourth review inquiry process and a useful summary of major developments over this reporting period relevant to the NBN rollout. Chapters 2 and 3 cover the core topics of performance reporting and regulatory issues. The section on performance reporting examines key performance indicators for the NBN; NBN rollout progress; and NBN Co.’s financial results. The committee made three recommendations concerning these matters. These three recommendations are aimed at enhancing transparency and accountability of the government and NBN Co. reporting on the NBN rollout.

Chapter 4 of the committee's report looks at the important issue of NBN rollout progress in regional and remote communities. A combination of the three NBN technologies—fibre, fixed wireless and satellite—will be rolled out to regional and remote areas of Australia, and indeed it is happening right now. The committee made one recommendation relating to this issue, concerning mobile telephone services and coverage across regional and remote areas and how that relates to the rollout, particularly of the wireless network, and the opportunities that present themselves.

Chapters 5 and 6 consider a range of matters determined by the committee to be of significance at this stage of the NBN rollout, such as connecting multidwelling units; medical alarms; private equity engagement; and workforce issues. The committee made recommendations concerning a number of these matters. In particular, on the matter of workforce issues, the committee was concerned to continue its monitoring of the Telstra Retraining Funding Deed. Under this deed, the government has committed to provide $100 million to Telstra to support the availability of an appropriately trained workforce for the NBN and retrain Telstra staff affected by the NBN rollout. The committee therefore recommended that the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy provide an annual statement to the committee on progress.
concerning a range of matters under the Telstra Retraining Funding Deed.

On a final note, the report also includes a detailed summary of the NBN committee's visit to New Zealand from 24 to 28 September 2012 under the Australia New Zealand Parliamentary Committee Exchange Program. The objectives of the committee's visit were to establish links with the commerce select committee, selected private sector organisations and government agencies responsible for delivery of New Zealand's high-speed broadband network and to gain a practical insight into the workings, policies and funding arrangements underpinning New Zealand's ultrafast broadband and rural broadband initiatives, in particular: the mix of technologies incorporated in New Zealand; the associated telecommunications regulatory issues in relation to the demerger of Telecom New Zealand; the wholesale pricing issues; the community consultation and community education strategies; the government, corporate and community readiness; and the existing employment and skilling issues. These are very similar to many of the issues we face here in Australia. The committee welcomed the opportunity to learn about the New Zealand experience in developing its high-speed broadband network, and I know it was valuable for all members across party lines.

Finally, I have had four children, and this is the fourth report of this committee. Like with children, you have easy births and difficult ones. This fourth report was a difficult birth. I invite those interested to read it and I invite committee members to produce a fifth and final report in this parliament. I, as chair, am not confident we can do it. We are starting to fall onto political party lines in election season, and there is a danger that we will just deliver a compendium of policy platforms. I hope I am wrong. The committee's challenge is to do the good work and oversight work of the committee as per its terms of reference. I hope we can get there and I look forward to working with the committee to achieve it.

Mr Turnbull (Wentworth) (10:15): Firstly, I congratulate the honourable member for his chairmanship of the committee. But I want to draw the attention of the House to the dissenting report by the coalition members and senators. There are some very real concerns with the way in which this project is being undertaken. As I think honourable members understand, the coalition is thoroughly committed to completing the National Broadband Network. We are thoroughly committed to all Australians having access to very fast broadband. Those points are not in contention. The issues are, relevantly, how much this is going to cost and how long it is going to take. On the issue of cost, it is obvious that the Commonwealth is spending more money than is absolutely necessary and it clearly is a matter of the more you spend on it the less affordable it becomes. And, of course, the longer it takes the longer people who do have inadequate broadband are going to have to endure that situation. We have suggested a different approach that we are quite satisfied will ensure the broadband network is completed sooner, cheaper and, consequently, more affordably.

We have a remarkable lack of transparency on the cost of the NBN's construction. The NBN Co. will not tell the committee what it is costing them to pass or connect each premise. As we have set out in this report, they have hinted at costs but they do not even include the cost of getting the fibre into the premise, which, as everybody in the industry knows, is actually the single largest part of the civil works. That is why so many telco firms terminate the fibre at the kerb or in the basement of an apartment...
building or on a street corner. What is most remarkable about this is that here you have the NBN Co., which is a government owned business that is being set up as a monopoly, so it does not have to worry about competitors, and is wholly owned by the taxpayers of Australia, and it will not provide basic information that telcos in other markets do. Chorus, which is the structurally separated customer access network company that was formerly part of Telecom New Zealand, discloses precisely what its cost is to pass each premise and to connect each premise. You have to ask yourself why NBN Co. is not producing those figures. I think the reason is pretty clear: they are not prepared to own up to the huge and growing cost of this rollout.

I have talked about the cost here, but the speed of the rollout is a matter that we have also expressed great concern about. In 2010 the NBN Co’s business plan said that they will have passed 1.3 million premises by 30 June 2013. In August last year they reduced that down to a figure somewhat in excess of 300,000. Now, it is 286,000, and we understand they will shortly be announcing that they have not been able to meet that target either. At that rate it could take in excess of 20 years to complete this network. So what does that mean for somebody who has lousy broadband? At least two million premises in Australia do not have sufficiently fast broadband to be able to watch a YouTube video. So, yes, there is a real need to address it, but it has to be done in a speedy and cost-effective way. If the government had had an ounce of rational responsibility and an ounce of business sense before embarking on this project it would have done a thorough cost-benefit analysis, but I have spoken to the House about that before.

We have made a number of recommendations in our dissenting report, which are all directed at the NBN Co. providing the committee, and through that committees the people of Australia, with the information we and the Australian people need to actually assess whether this project is delivering value for money and whether it is delivering an outcome, product or infrastructure in a timely way. At the moment, all of our predictions that this project would cost far too much and take far too long I am afraid are being borne out by experience. It is not good enough to have a wholly owned government business with a financial disclosure culture that would do the Kremlin proud. This should be the most transparent, the most accountable telecoms company in Australia, but you can find out more information about any of the listed telecoms companies in Australia, from Telstra down, than you can about this one. It is being treated as though it is some sort of secret agency in a black box.

The only conclusion we can come to is that they are not prepared to face up to the fact that this infrastructure project is failing. It is failing to deliver the job. It is failing to connect households. Nineteen months after starting construction in Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory, the NBN Co. through its contractor Syntheo is not in a position to connect one premise—zero. This is not a failure; this is a total failure—a complete and utter failure. It is not often that people fail to this extent. That is the nature of the problems this project is facing. It is about time that they fessed up, opened the books and allowed the people and its representatives in this place to thoroughly assess them. I strongly recommend to the House the report and, in particular, the dissenting report by the coalition members and senators.

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (10:22): I move:

That the House take note of the report.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Cheeseman): The debate is adjourned. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting, and the member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (10:22): by leave—I move:

That the order of the day be referred to the Federation Chamber for debate.

Question agreed to.

BILLS

Royal Commissions Amendment Bill 2013

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (10:23): As is well known to all members in this chamber, in January this year six commissioners were appointed to work together as the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. I wish to state at the outset of debate on the Royal Commissions Amendment Bill 2013, which amends the Royal Commissions Act to accommodate some of the needs of this commission, that the coalition supports this bill that makes those changes and we support the important work that the commission has been set up to deal with. We in the opposition are of the belief that whenever abuse has occurred it must be tackled vigorously, openly and transparently. But what will be clear to all members who have taken an interest in this royal commission is that the task that has been set before the commissioners really is enormous. The existing Royal Commissions Act, which dates back to 1902, does not have sufficient flexibility within it to be able to accommodate the needs of this royal commission.

This bill makes two important amendments that will assist the work of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The difficulties that the commissioners will face in pursuing their mandate have been brought home to me. We are all very familiar with these issues and instinctively have a very strong response to them, but sometimes when you talk to an individual or you see something it really brings home to you how difficult their task is going to be. In my case it was an interview that I saw with one of my predecessors as member for Stirling, Ian Cameron, who was talking about what the announcement of the royal commission meant to him. He outlined in the interview that he had been a victim of abuse within an institution. He was explaining in that interview about the dark shadow that this abuse had cast over his whole life, and not just his life but the life of his family as well, and how incredibly difficult it was for him to talk to people, even those who were close to him for many decades. Finally he did get a chance to give evidence, at another inquiry into abuse, which was actually being run by one of the institutions, but he was unable to do so because it was so difficult for him to recount what had happened to him. Ultimately his son gave the evidence on his behalf. You can imagine how difficult that must have been not only for him but for his family. These are the sorts of issues that the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse faces. I am pleased that this bill deals with some of those issues, in particular the amendment it makes to allow the commission to hear evidence in private.

The coalition strongly supports this royal commission into the evil of child sexual abuse wherever it has occurred within the context of institutions. We believe it is very important for the commission not to be
constrained in pursuing its inquiries in relation to all institutions, both public and private, where there is a reason to believe that child sexual abuse might have taken place. The letters patent that have been written by the Governor-General to Justice McClellan, who chairs the commission, allow a very broad scope for the commission to pursue its work. There is clearly going to be an enormous volume of information for the six commissioners to deal with. I will go through the commissioners because I think it is important to understand that they are a very distinguished group of Australians. The chair is Justice Peter McClellan, who since 2005 has held one of the most senior judicial positions in New South Wales, the Chief Judge at Common Law of the Supreme Court of New South Wales. The other five commissioners are Mr Bob Atkinson, a former Queensland police commissioner, Justice Jennifer Coate, a Family Court judge and former Victorian coroner, Mr Robert Fitzgerald, a productivity commissioner, Professor Helen Millroy, who is a consultant child and adolescent psychiatrist, and former senator for Western Australia, Mr Andrew Murray, who is well known and regarded in this place.

According to the commission's website, the commissioners have been appointed for three years and have been asked to begin their inquiry as soon as possible. They will prepare an interim report by no later than 30 June 2014. In the interim report the commissioners will also identify when their final report will be completed. The final reporting date has been set initially for the end of 2015, but this will be subject to advice from the commissioners in their interim report.

In a media statement issued on 16 January this year, Justice McClellan acknowledged the size and complexity of the task before the commission. He noted the need for amendments, some of which are contained in this bill, to allow authorised member hearings. Referring to those amendments, Justice McClellan stated:

Each of us has different backgrounds, professional experience, qualifications and expertise. We live in different regions of Australia. To assist the Commission in its work we understand that the government proposes to amend the Royal Commissions Act to provide that the Commissioners need not all sit when conducting a formal hearing. If that legislative change is made the Commission will utilise this capacity in an endeavour to gain a complete understanding of the problems in various parts of Australia in the most efficient manner possible. Even with this legislative change our task is complex and will take significant time.

In relation to the size of the task ahead there are some telling statistics that are available publicly that show the scope and the nature of the work that the commission will have to undertake. There have already been almost 12,000 visits to the commission's website since the middle of January, and there have been almost 500 calls to the 1800 number since 14 January, which is an average call volume of 25 calls a day. The hearing has not yet commenced and the commission is still in the process of hiring staff and training them to deal with what will be very difficult calls. So, at the moment, those almost 500 calls have been dealt with via an answering machine, which clearly means that there is going to be an enormous backlog for staff to deal with once they are hired and trained. This just reminds the House of the enormous work that the commission will be required to undertake.

The amendments to the Royal Commissions Act contained within this bill are going to do two very important things. The first will enable the chair of the royal commission to authorise one or more
members to hold a hearing or take evidence. There are six commissioners and the present act would require that all of them sit in on any hearing that the commission were to undertake. The amendment in this bill very sensibly will allow them to conduct an authorised member hearing, which means only one member will need to be present for a particular hearing. So, presumably, the commission will use this to hold hearings at the same time in different parts of Australia to help it deal with the scope and complexity of its task.

The amendment will give the chair commissioner the authority to distribute the hearing workload where appropriate. This measure will apply to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and it will allow one or more of the six royal commissioners to conduct hearings. As I said, part of the reasoning for appointing those six commissioners to oversee the royal commission into child sexual abuse is the high volume of evidence that they are likely to be required to inquire into. The royal commission will clearly move as fast as it can to cover what is a vast amount of evidence and deal with people’s personal accounts and therefore to report back about how we might craft necessary reforms. The amendment in the first part of this bill will make it possible to have the multimember hearings.

Part 2 of the bill details how the royal commission might respond to taking what is very sensitive and very personal evidence of people in private sessions. I outlined at the start of my comments how important this is. It would be so difficult for people to recount some of the events that the commission will need to deal with in relation to the abuse that these people would have suffered in institutions. You can imagine if you have been forced to go in and give that evidence in front of a royal commission how incredibly intimidating and difficult that would be even in normal circumstances. In this case, I think the bill crafts a sensible response to allow people to give evidence in a private session. We agree that it is important for those who are affected by child sexual abuse within the institutional context to be able to share their experiences in an appropriate way, recognising that many of the participants, in fact most of the participants, will be very traumatised. Of course, they will have particular support needs. Part 2 of this bill makes what I think are sensible amendments to the Royal Commissions Act to accommodate what will be the special requirements of participants in giving their evidence.

On behalf of the opposition, I would like to thank the six commissioners who have undertaken to be part of this very important work. It will be an extremely arduous and very emotionally demanding task. They will be engaged in it for several years. The time frame of reporting back by 2015 might not be possible, given the scope of the evidence that the commissioners will be forced to deal with. Clearly, they are going to be required to deal with many of the terrible things that have happened to people and their suffering as a result. Victims must be allowed to heal and perpetrators must be brought to justice.

I think this bill makes two sensible amendments to the Royal Commissions Act, which dates back to well over a century, to allow commissioners to deal with the volume of information that they are going to receive and also the nature of that information in a way that protects the dignity of victims and that recognises the difficulty which they will have in giving evidence in such a context. I commend the people who are prepared to come forward and share their experiences, because it must be such an incredibly difficult thing for them to do. I am glad that the parliament has taken these steps to enable
them to do that in a private way that does meet the needs of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (10:35): As previous speakers on the Royal Commissions Amendment Bill 2013 have noted, child sexual abuse is one of the hardest topics to speak about, particularly for those of us in this place who are parents. An account by Patricia Feenan titled *Holy Hell* gives some sense of the scale of the trauma. Ms Feenan writes about the abuse which occurred to her son Daniel which was perpetrated by their local parish priest, Father Fletcher. She writes:

*Father Fletcher visited our family a lot and we were very active in his church. John—her husband—did his accounts and I did everything from sewing the buttons onto his black shirts to taking communion to the elderly.*

He took a particular interest in Daniel, recruiting him as an altar server. People were always drawn to Daniel. He had a sweet nature, an angelic face and shining eyes.

And then she writes about how, when Daniel was 14, his behaviour started to change. He started binge drinking. He was arrested for drunk driving. Then one day the two of them argued when he was drunk. He walked out and she followed. She found him on a trailer beside the tractor with a noose around his neck. As Patricia screamed, Daniel jumped. She supported his weight until somebody else came, and then, wanting to help him, called Father Fletcher. Father Fletcher told Patricia to send Daniel over to see him, saying he could spend the night there. Of course, Daniel returned more distressed than ever.

Eventually, they found out that it was Father Fletcher who had been perpetrating the abuse on Daniel, and then, finally, when asked why he did not go to the police earlier, Daniel said: ‘Because it started when I was 12.’ Apparently, the abuse that Daniel suffered was so distressing that an employee of the Director of Public Prosecutions asked to be taken off the case. Patricia talked about weeping bitter tears when hearing what had happened to Daniel, about the harm that had been perpetrated on him and the pain and the indignity that he had suffered.

Other victims eventually came forward when the case went to trial in 2004, one because Fletcher asked the family for a character reference. When Fletcher finally suffered a stroke and died in 2006, his funeral was attended by 34 priests. Patricia’s story is a reminder of how horrendous these crimes are that the royal commission will be investigating.

To give another account, Albert John Abel, a perpetrator of child sexual abuse, was sentenced to three years imprisonment after attacking a 12-year-old boy in the Charlton Boys Home in Glebe. He was working at the boys' home run by the Anglican Church and had begun abusing his victim in 1959 and continued over subsequent years.

There were some insights provided into how child sexual abuse can occur in institutions through the ‘Forgotten Australians’ exhibition, known as *Inside: Life in Children’s Homes and Institutions*, which ran at the National Museum of Australia. I was fortunate to be taken through that exhibition by Hugh McGowan, one of the forgotten Australians. He ended up in institutional care after being born to a single mother in Scotland. She gave him up to a boys' home in Glasgow. He said one day the children were asked if they wanted to go to Australia. Hugh was 12 at the time and he initially agreed, but then he changed his mind and told the man known as the 'cottage
father' in Glasgow that he did not want to go. He says he still remembers the reply: 'Too bad; you're going.' Hugh told me that there was a lack of warmth. There was tough physical labour, corporal punishment and sometimes even sexual abuse, though he himself was fortunate to escape that. And he said that the worst of it was that, even at the harshest of times, there was never a father to gently put his arms around you.

There were videos in that exhibition of young children at Bindoon in Western Australia doing dangerous jobs like blacksmithing and tiling. A hand-drawn map of the layout of Bentleigh Children's Home in Victoria showed red crosses where terrified children would hide to avoid abuse. An official sign from another home told visitors that they were not to hold the babies.

Ryszard Szablicki says that, some time after he left the Melbourne orphanage where he grew up: 'I heard people standing singing around a cake that had candles stuck in it. I did not even know what was going on.' He did not know what a birthday cake and birthday candles were because, as another boy said of the institutions, only 'intermittent humanity was provided'.

As then Prime Minister Rudd said in 2009 when he offered a national apology to the forgotten Australians:

... whatever I might say today, the truth is, I cannot give you back your childhood.

... ... ...

But what I can do with you is to celebrate the spirit that has lived within you over the decades.

This inquiry, which also follows on from the 2004 Senate inquiry into the forgotten Australians and the 1999 Forde inquiry into institutionalised abuse, will provide an opportunity for victims of institutionalised sexual abuse to tell their stories.

The royal commission will have an extraordinarily tough job ahead of it. But I am confident that the commissioners who have been chosen will do a first-rate job. It will be led by Justice Peter McClellan, who chaired the Sydney water inquiry and worked on the Royal Commission into British Nuclear Tests in Australia. Other commissioners include: Bob Atkinson, the former Queensland police commissioner; Justice Jennifer Coate, who has served as a magistrate and County Court judge in Victoria, including for five years as President of the Children's Court; Robert Fitzgerald, who has served as a commissioner for the Productivity Commission and has expertise on commerce, law, public policy and community services; Professor Helen Milroy, a consultant psychiatrist with experience in child and adolescent health; and former Western Australian senator Andrew Murray, who brings tremendous experience as a member of these key Senate inquiries into children's experiences in institutional care.

The bill has two main purposes. The first is to enable the president or chair to authorise one or more members to hold a hearing, and that will allow for more efficient distribution of work between commissioners where it is appropriate to do that. These will be authorised member hearings. Evidence taken of this kind will form part of evidence for the inquiry as a whole and it will allow the inquiry to take more evidence than would otherwise be possible.

The second main purpose of the bill is to introduce measures that will facilitate people directly or indirectly affected by child sexual abuse and related matters in institutional contexts to present their account to a commissioner in a setting that is less formal. The bill refers to this as a 'private session'. It is important that those affected by child sexual abuse can share their experiences in appropriate ways, recognising the trauma
and the special support needs that are required. This is of a piece with courts having changed the way in which victims of sexual assault can give evidence. Recognising the trauma that sexual assault entails, to give evidence in a regular court is still a horrendous process that victims of sexual assault must go through but that process is better now than it was in decades gone by, thanks to changes that have been made in the judicial process. I regard the changes that this bill will make to the Royal Commissions Act as being of a similar nature.

In closing, it is difficult to speak of child sexual abuse without acknowledging the issues around suicide. In the context of those who might be listening to this debate, and recognising the trauma that is entailed in this, I thought it would be appropriate to acknowledge the work done by Lifeline Canberra, and particularly the work that has been done by their marketing manager, Matt Heffernan, in putting together this weekend's Lifeline Canberra Bookfair. Lifeline Canberra has been operating in the ACT since 1971 and the book fair is their major fundraising drive. This weekend, the jewel in their sales will be a first edition of Keynes's *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, which I am sure the Treasurer will be greatly attracted to. Lifeline is also supported by a range of generous sponsors: The Good Guys in Canberra, FM104.7, FM106.3, Leader Security, Canberra Cavalry, SERVICE ONE Members Banking and Tidy Temple Yoga. They meet significant needs—Mr Heffernan informs me the number of calls to Lifeline Canberra is up 58 per cent over the past year—and so it is important that they receive strong community support.

Like many other members, I am wearing a Lifeline badge today, recognising the national body's 50th anniversary today. It is possible that, as we have a substantial community conversation about institutional child sexual abuse, that will prompt further calls on social service agencies over the course of the coming years. I am sure Lifeline will be ready to step in on that, but we too need to be ready to support it. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (10:47): On 12 November last year, the Prime Minister announced the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The announcement did not come out of thin air; it came, in part, as the conclusion of a long-running campaign by victims, by their advocates and by many others within the community to have such a national royal commission held. As result of that, it was welcomed by victims, advocates, MPs and, I must say, even many church organisations. I welcome the establishment of a royal commission. I have believed for some time that this was the appropriate course of action for the Australian government to take. I do not rush quickly to the call for royal commissions. They have great investigative powers which, when combined with the constant scrutiny of the mass media, can alter the course of public opinion—and even personal reputation—well in advance of any findings and recommendations being recorded, and certainly well in advance of any prosecutorial process being concluded or even commenced. I believe that royal commissions should only be used when it is clear that both policing and judicial determination have failed or are inadequate to the task. In relation to the question of institutional responses to child sexual abuse, I believe that this is such a case. Our children have had their trust betrayed. We have heard stories of child abusers being moved from place to place to avoid having their crimes dealt with. We have heard revelations of
adults who have averted their eyes from this evil. This royal commission process will, I hope, be a healing process. But I specifically hope that its recommendations will help ensure that it never happens again.

Child abuse is always wrong. It is heartbreaking for the victims and for their families. It is always deeply distressing. Many people in my community have told me of their distress on hearing of these terrible stories of abuse and of damaged souls and broken faith. When we know that this tragedy exists, we want to see action taken. We all want to do everything we can to ensure that we do not see it in the future— that we do not see institutions fail to respond if there are allegations of child abuse in their midst. I hope that this royal commission can guide us to that place. This is not because there is some grand conspiracy between police, courts and church organisations—I simply do not believe that to be the case. But what is clear, and in some instances admitted, is that church organisations actively sought to cover up their offences. I know this from firsthand experience in the school that I attended, in the region that I now represent. Regrettably, Cardinal Pell attempted to explain this in an interview with the Weekend Australian last year, when he said:

"It wasn't just the Catholic Church that hoped (an abusive priest) would amend their conduct and give them a home somewhere else," he said.

"Back in those days, they were entitled to think of pedophilia as simply a sin that you would repent of. They didn't realise that in the worst cases it was an addiction, a raging addiction."

The problem with this view is that sexual abuse of children is not just a sin, whether it is a raging addiction or otherwise—it is a crime. It was then and it is now. And any decent moral code would also see the cover-up of child abuse as sinful as it is a crime. Above and beyond that, it is the crime of conspiracy.

My church, the Catholic Church, has been at the centre of the storm. I do not believe that it is the only institution in the country that has behaved in this way. Therefore, a royal commission should not be confined to the affairs of any one religious institution in any one state. Some have suggested that calls for a broad based inquiry are the result of a latent anti-Catholicism. I am sure there are some people in the community who harbour this sort of bigotry, but I do not believe that it is religious prejudice that motivates the majority.

I know of many Catholics who share my view. There are many, like my father, who made great sacrifices to send their children to a school and to a church, believing that in doing so they were honouring God's work and raising their children in their faith. Words cannot describe the complete betrayal they felt on learning that those they had trusted with their children—the parish priest, the principal and others—had been engaged in serial offences.

Many senior church people I have spoken to make the point that these events occurred in the past and the church has changed its way. This misses the point. As each new incident is uncovered it continues to damage the reputation of all churches and church-run institutions. It feeds the popular belief that a conspiracy continues right up until this day. A royal commission is the only way for the truth to be known and for the church to truly demonstrate that it has purged itself not only of the past culture of cover-ups but also of the perpetrators. Confession is a very Catholic thing.

It is important to note that this royal commission is not a prosecutorial process. Justice Peter McClellan, in setting out the
purpose and the processes, made a public statement of the Royal Commission. He said:

It is important to understand that the Commission is not a prosecuting body. Our investigative processes will be utilised to receive and consider what we expect will be accounts by individuals who tell of their experience when living within or when they were associated with an institution. The Commission will be concerned to examine these individual accounts to determine how the circumstances arose, the relevant management practices of the institution in which they occurred and the response which the institution has made to any complaint of sexual abuse by an individual. Because the Commission is not a prosecuting body it will establish links with the appropriate authorities in each State and Territory to whom a matter may be referred with the expectation that where appropriate prosecutorial proceedings may commence. It is also important to understand that the Commission is not charged with determining whether any person may be entitled to compensation for any injury which they may have suffered.

This is a commission that has been set up to let some sunlight in on some very sorry practices. The bill before the House will assist the commission and commissioners in conducting this inquiry. It will authorise the chair of a royal commission constituted by more than one member to authorise one or more members to hold hearings, to have general application to royal commissions. It will also authorise the chair of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse to authorise members to hold private sessions, to facilitate people affected by child sexual abuse, in an institutional context, to present their accounts to the commission in an informal setting and not under oath.

Given the subject matter of these proceedings, these are entirely sensible amendments to the Royal Commissions Act. The royal commission will inquire into how institutions with a responsibility for children have managed and responded to allegations of child sexual abuse and related matters. I cannot think of a more difficult area of inquiry for a person to sit on—to gather evidence, to advocate on behalf of victims or the commission or to assist in gathering evidence and reporting on this. We know from experiences in other countries and jurisdictions that these inquiries can go on for many years. The Prime Minister made the point, in announcing the commission, that it will take as long as it takes to ensure that we find out what has gone on and provide some justice to the victims of these terrible crimes.

I am very proud to be standing here addressing the legislation before the House. I am very proud to be an MP in a government that has had the courage to take this issue on and to ensure, to the extent that an injustice has gone on in the past, that this generation is not a part of a continued cover-up. I commend the legislation to the House.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (10:57): I commend the member for Throsby for his contribution. I also speak in favour of the Royal Commissions Amendment Bill 2013. As touched on by previous speakers, from both sides of the House, this is a logical amendment to an important piece of legislation supported by both sides of the chamber. Not always in this chamber is there bipartisan support but on this we speak with one voice, as a responsible parliament.

In January this year our Prime Minister recommended to the Governor-General that letters patent be issued appointing six commissioners to work together as the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. It is to be chaired by Justice Peter McClellan. He will be ably assisted by Mr Andrew Murray, Mr Robert Fitzgerald, Justice Jennifer Coate, Professor Helen Milroy and someone I am particularly proud of mentioning—a Queenslander—Mr
Bob Atkinson, whom I have had much to do with over the years in his capacity as commissioner for police. He is a longstanding, very well-respected police officer who served the Queensland community with great dignity and effectiveness in his capacity as a detective, where he dealt with some of the most horrific criminal cases in Queensland, and now he will serve all of Australia in this royal commission.

The aim of this bill is to amend the Royal Commissions Act 1902 to assist the work of the royal commission. The amendments will allow one or more of the six royal commissioners to conduct hearings, which means—because of the geography of Australia—we will not need to have people travelling all the time to Sydney. It is my understanding that the royal commission will be based here. It is obviously an important part of the nation, but there are people scattered all around Australia who will give evidence in front of one or two commissioners, as appropriate.

The Royal Commissions Act currently only permits hearings to be conducted by all members of a multimember commission or by a quorum. So this current model is not sufficient in addressing the challenges at hand and changes need to be implemented. These amendments will assist the commission to distribute its hearing work efficiently, where this is appropriate. As I said, coming from one of the most decentralised states—Queensland—I know that it will be appropriate for the commissioners to travel throughout Australia.

The other purpose of the bill is to allow the commissioners to receive information from those affected by child abuse at less formal, private sessions, therefore providing a more comfortable environment for the victims of child abuse. Anyone who has worked in this area—whether dealing with the evidence given by children or evidence given by adults who were abused as children—knows that often a less formal or adversarial judicial environment can be more conducive to the facts coming out.

All governments must take very seriously the responsibility to protect children from child abuse and to respond to family violence. I know I have said previously that I see all of our children as distilled hope. The nation's potential is represented in our children. The Gillard Labor government has a proud track record of helping the vulnerable and working to deliver reforms that will help future generations. As I said in my introductory remarks, at this time in the 43rd parliament there is strong bipartisan support for the proposed endeavours in this piece of legislation.

This government has always taken on the big challenges in our society—for example, putting a price on carbon. The Clean Energy Future plan is all about preserving the planet and this nation for our children, for our grandchildren and for our great-grandchildren. I know that this tough political decision engenders all sorts of responses from members of the public, be they outbursts in parliament or standing up at demonstrations and saying horrible things about members of parliament. However, the reason the Gillard Labor government took that decision is that it is the right thing to do for our children and for our grandchildren. Likewise the National Disability Insurance Scheme is a tough piece of legislation but it is the right thing for the future.

The decision I am most proud of is obviously the Gonski education reforms. Deputy Speaker Grierson, I know your background is in education and you know the joy that comes from seeing people's
circumstances change due to education. It is in the DNA of the Labor Party obviously to invest in education, to make sure that education gives people an opportunity. These tough reforms are not a backward step. These decisions will shape this country and the globe for years to come.

My wife has worked in child protection over 23 years—hopefully she is not listening to this. She started on 3 January 1990 as a very young child protection worker. I have known her for 21 years. In that time she has dealt with some horrific cases, some horrible, horrible cases. Obviously no-one phones the Child Protection Service to say, ‘Everything's going well here.’ The contact is only ever about families in crisis. My wife tells people of the lifelong scars suffered by those who experience physical and emotional abuse in the family home. I have heard a lot in this job but nothing like the stories she has heard and been involved in. Sadly she is still surprised by what people will do and the depths that people will plumb.

Being a child protection worker is obviously very difficult work, being involved with families and passions, paedophiles and all sorts of abuse. Sadly, two of her colleagues were in a car accident on the weekend when going off to work. The two women, who worked for the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, were killed when their four-wheel drive collided with a minibus at Barratta Creek near Townsville. I was speaking about this to the member for Herbert, Ewen Jones. I am going to do what I can and join with him, in another bipartisan effort, to have a raffle or something to raise funds in Townsville. I will make a donation and Ewen Jones will make a donation. He was an auctioneer in another life, so he is a very good fundraiser to support the families of these two women who, in going about their difficult work, sadly passed away.

Obviously, child abuse cannot be tolerated under any circumstances. Whether it is from violence in the family or from violence in an institution, in either case, it is not acceptable. All children deserve a safe and happy childhood. By establishing a royal commission into institutional child abuse we can bring attention to the injustices which have occurred in places where the most vulnerable in our society should have been cared for and protected. Child sexual abuse and other related unlawful or improper treatment of children has a long-term cost to individuals and, as we have sadly seen, also to the economy and to society as a whole. I want all of our children to grow up in a safe environment and to put trust in the institutions that step in when parents fail, so that a safe atmosphere is provided.

The amendments in the Royal Commissions Amendment Bill will bring occurrences of institutional child abuse out into the open, occurrences which over time have been ignored and rejected. For many people, telling their stories of child sexual abuse will be very traumatic. These private sessions will mean that people affected by this crime can voluntarily participate in the royal commission in a less formal setting so that their voices can be heard. So often when meeting people who have suffered abuse we see that it is important they be given a voice because they were silenced as a child. We want the victims of these horrid circumstances to be able to come forth and tell their story without fear of rejection or judgment, and these amendments facilitate that. Obviously, we cannot know at this time how many people will wish to participate in the royal commission; although, since January, we have seen significant media interest, and people have contacted my office to ask about the process. That gives an indication as to how many people in our
community have been affected, sadly, by child abuse.

We know it will be difficult, but this government is prepared to step up to the challenge and do everything that we can against these acts of violence and, more importantly, to prevent any abuse happening in the future. The government cannot undo the pain and suffering that has occurred in the past; but we can listen, we can bear witness and we, as a nation, can respond.

When the royal commission has completed its work, we can act to prevent these crimes and injustices from happening again. Like most crimes, eternal vigilance is the best defence, and the royal commission is a part of that process. The royal commission is as much about assisting victims of past abuse to be heard as it is about investigating systemic failures that can be prevented in the future. We cannot remain silent on these shocking crimes of sexual child abuse. I welcome the bill. I hope it will have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of those who have suffered the traumatic experience of child abuse in institutional circumstances. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs—Attorney-General and Minister for Emergency Management) (11:09): I welcome the contribution of all members to the debate on the Royal Commissions Amendment Bill 2013. The measures in the Royal Commissions Amendment Bill 2013 will assist the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse to undertake its important inquiry and to facilitate participation in the commission by those who wish to tell their story. The changes proposed have been designed to ensure that the royal commission can work quickly to deliver recommendations that will make real improvements and hear from a wide range of people. To achieve these aims, we need to give the commission as much flexibility as we can in the manner of its operation.

Making sure that the royal commission can directly hear the personal stories of people affected by child sexual abuse in institutional contexts will be very important in assisting the commission to understand past failings and to develop recommendations so that past failures are not repeated. The private session measures in the bill will facilitate voluntary participation in the royal commission by people affected by child sexual abuse in institutions. Participants will not need to tell their story on oath or affirmation. They will have the same protections as a witness appearing at a formal hearing of the commission. The commission will also be able to authorise support persons to accompany the person giving information at a private session. The commission will be able to use information it has received in a private session in a report, but the bill will require that identifying information about individuals is not published. In short, the private sessions are designed to ensure the commission can use material from a wide range of sources to deepen their understanding of the failures that have taken place and how these might be prevented in the future.

The measures in this bill will assist the commission by giving it more flexibility, with options to receive information and evidence for the inquiry. The work ahead of the royal commission is significant, and it will be a matter for the commission to determine how best to proceed to gather information across Australia. As the member for Moreton noted in his speech, this royal commission has a very large task ahead of it. Thousands of Australians have a direct interest in this inquiry and they are spread right across our country. It is important that
the commission have flexibility and make the best use of the resources provided to it. The bill will also permit the chair of the current royal commission and chairs of future royal commissions to authorise one or more members to hold a hearing and take evidence on oath or affirmation. Under the current act, the hearing must be conducted by at least a quorum of commissioners.

I would like to take this opportunity to alert the House to the fact that there are some technical amendments to this bill which are currently underdeveloped. They will be provided to the opposition in advance of their introduction in the Senate.

The government acknowledges the support of state and territory governments for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. All states have now issued letters patent or commissions in terms complementary with the letters patent establishing the Commonwealth royal commission. This makes a joint royal commission with those jurisdictions, which gives the royal commission broad powers under laws governing both the state and Commonwealth inquiries.

When the royal commission delivers its recommendations, all Australian governments will need to work together to make sure that all that can be done by governments is done to prevent the crime of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts and to improve institutional responses. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Australian Education Bill 2012
Second Reading
Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

to which the following amendment was moved:

That all words after "That" be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:

"whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading, the House is of the view that: (1) the Objects of the bill should be amended to read:

(a) families must have the right to choose a school that meets their needs, values and beliefs;
(b) all children must have the opportunity to secure a quality education;
(c) student funding needs to be based on fair, objective, and transparent criteria distributed according to socio-economic need;
(d) students with similar needs must be treated comparably throughout the course of their schooling;
(e) as many decisions as possible should be made locally by parents, communities, principals, teachers, schools and school systems;
(f) schools, school sectors and school systems must be accountable to their community, families and students;
(g) every Australian student must be entitled to a basic grant from the Commonwealth government;
(h) schools and parents must have a high degree of certainty about school funding so they can effectively plan for the future;
(i) parents who wish to make a private contribution toward the cost of their child's education should not be penalised, nor should schools in their efforts to fundraise and encourage private investment; and
(j) funding arrangements must be simple so schools are able to direct funding toward education outcomes, minimise administration costs and increase productivity and quality.

Third Reading
Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs—Attorney-General and Minister for Emergency Management) (11:13): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.
the definitions in the bill should be supplemented to define a non-systemic school as a non-government school that is not a systemic school, and a systemic school as an approved school that is approved as a member of an approved school system; and

(3) the bill should provide that the current funding arrangements be extended for a further two years, to guarantee funding certainty for schools and parents."

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Opposition Whip) (11:14): I was speaking, in the previous part of this debate on the Australian Education Bill 2012, about the need to include cybersafety in the national curriculum. With social media—like Facebook and others that we see out there—the user has to assume that anything they post online cannot be deleted and is, in fact, on the internet forever. Speaking on such social media, a quarter of teens surveyed said that they had been the victims of cyberbullying.

Advanced features of social media—we see them all the time—include Bluetooth and geotagging. Geotagging can often be a default setting which poses a significant risk, particularly to young people, who do not understand the implications of taking a photo with the geotagging embedded in there and then uploading it to Facebook. So the reason for cybersafety to be included in the national curriculum is very real. Our children face these issues on a daily basis. It is part of the challenges they face.

I deliver these courses into schools constantly, encouraging young people to be safe and aware online. Certainly it is something that needs to be included in the national curriculum. We need to teach our young people how to be safe and, equally importantly, we need to teach parents how to teach their children to be safe. This should be an Australia-wide activity. The only way to deliver that, in my view, to the next generation and the current one, is to include that type of education in the national curriculum.

As I said in relation to the nine-page, very short bill before the House—the plan to have a plan to have a plan—what we need is legislation that delivers certainty and choice. We need to deliver. Where is the definition of what is a systemic school and a non-systemic school? The government needs to deliver details in this piece of legislation, but no details are in this nine-page bill.

The government needs to deliver the funding well before the next election. Just where is the funding going to come from? We have heard nothing about that. There is no reference to that in this bill, in any way, shape or form—nothing in this legislation. Probably the way to describe this bill—as I did previously—is that it is, at best, an aspirational mission statement. The bill is supposed to be about education but is, in fact, nine pages long and approximately 1,400 words. Here is the financial impact statement; there is nothing on it. This is not legislation; this completely ignores the issues.

Ms BIRD (Cunningham—Parliamentary Secretary for Higher Education and Skills) (11:17): It is my great pleasure to stand to support the Australian Education Bill 2012, which is before the House today. Having spent a lifetime working in the education sector—as, indeed, you have, Acting Speaker Grierson, coming from a similar background to mine—I see this as a once in a lifetime opportunity to address the issue of ongoing school funding in this nation. So I particularly endorse the bill before the House.

A core Labor value is giving every Australian student the chance for a world-class education. Like many in this place, I was the first in my family to go to university.
We well understand the importance of making sure that each child has the capacity to reach their full potential and to achieve their goals in life. Every child should have this chance, no matter where they live, what their family background is or where they come from.

For a student, a great education should not depend on the income of their family, what school they attend or the personal circumstances of the young person. Every Australian student should have the chance to secure a great job when they leave school and be able to contribute to their community in the immediate and long-term future. This will help our economy stay strong. The Australian government, as shown in this education bill, believes in the power of education—and high-quality education at that. A highly skilled and highly educated community strengthens our workforce, strengthens our economy, increases productivity and leads to a greater prosperity for all. Who would not want that?

Australia is a prosperous nation, and countries in our position need to lead the way in education. Our schools must continually improve and offer equity in schooling so that our nation will continue to prosper. We need our students to engage with the region and we need to provide social, economic and cultural opportunities for this engagement to happen, particularly with our Asian neighbours.

New evidence based methods of teaching and learning—using the opportunities that the digital age, in particular, offers—will help successful reforms in education that will take us into the 21st century. Indeed, prior to my current position, when I chaired the Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communications—one of my wonderful colleagues who was on that committee is with us today—one of the interesting things that we found, when we were looking at utilising fast, ubiquitous broadband as it becomes available in the nation, was the capacity for it to transform education. A particular example we saw was with young people who wanted to study Asian languages but who came from a small school or a school without a critical mass that would support the employment of a teacher. Through online, video based classes with a high-quality teacher they were able to continue to engage in learning an Asian language, which may have been denied to them previously.

We saw examples of students in classrooms in Australia linked to partner schools in Asia. Indeed, two schools with enormous distances between them were doing joint science experiments. The young people in those classrooms had a common enthusiasm for exploring science and experimenting. So, there are real opportunities in the new century to drive that sort of reform in our schools.

We need to develop strong communities in which partnerships are formed across that broader community that engage parents and teachers, families and employers. Our National Plan for School Improvement is the next step in the education reform agenda and provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve the way our schools are funded and to provide our children with a fair and high-quality education system.

The Australian Education Bill 2012 states that the objects of this act are, firstly, to acknowledge the matters I have just referred to and, secondly, to set out the following goals for Australian schooling to address those matters: firstly, for Australian schooling to provide an excellent education for school students; secondly, for Australian schooling to be highly equitable; and, thirdly, for Australia to be ranked by 2025 as
one of the top five highest-performing countries based on the performance of Australian school students in reading, mathematics and science and based on the quality and equity of Australian schooling.

The government wants to ensure we fund reforms we know will work to lift the standards and the results of all students. Under the national plan, we have set an aspirational goal to be in the top five countries in the world in maths, reading and science by 2025. This plan will introduce a new way of funding schools based on the needs of the students. The government has put in place the My School website—and I acknowledge the Prime Minister and the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, Mr Garrett, are at this very moment talking about the most recent update to that website—which provides greater transparency and accountability of school performance. NAPLAN data allows us to focus on student achievements in literacy and numeracy and provides both contextual and financial information about each school. Our government aims to drive continuous improvement and improve school performance and educational outcomes. We will provide significant additional funding to do so. Quality education will be at the forefront of our educational plan.

Our government also wants to reward great teachers. We all have had great teachers in our lives. I think everybody has a story of a particular teacher who left an ongoing impression on their life. Teachers need to have the skills and the support that they require to both improve continuously their own performance and deliver teaching of a high quality to their students. The Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework will be introduced across New South Wales from 2013. Teachers who, after participating in annual appraisal processes, are seen to be doing well will be encouraged to apply for certification at the 'highly accomplished' or 'lead' teacher levels. Teachers will be rewarded, and rightly so.

There will be more support included in our program for students with disabilities, Indigenous students, students from lower income families and students with limited English skills. The extra funding will be provided to assist teachers in schools to improve the education of students, helping them to move towards a job or further education. Support will be offered in the form of health specialists such as occupational therapists in schools, curriculum tailored to students' needs and assistive technologies in the classroom. There will be extra funding for every student in the poorest half of the community, for Indigenous students and for students who need help with their English skills. Programs will be introduced—and there are some wonderful examples of these around already, but they will be further supported by the reforms—in the form of breakfast clubs, homework centres and personalised learning plans for students. We will put more power into the hands of school principals and provide more information about school performance for parents and the community. We will invest nationally to empower schools to make decisions at the local level, and additional funding will be provided for additional support for teachers in the form of training and professional development.

The Australian Education Bill 2012 has had great support in the Illawarra region. My office has received a lot of support for the bill and encouragement to continue with courage and tenacity to reform the funding model across Australia. On 24 April last year, the minister for school education, Peter Garrett, joined parents, principals and members of the community at Wollongong's Smith's Hill Selective High School to discuss
school funding and the future of Australian schooling. The event was one of many to be hosted in the Illawarra for us to speak with school communities about the recommendations of the report. My colleague the member for Throsby and I met with P&Cs and school groups, as have many of my colleagues in this place. It was a great opportunity for us to share ideas about the issues and challenges facing Australian schools and to provide information about the government's school improvement reforms.

The Illawarra has already benefited from the record investment in school education. We have seen some 7,835 computers delivered to senior high-school students at 17 schools, and seven schools are receiving funding for a school chaplain or welfare worker to look after the social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of students. In every school I visit, I hear from principals, teachers, students and parents about the terrific new facilities they now have, thanks to the Building the Education Revolution program. There have been 143 projects at 66 schools in my electorate. It would have meant an awful lot of lamington drives if those schools had been individually trying to raise funds for those particular projects. The government has invested more than $114 million in school infrastructure in Cunningham. We have great schools in the Illawarra, but this government wants to make them even better, to ensure that every local student will have access to a world-class education.

We have also had investment in innovative science outreach programs, with the launch of a mobile planetarium. This was created by the Science Centre at the University of Wollongong. The mobile planetarium will capture students' imagination and enable them to expand their knowledge of the sciences. It is vital that young Australians develop an understanding of science, and the mobile planetarium will expose students to new ideas in science and technology, potentially leading to an interest in a career in the field. The study of science is integral to the long-term prosperity of the nation, and being exposed to world-class curriculum in the sciences will be an investment in and asset to our society.

I want to very briefly mention a number of other important investments that have happened in schools in my region under the Labor government. Just to give the context: there are 66 schools in my electorate and around 24,000 students. There have been 143 BER projects, costing just over $115 million in total, and they have included building or upgrading 27 classrooms, 16 libraries and 27 multipurpose halls. Numerous times I have sat at schools where they have persevered with their annual presentation day, with their band playing and the kids coming up to get their awards, in less than ideal weather conditions. I can say that, at the end of last year as I went around and did all those awards, they were particularly pleased to have the wonderful new halls and facilities in the schools.

As I indicated, over 7,800 computers have been installed under the Digital Education Revolution and almost $5 million was approved for two trades-training-centre projects, which benefited four schools across my electorate and that of Throsby. There are four schools participating in the Smarter Schools National Partnerships and there are nine schools eligible to receive funding for chaplaincy and student welfare services in my electorate. Our National Plan for School Improvement has already delivered in the Illawarra, but importantly it needs to continue to improve and deliver quality teaching in every classroom as supported by the bill before the House. This Australian government is prepared to discuss significant investment in our schools and we will
provide more support for schools and students who need it most. We will provide more power to local school principals, more information about school performance for parents and the community and, finally and most importantly, a fair school funding system based on the needs of every student in every classroom to lift the wellbeing of all students across the nation. I commend the bill to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms O'Neill): I thank the member for her contribution. I know that she has a longstanding commitment to education.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (11:31): I rise to speak on the Australian Education Bill 2012. This bill is intended to outline the government's determination to introduce a new funding model for schools, as part of its response to the Review of Funding for Schooling panel, the Gonski review. However, this bill contains only nine pages and 1,400 words, which set out 'aspirational goals' rather than specific details about how the Gillard government plans to fund the state and non-state school system in the future. There are no details at all as to how the new funding model will operate; how much individual schools will receive; how this funding will be calculated; and what other obligations will be placed upon the sector. This is extremely important information that all state and non-government schools need to know so that they can plan for the future education of their students.

While this bill is very light on detail, the coalition will not oppose the bill in its current form. Before we finalise our position, we will of course wait for further details from the government following the COAG discussions this year, and wait for the further details from the House Standing Committee on Education and Employment's inquiry into the bill, referred to the committee on 29 November 2012. We previously heard the member for Grey, the deputy chair of the committee, advise the House that the committee has not even had a chance to begin the inquiry into this bill. It is therefore simply unacceptable that the government has continued the second reading today.

As the member for Sturt highlighted on 12 February, the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, the member for Kingsford Smith, attended a protest in New South Wales to demand that the New South Wales Premier, Barry O'Farrell, release how he is going to implement the Gonski recommendations and how he will cost that implementation. This demonstrates the sheer hypocrisy of the minister and this government: the coalition has been demanding answers from the federal Labor government about how they will implement the Gonski recommendations, given that to date the government has not responded formally to the 41 Gonski recommendations. This bill does, however, expect that states, territories and the non-government school sector will agree to a national plan for school improvement in return for future federal funding. This national plan indicates five general directions for reform, including quality teaching, quality learning, empowered school leadership, transparency and accountability, and meeting student need. These are laudable aims, but there is no further information about what these directions mean for the sector or exactly how the government intends on implementing them and improving education.

I read with interest an article by Scott Prasser, Professor of Public Policy and Executive Director of the Public Policy Institute at the Australia Catholic University here in Canberra. Professor Prasser calls the bill 'a vacuous document long on rhetoric and aspiration, short on substance and detail'.
He highlights the concerns of many in public policy of the huge concerns that have resulted from the fact that it is, as he explains, 'heretical to question the value of the Gonski proposals'. When a government proposes to spend billions on education, disability, broadband—it is absolutely crucial to scrutinise every single dollar. As Professor Prasser wrote:

A government that makes large-scale public investment in new policies and programs which have little prospect of success is failing the first principles of good government.

I absolutely agree with these sentiments. It is our responsibility as members of parliament to ensure the hard-earned money that we take from taxpayers is spent wisely and efficiently and that, further, we actually measure the outcomes and success or failure of programs. It is especially crucial given the nature of special interest and lobby groups and how they position the problems of their particular industry or sector. Often, the purported answer is money—that if you throw more money at a problem, magically, the problem will be solved.

What we do know is that research across the world confirms that more spending does not necessarily correlate with educational quality. The question is: what do you do with the money you spend and how cost-effective is it? We must therefore take stock of the entire school education system in Australia for both government and non-government schools. The Gonski review attempted to do this but left many stones unturned. As I said, the government has not formally or adequately responded to the Gonski review, so the only real recommendation that the government will entertain is spending more money. Everything from the Gonski review has been simplified into one figure—$6.5 billion. Now is the time for the government to explain what they intend to do in education reform. We must know further details about how the governments across Australia plan to spend the additional $6.5 billion.

There are many questions which still abound. How much money will be spent on employing teachers? How many teachers will we need? What Higher School Certificate score will students need to study education at university? Is the current score required for studying education at university set at a high enough standard to ensure that we attract the best quality people to become teachers? What are the advantages of implementing a voucher system in Australia? How do you harness a voucher system to truly provide parental choice while at the same time ensuring that funding is directed from the bottom-up, as opposed to being directed by some bureaucrat thousands of kilometres away? Will the government be focusing on technology or giving laptops to every student as per the now-defunct government program which wasted hundreds of millions of dollars?

Does the government have an ideal class size in mind? Will there be capital funding arrangements for the future establishment of new schools or classrooms? Will the Prime Minister guarantee that no school will have to increase school fees as a result of the changes? What will be the benchmark funding per primary and secondary school student?

Furthermore, there is still no clear answer as to how students with a disability will be supported by the federal government. I spoke, in my private member's motion last session, of the annual struggle of parents and staff at the Glenleighden School in my electorate to receive adequate support from the federal government for their children. The school is concerned that the Gonski
review does not adequately address the problem that operational policies relating to disability are inconsistent across states. While the Queensland state government does recognise children with primary language disorder as having a speech-language impairment, making those children eligible for funding, some states in Australia do not recognise PLD. The school is extremely concerned that the Gonski review made no recommendations in relation to loading for a disability because of 'significant obstacles'—as described on page 167 of the review. The Glenleighden School is the only one of its type, so parents travel from all over Australia to enrol their child. That means it is of paramount importance to the school that this issue is dealt with. At this point, I do not know how to answer the school's inquiries—because there is no answer from this government. This is not an exhaustive list of the many key questions about the implementation of the Gonski review.

Over the last five years, since the Labor Party took office, there has been much consternation within the state and non-government school sectors about what the government will change in school funding. During the 2007 election, the member for Griffith promised a review of funding but the government has since largely retained the former Howard government's funding model. David Gonski was selected to chair the review panel, which handed its final report into schooling to the government in December 2011. The main recommendation was to implement a new funding model at an additional cost of $6.5 billion a year. The panel proposed originally that the federal government and states would split the cost of introducing the recommended funding model on a 30 to 70 basis, which would require each government in Australia to lift existing expenditure in school education by approximately 15 per cent.

Since then, the panel's proposed theoretical model has been tested by the government and dozens of technical issues and anomalies have arisen. Both the National Catholic Education Commission and the Independent Schools Council of Australia reported serious anomalies and became very concerned about what the model meant for their schools. In August last year, leaked modelling revealed that approximately one-third of all schools, including both government and non-government schools, would lose funding. In particular, the Independent Schools Council of Australia reported that 16 per cent of its members would lose money—180 of the 1,100 independent schools losing out. This would mean parents having to fork out thousands and thousands of dollars extra each year just to cover the cuts in funding.

As I said, the coalition has consistently maintained that any new funding model must not reduce funding for any school in real terms. That makes the original Gonski proposal simply unacceptable for Australian parents and the coalition. I understand that the government has at least attempted to substantially redesign the original proposal, including spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on consultants. The devil, however, will be in the detail, about which we currently know very little. It is the coalition's position, as the member for Sturt has indicated, that the current quantum of funds for every school—and the indexation of those funds—is the basic starting point when considering any new funding model. In particular, no school should lose funding.

In addition, the coalition has set out 10 principles which outline our values for schooling. These include, among others, respecting the right of parents to choose a school that meets their needs, values and beliefs; ensuring opportunity for all Australian children to secure a quality
education; student funding being based on fair, objective and transparent criteria and distributed according to socioeconomic need; and decisions being made locally by parents, communities, principals, teachers, schools and school systems.

The coalition has introduced amendments to this bill to provide certainty to schools and parents that their funding is protected during implementation of any reform of school funding. Firstly, we will introduce an amendment to ensure funding certainty for schools by extending the current model for another two years in the event that a new model has not been agreed with the states this year. Secondly, we will introduce an amendment to include the coalition's 10 funding principles.

The coalition's amendment calls for the addition to the bill of a definition of both 'systemic school' and 'non-systemic school'. The essential difference is that systemic schools receive funding through system authorities. The 1,704 Catholic schools, for example, receive funding through their state or territory Catholic Education Commission. The non-systemic schools are funded directly by the federal government—some independent Jesuit schools and many schools of other faiths are funded this way. The government must, at the very least, explicitly recognise and define the difference between systemic and non-systemic schools. That would then allow funding to flow from the Commonwealth to non-government system authorities—or direct to a school, if it is a non-systemic one. During the Senate process, members of the coalition will continue to ensure that any measure which will have the effect of micromanaging schools or increasing red tape will be opposed, but we will definitely support those parts of the plan to increase school and principal autonomy.

Lastly, the coalition believes that parents and schools need funding certainty so that they can adequately plan for next year and guarantee teaching positions. Last year, I held an education forum in conjunction with the member for Brisbane. The shadow education minister, the member for Sturt, kindly attended and responded to the many questions from principals and parents about the uncertainty they face about what is going to happen—for example, whether the 'funding maintained' principle would continue or whether schools would continue to be funded on the basis of socioeconomic status. At that forum, the shadow minister was able to outline the broad philosophical approach of the coalition to quality and choice in education and to recommit to making sure that no school loses real funding if the funding model changes. Unfortunately, all government and non-government schools in Australia still have no clue as to the funding model to be in effect from 1 January 2014.

By introducing a bill that is only nine pages long, by introducing a bill with no detail, by introducing a bill prior to full consultation with the states and by progressing their bill prior to the committee process, this government is demonstrating that it is not serious about providing certainty to the Australian education system. While I do not oppose this bill in its current form, the government must announce the detail of its proposals. We owe it to the schooling system in Australia, we owe it to Australian parents and, most of all, we owe it our children. The coalition's plan is for real solutions for all Australians.

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (11:45): The Australian Education Bill is the Commonwealth government's response to the Gonski review. The Gonski review identified principally the shortcomings of the existing funding model for our schools. Our
response, when fully implemented by 2020, will see an additional $6.5 billion spent on our schools by state and territory governments and of course the Commonwealth. This amount is in line with the recommendations of the final report of David Gonski. From talking to families and teachers across my electorate of Corangamite it is clear that schools face a number of challenges, and it is clear that a large number of those challenges come from the existing funding model. When I am engaging with state schools I find that those schools are inadequately funded, particularly when you consider that by and large it is the state school system that teaches students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, students from non-English-speaking backgrounds and of course students with a disability.

The Gonski model funds each student on their needs. A base amount is applied for each student and then it is topped up with additional funds to provide additional resources to help those students succeed. Extra money will be available to schools to help support students, including those from low SES backgrounds and students with a disability, or students with limited English proficiency. Small schools and rural and remote schools will also receive additional loadings to cover the additional operating costs that they have because of the size of their enrolment.

The Australian Education Bill is implementing Labor's plan to deliver for our schools. The plan, in a nutshell, includes quality teaching, making sure that we have the best and the brightest teachers available for our schools, and quality learning, with a world-class national curriculum and individual support for students. Our plan also empowers school leaders, giving principals more say about how they run their school. Further, it provides better information, giving the community detailed information on local schools through the My School website. Further, it provides funding to help meet the challenges of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and schools located in disadvantaged communities.

Five specific new legislative measures form the centre of the Australian Education Bill. First, a quality education for every Australian child will be an entitlement arising from their common citizenship of our Commonwealth. Second, there will be new goals for Australian education. The aim is for Australia to be ranked in the top five countries in reading, science and mathematics by 2025 and, by the same year, for us to be ranked in the top five countries for providing a high-quality and high-equality education system. Third, there will be a new national plan for school improvement.

The bill provides the directions for our plan: quality teaching, quality learning, empowered school leadership, transparency and accountability, and meeting our students' needs. The bill further sets out the basis in law for agreement between the Commonwealth, the states and territories, and Catholic and independent education authorities to implement the plan in full. It also provides for new principles for school funding.

The bill provides for a new funding standard, based on what it costs to educate students at schools we know already get strong results. Quality education requires strong funding so that schools can engage quality teachers and provide the support they need. The bill will provide a benchmark amount per student with extra needs to be met through a system of loadings—additional funding to help children who the evidence shows need help. The fourth part of the plan is that there will also be a new link between school funding and school
improvement. The bill provides that the Australian government will deliver future funding on the principles legislated in this bill to those states, territories and non-government authorities which agree to implement the national plan.

The bill fulfils the government's commitment, given in its response to the final report of the Gonski review that we commissioned. This legislation needs to be implemented as soon as possible so that we can enshrine these principles and the new funding approach for the commencement of the next school year. The bill also picks up the commitments made in the government's white paper, *Australia in the Asian century*. Asian studies will be embedded across the Australian curriculum, and students will have access to at least one priority language. This is an exciting and challenging time for education.

Since 2007, Labor have invested heavily in our local schools—new buildings, new classrooms, a new national curriculum, computers in schools and additional funding assistance. All the evidence tells us that the single greatest factor in school improvement is lifting teacher quality. Labor's plan for school funding will have a particular focus on teachers. New teachers will be readier for the classroom, with more practical experience during training and two years of support in school once they become a teacher. Teachers will meet rigorous professional standards and be recognised for improving their skills and performance in the classroom. All teachers will be reviewed annually in their school. Teachers and principals will have access to more data on the school's performance. This also ensures that students who are falling behind, especially disadvantaged students, can be identified and provided with the extra support they need to meet the standards. This information about performance will hold teachers, principals and school communities to a greater level of accountability. Every school will have a school improvement plan and will be accountable for delivering it.

The bill requires the meeting of student needs—identifying the needs of every child and delivering what he or she needs. We will now have clear evidence about how disadvantage holds back many students and what is required to provide them with a quality education. We know that, if we get the resources right and ensure that no child misses out, every child can succeed in the classroom. Our national plan will see resources allocated to reflect the need of the student. We have made good progress on our national plan. Federal and state and territory education ministers have already commenced work, and that work will continue over the next few months. I look forward to outcomes being delivered and identified.

Labor is the party that is principally concerned with education. We have provided additional funding since we came to office in 2007, and it is one of the principles of the Labor Party—to deliver funding to students on a needs basis. There is a lot of work to be undertaken between now and 1 January 2014, when the new funding arrangements will be implemented. From getting around and talking to students, schoolteachers and parents right throughout the Greater Geelong area, across my seat of Corangamite, I know that we need to put more money in to assist in the delivery of quality education that enables Australia to achieve the goals of this bill—to provide opportunity to all students, to ensure that we have individual learning plans for students, to make sure that students are adequately resourced and to deliver on that learning plan. That is the way we need to move forward.
I look forward to further negotiations between us, the Commonwealth, and the state and territory governments, and the Catholic education system and independent schools. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield) (11:56): I rise to speak on the Australian Education Bill 2012, which—in a fashion we have come to expect from this government—sets out a list of noble and lofty aspirations with no plan as to how to actually achieve them. I want to make three points in the time available to me today. The first is that, despite all the noble and lofty aspirations which are articulated in this bill and elsewhere, the Labor Party is unable to guarantee that no school will be worse off when it comes to its proposed funding arrangements. The second point I want to make is that the measures which are contemplated in this bill will add substantial regulatory and red tape burdens, but the case has not been made out that they will deliver compensating and justifying benefits. My third point to the House today is that, on analysis, this bill is an entirely meaningless piece of legislation: it is explicitly stated, on the face of it, that it creates no legal obligations. To introduce a bill which does this is to demean the parliament and the legislative process.

I turn to the proposition that the Labor Party and the Rudd-Gillard government are unable to guarantee that no school would be worse off when it comes to funding arrangements. Clause 9 of the bill purports to deal with the issue of school funding. It states:

For any Government of a State or Territory, or non-government education authority, that reaches agreement with the Commonwealth on its implementation of the national plan referred to in section 6, the Commonwealth will provide funding for schools or school systems, through grants of financial assistance to States and Territories, based upon the following principles …

It then articulates a list of very noble and worthwhile principles. In other words, the bill sets out a very high level outline of the funding model that was described in the Gonski review of school funding. The Gonski report recommends new funding for education of some $6.5 billion per annum, which raises a fairly obvious and essential question: where is the $6.5 billion going to come from?

The original proposal in the Gonski review was that the incremental cost of introducing the model be split between the Commonwealth and the states on a 30-70 basis. The implication is that each government would be required to increase its existing expenditure on school education by around 15 per cent. It might have been thought that, when a bill dealing with the implementation of the broad model set out in the Gonski review was introduced, that bill would give detail, that bill would set out the precise implementation mechanics. But anybody who approaches this bill with that expectation would be gravely disappointed, because this bill gives no detail about the funding split at all and nor does this bill grapple with any of the technical issues which have been raised by the many stakeholders in this sector about the implications of the funding model proposed by the Gonski review.

Both the National Catholic Education Commission and the Independent Schools Council of Australia have highlighted what they see as significant anomalies which would lead to around a third of all schools having reduced funding compared to the current model, and I hasten to add this would include both government and non-government schools. It is no surprise, therefore, that we have seen a steady series of concerns expressed by state premiers and

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by state education ministers about the glaring lack of detail provided to date by the Rudd-Gillard government on how the new school funding arrangements will operate in practice. For example, Queensland's minister for education had this to say on 20 January this year:

We've had absolutely no detail about numbers. We don't have a model from which we can work and we also don't have any idea about what state contributions are supposed to be let alone whether we can afford them.

The Western Australian minister for education had this to say on 1 February:

It continues to be disappointing and frustrating that the Commonwealth is still yet to provide the states with any proposed funding model, particularly in light of the Prime Minister announcing the date for this year's federal election yesterday, an announcement which is meant to provide the electorate with certainty.

Last year, the Chief Executive of the Independent Schools Council of Australia, Bill Daniels, had this to say:

While ISCA appreciates the complexity of the task, many of the 1,100 independent school communities have genuine concerns about the continuing uncertainty of future funding arrangements. Considerable time has passed since the release of the Gonski Review of Funding for Schooling and current Australian Government funding arrangements for independent schools expire at the end of 2013.

The Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth was supposed to release data on student characteristics and school finances. There are reports around that data has been provided to stakeholders, but we simply do not know with any certainty whether that is correct and, indeed, what that data consists of.

It is only after the data has been provided that the proposed model is supposed to be finalised. Until all of that is done and until all of that information is in the public domain, there are key questions which remain unanswered, including: where will the at least $6.5 billion per year which is required to fund the Gonski arrangements come from? If it is the case that the Gonski modelling shows that over 3,200 schools will be worse off, how much extra will it cost for every school to receive more funding, as the Prime Minister has promised? And will the Prime Minister promise that no school will have to increase school fees as a result of her changes? This really comes to the core of the issue: are any schools to be made worse off as a result of the new funding model?

It has been the consistent view of the coalition that any new funding model should leave no school worse off in real terms—and I do emphasise the words 'in real terms', because one of the glaring areas where we have seen a lack of commitment from the government is the indexation of funding. As we all know, due to the effects of inflation, a funding commitment in any particular year can be eroded quite materially as several years go by when you get the cumulative effect of inflation year after year. Therefore, indexation is absolutely critical to address that concern.

In addition, as was mentioned in the remarks by Bill Daniels which I quoted earlier, there is a glaring lack of certainty about what is to happen when the existing funding arrangements cease at the end of 2013. There is no answer on this question in the bill before the House today, yet this is a matter which is causing very considerable anxiety in independent schools around Australia. In the electorate of Bradfield, there are a significant number of outstanding independent schools. I know that the school councils, principals and others charged with the management of those schools are becoming increasingly anxious about what is to happen when the existing funding model comes to an end. It is extremely difficult to
plan for the future when you have no idea of what the funding arrangements are going to be at the end of the current year. Yet these schools need to make plans for years ahead, and seeking to do so without having certainty as to what degree of funding support will be available from the Commonwealth makes their challenge extremely difficult.

It is really hard to see how any competent government could get into the position where a very significant existing program of funding is to come to an end and yet no clarity on how the new arrangements are going to apply has been given to the many, many schools in the sector which depend upon this funding. You can go to considerable levels of detail as to where that uncertainty extends. For example, we do not know about the future arrangements for capital works funding. We do not know about the funding arrangements to support students with disabilities and other disadvantaged students. The lack of this government's capacity to give a commitment on the future funding arrangements, and particularly a commitment that no school will be worse off should the arrangements contemplated in this bill pass into law, is of substantial concern to those of us on the coalition side of the House.

The second point I want to make is that this bill, as one would expect from any bill introduced by the Rudd-Gillard government, proposes to add substantial additional regulatory burdens. We are told that there will be a national plan which will improve school performance and drive continuous school improvement. It will provide opportunities for school students to develop capabilities to engage with Asia and do a wide range of other very worthwhile and desirable things. There are significant concerns in the sector, based on experience, that the establishment of additional plans, indicators and requirements will add materially to the regulatory burden on schools.

The question therefore becomes: what benefit is to be obtained in exchange for this extra burden which is to be imposed? As many in the sector point out, key aspects which are highlighted in the plan are already addressed under current arrangements. For example, schools already undertake annual performance assessments of teachers. So therefore there is a real question as to whether the plan envisaged in this bill is going to do anything more than simply increase the red tape burden on schools and be yet another opportunity for attempts by the federal government to engage in ever-increasing micromanagement of aspects of activity in various sectors—in this case, education.

I would note, however, that one aspect of what is envisaged is something that the coalition is very much attracted to, and that is the notion of increasing school and principal autonomy. If the present government actually delivers on its ideas in this area, that would certainly be something we would be pleased to support. But naturally enough, based on experience, we are somewhat sceptical that they will in fact deliver.

Let me turn to the final point I want to make in the brief period available to me. The bill before the House today is, in substance, a completely empty and meaningless exercise. Clause 10 of the bill states that, when it passes into law, the act which is so created will not create any legally enforceable obligations. In other words, to take up the parliament's time with considering and debating this empty and meaningless sham is a scandalous misuse of the parliament. It is a sham and an empty piece of trickery, designed to do nothing other than to give the appearance of progress and action.
Everything which is in this bill could have been dealt with equally well through issuing a brief government policy statement. But of course that has already been done several times and so, therefore, this government is desperate to give the appearance that they are doing more. And what could achieve that objective better than to introduce a bill? Of course, it is a bill with lots of lofty goals and laudable aims and it repeats the phrase 'excellent education' several times, as if the more often you repeat it the more likely you are to achieve the outcome. I am sorry to say that excellence, while a laudable goal, is unlikely to be achieved just by using the word repeatedly.

The bill before the House today is one that wholly fails to address a concern which is causing great anxiety within the school sector in that it fails to guarantee that no school will be worse off when the new funding model is implemented. This bill before the House today greatly adds to the regulatory burden that will apply to schools. And, thirdly, it is a bill which in fact has no legal effect whatsoever and is therefore a scandalous misuse of the parliament's time.

Mrs D'ATH (Petrie—Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (12:11): I rise to voice my strong support for the Australian Education Bill 2012, a bill for education reform that will significantly benefit schools across the country. I would just like to acknowledge and say how great it is to see the school students in the gallery today while we are having this extremely important debate, one that I believe is important for the future of our children and this country.

As my community and members of this House know, I have been a very vocal advocate for these reforms—reforms that will benefit our principals, teachers, parents, staff and, most importantly, our students, the leaders of the future and our country. We know the current school funding model is flawed. While our school communities moved into the 21st century, the funding model was rooted in the past. So we commissioned a national review, the Gonski review, to consult far and wide, including with the relevant experts, about how to make our school system better. Locally, I have had many discussions and held roundtables with local school principals, parents and teachers about the recommendations of the review, and I have passed on their feedback here in this House. My local schools know that I 'give a Gonski'.

The Australian Education Bill provides a framework for a better, fairer funding model and delivery of our national plan for school improvement, focusing on five core areas, including 'meeting student need', where we will provide targeted help for disadvantaged students and schools, and 'quality learning', where students will be taught using a world-class curriculum that supports all students to reach their potential.

As to the area of quality teaching, we will make sure we have the best and brightest teachers in our classrooms. The government will introduce new, more rigorous standards for teacher training courses to improve the quality of teachers graduating from universities and being employed in Australian schools. Under the new proposals, teaching degrees will have to introduce improved admission processes and aspiring teachers will have to pass a national literacy and numeracy test. All teachers will get additional training in managing disruptive behaviour. Student teachers will have more practicum experience before they graduate, and beginning teachers will have more time to plan their lessons, with 80 per cent of the workload of more experienced teachers. These measures will build on the $550 million teacher quality NP to attract the best
graduates into teaching and provide ongoing professional development.

We will empower school leadership. In return for more federal funding to the states and territories, we will stipulate that principals will implement local strategies and have more say over how they run their schools, who they hire and how they manage their budget to secure the best education outcomes for their students and that schools will be more transparent and accountable, providing better information about school performance using the My School website to make available even more detailed information about our schools, including information about school finances, teacher accreditation, student attendance rates, student behaviour and wellbeing, and year 12 attainment rates. As recommended by the Review of Funding for Schooling, Commonwealth funding will be provided on the basis of a schooling resource standard which will provide a base amount for all students, according to a formula that accounts for the costs associated with providing a high-quality education, and additional loadings that address educational disadvantage associated with any of the following circumstances: students from low-income families, Indigenous students, students with disabilities, children with limited English skills, the size of the student's school or the location of the student's school. This extra money, or loadings, will be 100 per cent publicly funded, so every student who needs more support will get it, no matter what type of school they attend. The loadings will help schools implement programs that can help their students, such as breakfast and homework clubs and personalised learning plans. The extra funding for students with disability will ensure that every child is able to fully participate in classroom activities and that teachers can be trained to understand and help every child reach their potential.

We all know and recognise the benefits of education. Access to a good, quality education means students can learn the skills they need to get a good job. We know that when we have a job, particularly a good, secure job, it contributes positively to their mental health and wellbeing. It also means we can spend money, which in turn helps keep our economy strong. According to independent analysis by PwC, improving the performance of Australia's schools will deliver benefits worth more than twice the current annual economic output of Australia. The analysis calculates the potential value to Australia of reforming its education system would be $3.6 trillion over the lifetime of the generation born in 2012.

Many schools around Australia are delivering a quality education and great outcomes for their students right now. But too many students are not achieving what they are capable of, and because of this, Australia is slipping behind our international competitors. And, worryingly, we are seeing significant differences between the education outcomes of students in the same year levels attending different schools. For example, by year 9 the gap in reading, maths and science results between advantaged and disadvantaged students is equivalent to about two years of schooling. This is not good enough. It should not matter what school a child attends, how much money their parents earn or where they live—every Australian child should be entitled to a quality education. That is what Labor stands for and that is what we will deliver.

We also recognise that schools need certainty so they can plan and budget. To this end, I echo the Prime Minister's guarantee that every school will see its funding increase every year. This means that under
the federal Labor government no school will receive less funding next year—or the year after, or the year after that—than they receive right now. The schooling resource standard will be a permanent feature, so schools will no longer be dependent on short-term grants to improve their communities. This assurance will take the pressure off P&Cs, principals and school staff to find more money, allowing them to better get on with the day-to-day running of schools.

The delivery of education in our schools has long been a partnership; the federal government works in partnership with states and territories and with the government, Catholic and independent school sectors, who are on the front line of education delivery. In return for our higher investment from next year, we seek continued collaboration with all sectors, and we expect the states and territories to also up the ante when it comes to their education funding. I know that discussions are ongoing at the highest levels and I look forward to positive outcomes being reached in the near future, particularly in my home state of Queensland. I strongly encourage the Premier of Queensland, Campbell Newman, to put his politics aside when it comes to providing educational opportunity for our students, now and for future generations. Queensland is an expansive state with significant decentralisation, which means we have schools in many rural and regional communities. In addition, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011 Census, around 3.6% of the Queensland population identified as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent and around one in every five Queenslanders has a disability.

Opposition education spokesman Christopher Pyne has confirmed that the coalition would keep in place the broken school funding model introduced in the Howard era that could see up to $5.4 billion cut from Australian schools—that is why we want to replace the current, broken system with a new and stable way of funding education. These facts and figures add up to one very clear message: Queensland—and every other jurisdiction in Australia—stands to benefit significantly from the federal Labor education reforms.

As we debate this bill, it is timely to reflect on what federal Labor has already achieved in our schools and in education policy over the past five years. We have built and improved facilities through almost 24,000 projects in 9,500 schools around the country, including $86 million in improvements in 36 schools across the electorate of Petrie. We have empowered parents and communities with information about schools through the My School website. We have delivered more than 950,000 computers to schools, an investment of $2.4 billion, including a computer for every student in years 9 to 12 across Australia, with 6,491 of those computers now benefiting students in my electorate alone. We have committed $2.5 billion to build trade training centres to help address Australia’s skills shortage and to ensure every high school student can have access to trade training. The value of our investment in this program was reinforced for me when I officially opened the new Arethusa College Trade Training Centre in Deception Bay on 18 February this year. I know this facility will make a world of difference to teachers and students at Arethusa. I was particularly pleased on the day to hear the Queensland Minister for Education, Training and Employment acknowledge the great work of this college and voice his support for the federal government’s investment in this trade training centre.

Our government recognises that sound literacy and numeracy skills are essential in
the 21st century, as is consistency in our schools. To this end, we have introduced a national curriculum to even the playing field for both teachers and students all over Australia and we have implemented the first ever national testing, through NAPLAN, to track the literacy and numeracy skills of every student, enabling the provision of more information to parents and better targeting of resources. In addition, we have funded over 2,500 chaplains and student welfare workers in schools and we are tackling the issue of bullying head-on through the National Safe Schools Framework and through a dedicated website with resources for parents, students and teachers at www.bullyingnoway.gov.au. These are programs that are very close to my heart and I know, Deputy Speaker O’Neill, are close to yours.

I am a huge supporter of chaplains and student welfare workers in schools and am thrilled that 28 schools in my electorate now have chaplains or student welfare workers in place. The feedback I receive about this program is fantastic. Students, staff and parents love it and it is great for school communities. As we observe the National Day of Action against Bullying this Friday it is important to note that our national plan for school improvement requires participating schools to have safe-school plans and anti-bullying strategies in place and make that information available to families.

Our government has developed the first national professional standards for principals and teachers. This initiative, together with $2.5 billion that we have made available in national partnership funding, is helping to improve literacy and numeracy, boost teacher quality and provide extra support to low-socioeconomic-status schools, including a number of local schools in my electorate. They tell me about the significant benefits that have come out of that national partnership funding.

We are rolling out the National Broadband Network across the country, which will significantly benefit our schools. I know schools are crying out to be switched on to the NBN as soon as possible, because they recognise it will revolutionise the way they do business, in and out of the classroom. To capitalise on the NBN capabilities, we are also delivering a $27.2 million NBN-enabled Education and Skills Services Program to develop online and interactive education and training projects, including virtual classrooms.

I could talk about Labor’s commitment to education all day. I could talk about how we are investing $54 million to attract maths and science professionals to teaching, our $200 million record investment in students who have a disability, our $64 million scheme for empowering local schools, another $1 billion for early childhood education to give every four-year-old in Australia access to 15 hours a week of kindergarten and preschool, and the Asian century white paper which, in coming years, will see opportunities for all students to learn an Asian language, from their very first day at school.

It is important that I also make mention of exactly what would be at stake if we were to have a coalition government, led by the Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, and the shadow education minister, Christopher Pyne. Most of the programs I mentioned would never have come into existence—the new school halls, libraries and science centres, the NBN, 950,000 computers for students in years 9 to 12 and a national Australian curriculum. We would see around one in seven teachers gone, teacher-training programs cut, small class sizes gone, national partnership funding scrapped and no NAPLAN information for parents.

Opposition members have been on the record, since 2010, confirming they would...
cut all of these initiatives. That is on top of their promise to stick to a broken funding system that could see our schools lose over $2 billion in coming years. The contrast is clear. The Gillard government is reforming our education system for the better. We have listened to school communities about what they want and what they need. We have consulted with principals, teachers, parents, staff and students—and I am proud to say we are delivering.

My local schools are great, already. But with more funding, more professional development for teachers and principals and more autonomy they can be even better. On behalf of my school communities—especially all of the teachers, parents and students who wrote letters to tell me they give a Gonski and asked me to do the same—I commend the Australian Education Bill to the House.

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (12:25): It is a privilege to rise and speak on the Australian Education Bill and outline my concerns with the bill as presented by the government. I listened carefully to the member for Petrie and essentially she said, 'We believe that children are our future. Teach them well and let them lead the way.' That is a lovely aspiration I support and which all members of this parliament support. But the purpose of a parliament and the purpose of legislation in the parliament is to outline, in law, the things that we intend to do and deliver, in a funding way and in a legislative way.

The problem with the Australian Education Bill, as it is drafted before this parliament, is that it is nine pages—1,400 words—long, with no detail on how anything will be achieved. So when you think you have reached a new low point, legislatively, from this government and you think, 'Wow, that is the worst-drafted piece of legislation I've seen in 17 years of watching these things,' and 'That is a poor way to word a phrase or a clause,' and 'That is a particularly bad name for a bill', here we have a nine-page bill about nothing, being put into the House of Representatives, with no detail attached, and we are asked to pass it with no detail attached. We do not know how anything will be delivered, we do not know how the future of education will be improved, we do not know if any funding will be attached and we do not know the government's intentions. It will not work.

I have had the privilege, thanks to the House, of being added to the inquiry into this Australian Education Bill. Again, I would point to an additional abuse of process, although my points today will not be just about process. They will also be about content and substance. The process is that we are having the inquiry into this bill. We are inquiring into a nine-page bill that says education is our future. Yes! Education is our future. We all agree. This inquiry process into a bill that is nine pages long with 1,400 words has been a complete farce, if I can put it that way. All of the witnesses and people who have made submissions have said, 'We'd really love to say something about what the government is intending in this bill but, essentially, we don't know the detail.' Some of them have said, 'We're in these bogus secrecy agreements with the government. We can't reveal any detail about what we're discussing, so we can't give you any evidence about it.' So when we have had serious questions like 'What funding models would benefit your system and what benefits would get to your school?', most of the time the answer is: 'We'd really like to say something about it, but we don't know.' That is exactly the problem that we have with this government and this piece of legislation before us. There is no detail. There is simply an aspirational attempt to say that education
is wonderful and we need to do something about it.

Of course we do. We do hear that the funding model is one that needs improving. But it is not a good or worthwhile process to ask the parliament to pass this piece of legislation when it says nothing about how we are going to improve things. Why not get a piece of legislation that says something, that has some clause that can improve the quality of education for us?

My points are not purely procedural. I do have serious concerns about some of the content we have been presented with. In the course of our inquiry and hearing from many of the different sectors in education, nationally, we have heard very concerning things about some of the funding models that are being considered.

I, coming from Sydney, have a great concern that there will be winners and losers. Certainly it was the view of ISCA, the Independent Schools Council of Australia, that this bill would produce winners and losers in schooling. That is contrary to the Prime Minister's view that no school would lose a dollar. It is easy to say no school will lose a dollar, and we have heard members opposite in the course of this debate say that, but it is not about the current amount of funding that they receive. Schools are serious enterprises that require increases in funding every single year. The indexation, of course, has not been guaranteed by the government, and the question of indexation is fundamental to the operation of schools. They cannot budget or continue their operations without guarantees, not just of their funding in real terms now, but of their funding in real terms with the guarantee of their indexation next year, the year after and the year after that.

We are now 10 months from all of these funding arrangements expiring, and the best that the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research can tell us—because there is no detail in this bill about the funding arrangements—is that COAG will work it out. I do not want to give advice to the government—it is not my job to give advice to the government and they certainly would not listen to me—but I have been around long enough to know that relying on COAG to resolve these kinds of critical questions, when your agreements are expiring in 10 months, is not a recipe for certainty for the education sector. It is not necessarily the smartest approach to take. If states and the Commonwealth do not come to an agreement—knock me down with a feather; it would not be the first time that that has happened, as we know from the history of Commonwealth-state relations—what is going to happen to the funding arrangements in these schools?

Schools need more than 10 months; they need certainty now to plan for their future years. That is why we have moved an amendment to this bill—this bill that contains nothing about nothing—to continue the current arrangements for two years, to give certainty to schools and the school sector so they can at least make plans for the years ahead. Sure, we may need to improve the funding model. Everybody in this place has a concern about that. But, if we have no detail, if we are relying on COAG to sort it out—perhaps—in a few months, we must have a message for those schools out there, who need to plan ahead for next year and the year after. This is not something we can leave to the last minute. I am very concerned about that.

I am also concerned about what we heard directly from ISCA in their presentation to our inquiry—that there would be winners and losers under the funding scenarios that are currently being considered, particularly in Sydney and Western Sydney. I want to
refer to a couple of sections of their submission to make my point. In particular, we heard that about a school in Western Sydney as an example. There are 440 independent schools in New South Wales and about 40 per cent of those, according to ISCA, would be worse off under the funding model that is being contemplated. Some of those are large schools and some are not necessarily high-SES schools. In particular, Dr Newcombe gave evidence of one school:

… with an SES of 91—

which is of course a high score—

so it is a very low socioeconomic area. It only charges fees of between $1,000 and $2,000 per student—so parents struggle there, but the school has well over 1,000 children.

So we are talking about a school community in a low-socioeconomic area with a reasonable level of school fees that the parents are making sacrifices to pay so they can send their children to the school of their choice. Dr Newcombe's contention was:

It would lose almost $1,000 per student under this model.

That is $1,000 a student, for a school in a low-socioeconomic area in south-west Sydney. That is just one example that he provided to the inquiry into this bill.

I read that out in the House today because I think it is extraordinarily important that members in Western Sydney in this place understand this. One in four students in Western Sydney attend a Catholic school, and the Catholic system are saying to the government—and said to us in the House inquiry—that they have concerns about the funding models that are being contemplated. In the course of the inquiry we heard that there were several models being considered. Then we heard there were up to 16 models being considered. This is the kind of detail that this House needs to know and understand before we make a decision on a piece of legislation of this nature. It is contemptuous of this parliament, it is contemptuous of the process of government, not to put the details of the funding before this chamber and put the arrangements in place before you ask us to debate and consider this legislation, because we do not know what the impacts on the sectors will be. The independent sector are telling us they are worried. The Catholic sector are telling us they are worried. They school a lot of students in our country. We ought to be very concerned about those things, and it is not right for the government to force this agenda on us without any reference to the detail or the quality of what they are doing.

You can go further into the detail of what they have provided—the 1,400 words—and see that a lot of those words are just a simple covering to ensure that the Commonwealth is not damaged by the passing of this nine-page bill. In the bill, if members want to have a look, they will find a particular clause in part 3 of section 10 saying that the act does not create legally enforceable obligations. Of course, that reads that the act does not create rights or duties that are legally enforceable in judicial or other proceedings. This is a very odd clause and you do not see it very often in legislation. Essentially, the government is saying to us that there is no legally enforceable part of this nine-page bill. Well, I would hope not, because there is nothing it. Why, then, do we have a clause in the nine pages and 1,400 words saying that it is not legally enforceable?

It also says that we believe the children are our future. I asked Mr Kritz from the Attorney-General's Department about that, and I will quote direct from his testimony to the inquiry. He said:

As to the reason for it, I can merely reiterate the fact—
By 'for it' he means that legally enforceable clause—
that without some substantive provisions being put in there, this bill, if it is passed as it is, would be legally problematical in terms of protecting the Commonwealth.

I attempted to ask Mr Kritz another question about that because that was pretty interesting, and it should be interesting to all members in this House, but I was shut down by the chair. I was not allowed to ask Mr Kritz another question on that day in the inquiry. So, I do not know what this provision means. I certainly would like to ask him what he meant by the statement that the bill would be legally problematical for the Commonwealth if it was passed in its current form. That was my next question, but I was not allowed to ask that question. What does it mean? There are only nine pages and there are only 1,400 words. Some of the words say, 'This bill is not legally enforceable.' There is no detail attached to this legislation. It is another low point that we have reached in the genesis of this parliament that is, I think, a bad example of a legal process.

I also want to turn to some of the comments that have been made about funding and the outcomes of the Gonski review which have led to the wording of much of this bill. Members opposite, in their rush to flesh out their speeches with statements about education, have talked about the BER and about money that has been spent in many other programs. To reiterate, there is no money attached to this bill. They have talked about $40 million here and $80 million there. The actual amount that was spent on the BER is $16 billion. What we know from all of the inquiries and investigations into the BER is that about $2 billion to $3 billion could have been saved.

In my electorate I had public schools where the money was wastefully administered by the department, and I have spoken about that in this chamber before. To give a quick example, I had a small school of 100 students who already had a library. They were told that they had to have a second library for those 100 students. A second library was built for those 100 students for $1 million. They had two libraries in Annangrove for 100 students at a cost of $1 million. The original library was air conditioned and fully functioning, but the new library for $1 million had no air conditioning, no shelving and was completely useless. There was great waste in the BER program.

That $2 billion to $3 billion that was wasted nationally is about half of the amount that Gonski has called for—the $6.5 billion. You would already be halfway there if you did not waste or throw away $3 billion. This government has a hide to talk about the amount of money that it has spent on education. You could get halfway to Gonski on the money that has been wasted on the BER. Certainly, if you gave that $1 million to my Annangrove Public School in my electorate, they could have used that $1 million to set up that school for 20 years. They should not have been told to build a second library for $1 million.

That underscores my point about this bill. We certainly do not want to do anything that damages the independent or Catholic sectors in terms of funding or education outcomes. Funding is not the only consideration, even though I have spent a lot of time talking about it today. There are other very important things. I want to make sure that we keep the efficiencies that come out of the Catholic system. I see that the Catholic system spent the BER money about three
times better than the public system did in New South Wales. That was a shambles. It is not a good outcome for public schools, but it is a fact and it happened that way. So we have to make sure that we—in this rush from the government, with all of these vague and sceptical terms—do not damage the inherent qualities of the different systems that produce good educational outcomes.

If we are serious about funding, let's get serious about a bill, let's put some meat on the bones and let's see something that is actually going to do something rather than being some sort of aspiration that has no place in a bill without any detail to back it up. This is a parliament and this parliament has to pass laws. Until you come forward with your detail and some practical proposals, please do not lecture us on the quality of education.

**Mr Bandt** (Melbourne) (12:40): Every child has the right to a good quality public education. To make that happen, public schools need money now—not in 2019 or at some unspecified date in the future but now. To even match the OECD average, Australia would need to put an additional $7 billion into education right now. Australia's public investment in all education is 3.7 per cent compared to the OECD average of five per cent. In relation to public expenditure on schools, we rank 24 out of 30, with Australia's public investment of 3.0 per cent comparing to an OECD average of 3.5 per cent. By OECD standards, only Belgium and Chile spend a smaller proportion of money on public schools than Australia, and only Belgium, Chile and Israel spend a higher proportion on private schools.

We know that this current inequity in funding hits disadvantaged public schools the hardest. As was reported in the *Australian*, over the last seven years public funding of independent schools has increased by 82 per cent and for Catholic schools it has increased by 64 per cent, but for public schools it has increased by only 48 per cent. Why are we in this position? We are in this position because the previous government, the Howard government, put in place a very unfair funding model. It is a model that does not take into account the streams of private recurrent income from sources other than fees, such as endowments, donations and capital works loan schemes. It is a model that gives an advantage to schools in regional areas and those with a high proportion of country students, leading to some wealthy city boarding schools receiving lower SES rankings, such as Geelong Grammar. The funding given to schools with high SES scores is disproportionately generous compared to schools at the lower end of the scale. That funding model has been in place for a number of years and has led to us having the distinction of being near the bottom of the heap in developed countries when it comes to spending on public schools.

For many years the Greens have said we need to fix this. The Greens know that public education is a cornerstone of democracy. The Greens firmly believe that every child has a right to a good quality public education. When the Gonski report came along, we said, 'It's well overdue. Let's get on with it.' We find ourselves in a situation where, five minutes to midnight, with only a few months to run on this parliament, we still have not fixed the unfair Howard funding model. Labor has had so many chances to fix this problem. At the early stage of its government, it had the advantage of having almost wall-to-wall state Labor premiers with whom it could have worked to fix the John Howard unfair funding model. Instead, Labor came to this parliament and said, 'No, we want to extend it, because we're not ready to fix it yet.' As a result, a child who was in grade 1 when Kevin Rudd became Prime
Minister has just finished primary school, all under a Labor government and all under John Howard's unfair funding model.

So now we have the ludicrous situation where, at five minutes to midnight, there is a much more hostile environment for public education, with conservative state premiers around the country, and we have a bill that still does not contain a new funding model. If a public school or a parent were to ask, 'How much more will I get for my public school or for my student if this legislation passes?' no one would know, because still there is no money on the table to redress that massive disadvantage that has us ranking amongst the bottom of developed countries in terms of how much money we give schools.

Even if this legislation were to pass, there is a clause in the legislation that says nothing in it is binding on the government. So still, even if we voted for this and it passed today, it would not result in our public schools, who desperately need the money, getting one more cent. What worries me is that, having passed up years of opportunities where there was a really good environment to fix this, we are now in the increasingly heated environment of an election campaign, where as the government looks around the states it does not find many political friends, and we still do not have a funding model.

This is not a good time to be debating such a significant reform, because history tells us that in the heat of a fight Labor gives in. We saw that with the mining tax. When one of the most significant reforms that could have set this country up for decades to come was recommended by Treasury, after a $26 million advertising campaign Labor caved in to the big miners, we got a change of Prime Minister and, as a result, the public purse is about $100 billion worse off over the next decade. That probably explains in part why we have not yet seen any money put on the table, despite five-odd years of government, and why when it does come, if the reports are to be believed, it will be put off into the never-never—because Labor has not had the courage to stand up to the big miners and raise the money we need to fund the services Australians expect, like decent public education for our kids.

So now we find ourselves speculating about when any money might arrive. According to one report, if it does arrive it will not be phased in until 2019. By 2019, if we get the full $6 billion that has been committed, we will still be behind the OECD average—because, of course, the rest of the OECD will have increased their spending. By 2019, that child who started primary school when Kevin Rudd became Prime Minister will have finished high school without seeing the full benefits of the Gonski reform package. This is what happens when you do not have the courage to stand up in the public interest and says to the big miners, 'You have got to pay your fair share.' It means that there is no money to pay for important reforms like this.

That is why I will be moving an amendment to this legislation to provide that, when the money does come in, given that it is probably going to come in dribs and drabs, the first lot should go to those disadvantaged public schools. We know from the Gonski report that public schools are where you find the highest concentration of disadvantage. As I go around and look at the schools in my electorate, that certainly rings true. But, because the money is going to come in dribs and drabs, if we do not give it to those public schools first, they are going to fall further behind. It will also mean that, of a limited quantum of money that is well below what is needed, money will be going to wealthy private schools that do not need it anywhere near as much, while the disadvantaged public
schools continue to drag further and further behind.

This is a sensible amendment that says, if you are not going to pay for it all upfront, then give it to those who need it most first. If the government comes out and releases the funding formula to say that from tomorrow we are going to fund the Gonski recommendations fully then there would be no need to proceed with this amendment. But I reckon you can pretty safely bet that that is not to happen. We are going to see funding promises put off to the never-never, and we are going to see years and years before public schools get the funding they deserve. We are going to see, whatever happens at the election in September, the legacy of the unfair Howard model continuing because Labor was not willing to act when it could to raise the money that we need to fund services that Australians expect.

I am also worried that the delay after delay potentially means that the decline in funding for public education and its consequences become irreversible. I read an article recently that suggested that whilst in Victoria the majority of parents still send their children to public schools at the primary level, it has now changed so that the majority of children at high school level are going to non-government schools. What I find from talking to people in Melbourne is that parents would love to send the kids to a government school at the secondary level. But they look around their neighbourhoods at the government schools and worry that they are underfunded at the high school level.

In areas like Flemington and Richmond we have enormous disparities. As well as some very wealthy people we also have more public housing than any other electorate in the country. So you have schools that are trying to educate people from backgrounds of extreme disadvantage as well as people who come from backgrounds of wealth. Of course, they get slugged when the Victorian conservative government hacks away at public education, as it has done recently. They look at these schools and say, ‘We want to be guaranteed that our child will get a good quality public education. We look and see that you are struggling for funds. Maybe we will look somewhere else.’ There are some very good principals and school communities in Melbourne who are trying to reverse that trend and who are trying to make sure that government secondary schools again become the school of choice for people to send their kids to. I have done everything I can to support them with that.

One of the things schools need are resources, and they need them now. If we do not give resources to these schools now, these patterns of decisions that parents are making are just going to continue and government schools are going to fall further and further behind. We need to give them the resources to support what the parents and the school communities are doing to turn that around. As a matter of basic principle, people should be able to send their children to private school if they want to. It is not a matter for government to stand in the way of that. But it should never become a forced choice. It should never be a choice that a parent makes because they feel that the quality of education their child is going to receive at a public school is under a cloud. You can do it if you want to, but do not do it because you feel that government schools are falling behind.

Unfortunately what the Gonski report tells us is that we are at risk of that happening: we are below the international average and we need to act quickly. So, if the government were serious, we would be putting in place a proper mining tax now so that we could have the money from next year to get our public
schools up to the average of international developed countries. I hope that in the lead up to the election the government has the guts to do that. It would be an extraordinarily popular move amongst the Australian people.

If you ask people, 'Would you rather that we increase the taxes on the most wealthy companies in this country that send 83 per cent of their profits overseas so that your children can have a good quality public education or would you rather that our public schools fall further and further behind and the government raises taxes that the rest of us have to pay?' I bet I know what the majority of Australians would answer. That takes a bit of guts. It takes guts to stand up to the mining companies. The Greens have the guts to stand up to the mining companies and raise the revenue we need to fund the services that Australians expect. It is time the government got on with it. If it is going to roll out funding in dribs and drabs, we will move an amendment to say, 'Give it not to those wealthy private schools that need it the least but give it first to those schools in the public system where the greatest areas of disadvantage are.'

Ms O’DWYER (Higgins) (12:55): I rise today to speak on the Australian Education Bill 2012. In doing so I have the opportunity to speak on one of the most important areas that a government can influence: the education of our children. Quality education is the cornerstone of a democratic and progressive society. It is through education that each generation improves on the one that precedes it. That is why it is so critical that the government put in place an education system that realises the outcomes that we as a nation expect and demand. In order for this to occur the system must be robust, fair and flexible. It must provide choice for families. Every family is different and our education system should reflect that each family wants different things for its children. For some it is faith based schools, for some it is schools that excel in things such as sport, the arts, science, maths, biology or English, and for others it is schools that provide programs to extend students as part of their extracurricular activities—to name just a few.

As we look for the detail in this bill we find that there is no detail on how such things should be achieved. There is no detail around how our education system needs to be improved, how it will increase choice and how it will deliver quality outcomes. This bill exemplifies the government's approach to policy development and governing. It exemplifies its approach to overblown rhetoric, coupled with underdelivery or just plain botched delivery. It astounds me that the government continues to make the same mistake over and over again by espousing motherhood statements without providing the necessary detail which will result in quality outcomes. The government is taking the Australian people for fools.

This bill is only nine pages long, consists of around 1,400 words and—wait for it—is not even legally enforceable. There is no discussion in this bill about the fact that there is a funding formula. In fact, we need to state in this place that there has been no COAG discussion on funding. You might well ask: what is the point, then? All this bill does is outline a set of guidelines or objectives that, despite being noble in their intention, provide very little in the way of how to actually achieve the stated goals. It is easy enough to say that this bill and our education system should provide quality teaching, quality learning, empowered school leadership, and transparency and accountability, and should meet student need. Who would not want those attributes within the school system? But the integral question is: how? How does the government
propose to provide quality teaching? How is the government going to provide quality learning? How does one improve transparency and accountability? These are the questions that need to be answered and are not being answered in this bill.

We know that the funding quadrennium will run out at the end of this year. We have known since the commencement of the last funding quadrennium that it would end in 2013, but the government chose to delay its decision regarding new funding, as it seems to do with all of its decisions. Instead, it established a review panel, chaired by businessman David Gonski, who handed his final report to the government in December 2011. Since then, we have heard precisely nothing from the government. There has been no formal response to the 41 recommendations made by Mr Gonski, nor has the government released any public modelling regarding the central recommendation in the Gonski report to do with an additional $6.5 billion of recurrent spending. The government has comprehensively failed to provide any detail whatsoever.

I know from visiting the schools in my electorate that what they want is certainty. They want certainty around how they will be funded and by how much. They want a guarantee that they will not go backwards and that they will not be part of a hit list, which we saw with certain schools when the Prime Minister proposed this under former leader Mark Latham. I know that from speaking with the parents of the 39 schools in my electorate that they want funding security for their students, their teachers and their schools so that they can concentrate on delivering the best educational opportunities for their students and for all young Australians.

As I mentioned, there is no detail as to how funding will be made up and where the funding will be coming from. This leads to more confusion and uncertainty in the schools and their administration. The government knows this but is happy to simply remain silent in the intervening period.

We just heard before from the member for Melbourne, who talked about wanting a fairer funding model. He does not yet propose how this will be achieved, but we certainly know from looking at the Greens' previous policy proposals that their idea of a fair funding model is to take away all government funding from independent schools. This would ultimately lead to many parents who would like to send their child to an independent school not having the choice and opportunity to do so. Despite the impression that the government and the Greens present, government schools receive the vast majority of government funding—as they should. There are 1.2 million children, or 34 per cent of all Australian students, attending independent schools. When funding from federal, state and territory governments is taken into account, current government funding favours government schools. In 2007-08—and little has changed since then—government schools received 79 per cent of total government funds for schools, of which the federal government provided only 79 per cent. Independent schools received 21 per cent of total government funding for schools, of which the federal government provided only 8.6 per cent. Independent schools received 21 per cent of total government recurrent expenditure per government school student is $14,380, as compared to $7,427 for non-government school students.

The lack of information provided by the government so far has led to great confusion and great uncertainty. Schools cannot budget
and, therefore, cannot determine their future plans. By contrast, the coalition has been very clear. We believe that the current quantum of funds for every school, and its indexation, must be the basic starting point for any new funding model. No school should lose funding as a result of the new funding model. We have moved amendments to this bill to this effect. In our amendments we also call on the government to extend the current funding arrangements for a further two years. We believe that parents and schools need funding certainty so that they can adequately plan for next year and they can guarantee teaching positions and programs.

State governments have also said on the record that they have been left in the dark and do not know what the government's funding proposal is going to be about. They therefore cannot respond to it and cannot respond more broadly to the aspirations outlined in the Gonski report.

We know that the government likes to talk big on education. I do believe their sincerity on this issue, as I wholeheartedly believe that every person in this House wishes for the best educational outcomes for the children of Australia. And I truly believe that the Prime Minister, when she says education is her ultimate passion, believes it. But what we have seen in this country since Labor took over government is a decline in Australia's educational outcomes.

Australia currently sits in ninth place in the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment rankings but is only one of five countries, and the only high-performing nation, to record a drop in student scores over the past decade. Under this government's watch we have slipped in performance. The Grattan Institute recently published a report entitled Catching up: learning from the best school systems in East Asia. It analysed the performance of the top four PISA ranked East Asian locations: Shanghai, Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong. In the report, Dr Ben Jensen identifies that success in high-performing systems is not always the result of spending money and that in recent years many OECD countries have substantially increased educational expenditure, often with disappointing results. Between 2000 and 2008, average expenditure per student rose by 34 per cent across the OECD. Large increases in expenditure have also occurred in Australia, yet student performance has fallen. Dr Jensen then went on to identify the particular focus of the countries he studied and found that each of the four countries has a particular focus on the things that are known to matter in the classroom, including the relentless practical focus on learning and the creation of a strong culture of teacher education, research, collaboration, mentoring feedback and sustained professional development.

We know when we look at the example of South Korea that they spend less, on average, than the rest of the OECD, yet their educational outcomes are so much more significant. This support for teacher training and development, which has been their focus, is indeed critical. But it is not a focus that the government has put at the forefront of this bill. Given the lack of detail, hopefully it is something that we will hear some more of. It is certainly something that is required. The coalition, on the other hand, has strong, very positive plans for education. We have been very clear in our guidelines for education reform, and we have clearly expressed our values for schooling.

First, families must have the right to choose a school that meets their needs, values and beliefs. Second, all children must have the opportunity to secure a quality education. Third, student funding needs to be
based on fair, objective and transparent criteria distributed according to socioeconomic need. Fourth, students with similar needs must be treated comparably throughout the course of their schooling. Fifth, as many decisions as possible should be made locally by parents, communities, principals, teachers, schools and school systems. Sixth, school sectors and school systems must be accountable to their community, families and students. Seventh, every Australian student must be entitled to a basic grant from the Commonwealth government. Eighth, schools and parents must have a high degree of certainty about school funding so that they can effectively plan for the future. Ninth, parents who wish to make a private contribution towards the cost of their child’s education should not be penalised and neither should schools, in their efforts to fundraise and encourage private investment. Tenth, funding arrangements must be simple so that schools are able to direct funding towards education outcomes, minimise administrative costs and increase productivity and quality.

In conclusion, it is clear that the coalition has a plan for education whilst the government has a nine-page bill that is not legally enforceable. The bill contains no detail of how much money will be available or which government will be required to stump up the additional funding. There are no details as to how the new funding model will operate, how much individual schools will receive, how this funding will be calculated or what other obligations will be placed upon the sector. The coalition does not oppose the bill in its current form. How could we? It comprises broad based, aspirational statements. We will wait for the detail before we finalise our position, once the government has actually spoken with their counterparts in the states following COAG discussion later this year. As further detail on the bill is made available we will consider the information. We stand united in rejecting the Greens’ previous policy announcements to strip government funding for independent schools. We also stand united in supporting excellence in quality teaching, quality learning, empowerment, school leadership, transparency and accountability, and needs based funding. So, we will wait with interest for the detail of the national school improvement plan as to how the government intends to drive reform in these areas. But until the government backs its rhetoric with substance, we and all Australians will continue to wait—at our cost.

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (13:09): I am pleased to be talking on the Australian Education Bill 2012. Education is very important to me. For those who do not already know, I left school at a very early age to begin work, and when I left school I had not mastered my reading and writing skills. In fact, I did not learn to read or write properly until I was 20 years old. Since then I have made education a top priority in my life, and especially so in my electorate of Lyons in Tasmania.

Every Australian child has the right to a world-class education, no matter where they live, what school they attend or their family background. This is why I am pleased the government has the National Plan for School Improvement. It is the first of its kind in over 40 years—which is a bit too long, I believe, for our country. This new plan will help every student get a great education and hopefully secure a great job once they leave school, which will help to keep our economy going strong and our standard of living and quality of life at a level that Australians have come to expect.

The review of our school systems has told us that Australia is falling behind in school
standards, and many speakers in this chamber have referred to that review. Over the past decade Australian students have fallen from second to seventh in reading, and from fifth to 13th in maths, in the international PISA exams. In December we had further proof of the urgent need to reform, with more international tests in maths, science and reading literacy revealing that Australia is lagging behind. For example, Australia’s year 4 students were significantly outperformed in reading literacy by 21 other countries, out of a total of 45 countries taking part. Other countries around the world are already investing in education to improve their results, and it is working: four of the top five performing countries are now in our region. Better schools will give our children the best start so that they can get high-skilled, high-paid jobs in the future. Our goal is for Australian schools to be in the top five in the world in reading, maths and science by 2025. Labor wants to make sure we have a school system that ensures all Australian children have a real chance to reach their full potential. This is not just about disadvantaged children and not just about gifted children; it is about all students.

The National Plan for School Improvement will deliver more money and resources to every school in the country. We want to introduce a new school-funding system based on the recommendations of the Gonski review. This will introduce a benchmark amount per student, plus extra money for the schools and students who need it most. We want to deliver a new way of funding every school that will guarantee all our schools are getting the money they need to do their job. We want to deliver higher standards for teachers, where they are required to have at least a term’s classroom experience before graduation and to undergo an annual performance review. Every report you see on education tells you that supporting teachers is one of the best things that you can do, and that the way to keep education standards high is to continue to support teachers and to give them professional training so they can keep up to date with new ways and stay fresh in the way they teach.

Teachers will get extra training in managing disruptive behaviour and dealing with bullying, so every child in the classroom gets a chance to learn in a safe environment. One has to feel for teachers who have to deal with disruptive behaviour, bullying on the bus, bullying in the classroom and bullying in school grounds. Dealing with that in schools is not an easy proposition. Every day right around Australia people are managing those behaviours. More training and more assistance in managing those behaviours will be of great assistance. There will be more power for principals, like hiring staff and controlling the budget, better My School information to make sure no school falls behind and more information for parents so they can see how their kids are doing.

Every school will have a school improvement plan which will outline the steps that school will take to improve student results. Schools that need extra help to improve their results will get it, and successful schools will share their ideas and strategies with others. School improvement plans will be part of a national drive to ensure we win the education race in the Asian century. Every student will have access to learning an Asian language from their first day of school.

The Gillard government is prepared to invest substantially more money to help deliver this plan for better schools and we expect other governments to contribute a fair share too. We have said that we believe the
extra money recommended by the Gonski review—around $6.5 billion a year in today's figures—is in the ballpark of where we want to get to over time. We are prepared to put in our fair share but states also need to contribute.

Already in my electorate of Lyons I have seen huge investments in education and in the future for kids. Lyons has around 11,000 full-time or equivalent students in 54 schools. Most of these schools are in rural and regional areas. The extra money in 'loadings', which will be available through Better Schools: National Plan for School Improvement, will help to support students in rural and regional schools, in small schools, students from lower income families, Indigenous students, students with disability and students with limited English skills.

A total of $82,688,710 in funding was approved for 134 BER projects. This included the building or upgrade of 26 classrooms, 10 libraries, 31 multipurpose halls and five science and/or language centres. I have had only positive feedback from schools, from parents and from parent groups about the new facilities they have been able to get through the BER. A number of students have also thanked me for helping to make their school more of a fun place to learn. I remember being at Bridgewater High School at the opening of a BER centre and dealing with the arts students, with so many of them wanting to participate.

Under the Digital Education Revolution's National Secondary Schools Computer Fund, 1,334 computers were installed in schools across Lyons. Funding of $12,094,500 was approved for six trade training centre projects. These centres are now benefiting 12 schools in Tasmania—and 10 of those are in Lyons. The trade training centres are helping to educate the next generation of chefs, carpenters, plumbers, mechanics and many other trades. Students are thankful for the opportunity to have a hands-on experience while learning.

I remember opening the trade training centre at St Helens, where a young boy, while putting on his overalls, was telling me how great a welder there was in that centre where he looked forward to participating and learning that skill. Across Lyons there are 29 schools participating in the Smarter Schools National Partnerships and 32 schools are eligible to receive funding for chaplaincy and student welfare services. Many principals tell me that chaplains have helped them to deal with issues throughout the school community which are more difficult for public servants to deal with.

Last September I had the pleasure of visiting my old school, Cressy District High School, with the Minister for School Education, Peter Garrett. On that visit the minister and I were impressed with how many Cressy students were excelling in their studies. We were even treated to a special music performance by a group of primary kids when they sang Blue suede shoes. On that visit the students thanked me and the minister for investing money in their school. They told us how their new multipurpose hall, funded by the BER, was making their schooling so much easier for performances and displays.

As you can see, my electorate is already reaping the rewards of positive investment in school education—and this is set to increase in the future. I believe every student in Australia has the right to a first-class education in Australia.

I want to take up the argument coming from the conservative side of this parliament about choice. It is very easy to argue that people can make choices about education. Right around our country some people can
make choices much easier than others. If the choice is between a well-funded private school and a run-down state school, that is not a real choice. I believe the Howard government drove state schools that way during its era. I certainly would not like us to go back to that sort of system in the future. There are areas in my electorate which certainly need much more support than others—and some very much so. I am always moved by the standard of people in education in Tasmania. They are people who work to achieve and do achieve real outcomes for so many students.

I see that conservative parties that have gained power in some of the states are cutting into education. In the states of New South Wales and Queensland, both are cutting education funding. In Victoria, TAFE funding is being whacked in a very, very big way. That is a real shame when you think about it, when you see the figures and you see where we should be in this country and where we need to be when we are looking at the future. We really need to be thinking about that, and not going back to old, conservative thinking or old conservative funding models.

I remember the flagpoles given to my schools in Tasmania under the Howard government. I have also seen, and am very proud of, the buildings that we have now built. I have talked to the parents and the school communities, and they know how those have improved education. Some of us voted for that money to go to education and, of course, some of us did not. Now, with this bill, we are starting new reforms that will add to improving education even more into the future. It is important that we get that right and we put an effort into that. I certainly hope that it is not frustrated by conservative thinking which takes us back into old thinking and old funding models. I strongly support the Australian Education Bill.

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (13:24): It is a terrific opportunity to speak on this bill—the Australian Education Bill 2012. There is so much detail about Labor's plans for education for the future that the member for Lyons could not get through 15 minutes actually talking about the bill; he had to go back through alleged history. We might deal with some of that. He suggested that state Liberal governments are cutting education. Let's go through what the cuts in the federal education budget are in the next four years: in the MYEFO figures—Deputy Speaker, you will be well aware of these due to your role now as the opposition costing spokesman—in 2012-13, $918 million was cut; 2013-14, $587 million was cut; 2014-15, $1.05 billion was cut; and 2015-2016, $1.3 billion was cut. So let's not have anything about funding cuts from this side of politics.

Mr Adams interjecting—

Mr BRIGGS: You can get as angry as you like, Member for Lyons. Those are the stats. That is your MYEFO document. I know it will change—Swanny will change it soon, I agree with you! It will be worse. Let's not have any hypocrisy from the Labor Party about state Liberal governments cutting funding. The other point the member for Lyons made was that the Howard government apparently attacked state schools. I have just a bit of constitutional advice for the member for Lyons: Guess who was in power in states largely during the Howard years—Labor governments.

Let's actually get the facts on the table here about what this is all about. This bill has no detail and it has no substance; it is purely a bill to try and raise a political issue in the lead-up to 2013 election. We are seeing it on
a daily basis. We are seeing it in the attempts to reduce the freedom of the speech in the Australian media by the minister at the table's friend and colleague Senator Conroy. We have seen it with the NDIS legislation which is before this place, which is without detail, and with the refusal of the offer of a bipartisan committee inquiry on what is such an important issue. We are seeing it with this bill here, which is all about political puffery, with no details attached and no costings attached. And something you are close to, Mr Deputy Speaker—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Leigh): The member for Mayo is reminded that he can say whatever he wishes about the member for Fraser, but he should not reflect on the chair. It is a distinction he will well understand, being well acquainted with the standing orders.

Mr BRIGGS: I do not think that I was reflecting on the chair, but if you took it in that sense I will withdraw, and I will reflect upon the member for Fraser at great length: the member for Fraser—who has been appointed the first spokesperson in government on coalition costings in the history of the Australian Commonwealth—would know very well that there is not a cent of costings attached to this document. Hearing on a daily basis these allegations about the opposition's costings makes this document a laughing-stock.

It is a sad indictment of a political party that is going through a death by 1,000 cuts that it is trying to make politics out of education for our children's future. I have three children: one in school, one about to start school in July and one who will start school in 2016. Many of us on this side are in the same position. We fundamentally believe in the education of our children. We fundamentally believe it is absolutely important to empower children for their future, to have an education system which meets their needs and to have quality teaching. Quality teaching is a point that gets raised in the bill, but there is no substantial detail addressing it. It is an issue the Labor Party does not like to talk about, because that would require the Labor Party to address the challenges within the state education systems. I think there an absolute, fundamental challenge in Australia education is the quality of teaching and the absolute control that the Australian Education Union has over addressing what are challenges in our education system.

I will reflect for a moment upon my home state of South Australia. The member for Lyons attacked the Howard government for attacking state schools—schools run by the state system, schools which state governments are responsible for. What has happened over many years is that, increasingly, the federal government has become too far involved in education policy. I think that is a mistake. It is a matter which should be largely left to the states. They are responsible for state schools. It is a constitutional requirement. At the federal level, we have, for some time—since the Menzies government—ensured that there is choice in education. That is a fundamental principle that we support. Those on the other side of the chamber do not.

Those on the other side are utterly beholden to the education union. In South Australia, principal after principal tell me privately that it is impossible for them to move underperforming teachers on. Or, worse still, they are given underperforming teachers from another school who have been moved on rather than been dealt with appropriately. So we cannot improve the quality where someone is not performing. What happens is that they are redirected to another school and the problem persists. Principals cannot directly address these
issues with teachers; they have to do it through the bureaucracy in Flinders Street in the city. The bureaucracy deals—would you believe it?—with the union and the union basically asks the principals, ‘Do you really want to bother going through this exercise?’

The teachers, at the first interview to review their performance, can refuse to attend and can, instead, have the union attend on their behalf. It is utterly absurd that parents have no control, at the state school, of the quality of their teaching. The principal of a state school has no control of the quality of the teaching or their workforce, at all. It is a fundamental problem that our education system has, and that is not being addressed—not even dealt with in part—by this bill: this piece of political fluffery which has no detail or substance attached to it.

Compare and contrast that with the experience in Western Australia—which, by the way, it seems the Western Australian voter does not think is too bad! The Western Australian voter re-elected the Liberal government on Saturday, if you had not noticed, Mr Deputy Speaker, in an absolute landslide. And one of the key policies of the Western Australian Liberal government has been to introduce independent state schools, where principals and the parents of the schools have some control over the school and are able to engage with the workforce, improve underperformance and encourage teacher quality. Compare that to the South Australian experience—my own home state—where we are still governed by an incompetent and out of touch Labor government. There you see the complete opposite. In Western Australia there has been a move, for the first time since 1977—a terrific year, that!—from parents choosing to send their children to private schools to parents choosing to have their children attend public schools. The opposite is happening in South Australia.

In Queensland Campbell Newman’s government has taken the same approach in developing these independent public schools. I think it is a fundamental that needs to be pursued. State governments are responsible for state public schools. The federal government is not responsible for state government schools. The states have got to be empowered. They have got to take on, I think, a major problem in our education system, which is the absolute control that the education union has over state bureaucracies, and over state Labor governments in particular. Hopefully, Liberal governments across the country will pursue what the Western Australian experience has shown to be extremely effective. Stakeholders in the education sector have heavily criticised this bill because it is, as I said, a piece of political fluffery designed to try and create a debate on what the Prime Minister would prefer to debate prior to an election—that is, general concepts in education.

The member for Lyons was going on about his belief that every child has a right to high-quality education. As if anyone in this House would not believe that! As if anyone in this House would not believe that children have a right to quality education! We live it day in and day out. Many of us on this side of the chamber live it day in and day out—wanting our children to have access to the best possible education. The member for Lyons also reflected upon aspiration. He asked, ‘Why should some have the ability to choose over others?’ That, of course, is the Labor philosophy. They do not like people achieving better. Mark Latham put it so well in the Quarterly Essay. I urge you to read it. In a moment of clarity—I have been a Latham watcher for 10 years now—he put the problems of the Labor Party into stark and direct light, which is that they do not believe in aspiration. They do not believe in people wanting to do better, anymore. They
do not believe in rewarding people with opportunity and understanding that desire that so many Australians have to want better, not just for them but for their children and for their future.

Choice in education is a fundamental of that aspiration, but the Labor Party does not accept that; they want a one-size-fits-all approach, where the teachers union is part of the discussion every step of the way, where they can nobble any reform and any change, to the point where they will stop people from our side of politics entering state schools, because they hate to have their power questioned or their authority challenged.

We have a set of aspirations and a set of principles that will guide our values and our policies when it comes to education. We believe in the power of education. We all do in this chamber—absolutely. Education is the way to a better future. It is the way for our country to perform better. It is absolutely fundamental for us to achieve our desire to be more prosperous and to have a stronger Australia in the future. Part of our 'real solutions' plan is education as a fundamental.

The first principle that we will pursue is that every family has a choice in education. Choice is absolutely important to us when it comes to education. We believe that people should have their needs, values and beliefs recognised when they choose the school they want to send their children to—whether that be a state-run public school, an independent private school, a school in the Catholic system, a school in the independent system or a school run by another denomination. We believe in that choice. Those on the opposite side do not believe in that choice. They do not believe in aspiration any longer.

Another fundamental principle of ours is that all children must have an opportunity to secure a quality education. Quality education means a well funded education, but that is not the only debate in town when it comes to education. The debate is about quality, values and opportunity; it is not all about funding.

Student funding needs to be based on fair, objective and transparent criteria and distributed according to socioeconomic need, a model developed by the Howard government that has worked successfully for some time. We have already, through the shadow education minister, committed to continuing that.

Students with similar needs must be treated comparably throughout the course of their schooling.

As many decisions as possible should be made locally by parents, communities, principals, teachers, schools and school systems, empowering local communities to look after their own schools and needs and to reward their desires for their own schools. All of us who are parents with children at school get out there and work on working bees and do what we have to do around school to ensure that our kids have got access to the best education they can possibly get. The empowering of communities—giving communities a chance to run schools, manage their workforce and get principals into the room to discuss the performance of teachers—is a vital and fundamental principle that we believe in.

Schools, school sectors and school systems must be accountable to their communities, families and students.

Every Australian student must be entitled to a basic grant from the Commonwealth government.

Schools and parents must have a high degree of certainty about school funding so they can effectively plan for the future. That is why we have committed to the funding model that we have.
Parents who wish to make a private contribution to the cost of their child's education should not be penalised, nor should schools in their efforts to fundraise and encourage private investment.

Finally, funding arrangements must be simple so that schools are able to direct funding towards education outcomes, minimise administration costs and increase productivity and quality.

We need to do better in education, undoubtedly, but this bill is not going to make a single bit of difference to the quality of education in this country, because it does not tell us what it is actually going to do. It is simply a bit of political posturing. It is nine pages—or 11 if you throw in the table of contents—just a handful of pages really, which are full of motherhood statements that are not going to end up delivering anything for the children and the next generations of this country.

The reason why this is the case is that the government see a problem in the future. They see a day of reckoning when the Australian people will next have the opportunity to pass judgement upon those that sit in this chamber and upon the government. To try to counter a judgement that they think is going to be harsh and negative towards them, we are starting to see these sorts of things—the motherhood statements that are part of this bill. We are going to see a little bit more fighting it out with the states, and a return to the days of the blame game. The Rudd government—or the first Rudd government; there might be another one yet in the next couple of months; who knows?—talked about ending the blame game and being the adults in the room and stuff like that. But now we are going back to the Prime Minister and the government looking for more opportunities to try to blame the states, particularly now that the people in so many states have rejected Labor. It gives the government the opportunity to try and shift a little blame, throw a little smoke, throw a little mud out there, to try to demonstrate that it is not them on that side of this chamber but someone else who is to blame, someone else who is letting them down. That might be the case in South Australia, but we saw in the election
last weekend in Western Australia that the Liberal and National parties were returned strongly there, with a great vote of confidence from the electors. I will go into the reasons why that state government was returned and the good things that it is doing in education.

If you wander around the hallways of this place, you will see on the office windows of most members from the other side a nice big green sign with the words 'I give a Gonski' on it. Being the fairly worldly person that I am, having spent 15 years in the Army, I have heard that phrase used before with the word 'Gonski' replaced by another word. I have never found that a particularly edifying word, and I have never found that expression to be a particularly great way to carry an argument. If you look for the source of it—and someone has to admit responsibility for such coarseness and such pointlessness—where does it come from? The Australian Education Union. There is a little bit of posturing with some of the ads on TV and these sorts of posters. They like to imply that they actually care about the children of this country. But, as we have found in various places around the country, they are fundamentally concerned with themselves, in the way that so many unions are—'Let's make sure that there's a career stream at the top of the Education Union'—and the fact that they can muddy the waters a little bit—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): Order! It being 1:45 pm, the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 43. The member for Cowan will have leave to continue his remarks at a later hour.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Breast Cancer

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (13:45): This morning I attended the launch of the Parliamentary Friends of Secondary Breast Cancer with the member for Robertson, Deb O'Neill, and a number of other members from both sides of the House and senators. And it is only right that such an issue should receive bipartisan support as cancer is not a disease that discriminates on the basis of political lines and it affects us all.

When I was approached to participate as deputy chair, I did not hesitate on this particular worthwhile cause. Everyone knows someone who has been affected by breast cancer. In my own case, a member of my family was struck down at a very early age. At this morning's launch, we also had the wonderful privilege of listening to a presentation from Dr Paul Craft, a senior specialist in the Medical Oncology Unit at the Canberra Hospital, with some of the most telling messages being the need for constant diligence and continuing to invest in medical research. I congratulate Novartis for the great work that they are doing in this area.

We in the coalition are committed to providing certainty and making sure that the existing funding levels of $740 million continue for medical research. The statistics are absolutely frightening: on average, 37 women are diagnosed with breast cancer each day, or more than 13,500 women per year. Breast cancer remains one of the most common causes of cancer related death for Australian women. I look forward to working to raise awareness on this committee.

Richmond Electorate: International Women's Day

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond) (13:46): I am very pleased today to outline some of the wonderful events in my electorate during International Women's Day, which, of course, was last week. The first great event I was able to attend was organised by a group called Byron United. It was called 'Conversations on the Couch'. Besides myself, there were some local women—
Hannabeth Luke, Helena Norberg-Hodge—and we discussed a whole range of issues pertaining to women and our community. It was a great fundraiser and the money raised went to the Byron Shire Committee against Domestic Violence. I thank Byron United for this very good community event.

I was also really pleased to attend the Wonders of Women Outstanding Achievement Awards organised by the Tweed Shire Women's Service. It was a great night in which a variety of local women were honoured for their remarkable contributions throughout our community. There were some great awards, but I would like to highlight the Woman of the Year—congratulations to Susie Dunn—and the Young Woman of the Year, Penelope Meeves. Congratulations to all the recipients who do such great work.

Towards the end of the week, I was pleased to attend the Coolangatta-Tweed View Club, which held their International Women's Day event, as they do every year. It is fantastic. They have hundreds of local women attending—a real testament to the View Club and the great work that they continue to do within our community. All in all, these were three very different events which reflect the great diversity of women throughout the electorate of Richmond. It was a great day to celebrate the achievements of women, but many of those events raise vital funds for very good services. The Tweed Shire Women's Service, in particular, does a remarkable job.

**Research Funding**

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins) (13:48): In June last year I spoke in this place about a constituent of mine, Dr Julia Sarant, a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Melbourne. Dr Sarant is the chief investigator of grants from the Australian Research Council worth over $1 million. Her primary grant covers the research project and her staff, but not her own salary. Dr Sarant therefore required a federally funded fellowship salary grant. But whilst both the Australian Research Council and the National Health and Medical Research Council provide salary grants, these grants could not be applied for by those working in a part-time capacity. You could apply full time, then go part time, but not apply part time.

Two years on from my first representations to the then Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research and the then Minister for Health and Ageing, and since forming the Parliamentary Friendship Group of Women in Maths, Science and Engineering early last year, the ARC and the NHMRC have changed their funding rules making part-time researchers eligible to apply for fellowship funding. I am pleased to report to the House that Dr Sarant has recently signed agreements with both organisations.

We should be encouraging more women to consider careers in science, maths and engineering, but barriers such as those limiting applications for part-time grants where there is already the capacity to work part time do not assist. Women like Dr Sarant should be able to have a fulfilling career and family life at the same time, and I am glad that the government, the ARC and the NHMRC have seen the error of their ways and capitalised on this great talent.

Mr LYONS (Bass) (13:49): I rise today to warmly congratulate an outstanding athlete from my electorate of Bass, Richie Porte. Over the weekend, Richie, who lives at Hadspen, won the Paris-Nice cycle race tour, by 21 seconds. The week-long, 1,174-kilometre tour was ridden in a range of conditions from heavy rain and snow, despite being commonly known as 'the race in the
The win was the first win for an Australian in that event.

Porte's goal is to ride in the Tour de France and ride with Sky team mates Brad Wiggins and Chris Froome. Congratulations and praise come from around the world, with other cycling superstars tweeting their well wishes, Richie's parents Ian and Penny are great friends of mine and I remember years ago after a surf carnival going back to their shack at Scamander and they told me Richie was riding from Hadspon to Scamander to visit them. He was a very young man then and he certainly had a goal in mind.

This is such an outstanding achievement for this young Tasmanian. He is an inspiration to others and an example—like Ricky Ponting and Daniel Geale, other Tasmanians from Bass—that when you put your mind to something, you can achieve anything. Congratulations to Richie Porte.

**Coeliac Awareness Week**

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (13:51): Today is the start of Coeliac Awareness Week. This annual event has been celebrated here in Canberra with an opportunity for the occupants of this place to get a blood screening test. I want to congratulate Coeliac Australia, a not-for-profit organisation that is working very hard to increase the rates of testing and diagnosis of coeliac disease. Coeliac disease is one of Australia's most commonly underdiagnosed diseases. It is expected to be present in more than one in every 100 people in Australia. We are talking about a quarter of a million Australians who have this condition, yet only one out of five tend to know they suffer from coeliac disease. This is very concerning given the significant consequences for long-term health and wellness for those who have coeliac disease. Coeliac disease is a permanent intolerance to gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye, barley, and oats. The condition is an ongoing concern for those who suffer from it, creating all sorts of digestive systems concerns and causing damage which can take many years to repair.

What is most disturbing is that four out of five people who have coeliac disease do not know they have it. Symptoms can vary quite widely, including fatigue, lack of energy, abdominal pain, bloating, weight loss and anaemia, as well as less obvious conditions such as irritability and depression. This year's campaign is called 'Are you sick and tired of being sick and tired?' Visit the website at www.sickandtired.com.au. If you do have coeliac disease, get the gluten out of your diet and the tiger back in your tank.

**Natural Disasters**

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (13:53): I rise to talk about the extraordinary natural disaster events on the mid-North Coast of New South Wales over the last eight weeks. In the middle of some extraordinary rain we had several days of high winds. That brought down a lot of trees and led to high seas, in turn causing a level of beach erosion not seen before. Many businesses, such as the entire oyster industry of the mid-North Coast, are pretty well decimated. Other industries, such as the macadamia industry, have been highly damaged and the road network is under threat, with lots of road closures. Locations such as Crescent Head, North Shore and Caparra have been isolated as a consequence. These disasters have once again highlighted that, with our governments, state and federal, natural disaster planning is an oxymoron. We are still trying to work through the various categories—A, B, C and D. There are problems of uncoordinated mitigation and very patchy definitional issues around insurance.

I put on record my thanks to the entire community, which has shown resilience.
through this very wet and difficult period. To all the volunteers and emergency workers: thank you very much for your work. I also take the opportunity to put on record the loss to the communities of Bonny Hills, Lake Cathie and Camden Haven of the life of a young man swept down a drain at Camden Haven Golf Club in the middle of all this. Luke O'Neill, your community does miss you.

Regional Development Australia Fund

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson) (13:52): It was bad enough when Mackay Gymnastics were competing against the Geelong Cats for funding. Now they are competing with Sydney's newest AFL club and the Penrith Panthers, Canterbury Bulldogs, and Parramatta Eels NRL teams—because the Gillard Labor government is expanding the definition of 'regional' to include Western Sydney.

I was critical of what was deemed as 'regional' when the application by Mackay Gymnastics under the Regional Development Australia Fund in 2011 was rejected while the Geelong Cats scored $10 million. The Gillard Labor government has now encouraged clubs and organisations in Greater Western Sydney—suburbs of the biggest capital city in Australia, with a population of over two million—to make applications to the Regional Development Australia Fund.

What is the point of regional funding if Labor is just going to siphon it back into the capital cities? This funding is specifically designed to address the inequities between places like Mackay and Sydney. Mackay is a growing city with a lot of young people, young people who miss out on a lot of the infrastructure and opportunity that capital cities have because of their higher populations. The Gillard Labor government is quite happy to take all the wealth being generated from regions like Mackay—generated by the mining industry—but they will not tolerate any funding being returned. This cash grab for Greater Western Sydney is nothing more than a blatant political move to try and save the Prime Minister's job in an area that has stopped listening to her lies and broken promises. Please—regions are regions and capitals are capitals. Do one thing right and understand the difference.

Owusu, Mr Francis

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (13:56): I rise today to pay tribute to another Canberra legend—Francis Owusu. Francis is the founder and CEO of Kulture Break and was a national finalist in Australia's Local Hero awards. Francis, from a Gambian background, moved to Canberra in his teens after living in Victoria. In Canberra, his life turned around with his discovery of dance and how it empowers kids and gives them an identity. Francis began organising after-school dance classes which have transformed and changed the lives of hundreds of young people.

When I met with Francis, he was full of passion and zest for Kulture Break, which is now operating in 30 schools and reaching almost 500 kids. It started in the Tuggeranong Valley. Francis Owusu connects through dance. He empowers young people and gives them a sense of self, social inclusion and wellbeing. As Francis told me, Kulture Break makes kids cool. It shows they have something to offer. It builds confidence and self-esteem.

Thank you, Francis and Kulture Break, for all you are doing to empower and transform the lives of so many young Canberrans. Thank you for giving so many young Canberrans a sense of purpose and direction and a love of dance.
Knox Relay for Life

Mr TUDGE (Aston) (13:57): The Knox Relay for Life, a fantastic community event in which members across my electorate come together to raise funds for the Victorian Cancer Council, is due to take place in a week or so. I know that this event also occurs in other electorates and that other members are also getting involved. I am proud to be the patron of this year's Knox Relay for Life. As you would be aware, cancer affects many Australians, either directly or indirectly through their friends, family members and other loved ones.

The Knox Relay for Life is taking place at the Knox Athletics Track in Knoxfield over the weekend of 23 and 24 March. We are now up to almost 30 teams, who will compete over an 18-hour period to raise funds for the Cancer Council. The top fundraising teams so far include Sherritt's and Friends, Such is Life, Gil's Gang, Simon Withington, The Chain, Callaway's and Friends, MieleOne, Snooze and Wiggle Attack. As the patron, I am happy that we have put in our own team, which is also doing pretty well in the fundraising stakes so far.

I take this opportunity to commend the event's coordinator, Elyce Carlyle, for her hard work and commitment to the cause, as well as all of the other community volunteers who are helping put this fantastic event together. I hope it raises a good amount of money for the Cancer Council.

Shipping

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (13:58): Australia is a nation of over 22 million people and has the 12th largest economy in the world, yet we have the fourth largest shipping burden. That is why Australia needs more boats and more crews to work them. Last Saturday, I attended Iron Boat Day at Port Kembla to mark the 100th anniversary of BHP's steel-shipping fleet.

It was also an occasion to celebrate the Australian Labor government's package of reforms to revitalise our shipping industry, which is extremely important for an area like the Illawarra, where the port is one of our key economic assets. Iron Boat Day is an annual event celebrating the iron boat industry. It is organised by the Maritime Union of Australia. It is also a day for old shipmates, wharfies and port workers in the area to catch up and reminisce about Port Kembla's long and proud history. The port directly and indirectly employs over 3,500 people and contributes around $418 million to the Illawarra economy each year. It underwent a major expansion recently—diversifying its trade base, constructing three new berths and developing 53 hectares of land. As shipping traffic increases, the government's shipping reforms will become more critical in sustaining the growth in this region.

The SPEAKER: Order! It being 2 pm, the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 43.

CONDOLENCES

Morrison, Hon. William Lawrence (Bill), AO

Report from Federation Chamber

Order of the day returned from Federation Chamber for further consideration; certified copy of the motion presented.

Debate resumed on the motion:

That the House expresses its deep regret at the death on 15 February 2013, of the Honourable William Lawrence (Bill) Morrison AO, a former Minister and Member of this House for the Division of St George from 1969 to 1975 and 1980 to 1984, places on record its appreciation of his public service, and tenders its profound sympathy to his family in their bereavement.
Wednesday, 13 March 2013

The SPEAKER (14:00): The question is that the motion be agreed to. As a mark of respect I ask all honourable members to signify their approval by rising in their places.

Question agreed to, honourable members standing in their places.

Child, Hon. Joan, AO

Report from Federation Chamber

Order of the day returned from Federation Chamber for further consideration; certified copy of the motion presented.

Debate resumed on the motion:

That the House records its deep regret at the death on 23 February, of the Honourable Joan Child AO, former Speaker of the House of Representatives and Member for Henty and places on record its appreciation of her long and meritorious public service and tenders its profound sympathy to her family in their bereavement.

The SPEAKER (14:01): The question is that the motion be agreed to. As a mark of respect I ask all honourable members to signify their approval by rising in their places.

Question agreed to, honourable members standing in their places.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:01): I inform the House that the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation will be absent from question time today for personal reasons. The Treasurer will answer questions in relation to financial services and superannuation, and the Minister for Employment Participation will answer questions in relation to employment and workplace relations.

CONDOLENCES

Archer, Mr Brian Roper

The SPEAKER (14:02): I inform the House of the death on Sunday, 10 March 2013 of Brian Roper Archer, a former senator who represented the state of Tasmania from 1975 to 1994. As a mark of respect to the memory of Brian Archer, I invite honourable members to rise in their places.

Honourable members having stood in their places—

The SPEAKER: I thank the House.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Asylum Seekers

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): My question is to the Prime Minister. Can the Prime Minister confirm that more people have arrived illegally by boat in the last nine months, on her watch, than during the entire 11 years of the Howard government?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:03): I remind the Leader of the Opposition that this government has brought to the parliament proposals to help us deal with the circumstances of asylum seekers and people who arrive by boat, and the Leader of the Opposition in his reckless negativity has not supported those proposals. The Leader of the Opposition cannot come into this place and mount this kind of criticism when he has refused to accept the advice of the former Chief of the Defence Force, Angus Houston, he has refused to accept the advice of refugee expert Paris Aristotle, he has refused—

Mr Pyne: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Prime Minister has to answer the very simple question: can she confirm that there have been more illegal boat arrivals in the last nine months than in the entire period of the Howard government?
Mr Albanese: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order that goes to disruptive conduct. This is the first question of question time today; the Prime Minister is exactly 41 seconds into her answer and the Manager of Opposition Business took up more than 41 seconds with his frivolous point of order.

The SPEAKER: The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD: I can confirm that we would have seen fewer boat arrivals but for the Leader of the Opposition's reckless negativity.

Immigration

Mr SYMON (Deakin) (14:05): My question is to the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship. How do the government's reforms to the 457 visa scheme work in hand with the government's agenda of skilling and training Australians to take on the jobs of the future?

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Immigration and Citizenship) (14:05): I thank the honourable member for Deakin for his question and his ongoing interest in looking after Australian workers. This government will always support Australian workers in jobs and training. Although the 457 visa is often used legitimately, there is clear evidence that in some industries and occupations the 457 visa scheme is not working as intended. Too many 457 sponsors are doing the wrong thing. Two examples will help illustrate that. First, in the IT industry, it is clear that some 457 sponsors are using the scheme to undercut wages and conditions, in effect denying young Australians the opportunity to compete for entry level graduate programming and computing jobs. Second, in hospitality, it is worrying that at a time when vacancies for cooks nationwide are falling, the occupation of cook is becoming the most popular application job. That is a disturbing trend.

The government's approach to this is very straightforward. To get jobs you need skills, and to get skills you need training. That is why the government will expect employers to take seriously the obligation to train. The government is concerned that some users of the 457 scheme, instead of training Australian workers to fill positions, just buy those skills from overseas. Of course, that reflects the approach of the opposition, with state governments taking money out of training and cutting TAFE. 'No problem,' they say. 'We'll just get the skills from overseas.' That is not acceptable. The approach of the opposition to 457s is just Work Choices by another name—and it smells the same too! 'Just let the market rip, and don't worry about how unfair it is on Australian workers.'

In future, employers' access to the 457 program will come with an obligation to make a serious commitment to training their own workers, to training Australian workers, and the government will rigorously enforce—

Mr Briggs interjecting—

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR: this obligation to train.

The SPEAKER: The member for Mayo!

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR: The contrast of this policy with the position of the opposition could not be any clearer. The Leader of the Opposition has said he wants the 457 scheme to be the mainstay of immigration. The member for Cook has said in a speech to AMMA:

At current levels of temporary labour migration under the 457 programme there is room for expansion.

Mr Briggs interjecting—
The SPEAKER: The member for Mayo is warned!

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR: What the opposition is looking to do here is to have an unfettered and expanded scheme to ensure that—

Mr Morrison: It's a government program, you moron!

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister will resume his seat. The member for Cook will withdraw.

Mr Morrison: I withdraw.

Mr Billson interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Dunkley! I apologise to the member for Cook for screaming over his withdrawal—my apologies. The member for Dunkley is warned!

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR: In the same speech, the member for Cook said to the AMMA conference:

… it is essential we consolidate the role of 457s and look to restore access that has been taken away for these visas … and remove some of the blockages to 457s …

That is an unfettered approach that will deny Australian workers the chance of getting a job.

Mr Christensen: Madam Speaker, the minister was quoting from a document. I wonder if that document has cases of 457 abuses, or what he might do about the situation—

The SPEAKER: The member for Dawson will resume his seat!

Mr Christensen: Can he please table it?

The SPEAKER: The member for Dawson will resume his seat! If he is seeking for a document to be tabled, he can seek that, but he cannot abuse points of order. Is the member for Dawson seeking for a document to be tabled?

Mr Christensen: Yes.

The SPEAKER: Was the minister quoting from a document?

Mr Brendan O’Connor: I was.

The SPEAKER: Is the document confidential?

Mr Brendan O’Connor: No, I am happy to table it. I table the speech by the member for Cook to the AMMA conference, where he actually says he is going to remove all of the protections—

The SPEAKER: The minister will resume his seat.

Mr Christensen interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Dawson will resume his seat!

Mr Christensen interjecting—

The SPEAKER: We are into our second question. This is an abuse. The member for Dawson is warned!

Asylum Seekers

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:10): My question is to the Prime Minister. Given that the budget for border protection has blown out by more than $5 billion since the last election, how can the Prime Minister justify reducing the forward estimates for border protection when illegal boat arrivals are at record levels and going up?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:10): The Leader of the Opposition may not be aware, but forward estimates are worked on by the public sector professionals at Treasury and the department of finance. I am not surprised the Leader of the Opposition is not aware of these questions, because the former Treasurer, Peter Costello, never let him anywhere near the budget process because he was well aware that the
The Leader of the Opposition was simply not up to the task—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The Prime Minister will return to the question.

Ms GILLARD: But the Leader of the Opposition ought to inform himself of the way the government's budget works and the way in which projections are done. If the Leader of the Opposition is genuinely concerned about this question, then he may want to stop the reckless negativity that has prevented him from joining with the government to fully implement the work of the Angus Houston report—that is, the former Chief of the Defence Force, aided by other experts including Paris Aristotle and Michael L'Estrange, respected experts. But of course the Leader of the Opposition did not want to accept an expert report that did not equate with his prejudices. The government will continue to deal with the facts, and we will continue to deal with the fact that in this parliament the Leader of the Opposition's reckless negativity means more boats.

Employment

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (14:11): My question is to the Minister for Industry and Innovation. What progress has been made in implementing the government's plans to support jobs in Australia; and how is the government dealing with any difficulties in these plans?

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Minister for Industry and Innovation and Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (14:12): I thank the member for Corangamite, because supporting and creating jobs is the key priority of Labor in government. Since we came to power in 2007, 800,000 jobs have been created. Given the prolonged period of the global financial crisis, that is a truly remarkable achievement in our economy. The economy is growing at 3.1 per cent, inflation is contained, unemployment is only at 5.4 per cent, there is a new measure of stronger consumer confidence that is out today, and there is a massive pipeline of private sector investment. The economic circumstances are strong under this government's management.

But of course there are some parts of the economy that are feeling some pressures from the effect of the high value of the Australian dollar and other structural changes, and that is why the government takes action to support and create jobs. That is why we have put in place a $5.4 billion new car plan, supporting 250,000 jobs related to the automotive sector. That is why we have provided support to Vodafone, which is bringing 750 jobs back from India to Tasmania—very important for the Tasmanian economy. And that is why the government is investing $1 billion also to grow jobs through our Plan for Australian Jobs announced just several weeks ago. That plan is in three parts. Firstly, it backs Australian businesses to win more work from large projects in our economy worth more than $500 million in areas like mining and other parts of the economy like infrastructure. Secondly, the plan sets up industry innovation precincts which will drive the innovation and investment that is needed to win new business in export markets. It will bring together the best minds in our research sector with businesses that have the capability and innovative drive to create jobs that are in export focused industries. Thirdly, the plan helps small- and medium-sized businesses to grow and create new jobs. That is the heartland of job creation.

It is a comprehensive package that resulted from extensive consultation with industry, has been supported by industry, has been led by industry with the government—
and the Australian Industry Group in the manufacturing sector of course has been a key part of that. But there are definitely impediments to these plans and definitely impediments to the creation of jobs in the Australian economy. Those impediments sit on the other side of the chamber. No-one loves it more when a business unfortunately announces some job losses than those on the other side. They are straight out there gloating about the loss of jobs. They never say anything when a coalition state government starts axing thousands of jobs, but they get right out there when business has to lay someone off. They will not support jobs in the Australian economy, but this government will. (Time expired)

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS
The SPEAKER (14:14): I would like to advise the gallery that with us this afternoon is Mr Paul Kehoe, a member of the Irish parliament. He is also the chief government whip, obviously a very important job, and we welcome him to the parliament today.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE
Asylum Seekers
Mr MORRISON (Cook) (14:15): My question is to the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship. Can the minister advise why there have been no transfers of asylum seekers to the Manus Island processing centre since 9 February, despite the fact that the centre is at less than 60 per cent of capacity and more than 850 people have entered Australia illegally on 17 boats since that last transfer?

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Immigration and Citizenship) (14:16): I thank the honourable member for his question and his interest in what is, of course, a very important centre and indeed something that is being implemented as a result of the recommendations of the Houston panel. This is a very important centre, and I think it is important to note that we engaged fully with the government of PNG to establish a memorandum of understanding to ensure that we could provide a deterrent for people who get on unseaworthy vessels. These centres, both the one in Nauru and the one in Manus Province, are important as part of the combination of reforms that are required to deter people from endangering their lives at sea. I managed to visit the facility some weeks ago—and, I understand, I was followed not long after that by the member for Cook—to see whether in fact the temporary facility was operating effectively—and it was operating effectively. I met with all of the service providers who are doing a good job in what are challenging circumstances, and indeed I met with the transferees themselves. I gave them a very, very clear message that of course they will be treated well, but we are going to ensure that the no-advantage principle as recommended by the Houston panel is realised.

Mr Morrison: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order on specific relevance. I asked why there had been no further transfers since 9 February. Why have there been no transfers?

The SPEAKER: The member for Cook will resume his seat. The minister has the call and will refer to the question before the chair.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR: I am happy to do that. This centre is very important, as I say, in ensuring we provide a deterrent to people getting on unseaworthy vessels.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR: I do not know why it is funny when I am talking about people dying at sea. I met with the
minister for immigration, who is also the minister for foreign affairs, when I was in PNG, and I made it very clear that we will work together to ensure that transferees are going into the centre appropriately. What we have done to date is transfer people into that centre, which I believe and the government believes will deter people from getting on unseaworthy vessels. We will continue to work with the PNG government. It is the host country and, indeed, the primary government making decisions in relation to these transferees. I can assure you of this: we will continue to transfer people in consultation with and, ultimately, by the authority of the PNG government to ensure that there are fewer opportunities for and chances of people endangering their lives at sea. We will continue to do that not only in Manus Province but also in Nauru.

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (14:19): When was the government advised by the government of Papua New Guinea that transfers of asylum seekers to Manus Island were to be indefinitely suspended, as I was advised by PNG officials when I recently visited Manus Province?

The SPEAKER: I am assuming the question was for the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship. The minister has the call.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Immigration and Citizenship) (14:19): A rookie mistake. Can I just respond to the shadow minister by explaining that I, unlike the member for Cook—

Mrs Griggs interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Solomon is warned!

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR: I have not even got half a sentence out. I am happy to answer the question. Unlike the member for Cook, I actually met the foreign minister and minister for immigration and discussed this matter. I did not meet a public servant and raise this matter. I met with the minister in the PNG government responsible for the transferees, and we—that is, the PNG government and the Australian government—have made very clear that we are still committed to transferring people. That undertaking was provided to me by the foreign minister at a meeting that I held with him in Moresby on the day that I was there. So I would have to suggest that the member for Cook should make certain whether in fact the advice he received is correct or not, because the advice I received directly from the government and from the foreign minister was that we would continue to proceed in the way in which we have, which is notifying the government of PNG when we transfer and having them of course agree to that transfer, as is appropriate.

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (14:20): Madam Speaker, I ask a further supplementary question. When were the transfers suspended and why, and when will those transfers commence again?

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton—Minister for Immigration and Citizenship) (14:21): I have just made clear that the foreign minister of the PNG government has indicated to me in a conversation we held in PNG that the transfers will proceed. Now it is quite customary—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR: It will proceed. It is quite customary for us to ensure that we get the approval of the government. There is no indefinite suspension is my point. The foreign minister has always been asked about the transferees when we do that. That is an operational matter in which they are engaged, and I made it clear and it was affirmed by the foreign minister that we will notify them.
when we transfer people. But there is no indefinite suspension. You are wrong.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business is warned! The member for Cook is seeking to table a document?

Mr Morrison: I seek to table the visit program prepared by the Australian High Commission which details the Australian officials who were present when that advice was given to me by the PNG government and Australian officials, including DIAC.

The SPEAKER: The Manager of the House: is leave granted to table the document? Could you please come to the dispatch box and advise the House.

Mr Albanese: No. That is absurd.

Goods and Services Tax

Mr WILKIE (Denison) (14:22): My question is to the Prime Minister, but I encourage the opposition leader to, on indulgence, also respond on this important matter.

The SPEAKER: That is for me to decide.

Mr WILKIE: Prime Minister, will you commit that if the Labor Party wins this year's federal election there will be no reduction in Tasmania's share of GST revenue?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:23): I thank the member for Denison for his question. I can absolutely affirm to the member for Denison that we support the principle of horizontal fiscal equalisation—a dreadful three-word term, I know. But what it means is that states like Tasmania get distributions to them out of the GST pool, because states like Tasmania, with a limited economic base and tending to have a more disadvantaged population, need more resources at their disposal in order to equitably provide services like health and education. The horizontal fiscal equalisation principle is there so that, no matter where you live in this great country of ours, whether it is in Tasmania or the heart of Sydney's CBD, you have the ability to access services of an equal standard. That would not be possible unless there was that distribution to states like Tasmania, and we absolutely endorse that and stand by it. And I can verify that all of my Tasmanian colleagues—the member for Bass, the member for Braddon, the member for Franklin and the member for Lyons—are making that crystal clear to their communities. I can absolutely assure the member of that.

I can understand why he is concerned about this matter, because the Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition are on the public record endorsing in various ways the claims of Liberal premiers that there should be a per capita distribution of GST. If that were to occur, Tasmania would lose at least $600 million from its budget. That is the equivalent of Tasmania losing $1,200 for every man, woman and child in the state of Tasmania. That is obviously a reduction in support that the Tasmanian community could not withstand, but that appears to be the policy of the Leader of the Opposition from his public statements: take $600 million out of Tasmania and reduce services to the amount of $1,200 per man, woman and child. And that is before you get to the very direct cutbacks that the Leader of the Opposition has publicly announced, like cutting away the schoolkids bonus, taking away the benefits of the tax-free threshold, cutting into schools—

The SPEAKER: The Prime Minister will return to the question.

Ms GILLARD: cutting into trade training centres, health care and the like. I can understand the member's concern. The
people of Tasmania are concerned. We, of
course, will continue to support the people of
Tasmania. It is a very good question for the
Leader of the Opposition, and one he cannot
give the same answer to.

The SPEAKER: And one I am not going
to give him indulgence to answer because
this is question time. There are other
avenues—

Ms Julie Bishop interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The Deputy Leader of
the Opposition is warned!

Education

Mr LYONS (Bass) (14:26): My question
is to the Prime Minister. How is the
government's My School website giving
parents better information about the
performance of their child's school, and how
will both My School and the government's
National Plan for School Improvement help
Australia win the education race?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister)
(14:26): I thank the member for Bass for his
question and I thank him for his genuine
concern about the quality of schools in his
electorate, and that means he is not only
genuinely concerned about the welfare and
opportunity of children in his electorate—

The SPEAKER: I remind the member
for Herbert that that is not his seat.

Ms GILLARD: but he is genuinely
concerned, too, about the long-term future of
Tasmania and of the Australian economy,
because we cannot be a high-skill, high-wage
economy in the future if our schools slip
behind the standards of the world. That is
why I am very determined that we engage in
a national plan for school improvement and
we deliver more resources to schools so that
our schools are in the top five in the world—
that is, our kids are getting a world-class
education today so we can be the strongest
and most prosperous economy tomorrow.

Today it was my very great pleasure, on
what is a good day for Australian education,
to launch this year's edition of My School.
My School has now come out for the fifth
time, and every time more information is
added so that parents, teachers and the
Australian community can have more
information about the performance of
Australian schools than ever before. As
education minister, I set our nation on this
journey because I was disgusted, when I first
became minister for education, to find out
that there was nowhere you could go in the
Australian nation to get a list of the most
disadvantaged schools in the country. There
was nowhere you could go to get a list of the
highest performing schools. No-one under
the former government had ever paid any
regard to the quality of education or bothered
to ask themselves the questions: 'Who needs
the most help? What is going on in
Australian schools?' That never happened—
not once. Wilful neglect and cuts were the
Liberal legacy in education.

We have changed that. And what we can
show today with My School is not only more
information for parents than ever before; we
can show the performance of our national
partnerships and our new resources for
school education. We can show that they are
making a difference. We can show, for
example, that the schools in our National
Partnership on Literacy and Numeracy are
improving at a faster rate than other schools.
Seventy-one per cent reduced the number of
students below minimum standards in year 3,
and 70 per cent reduced the number of
students below minimum standards in year 5
numeracy. That is a better education for kids,
a better opportunity for life. That is the
Labor way when it comes to giving children
access to a great education, because we want
all of them in the future to share in the life of
our nation, and we do not want to see any
child left behind.
Media

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth) (14:29): My question is to the Prime Minister. Can she provide the House examples of published content in breach of the standards her government wishes to enforce through the Public Interest Media Advocate? Is the front page of today's Telegraph such an example? If she cannot provide any examples, what exactly is the mischief, the problem, that her new media controls are intended to address?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:30): I thank the member for Wentworth for his question and I understand its motivations. I understand that the opposition have decided to seek some political advantage by bandwagoning with media interests and media organisations, transparent—and bordering on the laughable—as that is. Yes, it is.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms GILLARD: I am glad the opposition have the good grace to laugh when their motivations on this matter are transparently exposed. To the member for Wentworth I would say this: before we get into any sanctimonious nonsense about freedom of speech, it was under the Howard government that two journalists—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! There seems to be sanctimonious disrespect for the standing orders. I am not going to preside over, yet again, another day when not a word can be heard in this chamber. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD: Yes—this is the kind of hypocrisy that we see from the opposition. It was under the Howard government that two News Limited journalists faced jail for contempt of court. The reaction of the Howard government: do nothing. The reaction of this government: provide journalist shield laws. It was under the Howard government that churches would have their grants taken away—their services smashed—if they spoke out against government policy.

Mr Turnbull: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. This is not relevant. I am more than happy to debate freedom of the press. I have asked the Prime Minister—

The SPEAKER: The member for Wentworth will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD: I beg to differ. I think churches and charities being able to speak out freely is important to freedom of speech—and we have ensured it can happen. We have taken away the gag clauses that the Howard government had to stop churches and charities ever questioning an aspect of government policy. So maybe the member for Wentworth, who has been out today talking about freedom of speech, should take a look in the mirror and at the record of those opposite on these questions. The government's reform agenda has been misrepresented by the member for Wentworth in his question—completely misrepresented.

Mr Turnbull: What about Spycatcher?

The SPEAKER: The member for Wentworth is warned.

Ms GILLARD: Spycatcher was a long time ago. And those gag clauses are far more recent, as well as that threat to jail journalists. Coming back to the member for Wentworth's question, the member for Wentworth has completely misrepresented the nature of the government's reforms. What is being discussed here—and proposed to the parliament—is better self-regulation through an independent public interest media advocate. I would ask the member for Wentworth: why does he think that an appropriate self-regulation for our media
should not occur? Why doesn't he think that?
I am not going to be drawn on examples
because it is inappropriate for me to do so—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order!

Ms GILLARD: because this is not about
my view; this is not about the view of
politicians. This is about a system of better
self-regulation which would mean, of course,
that we see a functioning press council, or
press councils, self-regulating the media. I
think that is appropriate and certainly in line
with the best of freedom of speech. (Time
expired)

Education

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (14:34): My question
is to the Minister for School Education,
Early Childhood and Youth. Will the
minister update the House about the
launch of the My School 2013 website in my
electorate today? What are some of the
school success stories highlighted by the
site? Is the minister aware of other
approaches to giving parents more and better
information through the site?

Mr GARRETT (Kingsford Smith—
Minister for School Education, Early
Childhood and Youth) (14:34): I thank the
member for Fraser for his question and for
his longstanding interest in education policy
and reform. We on this side of the House
understand that investing in education is
investing in the nation's future, and we
understand that investing in students'
education gives them the opportunity for
good jobs in the future. And that is why it
was great to be with the Prime Minister at
Latham Primary School today to launch My
School 2013—and congratulations to that
school on their very good year 5 results.

My School is a powerful tool that
provides a more complete picture of school
and student progress and, importantly for us
here, helps us learn what works in schools.
So five years on, five million hits later, this
website is providing more information than
ever before. Five years on, we also know that
the investments we have made in national
partnerships in literacy and numeracy and for
low socioeconomic community schools are
also improving results. That is what we
discovered today.

In the National Partnership on Literacy
and Numeracy we have been more
successful in reducing the percentage of
students at or below minimum standards at
all schools in Australia. In the National
Partnership for Low Socio-economic Status
School Communities, we have seen
improvements for Indigenous students,
where education is a passport out of poverty.

I am asked about success stories. There
are plenty of them, but I was struck by an
article in the Age about Sunshine North
Primary School, where many students come
to school and struggle with reading and
writing. The principal, Mr Ryan, was 'not an
early convert to the NAPLAN student testing
scheme' but he now sees it as 'a useful tool in
pushing his staff and students to do better'.
There, again, the results speak for
themselves. In 2008, 53 per cent of students
were at or below the national minimum
standard for year 5 reading; in 2012 that had
dropped to 32 per cent, an absolutely
fantastic result. So we know that My School
is important because it can drive focused and
targeted investment and because it builds a
good body of information for policy and
education. Parents know it is important
because they get more information. The
Gonski report acknowledged it as a
foundation for funding reform. In fact, it
seems that the only person who does not
support My School in this way is—surprise,
surprise!—the member for Sturt, the shadow
minister for education.
Class sizes do not matter to the member for Sturt. He wants to show one in seven teachers the door and now he wants to strip out the very NAPLAN results that I have spoken to today, cutting away crucial school-level information for parents, closing down the transparency that has provided the platform for school reforms. We are proud of My School. We are proud of the investment that we are making in schools to lift student results and we will commit ourselves to further education reform, in the interests of all Australians.

Budget

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (14:37): My question is to the Treasurer. I refer him to this bill, introduced by Labor, that raised the credit card limit of the Commonwealth government to $75 billion, this bill that increased the credit card limit to $200 billion, this bill that increased the credit card limit to $250 billion and this bill that increased the credit card limit of the Labor government to $300 billion which the Treasurer said was 'no big deal'. Treasurer: can you guarantee it will not go above $300 billion?

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:38): As I said yesterday, and made very clear, we will update all of our estimates in the budget in the normal way. I also made the point really clearly that we outlined in MYEFO that our borrowings would be within the cap. I made that very clear. What this is about today is another attempt by those opposite to keep fear alive. Having seen their campaign against the carbon price completely bomb, they are now absolutely embarrassed by the fact that they are incapable of producing a respectable budget bottom line.

We had another example of this today. We have this article from Phil Coorey, online, this morning. He says this: ‘Senior sources predicted a month ago that it would not oppose legislation—

Mr Hockey: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It does go to relevance. It was a simple question: can you guarantee it is not going above $300 billion?

Mr Buchholz interjecting—

The SPEAKER: I am not interested in what the member for Wright has to say, so he will leave the chamber, under standing order 94(a).

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: I was asked a question about debt, which goes to the core of fiscal policy and to the progress of fiscal policy over the forward estimates, and I do intend to address each element of the question. The fact is that we have a very strong fiscal policy on this side of the House. We are strongly controlling expenditure and we are doing that because we operate within a medium-term fiscal strategy committed to surpluses, on average, over the cycle. Those opposite claim that they are committed to that same goal, except what we have seen this morning is that this shadow Treasurer was rolled in the Liberal party room yesterday and he had his commitment to back vital legislation in this parliament—to put in place responsible fiscal policy—completely rolled in the party room yesterday. He was absolutely rolled. And rolled by who? The member for Menzies. Fair dinkum. If he got rolled by the member for Menzies he could be rolled by anybody.

Mr Dutton: Is this a guarantee?
The SPEAKER: The member for Dixon is warned. The Treasurer has the call and will be relevant to the question. Everybody else also needs to observe the standing orders, which do not allow the type of interjection that is going on.

Mr SWAN: On this side of the House we are committed to a fiscal policy that will support jobs and growth. We are committed to publishing our estimates and forecasts twice yearly. Those opposite have not published a bottom line for five years. The last time they published one there was an $11 billion black hole at the heart of it. So what is very clear, in stark contrast to our side of the House—

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop: Madam Speaker, on a point of order: page 566 of the Practice provides that where a minister cannot provide a substantive answer he should undertake to supply one in writing. Could you so direct him, please.

Mr SWAN: The shadow Treasurer admitted on breakfast television, sitting beside the minister for the environment, that he had a $70 billion hole in his budget bottom line. That has just been added to by $500 million, because he was rolled in the party room. On this side of the House we will put in place responsible fiscal policy to support jobs. On that side of the House, if they are to be taken seriously, they are going to have to slash and burn, particularly if they are not capable of facing up to the big decisions for the future.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (14:43): I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon members of a delegation of parliamentarians from Pacific countries who are participating in the Pacific Parliamentary Leadership Dialogue. With them is Senator Kay Patterson, a former minister of the Howard government, and former Speaker Steve Martin. I wish them well in their dialogue during the week and on behalf of the House I extend to them a very warm welcome.

I am also delighted to acknowledge today Lifeline's 50th year of service to our community, delivering mental health suicide prevention. I welcome Lifeline's chairman, John Brogden, who has been with us in the gallery and wish Lifeline, its staff and volunteers the very best on its 50th anniversary.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Economy

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (14:43): My question is to the Treasurer. How is the government putting in place the economic reforms we need to build a stronger, smarter and fairer Australia?

Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:44): I thank the member for Parramatta for that question, because Australia has experienced 21 years of continuous growth. One of the reasons we have experienced 21 years of continuous growth—unlike any other developed economy—is that we have had governments that have had the foresight to put in the big reforms to create prosperity for the future. This government will not shirk from those big reforms and we will be going forward in the years ahead, putting in place fundamental reforms that will drive prosperity and productivity in our economy.

The school improvement program being taken forward by the Prime Minister and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research is absolutely critical. None of these things can be done unless we keep our economy strong. We have quite a resilient economy. We have strong public finances. We have low net debt. These are
things that other countries and finance ministers elsewhere in the developed world would give their right arm for. We understand the importance of strong growth within the framework of good fiscal policy, which is what we are putting in place every day. Every day we come into this House we ask ourselves, 'What can we do to make our country stronger, what can we do to make our country smarter and what can we do to make our country fairer?' We can keep our economy strong, we can make it smarter by investing in education and, of course, we can make it fairer. This government is committed to making a fairer Australia. You could not get a better example of that than our commitment to triple the tax-free threshold—\textit{that is, people on low incomes not having to pay a dollar of tax until their income gets to $18,200. That is an absolutely fundamental reform, not just in terms of fairness but also in lifting workforce participation. That reform is opposed by those opposite. Last week we had the debacle of the Leader of the Opposition and shadow Treasurer bumping into each other all over Sydney. The bottom line for what happened there is that they are going to take away a tax cut from seven million low-income Australians. That is the bottom line.}

We on this side of House understand cost-of-living pressures, the importance of a strong economy and the importance of making the country smarter and overall making the country fairer. That is what our program is directed to do. Those on the other side of the House stand for massive cuts to health and education, cuts which will hit growth, will push up unemployment and will push up deficit and debt. The contrast could not be clearer.

\textbf{Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (14:46):} Madam Speaker, I ask a supplementary question. The Treasurer has spoken about the importance of the government’s reform of tripling the tax-free threshold. What does this mean for working people and their families in my electorate of Parramatta, and what would be the impact of taking this tax cut away?

\textbf{Mr SWAN (Lilley—Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer) (14:47):} I thank the member for Parramatta for that very important question, because tripling the tax-free threshold is very important to many families not just in Western Sydney but right across the country.

\textit{Mr Hockey interjecting—}

\textbf{The SPEAKER:} The member for North Sydney is warned!

\textbf{Mr SWAN:} He is squealing, Speaker, because he knows that his plan to take away these tax cuts from low-income families is known more and more every day. A typical Parramatta family now pays over $550 less in income tax. Think about that for a moment—they pay $550 less each year. This goes to the very core of living standards and to the very core of dealing with the cost of living. The opposition march into Western Sydney and go around the rest of the country not admitting to the fact that they are going to take away this essential tax cut from so many working families. What happened in Western Sydney last week? The shadow Treasurer got up and told a real porky. He said, ‘They’re only going to get $3.’ Then he had the audacity to wipe it from his transcript. He doctored his own transcript. He might be able to doctor the transcript but he cannot doctor away the brutal tax hike that he is taking to working families in this country.

\textbf{Budget}

\textbf{Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (14:48):} My question is to the Prime Minister. Earlier today in response to my question about border protection blow-outs, the Prime Minister said that the forward
estimates figure was produced by 'public sector professionals'. Yet last month the Secretary of the Department of Finance and Deregulation said that the forward estimates were 'a decision of government'. I ask again: how can the Prime Minister justify their decision to reduce the forward estimates when border protection costs are blowing out and arrivals are at record levels? (Time expired)

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:49): Once again the Leader of the Opposition shows his ignorance of the basic workings of government and budgeting. Of course the government makes decisions about budgets—of course we do and we always will. We made a decision, for example, to treble the tax-free threshold. The Leader of the Opposition says no, that people should pay more tax. We made a decision to give a schoolkids bonus. The Leader of the Opposition says people should not get those benefits, and it goes on and on. The Leader of the Opposition ought also to be aware that as government's make decisions about priorities of the nation they work with public servants to generate and assist with budget estimates and budget forecasts. For example, no-one in the Howard government and certainly not the Leader of the Opposition puzzled through what expenditure Medicare would have if he made a certain decision about bulk-billing rates that was modelled for him. We work in the same way with our professional public servants. That is what my statement meant. It is self-evident to anybody who has the slightest regard for the way in which government works. Obviously the Leader of the Opposition does not.

Mr Abbott: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order as to direct relevance. How can the Prime Minister justify her reduction of the forward estimates when boat arrivals are increasing—

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. The Manager of Government Business will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has concluded her answer.

Aged Care

Ms HALL (Shortland) (14:51): My question is to be Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, Minister for Housing and Homelessness, Minister for Social Inclusion and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Mental Health Reform. I refer the minister to the Living Longer, Living Better aged-care reform package which was introduced into parliament this morning. Minister, how will these reforms improve the quality of care and support for older Australians?

Mr BUTLER (Port Adelaide—Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, Minister for Housing and Homelessness, Minister for Social Inclusion and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Mental Health Reform) (14:51): I thank the member for Shortland for the question. This morning I introduced five bills to round out the implementation of the $3.7 billion aged-care reform package Living Longer, Living Better. This legislation has been the subject of very detailed consultation with the sector and follows the delivery of a range of other commitments in the package: the design and release of new home care packages, consumer directed packages advertised last year and ready for delivery after 1 July this year; a determination by the new Aged Care Financing Authority about how providers will qualify for increased accommodation payments under this government's package and for a fairer and more transparent system of accommodation charging for consumers; the release and design of programs for increased dementia support; and better linkages between the aged-care system and our health system.
Last week, I announced arrangements to begin to lift the wages of aged-care workers. We will need to triple the number of aged-care workers in this country over the next few decades, yet even today we struggle to recruit and to retain workers that we need.

Mr Tony Smith interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Casey is warned.

Mr BUTLER: The most recent workforce census revealed that more than 60 per cent of aged-care facilities are short of registered nurses and 50 per cent of facilities are short of carers. Low wages in this sector are universally recognised as our key problem. The Productivity Commission recommended that we develop a funding system to underpin the payment of fair and competitive wages to those workers.

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the House is not assisting the minister with his answer. The Leader of the House will resume his seat.

This alliance is a very broad group and includes all of the major providers in the aged-care sector. I have always regarded their advice very highly.

I am pleased to say that my announcement last week reflected that advice entirely. I table the blueprint for the assistance of House members. Most aged-care workers that I meet do not do this work for the money. They do it because they love it, but that has to stop being an excuse for paying such low wages for such important work.

Budget

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of The Nationals) (14:54): My question is to the Prime Minister. I remind the Prime Minister of the July 2010 economic statement, in which she promised Australians that the net debt would peak this year at less than $90 billion. With net debt at the end of December 2012 already at $164 billion, almost twice the peak level promised, why should anyone believe that this government will ever pay off the record net debt that it has run up in just five years? (Time expired)

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:55): I thank the Leader of the National Party for his question. I would say a number of things to the Leader of the National Party on his question. No. 1, the Leader of the National Party would need to recognise, as the opposition does more generally, the nature of the revenue write-downs that have occurred. We have spoken in this parliament before about these revenue write-downs, which are in part some overhang from the global financial crisis, and in part a result of the strength of the Australian dollar and the various pressures that it is bringing to bear in the Australian economy. We obviously had a period, too, where we saw a reduction in commodity prices. Those things do effect revenue, and that is plain for all to see.

Mr Hockey: The revenue is going up!
Ms GILLARD: The shadow Treasurer is interjecting. If the shadow Treasurer wishes to be taken seriously at any point in this debate then he should be producing his plan, his alternate budget. There are more resources available to the opposition to do that work than has ever before been available to any opposition in the history of this parliament, but, despite that, the Leader of the Opposition and this opposition in general have not produced a policy, since 2010, that has in it proper costings and proper savings to match—not once, not ever.

Then, on the question of budgets, the Leader of the National Party ought to recognise that, yes—and the government has been very clear about this—in line with our fiscal strategy, we are asking the nation to take some tough decisions and to make some tough choices. What we find when we bring those choices to the parliament is, on the one hand, the opposition comes into the parliament and rails about the need to get back to surplus. Then, on the other hand, they come in here and exercise their votes to prevent reasonable and legitimate savings. In the court of public opinion, how, anywhere, can this possibly add up? On the one hand, they rail and say there must be a surplus and they are really in favour of a surplus soon. Then, on the other hand, they come into this parliament and say, 'Savings? Not for me; I won't ever support a saving—never, ever support a saving.'

The most embarrassed person about all of this is, of course, not the Leader of the National Party; it is the shadow Treasurer, who goes overseas and gives speeches about the end of the age of entitlement and looks to the press gallery to get big runs about what a deep thinker he is. Then, here in this parliament, he gets rolled by his party colleagues on a sensible savings measure—rolled by his party colleagues. With that kind of track record internally, the news for the Leader of the National Party is he ought to be directing his attention to the incompetence and confusion on his own side. (Time expired)

Arts

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (14:58): My question is the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government and Minister for the Arts. Will the minister update the House on the government's plan to strengthen the future of the arts, cultural heritage and creative industries in Australia?

Mr CREAN (Hotham—Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government and Minister for the Arts) (14:58): I thank the member for Moreton for his question, because I know of his long and passionate commitment to the arts, and his contribution to them, for that matter. This actually is a day of firsts, because this is the first question I have ever had on the arts. I cannot get one from the other side of the House. But the other first is that it is the first cultural policy this country has had for 18 years, and the last one was delivered by a Labor government too. In terms of the commitment to bipartisanship, we welcome it from the other side—but we never get the leadership, we never get the direction and we never get the ideas, and the big ideas, that demonstrate it.

Today, Creative Australia has seen an injection of $235 million extra in support of the arts. Why is this government investment important? Firstly, governments have to invest in our culture and our creative industries. Why?—because culture defines us. We are home to the oldest living culture on earth, and we have been welcoming to the greatest diversity of cultures on earth. This is what has made us unique, and it is why we have to preserve it, nurture it, invest in it and build upon it.
Secondly, if governments do make this investment there is a social dividend and an economic dividend. The social dividend is our values—values of inclusion and values of respect—which are the sorts of things that all of us want for our kids and all of us want for a healthy society. Investing in the arts pays dividends in that regard. But there is also an economic dividend, because a creative economy is also a more productive economy. In this day and age it is not enough simply to embrace technology unless we are consistently, creatively adding to it. Seeing the artist at the centre of a creative society and seeing a creative society central to our future as a nation is why this investment needs to be made.

The final thing is that already in this economy there are 531,000 people employed in the creative industries—531,000! This is close to five per cent of our workforce, and it is a sector, the growth of which is almost double that of the rest of the workforce. This is a growing industry. This is our future. Governments should invest in it, but it has taken another Labor government to do it. We ask the other side to get on side with us, because it is in the interests of the nation to do it.

**Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority**

**Mr HARTSUYKER** (Cowper) (15:01): My question is to the Prime Minister. Given that the Executive Director of the Australian Crime Commission, Mr Paul Jevtovic, has confirmed that intelligence from the ACC's *Organised crime and drugs in sport* report is yet to result in a single active police investigation, does the Prime Minister agree with the Minister for Home Affairs that the use of performance enhancing and elicit drugs in Australian sport is 'widespread amongst Australian professional athletes'?

**Ms GILLARD** (Lalor—Prime Minister) (15:02): Thank you very much. To the member who asked the question: I actually do not think that Australians want to see us playing politics about sport in this parliament, particularly not at this time.

What we have had is the professionals of the Australian Crime Commission deliver a report. We have had the professionals at the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority also dealing with this issue. From the perspective of the fans I can well and truly understand that fans who care passionately about their sport have watched this with a sense of anxiety. For fans of some clubs that have been out there publicly dealing with this issue there have been very difficult days indeed. I know what it is like to care passionately about a sporting club. But these things—

**Mr Hartsuyker:** I rise on a point of order with respect to direct relevance. The question asked, ‘Does the Prime Minister agree with the Minister for Home Affairs?’

The **SPEAKER:** The member for Cowper will resume his seat. The Prime Minister is answering the question and has the call.

**Ms GILLARD:** Thank you very much. What is available to government, what is available to the opposition, and what is now available to members of the public through public statements, are insights into the work of the Australian Crime Commission and the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority. These are independent and expert agencies. I have nothing before me which would lead me to conclude that the findings and statements of these agencies publicly are anything other than correct. So the Australian Crime Commission has made a series of statements publicly. I have nothing before me which would suggest that those statements are not correct. I have nothing
before me which would suggest that the public statements of the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority are not correct. Those statements, of course, have caused reactions, understandably, and concern amongst fans. And it is important that these independent agencies get on with their work.

What can government do? Government can make sure that, in particular, the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority, which now has a lot of work to do to deal with this matter, is appropriately resourced—and we have done so. We have received a request from them for more resources, and we have said yes to that. And if we receive further requests for more resources then of course they will be made available to assist them to get about this important work as expeditiously as it can be done.

**National Disability Insurance Scheme Committee**

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (15:05): My question is to the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister for Disability Reform. Will the minister update the House on the government's plan for a fairer Australia for people with disability, their families and carers.

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister for Disability Reform) (15:05): I thank the member for Reid very much for that question and for adding his voice to the chorus of Australians calling for the introduction of a national disability insurance scheme. I am very pleased that it is likely that the bill to establish the National Disability Insurance Scheme will go through the parliament—through both the House and the Senate—by the end of next week.

This is a very important part of our plan to build a fairer Australia—an Australia that says that we do not think it is right for people with disability to be part of a cruel lottery that says that how much care and support you get depends on where you live or how you got your disability. One of the things that is very important in the legislation that is about to go through the parliament is that it will give the choice and control that people with disability are looking for, over the care and support that they need.

The legislation will make sure that we are able to start the National Disability Insurance Scheme from July this year. It will start for little children across South Australia, and for adolescents and young people in Tasmania, and it will start in the area of Geelong—we have the members for Corio and Corangamite campaigning very hard for that—and also right across the Hunter.

Here in the Australian Capital Territory, we will see the National Disability Insurance Scheme start in 2014, and I am very pleased to inform the House again that, as a result of the agreement between the Prime Minister and the New South Wales Premier, we now have a clear plan for the introduction of the full scheme of the National Disability Insurance Scheme right across New South Wales by 2018, something which people with disability and their families and carers are very, very pleased about.

In addition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme, this government has also made sure that people with disability and carers have received significant improvements to their payments, and from 20 March, just next week, we will also see the next increase to both the disability support pension and the carer payment, of up to $35.80 a fortnight, a very important increase in the income support delivered by this government. This government is determined to do the right thing by people with disability and carers, delivering
increased income support and the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

**Obeid Family**

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield) (15:08): My question is to the Assistant Treasurer. I remind the minister of media reports concerning payments to Mr Moses Obeid and other members of the Obeid family through various family trusts, nominally in the form of loans. Will the minister ask the Australian tax office to investigate such payments to determine if they were, in substance, distributions on which income tax should have been paid; if so, whether such tax was paid; and, if not, to recover such unpaid tax?

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay—Assistant Treasurer and Minister Assisting for Deregulation) (15:09): I thank the member for his question. I remind the member, as I have reminded members on previous occasions, that the Australian Taxation Office is an independent statutory body. It is independent because I think all members would consider that it is entirely appropriate that it conduct its inquiries, investigations and any enforcement activity at arms length from government. The ATO, of course, takes a very close interest in matters that are in the public domain. Indeed, matters that are raised in this place will be looked at very closely, and no doubt the ATO will undertake whatever investigations flow from that. It is not appropriate for me to enter into a commentary on individual matters. If we were to go down that path then there are a whole range of individuals that might be closely aligned to those on the other side of the parliament that we could equally draw attention to. That is a matter that the ATO will consider. If there is anything for them to investigate, they will do that. If those opposite want to suggest that the law be changed to give the minister the power to instruct the ATO to start to pry into the affairs of individuals then let them come forward and make such a suggestion.

**Water**

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (15:10): My question is to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. What progress has the government made in introducing a new water trigger into national environmental law? How is the government addressing community and stakeholder responses to this?

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities) (15:11): I thank the member for Blair for the question. This morning I introduced the amendments that I referred to yesterday into the parliament, so they are now before the House, and I presume over the course of next week we will have the opportunity to debate them and work through them. They are exactly as I described yesterday, in that the window is a very tight window for the water trigger. It will only apply to those projects which are large coalmining operations or coal seam gas operations.

As to the stakeholder response, I want to put very squarely a rejection of claims that have been put out by the National Farmers' Federation, where they have claimed that in some way a minister would be able to extend the new water trigger to have an impact on the ordinary operation of farmers. No farm dam, no irrigation operation, none of the ordinary operations of farmers, in any way is impacted by this. But, if a coalmining operation or a coal seam gas operation were to have a detrimental effect on the water resource then this would provide a very substantial protection for those farmers, which is why the New South Wales farmers have come out in favour and why the
arguments which are being put forward by the National Farmers' Federation certainly do not in any way ring true and do not in any way match the concerns that their own constituents and membership have been putting on the ground for a very long time.

A further stakeholder reaction, though—possibly one of the more hysterical stakeholder reactions—came from the Queensland Premier. Unsurprisingly, on every occasion when you do something in favour of the environment, the Queensland Premier stands opposed. Whether it is protection of koalas, protection of the Great Barrier Reef or protection of underground water, the reaction of the Queensland National Party is exactly the same every single time, even to the point where the Queensland Premier, when he took to Twitter getting all emotional about it, wanted to describe the new change as simply 'green tape'. Let me make it clear. Members of this side of the House, and indeed members of the crossbench, when we talk about protecting the Great Barrier Reef, do not see it as green tape. When we talk about protecting iconic species like the koala, we do not see it as green tape. When we talk about the impact on water resources, whether it be underground aquifers, whether it be surface water, it shows the height of environmental vandalism, instead of seeing the benefits of this—whether they be for our agriculture, for our wetlands, for our forests, for our rivers—to simply see it as nothing but green tape. It shows a complete lack of understanding of the importance of water—surface water, underground water—in a dry continent like ours.

Ms Gillard: I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (15:14): Madam Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

The SPEAKER: Does the Leader of the Opposition claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr ABBOTT: I do.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition has the call.

Mr ABBOTT: In question time today the Prime Minister accused me of wanting to rip off the people of Tasmania. I want to make it crystal clear that, in respect of GST allocations, Tasmania will not be worse off under any future coalition government.

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (15:14): Madam Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

The SPEAKER: Does the Deputy Leader of the Opposition claim to have been misrepresented?

Ms JULIE BISHOP: Yes, in question time today.

The SPEAKER: The Deputy Leader of the Opposition has the call.

Ms JULIE BISHOP: In question time today the Prime Minister maintained that I had insisted on a per capita basis for the GST. I have never made such a claim—not ever.

COMMITTEES

Selection Committee

Report

The SPEAKER (15:15): I present Report No. 76 for the Selection Committee, relating to the consideration of committee and delegation business, private members' business and referral of bills to committees. The report will be printed in the Hansard for
today and the committee's determination will appear on tomorrow's Notice Paper. Copies of the report have been placed on the table.

The report read as follows—

Report relating to the consideration of committee and delegation business and of private Members' business; and referral of bills to committees

1. The committee met in private session on Tuesday, 12 March 2013.

2. The committee determined the order of precedence and times to be allotted for consideration of committee and delegation business and private Members' business on Monday, 18 March 2013, as follows:

   **Items for House of Representatives Chamber (10.10 am to 12 noon)**

**COMMITTEE AND DELEGATION BUSINESS**

**Presentation and statements**

1 **Joint Standing Committee on Treaties:**
   
   
   The Committee determined that statements on the report may be made—all statements to conclude by 10.15 am.
   
   Speech time limits—
   
   Mrs Prentice—5 minutes.
   
   [Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 1 x 5 mins]

2 **Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity:**
   
   
   The Committee determined that statements on the report may be made—all statements to conclude by 10.25 am.
   
   Speech time limits—
   
   Mr Cheeseman—5 minutes.
   
   Next Member speaking—5 minutes.
   
   [Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 5 mins]

3 **Parliamentary Delegation:**
   
   Parliamentary Delegation to the Kingdom of Morocco and the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria.
   
   The Committee determined that statements on the report may be made—all statements to conclude by 10.30 am.
   
   Speech time limits—
   
   Dr Stone—5 minutes.
   
   [Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 1 x 5 mins]

**PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS**

**Notices**

1 **MR HOCKEY:** To present a Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to taxation and for related purposes. (Tax Laws Amendment (Disclosure of MRRT Information) Bill 2013) (Notice given 11 February 2013.)
   
   Time allotted—10 minutes.
   
   Speech time limits—
   
   Mr Hockey—10 minutes.
   
   [Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 1 x 10 mins]

   Presenter may speak for a period not exceeding 10 minutes—pursuant to standing order 41.

2 **MR WILKIE:** To present a Bill for an Act relating to maritime safety to ensure the maintenance of standards of training and certification of marine engineers. (Marine Engineers Qualification Bill 2013) (Notice given 12 February 2013.)
   
   Time allotted—10 minutes.
   
   Speech time limits—
   
   Mr Wilkie—10 minutes.
   
   [Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 1 x 10 mins]

   Presenter may speak for a period not exceeding 10 minutes—pursuant to standing order 41.

3 **MR KATTER:** To present a Bill for an Act to provide for warning labels in relation to imported food, and for related purposes. (Imported Food Warning Labels Bill 2013) (Notice given 12 March 2013.)
   
   Time allotted—10 minutes.
Speech time limits—
Mr Katter—10 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 1 x 10 mins]
Presenter may speak for a period not exceeding 10 minutes—pursuant to standing order 41.

4 MR C. R. THOMSON: To present a Bill for an Act to amend the Customs Act 1901, and for related purposes. (Customs Amendment (Prohibition of Certain Coal Exports) Bill 2013) (Notice given 12 March 2013.)
Time allotted—10 minutes.

Speech time limits—
Mr C. R. Thomson—10 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 1 x 10 mins]
Presenter may speak for a period not exceeding 10 minutes—pursuant to standing order 41.

5 MS ROWLAND: To move—that this house:
(1) commends the historic achievement of the previous Labor Government in establishing universal superannuation through the Superannuation Guarantee;
(2) notes:
   (a) that Australia's total superannuation savings are projected to be $500 billion higher by June 2037 as a result of the Government's superannuation policies;
   (b) that Australia now has the fourth largest pool of retirement fund assets among OECD states;
   (c) the key findings in the report prepared by the Allen Consulting Group for the Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia, Enhancing Financial Stability and Economic Growth: The Contribution of Superannuation, that the:
      (i) superannuation sector assisted Australia in avoiding some of the worst consequences of the Global Financial Crisis;
      (ii) increase in the Superannuation Guarantee from nine to twelve per cent will benefit 8.4 million Australians; and
      (iii) superannuation sector plays an increasingly important role helping to fund Australia's investment needs;
   (d) data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics that whilst the mean superannuation balance for women almost doubled in the period between 2000 and 2007, there remains considerable disparity in the mean superannuation balances in the accumulation phase for females compared to males;
   (e) that the Government's Low Income Superannuation Contribution will boost the superannuation savings of 23,400 people in Greenway and 25,200 in Canberra; and
(3) supports the need to preserve the Low Income Superannuation Contribution which benefits 3.6 million Australians, of whom 2.1 million are working women. (Notice given 12 March 2013.)
Time allotted—40 minutes.

Speech time limits—
Ms Rowland—10 minutes. Next Member speaking—10 minutes.
Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 5 mins + 4 x 5 mins]
The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Orders of the day
1 PROTECTING LOCAL JOBS (REGULATING ENTERPRISE MIGRATION AGREEMENTS) BILL 2012
(Mr Bandt): Second reading—Resumption of debate (from 11 February 2013):.
Time allotted—remaining private Members' business time prior to 12 noon.

Speech time limits—All Members speaking—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 5 mins]
The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Items for House of Representatives Chamber (8 to 9.30 pm)
PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS
Orders of the day - continued

1 FAIR WORK (REGISTERED ORGANISATIONS) AMENDMENT (TOWARDS TRANSPARENCY) BILL 2013
(Mr Abbott): Second reading (from 11 February 2013):  
Time allotted—remaining private Members’ business time prior to 9.30 pm.
Speech time limits—
  Mr Abbott—15 minutes. Next Member speaking—15 minutes. Next four Members speaking—10 minutes each.
  Next four Members speaking—5 minutes each.
  [Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 15 + 4 x 10 + 4 x 5 mins]
The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Items for Federation Chamber (approx 11 am to approx 1.30 pm)
PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS
Orders of the day
1 MARRIAGE EQUALITY AMENDMENT BILL 2012 (Mr Bandt): Second reading—Resumption of debate (from 18 June 2012).
Time allotted—20 minutes.
  All Members—5 minutes each.
  [Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 4 x 5 mins]
The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Notices
1 DR LEIGH: To move:
  That this House:
  (1) notes that:
    (a) a bipartisan parliamentary report recommended the creation of the Parliamentary Budget Office, which is now operational having passed Parliament with bipartisan support;
    (b) the Australian people deserve a proper policy debate in 2013, with all parties presenting properly costed policies; and
    (c) the updated information contained in the Pre-Election Economic and Fiscal Outlook will not affect the cost of most policies, and therefore release of fully costed policies should not be delayed until then; and
  (2) calls on all parties to have their policies costed consistent with the Charter of Budget Honesty, and release them to the Australian people in enough time to have a well-informed debate.  
  [Notice given 12 March 2013.]
  Time allotted—60 minutes.
    Dr Leigh—10 minutes.
    Next Member speaking—10 minutes.
    Other Members—5 minutes each.
    [Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 8 x 5 mins]
The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

2 MR OAKESHOTT: To move:
  That this House:
  (1) recognises the need for comprehensive tax reform to maximise the standard of living for Australians for the next 50 years; and
  (2) encourages the Treasurer to:
    (a) release a 10 year road-map for comprehensive tax reform as a standalone Budget Paper as part of the 2013-14 Budget, and
    (b) include reform for consideration beyond the 4 year forward estimates period.  
  [Notice given 11 September 2012.]
  Time allotted—40 minutes.
    Mr Oakeshott—10 minutes.
    Next Member speaking—10 minutes.
    Other Members—5 minutes each.
    [Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 4 x 5 mins]
The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Orders of the day - continued
2 MIGRATION AMENDMENT (REINSTATEMENT OF TEMPORARY PROTECTION VISAS) BILL 2013 (Mr Morrison): Second reading (from 11 February 2013).
Time allotted—30 minutes.
  Mr Morrison—15 minutes.
  Next Member speaking—15 minutes.
  [Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 15 mins]
The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue at a later hour.

Items for Federation Chamber (approx 6.30 pm to 9 pm)

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

Notices - continued

3 MR S. P. JONES: To move:

That this House:

(1) notes:
   (a) the growth of self-managed superannuation schemes investment structures by Australians seeking to grow their retirement savings;
   (b) that there is $1.4 trillion in Australian superannuation assets;
   (c) self-managed superannuation funds are the largest single sector in superannuation; and
   (d) the severe hardship caused to investors in Trio Capital, which collapsed as a result of fraudulent activity and which was the largest superannuation fraud in Australian history, with around $176 million lost or missing;

(2) acknowledges that while investors in the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA) regulated superannuation funds were eligible for compensation through a member-funded levy under Part 23 of the Superannuation Industry (Supervision) Act 1993, no such member-funded compensation scheme exists for investors in self-managed superannuation schemes;

(3) notes the legal and resource limitations regarding supervision and detection of fraud by government regulators and prosecutors such as the APRA, Australian Securities and Investments Commission and Australian Federal Police in respect of failed offshore financial investment vehicles; and

(4) calls on the:
   (a) self-managed superannuation sector and policy makers to work together to achieve consensus on the establishment of a member-funded compensation scheme for self-managed superannuation scheme investors who have been subject to fraud; and
   (b) Government to work with regulators to enhance fraud detection and prevention in the superannuation system. (Notice given 11 February 2013.)

Time allotted—30 minutes.

Mr S. P. Jones—10 minutes.

Next Member speaking—10 minutes.

Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 10 mins + 2 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Orders of the day - continued

3 FAIR WORK AMENDMENT (TACKLING JOB INSECURITY) BILL 2012 (Mr Bandt):

Second reading (from 26 November 2012):

Time allotted—20 minutes.

Mr Bandt—5 minutes.

Other Members—5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 4 x 5 mins]

The Committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Notices - continued

4 MR HAYES: To move:

That this House:

(1) Notes that:
   (a) there are reports of human rights violations in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam including evidence of continued house detention and imprisonment of notable human rights activists including: the Nobel Peace Prize nominee the Most Ven. Thich Quang Do, Patriarch of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, Rev. Nguyen Van Ly from the Vietnamese Catholic Church, Dr. Cu Huy Ha Vu and Vo Minh Tri known as Viet Khang, a popular young peace songwriter.
   (b) the Government of Vietnam’s treatment of human rights activists, including the recent trial and conviction of 14 human rights activists last January 2013, appears to be inconsistent with Vietnam’s obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights relating to freedom of expression and due process.
Trade Union organisers; Doan Huy Chuong, Do Thi Minh Hanh and Nguyen Hoang Quoc Hung have spent more than two and half years in custody convicted for “national security” charges which emanated from their involvement in organising workers at a shoe factory.

despite the Socialist Republic of Vietnam being a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, human rights activists say that they are often denied a fair trial and prevented from defending themselves or calling upon witnesses for their defence.

on 10 December 2012 a petition was handed to the Federal Government as part of the Million Hearts, One Voice Campaign. The petition is a worldwide campaign which contained more than 15,000 signatures from local Vietnamese communities in Australia, and more than 135,000 signatures worldwide, drawing attention to the ongoing human rights violations in Vietnam.

Calls on the Government to:

(a) Take appropriate steps to convey to the Vietnamese government that Australia expects Vietnam to honour the undertakings it freely entered into when it became a member of the United Nations and a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

(b) Continue Australia’s engagement in bilateral and multilateral contexts with Vietnam on human rights;

(c) Ensure that the matters contained in this motion are brought to the attention of the 2013 Australia Vietnamese Human Rights dialogue.

The committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Mr Husic: To move:

That this House:

(1) notes the tremendous contributions of Australia's Bangladeshi community;

(2) shows concern at reports of human rights violations in Bangladesh, and claims that political activists and journalists are being targeted for persecution, abuse and physical violence; and

(3) encourages the Australian Government to engage with the Bangladeshi Government to progress democratic reform within that country.

The committee determined that consideration of this should continue on a future day.

Orders of the day - continued
REASONS FOR REFERRAL/PRINCIPAL ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION:

There is concern about bandwidth issues arising from the bill, particularly as it might affect community groups.

4. The committee recommends that the following items of private Members' business listed on the notice paper be voted on:

Orders of the Day—
Newstart Allowance (Mr Bandt).

DOCUMENTS

Presentation

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (15:15): Documents are tabled in accordance with the list circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings and I move:

That the House take note of the following document:

Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency Quarterly report of the Chief Executive Officer for the period 1 October to 31 December 2012.

Debate adjourned.

STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Disruption in the Galleries

Use of Twitter

The SPEAKER (15:16): Yesterday I was asked by the member for Lyne if persons in the public gallery who were disruptive during question time had been signed in by a member. I inform the House that bookings for the public galleries for question time yesterday were generally made by individual members of the public. Except for the first three rows in the central gallery, members of the public are able to book seats in the public galleries and do not need to be signed into the building.

I have been advised that the five people who were involved in disruptive behaviour from the galleries had not been signed into the building. I remind members that the first three rows in the public gallery are the ticketed areas. Members are reminded that they and others who sign visitors into the building are responsible for the conduct and behaviour of their visitors.

The disruptive behaviour from the gallery yesterday was totally unacceptable. I remind the House that admission to the gallery is a privilege, and people attending must adhere to certain standards of behaviour. Visitors are required to be silent and to refrain from attempting to address the House, interjecting, applauding or conversing. With the agreement of the President of the Senate I have banned the individuals concerned from the building for the remainder of this sitting fortnight.

Additionally, yesterday, the Manager of Opposition Business, the member for Sturt, asked me to request the member for Bendigo to withdraw a comment he made on Twitter during Question Time. As Speaker, I am responsible for maintaining order in the chamber and interpreting the standing orders. My role is to adjudicate on the proceedings of the House. It is not practical to extend this role to adjudicating on a range of matters incidental to proceedings such as private communications, conversations or use of social media when it is thought that they have come from the chamber.

To prevent tweeting would necessitate a blanket restriction on all electronic and communication devices in the chamber. Although this may appeal to some members, I imagine it would be strongly resisted by others. I do acknowledge that public communications emanating from the chamber are a recent phenomena which could impact on deliberations. This is something the House has only just started to grasp. If the House wishes to come to a more
considered view on this matter, it may wish to use the avenues available to it, such as asking the Procedure Committee to address the question of tweeting or sending other forms of public communication from the chamber.

Members are reminded that any comments made on social media, even if made from the chamber precincts, are not covered by parliamentary privilege. While I cannot reasonably adjudicate on members’ private communications, I remind members they should have regard to the perceptions the wider community will have of any comment that is made by them, including via social media. They should also be conscious of their relationships with other members and seek to have a level of discourse that enables civil relationships to be maintained between members.

Finally, I inform the House that any use of social media by members reflecting on any occupant of the chair that comes to my attention, would be dealt with as any other comment made outside the House that reflects on the chair: as an important matter of order. I thank you for your attention.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Migration

The SPEAKER (15:19): I have received a letter from the honourable member for Cook proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The Government’s failure to protect the integrity of our borders and our immigration program.

I call upon those members who approve of the proposed discussion to rise in their places.

More than the number of members required by the standing orders having risen in their places—

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (15:20): The last time the Australian people had confidence in a government running the immigration program of this country was when John Howard was the Prime Minister. That is the last time that people felt that way and there is a very good reason they felt that way. Under the Howard government the level of permanent migration to Australia doubled, but at the same time the percentage of Australians who had concerns about immigration levels being too high had halved over the term of that government. There were important policies that were responsible for what was an impressive quinella in terms of those results—rising immigration but rising confidence in immigration.

Those policies not only had to do with the Prime Minister of the day and the cabinet that supported him—in particular, the Father of the House, the member for Berowra. He and his successors pursued two important policies that ensured confidence in the integrity of our immigration program. The first one was: they stopped the boats. It is not a slogan; it is a fact; it is a result. It is something that actually happened as a result of policies of the Howard government. The second thing that was done under that government, and initiated by the member for Berowra, was that the government focused on skilled migration. They believed, and they were right, that focusing on skilled migration within the immigration program was the most important way (1) to get an economic dividend out of your immigration program and (2) to ensure the social cohesion that is necessary for a society which is going to be an immigrant society. The focus of the Howard government was on those individuals who come to Australia with skills, with something to offer—people who get a job and who pay taxes. The percentage of the permanent migration program devoted to skilled migration increased from less than
30 per cent under Prime Minister Keating to almost 70 per cent by the time the Howard government left office.

Because of those twin achievements of increasing the level and focus on skilled migration—457 visas were a component part of that strategy—and of stopping the boats and sending a very clear message that a coalition government would ensure that our migration program was focused not only on economic outcomes but on the integrity of our borders, it is not surprising the Australian people had confidence in the government's ability to run our immigration program. That confidence is no longer there. That confidence has been shattered by the performance of successive ministers for immigration—the third is at the table now—over the course of this government.

The performance of the government on border protection is historic. More people have arrived illegally on boats this financial year—and we still have several months to go—than occurred over the entire period of the Howard government. So far this financial year 13,745 people have turned up illegally on boats. Over the entire period of the Howard government—over 11 years—there were 13,584. That is a staggering milestone achieved by this government this financial year.

It is therefore no surprise that, in this financial year, the cost of this government's border failures is going to be $2.5 billion—that is just in the immigration portfolio this year. The cost when we left office was $85 million a year. It is now $2.5 billion. The cumulative blow-outs in the asylum seeker program in the immigration portfolio—just since the last election—are $5 billion and counting. When we reflect on the scale of that failure, it is truly staggering.

What is even more staggering is the front of this government in coming into this place—the Leader of the Opposition questioned the Prime Minister on this just today—and saying that next year the cost will go from $2.5 billion down to $1.3 billion and that in the year after that it will go down to $450 million. At Senate estimates recently, when Senator Cash was pursuing the department over these extraordinary figures, she held up the chart showing the huge drop-off in planned expenditure over the next few years and she asked a simple question: 'Is that what the budget looks like when you stop the boats?' The answer was yes.

So the government has put into their budget—and they have told the Australian people—not that they are going to stop the boats but that they have actually already stopped them! It has already happened, according to this government, and that is what they put in their budget. They will have to come clean when the budget rolls around this year. If they want to pursue these ridiculous estimates—which they have signed off on and put to the Australian people—I am sure, when it comes around to PEFO, they will have egg all over their faces.

On this issue of border protection and immigration—people arriving illegally by boat—this government has shown that they have no answers and that they have absolutely no resolve. At first they denied there was a problem. That was the position taken by Senator Evans. Then they sought to ignore the problem, saying that nothing needed to be done. The latest response is to blame someone else for the problem. Apparently what has been happening over the last five years is the coalition's fault.

The Australian people are not mugs and they understand that the government had an answer in place and that, when they removed it, the number of people in detention—
people who had arrived by boat—went from four at that time to what we have now. The current estimate of those in detention, on community release and in community detention is over 15,000 and that may well rise to 20,000 by the time we get to the election. The Australian people are able to draw their own conclusions. Since the community release model was announced over a year ago, over 20,000 people have turned up.

As we know, the government is now running a water taxi service to our north—48 out of the 50 interceptions and rescues involving AMSA have taken people in the Indonesian search and rescue zone to Australia. But the department and the government have themselves confirmed that the Australian government has no responsibility whatsoever to take them to Australia. So we are running a water taxi and we are running a community program where people are basically getting what they got on a boat to get.

The vast majority—over 90 per cent—of the people arriving by boat have no documentation whatsoever. Yet we know that the Malaysian government takes biometrics and passports on entry and we know the Indonesian government takes a scan of the passport of every single person who comes through that airport, takes biometrics on people who are intercepted in Indonesia—many of whom, we know, later try to enter Australia—and takes biometrics from many countries in the region. Given that, you would have thought that this government would have gone to both of those countries and asked, 'Can we share some information so we can find out who is coming on these boats?' This government was very keen to do a people swap but they cannot even get a data swap on these issues. It is their lack of resolve and lack of thinking through these issues through which has got them into problems on every single occasion.

They were dragged kicking and screaming to reopen Nauru and Manus. The situation on Manus, which I have visited, is very challenging—and I suspect the minister may agree that it is a challenging situation. It is more challenging because of the way the government conceived this and how they are seeking to execute it on the ground. I will give them some credit, though—and it is a shame the former minister just left the chamber—because on one issue they actually got something right. When they decided to send people who were coming on boats back to Sri Lanka, guess what happened? The boats stopped coming from Sri Lanka. They seem surprised at this result. If it had been a coalition government, (a) we would have done it earlier and (b) we would have ensured that people were intercepted outside our sea border. But at least the government finally got some wisdom and decided to send people back. What this proves is that if you send people back, the boats stop coming—and, broadly, the government continually refuses to send back arrivals.

The former minister, Minister Bowen, has left the chamber, but I have to say he is demonstrating his political genius. Whether in respect of illegal boat arrivals or cost blow-outs, the previous minister was certainly the worst performing minister for immigration we had seen. But he is looking like an absolute genius against his successor. So the previous minister has trumped everyone—if you want to make yourself look better, appoint the current minister to follow you.

This bloke is the one who has taken things to a whole new level. Within days of getting into the job, he mounted an unprecedented attack on skilled migrants who have come to this country. I look forward to this minister
going out into the electorate of Minister Burke, who is also at the table, and explaining to them what this government thinks of skilled migrants; what this government thinks of the people who came and built the Snowy Mountains hydro scheme and built Warragamba Dam. What will they think when this minister comes and says, 'Look, we are happy to see people coming in their thousands and going onto welfare, but if they want to come and get a job and pay taxes and contribute to the economy, it is a different story.' Access Economics attributes $2.2 billion over three years to 457 visa holders who arrived in the year 2010-11. This minister is saying this is not something we want—we do not want the benefits of skilled migration to be applied to this country.

Something has happened that I have missed. In 2011 the Prime Minister said 'We've got the settings right with 457 visas' and she then proceeded to hand out over 200,000 of them in subsequent months. Then the previous minister said we had the balance right, just before the current minister came into the chair. I ask the question: what has changed between Minister Bowen and Minister O'Connor? One thing has certainly changed, and that is that the union movement has taken control of the immigration portfolio with the appointment of the latest minister. This is a minister who was there to ensure that the unions continued to cover the Prime Minister's back. That is what Paul Howes said, 'We've got your back, Prime Minister'—and this is the minister who has been installed to make sure he keeps the unions happy. This is his job—it is his responsibility to protect the Prime Minister's back, as he has been doing for years.

I ask the minister whether, when he speaks, he can table the report of the inquiry conducted by his department into the widespread abuses that he alleges. That is all I have been asking him to produce, and so far he has been unable to do so. Yesterday when I asked the minister a question he seemed to be completely oblivious to the fact that the budget for detection onshore—that is, for the people who police our immigration program right across the board—has fallen from $74.2 million, when this government came to office, to now, this year, $52.1 million. They are cutting the budget for police. My colleague who follows me will make reference to cuts in the customs area, which this minister knows about all too well.

As someone who has had firsthand experience of what such cuts mean in our community, I can only say when 220 Glock pistols turn up at the Sylvania Waters post office in my electorate that I wish this government were as concerned about its focus on the borders that have allowed people to arrive illegally on boats and allowed guns to come into my community as it seems to be about peptides in sport. If it were as interested in guns coming into our country and border protection failures, maybe our community would be a much safer place. All we have seen is a government that likes to beat its chest over a big announcement, trash the reputation of Australian sport. Thousands of sports fans all around the country want to support their clubs, but this government is pitting club against club, pitting coach against management, pitting fans against the boards of clubs—that is what we have seen as a result of this government's hairy-chested approach to border protection.

My point is that the government are always big on the announcements but they never stump up on the delivery—whether it is on our borders, or whether it is the immigration program, they are always big on the talk but their record speaks for itself. Let us reflect on the record again—33,656 people have illegally entered on 577 boats
under this government. That is a shameful record. The chaos and the cost and the tragedy that has followed from those decisions, and this government's refusal even to admit that they have got it wrong, let alone fix it, will hang around this government's neck from here to election day, and they will be held to account for their appalling failures.

**Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR** (Gorton—Minister for Immigration and Citizenship) (15:35): The government's immigration program is a very important matter for public debate—

**Mr Burke:** Not important enough for him to stay in the chamber.

**Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR:** It is disappointing that the member for Cook has left, because I think he could have learned something from my contribution. That is up to him. It is an important matter because we need to put things in the context of what is going on globally. We have to accept that there are millions of people displaced around the world—over 40 million, of which approximately 15 million may well be recognised as refugees. There have been conflicts in Sri Lanka, there is war in Afghanistan and just recently we have seen tragic conflicts in Syria. History shows that these things will continue to happen, and from time to time there will be pressures on First World nations and refugee convention signatories to take in their fair share. This country is a generous country but of course we want to ensure the efficacy of our immigration system and the efficacy of our border protection.

But there have been challenges, and indeed we are among many First World countries that have seen those challenges in recent times. Those things will increase and decrease over time, but let us remember that the reason why this occurs, in the main, the reason why there are such challenges for First World nations, is that there are people fleeing persecution and we have obligations under international law to assist them where we can and take our fair share—no more, no less.

The member for Cook raised a number of issues that I would like to respond to. Firstly, he indicated that he has the answers to our border protection challenges, and I would have to refute that. He has, of course, and has had for some time, along with the Leader of the Opposition, a three-word slogan, 'Stop the boats'. Let us contemplate exactly what is meant by that particular phrase. The suggestion by the member for Cook is that we can, for example, turn back the boats to Indonesia. Now, what expert, whether it is a maritime expert, a foreign policy expert or a border protection expert, agrees with that contention? I cannot find one. Indeed, the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers that co-authored the Houston report made clear in that report that the notion that you can turn back vessels on the high seas without the cooperation of another sovereign state was impossible—impossible and inoperable; dangerous to the people on those vessels and to our Customs and naval personnel; and undiplomatic. It would enrage and in fact endanger our relationship with Indonesia—so much so that, when the Leader of the Opposition met with the President of Indonesia, he chose not to raise it.

**Mr Perrett:** He didn't have the ticker.

**Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR:** Such an important plank of their policy, to turn back the boats, and he did not raise it. He did not have the courage or the confidence that he could reach agreement with the President of Indonesia, so he chose not to raise it at all. The reason for that is not that he just did not have the ticker; it is that deep down he knows that what he is suggesting is not true.
The opposition are really working on the big con. They are like snake oil salesmen. They can cure baldness—maybe not the member for Cook! They can cure all sorts of ills. The bigger the con, they hope, the more people will believe it: 'Why would they say it if it's not true?'

The fact is that no experts in this country at all have agreed with the approach of the opposition to turning back the vessels. And I would go further than that. I think that, of the many transit countries, there are two particular transit countries that we really must engage with closely—and this government and my predecessor in particular put enormous effort into doing just that, as does our foreign minister—and they are of course Malaysia and Indonesia. These are the two countries that most people travel through, and Indonesia is quite often the last point of departure for people who come into our waters. It is therefore absolutely vital that we work closely with our neighbours and friends in the region, Indonesia and Malaysia. I can tell you now that, given the efforts by the opposition to traduce the reputation of Malaysia, it would be very difficult for them, in the event they were elected, to properly engage with the government of Malaysia. The fact that they have put up time and again the notion that they are going to turn the vessels back towards Indonesia, as if it is entirely Indonesia's problem, is quite possibly going to enrage the Indonesians, in my view, and ruin our diplomatic relations with that country. Let me just explain to the opposition, particularly to the member for Cook, who obviously has not had experience in these matters, that that approach is going to make it much more difficult for us to have a regional response to a regional challenge.

What we need to do is to continue to put in place the recommendations of the Houston panel. Let us think about those three people. We have Angus Houston, the former Chief of the Defence Force, appointed by the Howard government and this government to the highest office in our Defence Force, and we have two other eminent Australians: Paris Aristotle, who has dealt with refugee settlement and this area of public policy for well over 20 years; and Michael L'Estrange, who has been the Australian High Commissioner to London and the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and has also held other very significant positions. These three people have 75 years of experience between them on geopolitical matters, matters to do with refugee settlement and matters to do with border protection. But I am supposed to ignore them and listen to the member for Cook? Okay, he was Director of Tourism Australia, but I do not think that actually puts him in a position to advise the government on the best approach to deal with national security. I think if I am going to listen to someone about national security, I should listen to the former Chief of the Defence Force. If I want to talk about refugee settlement and the complications of doing that with countries of origin, transit and destination, I should talk to Paris Aristotle, and to others who understand the difficulties in this complex area of public policy. It is easy to throw around slogans, but Australians understand that this area is complicated.

I have heard a lot of things about how many people have come to this country by boat—and, of course, for anyone to come to this country on a dangerous vessel is not a good thing. I do not want to see anybody endangering their lives. We have seen too many people die at sea, and it did not happen under just this government. There was the SIEVX, where over 400 people died in October 2001—a tragic set of circumstances where so many men, women and children...
perished. We have seen tragedy too often recently. I saw the aftermath of the tragedy that occurred on 15 December 2010, where the vessel foundered on the rocks on Christmas Island. I arrived on the day of the tragedy. I was there to comfort and assist those who were there on the island, including the islanders themselves, and the AFP and Customs officials. Later I managed to meet and commend formally those naval and Customs personnel who went out in tenders and RIBs and recovered 40 of the 41 people who survived and the dead bodies of those poor souls who lost their lives.

So I do not need to be reminded of how difficult this area is, but I do not think it is helped by suggesting simple solutions that will not work. It is also not helped by sensationalising matters or seeking to cause hysteria. The facts are that since we were elected two in every 100 people have come by an irregular pathway. Two in every 100 people have arrived here in this manner, and I think that is important to note. The second thing is that the only way we are going deal quite properly with this matter is by working with our friends in the region. The Bali process is meeting in early April. I will be meeting with my counterparts from countries of origin, transit and destination, and we need to continue to work together to do that. Domestically, we need to implement the recommendations of those three eminent people. I am not going to pretend that this matter can be solved overnight. I have never suggested that. The government has never suggested that. We believe that it is complicated and that it will cause problems for governments from time to time. It caused problems for the Howard government; it has caused problems for this government. There is no point in saying that it has not. But I think to pretend that the solutions are simple is a terribly contemptuous way to treat the Australian people. It is to treat them as fools to suggest that this thing can be solved so simply—so I say that. It is unfortunate that the incendiary language of the member for Cook, in particular, is deployed too often to create anxiety and fear and, dare I say it, bigotry, and that is not helpful at all.

I did not want to raise the issue with respect to 457s because I have never conflated the two matters. I have not conflated the two matters on any occasion that I have spoken publicly. The Leader of the Opposition has chosen to do that and now the member for Cook today has chosen to do that. They should not do that, because they are not matters that should be discussed in the same breath. But the matter has been raised in the MPI by the member for Cook, so I just want to say this: with respect to the 457s I will make it very clear that as a migrant I support immigration. It should not be that surprising. As a migrant, I think immigration helped build this country and I think immigration will continue to build this country, and that is a good thing. I support the fact—and this is where I do applaud the efforts of the Howard government, not so much this opposition—that two-thirds or thereabouts of the permanent stream of migration is made up of skilled workers. That is a fantastic thing.

I also support as a good thing genuine 457 applicants who seek to become permanent residents while they are onshore—and, in fact, my predecessor made that easier to
happen. I support that too. I also support legitimate 457 applicants because they are attending to temporary skill shortages in this country. What this government will never support is the pretence that we respond to shortages that do not exist and thereby displace Australian citizens and permanent residents from getting the jobs first. What is wrong with that? There is nothing wrong with that. We should always put Australian workers first when it comes to training and jobs. There is nothing wrong with that. In fact, it is entirely proper. This is not an inclination by this government; it is an obligation of any federal government to make sure that Australian citizens and permanent residents are given the first opportunities of employment.

In relation to the development of this policy, it is, I know, convenient for the member for Cook and the opposition to think that I came into this portfolio and announced something in a knee-jerk manner. That is the way in which they like to suggest it has happened. Let me make it very clear: the department identified 12 months before that there were issues with the 457 visa. They actually wrote an internal document and provided it to the Ministerial Advisory Council on Skilled Migration, of which employers and unions are a part. They also recommended a series of recommendations that my predecessor referred to the council for consideration. They affirmed all of the recommendations. This was all done last year and early this year by my predecessor. On 23 February, I thanked and congratulated Minister Bowen for his good work in this area. I know it is an inconvenient truth that I did not just drum this up, but that is the reality—good work by the department, affirmed by the advisory council, affirmed by my predecessor, and then I announced it because of the portfolio change.

These reforms are needed to make sure that Australian workers do not lose the opportunities of employment. These reforms are needed so that young people in this country get training rather than people saying that we just have to get the skills from overseas. We will never support the abuse of 457s. We will always accept the legitimate use of temporary skilled labour in this country, and we make no apology for it.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (15:50): I want to touch on another aspect today of Labor's border protection failures. We often—and rightly—spend a lot of time talking about their inability to control illegal boat arrivals. Why wouldn't we? Under this government we have had over 33,500 people arrive illegally on 577 boats. We have wasted $6½ billion because of the Labor Party's failed border protection policies. But I would like to spend a little bit of time talking about not just their failure to control people who come to this country but their sustained and savage cuts to our law enforcement capabilities at the Commonwealth level and the way in which this has contributed to the failure at our borders to stop contraband from hitting our streets.

The cuts made to Australia's law enforcement capabilities by the Labor Party since they came to office have been sustained and very real. Every Labor budget has seen cuts to the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service—the agency that has been most savagely affected by Labor's neglect of their law and order responsibilities. This is an agency with just over 5,000 staff. It has been the subject of cuts of 750 staff since the Labor Party came to office, which is over 15 per cent of its workforce. Over 15 per cent of the workforce of the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service has been removed by the Labor Party.
What this means is that, when cargo comes into this country, through our airports or through our seaports, the chances of it being inspected are incredibly slim indeed. Under the Howard government, up to 60 per cent of cargo was inspected when it crossed our threshold. Under this government, less than 10 per cent is inspected when it crosses our threshold. That means criminals have a much better chance of bringing in guns, drugs and contraband. These are the sorts of things that we see on our streets because Labor has failed in its fundamental responsibility to resource Customs and Border Protection properly and to make sure that they stop this sort of contraband from hitting our streets.

The results are plain to see all around the country. The member for Cook made a reference in his contribution to the 220 Glock pistols that were smuggled in through the Sylvania Waters Post Office—220 Glock pistols that have been turning up at crime scenes all over Sydney because of Labor's failures to resource Customs properly. Indeed the Premier of New South Wales put it very succinctly in February this year when he said:

Last year the New South Wales Police certainly embarrassed the federal police with its discovery of the importation through the mail, through a sub-branch of Australia Post, authorised by the federal government, of 220 Glock pistols

... ... ...

And they're only able to come here because we have a federal government that seems to look the other way with the illegal importation of guns into this country.

That is what the Premier of New South Wales said last year. The reason he said that is because Customs have been the subject of sustained and systematic cuts since the Labor Party came to office, both to their personnel and to their budget, in a way that is clearly affecting their ability to do their job, which is to stop these guns and other contraband from hitting our streets.

It was exactly one year ago that this was discovered—and this was uncovered by the New South Wales police and, unfortunately, not by the federal authorities who are tasked with doing this job. The New South Wales Premier commented further on this yesterday. He is commenting on this because he knows that the federal government has made the job of the New South Wales police a lot more difficult because they are not doing the job that they are tasked with. Indeed, what we have had instead is this sort of destruction that we get from the government where we see the Prime Minister, with her very successful swing through Western Sydney, coming up with a plan for an antigang task force. For the past five years, the Labor Party has systematically degraded the federal government's law enforcement capabilities but, suddenly, at five minutes to midnight, they have discovered that the Commonwealth actually have a role to play in keeping our streets safer in Australia.

Unfortunately, the most important thing that the Commonwealth government could do is to actually do the job it has already been allocated properly. You cannot do that job properly when you have cut 20 per cent of the workforce of the Australian Crime Commission, when you have cut 15 per cent of the workforce of the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service, when you have failed to keep your promise to increase the sworn officers of the Australian Federal Police by 500 and when you have systematically attacked the ability of the Commonwealth to properly fulfil its law enforcement responsibilities.

The Premier of New South Wales again put this very succinctly yesterday when he made a contribution in relation to the Glock ...
pistols that have been found in various crime scenes around Sydney. He said yesterday that the federal government should be tackling the importation of illegal weapons before it tinkers with antigang laws.

... the first priority of the federal government ought to be to stop the importation of illegal drugs and weapons across our borders.

The fact that police have seized a handgun and machine gun in today's raids, as well as a Glock pistol yesterday which was linked to an illegal importation from Germany last year, could provide no better evidence of Australia's porous borders.

This is so typical of the way this government go about business. They neglect their responsibilities for five years—they not only neglect them but wilfully attack the capability that the Commonwealth has to police our borders and to enforce law and order—then, at five minutes to midnight when they realise they have a serious political problem on their hands, they decide that they must be seen to be doing something. So on the Prime Minister's swing through Western Sydney last week she came up with the idea of $64 million for an antigang task force—an idea that actually mirrors something that we promised at the last election. But this time it of course comes with no real resources and it comes through at a time when the Labor government have already attacked the agencies that they have tasked with taking part in this antigang task force so significantly since they have come to office.

I want to just go through the cuts that have been made by the Labor Party since they have come to office. We know that, in 2007 when the government changed, the Labor Party came with an agenda to reduce the funding that law enforcement gets on a national basis. They had the view, and their shadow minister at the time was telling stakeholders, that the Howard government had overfunded Commonwealth law enforcement agencies and that when the government changed they were going to rectify this. This is one promise they have actually kept, because they have systematically attacked and degraded all of the Commonwealth's law enforcement capability. In Customs they have cut $58 million from the budget that Customs has to inspect cargo when it crosses our borders.

Mr Burke: Are you going to reverse it?

Mr KEENAN: And the minister just asked, rather foolishly, whether we are going to reverse it. The answer is yes. That is our policy. We will reverse that $58 million cut that was made by the Labor Party that means that so little cargo is inspected when it comes through our airports and our ports. So, yes, we will reverse that cut—thank you, Minister, for asking.

But of course that is only one of the very savage cuts that have been made by the Labor Party. An agency that had almost 5,800 officers now has just over 5,000. You cannot seriously tell the Australian people that reducing the workforce by 15 per cent is somehow going to enhance the ability of that agency to do its job.

Mr Perrett: That's your policy for the Public Service!

Mr KEENAN: As I have just said, we will reverse that cut. In every budget the Labor Party has reduced the resources that are available to Customs and Border Protection. The former CEO of Customs was forced to reduce the levels of the SES in Australian Customs and Border Protection by 20 per cent. Astonishingly, they have actually cut almost $21 million out of the capability of Border Protection Command to conduct aerial surveillance: the planes that pick up the illegal boat arrivals that have been a direct result of this government's failed border protection policies and which
do other things to police our borders. They have also cut over $34 million out of the budget for passenger facilitation at Australia's eight major international airports. This is on top of cuts of $17.3 million over five years for the management of vessels of illegal foreign fishers and, in the latest MYEFO, it was estimated that $35 million has been cut from Customs in the forward estimates. And that is not the extent of the cuts—I could go on. The cuts to other agencies have mirrored these savage cuts to Customs and Border Protection. The truth is that the Commonwealth has failed the Australian people dismally. It has failed to fulfil its responsibilities to enforce law and order in this country. It has completely failed to meet its responsibility to protect Australia's borders. It cannot control our immigration system, and it cannot control our ports and seaports and stop contraband like drugs and guns from coming onto our streets. We will make sure that these front line agencies are properly resourced and make sure that border protection again has the priority it deserves— (Time expired)

Ms BIRD (Cunningham—Parliamentary Secretary for Higher Education and Skills) (16:00): It is a great pleasure to speak on this today. I have to say it is probably slightly misnamed as a matter of public importance; I think it would probably be more accurately described as a matter of public fearmongering. It regularly appears whenever the opposition are obviously struggling and casting around for something to talk on in this place—'We will just get the old fearmongering-on-border-protection out, pop it on the stove, give it another boil-up and see how well we can do.' But we have discovered an addition to the black hole of the financials on that side of the House with the acknowledgement of the shadow minister that this will be another amount that they are adding to the cost. I am just wondering if the shadow Treasurer is waiting outside that door to have a little chat with him about making that commitment. It was an interesting disclosure, that that is another cost to be added to that black hole.

This is a serious matter. I spoke most recently on this at the time of the very extended sitting we had in this House, and there was a great deal of distress then—which I thought was felt quite honestly across the chamber—about the terrible situation we were facing of boats attempting to make that very dangerous journey across the seas to Australia and having difficulties, and indeed on too many occasions actually sinking and taking enormous numbers of lives. That was the last time I spoke on this matter in this chamber. I spoke then to support the decisions that were taken arising out of the excellent work that was done by the Houston committee. It was a task that the government put to that committee because of the difficulties that we had faced with this very real problem of very desperate people taking what was clearly a very unsafe, unwise decision to get on boats and try to come across the sea. At that time, in August last year, we had the expert panel come together, and the panel made 22 key recommendations to government. And rather than take an approach that said, 'Look, we are going to ignore evidence; we are going to be pedantic in terms of having a political position,' we said, 'No, they are three experts with'—as the minister said in his contribution—'75 years of combined effort and expertise in this very troubled and difficult area.' We decided to take their advice and implement the full range of recommendations—because it was a package: each of the individual recommendations was built on the basis that it complemented and worked with each of the others. It was a comprehensive package that required all of those recommendations to
be put in place, and we took a decision to go down that path.

Those recommendations, as people will well remember, included a return to offshore processing in Nauru and Manus Island, and increasing the Humanitarian Program to 20,000 places. So the message was not only 'Don't get on the boat because you will get no advantage from doing so,' but also, as encouragement not to do so, that we would increase the number of people that Australia would take under our Humanitarian Program. I think that the no-disadvantage policy was specifically aimed at stopping that tragic loss of life at sea, and that is why so many people who may have in the past held the position that they would not support things like offshore processing on Nauru and Manus took a decision in that context to support it and to say, 'This needs to be given complete support and an opportunity to work'—to see if we could address in particular this difficult issue of people taking dangerous boats and losing their lives at sea. The message was sent twice. The message was: this is not the way to go. And many of us struggled quite intensely—and I know that was not just on this side; I know that was on both sides of the House—with that full suite of recommendations coming out of the Houston report, but we understood that action had to be taken. And so we have put in place that particular range of initiatives.

We are committed to implementing the expert panel's recommendations. But unfortunately—and contrary to all the claims that were made up to that point—the opposition leader continued to be negative about those recommendations and about implementing those initiatives. It was that negativity and that opposition to those initiatives which stopped that vote going through and which stopped the opposition from supporting the policy as it was developed by the expert panel. It is a sad reality of this debate that we continue to have it treated as a political football rather than, as it should be, a humanitarian challenge to this nation. And that is not a tradition that has a long history in this place; in fact, quite the contrary. It is a policy area in which the best achievements, the most humanitarian achievements, have been those that happened when this place worked in a bipartisan manner in the interests of individuals in desperate circumstances, in the interests of our international obligations and in the interests of finding solutions that would stop people risking their lives. It is not a long-established tradition of this place to see the divisive sorts of debates that we have seen in recent years in this policy area.

In talking about this debate, I just want to address an important part of that range of initiatives. I notice the framing of the matter of public importance is once again around losing control, the negative side of the debate, the attempt to create fear and uncertainty, and the attempt to create contention and disagreement. Underlying that raft of recommendations there was a very important initiative, and I very much welcomed it. That was the part that increased our humanitarian intake to 20,000 people. I would remind the House that in June last year the Leader of the Opposition said: … what we have offered to crossbench members is an increase in Australia's refugee and humanitarian intake from the current level to 20,000 a year within three years…

The next day the member for Cook stood beside the Leader of the Opposition at a media conference. He said: All I can say is the Greens are on record for supporting an increase of the refugee and humanitarian intake to 20,000. The Coalition offered to support that today and a range of other measures as we did yesterday and when that was put to the party room I understand in the Greens,
the answer that came back from the Greens to us was no. He was disappointed and frustrated by that, clearly—no less than we were by his reaction to our implementation of this recommendation. After we accepted the recommendations of the expert panel and lifted the humanitarian intake to 20,000, the member for Cook changed his mind—and the coalition's policy—and decided to oppose the increase.

In November last year the member for Cook told Sky News: 'No, we have made no comment on increasing the intake.' It was clearly a matter of frustration for the member for Cook that the Greens would shift their position on this issue. I would say to him: have a close look at your own shifting-in-the-wind position on this issue and understand this is a policy area that we should be treating with far more respect than that sort of political positioning. It is no different from the MPI on immigration before us today.

The member for Cook went to the issue of the 457 visas. I want to make clear that I stand here as a member of a government very proudly supportive of the skilled migration program and very determined to see its integrity maintained. That is what the issue is about—addressing the use and misuse of 457 visas. It is a clear case that goodwill of the community, broadly, in supporting all streams of migration, revolves around the integrity of the system. There is no difference when it comes to 457 skilled visas. They are there to address genuine short-term skill shortages. No-one would object to that. It is beyond me how anybody who is putting a motion such as the MPI before us today could have any issue with a system, and an increase in the integrity of a system, as that proposed by the government for 457 visas.

Mrs GRIGGS (Solomon) (16:10): I rise to speak on this very important matter of public importance: the government's failure to protect the integrity of our borders and our immigration program. It disappoints me to once again have to speak about the Gillard Labor government's absolute failure to protect our nation by efficiently protecting our borders and our immigration program. It is very clear—the Gillard Labor government has lost control of our borders and the people smugglers have welcomed this development with open arms.

The Gillard Labor government has declared open season on our borders, and people smugglers are jumping for joy. They are delighted because they still have a product to sell. Australians know it was the Gillard Labor government that so viciously destroyed the border protection procedures introduced by the Howard government. It is for this reason that the people smugglers' favourite party to lead Australia is—you guessed it—the Labor Party.

Unfortunately it did not surprise me, but it was very concerning to hear reports come out just a couple of hours after Prime Minister Gillard announced the federal election date that people smugglers were racing to fill their boats before 14 September. Why would that be? The people smugglers know now that the welcome mat will be laid out until then.

News of the election date and possible change of government spread quickly. We have all heard reports of people smugglers scrambling to fill their boats as fast as they can before the election—because after the election there may not be the certainty that this current government provides of arriving in Australia. The people smugglers know that the coalition will stop the boats. They know that the coalition will not have the same $5 billion in failed border policies that
this current Gillard Labor government has. People smugglers are shaking in their boots at the idea of a coalition government, whilst the people of Australia cannot wait for a government that will take the vulnerability of Australia's borders seriously and stop the boats. We are seeing evidence that Labor's border protection policy failures continue, day after day. Their $5 billion blow-out on border protection continues every day.

Their $5 billion failure means lost opportunities for infrastructure funding in my electorate. The people of Solomon are aware of this government's border protection failures and, quite frankly, they are sick of Labor's waste and mismanagement, and ridiculous policies that do not work. They are tired of this Gillard Labor government wasting money, when Darwin and Palmerston—like so many other jurisdictions across the country—are in desperate need of funding for improvements in health, education, community safety and housing.

After almost six years at their disposal, the Gillard Labor government has not and will not stop the boats. Let us look at its record on border protection. We on this side of the House know—and the Australian people know—that this Gillard Labor government still has no answers on how to stop the boats. It is no surprise that six boats have arrived over the past eight days, carrying over 800 people. We now have more than 11,000 people who have arrived illegally by boat since the Gillard Labor government agreed to reopen offshore processing on Nauru. Since the last federal election over 400 boats and 25,000 people have arrived illegally on our shores. Thanks to the Gillard Labor government, people smugglers now have a product to sell.

Labor has created a job for people smugglers and the people smugglers thank their lucky stars. Labor has pointed out this gap in the market for people smugglers to prey on the vulnerability of our island neighbours who are not as fortunate as us to have been born in this fabulous nation. I can only imagine what I could do in Solomon with $5 billion. It would fund a desperately needed hospital for the people of Palmerston. It would provide more police to improve community safety. It would provide a new school for our ever-increasing population. It could contribute significantly to affordable housing for Territorians who are being forced into homelessness every day due to the rising cost of housing. No wonder the people in my electorate are fed up with the Gillard Labor government and its failed border protection policies—policies which give the people smugglers a product to sell.

People in my electorate know very well that every dollar spent on combating people smuggling is a dollar not spent in our community. In my electorate people often tell me that their No. 1 issue with the Labor government is their massive failure in border protection. Recently, in a questionnaire in my community, I asked people what they thought was the biggest challenge facing Australia. Some of the responses included 'the steady stream of illegal immigrants', 'illegal immigration', 'boat people', 'people smugglers', 'illegal immigrants', 'the influx of illegal immigrants and the drain of Australia's resources to provide for these immigrants', 'the cost of illegal immigration' and 'the free health and dental services provided to illegal immigrants when I can't afford to take my family to the dentist'. Those were just a few of the comments given to me.

Labor's track record speaks for itself. We have had more people arrive illegally by boat this financial year than turned up during the entire period of the Howard government. As many of my colleagues have stated, this government is more interested in distracting
attention from these issues than in dealing with them, raising all sorts of matters without addressing the core problem—that is, their failed border protection.

The lack of common sense and practical approach this government has in releasing hundreds of asylum seekers into our communities is quite alarming. A common-sense approach must be taken when considering the safety of our community and of course the safety of asylum seekers themselves. Releasing people into the community without the proper support required, such as secure accommodation and a sturdy support network, is absolutely ridiculous and outrageous. We have seen the results of this policy in the past few weeks, with asylum seekers sleeping on couches in university dormitories, in garages and in overcrowded boarding houses. Is this the best we can do? Absolutely not.

The coalition has a plan, an alternative to mitigate the disastrous impact the Gillard Labor government has had on border protection. We have stopped the boats before and we will do it again. The coalition will restore what the Labor Party abandoned—a strong border protection regime developed by the coalition as a priority to protect our nation's borders. The coalition will reintroduce offshore processing of illegal boat arrivals as part of a series of measures to stop the boats and to protect our borders. We will prevent this problem by minimising the numbers coming from both initial countries of origin and first asylum countries.

The coalition will disrupt the business of people smuggling and intercept boats where it is safe to do so. We will make it a priority to identify and assist those in genuine need of refugee protection. We have done it before and we will do it again. After 2001, the Howard government successfully reduced the flood of illegal boats to a mere trickle. Between 2002 and 2007 just 10 illegal entry boats arrived with fewer than 250 passengers. Compare this with over 400 boats and 25,000 people arriving illegally since the last federal election.

It is fair to say that Labor's management of this issue has been a disaster. The boats must be stopped. There is no argument that people smuggling is a good result for anyone. It is unsafe for asylum seekers and every year people die from taking this risk. Stopping the boats is a priority in my electorate. Given the opportunity, the coalition will make it a priority to fix the disastrous legacy of the Gillard-led Labor government. We will stop the boats. If we are fortunate enough to be elected to government come 14 September, we will stop the boats.

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa)
(16:20): The shadow minister for immigration made great moment of the fact that the Howard government introduced record numbers of migrants to this country, yet at the same time polls showed that people supported that. Clearly that research from the Scanlon Foundation is interconnected with people's degree of confidence in the economy and other factors. However, one factor the Howard government did not have to deal with was an opposition spokesperson who has attempted to demonise, to marginalise and to put to the Australian people, 'Perhaps you should be worried and terrified about the people coming in the boats.' There was not an opposition pushing that line at any stage. That might be why there was significant support for migration, even at a time when boat arrivals went up for a period after the election of the Howard government. They did not have to deal with an opposition spokesperson, a man who usually ignores and derides the refugee convention, who, when an eight-year-old
child was being offered transport to his parents' funeral, said:

Well there's nothing in the refugee convention which covers this situation and places an obligation on us and I think people would be rightly, from what they've heard, angry about this. He thought it was a waste of government money for Australia to finance transport for an eight-year-old child to attend his parents' funeral when those parents had perished on a boat coming to this country. The same opposition spokesperson in the last week, because of one rape case by an asylum claimant, said that there should be protocols on their release. We all know that anyone released is supposed to subscribe to certain standards, but he said that residents should be advised if a refugee asylum claimant was put in their suburb, implying again that perhaps all of these people are rapists and murderers. It ignores the statistical reality, the criminology facts of this country, that the level of convictions of released asylum seekers is far lower than that of the general Australian population. What this opposition is essentially pushing is an implication that these people are in some ways people you should be terrified of and that their claims are illegitimate.

The other part of the opposition's position is that, in some manner, these people are economic migrants and they are not suffering any fear of persecution. If that was the case, we would see these boats filled with Bangladeshis, Indonesians, Nepalese and Yemenis. They are all countries where people live in very poor circumstances. In many of these countries, people could just as easily get on the boats. In fact, that applies to Indonesians far more than the others. But the people on the boats are not coming from these countries, and the opposition knows that. They are coming from Afghanistan. As we know, in recent weeks there has been a series of bombings in Qatar and Pakistan of the Hazara minority and other Shiites. There have been constant bombings in Pakistan of the Hazaras and murders in the streets of the cities.

We know that some of the other claimants are coming from the Middle East. Clearly, many Iraqis—Mandeans, Christians and, on various occasions, Shia and Sunni—came because of the struggles in that country as the power balance shifted regionally and nationally. We know that some of the people on the boats are coming from Sri Lanka. There has been an upsurge in the numbers from Sri Lanka. This has nothing to do with who is in government. It has nothing to do with politics in this country. It has got everything to do with the Sri Lankan civil war. The established world believes that a significant number of Tamil Tigers were murdered in the aftermath of that war.

There is a clear correlation between who is coming on the boats, where they have arrived from and the situation in their homeland. The opposition's attempt to say, basically, that this is interconnected with government policy in Australia, that it is somehow all about queue jumping and that it is all about people who are coming here for financial reasons is ridiculous. We know that there are reasons that people would seek to come to this country. In the period of this government, the economy has increased by 13 per cent. Our GDP, of 3.1 per cent, is four times better than the average GDP of the rest of the developed world. We know that our key interest rate is three per cent and that our unemployment is only 5.4 per cent. There are reasons that people would seek to come to this country—for advancement, for financial reasons. No doubt the way the economy is being managed is a strong incentive for people to try and come here by boat, for financial reasons. But, as I say, there is a clear correlation between where they are
coming from and what is happening in those countries.

We have from the opposition platitudes and slogans—they are basically going to tow the boats back. When their leader went to Indonesia and had meetings with the Indonesian president, he talked about how good the lumpia was, he liked the nasi goreng that they had for dinner and he liked the ayam chicken. He discussed all of those things with the Indonesian president—how good the banquets were and how nice the rooms were in Indonesia. But he never once talked about this policy of towing the boats back. He did not have the guts to put it to the Indonesians. What is going to be the reaction of the Indonesians—a country we have to deal with, a country we depend on in regards to illegal boats and a country whose cooperation we need—if they basically have to receive all of these boats back? I think we all know what their reaction is going to be.

There is going to be another gathering in relation to the Bali Process in April. That is where these things are solved by cooperation in our region. The other party that is crucial to our country and how we deal with immigration is Malaysia. What happened in regards to Malaysia? The opposition says, 'Let's send some people back to Iran because it's not a bad country.' In Iran they execute 13-year-old kids and they suppress any people who do not share their religious beliefs—that is not a bad country for the shadow minister to support people being sent back to! But Malaysia is so dreadful! This Labor government—they are so sadistic!—are going to send to people to Malaysia, a country which is currently having democratic elections and a country which has many institutions similar to our own.

The opposition got together with the Greens for 12 months, after the High Court rejected the government's position. When we saw a solution through the Malaysian concept, they lined up with the Greens to block it. This government has come down with a series of recommendations that do not come from the Prime Minister and do not come from the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship; they come from a panel including Angus Houston, the former Chief of the Defence Force, who is a person of some credibility, and Paris Aristotle, who is well known in this policy area. They came up with the recommendation that we return offshore process to Nauru and Manus Island and that we have a no-advantage policy—that people who come here by boat do not get any advantage over the people in refugee camps overseas. Basically, that is what this government is pursuing.

I now want to turn to 457 visas. This government is not going to apologise for trying to do something about the huge numbers of contrived entrances to this country and the employers trying to undermine Australian conditions. We had a defence from them other there: one of their speakers said that the government does not want the benefits of skilled migrants. They referred to the Snowy River scheme. Let's get real: the conditions under which people entered this country as skilled migrants for the Snowy River scheme and similar proposals were a lot different to what is being suggested here today. People had to work for a significant number of years under clear controls. We had a situation in this country where the unions were more powerful. There was more labour regulation and more industrial relations regulation. It was extremely difficult to undermine Australian workers' conditions through skilled migrants.

What we have now is a sham system. The opposition are basically, on behalf of the big end of the town and the large corporations, opposed to any restrictions whatsoever in
regards to the entry of temporary migration in this country. The shadow minister, who is so hard on everything else about immigration and so down on any other migration stream, ran out there in August and said: 'With our current levels of temporary labour migration under the 457 program, there is room for expansion.' There were record numbers last year, and he said we should be bringing more temporary skilled migrants into this country.

I want to make one final point. The opposition are trying to say that this government is racist because it is clamping down on employer abuse of our industrial relations system and 457 visas. The jobs being protected are actually the jobs of many migrants in this country.

Many of the people who are being undermined, are people who, themselves, migrated. I had a Bangladeshi Muslim resident in my electorate ring me up last week and say, 'Laurie, what's wrong with the government of this country saying that it wants to protect Australian jobs first? Why doesn't the government get more hardline about this?' That is the sentiment of the Australian people. They have had a gutful of the way the system has been abused. There has been an investigation over the last year. This announcement is overdue, and the opposition should get out of the way and stop defending the big end of town and the large corporations, who are undermining Australian conditions through temporary skilled migration.

Mr O'DOWD (Flynn) (16:30): I am pleased to speak on this matter of public importance and to denigrate the government for its failure to protect the integrity of our borders and immigration programs. At the core of this debate is the reality that the Rudd government changed a good, workable, functional and effective border protection policy purely for political reasons. There was no reason for Mr Rudd to change a system that had worked very well over a number of years. I will prove that with the figures I will talk about later on.

Since Mr Rudd made those changes, the Labor government has leapt from policy failure to policy failure, and has still failed to secure Australian borders. These failures have cost, and are continuing to cost, the country billions of dollars, to the detriment of other, good programs that could have been introduced or not cut back. How can this government claim any credibility on immigration and border protection after so many broken promises?

The stream of incoming boats is not getting any better. In fact, compared to the same time last year, we have had 1,700 more arrivals. Last year we had 17,000 people come to our shores illegally. Who knows what this figure will be, come the end of June? The total number of arrivals since November 2007 is a staggering 33,656. The total number of boats since November 2007 is 577.

The mind boggles in relation to what happens to these boats that come to our shores and to Christmas Island. They were, at one stage, being burnt off Darwin and Christmas Island. Now we believe they are being sunk. It would be pretty rocky shores of Christmas Island, if you go water-skiing around that area, with all these sunken boats! So I beg to ask that question, and if I am wrong about the boats being sunk I would like to know what is happening to those boats. And I would like to know what is happening to the crews, and what penalties they have faced.

The total number of arrivals since polling day, 21 August 2010, amounts to 424 boats and 26,307 people. The total number of arrivals since the Gillard government—24 June 2010—is 438 boats and 27,104 people.
The total number of arrivals since the Malaysia announcement, on 7 May 2011, is 354 boats and 21,876 people, excluding crews. The total number of arrivals since the signing of the Malaysia deal on 25 July 2011 is 343 boats and 21,564 people. The total number of arrivals since 31 August 2011, the date of the Malaysia High Court decision, is 338 boats and 21,468 people.

Those figures prove that nothing the Labor government has introduced is working. The total number of arrivals since 13 October 2011 is 333 boats and 21,064 people. The list goes on. The total number of arrivals since 25 November 2011, when the announcement was made about the bridging visas, was 319 boats and 20,107 people. That is a lot of people.

These numbers prove that none of the government's attempted measures to bring Australia's borders under control have worked. More people have arrived on illegal boats this financial year than arrived over the entire 11 years of the Howard government.

Mr Christensen: Shame!

Mr O'DOWD: It is a shame. That means 13,745 people arrived this financial year versus 13,584 under the 11½ years of the Howard government. This Labor government's border protection failure has now cost Australians over $5 billion—and $2½ billion in the last 12 months.

There are currently around 14 million refugees waiting in camps all over the world. We know we have an obligation to the world or to the United Nations to take our fair share of these refugees. However, we also have an immigration policy where you come through the front door. People in my electorate are asking me, 'Why can't they come through the front door? Why can't they be like anyone else and when they come to Australia get a job and work—not be banned from working—and become part of Australian life? Why should they receive more benefits than our pensioners, who have worked all their lives and are now on a very meagre pension? Why are the boat people better off than our pensioners?'

In 2010 the number of legal offshore places was reduced by 2,000 people. What we did to make up for those extra 2,000 people who wanted to come but were not allowed to come because there were too many boat people was to have those 2,000 places taken up by families of the people who illegally came here. So that is not a very fair system, either.

We have spent this money, and what have we gained as a nation? We have helped some people but we could have helped them if they had come through the front door. I cannot emphasise that enough. We have clearly lost control of our borders.

Labor has walked away from a budget surplus. As we all know, they promised 650 times that there was going to be a surplus budget. But the day they walked away from their budget they walked away from border control also, because it was costing the budget well over what was estimated, and it helped throw the figures out. As we go on, future budgets have a decrease in what illegal immigration is going to cost us. It comes down from $2½ billion a year to $400 million in two years time. What whiz kid came up with those figures? How did he get to those figures?

Mr Christensen: Made a wish!

Mr O'DOWD: It probably was a wish. Has anyone ever thought of our Australian Defence Force, our Australian Navy, in Darwin, who have to sail to these places when they get the SOS: 'Please come and accept another boat. We want a welcoming party here at Christmas Island because we've got five boats coming in tomorrow'?
Mr Christensen: 'Sorry; we're out of money!'

Mr O'DOWD: 'Sorry; we've just cut the ADF budget by $5.5 billion.' And yet they are expected to do all this extra work, steaming out from Darwin to Christmas Island. I have spoken to some of the Navy guys in Darwin, and, when they get to the boats, these people are very demanding and actually have been known to spit on Australian Naval personnel.

Mr Christensen: Disgraceful!

Mr O'DOWD: That is a disgrace and those people should not be allowed in Australia under any circumstances. To spit on Australian Navy personnel is a disgrace.

This has created a new business. It is called people smuggling. The people smugglers are laughing all the way to the bank. They get a slap over the wrist when they get here and are sent home not too long afterwards. If you want to encourage that, keep going the way you are going, because the people smugglers are smiling and laughing.

The refugees have money in their pockets before they meet the smugglers. They have passports and documents before they meet the smugglers. But, strangely enough, after the smugglers take them under their wings, they have no money and no passports. Isn't that amazing?

I am all for stopping the boats. I am all for turning them around where it is possible to do so safely. I think that we, in government, could do a much, much better job and stop the boats.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georganas): Order! The discussion is now concluded.

BILLS
Maritime Powers Bill 2012
Maritime Powers (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2012
Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 1) 2012

Returned from Senate
Message received from the Senate returning the bills without amendment or request.

Export Finance and Insurance Corporation Amendment (Finance) Bill 2013

Report from Federation Chamber
Bill returned from Federation Chamber without amendment; certified copy of bill presented.

Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.

Bill agreed to.

Third Reading
Mrs D'ATH (Petrie—Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (16:41): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

BUSINESS
Rearrangement
Mrs D'ATH (Petrie—Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency) (16:41): I move:

That order of the day No. 3, government business, be postponed until a later hour this day.

Question agreed to.
Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Improving Electoral Administration) Bill 2012

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:
That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr GRAY (Brand—Special Minister of State and Minister for the Public Service and Integrity) (16:42): I am pleased to sum up debate on the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Improving Electoral Administration) Bill 2012, which amends the Commonwealth Electoral Act and the Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act to substantially improve interactions that Australians have with elections and referendums. The bill implements the government's response to several of the recommendations made by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, JSCEM, in its report on the 2010 federal election, specifically recommendations 3, 9, 10, 11, 15, 23, 29, 30 and 37, and makes some small technical amendments.

This bill continues the majority view of this parliament that the Commonwealth electoral roll should best represent those Australians who are eligible to vote. In a 2010 Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters report, the committee made three recommendations related to the maintaining of the electoral roll. This bill includes the last of those three measures, a recommendation to allow the Australian Taxation Office to provide enrolment-relevant personal information to the Australian Electoral Commission, the AEC. It is achieved by a small amendment to the Taxation Administration Act 1953, which appears in schedule 1 of this bill. Although it is a small amendment on the face of it, it is another important step in assisting the AEC to deliver the most inclusive electoral roll. The government is proud to be able to deliver this change. The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters report makes it clear that there were an estimated 15.7 million Australians eligible to be enrolled but only 14.2 million on the roll. Consequently, the majority of the committee agreed with the recommendation that the AEC should have access to information from credible government sources such as the ATO to update and maintain the electoral roll.

There are also other small administrative amendments made in the bill. These amendments deal with when prepoll voting can commence, when postal voting applications can be received and removing the requirement that a person who is seeking to use prepoll voting for an ordinary vote should complete a certificate before they do so. One of the methods of voting is prepoll. There are currently two times set out in the Electoral Act when applications for prepoll votes can be made. These amendments clarify and establish one time at which prepoll voting will be available—that is, the fourth day after nominations are declared.

For a minimum election timetable, nominations are declared on a Friday, making the fourth day afterwards the succeeding Tuesday. Depending on the type of election—whether it is for the House of Representatives or the Senate or both—the act provides different days for the commencement of prepoll voting and varying minimal times are provided for the AEC to print and distribute ballot materials to early voting centres across Australia in time for polling to commence. This is a sensible, small amendment which provides a consistent time frame for when prepoll voting can commence. There is also currently a requirement that a voter complete a written declaration in order to vote by prepoll as an ordinary voter. This
requirement is not consistent with other forms of ordinary voting, which only require a verbal declaration. It does not serve a useful purpose and will be omitted by this bill.

One of the matters considered by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters concerned incidents that had occurred in connection with the 2010 election, where some ballot boxes were opened before they were lawfully authorised to be opened. Since that incident extra training and support materials have been applied and it is less likely to happen again. Although this may be an excess of caution, the bill contains provisions which expressly clarify the action to be taken with respect to ballots that are contained in prematurely opened boxes. These provisions will be the subject of government amendments.

For the 2010 election the Electoral Commission processed over one million postal vote applications, which was a 17.8 per cent increase in the number processed at the 2007 election. Under the existing provisions, postal votes applications can be received up to 6pm on the Thursday—that is, two days—before polling day. Voters are required to cast their vote before the close of polling on Saturday. The limited time between the closing time for applications and election day make it highly unlikely that applicants will receive their postal ballots in time to cast their vote before the polls close. This amendment brings the cut-off forward by one day to 6pm on the Wednesday, three days before polling day. This change is to improve the chance the AEC can deliver postal voting papers to an elector before the close of the poll. Of course, there are equivalent amendments made to the Referendum Machinery Provisions Act 1984. All the measures of the bill are designed to assist in ensuring that we continue to have a robust and up-to-date electoral system and administration. The recommendations made by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters in the majority report are both sensible and politically neutral. The government is committed to ensuring their implementation. I commend the bill to the House.

The SPEAKER: The question is that this bill be now read a second time.

The House divided [16:51]

The Speaker—Ms Anna Burke

Ayes ...................... 71
Noes ...................... 67
Majority.............. 4

AYES

Adams, DGH
Bandt, AP
Bowen, CE
Brodtmann, G
Butler, MC
Champion, ND
Clare, JD
Combet, GI
Danby, M
Dreyfus, MA
Ellis, KM
Ferguson, LDT
Garrett, PR
Gibbons, SW
Gray, G
Griffin, AP
Husic, EN (teller)
Jones, SP
Kelly, MJ
Livermore, KF
Macklin, JL
McClelland, RB
Mitchell, RG
Neumann, SK
O’Connor, BPJ
Owens, J
Perrett, GD
Ripoll, BF
Rowland, MA
Rudd, KM
Sidebottom, PS
Smith, SF
Swan, WM
Thomson, KJ

Albanese, AN
Bird, SL
Bradbury, DJ
Burke, AS
Byrne, AM
Cheeseman, DL
Collins, JM
Cren, SF
D’Ath, YM
Elliot, MJ
Emerson, CA
Ferguson, MJ
Georganas, S
Gillard, JE
Grierson, SJ
Hall, JG
Jenkins, HA
Katter, RC
Leigh, AK
Lyons, GR
Marles, RD
Melham, D
Murphy, JP
Oakeshott, RJM
O’Neill, DM
Parke, M
Plibersek, TJ
Rishworth, AL
Roxon, NL
Saffin, JA (teller)
Slipper, PN
Snowdon, WE
Symon, MS
Vamvakou, M
AYES
Wilkie, AD
Zappia, A

NOES
Abbott, AJ
Andrews, KL
Billson, BF
Bishop, BK
Bishop, JI
Briggs, JE
Broadbent, RE
Christensen, GR
Cobb, JK
Coulton, M (teller)
Crook, AJ
Dutton, PC
Entsch, WG
Fletcher, PW
Gambaro, T
Gash, J
Haase, BW
Hawke, AG
Hunt, GA
Jensen, DG
Keenan, M
Laming, A
Macfarlane, IE
Markus, LE
McCormack, MF
Morrison, SJ
Neville, PC
O’Dwyer, KM
Pyne, CM
Robb, AJ
Roy, WB
Scott, BC
Simpkins, LXL
Somlyay, AM
Stone, SN
Truss, WE
Turnbull, MB
Vasta, RX
Wyatt, KG

Mr GRAY (Brand—Special Minister of State and Minister for the Public Service and Integrity) (16:58): I present a supplementary explanatory memorandum to the bill and seek leave of the House to move government amendments (1) to (14), as circulated, together.

Leave granted.

Mr GRAY: I move government amendments (1) to (14):
(1) Clause 2, page 2 (table item 2), omit "25", substitute "24".
(2) Clause 2, page 2 (table item 5), omit "items 49 and 50", substitute "item 50".
(3) Schedule 1, item 24, page 6 (line 15), after "officer", insert "the reporting officer".
(4) Schedule 1, item 24, page 6 (lines 23 to 27), omit subsections 238B(3) and (4), substitute:

Report
(3) The reporting officer must prepare a report about the circumstances in which the ballot-box was opened before the close of the poll other than in accordance with this Act (including details of any witnesses).

Material to be given to DRO
(4) The reporting officer must give the report, parcel, ballot-box and any other thing the reporting officer considers appropriate to the DRO for the Division as soon as practicable.

Role of DRO
(5) The DRO for the Division must examine the report, parcel, ballot-box and any other thing given to the DRO under subsection (4) and then give them to the Australian Electoral Officer (the AEO) for the State or Territory concerned.

Role of AEO
(6) The AEO must:
(a) open the parcel and examine the ballot papers not enclosed in envelopes, the envelopes, the report, the ballot-box and any other thing given to the AEO under subsection (5); and
(b) for each ballot paper not enclosed in an envelope—decide whether the ballot paper is to be included in the scrutiny under Part XVIII (see subsections (7) and (8)); and
(c) for each envelope—decide whether the envelope is to be included in the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 3 (see subsections (9) and (10)).

(7) The AEO must decide that a ballot paper is to be included in the scrutiny under Part XVIII unless the AEO is satisfied that the ballot paper has been fraudulently altered or otherwise interfered with so as not to reflect the voter’s intention.

(8) If the AEO decides that a ballot paper is not to be included in the scrutiny under Part XVIII, the ballot paper is to be excluded from that scrutiny.

(9) The AEO must decide that an envelope is to be included in the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 3 unless the AEO is satisfied that the envelope has been fraudulently altered.

(10) If the AEO decides that an envelope is not to be included in the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 3, the envelope is to be excluded from that scrutiny.

(11) The AEO must, after examining all the ballot papers and envelopes:

(a) place in a parcel the ballot papers that are to be included in the scrutiny under Part XVIII; and

(b) place in another parcel the ballot papers that are to be excluded from the scrutiny under Part XVIII; and

(c) place in another parcel the envelopes that are to be included in the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 3; and

(d) place in another parcel the envelopes that are to be excluded from the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 3; and

(e) seal each parcel; and

(f) write on each parcel an indication of the type of ballot papers or envelopes enclosed and that the ballot-box has been prematurely opened; and

(g) sign each parcel.

(12) The AEO must give the parcels referred to in paragraphs (11)(a) and (c) to the DRO for the Division, and the ballot papers or envelopes in the parcels are to be included in the scrutiny under Part XVIII or in the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 3, as the case requires.

(13) Before the declaration of the poll in the election, the AEO must advise the Electoral Commissioner and the candidates concerned of the following:

(a) a ballot-box was opened before the close of the poll other than in accordance with this Act;

(b) the number of ballot papers the AEO examined;

(c) the number of ballot papers that were excluded from the scrutiny under Part XVIII because the AEO was satisfied that they had been fraudulently altered or otherwise interfered with so as not to reflect the voter’s intention;

(d) the number of envelopes the AEO examined;

(e) the number of envelopes that were excluded from the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 3 because the AEO was satisfied that they had been fraudulently altered.

Preservation of material

(14) The AEO is responsible for the safe custody, in accordance with the directions of the Electoral Commissioner, of the parcels referred to in paragraphs (11)(b) and (d), the ballot-box and the report and any other thing given to the AEO under subsection (5) until they are destroyed.

(15) Subject to Part XXII, the Electoral Commissioner may direct that the things referred to in subsection (14) be destroyed if:

(a) not less than 6 months have elapsed since the declaration of the poll in the election in which the things were used; and

(b) the things are no longer required by the Electoral Commission for the performance of its functions.

(5) Schedule 1, item 25, page 6 (lines 28 and 29), omit the item.

(6) Schedule 1, item 26, page 6 (line 30) to page 7 (line 5), omit the item, substitute:
26 At the end of subsection 248(2)

Add:

; and (c) for section 238A—a reference in paragraph 238A(3)(b) to the Divisional Returning Officer for the Division is taken to be a reference to the Electoral Commission.

(7) Schedule 1, page 7 (after line 7), after item 27, insert:

27A Subsections 328B(2) and (3)

Repeal the subsections.

(8) Schedule 1, page 7, after proposed item 27A, insert:

27B Paragraph 328B(4)(d)

Omit "subsections (1) and (2)", substitute "subsection (1)".

(9) Schedule 1, page 7, after proposed item 27B, insert:

27C After section 339

Insert:

339A Officers not to interfere with etc. ballot-boxes or ballot papers

An officer commits an offence if:

(a) the officer does an act; and

(b) the act results in the unlawful destruction of, taking of, opening of, or interference with, a ballot-box or a ballot paper.

Penalty: Imprisonment for 6 months.

(10) Schedule 1, item 32, page 7 (line 26), after "officer", insert "(the reporting officer)".

(11) Schedule 1, item 32, page 8 (lines 5 to 8), omit subsections 41AB(3) and (4), substitute:

Report

(3) The reporting officer must prepare a report about the circumstances in which the ballot-box was opened before the close of voting other than as mentioned in subsection 29(2) (including details of any witnesses).

Material to be given to DRO

(4) The reporting officer must give the report, parcel, ballot-box and any other thing the reporting officer considers appropriate to the DRO for the Division as soon as practicable.

Role of DRO

(5) The DRO for the Division must examine the report, parcel, ballot-box and any other thing given to the DRO under subsection (4) and then give them to the Australian Electoral Officer (the AEO) for the State or Territory concerned.

Role of AEO

(6) The AEO must:

(a) open the parcel and examine the ballot-papers not enclosed in envelopes, the envelopes, the report, the ballot-box and any other thing given to the AEO under subsection (5); and

(b) for each ballot-paper not enclosed in an envelope—decide whether the ballot-paper is to be included in the scrutiny under Part VI (see subsections (7) and (8)); and

(c) for each envelope—decide whether the envelope is to be included in the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 4 (see subsections (9) and (10)).

(7) The AEO must decide that a ballot-paper is to be included in the scrutiny under Part VI unless the AEO is satisfied that the ballot-paper has been fraudulently altered or otherwise interfered with so as not to reflect the voter's intention.

(8) If the AEO decides that a ballot-paper is not to be included in the scrutiny under Part VI, the ballot-paper is to be excluded from that scrutiny.

(9) The AEO must decide that an envelope is to be included in the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 4 unless the AEO is satisfied that the envelope has been fraudulently altered.

(10) If the AEO decides that an envelope is not to be included in the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 4, the envelope is to be excluded from that scrutiny.

(11) The AEO must, after examining all the ballot-papers and envelopes:

(a) place in a parcel the ballot-papers that are to be included in the scrutiny under Part VI; and

(b) place in another parcel the ballot-papers that are to be excluded from the scrutiny under Part VI; and
(c) place in another parcel the envelopes that are to be included in the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 4; and

(d) place in another parcel the envelopes that are to be excluded from the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 4; and

(e) seal each parcel; and

(f) write on each parcel an indication of the type of ballot-papers or envelopes enclosed and that the ballot-box has been prematurely opened; and

(g) sign each parcel.

(12) The AEO must give the parcels referred to in paragraphs (11)(a) and (c) to the DRO for the Division, and the ballot-papers or envelopes in the parcels are to be included in the scrutiny under Part VI or in the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 4, as the case requires.

(13) Before publication in the Gazette of the statement by the Electoral Commissioner showing the result of the referendum, the AEO must advise the Electoral Commissioner of the following:

(a) a ballot-box was opened before the close of voting other than as mentioned in subsection 29(2);

(b) the number of ballot-papers the AEO examined;

(c) the number of ballot-papers that were excluded from the scrutiny under Part VI because the AEO was satisfied that they had been fraudulently altered or otherwise interfered with so as not to reflect the voter's intention;

(d) the number of envelopes the AEO examined;

(e) the number of envelopes that were excluded from the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 4 because the AEO was satisfied that they had been fraudulently altered.

Preservation of material

(14) The AEO is responsible for the safe custody, in accordance with the directions of the Electoral Commissioner, of the parcels referred to in paragraphs (11)(b) and (d), the ballot-box and the report and any other thing given to the AEO under subsection (5) until they are destroyed.

(15) Subject to Part VIII, the Electoral Commissioner may direct that the things referred to in subsection (14) be destroyed if:

(a) not less than 6 months have elapsed since the publication in the Gazette of the statement by the Electoral Commissioner showing the result of the referendum in which the things were used; and

(b) the things are no longer required by the Electoral Commission for the performance of its functions.

(12) Schedule 1, item 49, page 9 (lines 15 and 16), omit the item.

(13) Schedule 1, item 50, page 9 (lines 17 to 22), omit the item, substitute:

50 At the end of subsection 75(2)

Add:

; and (c) for section 41AA—a reference in paragraph 41AA(3)(b) to the DRO for the Division is taken to be a reference to the Electoral Commission.

(14) Schedule 1, page 9 (after line 24), after item 51, insert:

51A After section 130

Insert:

130A Officers not to interfere with etc. ballot-boxes or ballot-papers

An officer commits an offence if:

(a) the officer does an act; and

(b) the act results in the unlawful destruction of, taking of, opening of, or interference with, a ballot-box or a ballot-paper.

Penalty: Imprisonment for 6 months.

The Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Improving Electoral Administration) Bill 2012 implements recommendations 3, 9, 10, 11, 15, 23, 29 and 30 made by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters in its report on the 2010 federal election. One of the proposed amendments sought to change the law in situations where ballot
boxes were opened other than in accordance with electoral legislation. Following the introduction of the bill on 29 November 2012 it was referred to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. The joint standing committee considered the bill and reported on 27 February 2013.

The committee recommended an amendment to the proposed provisions that will deal with the situation where ballot boxes are opened other than in accordance with the legislation. The recommendation covers two points. In some instances ballots that are held in a box which is opened not in accordance with the legislation should be saved, and there should be a specific offence written to apply to officers who interfere with ballot boxes or ballot papers. In reviewing this matter I am persuaded by the reasoning contained in the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters report that this measure should be amended. I thank the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters for its work in improving this measure and I also acknowledge in particular the contributions of the chair of the joint standing committee, the member for Banks, and the shadow special minister of state, the member for Mackellar.

The government has also taken this opportunity to make a small technical amendment to the rules relating to how-to-vote cards, which are set out at section 328B of the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918. The government considers that it is unnecessary to specify the font size to be used for authorisation details, and these amendments will omit these provisions. I am moving government amendments to accept the recommendations of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters and to amend proposed section 238B to introduce a procedure for dealing with ballots contained in an unlawfully opened ballot box. This procedure may result in some ballots being included in the count. The Australian Electoral Officer for each state or territory will examine the ballots and ballot boxes and determine which ballots should be saved and advise the Electoral Commissioner and candidates in the election of the details relating to the ballots. A new offence is also established at section 339A, dealing with officers not interfering with ballot boxes or ballot papers.

Finally, I am moving government amendments to omit subsections 328B(2) and 328B(3) of the Commonwealth Electoral Act, which deal with how-to-vote cards.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (17:02): In the course of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters discussions on the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Improving Electoral Administration) Bill it seemed to me that the proposal by the Electoral Commission to eliminate from scrutiny all ballot papers contained in a ballot box which has been opened prematurely—that is, before 6 pm on election day—was an invitation to unscrupulous behaviour, to allowing someone to tamper with a box in order to get rid of those ballot papers if they knew the sort of polling place they had come from. It also meant that an elector would be denied their validly cast vote through no fault of their own. I argued that way fairly vociferously, and I am delighted to say that the chairman and other members of the committee, together with some witnesses who appeared before us, agreed with that point of view and the result is this amendment as outlined by the Special Minister of State.

I do have some problems with the way this amendment has been drafted. I think it would be preferable if there were a count on the night of the ballot papers, which would allow us to know whether or not it was likely
to result in an appeal to the Court of Disputed Returns and would allow the ballot papers to be properly tallied against those that had been issued. I did have drafted certain amendments, which are set out in the report of the committee, and the committee took the approach of doing the count on the night. The way in which the government has drafted the amendments means that the votes are parcelled up and sent to the DRO, the DRO sends them to the Australian electoral officer, who then looks at the ballot papers and makes a decision as to whether any of them have been fraudulently altered or otherwise tampered with so as to misdirect the intention of the voter. It is an unusually difficult thing for an electoral officer to determine what is a fraudulently tampered with vote and, because it is outside scrutiny, scrutineers will not be allowed at the process. I think that is a serious problem. However, the opposition will allow these amendments to pass, and should we be successful in being elected at the next election we will take action to clean up what we think are deficiencies in the draft as it is being presented.

We agree with the amendment that changes the penalty for electoral officers to make it the same as it is for an ordinary civilian. In the way the Electoral Act is currently presented, if you are an electoral official you get a lesser penalty than if you are an ordinary punter. We did not think that was right, and we are pleased to see that change. We think also that the provisions dealing with font are equally sensible amendments and will be agreeing with those.

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (17:05): The amendments the House is discussing arise out of the report by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters following its examination of the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Improving Electoral Administration) Bill. I acknowledge that the member for Mackellar was largely successful in moving other members of the committee to her views, save for one area, which she mentioned in her speech. We just agree to disagree on that. The amendments before the House certainly come down in favour of enfranchisement as against disenfranchisement, which would not have been the case had the bill stood in its original form. This is an example of our having constructive discussion, and I pay tribute to the member for Mackellar in that regard.

The relevant description is at point 9, which says that the AEO must decide that an envelope is to be included in the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with schedule 3, unless the AEO is satisfied that the envelope has been fraudulently altered. So, indeed, it has reversed the onus of proof. The AEO has to be satisfied that it was fraudulently altered. If in doubt, the votes are included, and I think that is how it should be. Now, they are parcelled up if there is a suspicion of fraud—they are put to one side. On the issue of whether they should be counted, I am strongly in the camp that says those particular votes should not be counted, because that has been the convention and the way it has been done in electoral practice and, if you count them, you can actually influence decision makers. It has always been the global votes. If you can establish that there are 10 fraudulent votes and the margin is, say, three, that will give you the ability to appeal to a Court of Disputed Returns or whatever. It is actually easier to not count the votes.

But the point of counting the votes is that the only time votes are counted or looked at is when there is a scrutiny and a debate about an informal vote. In the McEwen case, the then returning officer had taken a hard line in relation to formality, but some 400 votes were subsequently included in the count by
the court at a later date. So here, as long as the votes are preserved, as long as they can be included in a subsequent count or audit by the Court of Disputed Returns—and there can be no dispute that that is what is done; they are wrapped up, they are parcelled, the instructions are all there for the returning officer and the Australian electoral officer—then those votes are there in the event of a later challenge. As I said, historically, if you have a postal vote or votes in envelopes, and signatures are challenged or other things mean those votes are put to one side, those votes are never opened up. There is never an indicative count of those particular votes because they are excluded from the count. So, when it comes to a declaration vote, if there is a question mark over a signature because of a postal vote application, or the signature of a witness, none of those votes are opened up and exposed to scrutineers.

There is another point on which I disagree with the member for Mackellar. My understanding is that scrutineers are available, at any stage of the process, for the candidates. You just need to go along to the particular counting area. Now, if I am wrong about that, I will admit it, but my understanding is that the divisional returning officer and candidates are notified of all stages of the process and they are able to provide scrutineers. Normally, what happens is people do not provide scrutineers. I know in many instances I have trusted my returning officers because I have great faith in them and I have not sent scrutineers along. But I do not know of any process where scrutineers are excluded if a count is taking place or if there is a check of votes. We can probably get this clarified in further discussion and debate.

In relation to the penalties, I agree, and we made the recommendation, that the penalty that applies to officers should be the same as that which applies to other people. We are in agreement on that. I think the one area we still disagree on in principle—but I respect that the opposition are supporting the amendments in any event—is whether the votes are counted at an early stage of the process or left till later, in the event that a determination is made. (Time expired)

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (17:10): I have a couple of points. Firstly, the member for Banks said he was dealing with the question of envelopes. Because of the way the ballots can become mixed, in that box will be ballot papers as well as envelopes, so you are dealing with both. The other point is about scrutineers. The act says: A candidate may appoint scrutineers to represent the candidate at the scrutiny.

The way the amendment is written, I think it is open to interpretation that the Australian electoral official who is in fact opening the box, once it has been sent to him from the DRO together with the reports, examines the envelopes and the ballots and makes the decision about which ones are to be admitted to the scrutiny, and that is all of those ballots and envelopes unless he determines that they have been fraudulently or otherwise dealt with. Having made that decision, all other ballots will be put into the scrutiny. So what he is doing is not part of the scrutiny as set out in the act, and therefore there will not be scrutineers. It is certainly open to that interpretation, and I think we should be alert to that.

The other thing is that the ballots and envelopes that are admitted to the scrutiny or placed in the scrutiny by the AEO will in fact no longer be identified. So, although the balance of envelopes which the AEO determines should not be admitted to the scrutiny will remain identified, the ballot papers which he has determined are to be validly put into the scrutiny will no longer be identified, and therefore a Court of Disputed
Returns would be unable to make a
determination as to whether the AEO has
made the right decision about those ballot
papers.

They are the concerns I have. But the
opposition are agreeing to allow the
amendments to save the votes to g
o forward; that is the most important thing. And I do
think it is less likely to occur in this coming
election, unlike the last election. At the last
election, the Australian Electoral
Commission had not given adequate advice
to all its electoral officers as to the change in
the law that turned declaration votes, which
were pre-poll votes, into ordinary votes, and
the ramification of that was that as a
declaration vote it could be opened before 6
pm on election day but as an ordinary vote it
could not. That was the origin of the
difficulty. Hopefully, this time the Electoral
Commission will give correct information to
all of its officers and that will not happen.

However, we have not touched on one
question which remains for another day:
who have to deal with subsequently but, for the
purposes of dealing specifically with the
recommendations that came out of what
happened in the seats of Boothby and Flynn,
I think it is important at this stage that we are
agreeing to let those amendments go
through. And then, as I said, should we be
successful in being elected, we will address
those other issues in government.

Mr GRAY (Brand—Special Minister of
State and Minister for the Public Service and
Integrity) (17:15): I thank the shadow
minister for her contribution. I also thank the
member for Banks, the chairman of the Joint
Standing Committee on Electoral Matters,
and of course the shadow minister, the
deputy chair. What we have just witnessed
demonstrates the real value to our parliament
and to our process of discussing, debating
and resolving changes to the Electoral Act,
which is unique. It allows a properly
constructed committee of the parliament
after each election to contemplate elections,
to contemplate fixing problems that arise and
making improvements to the act. I thank
both of them for their contributions.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S
Georganas): The question is that the
amendments be agreed to.

Question agreed to.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar)
(17:16): by leave—I move amendments (1)
to (14) as circulated in my name together:
(1) Clause 2, page 2 (table item 2), omit "25",
substitute "24".
(2) Clause 2, page 2 (table item 5), omit "items 49
and 50", substitute "item 50".
(3) Schedule 1, item 24, page 6 (line 15), after
"officer", insert "the reporting officer".
(4) Schedule 1, item 24, page 6 (lines 23 to 27),
omit subsections 238B(3) and (4), substitute:
Report
(3) The reporting officer must prepare a report
about the circumstances in which the ballot-box
was opened before the close of the poll other than
in accordance with this Act (including details of
any witnesses).

Material to be given to DRO
(4) The reporting officer must give the report,
parcel, ballot-box and any other thing the
reporting officer considers appropriate to the
DRO for the Division as soon as practicable.

Role of DRO
(5) The DRO for the Division must examine
the report, parcel, ballot-box and any other thing
given to the DRO under subsection (4) and then
give them to the Australian Electoral Officer (the AEO) for the State or Territory concerned.

Role of AEO

(6) The AEO must:

(a) open the parcel and examine the ballot papers not enclosed in envelopes, the envelopes, the report, the ballot-box and any other thing given to the AEO under subsection (5); and

(b) for each ballot paper not enclosed in an envelope—decide whether the ballot paper is to be included in the scrutiny under Part XVIII (see subsections (7) and (8)); and

(c) for each envelope—decide whether the envelope is to be included in the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 3 (see subsections (9) and (10)).

(7) The AEO must decide that a ballot paper is to be included in the scrutiny under Part XVIII unless the AEO is satisfied that the ballot paper has been fraudulently altered or otherwise interfered with so as not to reflect the voter's intention.

(8) If the AEO decides that a ballot paper is not to be included in the scrutiny under Part XVIII, the ballot paper is to be excluded from that scrutiny.

(9) The AEO must decide that an envelope is to be included in the scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 3 unless the AEO is satisfied that the envelope has been fraudulently altered.

(10) If the AEO decides that an envelope is not to be included in the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 3, the envelope is to be excluded from that scrutiny.

(11) The AEO must, after examining all the ballot papers and envelopes:

(a) place in a parcel the ballot papers that are to be included in the scrutiny under Part XVIII; and

(b) place in another parcel the ballot papers that are to be excluded from the scrutiny under Part XVIII; and

(c) place in another parcel the envelopes that are to be included in the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 3; and

(d) place in another parcel the envelopes that are to be excluded from the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 3; and

(e) seal each parcel; and

(f) write on each parcel an indication of the type of ballot papers or envelopes enclosed and that the ballot-box has been prematurely opened; and

(g) sign each parcel.

(12) The AEO must give the parcels referred to in paragraphs (11)(a) and (c) to the DRO for the Division, and the ballot papers or envelopes in the parcels are to be included in the scrutiny under Part XVIII or in the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 3, as the case requires.

(13) Before the declaration of the poll in the election, the AEO must advise the Electoral Commissioner and the candidates concerned of the following:

(a) a ballot-box was opened before the close of the poll other than in accordance with this Act;

(b) the number of ballot papers the AEO examined;

(c) the number of ballot papers that were excluded from the scrutiny under Part XVIII because the AEO was satisfied that they had been fraudulently altered or otherwise interfered with so as not to reflect the voter's intention;

(d) the number of envelopes the AEO examined;

(e) the number of envelopes that were excluded from the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 3 because the AEO was satisfied that they had been fraudulently altered.

Preservation of material

(14) The AEO is responsible for the safe custody, in accordance with the directions of the Electoral Commissioner, of the parcels referred to in paragraphs (11)(b) and (d), the ballot-box and the report and any other thing given to the AEO under subsection (5) until they are destroyed.

(15) Subject to Part XXII, the Electoral Commissioner may direct that the things referred to in subsection (14) be destroyed if:
(a) not less than 6 months have elapsed since the declaration of the poll in the election in which the things were used; and
(b) the things are no longer required by the Electoral Commission for the performance of its functions.

(5) Schedule 1, item 25, page 6 (lines 28 and 29), omit the item.

(6) Schedule 1, item 26, page 6 (line 30) to page 7 (line 5), omit the item, substitute:

26 At the end of subsection 248(2)
Add:
; and (c) for section 238A—a reference in paragraph 238A(3)(b) to the Divisional Returning Officer for the Division is taken to be a reference to the Electoral Commission.

(7) Schedule 1, page 7 (after line 7), after item 27, insert:

27A Subsections 328B(2) and (3)
Repeal the subsections.

(8) Schedule 1, page 7, after proposed item 27A, insert:

27B Paragraph 328B(4)(d)
Omit "subsections (1) and (2)”, substitute “subsection (1)".

(9) Schedule 1, page 7, after proposed item 27B, insert:

27C After section 339
Insert:

339A Officers not to interfere with etc. ballot-boxes or ballot papers
An officer commits an offence if:
(a) the officer does an act; and
(b) the act results in the unlawful destruction of, taking of, opening of, or interference with, a ballot-box or a ballot paper.

Penalty: Imprisonment for 6 months.

(10) Schedule 1, item 32, page 7 (line 26), after "officer", insert "(the reporting officer)".

(11) Schedule 1, item 32, page 8 (lines 5 to 8), omit subsections 41AB(3) and (4), substitute:

Report
(3) The reporting officer must prepare a report about the circumstances in which the ballot-box was opened before the close of voting other than as mentioned in subsection 29(2) (including details of any witnesses).

Material to be given to DRO
(4) The reporting officer must give the report, parcel, ballot-box and any other thing the reporting officer considers appropriate to the DRO for the Division as soon as practicable.

Role of DRO
(5) The DRO for the Division must examine the report, parcel, ballot-box and any other thing given to the DRO under subsection (4) and then give them to the Australian Electoral Officer (the AEO) for the State or Territory concerned.

Role of AEO
(6) The AEO must:
(a) open the parcel and examine the ballot-papers not enclosed in envelopes, the envelopes, the report, the ballot-box and any other thing given to the AEO under subsection (5); and
(b) for each ballot-paper not enclosed in an envelope—decide whether the ballot-paper is to be included in the scrutiny under Part VI (see subsections (7) and (8)); and
(c) for each envelope—decide whether the envelope is to be included in the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 4 (see subsections (9) and (10)).

(7) The AEO must decide that a ballot-paper is to be included in the scrutiny under Part VI unless the AEO is satisfied that the ballot-paper has been fraudulently altered or otherwise interfered with so as not to reflect the voter's intention.

(8) If the AEO decides that a ballot-paper is not to be included in the scrutiny under Part VI, the ballot-paper is to be excluded from that scrutiny.

(9) The AEO must decide that an envelope is to be included in the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 4 unless the AEO is satisfied that the envelope has been fraudulently altered.
(10) If the AEO decides that an envelope is not to be included in the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 4, the envelope is to be excluded from that scrutiny.

(11) The AEO must, after examining all the ballot-papers and envelopes:
(a) place in a parcel the ballot-papers that are to be included in the scrutiny under Part VI; and
(b) place in another parcel the ballot-papers that are to be excluded from the scrutiny under Part VI; and
(c) place in another parcel the envelopes that are to be included in the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 4; and
(d) place in another parcel the envelopes that are to be excluded from the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 4; and
(e) seal each parcel; and
(f) write on each parcel an indication of the type of ballot-papers or envelopes enclosed and
(g) sign each parcel.

(12) The AEO must give the parcels referred to in paragraphs (11)(a) and (c) to the DRO for the Division, and the ballot-papers or envelopes in the parcels are to be included in the scrutiny under Part VI or in the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 4, as the case requires.

(13) Before publication in the Gazette of the statement by the Electoral Commissioner showing the result of the referendum, the AEO must advise the Electoral Commissioner of the following:
(a) a ballot-box was opened before the close of voting other than as mentioned in subsection 29(2);
(b) the number of ballot-papers the AEO examined;
(c) the number of ballot-papers that were excluded from the scrutiny under Part VI because the AEO was satisfied that they had been fraudulently altered or otherwise interfered with so as not to reflect the voter's intention;
(d) the number of envelopes the AEO examined;
(e) the number of envelopes that were excluded from the preliminary scrutiny conducted in accordance with Schedule 4 because the AEO was satisfied that they had been fraudulently altered.

Preservation of material
(14) The AEO is responsible for the safe custody, in accordance with the directions of the Electoral Commissioner, of the parcels referred to in paragraphs (11)(b) and (d), the ballot-box and the report and any other thing given to the AEO under subsection (5) until they are destroyed.

(15) Subject to Part VIII, the Electoral Commissioner may direct that the things referred to in subsection (14) be destroyed if:
(a) not less than 6 months have elapsed since the publication in the Gazette of the statement by the Electoral Commissioner showing the result of the referendum in which the things were used; and
(b) the things are no longer required by the Electoral Commission for the performance of its functions.

(12) Schedule 1, item 49, page 9 (lines 15 and 16), omit the item.

(13) Schedule 1, item 50, page 9 (lines 17 to 22), omit the item, substitute:

50 At the end of subsection 75(2)
Add:
; and (c) for section 41AA—a reference in paragraph 41AA(3)(b) to the DRO for the Division is taken to be a reference to the Electoral Commission.
(14) Schedule 1, page 9 (after line 24), after item 51, insert:

51A After section 130
Insert:

130A Officers not to interfere with etc. ballot-boxes or ballot-papers
An officer commits an offence if:
(a) the officer does an act; and
(b) the act results in the unlawful destruction of, taking of, opening of, or interference with, a ballot-box or a ballot-paper.

Penalty: Imprisonment for 6 months.

These amendments relate to different parts of the bill and are ones on which we, in the opposition, have been very consistent. They relate to the question of automatic enrolment. What this bill does is amend the Taxation Administration Act so as to allow the Australian Taxation Office or its officers to give to the Australian Electoral Commission lists of taxpayers and their details for the purposes of automatic enrolment. We find that absolutely unacceptable on two counts. Firstly, we are totally and utterly philosophically opposed to the concept of automatic enrolment. We say, and the Commonwealth Electoral Act says, that the prime duty of the Australian Electoral Commission is to uphold the integrity of the roll. This means that people have to have confidence that the roll as it is comprised is accurate. Court decisions since the 1930s have said that they will not permit courts to look behind the roll—that is, to take evidence as to whether people should be on it or not—because the roll itself has to be treated as accurate and has to be final. Professor Graeme Orr writes:

Like other official public registers, such as land registers, a chief feature of electoral rolls is their finality. The purpose of a roll is to be a definitive statement of the entitlement to vote. Thus there is a rule that the roll is conclusive evidence of the entitlement to vote. Reinforcing this is the secondary rule in almost all jurisdictions that a court of disputed returns is not to inquire into the correctness of the roll."

Therefore, preserving its integrity is fundamental to having confidence in our system.

What happens now that we have automatic enrolment and automatic upgrading of addresses is that the Electoral Commissioner is entitled to take any roll he chooses. One that he has used to date is from Centrelink, which in fact is not a single piece of data; it is anything up to 100 pieces or lists which are compiled into one. Another is the motor traffic register. And now the commission wants to add the tax office list of taxpayers. The error in these lists will be just astronomical. In 1999 a committee of this House found that there were 3.2 million more tax file numbers than there were people in the country. They found that 62 per cent of their deceased clients were not recorded as deceased. Another inquiry found that up to half a million active Medicare enrolment records were probably for people who were deceased. The inaccuracies in records or rolls that are kept for another purpose can be useful for that purpose with their inaccuracies but should not be allowed to corrupt the integrity of the electoral roll, because it is necessary for us to have absolute confidence in it. The opposition feels very strongly on that and would be looking to repeal automatic enrolment. Certainly it will be vociferously rejecting the proposal to allow the tax office to provide information to the Electoral Commissioner. In fact, it is an offence currently under the law for that to occur.

What this legislation will do is remove that offence if it is for the purposes of the Electoral Commissioner. If it goes to somebody else, it will still be an offence. There is the inaccuracy of the material and the fact that the electoral office is really not capable of determining its accuracy or otherwise. It writes a letter to the person at the address that is on that roll, and the person could quite easily be at another address. When the electoral office does not get back a letter saying, 'That's not me because I'm not here'—which is a stupidity to think that someone who is not there could write back
and say 'I'm not here'—it means that the information is automatically wrong.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member's time has expired. I call the Special Minister of State.

Mr Melham: Let her speak again.

Mr Gray: She can continue speaking.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The debate is continuing. You can speak, Member for Mackellar.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (17:21): The second part of the bill that we are opposing specifically is removing the necessity for someone who is seeking a prepoll vote to sign a certificate as to the reason they are in fact entitled to seek a prepoll vote. We believe the legislation has turned a prepoll vote from being a declaration vote into an ordinary vote, and the real purpose of that was to allow those votes to be counted on the night so that we get a more accurate call on the night of who is likely to win the election instead of having to wait for a period of days or sometimes weeks for those declaration votes to be dealt with. So we do believe that it is sensible that the certificate that is presently required to be signed should continue to be signed. The reason is that we are philosophically opposed to the concept that the Australian Electoral Commissioner, together with the government, seems to be fostering: that you do not talk about 'polling day'; you talk about a 'polling period'.

We do not believe that that is the right course of action to follow. The practice has developed in recent times that political parties release their manifestoes, for want of a better term, later and later in the election period itself, which means that many people can vote prior to even hearing the outline of the policies that the leaders are giving in order to make a judgement. There is a lot of material that is available in the last few days leading up to the election day, and it does mean that the people who are voting earlier and earlier are not having the benefit of seeing that material.

For a similar reason, we are moving an amendment to change a provision in the bill which requires that you cannot make an application for a prepoll vote earlier than the fourth day after the close of nominations to the 11th day, which means, in effect, under the government's proposals, it would be 19 days of prepolling and, under our proposal, it would be 12 days of prepolling. We think that 12 days is quite adequate, together with the requirement still to state why it is that you cannot turn up on polling day. Also, as I did point out, as the Prime Minister has chosen on this occasion to announce that election day will be on 14 September 2013 and that happens to be, for the Jewish community, Yom Kippur, which is a very sacred day for them, obviously they will be unable to vote on that day. That is a very legitimate reason for using a prepoll vote.

So there is a need for the provision for prepoll, just as there is a need for postal votes. But with postal votes we have remained, again, very strong on the fact that there is a need for political material to be included with the ballot paper—that the person to whom the AEC is going to send the ballot paper should be entitled to receive political material, just as anyone who turns up on polling day will receive political material.

So we are moving amendments to the Commonwealth Electoral Act, to the Referendum (Machinery Provisions) Act, and to the Taxation Administration Act 1953. We believe that should those amendments be made then the bill would be in a much better form and the interests of electors would be served.
Mr GRAY (Brand—Special Minister of State and Minister for the Public Service and Integrity) (17:26): I thank the shadow minister for her contribution. I would just make some observations about the opposition's amendments. Firstly, what we are dealing with here is direct updates and direct enrolments. We are not dealing with automatic enrolments. We are dealing with measures that are designed to address the nearly 1.5 million eligible Australians who are not currently on the electoral roll. And we are dealing with trusted sources of information, and only trusted sources of information.

The changes that were made to the act in 2012 were changes which improved the integrity of the electoral roll—they did not diminish it—and these measures further enhance the integrity of the electoral roll. Further, the shadow minister points to the removal of the requirement for a declaration to be made in application for an early vote. This really brings the Electoral Act into line with current custom and voting practice. Increasingly people are seeking to vote early, so increasingly we need to have an Electoral Act and a process which accommodate that need in our community. While the shadow minister and I would agree on a voter listening to all of the arguments and concluding appropriately, on the eve of the election and consistent with media blackouts 48 hours before elections—the idea of the one-day national decision—our country and its 14 million voters think differently, and people do wish to vote early.

In my own electorate there are a very large number of mine workers, and it is often the case that those mine workers are away during election week and, even under the existing provisions, have difficulty casting their votes. These measures will make it easier and also facilitate the voting process by giving greater certainty as to when earlier voting will take place. The measures respond to recommendations of the Australian Electoral Commission and are supported by the majority view of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters.

The opposition's amendments also make the period for early voting shorter than it currently is. In 2007, my first election, I had the great pleasure of being invited down to Stirling Navy base for the departure of an Australian vessel heading off to the Gulf. The then defence minister Brendan Nelson spoke eloquently as the ship left, and every one of those crewmembers who were domiciled in Rockingham in my electorate were able to vote, and vote they did.

I have mentioned the importance of fly-in fly-out workers, and through Northern Queensland drive-in drive-out workers are important. The nature of our economy is changing. The nature of the way in which our communities interact with voting and the electoral process is changing. These changes simply keep our electoral process abreast of where our community is at, and therefore I oppose the amendments being offered by the opposition.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (17:29): I would like to make just a couple of points on those comments. First of all, I think I outlined quite clearly earlier why the information that is provided from a list which is compiled for another purpose and then used either to alter the address of an enrolled voter or to add people to the roll cannot be trusted. It is quite possible that people who are not eligible to be on the roll will be placed on the roll.

Under the act as it was prior to introducing automatic enrolment and updating, it was the obligation of someone once they turned 18 or became a citizen to enrol themselves to vote. That is the compulsory part. You must compulsorily go
and enrol yourself to vote. If you do not, you are subject to a penalty. What the automatic provisions have done is to say that, if the government automatically enrols you and you have not bothered to go down and enrol yourself, you are relieved of the obligation of the penalty. That penalty is removed, which really encourages people not to comply with the law and with their obligation to enrol. I and the opposition view the right to vote as a very precious right. When you do these sorts of things, you are lessening its importance because the obligation of the person to enrol is being removed.

With regard to the comment that more and more people are voting earlier, I agree with that, but they are doing it simply because they can. It is simply convenient. I may as well go down to Aldi, and I will go and have a vote at the same time. That is not the purpose that prepoll voting was introduced for. It was introduced for people who legitimately cannot turn up on election day. We believe that that shortened period is enough to satisfy that intention. Underlying this is the important principle that the coalition believes solidly in election day voting, not—as the Electoral Commission seems to be wishing it to be viewed—in an election period. Equally, the change in terminology in the Electoral Act itself from talking about 'electors' to talking about 'persons' I think is also a retrograde step.

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (17:32): I acknowledge that the views of the member for Mackellar have been consistent, and she has aired those views in the substantive debate on this bill and in the hearings that we have had of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, but I just have a fundamental disagreement with where she is coming from. Firstly, the Electoral Commission draws its information from a number of agencies. We are just adding the Australian Taxation Office. They have agreed—there have been discussions with the Australian tax office and Treasury—to participate if the legislation is amended and the tax office is added. The tax office, as I said in my speech on the second reading, has provided information to a number of other organisations, so the Electoral Commission is nothing different in relation to that. We have had that discussion. We just agree to disagree. I understand that the views of the member for Mackellar are genuinely held, but my view is that it is pretty hard to argue that the tax office is less reliable than other organisations from which the Electoral Commission draws its information. I know that the member for Mackellar has had a longstanding interaction as a member of parliament and as a senator with the tax office, but we have had that debate. I just disagree, and I think the government disagrees.

The one that puzzles me is the amendment that basically says, 'Let's contract the time for a prepoll vote from 19 days to 12 days'—in other words, one week less. I know that the member for Mackellar is being nostalgic here in terms of 'election day is election day', but that is not our modern society. The parliament and the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters over a number of years—when either side has been in government, when there has been an opposition chair, or whatever—have relaxed the provisions and made it easier to have postal votes and pre-poll votes. Indeed, one of the recommendations raised for the last
election was that you could have a pre-poll vote if you were outside your electorate. We just took the view that we were not going to force people in that instance to lie and maintain that they are not within eight kilometres, they are interstate, or whatever. The figures are such that pre-poll voting is for a lot of people the preferred method of voting, as against filling out the forms for a postal vote application and then having your vote excluded because there is a challenge to a signature or something else like that.

What will result here, if the opposition gets their way with this amendment, is different systems for postal vote applications and for pre-poll applications. We have already contracted by one day the ability to have a pre-poll vote so that we can make sure there is uniformity with printed ballot papers for both the Senate and the House of Representatives. So it is now the Tuesday, four days after nominations close. In that week that the opposition would take away, people going overseas would not be able to have their postal votes processed. The postal vote would be the only form of voting left for them, as against rocking down to the electoral office and doing a pre-poll vote before they go overseas. As I understand it, a lot of votes—100,000 votes—were made in that one-week period about which the opposition are now saying, 'We do not want you to have the opportunity to vote.' That is how many people voted in terms of pre-poll. As long as they are legitimate votes, as long as you are dealing with people who are entitled to vote then the method of voting—pre-poll, postal or voting on the day—should be irrelevant. We just want people to vote. We want them to participate in the system. People now have different work patterns to what they used to have. In the old days, the weekends were more like a holiday.

What I am worried about is that the opposition seem to be following the Republican approach, which featured at the last presidential election in America, and which is about restricting the availability of early voting. When you scrutinise this recommendation, it falls short of the common sense argument and the existing argument. It is actually a safe way to vote for people who cannot vote on the day—better than mucking around with applications for postal vote applications.

People are voting with their feet because they have shown more and more since 1993 that this is a preferred way and we should not cut this option out for them. I am not doubting the motives of the member for Mackellar. I think that the way we have behaved in relation to scrutinising this bill is the way we ought to behave. People have argued the philosophies and the principles. It is just that I think it is like trying to unscramble a scrambled egg. Postal votes and pre-poll votes form between them, I think, 25 per cent of the vote. I am nostalgic like the member for Mackellar, but I also say this—and I say this from a political point of view—if you did a study, you would see that it suits the Labor Party to restrict the access of pre-poll voting and postal voting in a lot of instances, based on the way those votes fall on election day. I do share the concerns of the member for Mackellar that a lot of people will vote before the launch of a party's manifestos or whatever. But what is the greater good? The greater good is more opportunity for people to actually register a vote, especially in a society that more and more is becoming mobile. I support the current situation that the government is putting forward and oppose the amendments put forward by the member for Mackellar.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (17:39): I want to make it quite clear that the reasons that we are wishing to see 12 days, not 19 days, for pre-poll has got absolutely nothing to do with nostalgia. It has
everything to do with a strong and logical vote, which I put, which is that I want the voters to be well informed when they are casting their ballots. That means having the ability to hear and judge the manifestos given by the political parties as they launch their campaigns later and later in the cycle. It also means that any issues that blow up in that period are taken into account when they are casting their ballot. That is a strong, logical, deeply held argument. It has nothing to do with nostalgia.

With regard to the question of the concept of making a comparison with the voting system of the United States, nothing could be further from an irrelevancy. Our voting systems are entirely and utterly distinct, separate and different, let alone the question of the compulsory nature and preferential nature of our elections. So I do not think that what occurred in the United States elections has any bearing on the debates we are having here.

By maintaining the importance of keeping that certificate with regard to pre-poll votes we are simply reinforcing that the purpose of a pre-poll vote is not that 'I think I will go and vote today because it is easier for me to do so,' but it is because you are complying with the reasons set out in the legislation, and that you are committing yourself to saying in a public way that that is what you are doing. I think those things are important to maintain in the legislation.

So, I would simply say of the amendments we are moving, particularly that very strong argument about the Australian Taxation Office, that I think people are appalled that tax office information is being extended to the Electoral Commission. There may be other legitimate purposes for which information can be shared. I do not believe this is one of them.

To the coalition the whole concept of automatic enrolment, which corrupts the integrity of the roll, is something we will stand firmly against. With those words I am strongly and firmly moving our amendments.

The SPEAKER: The question is that the amendments be agreed to.

The House divided. [17:46]

The Speaker—Anna Burke

Ayes ................. 69
Noes ................. 73
Majority .............. 4

AYES

Abbott, AJ
Andrews, KL
Billson, BF
Bishop, JI
Broadbent, RE
Chester, D
Ciobo, SM
Coulton, M (teller)
Dutton, PC
Fletcher, PW
Gambort, T
Griggs, NL
Hartsuyker, L
Hockey, JB
Irons, SJ
Jones, ET
Kelly, C
Ley, SP
Marino, NB
Matheson, RG
Mirabella, S
Moylan, JE
O'Dowd, KD
Prentice, J
Ramsey, RE
Robb, AJ
Roy, WB
Scott, BC
Simpkins, LXL
Somlyay, AM
Stone, SN
Truss, WE
Turnbull, MB
Vasta, RX
Wyatt, KG

Andrews, KJ
Baldwin, RC
Bishop, BK
Briggs, JE
Buchholz, S
Christensen, GR
Cobb, JK
Crook, AJ
Entsch, WG
Frydenberg, JA
Gash, J
Haase, BW
Hawke, AG
Hunt, GA
Jensen, DG
Keenan, M
Laming, A
Macfarlane, IE
Markus, LE
McCormack, MF
Morrison, SJ
Neville, PC
O'Dwyer, KM
Pyne, CM
Randall, DJ
Robert, SR
Ruddock, PM
Secker, PD (teller)
Smith, ADH
Southcott, AJ
Tehan, DT
Tudge, AE
Van Manen, AJ
Washer, MJ
Question negatived.

The SPEAKER: The question now is that this bill, as amended, be agreed to.

Question agreed to.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr GRAY (Brand—Special Minister of State and Minister for the Public Service and Integrity) (17:51): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

COMMITTEES

Broadcasting Legislation Committee Appointment

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (17:52): by leave—I move:

That:

(1) a Joint Select Committee on Broadcasting Legislation be appointed to inquire into and report on potential areas for further reform of Australia’s broadcasting legislation, with particular reference to:

(a) the abolition of the 75 per cent rule, particularly in relation to regional and local news;

(b) whether the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) should be required to examine program supply agreements for news and current affairs when determining whether a person is in control of a commercial television broadcasting service; and

(c) on-air reporting of ACMA findings regarding Broadcasting regulation breaches;

(2) the committee consist of ten members, two Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Government Whip or Whips, two Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Opposition Whip or Whips, and one non-aligned Member, two Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Senate, two Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, and one Senator to be nominated by the Australian Greens Whip;

(3) every nomination of a member of the committee be notified in writing to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives;
(4) the members of the committee hold office as a joint select committee until presentation of the committee’s report or the House of Representatives is dissolved or expires by effluxion of time, whichever is the earlier;

(5) the committee elect:
   (a) as its chair a Government member; and
   (b) a deputy chair who shall act as chair of the committee at any time when the chair is not present at a meeting of the committee, and at any time when the chair and deputy chair are not present at a meeting of the committee the members present shall elect another member to act as chair of that meeting;

(6) in the event of an equality of voting, the chair, or the deputy chair when acting as chair, have a casting vote;

(7) three members of the committee constitute a quorum of the committee provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall include one Government member of either House and one non-Government member of either House;

(8) the committee have power to appoint subcommittees consisting of three or more of its members and to refer to any subcommittee any matter which the committee is empowered to examine;

(9) the committee appoint the chair of each subcommittee who shall have a casting vote only, and at any time when the chair of a subcommittee is not present at a meeting of the subcommittee the members of the subcommittee present shall elect another member of that subcommittee to act as chair at that meeting;

(10) the quorum of a subcommittee be two members of that subcommittee, provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall comprise one Government member of either House and one non-Government member of either House;

(11) the committee or any subcommittee have power to call for witnesses to attend and for documents to be produced;

(12) the committee or any subcommittee may conduct proceedings at any place it sees fit;

(13) the committee or subcommittee have the power to adjourn from time to time and to sit during any adjournment of the House of Representatives and the Senate;

(14) the committee be provided with all necessary staff, facilities and resources and be empowered to appoint persons with specialist knowledge for the purposes of the committee with the approval of the Presiding Officers;

(15) the committee be empowered to print from day to day such documents and evidence as may be ordered by it, and a daily Hansard be published of such proceedings as take place in public;

(16) the committee may report from time to time but that it make a final report no later than 17 June 2013;

(17) the provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the standing orders, have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders; and

(18) a message be sent to the Senate acquainting it of this resolution and requesting that it concur and take action accordingly.

I will speak briefly to this motion, which seeks to establish a parliamentary committee to inquire into three potential further media reforms beyond the legislation that will be introduced to the House tomorrow: firstly, the abolition of the 75 per cent reach rule, particularly in relation to regional and local news; secondly, on-air reporting of the Australian Communications and Media Authority findings regarding broadcasting regulation breaches; and, thirdly, whether the ACMA should consider program supply agreements for news and current affairs as part of determining whether a person is in control of a commercial television broadcasting service.

The intention to abolish the 75 per cent reach rule was announced in the package of broadcasting regulation reforms announced by the government in November last year. Over recent weeks, concerns have been raised that the abolition of this rule may jeopardise the delivery of regional news services or local content in general. Regional
broadcasters in aggregated markets are currently obliged to meet minimum levels of content of local significance. When announcing our proposal to abolish the 75 per cent rule, we made it clear that this will be subject to adherence by any future owners of regional broadcasters with existing local content obligations in regional areas and written undertakings in respect of those obligations. We will provide to the committee draft clauses which bring effect to that policy intention of maintaining local content obligations into the future. If the committee were able to come up with a quick resolution or agree to a consensus on the 75 per cent rule, the government would include this amendment in the general package of media reform legislation.

The other issues of on-air statements and the extent to which supply agreements on news programs may constitute a form of control over media voices have been raised in public debate leading up to these reforms. The government is interested in understanding the implications of changes in these areas for possible future legislative action, hence the establishment of a joint select committee.

I thank the shadow minister for his cooperation in ensuring that this committee can be established. Then it will be possible to appoint members to the committee. Obviously, the statement I have made about the 75 per cent reach rule, if a consensus can be reached, being able to be brought forward into the legislation is one reason for expediting the establishment of this committee. I commend the resolution to the House.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth) (17:55): The coalition are prepared to support the government on the establishment of this committee, but we have to say that the presentation of the so-called media reforms by the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Conroy, yesterday was characteristically chaotic. Right from the very outset, he had a press conference which was incoherent. He had no press statement that he could distribute. It is a jumble of reforms. Some of them have been well flagged, such as the changes to content rules and the reduction in the licence fee. That has been well understood and it has been out there. But now also there is the introduction of a so-called public interest media advocate that is going to be a new government official to oversee and regulate the journalistic standards of all media outlets of any consequence, including newspapers. So, for the first time in our history, we will have a government official dealing with newspapers' content. This, of course, has just been a reaction on the part of the government to the injustice that they perceive of the criticism they have been getting from the News Ltd newspapers, in particular their tabloids.

Really, it is extraordinary that there are elements of important policy that have a timeliness associated with them—and the issues about the reach rule would fall into that category, as would the issues about licence fee and content arrangements—jumbled up together with changes of enormous significance which, frankly, deserve lengthy and detailed debate. It is one thing to say that this question of the reach rule is going to be considered by a committee which will report in the middle of June. I am sure that no doubt the committee can adequately deal with it in time. But it is another thing for the government to propose, for the first time in this country's history in peacetime, to have a government official overseeing the content of newspapers—for the first time in our peacetime history to have that enormous change—and for this to
be, according to the senator, debated and approved by the parliament by no later than next Thursday. Coupled to that is a so-called public interest test for media acquisitions.

We have a number of laws that impact on media acquisitions, not least of which, of course, are the provisions of the Competition and Consumer Act, which deals with market concentration and ensuring that we have competitive markets. Indeed, Kerry Stokes's or the Seven Network's attempt to buy a larger share of Fox was knocked back by the ACCC recently, so the laws certainly work. We have clear, well-understood legal arrangements that impact upon media transactions—indeed, all transactions—and concentration of ownership.

But now we are going to have a new test, defined as the 'public interest test'. The public interest test, of course, is completely ill defined. A public interest test in respect of media will inevitably be a political interest test. Yesterday when the senator announced this, people naturally asked, 'What do you mean by public interest? That is a pretty general term. What do you mean by it?' And he said, 'There will be criteria of public interest, which will be released later this week.' So apparently we will find out what he means by 'public interest' on Thursday, and then we will only have four sitting days to consider it.

This minister is a serial bungler. He is the most incompetent member of this government—which is a big call. The Manager of Government Business over there is racking his mind, he is trying to think of somebody who is more incompetent—I am inviting him to nominate one of his colleagues who is more incompetent than Senator Conroy. The senator has this distinction: he announced 2½ years ago changes to the anti-syphoning laws and has been unable to present a bill to the parliament to put those changes into statutory form. This is quite remarkable. The parliamentary draftsmen, of course, are able to write bills on a few minutes notice, sometimes. But the minister has such a chaotically cluttered mind, so incapable of coming to a resolution, that we may well get to the election without any statutory enactment of the anti-syphoning laws. And no doubt a similar fate will befall the public interest media advocate and the public interest test for media takeovers.

We on our side of the House—and I say this with my friend the Leader of the Opposition here with me—are absolutely, fundamentally, irrevocably committed to freedom of speech and freedom of the press. And when we talk about freedom of the press we mean, above all, freedom from government control. The biggest threat to freedom of the press, to freedom of speech, if you look around the world, is government. Government must be restrained so that it impinges no more than it has already on freedom of expression and freedom of the media in this country. Senator Conroy says he is concerned about concentration of ownership. What hypocrisy and humbug. Let us never forget that the transaction which created the concentration of newspaper ownership in this country and has been the subject of endless commentary in the nearly 30 years ever since was when the Hawke and Keating Labor government allowed Rupert Murdoch to buy The Herald and Weekly Times. That is a fact. That was what gave Murdoch the dominant share of metropolitan daily newspapers and has been unable to present a bill to the
1986, when Hawke and Keating allowed it to happen, what has happened is that the share of the media pie represented by newspapers gets smaller every day. We have more voices, more competition and more diversity. Whether it is social media, whether it is all of the online publications or whether it is the dozens and dozens of channels on pay television, we have a more competitive and more diverse media than we have ever had in our lives. So to now suddenly say that we need a government regulator to impose an undefined public interest test on media mergers to ensure diversity is surely laughable and it will be seen for what it is. It is nothing more than an attempt to provide some sort of payback or retaliation to News Limited for their treatment of the government in their papers. And sometimes the treatment has been outrageous. I thought comparing Senator Conroy to Joseph Stalin was outrageous today; it was quite unfair.

Mr Hartsuyker: On Stalin.

Mr Turnbull: The honourable members says 'On Stalin.' Everyone is entitled to their point of view. I would not go so far as to say that. I would say this: Stephen Conroy is not in the class of Joseph Stalin—

Mr Albanese: I rise on a point of order. It is very clear in the standing orders and in the House of Representatives Practice that there are rules that go to statements that can be made of members of the other place—as the House of Representatives Practice would refer to honourable senators. I suggest that, given there is agreement for the resolution that is currently being moved, it would be appropriate if the honourable member would just return to the question.

The Deputy Speaker: I call the member for Wentworth and ask him to speak to the motion before the House.

Mr Turnbull: The motion to establish this committee, which we are acceding to, has to be put in the context of this total mess of media reforms—or changes, the so-called reforms—which, as I have said, have been ill thought out and are being rushed through the parliament. The parliament is having a gun held to its head and is being told, 'You have four days to talk about these provisions and then you have to pass them or nothing will happen.' That is the threat that Senator Conroy has made. It holds the parliament and the people all of us here represent, both in the House and in the Senate, in contempt.

The reality is that if a senator or indeed any other member is unhappy with how they are portrayed on the front page of the Daily Telegraph they can always bring a defamation action and sue for libel. They have every recourse of the law. It is not the job of the government or any government bureaucrat to regulate the content of newspapers. There is a degree of regulation of broadcasters because they are using public licensed spectrum and that has been part of our media landscape for all of our lives. But the newspapers, whether they are on paper or online, have always been free of government regulation. Committed as we are to freedom of speech, we say that they should remain free. Those voices should remain free. We asked the Prime Minister in question time, 'What is the mischief, what is the problem you are seeking to address? Give us one example of some outrage that you think this new intervention is going to address,' and she could not nominate one—not one. So what is this? It is just the outpourings of a government that is obsessed with regulation and is determined to inflict some pain on News Limited because it has been unkind to the government—so they say. We would say that it has been thoroughly just in giving them the shellacking they deserve. We all
have a view on that. But it is not the government's job to regulate newspapers and it should not be.

As far as concentration of ownership is concerned, I repeat what I said earlier, and it is an undoubted fact: there is more diversity in the media today than there has ever been in my lifetime. That is for sure: there is much more diversity today than there ever has been. The Guardian is about to launch an Australian online newspaper, a completely new paper. When did that last happen? That is an example of the liberating way in which the internet, this super platform, opens up so many opportunities for so many different voices. And of course that does not even begin to touch upon the impact of social media.

When Senator Conroy said that the threshold for media outlets to be subject to this regulation was circulation, readership or viewership of 50,000 I thought they were having a go at the member for Griffith, because he has more than a million followers on his Twitter account. But apparently they have to be paid subscribers, so the member for Griffith is not going to be subject to it.

Yes, we are committed to freedom and diversity. Technology and competition in the market have delivered diversity we have never known before in our lives and freedom of the press is as fundamentally important to our democracy as anything we do in this chamber or in the other place. The government is putting it under threat and it is asking the parliament to make decisions on these momentous matters in four sitting days. It is holding the people in contempt and we will not be a part of it.

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (18:09): I would also like to speak briefly on the proposed establishment of the joint committee and the 18 items in the motion—in particular, item (1)(a), which relates to the reach rule for regional and local news. We have some process problems before this chamber tonight and this Joint Select Committee on Broadcasting Legislation is an example of that. The inflammatory language from the minister, with his 'take it or leave it' statement of a couple of days ago, adds to the problems that this chamber has to deal with.

The House of Representatives has a role to play in improving legislation. There are standing orders that establish a proper and due process for the consideration by the House of Representatives of all legislation. I am disappointed to hear the minister in question and the government trying to ram this through, leaving behind issues that are at the heart of this media reform package—and I refer to item (1)(a) of the motion, relating to the 75 per cent reach rule—which in many ways define either the success or the failure of the whole exercise.

The 18 points listed in the motion do not mention the fact that this is not a 24-hour committee, as we were told two days ago, but, according to the terms of reference, it will report by 17 June 2013. My initial inclination of yesterday, when I said publicly that the media reform package was all in or none at all, is where I now end up. In many ways, this motion gives the game up, as far as I am concerned. If we are waiting till June this year to address the key issue of how local and Australian content is going to be dealt with through the new media landscape and in response to the considered convergence review of the last 18 months—if we are just going to park that in a committee for four months—we are now not conducting media reform at all.

I will be damned if I will be part of giving some sort of licence fee reduction to anyone on the way through and somehow dress it up as a media reform package. We deal with it
all, including the reach rule, as part of a media reform package. We deal with it with the national interest in mind. We do not get caught up in tactical games of the moment around who is going to do mergers and acquisitions in what businesses, or tactical games around which party is trying to do over which party in an election campaign, or trying to subvert the processes of this chamber and speed the whole process up with take-it-or-leave-it language, or failing to consult with all the many stakeholders involved in what is a substantial media reform package.

From a content providers' point of view, for the first time in a long time they are united in saying, 'We need to do more than is currently being done.' Writers, producers and actors are united in saying, 'This package is undercooked.' Yet you are asking us to rush it through in some sort of take-it-or-leave-it language and you are parking the critical issues of quotas, subquotas, local markets and how the Australian story gets told in the future. You are saying: 'Don't you worry about that. That will get resolved in the future. Let's just get a licence fee reduction through and the rest will look after itself.' I will not be a part of that.

In many ways, the motion to establish this committee bells the cat. I know that is the cliched term in politics at the moment, but it does bell the cat that the hard intellectual work has not been done. This committee is going to do what the minister, the government and the consultation process should have done in responding to the very good work of the convergence review. So we do not have media reform on the table at all; what we have on the table is a committee that is going to do media reform and a government that is going to give a licence fee reduction—with the support of the opposition by the looks of it—and not much else.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (18:15): I thank the shadow minister and the member for Lyne for their contributions. However, I do want to respond briefly to a couple of comments that have been made. To the member for Lyne on the 75 per cent rule, in moving this resolution I have made it clear, as did the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy in his announcement yesterday, that if there can be a consensus gained by the committee then the 75 per cent rule could be included in the general package of media reform legislation. That is one of the reasons why we have sought to establish this committee in a timely fashion and why I have brought forward this resolution to establish the committee here. The fact is that there were changes to the way in which the free-to-air networks had put forward their position during this process, a change to the advocacy that had been put forward to the parliament, I assume including to the member for Lyne, to members of the opposition and to members of the government. What this is designed to do is establish a process so that if there can be a clear resolution on a way forward then it can be dealt with as a part of this package of reforms. That is certainly the government's intention.

With regard to the issues raised by the member for Wentworth, I say with respect to the member for Wentworth that, with regard to the positions, if he has differences with elements of this package, at least advocate on the basis of what they actually are rather than on the basis of what some have interpreted or deliberately misled people to believe them to be. With regard to regulation, the model that is in the legislation that will be brought forward tomorrow is a model of self-regulation by the industry, funded by the industry. That is what has been
put forward in the processes that have been established. There has been the Convergence Review, the Finkelstein inquiry and considerable public debate on this. The minister made his announcement with regard to the determination—and this relates to the question of the member for Lyne of, 'What next if they don't agree?'—and then it will be up to this parliament to determine its response. It is as simple as that. But one of the things that we have made clear is that, in terms of the public interest test, if there is not agreement by this parliament in the next fortnight, what we are not going to do is spend the entire period in the lead-up to the budget, and post budget, dealing with this issue. It will not be pursued. That is a reasonable position, in my view, for the government to take—that is, to be up-front about what the decision-making process is. And part of that process, as announced by the minister yesterday, is the establishment of this committee in good faith. I commend the motion to the House.

Question agreed to.

BILLS

National Disability Insurance Scheme Bill 2012

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (18:19): I rise to support the National Disability Insurance Scheme Bill 2012. The coalition has consistently supported the National Disability Insurance Scheme. When the former parliamentary secretary, now the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, first put this matter to the Productivity Commission, the coalition enthusiastically supported him. When the Productivity Commission brought down its various reports, the coalition enthusiastically welcomed them. And when the government finally committed itself to the National Disability Insurance Scheme, we warmly welcomed that and gave it our support.

Quite often in this chamber, I am accused of a relentless negativity. It is always unfair, but in this case it is false—because when it comes to the National Disability Insurance Scheme, I am Dr Yes. I always have been, always will be. But the National Disability Insurance Scheme itself is a work in progress. It is a building site. Much is yet to be done. Much of the design work, indeed, is yet to be completed. We still do not know who will be eligible for the NDIS. We do not know what is covered by the NDIS. We do not know the extent of coverage by the NDIS. We do not know the precise role of the states in the operations of the NDIS, if any. Indeed, the very nature of the scheme itself is yet to be determined. Is it to be a scheme such as Medicare? Is it to be, in effect, Medicare for people with disabilities? Or is it to resemble more closely the workers compensation schemes or the state traffic accident schemes, which are genuine insurance schemes? All of this is yet to be finally determined—and there is a long, long road ahead of us. If we follow the Productivity Commission's timetable—and that would seem to me the smart thing to do—the road from this point will last for at least two more terms of this parliament. It involves not only three terms of the national parliament but also, if the National Disability Insurance Scheme is to come to fruition, the cooperation of nine governments: the Commonwealth, all six states and both of the territory governments and parliaments.

This is an extremely complex piece of policy we are dealing with. It is probably one of the most complex pieces of policy that has ever come before this parliament, that has ever been managed by a national government
in this country. That is why, from the very beginning, the coalition has recommended the establishment of a bipartisan parliamentary committee, co-chaired by relevant frontbenchers—so that this scheme can indeed be shepherded from the early days to its completion through this parliament and through the other parliaments that need to work together if it is to succeed.

In the end, for this scheme to successfully come to fruition for the mighty benefit of people with disabilities throughout our country, it cannot simply reflect Labor values; it cannot simply reflect Liberal values. It must reflect national values. It must reflect the values that are held deep by members on both sides of this chamber, values that are common to members of all parliaments right around our country. It has to be a national scheme. The best way to ensure that the scheme is the product of this parliament, this nation, and not just the product of any one government or any one parliament, is to have the bipartisan committee that I have recommended. I am disappointed that the Prime Minister has not seen fit to take up this offer. I undertake—should there be a change of government later this year—to establish such a bipartisan committee, to ensure that this work comes to fruition.

The great issue that inevitably hovers over an enterprise of such magnitude is funding. The Productivity Commission estimated that the extra funding required for the National Disability Insurance Scheme was in the order of $6½ billion a year. That is not over the forward estimates. That is the starting estimate. I think the finishing estimate is likely to be somewhat more than this.

It is absolutely critical that as well as focusing on the National Disability Insurance Scheme, important as it is, we focus on building a strong and prosperous economy. It is the only guarantee of sustaining such a scheme through the years and decades to come. A rich country can afford a national disability insurance scheme; a poor country cannot. That is why economic prosperity is at the heart of delivering these kinds of services, the services that our people so understandably and so badly need.

The party that you can best trust to deliver a national disability insurance scheme is the party that you can most trust to deliver strong economic growth. I would put it to you, Madam Deputy Speaker Rishworth, and through you to the Australian people, that such a party is the coalition. Not only do we have the record when it comes to delivering strong economic growth but also we have the record when it comes to showing decency and compassion to people with disabilities and to their carers. It was the Howard government that in the last six budgets delivered substantial bonus payments to carers of people with disabilities. It was the Howard government that presided over a substantial growth in the number of people receiving the carers pension and the carers payment.

At the risk of blowing one's own trumpet, I have sought to engage as deeply as I can with carers. The Pollie Pedal charity bike ride last year, this year and next year will raise money for Carers Australia and I hope that on next year's Pollie Pedal bike ride the carers of our country, particularly in regional areas, might have the chance to chew the ear of a Prime Minister about concerns that are so important to them. It is this engagement with the carers of our country and with those they are caring for that will most guarantee that we do not lose interest in this scheme, that this scheme will be not just something that is put up in a bid to win an election but is something that becomes part of the life of our country—not just for a few months, not
just for a couple of years, but forever, which it should be.

Many people have helped shepherd this parliament to the place it is today in support of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Obviously, much work has been done by members opposite and by officials of the government and I thank them for the work they have done. I want to congratulate the shadow minister Mitch Fifield, who has been an indefatigable advocate for the rights of people with disabilities inside our party room as well as in the wider community. All of us are on a journey when it comes to our understanding of these issues.

I want to particularly mention Ara Cresswell, CEO of Carers Australia, who I have worked with so closely over the last year or so, particularly in connection with the Pollie Pedal charity bike ride. I should mention Millie Parker, one of the great advocates of people with disabilities. She is someone who has had a disability herself, someone who has herself experienced our system at its best and at its worst. She is obviously a strong advocate for the National Disability Insurance Scheme. I thank John Della Bosca, a former New South Wales minister, who is running the Every Australian Counts campaign.

I particularly want to mention the Moore family of the northern beaches of Sydney. Derek and Laurelie have worked indefatigably for their son Grayden, who received a horrific brain injury some years ago. He was a youngster in the prime of life, an international standard athlete, when he received a horrific injury and probably would have died but for the indefatigable advocacy and intervention of Derek and Laurelie Moore. People like that are the real heroes in our society. People like that deserve to be acknowledged and recognised and deserved to be thanked for what they do, not just for those they love and care about but for the impact they have, the ripple effect they have throughout our society. Certainly my own understanding and insights into disability issues have been immensely impacted by what they have done and by what they have said to me.

The coalition strongly supports the National Disability Insurance Scheme. We intend to be a part of bringing it to fruition. For that reason, I am very pleased to have had this opportunity to contribute to the debate.

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Manager of Opposition Business) (18:31): It is a rare thing indeed when an idea builds such momentum that it becomes accepted across the whole political spectrum. I can say without equivocation that this applies to the National Disability Insurance Scheme. As the Leader of the Opposition has said, it is an idea whose time has come. People across Australia have put up their hands to say that the current system needs to change. For many Australians with a disability there is currently no system or safety net at all. It is a shame that Labor has attempted to characterise this as a 'Labor reform' and politicise it. I see it as a reform all right—thinking Australians would support and do support. It is an entirely Australian reform, representing Australian values. All in this place agree that the current system of support available to Australians with a disability needs to change. People with disability and their families, their carers and all those supporting them deserve a better deal than they are currently getting. The coalition is committed to making this a reality and we have supported every step along the path to the development of the NDIS.

The agreement between the New South Wales government and the federal government demonstrates what can be
achieved when the federal government adopts a constructive approach in negotiations with the states, rather than the adversarial approach of the last COAG meeting. That is why at the COAG before last it was disappointing that the Prime Minister could not rise above her partisan instincts. It is to the credit of Ted Baillieu and Barry O'Farrell that they continued to negotiate, in the face of public attack and misrepresentation by the federal government, and reached an agreement to host launch sites.

The NDIS is a once-in-a-generation reform that will unfold over the life of several parliaments. It therefore should be the property of the parliament as a whole, on behalf of the Australian people. The coalition has urged the Prime Minister to adopt a more cooperative approach, as there can be no NDIS without the states. They are partners, not enemies. It is now up to the Prime Minister to continue this constructive approach in discussions with all the other jurisdictions to conclude further bilateral agreement. Further expansion of the NDIS will be dependent on the Commonwealth negotiations concluding further bilateral agreements with each jurisdiction.

While we emphatically supported the government's commitment of $1 billion to the NDIS in the federal budget, we have some difficulty in reconciling this figure with the $3.9 billion the Productivity Commission said would be necessary over the forward estimates just for the first phase of the NDIS. It is imperative we get this right and we will require a very high level of consultation and attention to detail, not just now, not just when the sites are launched, but from now to its full implementation. To ensure this occurs, the coalition has called for the establishment of a joint parliamentary committee to be chaired by both sides of politics. A parliamentary oversight committee would lock in all parties and provide a non-partisan environment where issues of design and eligibility could be worked through cooperatively. The member for Dawson, George Christensen, has for some time put a motion in the House to establish this committee. Regrettably, it has not been brought forward for a vote by the House.

Senator Mitch Fifield, the shadow minister for disabilities, carers and the voluntary sector, moved a similar motion to establish the oversight committee in the Senate. He has done a marvellous job in advocating for people with a disability and for the NDIS. Labor and the Greens combined in the Senate to vote against Senator Fifield's motion. The Leader of the Opposition reiterated this offer in his Press Club speech this year when he said:

The Coalition is so committed to the National Disability Insurance Scheme, for instance, that we’ve offered to co-chair a bi-partisan parliamentary committee so that support for it doesn't flag across the three terms of parliament and among the nine different governments needed to make it work.

Only if we give the most careful consideration to the implementation of the NDIS will we get this right for all Australians with a disability. Yet the government, which likes to pay lip service to wanting cross-party support for the NDIS, does not support a cross-party committee. When the opportunity arose to give this real meaning, the government declined to do so. Unlike the government, we will continue to place this issue above politics and are prepared to work with the Commonwealth and state governments toward a better deal for Australians with disabilities. I note that the Leader of the Opposition has reiterated in the parliament tonight that, if we are fortunate enough to be elected in September this year, we will introduce a genuine
bipartisan committee co-chaired by the opposition and the government. We stand ready to work with the government to see an NDIS delivered as soon as possible. We believe we can do this within the time frame recommended by the Productivity Commission.

The coalition believes that the full implementation of an NDIS would be nothing short of a new deal for people with disabilities and their carers. Currently the level of support available to a person with a disability is dependent on a number of things—the state they live in and whether the disability is congenital or acquired later in life or through an accident or a workplace incident. But if you are born with a disability or acquire a disability it is a different story each time, particularly with waiting lists and queues. The bottom line is that this results in many people with a disability being left without the assistance that they desperately need. It is imperative that individual needs are at the centre and take priority. Individuals need to be able to pick the support, aids, equipment and service providers of their choice. We need a system of support that is based on need, rather than rationing, with the entitlement for support going to the individual. The NDIS is about empowering the individual, and removing government and unnecessary red tape from people's lives.

The coalition has a longstanding commitment to assisting people with a disability and their carers. The Howard government was trailblazing in support for carers and mental health in particular. I have been very lucky in my career in this place to have had opportunities in government to be involved with creating organisations and initiatives to help those with mental illness and disabilities. In 2006, as Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing, I established the youth mental health initiative called headspace. The aim was to change the way youth mental health services are delivered with an emphasis on youth-friendly environments and improved accessibility. Headspace goes from strength to strength; it remains something I am very proud to have been involved with and, in fact, to have created.

I might say, in an element of bipartisanship, the current Minister for Mental Health and Ageing has done a superb job at continuing the good work of headspace. When good ideas are agreed to, whether by Labor or the Liberals, new governments should not sweep them away simply because the previous government came up with them. But even from opposition it is possible to make a difference. You need look no further than the Leader of the Opposition, who 15 years ago started the Pollie Pedal, which is a bike ride that raises awareness and funds for various charities. Each year, the Pollie Pedal has been gone from success to success. Last year, $540,000 was raised for Carers Australia. The next two Pollie Pedals will be in partnership with, and raise funds for, Carers Australia. Every year, the Leader of the Opposition invites me to join the Pollie Pedal; but, given my now ageing station after 20 years in this place, I fear that my best days of fitness might well be over.

Mr Briggs: You are not competitive?
Mr PYNE: I am, but he is very fit.
Ms Hall: Stop smoking!
Mr PYNE: Jill, for goodness sake, do not let the cat of the bag! Similarly, last year I had the privilege of addressing In 2 Life, which is a national youth organisation that supports Australia's youth by building help-seeking behaviours, coping strategies and life skills amongst peers. In 2012, In 2 Life launched their suicide prevention program, that was inclusive of a Facebook page. I was
recently informed by Darryn Keneally, one of In 2 Life's directors, that since the introduction of the Facebook page the group has grown to approximately 23,000 members. The use of Facebook has provided another avenue for young people to engage in and utilise a significant resource of support.

Like many in this place, I have been involved with the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation and have met with many ambassadors from my own electorate of Sturt. Lorraine Pitman—the Family Voices committee chair—and her son, Thomas, have been fantastic ambassadors for JDRF. Lorraine has been involved with setting up workshops that assist people with type 1 diabetes to navigate through their challenges. In October last year, I attended the Walk for Juvenile Diabetes to raise awareness and funds for this group. I had the pleasure of supporting Oscar Lawrance from Sturt on this walk and the privilege to host him when he attended Parliament House in November for Kids in the House. Georgia Hall is another youngster from Sturt whom I have taken the time to meet with to discuss the concerns she has about facing diabetes. She raised a number of issues where the system is failing them. Along with meeting young ambassadors for JDRF, I have met with the chief executive officer Mike Wilson. Through all these conversations and this dialogue, what has been very clear is the need for the NDIS to be a success, and the need for it to be incredibly apparent and transparent in people's lives.

I must also acknowledge the work of the Every Australian Counts campaign, chaired by John Della Bosca, which has sought to keep the NDIS in the public mind on behalf of disability organisations. I did speak at the Every Australian Counts rally—alongside the member for Mayo—which was held in Adelaide with David Hoist and many of my South Australian parliamentary colleagues. During this campaign, I was invited to attend the DisabiliTEA that was being conducted Direct Care Australia, a fantastic organisation in Sturt that specialises in nursing recruitment, and providing personal and domestic care. The morning tea was attended by local service providers and carers. It provided an opportunity to have an open and frank discussion about the need for a way to overcome the issues currently facing the disability sector and the need for successful implementation of the NDIS. Andrew Daly, the chief executive officer of the Royal Society for the Blind—which exists in the north of my electorate—has gone through his concerns with me on many occasions about the way the NDIS deals with blindness as a disability.

In my role as a shadow minister for education, I firmly believe that there is no shame in a learning disability; the only shame is if it is not recognised and treated to an individual's needs. We are calling for the use of modified curricula and instruction in education, appropriate assistive technology and extra time for learning as students with disabilities go through school. It is crucial for children who suffer from a learning disability to receive the appropriate diagnosis, treatment and support in their school. I am currently working with the Specific Learning Difficulties Association of South Australia, SPELD, to raise awareness of this by asking the parliament to formally recognise dyslexia as a disability and to provide funding to ensure that students with dyslexia receive high-quality intervention as soon as the diagnosis has been confirmed.

Dyslexia is not a sign that children are lazy or unintelligent; it is a genuine disability. Sadly, proper support for children with dyslexia has not always been available. Although attitudes are changing as people come to understand the condition more, there
is still much work to be done. We need to ensure that all Australian children with dyslexia and other learning difficulties get the support they need. The NDIS, properly implemented, will dramatically improve the lives of people with a disability. A coalition government will deliver it for all Australians and will work with the Labor government for as long as it is in power to make sure that the NDIS is successfully implemented. I thank the House.

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (18:44): It is a privilege to follow the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Sturt, echoing their fine words of support for the National Disability Insurance Scheme. This important initiative is something which the coalition fully supports. It is important that there is a bipartisan commitment to such a policy, because it affects an area that is so important to people in the community.

I think it is important to say, at the beginning of my remarks, that I often find it the case in Australia today, that—with all of the apparatus of state and federal governments, charities and all the people who are there to look after people with disabilities—from a governmental perspective all of us in this place know that we are still not doing a very effective job. There is a great deal of need and a great deal of demand in our community, yet with all of the agencies, alms and taxes that are paid in we do not tend to get a lot out for people with very profound levels of disability and their carers, their families and their communities.

That is always something I like to reflect upon, because this is really one of the fundamental reasons that we have government. When somebody asks, 'Why do I pay so much tax?' or, 'Why do I pay such a high level of tax?' the answer invariably is: to look after people who cannot look after themselves—to do things for those who are in the most need. And there is no more genuine need than that of people who have high levels of disability. It often bemuses me that governments spend so much time doing so many other things but do not take care of these very fundamental things which I think we all agree we need to do much better on.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme is something which is an attempt to bypass all of the blockages in the system that have built up over many years, between state and federal governments, and between agencies, and provide a platform for a better future for a person with a disability in Australia. That is why it is so welcome.

It is, of course, the case that we have seen many attempts in the past to do something about disabilities. Perhaps one of the most profoundly disappointing moments for me, as a participant in and a watcher of politics in Australia for some time, was when, near the end of the last Labor government in New South Wales I saw the minister responsible for disability issues, Graham West, retire from office. In his retirement press conference—I will never forget it; there was a Stateline presentation by Quentin Dempster—the minister with responsibility for disabilities in New South Wales said that he was stepping down because he felt that he could no longer make any meaningful change in the disability sector as the minister. Quentin Dempster, quite rightly, in this press conference said, 'But, Minister, you are the minister. You have a passion for disability services.' Mr West had a genuinely passionate interest in disabilities in New South Wales and a genuine desire to do something. The statement was, 'Surely you are at the pinnacle of government in this state and you can do something about it.’ The minister was retiring to become a disability advocate in the private sector—to advocate for people with disabilities. I have say that as
a young person—as a person who is passionate about politics and who has been committed to making a difference in my community for a long time—that interview has always stuck with me and has always affected me. Someone who had that passion, and who had that intensity to want to change the system—to do something for people with profound need—had got to the pinnacle of the ability to do it in government, as the minister for disability in New South Wales, but was pulling the pin because he did not feel he could make any impact in government. It was not an encouraging signal. And it was a signal that we need to do things differently.

The more involved you get with this sector and the more involved you get with the real humanity of the people—the more all of us interact—the more you understand that this is not a partisan matter. It is something that we all need to do better on. That is why I am quite prepared to support a concept like the NDIS. I am quite prepared to support substantial funding of an NDIS and ensure that we try something different and that we look at something that could provide a better future for so many people.

I attend disability events in my electorate—particularly the Ability Options at Bella Vista. Ability Options, which began in 1976, now provides programs and services to over 2,000 people and their families. It provides all kinds of services for people with disabilities: housing development, home maintenance, supported living, respite, community access, post-school programs, case management, self-management, disability employment services, transition to work and supported employment. Visiting with them, and understanding what they do, it was clear to me that there is a feeling in the community that we need to do better.

I had morning tea at the Jasper Road Public School Hills Physical Disabilities Team at Castle Hill. That was important in understanding the barriers that people can meet when trying to access services—the repeated barriers and the nature of the barriers over many years—and the frustration felt by parents, carers and people with disabilities. Those things are very important for all of us to engage with, but it is more important that we do something about it. When we get to the ‘doing’ we have some concern about ensuring that we get the best detail—and this will be a detailed area. It will be a new and complex initiative. It will require a focus on detail.

That is sometimes something which we are critical of, when it is lacking in other bills. In this area it is important that we work together to get the detail right from the beginning. I think it is right that the coalition, through the member for Dawson, has proposed an oversight committee of parliamentarians from the House to ensure that all parties are brought together in a spirit of bipartisanship. There is nothing political or untoward about it. It is purely to ensure that we have the same input as anyone else so that we people on this side of the chamber can contribute the experience of people who have been in government and who understand that complexity can often be one of the biggest challenges with such a grand and noble scheme. And it is a noble scheme. So, when we get to that scenario, when we are examining the details, the coalition stands ready to work with the government and see an NDIS delivered as soon as possible. Given that the full implementation of an NDIS would be nothing short of a New Deal, from the beginning it has to be carefully monitored, implemented and put into place with a well-thought-out program.

I am certainly concerned about a number of aspects of it because when I meet with
people at disability events, and when I read all of the emails I receive from so many people in my electorate—I have a sample of them here that I will speak to in a minute—I find that there is a level of expectation about the NDIS that is building to the point where I am concerned that we should make sure, from the beginning, that we are realistic with people about it. This will not be a panacea. It will not solve everybody's problems everywhere, all at once. That is why it requires careful thought about structure, careful thought about form and careful thought about detail.

In particular, I am concerned about how we can ensure that we get greater employment of people with a disability in Australia. It is a source of great shame for Australia that we are, internationally, at quite a low benchmark in relation to the employment of people with disability. It is something that governments need to look at. It is something that I would like to see at the forefront of what we are doing to help people with a disability. It is a vital component, where we can get industry, business, the private sector, working in cooperation with government to ensure that benefits are delivered. I have not heard a lot about it so far, but I am hoping that we can ensure that employment is part of the insurance scheme's objectives or at least ensure that we are working concurrently with the private sector so that more people with a disability are able to be employed in Australia in the future.

I have spoken about the importance of the National Disability Insurance Scheme bipartisan parliamentary committee and why that will assist to ensure that we can provide our experience and diligence to the government, but I am also concerned that the federal government work with the states. We want to see a productive relationship between state and federal governments on this issue. Part of the problem and challenge with this sector in the past has been that we have not necessarily had the best approach to disability support. We have had duplication, red tape, regulation and sometimes insufficient interaction between federal and state governments. We have seen a constructive approach in New South Wales, and I fully support, as a New South Wales member, the approach of Premier O'Farrell in signing an intergovernmental agreement in December for a full state-wide NDIS rollout after the Hunter project. This is important, and it is now up to the government to continue with bilateral agreements.

The mechanics of the agency that will be established by way of legislative instruments are called the NDIS rules. The NDIS rules establishing eligibility and criteria are going to be where the most consideration and the most concern will have to be given. I have received many submissions about the age barriers, which we have already set at 65. I understand why there has to be a limit, but there are a lot of concerns in the community that are going to have to be addressed and managed.

On the significance of this bill as a framework, I think it is important to lower the expectation bar in some regards about what this will do. That requires a careful discussion about these rules. We have just seen the release of the discussion paper, on 1 February. I am not trying to criticise, but it would be fair to say, having a look at it, that there is not a lot of detail there. There is not a lot of information. It is really a set of questions, not a set of rules. I think we need to start to get to some of those rules and start to manage the expectations of the community in a way that will produce a positive outcome, because, regardless of which party is in government now or going forward, it is vital that there be a consensus...
on the approach and vital that there be a bipartisan approach to every part of the process, including the draft set of rules and including the expectations of the NDIS.

I want to turn briefly to some of the people in my electorate whose concerns I promised I would raise. Sharon, who lives in my electorate, has written to me about her younger sister, who is 46 years old and has an intellectual disability and a range of limitations, including failing eyesight, limited mobility in both arms and legs, and the need to use a bladder catheter and a bag. She has been in receipt of a disability support pension since she turned 18, although she has had short periods of supported employment. Sharon and her siblings continued to support her living in a home following the illness and death of their mother 8½ years ago. However, now she is in Westmead Hospital following several falls, depression and ongoing harassment from drug-addicted and threatening neighbours. She is residing there following a stint in hospital at North Parramatta. Sharon tells me there is insufficient support available, especially overnight support, to enable her to live independently in the community. When you put all of those circumstances together, you can understand why we need to do better in Australia for people like Sharon and her younger sister. Dealing with that sort of profound disadvantage is supposed to be the pointy end of government, and yet the limited support available makes life very difficult for Sharon and her sister. That is why this NDIS is so important.

I have had many other people raise issues with me. Melissa from Castle Hill is hoping that the NDIS will mean that her daughter has some security for her future. I think the families are sometimes the most compelling in the cases that they make, because they are the people who take up the slack when government and society fail to assist in a profound way. They are the ones who feel most passionately, because they care so much for their relatives and siblings, and they often have the best experience and stories to tell about where the system is failing.

It is easy for us to come in here and talk about all these individual cases, and we all have these concerns and we all share a profound concern for the future of the disability sector; it is much more difficult for us to do what needs to be done. In the doing of the NDIS, it is vital that we get this government policy right. It is important that, from the beginning, it is bipartisan, it is well supported by government and it is well planned and executed. Whether that be through the use of the parliamentary oversight committee mechanism, which is a very good suggestion of the member for Dawson, or whether it be through other ways whereby the experience and know-how of former ministers, of people with longstanding service in the parliament, can be brought together, this is such an important change in the environment for the future, at the federal government level, that it is vital that it be done right from the beginning. In speaking in total support of the NDIS—the concept and the plan—I urge the government to work with us as we are willing to work with them at any point, at any juncture, to ensure that this is an unqualified success.

Debate interrupted.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The SPEAKER (18:59): It being so tantalisingly close to 7pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

**Fishing Industry**

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (18:59): Tonight I stand in defence of the five million...
recreational fishing people in Australia. The recreational fishing industry is worth conservatively around $10 billion to our national economy. These five million people are the largest participant group of any group participating in recreational activities. It was with great pleasure that I read this morning how the New South Wales government is revisiting the marine park plans that were instituted by the former Labor government— instituted without adequate consultation with the recreational fishing industry or with the commercial fishing industry. In fact, it was a dirty deal done dirt cheap to support the green movement.

Ministers Hodgkinson and Parker in New South Wales have made a responsible decision. They are going to revisit the science and put in place an expert knowledge panel that will look at the benefits of the park, areas that should be sanctuary and areas that should be opened up to recreational fishing. In the last few years in particular I have been working with a number of groups—from Recfish through to AFTA, steered and headed by John Dunphy from Shimano. In particular I have been talking to people who are making their living out of the recreational fishing industry. Those are the people who supply the fishing equipment, the bait, the cafes, the motels, the boat sales—all of those whose income depends on having a viable recreational fishing industry.

Our yield from fishing per square kilometre in Australia is one of the smallest in the world. It is a key part of our tourism fabric. People like Paul Worsteling, who runs the *IFISH* television show, and Al McGlashan, who runs the *Small Boats Big Fish* television show, understand it: they are out on a weekly and daily basis selling recreational fishing. It is not just the benefits of catching the fish—parents and families go out to enjoy the outdoors, away from televisions and away from computers, spending time and engaging. It is part of the social fabric that we really need in this country.

Again, I congratulate the New South Wales ministers, but what happens with this federal government? Here we have the federal minister who had the Marine Reserves Network Management Plan released yesterday that was rushed through—bashed through—without reasonable consultation. There is a total lack of understanding of the long-term social and economic implications of these lockouts that they have put in place. There will be some that say, 'This is unreasonable; we need to protect these areas.'

I spent over 30 years in the diving and fishing industry. I have spent the hours under the water and above the water; I have earned my living in it; I have trained and educated people in the management of the marine environment. One of the big problems up in the Great Barrier Reef in relation to the divers is the concentrated effort on one reef. I will give you the example of Hastings Reef, just off Cairns. You have three buoys, so you have three boats. Let's say they are carrying a hundred divers each and they are doing two dives a day. That is 200 dives times three boats—600 dives a day or 4,200 dives a week on one small reef. In discussions with people across the broader industry people want a great environment. I think we need to learn a lesson from those who work the land—those who understand that if you plough the same paddock and grow the same vegetables in that paddock over and over again, you get degradation in that paddock. We need to look at things like crop rotation, releasing some reefs for this year and then moving on to give the reefs a chance to recover. That applies to both fishing and to diving—in fact, to all marine management.
I do agree that we need certain areas that are sanctuaries—no boats, no fishing, no diving, no activity occurring. You hold those as the benchmark areas. The recreational fishing industry is important to Australia. It is important to our tourism market; it is important to regional communities that make their living from it. It is important to those more than 20,000 people nationally who work in industries supporting and supplying the products for our recreational fishing industry. What we have from this government is a determination to shut down one of the greatest pastimes ever. As a young fellow, I used to spend my days with my dad. We were so poor that my fishing line was an old Coke bottle—because it had the best curve—with a bit of line wrapped around it, a cork and a hook. But, you know, those hours I spent with my dad were some of the most memorable ever. It didn't matter whether we caught fish or not. The most important thing was spending time together. I condemn this government for their actions.

Griffith Electorate: Bus Services

Mr RUDD (Griffith) (19:04): The business of government is largely about the delivery of government services. I rise this evening to speak about the decline in the delivery of basic state government services, which has become a particular concern to residents in my community on Brisbane's Southside. The Liberal-National Party government in Queensland has taken a slash and burn approach to local services. Having put 14,000 public servants out of work—14,000 public servants out of work—cut funding to local community organisations and slash frontline health services, the Liberal-National Party have now decided to attack public transport.

Last week the Newman government released their long-anticipated review of South-East Queensland's bus services, which, if implemented, will leave Brisbane residents standing in the rain as bus stops are closed and wondering what will be hit next. Bus services may sound very small beer to some standing here in the national parliament, but for people who depend on buses to physically get around to do their shopping, this is no small thing at all. It is a very big thing. The Newman government has confirmed that it will put profits before people and cut 111 local bus routes, significantly impacting on the lives of many in our community who are elderly or who have mobility challenges, as well as those who have no private transport.

Of particular note are two local bus services, the 192 and the 198, which provide the people of Highgate Hill in my electorate with vital services to other parts of the community. The 198 is a hale-and-ride service that connects the people of Highgate Hill with the Mater Hospital, the PA Hospital and the Buranda shopping centre. It is the only bus from Highgate Hill that goes to the Princess Alexandra Hospital. Many of the people who rely on this service are elderly or have health or mobility problems or are one of the 17 per cent of people who live in the area who do not own private transport. The alternative for those living around Dornoch Terrace will be to walk more than 1½ kilometres up hill and down dale to the nearest bus station. It is not called Highgate Hill for nothing. This is a very hilly part of Brisbane and, when we are talking about the elderly, this represents a real new challenge. Then, of course, having walked 1½ kilometres further, they have to find their way back again when they eventually head back home.

The 192 is the only bus that runs along the length of Dornoch Terrace. It is essential for residents accessing the city and the University of Queensland and it is a school
bus for at least 34 kids who attend St Ita’s Catholic Primary School.

One of those affected is 82-year-old Carol Crew. Without the 198, Carol, I am advised, will now find it difficult to attend Sunday mass at St Francis of Assisi Church on Dornoch Terrace, where she also plays the piano. Carol has told my office that many in her congregation rely on these buses to get to church and without them would have to miss this important opportunity for weekly fellowship. I am told that even the parish priest catches the bus to church as he has no car. Many like Carol will find it particularly difficult, if not impossible, to independently access their local shopping centres, meet with friends or even collect the morning paper. The decision will increase the level of social isolation in my local community.

The people of Highgate Hill are not the only residents in my community who will be affected by these cuts to vital services. Whole sections of Tarragindi and Annerley will be denied access to public transport when they lose their 114 and 112 services and the people of Seven Hills will lose the 212, a bus service that is often full of local hospital workers. Let us not be fooled. This is not about improving access to local bus services; it is a heartless exercise which will leave many in my community stranded—literally—on the side of the road.

In preparation for wholesale cuts to Brisbane's bus network, the Liberal-National Party government conducted their consultation in the two weeks immediately prior to Christmas. That is right; they chose a time when they could guarantee that the public already had other things on their mind. The Liberal-National Party cutbacks in health, hospitals, education and now transport services are heartless—many people depend on those services. It was similarly heartless of the LNP to sack 14,000 good, honest public servants. These public servants also have families to feed and mortgages to pay.

This is a stark reminder of just how important the upcoming federal election is for the people of Queensland. As I have said before, in this parliament and elsewhere, the Newman Liberal-National Party government is very much just the entree. If Tony Abbot becomes the next Prime Minister of Australia, that will be the main course—we will see the slash and burn of services nationwide.

Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis

Dr WASHER (Moore) (19:09): I recently met representatives from a fertility and stem cell research company, Genea, who brought to my attention the extraordinary difficulties faced by couples with serious genetic disorders who wish to have healthy children. These are couples who are carriers of a genetic disease which is disabling and has no prevention or cure—conditions such as cystic fibrosis, muscular dystrophy and Huntington's disease, to name a few.

As some members would be aware, couples who want to avoid passing on such disorders to their children can face terrible choices and decisions. Some will choose to undergo prenatal genetic tests during pregnancy and, on discovery of a serious genetic condition, termination of pregnancy. It is not uncommon for a couple to undergo more than one cycle of testing and termination before conceiving a child free of a genetic condition. Other couples will try to adopt or just give up on having children.

However, for the past decade or so, couples with enough money have been able to use an advanced medical procedure called preimplantation genetic diagnosis, or PGD, in combination with IVF services. PGD allows couples to screen their embryos for a genetic disorder and select an embryo free of
the disorder for implantation. PGD can detect well over 100 serious genetic conditions—from the well-known disorders I mentioned earlier, such as cystic fibrosis, through to diseases such as Fragile X, which is thought to be the main genetic cause of autism, and juvenile retinoschisis, which leads to a progressive loss of vision in male carriers.

One couple to have experienced the grief and heartache of genetic disease is Tracy and Warren Taprell of Queensland. Both are carriers of Leigh’s disease, a neurometabolic disorder which affects the central nervous system, and they have a one in four chance of passing on the disorder to their offspring. Sadly their late son Dion inherited the disease and died at three years of age. Not long after the death of Dion, Tracy discovered she was pregnant, but a prenatal test at 14 weeks called chorionic villus sampling showed the baby had inherited Leigh’s disease. Almost a year to the day after Tracy lost her son Dion, she made the harrowing decision to end the pregnancy.

The couple was determined not to have to go through this again, so they turned to PGD. Tracy underwent an IVF cycle with PGD testing and was implanted with an embryo free of Leigh’s disease, giving birth to a healthy baby boy called Levi in November 2011.

Reaching this point has, however, been a terrible financial struggle for Tracy and Warren. They were on carer and disability payments while caring for their late son Dion and had to scrape and save to pay for PGD treatment. While Medicare funding is available for genetic tests during pregnancy, Medicare funding is not provided for genetic tests, such as PGD, prior to pregnancy. It is illogical and has a devastating impact on couples like Tracy and Warren. They are just one of many Australian couples with known genetic diseases whose lives would be made better if PGD were partly subsidised by Medicare.

Australians like to think we have one of the world’s leading universal health systems, but we are not keeping pace with other countries when it comes to public funding for PGD—the United Kingdom, New Zealand, France and the Netherlands all provide some public subsidy for the medical procedure. PGD is not a new and untested treatment. It is a standard medical procedure and has been available in Australia for over a decade, so the time has well and truly come to provide Medicare coverage. The time is well overdue for us as parliamentarians to recognise we are failing to properly help couples with serious genetic diseases.

Interfaith Dialogue

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (19:13): On Wednesday, 6 March, I hosted an interfaith forum at the Ingle Farm Recreation Centre in the Makin electorate. The forum was attended by about 200 people, including religious and community leaders from across diverse sectors of the Adelaide community. Keynote speaker at the forum was the Hon. Kevin Rudd. The former South Australian Premier, Lynn Arnold, who had the role of forum moderator, brought his own extensive expertise on matters of faith to the discussion. Those attending were able to ask questions or simply express their views about religion and matters of faith.

Throughout the world, faith communities have been at the forefront in responding to social disadvantage, poverty and human suffering. In my own community, I am continually heartened by the extensive humanitarian work faith communities are associated with both in Australia and abroad.

Relying extensively on volunteers and without being judgemental, they have led by example in extending a hand of friendship and bringing comfort to people, regardless of
who those people were or where they came from. Through their generosity and compassion, faith communities have overcome cultural barriers and they have become the voice of social justice for people who often have no-one else to turn to. Yet they have mostly worked independently of each other, with each maintaining their individual identity.

In addition to their humanitarian work, I believe that there is another equally important role that faith communities can serve in today's world where so much tension exists at local and international levels. Racial prejudice lies at the heart of so much of that tension. Racial prejudice often stems from a lack of understanding of others. Cultural values, customs, traditions and behaviour of people have many origins, but where religion or spiritual beliefs are present within a culture those beliefs are likely to be the most influential factors.

Spiritual beliefs and culture are inseparable. One need only look to the Indigenous people of Australia, whose culture is built from their spiritual attachment to our land, to understand that. If we are to understand culture we therefore cannot ignore the faith that underpins it. We embrace another's culture only superficially if we do not respect and understand the spiritual beliefs on which it is founded. Yet we make little effort to do so. In fact we do the opposite and tend to steer away from discussions about matters of faith. That appears to be changing—and it is our faith communities and religious leaders who are leading the change. In South Australia the Oasis project at Flinders University and the Abraham Institute are shining examples of how interfaith dialogue is breaking down cultural barriers. In breaking down those barriers we make Australia a better society, not by being tolerant of others but by being accepting of them.

According to the most recent ABS statistics, over three-quarters of the Australian people associate themselves with a faith but the mix is changing and it will continue to change as people come to Australia from different parts of the world. For example, whereas 100 years ago about 96 per cent of Australians identified with Christianity, that figure is now 61 per cent. The Australian Constitution specifically ensures freedom of religion. It was a considered decision made by the founding fathers of our nation which has served Australia well and which I believe has made the transition to Australian life by new settlers much easier. The Hon. Kevin Rudd made this point so well at the forum when he said:

We actually have something uniquely precious here. I think one of the great hidden strengths of Australia is our embrace of diversity.

We have an ability to absorb the traditions, and consider respectfully, the traditions of faith which have come to these shores through successive waves of migration, creating for us an enormous national strength of resilience in ourselves, as a community and a nation, and frankly a strength in engaging the world today.

The importance of faith and its relevance to culture cannot be ignored if we are to live in peace with others in Australia and overseas. Regrettably, perceptions about faith are often drawn from the actions of extremists but, just as extremists do not reflect the wider community on other matters, nor do they on matters of faith.

In a world with so much cultural conflict, where international migration is commonplace and where international trade sustains economies, interfaith discussions and cultural understanding make good sense. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair understood this when in 2008 he set up the Tony Blair Faith Foundation to promote understanding and respect between the
world's main religions and as a vehicle to alleviate poverty in developing countries.

I thank all of the people who participated in the interfaith forum at Ingle Farm, and I thank people for their contribution on the day. The feedback that I have received from them subsequent to the forum has all been positive, with many requests for more similar events. I also take this opportunity to thank Pastor Terry Williams and his team from the Ingle Farm Baptist Church for setting up the venue on the day and providing morning tea for those who attended.

Northern Territory

Mrs GRIGGS (Solomon) (19:18): In these halls many comment that in the Territory we do things differently. This is true—it is our badge of honour. You cannot fit a square peg in a round hole; that is the way it has always been and I guess that is the way we like it. Many an Australian government has tried—some have succeeded but most have failed—to override the Territory and enforce their southern state policies. One of the most recent backfires for the Gillard Labor government was the coup that saw the end of the career of Senator Trish Crossin, a constituent of mine, with the installing of 'captain's pick' Nova Peris as the Labor Party's No. 1 Senate candidate in the Territory. Across my electorate of Solomon there was total outrage. I had staunch Labor voters declaring war against Prime Minister Gillard because of the way she had treated the Territory senator and Territorians with complete and utter contempt.

The Northern Territory is certainly a focal point for many. We are viewed as a place where the opportunities are endless. According to CommSec, compared to other jurisdictions the Northern Territory economy experienced economic growth of 35.4 per cent last year. The next closest jurisdiction was Western Australia, who experienced economic growth over 20 per cent less than the Territory, averaging 11.1 per cent across the year.

Not only do we have a strong economy; the Northern Territory labour market is growing at a solid pace. This is reinforced by CommSec, who stated that in 2012 the Northern Territory had the strongest job market in the country. Additionally, in the Northern Territory we have a relatively young and skilled workforce. According to the 2011 census, my electorate of Solomon has a median age of 32, while Australia wide it is 37.

This is all coupled with major projects, such as the INPEX-led Ichthys LNG project. There are significant investments across the Northern Territory, with the potential for more. These projects are generating significant employment opportunities across industries and the skills spectrum. The challenge for the Northern Territory will be to provide the workforce to meet the predicted growth requirements. My colleague the Hon. John Elferink MLA, the Attorney-General for the Northern Territory—who was here today in parliament—has shared with me some of his initiatives to assist with the potential skills shortage in the Northern Territory. He, like the rest of the Country Liberal members, understands the importance of creating opportunities for Territorians to provide a workforce that will meet the demands of these enormous projects coming to the Territory.

Tackling this issue head-on is a new initiative developed by the Country Liberal government, the Sentenced to a Job program, the Indigenous employment transition program. This program is run through the Northern Territory's Department of Correctional Services and is aimed at moving forward with a strong focus on
employment to help break the cycle of reoffending, having recognised that there is a direct correlation between higher levels of education and employment and lower levels of crime. The information they provided me says that prisoner education and employment is the key to the program's success. Through this program, the Northern Territory government is determined to reduce reoffending and improve public safety through the provision of real jobs for prisoners.

The program, in partnership with local community and industry, will strive to achieve economic development for local communities in construction, horticulture and agriculture, mining, hospitality and tourism, with the objective of having around 400 prisoners with a job—to secure a future for themselves and their families by gaining a range of employment and vocational skills that will assist them to find meaningful and sustainable employment upon release. The increase in Indigenous participants in real jobs will reduce the rate of reoffending and support business and industry by providing a skilled workforce.

It is essential that federal funding through programs like the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory be more flexible so as to ensure that initiatives like the Sentenced to a Job program that are proven to work in the Northern Territory but may not necessarily work in, say, New South Wales or Victoria can be funded and implemented so that we can create real jobs for Indigenous people in our community.

National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (19:23): On 15 March 2013, schools across Australia will celebrate the third annual National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence, an initiative of governments and schools across the country calling on school communities to 'take a stand together' against bullying and violence. Students across Australia will participate in raising the profile of the antibullying message, fostering positive and supportive social environments and increasing awareness of local counterbullying initiatives within their school and school community.

Around one in four Australian year 4 to year 9 students report being bullied at least every few weeks, with the highest rate of bullying occurring amongst year 5 and year 8 students, which are tough years at any time for young people. What is not so well known is that, in 87 per cent of bullying cases, students' peers are present as onlookers. These bystanders play a key part in the bullying process by not speaking out and by being seen to condone the bullying actions.

I have been contacted by young Jacob Kokins, a year 4 student from Newcastle, who told me about his ordeal with bullying at school. Jacob is a brave young man who has Asperger's syndrome and he asked that I bring to the attention of the House of Representatives the fact that bullying in schools is still a major issue faced by young people. Jacob has told me that, even though he has started in a new school in a special class, he feels unwanted because he is different. I say to Jacob, his parents and the wider school community across Australia that we really need schools to take a zero tolerance approach to bullying because it can destroy lives, and it should certainly not be viewed as routine or 'a part of growing up'. Bullying in the school years will invariably contribute to mental health issues faced by many young Australians, with many victims of bullying experiencing low self-esteem, and depression and anxiety issues.

Sadly, there have been documented cases locally, in the Newcastle region, of school-
... bullying can lead to criminal behavior later in life: 60 percent of males who were bullies in grades 6 through 9 were convicted of at least one crime as adults, compared with 23 percent of males who did not bully; 35 to 40 percent of these former bullies had three or more convictions by age 24, compared with 10 percent of those who did not bully.

We must also look at the cause of bullying, with many bullies actually victims themselves, either at school or often in the home.

The federal government's National Safe Schools Framework is the first of its kind in the world, offering guiding principles that help school communities to develop positive and practical safety and wellbeing policies. We have invested almost $4 million in online tools and resources to assist with this process. I encourage teachers, parents and students to visit bullyingnoway.gov.au to explore the range of resources, lesson plans, competitions and fact sheets available to assist with bullying issues and creative positive relationships in the school environment.

The best way that students can assist in combating bullying is by speaking out, not being a bystander. I would like to thank Jacob for his courage and for his belief in himself for speaking up in this important week. It is up to everyone to create positive environments that eliminate discrimination, intolerance and bullying.

Small Business

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (19:28): Small businesses employ almost half the total number of private sector employees. Regrettably, in our country we currently have a federal government that constantly ignores and refuses to listen to such a vital sector. Since 2007, Australians have been slugged with Labor's carbon tax, mining tax, repeated broken promises on company tax and its class-war rhetoric.

Labor promised they would follow a strict one-in one-out approach to the growth of regulations. Successive Labor governments have indeed repealed 104 regulations. Unfortunately, in the same time frame, they
introduced not 104 but an additional 20,900 regulations. So, for every regulation removed, 200 regulations have been added. It is plain to see that Labor is absolutely committed to greater and greater regulation, more bureaucracy and increasing intrusion into business and the marketplace. What this means for small business—and what the Labor government has been ignoring—is that there are almost 250,000 fewer people employed in small business today than when the Labor Party came into government.

I know that small businesses are doing it tough. When there are so many problems in the economy impacting on small business—such as the high Australian dollar, subdued consumer confidence and a subdued economic outlook—the 'more of the same' approach from this government does nothing to address the concerns of small business. This is why I have launched the Ryan Small Business Survey to hear the views from small businesses in Ryan about how I and the coalition can best improve conditions for their operations. Already, many small businesses in Ryan have told me how concerned they are, particularly because consumers are facing increasing cost-of-living pressures and are spending less across the board.

While businesses have had to spend thousands of dollars on compliance and rising input costs as a result of policies such as the carbon tax, consumers are tightening their spending following major price hikes in energy costs, child care and private health insurance. At all levels of government, small businesses have told me of the difficulty they have in tendering for government contracts. My priority as the member for Ryan is to help build a strong economy through lower taxes, more efficient government and more productive businesses which will deliver more jobs and better services for families in Ryan.

The federal coalition will support small business, as we have already announced, by: rescinding the carbon tax in order to reduce the rising pressures of electricity prices on, for example, every hairdresser, every newsagency and every drycleaner in the country; reducing the regulatory costs to all businesses by at least $1 billion a year and not changing current laws relating to the treatment of personal services income; relieving the red tape burden on Australia's small businesses by giving them the option to remit the compulsory superannuation payments made on behalf of workers directly to the ATO; and supporting and refocusing on family and home-run businesses. In particular, deregulation reform is a key part of the coalition's plan to free up Australia's businesses so that they can create more jobs and opportunities for all Australians. It is also part of our plan to help reduce the administrative burden on Australian community and not-for-profit organisations and allow them to focus more on their important work of strengthening local communities.

The Productivity Commission has estimated that reducing unnecessary red tape could generate as much as $12 billion in extra GDP per year. Therefore, the coalition is absolutely committed to reducing annual red tape by at least $1 billion for individuals, small businesses and society as a whole. Cutting red tape is not just about improving the economy and providing the opportunity for growth. For a small business person running a café, newsagency or lawn-mowing business, red tape means less time with customers, less time earning money and, more concerning, less time with their families. We know that many small businesses are run by individuals, mums and dads and their families. They are run by hardworking people, who might not get
holidays or even weekends or who might not draw a salary for years.

Fundamentally, the coalition has the guiding principle that, to help small business, government must get out of the way. We must ease conditions and reduce regulations on small businesses so that they can grow. That is why I am committed to what we can restore—hope, reward and opportunity for all Australian small businesses.

**keys2drive**

Mr SYMON (Deakin) (19:33): On 25 February, I had the great pleasure of the Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport, the Hon. Catherine King, coming out to my electorate of Deakin to celebrate a milestone in the keys2drive program. It was a particular milestone with 150,000 young people now having gone through that program. The keys2drive program is particularly important in that it teaches young people their first driving lesson. It teaches the parents and supervisors of those young people their driving lesson as well. But even better than that, it involves driving instructors, so a circle is completed.

There is hardly a day that goes by, unfortunately, in my city of Melbourne and, I dare say, in the rest of the country when any of us can pick up a newspaper and not read about another fatality or serious injury involving young people behind the wheel of a car. It has been a long-term issue in every state and territory across Australia, and it is particularly distressing when it involves someone close to you. I would doubt very much that there is a person in this place who has not been touched at some time by an accident or, even worse, a fatality involving a young person behind the wheel of a motorcar.

The milestone of delivering 150,000 lessons was held at Ringwood Square—a great place to hold an event like that. The sun was out, and plenty of people came along to the day. We had: Mr Andrew McKellar, the Executive Director of the Australian Automobile Association; Mr James Goodwin, the Director of Government Relations and Communications at the Australian Automobile Association; Mr Ben Haythorpe the program manager from keys2drive; a wonderful person by the name of Julie Clasper, the CEO and driving instructor of Wemco Driving School; and, I suppose, the star of the show for the day, Geena Castellano, the student who took part in the program. Of course, many others have gone through the program in the past.

The program has been running since 2008. It was announced in the budget and it was an election commitment—a $17 million program. The commitment was to deliver 200,000 free driving lessons to learner drivers and their parents. As I said before, it is particularly important that parents are part of this program too, because in many cases they are the person in the car teaching the young driver behind the wheel. I think many of us may fall into the situation same where what we learnt in our driving test or in our driving lessons many decades ago may not be exactly the same as what is being learnt today, or our memory may have faded a bit. It really pays to have a bit of an update before passing on the knowledge that we think we have to young people who will pick that up eagerly and follow, hopefully, our good habits and not so much our bad habits.

This program has had a great impact locally, and I think the good thing about it is that it does not discriminate against anyone wants to learn because of their age. As long as they are an Australian citizen they can apply, and that is done online. The same goes for driving instructors. There are now 1,100 driving instructors who are part of the program. I think it is really a great advertisement that people who are
professional drivers are delivering the program too.

Because the program has hit 150,000 it was due to finish at the end of this financial year, but there is a little bit of money left, I am told, and it means that lessons will keep on going until sometime in the next financial year. I know that the AAA are so impressed with the program that they have indicated that they will be knocking on the door of the federal government to continue the program right through to June 2016.

I mentioned before Julie Clasper of the Wemco Driving School. As I say, she is a fantastic person as a driving instructor—someone great to talk to, who was to the point but friendly and really good at imparting knowledge across different ages. She, in partnership with Ken Clasper, started in Geelong in 1982. They were there for 14 years but they are now in Melbourne, and because of that Julie has completed 28 keys2drive lessons to date. That is also a great example of what can be done with local kids who are learning to drive. (Time expired)

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (19:38): I rise tonight to offer my congratulations and support to the new ACCC Chairman, Mr Sims, on some of the comments he has made which have been a refreshing change from the last 10 years of the ACCC. Mr Sims recently made some comments on bullying of suppliers and also the anticompetitive effects of shopper dockets.

As to the bullying of suppliers, Mr Sims appeared before one of our Senate estimates committees several weeks ago and gave some evidence which has been described as a watershed moment as far as the ACCC's inquiries go. Previously, suppliers to our supermarket duopoly had been frightened to give evidence to the ACCC, but Mr Sims gave an offer of complete confidentiality to any supplier who came forward and 50 suppliers trusted Mr Sims's word. They came forward and made comment, and they advised Mr Sims of conduct which would be either unconscionable conduct or misuse of market power if proved before a court. Mr Sims told the Senate estimates committee that such conduct included: (1) persistent demands for additional payments from suppliers, above and beyond that negotiated in their trade terms; (2) the imposition on suppliers of penalties that did not form part of any negotiated terms of trade and which apparently did not relate to any actual costs incurred by the supermarket chains; (3) threats to remove products from supermarket shelves or otherwise disadvantage suppliers if claims for extra payments or penalties were not paid; (4) failure to pay prices agreed with suppliers; and (5) conduct that discriminates in favour of the supermarkets' home brand products.

In addition, Mr Sims has made some very welcome comments on shopper dockets, which I would like to quote. He said:

If the supermarkets want to discount their products to get people in the door that's fine, lower the price of the goods in the supermarket. However, he says what the supermarkets are doing is:

... taking the supermarket profits and lowering the price of their petrol when they are competing with other people.

So we’re not against discounts, but when you take your profits from one sector and have massive discounts in another sector, then it does have an effect on the competitive process and that's what we’re here to protect.

Hear, hear, Mr Sims! Shopper dockets are anticompetitive. They are against the long-term interests of the consumer. There is simply no free lunch—someone has to pay
for these discounts, and we all pay for them with higher grocery prices, and then we pay again through higher petrol prices as competition collapses and the independents are driven from the market.

Why is this important? It is important because Australian consumers have been paying, for years, some of the highest grocery and supermarket prices in the world. Even Wesfarmers’ managing director has said:

Australian consumers for too long have worn higher and higher prices for food and groceries in this country.

And he is exactly right. Just one example is the price of Vegemite. The information was published in News Limited papers several weeks ago that the price of Vegemite is actually 40 per cent higher here in Australia than it is in Britain. And remember: this is a product that is made here in Australia and shipped to the United Kingdom, with all the additional handling costs. Yet a consumer in the UK can walk into a supermarket and buy that for a price 40 per cent less than consumers here in Australia are paying. And that is not just an isolated example. You could look at Coke, Cadbury chocolate, Heinz tomato sauce or Kellogg’s breakfast cereals—Australian consumers are paying prices 30 and 40 per cent higher than anywhere else in the world.

What can we do about this? We have a serious problem. The government made a big song and dance of this before they were elected in 2007. And what did we get from this government? GroceryWatch, spin, stunts—a complete waste of taxpayers’ money. At least the coalition has put forward a promise: a root-and-branch review of Australia’s competition law. We need to have a look at it to see what we can do to improve competition.

In conclusion, we should look at Canadian competition law. The Canadian Competition Act has a special section which says:

The purpose of this Act is to … ensure that small and medium-sized enterprises have an equitable opportunity …

That is what we need here in Australia—equitable opportunity to compete. (Time expired)

New South Wales Floods

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (19:43):

Tonight I want to talk about floods, and in particular two floods that have had a devastating impact on sections of the New South Wales mid-north coast community, and a bureaucratic process that has little regard for the immediacy of the support required after a natural disaster. I am sure this is a comment that we have heard before and, in the country we live in, unfortunately, until we get it right, we will hear it again.

The Hastings-Macleay flood of 23 and 24 February impacted particularly hard on the communities of Port Macquarie’s North Shore and Crescent Head. Twenty-five oyster producers on the Hastings River have sustained unprecedented damage to their infrastructure, stock and future earning capacity as a result of the floods, the worst in 50 years. The sheer volume of rain which fell in the upper Hastings—415 millimetres at Mount Seaview over just a couple of hours on 23 February—resulted in a wall of water coming down through the Hastings Valley that left farmers with very little time to move livestock from lower paddocks or to remove oyster modules from the river, where king tides, at the same time as this heavy rain, were forcing waves to go quite a fair way up the river.

For our local oyster industry in particular the impact has been devastating. Such was the force of the water, the entire modules—up to 14 trays high—were ripped from their
moorings. Not a single oyster producer on the Hastings River, the largest oyster-producing estuary in New South Wales, was unaffected by the storm. Hastings Pontoon Oysters and Crown Oysters, the largest oyster-producing enterprise, lost 70 per cent of their farm. Seven of their eight double pontoons were either smashed or torn from their moorings despite the pontoons being secured with 25mm thick ropes, with each rope capable of holding 7.3 tonnes. Robert and Cisca van Breenen, who own the company, told me that locals who have lived and worked on the Hastings River for 40 years have never seen the river in such a state due to the speed with which the wall of water hit the lower estuary. The van Breenen business has now gone to being no business—no income and no way of rebuilding without going into unmanageable debt. The damage bill, at their estimate, is about half a million dollars. A conservative early estimate of damage to the river's oyster infrastructure is $1.2 million but the potential loss could rise beyond $2 million. This figure does not take into account the recovery factor—that is, the salvage operations, the loss of business operations, a suspended harvest, the rebuilding of frames and replacing of baskets. New South Wales's primary oyster nursery has sustained heavy losses which will impact on wholesale supply throughout the entire state.

Homeowners at North Shore and at Crescent Head were also among the worst affected and are still trying to clean up the mess from their properties. More than 1,200 residents were stranded for almost a week in Crescent Head. Limited supplies were airlifted into Crescent Head on the Monday afternoon and teachers were airlifted out to keep schools open in Kempsey. Many residents could not go to work, were unable to return home and had to seek accommodation in other locations. At North Shore in Port Macquarie, residents were isolated from services, supplies and employment for over a week while the Settlement Point ferry was unable to operate. Floodwaters entered about 170 houses, more than 30 cars were towed away from properties, and hundreds of thousands of dollars of damaged household goods are still waiting to be collected.

And just when we thought it was over, another flood hit—this time two rivers down, on the Manning on 2 and 3 March. Greater Taree was included in the Natural Disaster Declaration on 4 March. As a result of the Manning floods, residents on Caparra Road about 41km to the west of Taree were included on the SES's isolation list after two bridges along Caparra Road, Granny Fahey Bridge and the Goldsmith Bridge, were swept away in the flood, isolating about 90 residents between the two bridges. Reference numbers were issued to affected residents so that they could order supplies, which are being delivered by the SES. Council engineering teams are assessing access options, including temporary bridge structures, but the very best scenario is that this could take weeks, if not months.

My community certainly appreciates the swift action by the both the New South Wales and Commonwealth governments to make hardship assistance available under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements within 48 hours of both floods. However, in the days and the weeks that have followed both floods, I have become increasingly concerned about the process of gathering information to access other Commonwealth categories of relief, such as Categories C and D, and other Commonwealth assistance programs. I would ask the Commonwealth, and this chamber, to assist local authorities and to assist the state government in doing whatever the paperwork is that is necessary
to make sure the individual residents and the businesses are treated as an absolute priority in what has been a devastating six weeks. (Time expired)

Voices of Outer Suburbs Campaign

Mr BYRNE (Holt) (19:48): I rise tonight to talk about a great initiative which will be an important vehicle and a voice for people living in the outer suburbs of Australia's major cities, including people living in suburbs in my electorate of Holt, including Cranbourne, Doveton, Hallam, Narre Warren and Endeavour Hills. Australian governments have traditionally been perceived to be good at delivering services and facilities for the needs of people living in the inner suburbs of Australia's major cities, but the needs of people living in the rapidly growing outer suburbs have often been neglected—in many cases, put in the too-hard basket. The interests of people living in the outer suburbs are certainly not helped by an increase in criticism of people living in the outer suburbs and of their communities more generally, nor by the perception that the further they live from the CBD the less their views count. There is a richness that exists in many, virtually all, of our outer suburbs. So many people make a positive contribution to our local communities, and people are always advancing the interests of the suburbs where they live.

The facts about our outer suburbs are compelling: over 3.6 million Australians live in 25 of the nation's fastest-growing municipalities in Australia's outer suburbs; 1.3 million Australians living in our outer suburbs are children and young people—our nation's future; and 40 per cent of people living in the outer suburbs are migrants who have come from countries all around the world and now call Australia—and its outer suburbs—home. By 2026, one in five, or 5.4 million, Australians will live in the outer suburbs. By 2050, Melbourne's population according to the ABS will be 6.4 million people. The City of Casey's projections indicate that Casey's population will reach 450,000 by 2036, which is the same size as Tasmania. With the outer suburbs comprising such a substantial proportion of the Australian population, it is vitally important that we fully and completely address their needs and aspirations.

Since 1835, cities like Melbourne have developed a wonderful suburban culture. It is important for governments to provide the much needed social infrastructure to those outer suburbs that have just been established, to give them that suburban culture that they crave and to meet those community centred needs that they have—and that they feel are being denied because of their postcode. People living in the outer suburbs, like those living in the local area that I represent, face a number of daily challenges including traffic congestion, lack of access to public transport, lack of access to quality roads, lack of access to health and education services, community facilities bursting at the seams and lack of access to a range of local jobs.

To help overcome these challenges I wish to encourage all people living in the outer suburbs of Australia's major cities to participate in the Voices of Outer Suburbs campaign run by the National Growth Areas Alliance, NGAA, a coalition of Australia's 25 fastest-growing municipalities. The NGAA's Voices of Outer Suburbs campaign is vitally important so that we can hear directly from people in the outer suburbs about the challenges that they face, their ideas and their needs, in order to improve their local communities. One of the key issues that we face in the outer suburbs is the need to improve employment opportunities and employment skill bases.
Recent investments, such as the $10.5 million Hallam Valley Trade Training Centre, are providing job-ready training in traditional and emerging trades for young people in my electorate of Holt. Last year there was a $320 million upgrade of Westfield Fountain Gate shopping centre, which increased employment opportunities for locals in Holt by creating over 800 new jobs. However, despite these investments, there is still much more that can be done to meet the skills and employment challenges facing our areas. According to the NGAA, to meet the shortfall in employment another 660,000 more jobs in 2011 were needed in Australia’s outer suburbs.

Unfortunately, a growing unemployment rate is emerging in national growth areas; however, our youths need to know that there will be good local jobs available in the outer suburbs when they need them. Whether it means relocating public service departments to the outer suburbs or creating incentives for businesses to relocate there—or expanding campuses, such as the Monash campus in Berwick—all options need to be put on the table. Our young people will be watching future state and federal governments closely to see what they do to create additional jobs and employment opportunities in the outer suburbs. Failure to act will not provide the employment opportunities and will only create additional pressures for our young people. When meeting with some young people today, that was emphasised. I commend this initiative and the City of Casey for backing it. Voices in the outer suburbs are as important as voices in the inner city.

Bonner Electorate: Carindale Post Office

Mr VASTA (Bonner) (19:53): I rise tonight to advise the House of the recently announced plans by Australia Post to relocate its Carindale Post Office, which is in my electorate of Bonner. The post office is currently located within Westfield Carindale shopping centre. Australia Post has confirmed that it intends to relocate to Metropol Shopping Centre, three kilometres from its existing location. The relocation is expected to occur by mid-April and will include the transfer of all post office boxes to the new site. This site currently attracts upward of 700 to 1,000 Australia Post customers daily and is especially convenient to the seniors community of Carindale, who regularly use the shop as a way to pay their bills. Essentially, this now means there will no longer be a post office in Carindale. Indeed, it will move entirely outside the boundaries of the Bonner electorate. In real terms, it means that all Carindale residents—and countless businesses and community groups—will be robbed of the convenience of a post office.

I am sure the members of this House will concur that it is extremely disappointing that Australia Post would make such an arbitrary decision about the future of this vital community facility without consultation with the Carindale community, businesses or any other stakeholders, such as my office. As the federal member, I felt it my moral and practical obligation to let the residents of Carindale know about Australia Post’s proposed move. In February I sent out a direct mail letter to the entire suburb of Carindale, offering them the opportunity to have their say on the move, with the ultimate aim of presenting my overall findings to the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and also to Australia Post decision makers. I have subsequently done so.

To date, we have received an enormous 1,177 responses. I thank the residents of Carindale. Nine hundred and sixty two, or 82 per cent, of Carindale residents who...
responded are against the move. Only a meagre 18 per cent are for the move to Metropol. Most of those for the move cite parking considerations as the reason for the move, which, in itself, is extremely concerning, as the current Westfield location boasts over 6,000 car parks. There are a paltry 170 car parks at Metropol. Furthermore, access to the site is not adequately serviced by appropriate public transport routes. But, as Stan Rawlings, chairman of the Residents Committee at Carindale Aveo Aged Care Community, points out, public transport is impractical when you are 80 and need assistance walking.

It has since come to my attention that the lease signed by Australia Post at Metropol is irrevocable. In my mind that does not change anything. Australia Post must have a presence at Carindale. I cannot and will not accept an alternative scenario. In my often robust negotiations with Australia Post they have defended their actions by saying they were left with no alternative by Westfield Carindale, who issued them with a non-renewal notice after the single tenancy offered to Australia Post was repeatedly rejected due to unsuitability of its location. They further advised me that no other option was formally presented to them for consideration. It is disappointing that Westfield appears to have made a commercial decision rather than a community one.

Regardless of whose fault it is, I am sure the members of this House will concur that these results clearly demonstrate that the residents of Carindale are overwhelmingly against any relocation of the Carindale Post Office. Put it this way: if the members of this House ignored the wishes of 82 per cent of their constituency we would not have a job, and deservedly so. It begs the question: why would Australia Post—and Westfield Carindale, for that matter—go against the wishes of their core customers?

There may be some light at the end of the tunnel. In response to my advocacy to them on behalf of the Carindale community, Australia Post are now investigating alternative options, to preserve their presence at Westfield. I welcome this show of progress and congratulate them on listening to their Carindale customers. I also thank my colleagues Councillor Adrian Schrinner and Steve Minnikin MP, who are behind me on this important community issue. Westfield Carindale has long been a one-stop shop for the community, offering important facilities such as a council library, a Medicare and Family Assistance office, medical facilities, banking services and a post office. That is essential, and it must remain that way.

(Time expired)

Regional Australia

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (19:58): I rise to raise my concern that regional Australia does not have an authentic regional voice within this current government’s cabinet. Despite the recent reshuffle of the ministry, it is alarming but true that there is not a single Labor cabinet minister who actually lives in regional Australia. Those listening at home may ask why this matters. It matters because if you are going to represent regional Australia you need to have a passion for regional Australia. You have to live there and work there to understand the needs, expectations, hopes and aspirations of regional people. You need to live and work amongst us to really appreciate our love for our communities and the challenges we face.

It bothers me that the minister for agriculture lives in Brisbane. The Minister for Regional and Rural Development is Melbourne based—and he now thinks that Western Sydney is deserving of regional funding, which is not surprising since he...
gave regional funding to the Perth Airport link road. The trade minister lives in the southern suburbs of Brisbane and the roads minister lives in inner Sydney. This is the most city-centric cabinet since the Rudd government, actually. The lack of regional representation in this government is a real concern for regional people. It is no wonder that regional people feel unrepresented by the Gillard and Rudd governments and that they do not get a fair go from the Australian Labor Party.

The SPEAKER: Order! It being 8 pm, the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 20:00

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Shorten to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Insurance Contracts Act 1984, and for related purposes.

Mr Albanese to present a Bill for an Act to amend legislation relating to broadcasting, and for other purposes.

Mr Albanese to present a Bill for an Act to amend legislation relating to broadcasting, and for other purposes.

Mr Albanese to present a Bill for an Act relating to news media self-regulation, and for other purposes.

Mr Albanese to present a Bill for an Act to deal with consequential matters arising from the enactment of the News Media (Self-regulation) Act 2013, and for other purposes.

Mr Albanese to present a Bill for an Act relating to the Public Interest Media Advocate, and for related purposes.

Mr Swan to present a Bill for an Act to amend legislation relating to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, and for related purposes.

Mr Bradbury to present a Bill for an Act to amend the International Monetary Agreements Act 1947, and for related purposes.

Mr L. D. T. Ferguson to move:

That this House:

(1) recognises the accomplishments of 50 years of fruitful diplomatic relations between Peru and Australia, the continuing friendship between our nations and the contribution of Peruvian migrants in our nation building; and

(2) notes:

(a) the reopening of our Embassy in Lima in September 2010;

(b) our:

(i) shared democratic values in the context of a strong commitment to transparency, well-established policy credibility and good governance structure and quality of institutions; and

(ii) mutual emphasis on multilateral involvement exemplified by Peru’s membership to the United Nations, World Trade Organisation (WTO), Organization of American States, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, Pacific Alliance and Forum for East Asia and Latin America Cooperation;

(c) the roles of Herbert Vere Evatt and former United Nations Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar point to our mutual activity;

(d) our similar activity on the free trade front and common membership of the Cairns Group, WTO and APEC; and

(e) the:

(i) visits to Peru by former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam in 1975 and former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2008, and the visit of former President Alan Garcia Perez to Australia in 2007;

(ii) November 2011 framework to promote Bilateral Consultations and Cooperation;

(iii) presence at the 2011 census of 8,441 Peruvian born citizens in Australia and attraction of Peru to Australian visitors totalling 30,000 in 2011; and
(iv) longstanding Australian mining endeavours in Peru, the growth of Peruvian student numbers in Australia and 56 Australian companies having an office in Peru or investment in a Peruvian project.

Mr L. D. T. Ferguson to move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) 14 February marked two years since the outbreak of the 2011 period of major unrest in the Kingdom of Bahrain;

(b) the 2011 unrest in Bahrain has been characterised by a mass protest movement calling for constitutional, political and election reform;

(c) since the beginning of the protest movement in Bahrain, there have been reports of ongoing human rights violations against opposition figures, demonstrators and medical practitioners at the hands of the authorities, including fatalities and arbitrary political arrests; and

(d) there have been reports of acts of violence against the State, resulting in injury and, in some cases, fatalities;

(2) welcomes the resumption of Bahrain’s National Dialogue on 10 February 2013 as a positive step towards political and related reform and reconciliation, and urges all parties to commit fully to the process and to reject violence; and

(3) calls on the Government of the Kingdom of Bahrain to:

(a) follow through on its commitment to full implementation of the recommendations of the November 2011 report of the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry on human rights violations during the 2011 unrest;

(b) release political prisoners who were arrested arbitrarily, investigate new reports of human rights abuses and bring the perpetrators to justice;

(c) respect the human rights of its people including the right to freely protest and the right of medical staff to give unhindered treatment to those injured while protesting; and

(d) commit to genuine reform that addresses the legitimate concerns and aspirations of the people of Bahrain.

Mr Christensen to move:

That this House:

(1) notes:

(a) that the television series Doctor Who will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary on the 23 November 2013;

(b) that the fiftieth anniversary of the first screening of Doctor Who in Australia will take place on the 12 January 2015;

(c) the many connections between Doctor Who and Australia including (but not limited to):

(i) the very first Doctor Who story, ‘An Unearthly Child’, written by Australian scriptwriter Anthony Coburn;

(ii) the score for the signature Doctor Who theme tune, written by Australian composer Ron Grainer;

(iii) the incidental music in the series throughout most of the 1960s and 1970s, written by Australian composer Dudley Simpson;

(iv) Australian actress Janet Fielding, playing an Australian character Tegan Jovanka in the series (alongside the Doctor as portrayed by Peter Davison);

(v) actress Katy Manning, playing the character Jo Grant in the series (alongside the Doctor as portrayed by Jon Pertwee), and becoming an Australian citizen in 2004; and

(iv) Australian pop star Kylie Minogue, playing the character Astrid (alongside the Doctor as portrayed by David Tennant) in the 2007 Christmas Special ‘Voyage of the Damned’; and

(d) the fact that the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) has been the main broadcaster for Doctor Who in Australia; and

(2) requests that:

(a) in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the first screening of Doctor Who in Australia, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) consider filming the 2015 series of the television show in Australia; and

(b) the ABC, Screen Australia and the various State-based film funding bodies consider offering
finance to entice the BBC to film the 2015 series of Doctor Who in Australia.

**Dr Leigh** to move:

That this House notes:

(1) economists, businesses and industry support a price on carbon as the most efficient means of cutting pollution and tackling dangerous climate change;

(2) the *Clean Energy Act 2011* establishes an emissions trading scheme with a three year fixed price period;

(3) that in the first nine months of the carbon price, the predicted wrecking ball to the economy has resulted in:

(a) real GDP growing by 1.2 per cent;

(b) employment rising by 53,400 people;

(c) the All Ordinaries index rising by 25 per cent, adding $296 billion to the value of Australian shares;

(d) the Wage Price Index rising by 1.5 per cent and average weekly earnings rising by $39.10 per week;

(e) interest rates falling to three per cent;

(f) Westpac consumer sentiment rising to 13.3 per cent, a 38 month high; and

(g) Australia retaining its AAA credit rating from the three major rating agencies; and

(4) in addition to the above, emissions in the National Electricity Market were 8.6 per cent lower in the first six months of the carbon price than in the corresponding six months in 2011, and electricity production is cleaner, with emissions per megawatt hour falling by around six per cent.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr BC Scott) took the chair at 09:33.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Hasluck Electorate: Woodbridge

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (09:33): I rise this morning to share with the House the work of a group of my constituents living in the suburb of Woodbridge in my electorate. Lois and Gerry Crowley recently found out, under Freedom of Information, that their local council had approved the development and subdivision of the site next to their house. What is unusual about this approval is the lot itself. The lot is on the old riverbed of the Helena River and is within a natural floodplain. The approval of a development on the lot would involve a substantial fill—approximately nine metres of fill in total—raising concerns about the impact on the lot itself and on neighbouring properties.

On the face of it, Gerry and Lois looked to have very valid concerns about the potential development of the lot next door to their house. Unsure of what to do, or who to speak to, about their concerns Gerry and Lois contacted me for advice. In Gerry's own words:

The area under question is unique in that it is a buffer of natural bush setting for a variety of birds and native animals within an increasingly populated area.

From our house we have viewed owls, Kingfishers, Kookaburras, cockatoos, galahs, finches, Magpies, Willy Wag Tails, Butcherbirds, Tawny Frogmouths, ducks, Honeyeaters and Black Faced Cuckoo-Shrike. Neighbours have described seeing possums, echidnas and bandicoots.

Gerry went on to say:

We understand that any construction on the site in front of us will require from 9 to 11 metres of fill and extensive retaining walls. Not only will this create an eyesore for us and devalue our property it will have a huge impact on the drainage from our site. We have the potential to have our very own wetland at the base of our house which may cause structural instability.

I recently met with Gerry in my office to outline his concerns and look at the typographical data on the property and in the surrounding area. It is clear from looking at this information that this is a situation that warrants further investigation before a decision about the future of the lot is made. Last week I met with Lois and Gerry to take a look at the site.

I want to congratulate the work of my local community in Woodbridge that has rallied to this concern. I know that the residents have held a community meeting that has been well attended by not only properties immediately bordering onto the proposed development site but also the wider neighbourhood. The group of residents has been very active and has made its views known. Their concerns are valid and, as a member of parliament, I have had the opportunity and privilege of working with them. I believe that together we can achieve an appropriate outcome and together we can build an even stronger local community.

Blair Electorate: Ipswich Motorway and Blacksoil Interchange

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (09:36): Delays to the work with the Blacksoil Interchange intersection of the Warrego and the Brisbane Valley highways have caused motorists and residents aggravation, hindered further economic development and put lives at risk on a daily basis. The previous state Labor government opened tenders on 14 January 2012 for this project. We delivered by June 2012 our $54 million for what was then a $70 million project.
The project in the interim has been delayed by the state LNP government in Queensland and has blown out to $94 million.

The new LNP state member for Ipswich West, Sean Choat, promised the *Queensland Times* in June 2012 that the project would be under construction, then he said September 2012, then December 2012 and then he said sometime in 2013. In his most recent newsletter he had the temerity to say a blatantly untrue statement that work on the Blacksoil Interchange is underway and is expected to be completed by April 2014. Anyone who goes there can see that that is absolutely not true. Indeed, he deliberately delayed the project on the basis that there needed to be another access point for a service road. I have never been opposed to that and, in fact, I was quite critical of the Ipswich City Council for its failure to fund and to construct an extension of Bayley Road for the purpose of the local residents who live in the Pine Mountain area. The extension of Bayley Road to the Pine Mountain Road would solve the problem of a second access route while Eleazar Drive was cut off under construction of the Blacksoil Interchange.

On 6 March this year it surprised me to hear the backbencher for Ipswich West, the LNP state member, announce that the Fulton Hogan construction company would get the contract to do this particular work. There was no notice given to the federal government, the primary source of the funding, and there was no announcement from the Queensland LNP state minister, Scott Emerson, the Minister for Main Roads and Transport. Indeed, if Fulton Hogan have construction of this project I am pleased, because they are one of the six companies in the Origin Alliance who did the Dinmore to Goodna section of the Ipswich Motorway, which was the $1.76 billion project funded by the federal Labor government. It was done on time, under budget and was certainly a great effort for the people of Ipswich.

There was particular community consultation when the previous design of this project was undertaken, but these questions need to be asked and have not been answered. How much will the new project cost? What is the timetable for construction? What inconveniences for motorists will there be? What is the final design? When will it start? When will the upgrade be completed? I look forward to answers to these questions; none of which have been given by the LNP state government. It is important that residents know the new design, that they not be kept in the dark and it is important that we, the federal Labor government, be told the answers to these questions by the state government.

**Casey Electorate: Warburton Fun Run**

Mr TONY SMITH (Casey) (09:39): On Sunday, 24 February I had the pleasure of attending the Warburton Up and Running Fun Run to present prizes to the winners and placegetters in a series of fun runs. This was the 10th annual run and it saw a record number of entrants, 525 in all. The run is organised by a dedicated committee comprising Lesley Grimes, David and Sue Hoffman, Michael Alter, Kaye Laity and the irrepressible Chris Thomas, who was the MC for the day. The purpose of the run is to put Warburton and surrounding towns on the map and in everyone's consciousness and to draw people to what is a very beautiful part of the Yarra Valley. The committee run the event as a not-for-profit. They cover the costs and then donate profits to the local CFA and SES. It was a wonderful event. I thank the organising committee. I also thank the more than 50 volunteers—partners, spouses, friends and relatives of the organising committee—who made the event such a great success, as well as the generous sponsors who gave so much of their time, resources and

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FEDERATION CHAMBER
finances to make the day the success that it was. I should also make mention of Lavinia Petrie, who also helped present the prizes. She is a 69-year-old running legend who still holds many records.

Last Thursday, 7 March, together with the member for Wentworth, the shadow minister for communications, I also had the pleasure of visiting the Steels Creek Tennis Club. The Steels Creek Tennis Club was badly affected, as was the Steels Creek community, by the Black Saturday bushfires a little over four years ago. At the time, the member for Wentworth visited the tennis club a week after those fires to view firsthand the devastation that had occurred to the community. He visited on a day where, despite the devastation, the club was still playing tennis. It was great for the club to welcome him back. It was also great to then take him to the Steels Creek Community Centre, where Eva Matthews, the Secretary of the Steels Creek Association, discussed a range of initiatives that the community is looking at as it rebuilds, and to discuss in particular the need for better mobile telecommunications in that fire affected area. It was great to take the shadow minister there and for him to hear firsthand the needs and concerns of that community, which was so badly affected by the Black Saturday fires.

Redhead, Mr Bill

**My Eye Health Program**

*Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (09:42): Today I recognise the recent passing of Bill Redhead, a long-time resident of Para Hills. Bill came to Australia from England with his wife, Rene, and in the early 1960s settled in Para Hills. At the time, Para Hills was being transformed from farmland to a housing estate by Reid Murray Developments Pty Ltd. The lack of community facilities saw the emergence of an active progress association, of which Bill Redhead was a key driver and office holder. The efforts of the progress association resulted in the preservation of a considerable area of land for recreation and sporting facilities; the Para Hills Community Club, which today is a thriving community asset; and several other community initiatives.*

* A clear thinker and always prepared to speak his mind, Bill became a successful negotiator in pursuing the interests of his community. At his workplace at News Ltd, Bill became a spokesman and defender of workplace rights for his fellow work mates. Even in his latter years, Bill's interest in the community did not wane, and he remained an active member of the local Neighbourhood Watch group. In 2002, as Salisbury mayor, I had the privilege of naming Bill Redhead as Salisbury's Citizen of the Year for his many years of community leadership.*

* Bill was supported to the end by his wonderful wife, Rene. The two were inseparable. His legacy will be his contribution to the development of Para Hills and, more particularly, the enduring community facilities which today stand as testament to the foresight and determination of Bill and his fellow pioneers, the new settlers of the era. To Rene and the Redhead family members, I extend my condolences and my appreciation for Bill Redhead's notable contribution in making our local area a better place than he found it.*

* On a separate matter, on Thursday, 27 February I attended an information session on eye health at the Tea Tree Gully council offices. Referred to as the My Eye Health Program, the information session was sponsored and organised by the Freemasons Foundation in South Australia with the support and partnership of the Royal Society for the Blind, RANZCO and*
the Sight For All Foundation. I understand that the Freemasons Foundation has already sponsored over 30 similar events throughout South Australia. The purpose of the information sessions is to raise community awareness and education around the issues of eye health, intervention and rehabilitation.

With almost half of all Australians affected by vision issues at some stage in their lives, eye health is a major national issue. We also know that early diagnosis, intervention and appropriate treatment can make a huge difference in correcting disorders and preventing blindness. If detected early, eye diseases such as macular degeneration, cataracts, diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma can, with professional care, be well managed. It is therefore important to get the message out to the community that regular eye examinations—preferably once a year—by an eye health professional are a must, particularly as a person gets older. That is the key message of the eye health program. I commend the Freemasons who, through their Freemason Foundation, are raising funds to support the My Eye Health program and raise community awareness about this important health issue.

Harvey, Mrs Isobel

Dr STONE (Murray) (09:45): I want to commend the community spirit and generosity of Mrs Isobel Harvey, a Kyabram woman who has spent much of her adult life collecting vintage women's and children's clothing. She now has a collection from the Edwardian and Victorian eras which is second to none. It includes not only dresses but undergarments, hats, handbags and shoes. It also includes things like the perfumed buttons that soldiers in the Civil War in the United States were given by their loved ones so they could smell the rosewater and lavender perfumed buttons when they went off to war.

This magnificent and very valuable collection has now been placed in the Kyabram Community and Learning Centre on exhibition so that more than Mrs Harvey's immediate family can enjoy it and be amazed at how clothing for women has evolved over the ages. I had the privilege last Friday evening of opening this exhibition, which shows only about a third of all her materials. Her generosity was very well acknowledged at the time because all donations for going to the exhibition as well as the profits from all the items on the trading table that Isobel has personally made are going to the Warramunda aged-care complex in Kyabram. Warramunda is an excellent not-for-profit community-run home for some of our area's most frail and elderly. What a very generous offer that has been.

Isobel and her husband have painstakingly set up this exhibition. As well, Isobel has made sure the provenance of the garments is well understood and she has written about them. She is now most keen that the collection passes into community hands. She has offered to donate all of her amazing garments, hats, shoes, gloves, buttons and underwear for a permanent display in Kyabram. We are now looking for a permanent home for this amazing collection. I can imagine how people would come from far and wide to look at the painstaking work that has gone into this collection over many decades. I want to commend Isobel and her husband. Isobel has not always been in good health. She has a generosity of spirit and a sense of community that is an absolute inspiration to others and to up-and-coming generations. I also want to wish her well in finding a permanent home for this exhibition somewhere in Kyabram where conservation of the collection will be well attended to and where there are volunteers or others who can make sure the exhibition is preserved for all time. It shows the evolution of
women's place at home and at work, as well as the craft skills of the men and women who made these garments, and it reminds us of times past.

**Richmond Electorate: Coal Seam Gas**

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond) (09:48): I am very pleased to rise today to speak about the government's announcement yesterday in relation to the additional environmental protections around coal seam gas proposals. The member for Page and I were with the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities when he made this very important announcement. He announced that the government would introduce amendments to our national environmental law, which is the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, to require federal assessment and approval of coal seam gas and large coalmine developments which have a significant impact on a water resource. We are amending the act so that water resources become part of the assessment of proposals. It is a very important move by this government in recognising the massive community concern about coal seam gas mining.

Right across the North Coast we have had major concerns from the community. They have certainly called upon us to take this action. Whilst we have acknowledged that this has happened, I want to focus today on the role that the states need to keep playing because they regulate and license coal seam gas mining. This is an issue that I and the member for Page have raised on numerous occasions. In fact, we have a petition at the moment for a CSG-free North Coast and we are calling on the state members to take action. We want the state members for Tweed, Ballina, Lismore and Clarence to go and see the Premier and demand that the North Coast is CSG free. The member for Page and I have voiced the concerns that locals have on the federal front, and we have done what we can. We have seen these really important amendments that are going to be made to the EPBC Act in recognising the potential impact on our water resources. If this action is taken it effectively means that coal seam gas mining could potentially be stopped on the North Coast if it is determined to be a risk to our water resources. Currently, there is no direct protection for resources under that national environmental law, but that is what we are going to change. We have done that at a federal level; let's see some action at a state level.

We know that the biggest risk is the National Party and their very pro-CSG agenda. We see that at a state level, and we see it at a federal level as well. It is a real concern that locals have in terms of the action that we see being taken locally. We will certainly continue to voice those concerns. We are very proud that we have our petition, and hundreds of people are signing it. When 10,000 people sign that petition to the state government, it will then force them to debate it. All of those members—Geoff Provest, Don Page, Thomas George and Chris Gulaptis—will have to go into parliament and talk about why they are not standing up for their communities. We will certainly continue our campaign to get the North Coast CSG free. We will keep the pressure on the state government. Both the member for Page and I were very pleased with our government's announcement and the action that we have been able to take, but we need now to have the state government get on board. We need to have them do their bit, and we will certainly keep the pressure up on that.
Wright Electorate: Australian Natural Disasters
Members of Parliament National Volunteer Awards

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright) (09:51): A news cycle can last 24 hours or it can last 36 hours, but I can tell you that the rebuilding phase of trying to rebuild a community after devastating floods can last many, many, many months and sometimes years. Today I would like to acknowledge the community spirit shown by constituents of mine within the seat of Wright in the tenacity and the dedication they are showing in helping to rebuild their communities.

In starting to rebuild our community, we looked at our farming sector first. The amount of damage that farming land experienced was incomprehensible. As a result, our growers had to work out where to start the rebuilding process and what assistance was available. There was a short amount of time where surrounding shires were being assisted with disaster payments and the Scenic Rim was being left behind, so we applied some political muscle to that situation and were fortunate to get it declared category B, C and D. As a result, there was some ambiguity about what people could claim. I was fearful that growers and so on were going to go out and start rebuilding with the intention that they were going to have financial assistance. To try and give that situation more clarity, we reached out to the CEO of the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority and asked them to send down one of their field agents who could work with our people to start giving some parameters about what could be claimed for assistance in the rebuilding phase.

We did that, and we had over 100 growers who attended a forum that we held in the Boonah Cultural Centre. It was well received. Now, I am proud to say that our community have some direction in the farming sector with reference to what they can get financial access to. They have some certainty now as they start to rebuild.

In addition to that, over in the Lockyer Valley the Australia Day celebrations on 26 January were washed out, so they had them the month after. Sam Kekovich, the lamb ambassador, was there and had a cook-off with a number of different celebrities. I had the privilege of being the celebrity master chef judge. Unfortunately, Sam did not cook, but there is no questioning his commitment to the product that he endorses.

In closing, I would like to announce the federal Members of Parliament National Volunteer Awards, which we have launched. We are looking for people in our electorates who, on a regular or a one-off basis, conduct random acts of kindness to assist in a volunteering capacity, whether they are helping their neighbours or they are helping someone in the community in need.

Fowler Electorate: Ms Lucy Reggio

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (09:54): I would like to congratulate Lucy Reggio, a Bonnyrigg Heights resident, who was highly commended in last week's University of Western Sydney Women of the West Awards. This award recognises outstanding women who live and work in Western Sydney and make a positive contribution to individuals, families and local communities. I nominated Lucy for this prestigious award because over many years I have seen her generosity, her drive and her passion for helping families that live with disabilities. Her fight for people with disabilities is particularly important in my electorate, which unfortunately is overrepresented by people living with disabilities. For this reason, only recently I hosted another disability forum in my electorate, which brought together over 90
people with disabilities, their carers and service providers who all came together to talk about this important issue.

Lucy Reggio once again proved that she is one of the hardest working members of my community by dedicating a lot of her time to helping to put together that forum. Lucy juggles a number of important responsibilities and yet always finds time for others. She is the founder and president of the Special Needs Ability Program Providers, called SNAPP, a community development project officer with Mission Australia and an energetic volunteer at the Les Powell Special School, all the while being a doting mother of two.

One of her sons is a very special 15-year-old, Alex, who suffers from a very rare genetic disorder. Alex does not let that stop him or get in the way of being an avid sports fan and a successful soccer player. But as Lucy often says, Alex inspires her to get involved and assist others, particularly in organising sporting and family activities that cater for children with special needs. SNAPP offers soccer, tenpin bowling and family games nights as well as recreation activities for parents. Unfortunately, most sporting clubs do not cater for people with special needs, and Lucy is one of those very special and dedicated people in our community that stands up for inclusion, breaking down the barriers for members of our community whose voices are not always as strong as others.

I had the honour of attending last week's Women of the West Awards at the University of Western Sydney—a fantastic ceremony—and witnessing not only Lucy's surprise but also her humility in being recognised for this prestigious award. Once again, I would like to congratulate Lucy Reggio on this most deserved award and indicate that on behalf of a very grateful community I am indeed indebted for what she does for people with disabilities.

**Multicultural Development Association**

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (09:57): At present, the United Nations estimates that there are more than 43 million displaced people worldwide. It is a great shame that only 100,000 resettlement places are available annually. Australia provides through its many humanitarian resettlement programs 20,000 of these places. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate one very special organisation for their incredibly crucial contribution to how Australia welcomes refugees and asylum seekers. The Multicultural Development Association, MDA, is an independent, nongovernment settlement organisation, which is:

…committed to achieving the best settlement outcomes for our clients and to working actively to promote multiculturalism.

It is also an avenue through which committed members of both the Australian and migrant communities help each other.

Established in 1988, they have seen amazing growth within the organisation in recent times and have significantly expanded their resettlement operations. Indeed, MDA resettles newly-arrived refugees and asylum seekers now in Brisbane, Rockhampton and Toowoomba. Their wonderful Chief Executive Officer, Kerrin Benson, recently told me that in 2011-12, MDA was able to assist 2,438 clients and provide social inclusion activities for a further 1,500 community members including many refugees and residents in the electorate of Ryan. On Friday 15 March they will open their third Brisbane office so that they can continue to grow the number and quality of services they provide.
MDA supports those who enter our country in the most harrowing circumstances. Many thousands of people who come to Australia each year may have already spent many years in refugee or detention camps across the globe. Before that, we know that asylum seekers suffered from persecution, such as the Rohingya men and women from Burma, or the Hazarah from Iran. As I have previously stated, many of these people have come a long way in treacherous and dangerous circumstances, but they come to this country because Australia has a proud record for the humanitarian treatment of refugees. Refugees look to come to our country seeking a new life. They are desperate and they will take risks. They see in Australia a stable nation, absent of the horrors of their homelands, and I can understand why they are driven to adopt this desperate course.

In December, I attended MDA's successful production of I Am Here, in conjunction with the Queensland Theatre Company and Two Thumbs Up. For all involved, it was an opportunity to share the stories of many of the refugees they have encountered. I Am Here was written and performed by six refugees who presented the stories of their own journeys in a powerful and moving way. The production gave those who saw it an insight into the courage and resilience of the refugee community, and marked their journey and their contribution to Australian society after so many years of trouble. As their program said:

By definition, refugees are survivors. They have survived because they have the courage and initiative to do so. These are exactly the qualities we value here in Australia. The real challenge for us is to help newly-arrived refugees to rebuild their lives. If we do this, we will reap the benefit of the qualities and experiences they bring to Australia.

Every year I look forward to attending MDA's Lantern Walk on World Refugee Day, and continuing to work with organisations such as MDA to support the resettlement of refugees across Australia.

Road Infrastructure

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay—Assistant Treasurer and Minister Assisting for Deregulation) (10:00): I was pleased to have the Prime Minister in my electorate last week and pleased to see her spending the best part of the week touring around various parts of Western Sydney. As part of this trip, the Prime Minister made a significant announcement in relation to local infrastructure investment. Congestion on our roads is a huge issue in Western Sydney. To underline this point, just two weeks ago I drove into the city from my home in Claremont Meadows in my electorate, and it took 2½ hours to get into the city. Of that 2½ hours, at least half of the time was spent driving from the end of the M4 at Concord all the way into the city. That missing link in the M4 motorway is something that residents of my community have long lamented. But now there is an opportunity to fix that. The Prime Minister announced that a significant commitment of funding would be made in the event that the state government is able to amend its current proposal to upgrade the M4 and M5 motorways.

The state government currently has a plan called the WestConnex proposal, but there are three problems with this plan. The Prime Minister has said that we will make an investment of funding, provided that these three issues are addressed. The first one is that the upgrade does not connect the M4 with the city. This is a huge issue for people in Western Sydney and, frankly, there is no point spending more than $10 billion on a motorway upgrade that does not take people where they need to go, which is all the way into the city. Nor does the WestConnex proposal take the M5 all the way to the port. That is important in making sure
that this is a national infrastructure project. The third significant factor is that the current WestConnex proposal would require that residents travelling along existing parts of the M4, which they currently travel on free, to pay a toll. This would mean that the toll would be reintroduced at Parramatta on a distance-based approach, and would mean that commuters would have to pay up to $7 each way just to drive along a road that they currently drive on for free. This is not good enough, and the Prime Minister has made the point that we will make funding available in the event that the O'Farrell government revises its proposal to address these three flaws.

I think it is worth noting that the Leader of the Opposition has said that he is prepared to commit some funding to this project, but he has chosen not to impose any of these conditions. In fact, when asked about it last week he said that to impose these conditions would be:

… to make it almost impossible for it to be built any time soon.

The only problem is that the following day, in the Penrith Press in my electorate, the local Liberal candidate for Lindsay had a full page advertisement saying that the Liberals would the M4 all the way to the city. This is not true; this should be exposed. It is something that the residents of our community need to know about.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): Order! In accordance with standing order 193 the time for constituency statements has concluded.

BILLS

Export Finance and Insurance Corporation Amendment (Finance) Bill 2013

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (10:03): I rise to debate the Export Finance and Insurance Corporation Amendment (Finance) Bill 2013. According to its official website, EFIC:

… provides finance and insurance solutions to help Australian exporters overcome the financial barriers they face when growing their business overseas.

It is, in fact, the Australian government's export credit agency, and assists export trade, or overseas investments, where the private market is unable to do so. Specifically, EFIC works:

… directly with exporters or with their banks to provide loans, guarantees, bonds and insurance products…

which are otherwise not provided by the private sector. The bill will amend the financial arrangements of EFIC to provide for the payment of a special dividend of $200 million and any adjustments to EFIC’s callable capital that may be necessary in the future. The coalition does not oppose this bill.

According to the government, the bill follows recommendations and findings of the 2012 Productivity Commission inquiry report into EFIC’s operations. The Productivity Commission found that, where EFIC retains capital above its minimum requirements, this surplus capital has an opportunity cost that is borne by the taxpayer. The commission recommended that legislation be amended to allow the minister to direct EFIC to return surplus capital to the government. Of course, the Productivity Commission report is just a thin
excuse. It is a smokescreen for what is actually going on here in terms of this government's real agenda. In fact, this bill essentially has nothing to do with EFIC as such but everything to do with $200 million that is being extracted from it.

The reality is that, despite 100 or more promises from the Prime Minister and the Treasurer that this Labor government would deliver a surplus in 2012-13 and subsequent budgets, they have reneged on those solemn promises. The Prime Minister said that failure was not an option in terms of delivering a surplus in 2012-13. There were no ifs or buts. They would return to a surplus in 2012-13. So the government is desperately casting around for every dollar it can find and EFIC is one of its convenient cash cows. Labor has seriously mislead Australians on its management of the budget and the economy. This represents a massive breach of faith with the Australian community. After four of Australia's biggest surpluses under the previous coalition government, Labor has given Australia the four worst deficits in our history. Now Labor is heading for yet another substantial deficit after promising until it was blue in the face that this would be the year the budget would return to surplus.

The Business Council of Australia warns of a $60 billion budget black hole over the forward estimates alone, while beyond this period the Australian Financial Review estimates a Labor black hole of $120 billion as a result of unfunded spending promises. The Business Council analysis also found that around $15 billion in so-called government savings were in fact timing shifts—in other words, money shuffles. This comes after macroeconomics analysis for the Minerals Council of Australia put the budget structural deficit at an alarming $66 billion in 2011-12, with the problem enduring as far as the eye can see until at least 2025-26. Every hollow log, including EFIC, is being raided. Nonetheless, front-line services are also being struck down. The Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook in October last year slashed $1.6 billion out of health funding. In the same MYEFO, education was cut by $3.9 billion. In fact, after five years of Labor's so-called 'education revolution' and billions of dollars wasted on overpriced school halls, Australian literacy and numeracy results are actually going backwards. Labor's mining tax adds to the black hole with $15 billion of expenditure linked to it that is not covered in offsetting revenue. Analysis by Deloitte Access Economics shows that Labor added almost $50 billion to the budget in new spending programs just as its massive stimulus splurge was being unwound.

It must be remembered that this is on top of a total stimulus spend amounting to a staggering $87 billion as confirmed by Treasury. The Gillard government is now spending over $90 billion—or about 35 per cent—more compared to the last year of the Howard government, despite inflation of just 14 per cent over the entire period. Over the past four budgets the government has effectively spent $172 billion more than has come in as revenue. Despite the government's spin about spending restraint, real expenditure is set to grow again next year at 4.4 per cent while the terms of trade decline.

The coalition has been sounding the alarm about the structural deficit for several years now. It is the key indicator of a government living way beyond its means. No wonder the government is raiding every nook and cranny of the Public Service. I am surprised that EFIC has been untouched by this government up until now. Labor's budget surplus promise is a fraud. Labor's spending priorities are a mess. Labor's plans for more and new taxing are disastrous. The Labor government is a mess.
The coalition has real plans and real solutions to ensure that we can impose fiscal restraint and proper budget management after five disastrous years of Labor. We will build a stronger, more productive and diverse economy with lower taxes, more efficient government and more productive businesses that will deliver more jobs, higher real incomes and better services for Australians and their families. I point out again, we do not oppose this bill. However EFIC and its clients in the business community have to deal with an incompetent Labor government and have them to thank for this raid on their finances.

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of The Nationals) (10:11): I note that there were no Labor speakers fronting up to try to defend this Export Finance and Insurance Corporation Amendment (Finance) Bill 2013. Presumably, the minister may say something at the end, but no self-respecting member of parliament—

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Wide Bay has the call.

Mr TRUSS: not even, I would have thought, from the government side—would not be embarrassed about this piece of legislation. As we have just heard from the shadow minister for foreign affairs and trade, this is simply a raid on an important financial institution that supports Australian exporters, to prop up the government's hopeless budgetary situation. At the very time our country is building bigger and bigger trade deficits and our manufacturing industry is suffering significant job losses, this government is restricting the capacity of one of the institutions designed to help Australian industries in difficult export markets to win market share, and that makes absolutely no economic sense.

The Export Finance and Insurance Corporation is Australia's export credit agency. EFIC's mandate is to support the growth of Australian business internationally particularly in the market gap where private sector capacity is insufficient or unavailable or unwilling. The Export Finance and Insurance Corporation Amendment (Finance) Bill 2013 will amend the financial arrangements for the Export Finance and Insurance Corporation to provide for the payment of special dividends and any adjustments to EFIC's callable capital that may be necessary in the future. The bill implements a 2012 budget measure and follows some of the findings from the 2012 Productivity Commission inquiry into EFIC's operations. The Productivity Commission in that report found that when EFIC retains capital above its minimum requirements any surplus capital has an opportunity cost that has to be borne by the taxpayer. It recommended that the Export Finance and Insurance Corporation be amended to allow the minister to direct EFIC to return surplus capital to the government, and so this legislation deals with that issue.

Besides allowing for the extraction of $200 million for the current financial year, these amendments provide for an ongoing ministerial direction with respect to EFIC dividends, so we can expect that in the future EFIC will be raided again and again by this government and, in the process, that will clearly limit its capacity to do its job. We need to be frank about the motives for the bill. It is about helping to shore up the government's large budget problems.

The need to reap these dividends is because the Gillard government has been an economic disaster across the board. Labor is the highest spending government in Australian history. This government has inflicted 27 new or increased taxes since coming to office and still it is out trying to find new ways to raise money. It comes in one door and is trucked out the back.
The need for the new cash flows comes despite the fact that the Gillard government will reap $70 billion more in revenue this year than in the last budget of the Howard government. Clearly Labor does not have a revenue problem, it has a spending problem. And what is particularly annoying about its spending problem is that so much of it has arisen as a result of waste and mismanagement.

The amendments that are introduced in this bill highlight the government's complete mismanagement of the Australian budget. The Australian Industry Group's Australian Performance of Manufacturing Index this month shows manufacturing in decline for the 12th straight month. Around 110,000 jobs have been lost in Australian manufacturing since 2008. This was the government that talked about 'jobs, jobs, jobs'. Well, it is 'jobs lost, jobs lost, jobs lost'. That has been their mantra. They as a party talk about being supportive of the workers, but they have stood idly by while 110,000 jobs have been lost in the manufacturing sector and, of course, many others in other places.

One of the things that we need to do to help support our manufacturing industry is to give them opportunities in the export sector. This bill reduces those opportunities. The ABS Accounts of Australian Business, including entries and exits from June 2008 to June 2011, reveals that 800,000 small businesses have exited the marketplace since Labor's election. And that was only up to 2011; it is probably more than a million by now. Recent Dun and Bradstreet research shows that small business bankruptcies have jumped by 48 per cent, and small business start-ups have fallen by 95 per cent, over the last 12 months.

The mining tax is a complete flop, raising just $126 million of the promised $2 billion in revenue. But in the true Labor tradition it is actually worse than that. Once you deduct the administrative costs and the company tax offset, the mining tax raised less than $40 million. And what about the carbon tax—again, making it harder for Australian exporters. IBISWorld research says the carbon tax is costing Australian farmers alone $3.2 billion in 2012-13, and that slug will ramp up to $3.7 billion in 2014-15. So, on top of a high Aussie dollar and flat commodity prices, this is the worst possible time to be inflicting a tax of that nature on our farmers, let alone a tax that is not imposed on farmers in any other part of the earth. It is little understood that one in six Australian jobs still hinges on the farm sector, which ripples through the economy to transport, processing, packaging and all the way to the retail end. Today Australia's businesses pay a $23 per tonne penalty for carbon emissions, and that will go up to $24.15 in only a few months time on 1 July. Our businesses and our families are locked into this high carbon price for three years. There are yet more examples of the blatant revenue raising that the Labor government have put in place in order to try and cover up the fact that they cannot control Australia's budget. We have been here before. Labor's legacy has seen this kind of wreckage in state and commonwealth governments now over decades.

The reality is that we need to be doing what we can in these difficult times to try and give our industry whatever opportunities we possibly can. We need to be supporting those in manufacturing who are hanging in there in spite of the increased taxes and lack of competitiveness that have been imposed upon them by this Labor government through its taxation policies, its workplace relations policies and the inconsistency of its approach to support for industry. Under Labor, economic management has descended from sound and responsible decision-making into utter chaos. Stripping $200 million away from EFIC simply reduces its capacity to support Australian exporters at a time when they need it. I know EFIC
has always had its critics. Dry-as-a-bone economists, Treasury officials and academics have opposed the very existence of an organisation like EFIC. Perhaps it is not surprising that the Productivity Commission also is a critic and has provided the fig leaf that the government is using for this legislation to strip $200 million away from EFIC's reserves.

Labor is doing this at a time when our trade balance is in crisis also—when our trade deficits continue to rise. The Australian dollar is high. Europe, the US and a range of other countries are maintaining and, in some cases, increasing the subsidies that they are offering to their exporters. Others manipulate their currencies so as to give them a trading advantage. Australian manufacturers and Australian exporters have to carry a huge burden: not only the extra costs that are associated with doing business in this country but also now a government that does not seem to be willing to support them in their efforts.

At the very time when our exporters need more help, Labor is taking money away from them. We are discussing this EFIC legislation in the Federation Chamber today, but downstairs in the other chamber Labor is also attacking the EMDG scheme and taking money away from the export market development grants. There seems to be a consistent disregard for the vital role that our exporters can play in restoring the national economy and making our country work more successfully in the future.

EFIC is a very modest export finance and insurance organisation. It helps small businesses to access markets by supporting their transactions. It is not a mainstream banker; in fact, its charter prevents it from acting in any competitive way with the banks. They take on the business that the bankers will not touch, whether that is because of higher risks or nonconventional lending requirements. The fact that this $200 million is being usurped is in some way a tribute to its success—the fact that there is actually $200 million available is a remarkable tribute to its good management. They operate in a very difficult financial environment; they are facing competition and challenges from huge organisations run competitively by other countries, and over quite a number of years they have managed to accumulate this $200 million that the government is raiding through this legislation.

The point that I just referred to is an important one. Countries like the US, European countries and China back their exporters with billions of dollars worth of export finance. Many deals are consummated between some of these major exporting countries and smaller, poorer nations on the basis of the very, very generous financial terms that are provided to those countries. We can never match the scale of those kinds of operations, but we can help. We actually can help and, unfortunately, the very organisation that has been established for that purpose—EFIC—is going to be less financially capable in the future because of the money being taken away from it in this legislation.

It is important that we do whatever we possibly can to support our exporters. I think EFIC has played a key role in enabling many small businesses and smaller exporters to find a way into an overseas market where previously that may not have been possible. I think we need to be helping and supporting organisations like EFIC to do their job. It seems that Labor does not even want to try, and instead just sees these organisations as yet another milking cow to prop up their extravagant spending.

Dr Emerson (Rankin—Minister for Trade and Competitiveness and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Asian Century Policy) (10:24): As part of my summing up I want to respond to the comments of the shadow trade minister and also to the Leader of the Nationals.
The criticism of this government is that, firstly, we do not support EFIC. Of course, we do. The Productivity Commission did a thorough review and we have accepted a number of those recommendations and rejected others. I do think it is poor form for the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to attack the Productivity Commission for its work. The Leader of the Nationals did the same thing. The Productivity Commission does its very best based on objective evidence. For the alternative government to attack this institution for suggesting that perhaps $200 million could be better used, that its opportunity cost is significant and made a recommendation in this direction, I think is unedifying on the part of the coalition. But I suppose that is its approach to economics, just as its approach has been to assert that this government is a high-taxing government and damaging Australia's competitiveness.

The truth is the highest-taxing government in Australia's history is the previous coalition government. By any standard, that is a fact, as reflected in budget paper No. 1. In fact, in the period from about 2001 to 2007 taxation as a share of gross domestic product was higher than at any time since and higher than any time previously. So if you are looking for gold medals, the gold medal for the highest-taxing government in Australia's history hangs around those members of parliament who were members of the previous coalition government.

It is hypocrisy for the coalition now to claim that this government is a high-taxing government when in fact their policy prescriptions, to the extent that we have been able to squeeze them out of the coalition, are in fact for higher taxes. I refer, for example, to the fact that the coalition has announced that to pay for its gold-plated paid parental leave scheme there will be a 1 1/2 per cent increase in company tax for larger companies. That is an indisputable fact. That is a tax rise. It has been a quite feeble attempt on the part of the coalition to assert that a 1 1/2 per cent increase in the company tax rate for larger businesses is not a tax rise but a 'levy'. This is the oldest trick in the book—to call a tax rise a 'levy' and say it is okay. Ask the major companies if it is okay, if it does affect the competitiveness, if it does affect their returns and they will indicate to you that obviously it does affect their returns.

The Leader of the Opposition has said that these large companies will do the right thing and they will absorb this tax rise and not pass it on to the men and women of Australia in the form of higher prices. He is asserting that the banks and the major retailers will do the right thing and absorb the coalition's 1 1/2 percentage point tax rise. I am not sure from which planet they are formulating these policies, but it is certainly not planet Earth.

There are further proposals to increase tax on some of the most vulnerable people in Australia, and that is through reversing the trebling of the tax-free threshold from $6,000-$18,200. The shadow Treasurer the other day confirmed that this indeed was coalition policy, being directly repudiated by the Leader of the Opposition. But he said during his press conference that this was just $3 per person—completely false. It is around $300 for low-income earners. So embarrassed was the shadow Treasurer in having made that statement that he expunged it from his transcript. It was so clearly wrong—so ridiculous—and, true to form, the coalition just removes these sorts of mistakes from their transcripts. But what is unmistakable is that the coalition would take that tax-free threshold back from $18,200 to $6,000, bringing back, dragging back, into the tax system more than one million Australians. That is indisputably a tax rise.
The coalition has also said that in respect of superannuation for low-income earners it would reinstate the 15 per cent superannuation contributions tax. That is a tax rise. No matter what language they use to seek to disguise the reality, it is a tax rise. Of course, the party that pretends to be the champion of small business has revealed that in respect of the small business tax breaks, where small businesses can claim for immediate deduction any assets valued up to $6,500, that, too, would be scrapped. So everywhere you look you see the coalition behaving to form—that is, it was the highest-taxed government in Australia's history and it plans to be the highest-taxed government in Australia's history if it were re-elected. We do not accept the criticism from them that the decision in this legislation to take $200 million from the EFIC fund would be damaging to EFIC. We have, in fact, received advice from the Productivity Commission that the relevant prudential ratios would be preserved.

I sum up by saying that the Export Finance and Insurance Corporation Amendment (Finance) Bill 2013 makes changes to the financial arrangements of the Export Finance and Insurance Corporation. The 2012 Productivity Commission report on Australia's export credit arrangements recommended, amongst other things, that the EFIC Act be amended to allow the government to direct EFIC to return surplus capital to the Commonwealth. The Productivity Commission found that EFIC held capital well above its minimum prudential requirement, and this surplus capital has an opportunity cost that is borne by the taxpayer. The amendments in this bill give effect to the 2012 budget measure which directed EFIC to pay a $200 million special dividend from EFIC's retained profits, as well as accepting the Productivity Commission's recommendation. The bill also provides for a mechanism to adjust EFIC's core capital should the government consider it is necessary for EFIC to meet its future prudential benchmarks.

Next week I plan to introduce a second EFIC amendment bill to implement further elements of the government's response to the Productivity Commission report. The government's broader response to the Productivity Commission report was announced in January and includes a new mandate for EFIC to ensure more of its resources are devoted to small- and medium-sized enterprises which face financial barriers to exporting. The forthcoming bill will also give effect to EFIC's new powers to enable it to better support Australian businesses participating in global and regional project teams.

Supporting Australian small- and medium-sized enterprises in their exporting endeavours, including through participation in global value chains, is an Asian century white paper objective upon which we are delivering. The measures in this bill, which will ensure greater flexibility in EFIC's financial arrangements, will help support EFIC’s continued sound operation into the future, and I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.
Debate resumed on the motion:

That the House take note of the document.

Dr STONE (Murray) (10:33): Australia is frequently called the lucky country, but too often you are out of luck if you are born an Australian Aborigine in a rural or remote community, that is if you consider life expectations, in particular your length of life, your health, your opportunities to have a job, and the likelihood of you completing your secondary school education and going onto higher education. There is an enormous difference, a gap, between the life experiences of Australian Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians, whether they are newly arrived in Australia or have been born here. You are only marginally more fortunate if you are born an Australian Aborigine in one of Australia’s great cities.

There has been investment of hundreds of millions of dollars by state, federal and territory governments in Indigenous programs aiming to improve health, education, business development outcomes, employment and life chances in general. Unfortunately, while there has been some movement in, for example, the numbers of babies surviving infancy in the Indigenous community compared to the rest of Australia, we still have, as I said before, an enormous gap despite these hundreds of millions of dollars being invested. There have been endless inquiries, surveys and analyses of what works, what has gone wrong and where dollars have gone missing. Endlessly we see a parade of short-termism, with projects typically called pilots. Even if they work, they are not given ongoing funding.

Fortunately there are some amazing success stories—for example, the Clontarf program, which we celebrated in parliament last night. This is a program aimed specifically at boys—young boys and youths—and it aims to attract them back into education via their love of sport. It was an inspiration to be at the celebration of Clontarf in Parliament House last night, where numbers of the young men involved in the program were examples of some of the finest young Australians you would see anywhere.

But, sadly, while fewer Indigenous babies now die compared to the rest of Australian society, we are now seeing increasing numbers born permanently and irreparably brain damaged as a result of their mothers’ consuming alcohol during their pregnancy. These babies’ capacities to live a life realising their full human potential are not what you would expect of a baby born to a mother who has not had any alcohol during her nine months of pregnancy. I am in particular referring to the incidence of newborns now being brought into the world suffering from foetal alcohol spectrum disorders. This spectrum includes permanent brain damage.

FASD, as it is called, is not just a tragedy confined to Australian Indigenous populations, of course. It is found also across all populations in the Australian community, particularly where now we have a culture of binge drinking amongst our teenage girls, where the culture of drinking is seen as more important than responsible drinking and where, particularly through our sporting obsession in Australia, young people are targeted with the idea that consuming alcohol in excess is not irresponsible; it is just having a good time.
We in Australia, then, have a real problem with babies being born who will not have a right to a full life of intellectual development or of employment. Many, particularly the young boys, will find themselves incarcerated at an early age. Many of the young girls with FASD will find themselves mothers at a very early age, and in turn their babies will often be victims of FASD because, as young mothers suffering from this condition, they too drink during their pregnancy.

Indigenous women have been at the forefront of challenging the destructive alcohol consumption in their communities. I refer in particular to the brilliant women like Marmingee, June Oscar and Emily Carter at Fitzroy Crossing. They are now internationally renowned for the stand they have taken against the abuse of alcohol in their remote Western Australian communities. Unfortunately, their example is not found across the broader Australian society, and other Indigenous communities struggle to be able to control the alcohol consumption which not only leads to babies being born brain damaged but also leads to violence and behaviour which means that, as a community, they suffer hugely from even more poverty and disadvantage.

In November 2012, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs tabled *FASD: the hidden harm: inquiry into the prevention, diagnosis and management of fetal alcohol spectrum disorders*. In particular, one of the recommendations was:

... that the Commonwealth Government raise with the States and Territories the critical importance of strategies to assist Indigenous communities in managing issues of alcohol consumption and to assist community led initiatives to reduce high-risk consumption patterns and the impact of alcohol. For Indigenous communities like those at Fitzroy Crossing, this is not just a matter of making sure that each baby born has an opportunity—in fact, the right—to develop their full potential. It is also about the potential loss of culture. Given that a lot of the traditions and culture of Indigenous communities are still orally transmitted, if your next generation cannot learn, cannot retain information and cannot be held responsible for their actions at all times, you are in fact looking at cultural genocide.

So we need to address very seriously in all of our closing the gap rhetoric the fact that one of the great hidden tragedies in Australia right now is the incidence of FADS in Indigenous communities. Already some of the recommendations from this report from the Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs have been missed by this government in terms of strategic actions we called for. For example, in recommendation No. 10 we said:

The Commonwealth Government should determine the appropriate format and design of the labels by 1 March 2013 ...

This was to assist the alcohol industry in adopting best practice principles and preparing for the mandatory implementation of labelling on alcohol, which they have already determined will be happening later this year. We felt it was important that guidance was given to the alcohol industry, whether beer, spirits or wines, so those wanting to take up this labelling in advance of the mandatory period commencing would have advice about what was going to be the required labelling. Unfortunately, the deadline of 1 March 2013 has now passed and this government did not issue any guidance to the alcohol industry. Many in the industry are being responsible—the small wineries, the brewers of Australia are wanting this guidance.
We have also, sadly, not seen the placing of the matter of including health warning labels on alcoholic beverages on the agenda of the Legislative and Governance Forum on Food Regulation. We wanted it included on the December agenda last year. That did not occur. So I am concerned that, while this report received an overwhelming positive response from the government and from the coalition, who were agreeing that there was a hidden disaster in Australia—the hidden harm of foetal alcohol spectrum disorders—unfortunately the recommendations, all 19 of them, still sit there without much attention being paid.

The budget is coming up in a few short months and we know it is going to be a budget with very little real money to spend, but some of these recommendations were not expensive recommendations. I am concerned that the budget will not pay any attention to the advancing of public awareness about the dangers of alcohol consumption during pregnancy. I am also concerned the budget will not do anything about ensuring the new FADS diagnostic tool is properly introduced and tested. We were most concerned that a diagnostic tool, which the government has already funded, should be further developed with training and a user manual. But, unfortunately, that will require some funding. Let us see the if it is in the budget. I certainly hope for the sake of all Australians that it is.

We also, of course, had recommendations about making sure that all Australians, particularly health professionals, are fully aware of the National Health and Medical Research Council's guidelines that advise women not to drink while pregnant. We want to make sure that alcohol consumption impacts on pregnancy and the developing foetus are incorporated into all general practice and midwifery training. We wanted to ensure that all are trained in discussing the National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines on alcohol consumption with women, because we are told regularly and repeatedly that general practitioners and midwives feel quite reluctant to talk to women about their alcohol consumption during pregnancy, while they are more than happy to ask them about their smoking habits or intake of something like fast food.

So we have got to make sure that there certainly is not a misunderstanding about FADS, where we leave ourselves to imagine that is a problem only affecting Indigenous communities and their newborn. We have a problem of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder occurring with greater prevalence across all of Australian society. But in particular I am addressing in my remarks today the problem in closing the gap in life experience of Indigenous and other Australians, so I want to focus and stress that alcohol, when it is abused and misused, has serious consequences for all in that society, particularly if it is a small and remote society. But for the unborn, if a mother chooses to drink while pregnant, the risks that that baby will be born with permanent irreversible brain damage are risks too high to be borne.

It is particularly tragic where the mother is not informed about the risks or, if she is in fact an alcoholic, is not given support during her pregnancy to try and minimise, or altogether eliminate, the use of alcohol at a time when her baby's development is in danger. I repeat: Australian society cannot rest and simply believe that the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on Indigenous programs has delivered any real improvement in the lot of Australian Indigenous communities. In my electorate of Murray, where I have a significant number of first Australians, particularly the Bangarang and Yorta Yorta peoples, at least I can celebrate the fact that this year we have more than 70 Koori students in year 12, the highest number ever in our final year of secondary education. That is a triumph for their families, for the
Rumbalara Cooperative and for all of the communities who have done so much to try and assist our Indigenous families. We need to make sure that those young people complete year 12 successfully and move on to higher or further education, or employment, and that their lives are as fulfilling and as full of prospects as those of any other Australian in the 21st century.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (10:46): I thank the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition for their statements this year on the progress of Closing the Gap and increasing opportunities for all Indigenous people across the country. I would like to echo the words of my colleague the member for Hasluck, who said that, although progress has been made in some areas, 'we still have a distance to travel to close the gap in Australia and that efforts need to be focused on the best ways to initiate long-term, lasting change'. The member for Hasluck has a very strong commitment to closing the gap and has also worked tirelessly for over two years on the Expert Panel for Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians.

We must acknowledge that in some areas there has been progress. Year 12 attainment is increasing, and mainstream economic employment for Indigenous Australians has increased by two per cent since 2006, with a 10 per cent increase in the Northern Territory. It is particularly pleasing to see Indigenous Business Australia approve its 15,000th loan this year, helping Indigenous Australians build for their family's future in their own home. In some areas, however, we have gone backwards, which reminds us that we must constantly be vigilant to ensure that we are indeed achieving genuine progress.

I want to discuss two on-the-ground projects which are making a real difference to the lives of Indigenous Australians. Evonne Cawley has been a strong advocate for Indigenous issues for decades and has seen her tennis camps for young Indigenous Australians go from strength to strength. Evonne and Roger Cawley started her foundation and the Goolagong National Development Camp for Indigenous Youth in 2005 and have since become involved with 'Learn, Earn, Legend' and the Tennis Australia National Indigenous Program. These initiatives give strong support to the three key Closing the Gap targets on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reform. This program is not only about finding tennis players or unearthing athletic ability; it is about encouraging social responsibility. To be a part of Evonne's tennis camps participants are expected to not only attend their school classes and tennis camps on time but, more importantly, must both attend school and pass their grades. These camps give participants the opportunity to display their enthusiasm, determination and willingness to improve themselves. Furthermore, they empower individuals to make a difference in their own communities.

The Tennis Australia National Indigenous program, in conjunction with Evonne's foundation, has now been expanded to every state, culminating in more than 20 'Come and Try' days with more than 1,100 children having been involved so far. The most recent Goolagong Foundation national camp, held in conjunction with the Australian Open, had 26 participants—in addition to the success of the three state camps, with over 60 participants. This has been a very successful initiative for these participants and there are now 10 Indigenous coaches qualifying through Tennis Australia coach membership and continued coach education who will continue to give back through their local communities.

I discussed the program with Evonne and Roger Cawley earlier this year at the Brisbane International, and they enthusiastically spoke of their desire to increase the program and to
help even more Indigenous students across Australia. It is truly refreshing that, after so many years dedicated to Indigenous issues, Evonne still has that burning enthusiasm as a result of the enormous success that the program has had so far—and can and will have in the future—for Indigenous students.

I would also like to mention Red Earth Connections, an organisation which was founded by two constituents in Ryan, Arthur Alla and Alex Harper. This has also continued to grow, with 10 schools from around Australia so far committed to making a trip to Aboriginal homelands this year and working on meaningful projects chosen by local elders.

I would also like to mention the Clontarf Foundation. I, along with many colleagues from both sides of the House, had the honour of meeting several of their participants yesterday. This particular program is targeting teenage Aboriginal males, and the foundation have approximately 2,800 young men actively involved in secondary education at academies in Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Victoria and New South Wales. Using the passion that Aboriginal boys have for football allows the Clontarf Foundation to attract the boys to school, but it is not just a sporting program. Each Clontarf academy, formed in partnership with a local school, is focused on encouraging behavioural change, developing positive attitudes and assisting students to complete school and secure employment. Fundamental to this is the development of values, skills and abilities that will assist the boys to achieve better life outcomes. Through a diverse mix of activities, the full-time local Clontarf staff mentor and counsel students, while the school caters for the educational needs of each student. It was wonderful to have the Governor-General here yesterday supporting the work of the Clontarf Foundation, and I commend all the people working with them on their wonderful outcomes.

These programs are but a few of many which are making a real difference on the ground for Indigenous Australians. Many constituents have contacted me to ensure that there is bipartisan support in ensuring that we do not waver in our commitment to meeting the Closing the Gap goals, which include halving the gap in literacy and numeracy achievements, year 12 attainment and employment outcomes within a decade. I know that every member of this parliament wants to achieve those aims, because, ultimately, Closing the Gap is not a Liberal-National project or a Labor project; it is a national project in the interests of each and every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander who is missing out on opportunities afforded to so many Australians—and it is a project that we must all support.

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (10:53): This nation's effort to close the gap is probably one of the truly important pursuits that unite both sides of this chamber—and of course chambers all around this great country, with state jurisdictions doing great work as well. I want to make an observation about where Closing the Gap is heading. We have heard a lot about the extra investment in Closing the Gap, but there is still not enough of a focus on outcomes. My great concern is that the prime ministerial reports that happen every year—and I hope they will continue to—clutch at small glimmers of hope but that, in a context where hospital investment has nearly trebled and where we now have billion-dollar investments, in places like Alice Springs, Palm Island, the Kimberley, the gulf and the APY we are yet to see the community transformations that particularly see young children given a start early in life. If there is one area where I think everyone would agree, it would be that. Every Australian citizen would believe that a child deserves the best possible start in life. There is no cultural
disagreement on that; it is a social norm that transcends our boundaries and goes right around the world.

What we know at the moment is that children are still not going to school in adequate numbers, and there is basically a division about whether this is a responsibility of education or the police. We still have an issue where alcohol is not yet agreed upon between major jurisdictions, let alone communities. My strongest recommendation would be that, fundamentally, alcohol is something that can only be available in any community around the world if it stacks up on social impact. The social impact is quite simple: do kids go to school, are youth getting training and do people have jobs?

If alcohol reaches a point where it prevents that, then it does not cross any bar for social acceptability.

We have an expectation of the community that there is roughly two-thirds workforce participation for healthy adults who are not caregivers. That is a number that every community aspires to. No community anywhere in the world survives if it does not achieve a certain level of workforce participation; it is economic engagement 101. We can talk about delivering services to people, kicking the door in and going in and changing their lives, but as zealous as we get about these programs ultimately there is only so much you can do with services. Ultimately you have to create the opportunities and an environment where people can have a go.

It is very interesting that this year Australia’s Aboriginal population will reach 600,000, and 100,000 of those live in what I would call remote and very remote locations. Half a million Aboriginal Australians now live in cities and regional towns, so we are seeing a complete shift in the demographics. With that goes political power, because half a million Aboriginal Australians will be demanding better services where they live—and I do not blame them. But the answer is, if we are going to close the gap, no gap will close without closing the remote gap. Let us not forget that.

There are multilayered and many poorly coordinated services in urban areas. We can work on that one. That is a doable challenge and a problem I want to have. But the problem I do not want to have is no services. The problem I do not want to have is no doctor in a community. The problem I do not want to have is not being able to get good teachers to schools in remote areas. Let us be clear: this is a uniquely Australian challenge. Canada, potentially, has the same challenge but not to the same degree. Australia is the second-most sparsely populated continent in the world, and we have the second-best health system. So we will always have a fantastic challenge: a massive challenge and huge expectations on our workforce to go out and do the tough jobs where most of us would never even conceive of living, let alone working. But we have a health system that will push our professionals to deliver those top-class services. That is the challenge for Australian lawmakers: fine.

But in the end what we need to remember is that we must not pat ourselves on the back, because in the age standardised death rates Aboriginal Australians fall slightly from 2,000 per 100,000 to 1,500 per 100,000—if they are mainly being driven by self identification of mostly healthy urban-living Australians who are identifying as Aboriginal at very high levels. There has been a 45 per cent increase in self identification since 2001. It is not all birth rate; it is self identification. So we need to examine true birth rates and acknowledge that the population in most remote and very remote areas is virtually stagnant. If you look at the one per cent growth
in remote Queensland, the two per cent growth in remote Northern Territory, the fall in remote Western Australia and the fall in population in remote South Australia, it is roughly a 100,000-person problem that we have, but a massive challenge that I fear we are not addressing with the current close the gap agenda because we are simply taking national figures.

Perhaps it is a time to look specifically at the remote gap. Perhaps it is time to stop saying we are simply delivering better services in urban areas and, by simple weight of numbers, achieving a closing of the gap. Michael Marmot has done impressive work about early intervention with children. We have the adverse childhood experiences study from California. Everything tells us that the key window of opportunity is between the ages of 18 months and five years. I commend the government for doing their five-year-old health check and for including a biosocial component to it, but the reality is that five years of age is too late. The reality is we have already missed the boat at five years of age. So the question to everyone of us here and at both state and federal levels is: what are we doing for young kids from the age of 18 months?

I, as a former doctor, say it is not easy to diagnose vulnerable kids at 18 months, but you can certainly diagnose vulnerable families at 18 months. You can identify the families living in poverty, with closely spaced children and a caregiver who either has a mental health record or who has a criminal record and has spent time in jail. This is the incredibly challenging cohort we need to identify very early and be unapologetic about delivering great services to them. But at the moment we do not. It is all white noise of health service provision, mostly fee-for-service. You see someone, they go out the door and basically if things fall over it is the next practitioner's problem. There is no continuity. Aboriginal medical services do a fantastic job, but too often they have a state health facility down the road seeing the other half of the population or the half that get really sick and have to be evacuated.

It is time in smaller regional communities to have some cooperation between state and Aboriginal community controlled services. Of course communities love having an AMS, but there is no point if you have half the data held at the Queensland health facility and no collaboration. Maybe we need to get these systems working together. It is something that Medicare Locals cannot do alone. A Medicare Local covering a large expanse of some of these areas is simply too far removed to make a great difference.

The last thing we want in our health system, as good as it is, is another level of bureaucracy trying to talk to other providers. What we need are more people on the ground and an unshackling of local clinicians to tailor services for their community. That all sounds very glib, but, in reality, if we cannot get those opaque state community health services talking to the work that is being done in primary health care that is funded by the federal government, we will just keep having more blame shifting, more gaps and more people suffering those consequences. I strongly urge both sides of this chamber: if we are serious about closing the gap, let's do the following.

Let's agree on earlier benchmarks to measure progress. It is okay to congratulate ourselves on a fall in age standardised death rates, but they have been falling at the same rate since 1998, so the current do-nothing scenario is the current rate of fall. If you look at infant mortality or death rate targets for Close the Gap, we were going to hit them anyway with the
existing slopes we were achieving before we started the CTG agenda. We need closer measurements and more frequent measures of success.

Secondly, we need more of a focus on outcomes, not outputs and certainly not inputs. We need to be measuring just how many people quit the fags. There is no point measuring how many public health promotions we roll out or community barbecues we put in or people on the ground delivering services—that is fine; that is a bureaucratic output. I need to know how many people quit smoking. This is vital information for us to know whether we are investing money in the right way, and it is a huge amount of money in Indigenous smoking.

Thirdly, we need to perhaps look at a new Close the Gap agenda item—a new target. I know that there is a target on employment, but there is no target for economic engagement and there is a very, very subtle but important difference. It is not enough to soak up Aboriginal Australians, particularly in remote areas, into jobs that are simply created in community that have no fundamental market basis or foundation behind them. We need to be engaging Aboriginal families in the real economy.

Everyone around the world is comfortable with the idea that, at some stage in your life, you leave your community for training and to get a job. We move. Aboriginal Australians are no different: they did it, too, for generations until we created the welfare trap. So I urge both sides of this chamber: if we are going to direct incentives, we should direct them to people who do the things we want—who go out and seek training or have a go at a job. Provide all the culturally safe services that underpin that, but let's support people who have a go. It is no longer good enough to put people through certificate II training in stockman work when none of them get a job and you train another 15 for a cert. II in stockman work. If we are not going to place these youth and give them the support to move together in cultural groups and work outside of their immediate country, we are not actually solving any problem at all.

Marcia Langton said it so well. She said we have a once in a generation opportunity called the mining boom. Before it slips through our fingers so ephemerally, we need to grasp something from it for Aboriginal Australia. If we are going to transform the wealth under the sands that are fundamentally Aboriginal ground, let's absolutely work in a forward way with mining companies to see what low-skill jobs can be taken up by Indigenous Australians—planning ahead. If there is one operation that plans ahead it is mining. They can tell you their mining time lines for years in advance. With, of course, the potential fluctuation of prices, they can tell you what their operational plans are. Let's help Indigenous Australians who are living in those regions—No. 1. Let's set goals not to pick a few happy faces out of a community and pat ourselves on the back because they are wearing high-visibility jackets; let's actually say that every person who lives in that community was given a chance at a job with that mining firm or that aquaculture operation or something in their region. And, if it is a big community, those youth will have to go further—we accept that. But government's job is to facilitate that, because there is no reason why the kids who leave school at the age of 13 cannot go into training. They are a relatively small cohort, but at the moment we just let RTOs swing through on fortnightly flights, stay there for half a day and sign people up to do training that ends in nothing. We have to have a denominator based approach that leaves no-one behind.

If you are a primary caregiver, there is no reason why you cannot turn up with your own child to the childcare centre, support your own child and possibly be inspired yourself to do
some further education. If you are incapacitated, of course, that is fine. If you are a big brother that is actually looking after two or three young blokes that are going off the rails, that is fine, too—there is room for that. But for everyone else, let's give them a shot. At the moment, we are not doing it. We hear about Noel Pearson's good work; we hear about Twiggy Forrest.

There are efforts in Alice Springs but they have massive challenges because Alice Springs is fundamentally the bottom of the waterfall, isn't it? It is where everyone ends up when they cannot live in the community or do not want to live in the hub and spoke. Then you have Alice Springs, which is basically the catch-all. I would put to this chamber: if we have a once-in-a-generation challenge, it is to look after the children that end up in those Alice Springs town camps. Again, do not pick out two or three kids and pat ourselves on the back. I am saying that, if you receive a payment from the state, the expectation of receiving a parenting payment is: be a parent, come along and be part of a childcare centre that engages you.

Ms Hall interjecting—

Mr LAMING: Yes, I was there last year. Let's engage those children and actually give them the abecedarian model, if that is what the evidence shows us. We know one thing: engage these children roughly 24 hours a week—you do not need a PhD, you do not need a master's degree to do it—engage these children in bilateral, purposeful efforts to start them on the road to literacy and numeracy. Let us overlay a cultural component to it. For goodness sake, put some traditional language into that approach. But there is no excuse to give up and there is no excuse to simply say that the parents could not muster the effort to get those children along to a centre.

If you get a state payment, part of it is taking your kids along and giving them a start in life. That is a basic, fundamental positive social norm. It exists in Cape York. For anyone who has not visited the Aurukun school, I challenge you: go and see young Aboriginal Australians there who will look you in the eye at the age of eight years of age and say, 'I want to be a fireman. I'm going to be a rescue worker. I will be an ambulance worker.' Anyone who says we have lost a generation, I challenge you to go and see what is happening in Aurukun with direct instruction, because at 3 pm those children will still be in class and they will be asking to stay another half hour because they want to achieve their own objectives. The teachers says, 'These kids don't want to finish school until they finish their work.'

We can keep Aboriginal children at school after lunch. This old dogma that no-one in remote communities will stay in school after lunch is a fallacy that belongs in the last century. These kids are like everyone else—they want a shot. When you sit down with an Aboriginal child and sit there with their parents and that young boy or girl reads to their parents, there are tears in the eyes of those parents. I do not care what their background is. That is what the state can offer: a chance at a new future and a different future.

Those kids in Aurukun are going to change it. There is 75 per cent school attendance. We still have issues around the other 25. We have in other parts of Queensland—in Mornington Island, Doomadgee and others—tried extra IT as an inducement, but ultimately our challenge is the afternoon rolcall. Can we engage kids after the breakfast club in the morning where the roll is ticked off? That is a challenge, of course, for school providers in remote areas and to young teachers often straight out of graduation with very little experience. I say to them: you do the toughest job of all, but thank you for doing it. When you go there you are probably
taking on one of the great educational challenges. I congratulate you for incorporating traditional culture and language where you can in that syllabus.

Too often we have swung from the extremes—from expunging Indigenous culture from educational curricula to trying to teach nothing but Indigenous language until grade 5. Both extremes were foolish. We can come back and find that middle ground. We can do that and close the gap. We can achieve that in education, we can achieve it and seeing young Indigenous Australians going to university. We will see improvements in infant mortality. We are slowly seeing improvements in death rates. This is a gap that Australia can close. *(Time expired)*

**Mr PYNE** (Sturt—Manager of Opposition Business) (11:08): Is a pleasure to follow the member for Bowman, who has a great passion for Indigenous health, in particular, but all aspects of Indigenous communities. As an eye surgeon and as a person who has volunteered his time in communities throughout Australia, I know that he feels very passionately about the need to close the gap. Closing the Gap is a statement that the Prime Minister makes each year, a report to the parliament, about the progress that we are making as a nation towards improving the welfare of Indigenous Australians and, in particular, Indigenous children. In my case, as the shadow minister for education, that is what I want to focus on in my brief remarks today.

As the Prime Minister said in her statement, education is the key to unlocking the potential of every child. It is a hackneyed term but it remains a truism. For Indigenous children that is just as much the case as for any other child. We heard the Prime Minister in her statement on Closing the Gap talk about national testing results and express her disappointment that the literacy and numeracy results being achieved by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have not closed towards their non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peers nearly as much as she would have hoped or, indeed, any of us would have hoped. I know that members on both sides of the House have the same ambition as the Prime Minister that progress should be quicker for Indigenous students and we all share her disappointment that it has not been the case.

We have also seen, as a nation, increasing reports that Australia is falling further behind in international tests for literacy and numeracy in general. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development— the OECD—Program for International Student Assessment known as PISA revealed a significant difference in the range of scores between the highest and lowest performing students in 2006 to 2009. In 2006, the range of the scores between the highest and the lowest percentiles was narrower for Australian students than the OECD average but in 2009 the range had widened for Australian students and was wider than the OECD average. For Indigenous students that also remains the case.

These results have led many experts to conclude that the gap is widening in Australia for two reasons. Firstly, it is because our most gifted and talented students are falling further behind and, secondly, it is because student achievement from our most disadvantaged students is failing to improve. These PISA results are just one disturbing example about decline in student achievement in this country and governments simply must act to address this gap as a matter of priority. We need to both lift the achievement of our best and brightest students and also improve the outcomes for our most disadvantaged students if we are to reverse this gap. Indigenous students rank disproportionately amongst our most disadvantaged students.
The Prime Minister also highlighted to the parliament that, if we are to make progress in closing the gap, we need to improve school attendance. Most of us instinctively know that student outcomes can only be improved if we actually get these students inside the school gate, as the member for Bowman said in his speech. The Prime Minister foreshadowed in her statement that supporting regular school attendance and improved data collection will be one of the government's priorities in the so-called National Plan for School Improvement. We are yet to see the detail of the government's National Plan for School Improvement or, in fact, their response to the Gonski review.

I know that both the Leader of the Opposition and my colleague in the other place the coalition's Indigenous affairs spokesman Nigel Scullion strongly support the government's intent to improve the way we collect school attendance data so as to give a better picture of how and where we can improve Indigenous school attendance. We do need better information and statistics to inform us of the communities that are improving and those that are not. But we also need to be mindful that any statistical analysis and data collection are efforts that are important but remain behind meaningful, relevant and sophisticated policies to ensure school attendance. We do not want to lose sight of the very purposes of why we need to collect data or overcomplicate and unnecessarily overburden education authorities. I look forward to hearing the detail of the government's response to the Gonski review and the national school improvement plan in due course.

I also want to take this opportunity to share some of the more positive initiatives I have seen in my time as the shadow minister for education which really do give me some hope about progress in closing the gap that can be achieved much faster if governments of all persuasions get the policy settings right in our schools. We know that governments have been ever increasing the amount of funding being spent on students facing particular types of disadvantage but, at the same time, outcomes have been failing to significantly improve. The money is there but the way it is being spent has failed to improve the outcomes of our students. That is not a political statement. It is simply a statement of fact. I know that Labor sometimes are obsessively focused on the amounts of funding and large new spending commitments, but the issue of education is not the lack of funds. The issue is how the funds are being spent.

I believe an equally important subject in addition to how much the government should spend on students with additional needs is how the funding is actually being spent at the grassroots level. A recent analysis of national testing data undertaken by the Centre for Independent Studies has concluded that only two states have seen improvements in meeting Indigenous literacy and numeracy targets. They are Western Australia, following the introduction of independent public schools, and Queensland, through the joint reform efforts of the Cape York partnerships—and the member for Bowman mentioned the work of Noel Pearson. The success of these two states has been attributed to reforms to introduce school autonomy. This means that principals are provided with more flexibility in hiring teachers, budgeting, timetabling and organising their own school programs, as well as introducing what they know will work in their school. Initial results following the implementation of direct instruction teaching, for example, in Cape York, gives us all reason to believe that we can make rapid progress in improving student achievement in remote primary education across
the board, as long as we give schools and education authorities the freedom and the opportunity to pursue the course they want to follow.

Direct instruction is an evidence based explicit instruction teaching method, recognised to be highly effective in the teaching of literacy and numeracy to children internationally. The member for Herbert has real experience, as the member who covers Townsville, of the importance of literacy and numeracy in north Queensland. The results in Cape York are showing us that students can catch up to their peers if schools are allowed to have autonomy in developing intensive curriculums and rigorous instruction and through their own strategies can develop a strong work ethos among staff. All of us have met with representatives of the Cape York partnerships over the last few months if not years. The passion and the enthusiasm that those young people and not-so-young people bring to their goal of improving the student outcomes for Indigenous students in Cape York is unmatched by any I have ever seen. In meeting many education authorities across Australia over the last four years, I have never seen the passion and enthusiasm that the Cape York partnerships bring to their role.

In Western Australia, government school principals are also making remarkable progress through independent public schools. I have been to visit many of these schools, where principals and their governing councils have been provided with complete control over their school budgets. It has resulted in providing principals with more opportunity to better spend government funding in a way that has a positive impact on improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their communities.

So the coalition strongly supports any moves the government makes to improve school attendance. But if we are really to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students we need strong and meaningful action by this parliament as the government’s reforms for school funding progress to ensure that any reforms that are passed are linked to school and principal autonomy. If we do this, maybe both sides can stand before the parliament in future Closing the Gap statements and actually celebrate real student outcomes, where people at the coalface of education have been given the opportunity and the freedom to actually close the gap.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (11:18): I appreciate that the member for O'Connor was intending to speak next in this debate on Closing the Gap. I just really wanted to put some words on the record, and I promise him I will not keep him waiting too long.

Closing the Gap and the Closing the Gap statements that the Prime Minister has made since the first report are very important because, as a nation, we have to ensure that all people living in Australia have equality—and not just equality on the surface but equal access to all the things that everyone in our society enjoys. In this debate I probably speak from a different perspective from that of a lot of other people. I grew up in an area where there were a number of Indigenous Aboriginal students and Aboriginal people living in the community that I lived in. Some of them were my friends, but at the time I was at school there was very definitely a segregation within the town between people who were non-Aboriginal and those who were Aboriginal. I am also in a position where I have two Aboriginal grandchildren and I know that I want them to have the same opportunities in life as my other grandchildren that are not Aboriginal. They are fortunate because they live in an area where they have access to a number of services and opportunities, but there are other areas and other communities in Australia where simply being an Aboriginal child or person means that you do not have the
same access to jobs, education, health care and aged care as non-Aboriginal or non-Indigenous people in those communities do.

It was interesting hearing the shadow minister for education speak and I was pleased to hear that he is totally committed to seeing young Aboriginal students get access to the type of education that they need, because education is the key. If young people can have a quality education—if they can get the support that they need in the school system—then they have a much better chance of succeeding in all those other areas of life. Education is the key that unlocks the door to employment. Education is the key that unlocks the door to quality of life. Education is the key that unlocks the door to choices, I believe, by ensuring that young Indigenous students—and I am looking at it from the time that they start preschool—have full access to services that other students have. Prior to even looking at education—I suppose it could be put in terms of education—we need to make sure that from the time they are born they have access to proper health care, immunisation and support services and do not just rely on mainstream services without being given extra assistance. It is not realistic to just expect somebody that lives in a very remote community to be able to access the services that somebody living in the area I live in can access. Even within the community I live in, some people are more able to access mainstream services than others. That is why it is important to have special services for Indigenous Australians—services that they can relate to—and for those services to facilitate their ability to get that education and those jobs that they need in the future. That is why the Smarter Schools National Partnerships program, and putting more money into education, is so important as well.

I know that when the minister and the Prime Minister spoke they spoke at some length about alcohol and alcohol programs in the Northern Territory. It is really important that, if we are serious about looking at issues like domestic violence and community safety, all sides of politics get together and support the alcohol policy in the Northern Territory. I focussed on education in the beginning. Education leads to jobs and jobs lead to financial security, but jobs also lead to a situation where a person has a meaningful role. A job does not necessarily only exist if you go off and work in a mine or a school or a factory. Jobs for Aboriginal and Indigenous Australians should not be just low-skilled jobs, as I heard one previous speaker refer to. Jobs can be within a community and they can perform a more meaningful role. They can be high-level jobs. Jobs for Indigenous Australians should not be restricted by any preconceived ideas we have.

We as the parliament should be providing people with opportunities, not trying to fit people into a mould that we predetermine they fit into. The best way we can achieve this is by making sure that young people get the education and access to education that they need. We also need to ensure that there are proper health programs available in communities throughout Australia, be they in remote, rural or metropolitan areas—of course, we must never forget that the majority of Indigenous people live in metropolitan areas. We need to make sure that the health programs link to providing services, education, immunisation and preventative health care. We need to support the alcohol policy in the Northern Territory.

We need to make sure that there are adequate and appropriate services for all people living in Indigenous communities and older people living in metropolitan areas. When aged-care services are provided they need to be relevant. When I was recently in Alice Springs I visited a number of aged-care facilities and saw some of the services being provided were culturally
appropriate for Aboriginal people living in those residential facilities. I also looked at the services that were provided through the community sector. I looked at how the aged-care packages were delivered in remote areas. Similarly, within my own area Awabakal provides specialised aged-care packages and services to Aboriginal people. There is a need for specialised packages.

In closing the gap we need to embrace both mainstream and specialised services. It is all about making sure that all Aboriginal and Indigenous people living in Australia have a true opportunity to enjoy all of the benefits of living in Australian society. This can be done only by us working to close the gap. I congratulate the Prime Minister on her speech and her commitment—and the commitment of the minister—to closing the gap between Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians.

Mr CROOK (O'Connor) (11:28): I rise today to address the issue of closing the gap in Indigenous employment levels in my electorate of O'Connor and to express my disappointment that since May 2012 this government has recklessly undermined the progress of established Indigenous employment agencies. In May 1986 the Southern Aboriginal Corporation established its headquarters in Albany in my electorate of O'Connor. In its relatively short history the Southern Aboriginal Corporation has been recognised by both the Nyunga and the wider community as the most appropriate body to represent the interests of the Nyungar and the wider community as the most appropriate body to represent the interests of the Nyungar people in the Great Southern region.

Since the establishment of the reformed Indigenous Employment Program in early 2009, the Southern Aboriginal Corporation, in partnership with local industry and business, have established a proven track record in placing Indigenous Australians in training and employment under the Indigenous Employment Program. As proof of their success, the Southern Aboriginal Corporation has consistently exceeded key performance indicators set by government for the Indigenous Training Program and employment goals.

In May 2012, with no prior warning, the Southern Aboriginal Corporation were advised by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations that a moratorium was being placed on new funding for Indigenous Employment Program projects until further notice. With the same communication, DEEWR advised that the new initiative, called the Remote Jobs in Communities Program, was about to begin, targeting 59 very remote Indigenous communities. The locations designated by DEEWR as remote were partly based on Australian Bureau of Statistics maps. However, they excluded some areas previously identified as remote.

On 6 February 2013, as the Prime Minister was making her Closing the Gap statement in this chamber, my office was attempting to explain to our local Southern Aboriginal Corporation why the Indigenous Employment Program funding to their proven and incredibly successful employment program for Indigenous people in the south of my electorate had been halted. The Minister for Indigenous Employment, the Hon. Julie Collins, said in a media release on 20 June 2012 that the Indigenous Employment Program had delivered almost 33,000 work and training commencements in 2011-12, which is 15 per cent higher than the program’s target. She also said that the Indigenous Employment Program is one of the most successful programs helping Indigenous Australians to get the training they need to get a job and supporting them to keep it.
In light of these statements by the minister I find it extremely difficult to understand why DEEWR are withholding, or redirecting, funds away from the Southern Aboriginal Corporation for this program. After nine months of inaction, in February 2013 DEEWR advised that the moratorium had been lifted. Their communication again created uncertainty, this time by indicating that there would not now be increasing pressure on Indigenous Employment Program funding and applications would need to be considered with new processes to be advised later in 2013.

With no indication available to date of what DEEWR's new criteria or priorities will be, a local Indigenous employment agency is once again left in limbo, with one extremely valued member of the Indigenous Employment Program team having to be retrenched recently and with the potential for more job losses to follow soon. In addition, potential business partner employers are now also feeling the uncertainty, and the vital momentum and hard-won trust that has been built with these businesses over many years is quickly being lost—once lost, it will be very hard to win back.

There is currently no locally based provision of Indigenous Employment Program services in WA south of the Perth metropolitan area. This is essentially the same region which contains no areas designated as remote, and therefore it will not be part of the Remote Jobs in Communities Program arrangements either. The current situation seems largely inconsistent with the concept of Closing the Gap and is made more alarming by the fact that the area comprising Nyungar country in my electorate has been overlooked for inclusion for support under the new Remote Jobs in Communities Program initiative. There is an obvious concern that the majority of the Indigenous Employment Program funds are now being redirected to areas designated as remote under the new Remote Jobs in Communities Program boundaries. Recently DEEWR advised the Southern Aboriginal Corporation, off the record, that the chances of new Indigenous Employment Program projects being accepted are quite slim because the money is very tight—surprise surprise—and a very large financial commitment has already been made to the Remote Jobs in Communities Program.

At 24.9 per cent, the unemployment rate for Aboriginal people in the Great Southern region of Western Australia is considerably higher than the 17.9 per cent Indigenous unemployment rate across the whole of WA. Individual towns in the region fare even worse, with recent statistics for the regional centre of Katanning showing Indigenous unemployment is at a staggering 27.8 per cent, compared to the non-Indigenous rate of 4.6 per cent. Demographically, the Great Southern region also contains the state's poorest populations, according to the ABS statistics. These figures clearly demonstrate an area of need for additional support. Are we defining remote as the distance removed from a capital city, or are we talking about geographical proximity in relation to economic and employment opportunities? The question becomes more perplexing when you consider the example of South Hedland, with its immediate proximity to the opportunities provided by the resource giants BHP Billiton and Fortescue Metals and by all the associated development. How can South Hedland be considered remote under the DEEWR definition for the Remote Jobs and Communities Program, while smaller towns in the Great Southern, with extremely limited opportunities for employment, are not being included? It appears remoteness has become an arbitrary factor, and one that has very little bearing on the actual access to opportunity.
We have just heard the member for Bowman, Andrew Laming, speak. He made some very valid points and I would urge members of this House, if they are seriously interested in what is happening in the Aboriginal communities, to run their eyes over that speech. The Great Southern region, the area I have just referred to, is 2,000 kilometres away from the furthest part of my electorate out in the lands. I was very fortunate a couple of years ago to attend what they call the Desert Dust Up, where all of the regional and remote schools come together and have three days of sport and education. I was very fortunate to sit on the grass one evening alongside some Aboriginal women who were really concerned about the CDEP program. They were really concerned that their communities were at a total loss with the CDEP program.

The member for Bowman referred to Alice Springs as the bottom of the waterfall; now that is a very good analogy, but I would just like to add a few more communities to that. The town I live in, Kalgoorlie, is also the bottom of the waterfall. What is happening is that young people are leaving remote communities—the control of their parents and their elders has been taken away—and they are coming to towns where they can get access to grog and ganja and can sniff petrol. Out in the lands they are dry camps—we have Opal fuel out there; I would like to thank Warren Snowdon for his efforts in ensuring that Opal fuel is delivered into regional and remote areas of concern. But the simple fact of the matter is that the CDEP program must be reconsidered. The notion of a one-size-fits-all scenario simply does not work. We need to re-empower these remote Aboriginal communities with the CDEP and let the elders in the communities take control of their children. As the member for Bowman said: all of these communities are self-empowering. Give them the opportunity and they can make a huge, huge difference. I would urge the appropriate ministers to reflect on that and reflect that the CDEP program did work. Is it perfect? Possibly not, but I think that there are lots of programs that come out of this building that are not. CDEP was certainly one that was working: it was making a difference. It was giving employment in these remote communities; it was giving the people a sense of purpose and it was giving the communities a sense of purpose. It needs to be reinstated.

I urge the minister to consider that if the current government is truly committed to Closing the Gap surely it makes good sense to support and encourage those local organisations and initiatives which are clearly making a positive contribution towards this goal. The Southern Aboriginal Corporation is one of those, it has been doing it in spades. I would urge that the minister review this.

Mr HUSIC (Chifley—Government Whip) (11:41): When the Prime Minister gave a statement on Closing the Gap last month, she delivered a report card that showed the government was well on its way to reaching its targets. In fact, in her speech the Prime Minister was able to tick off the first of these Closing the Gap targets—that being providing access to early childhood education to all four-year-olds in remote communities. Former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd outlined this ambitious plan in 2008 and set the target for early childhood education to be achieved in five years. The year 2013 marks the fifth anniversary of the Closing the Gap plan. I am proud that our government has been able to bring this part of the plan to fruition. Providing early childhood education to Indigenous children will have generational benefits. It will help us to achieve longer-term targets like halving the gap in Indigenous year 12 achievement and closing the gap on life expectancy.

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FEDERATION CHAMBER
Chifley, which sits within Darug lands, has one of the largest urban Aboriginal populations in the country. I have seen firsthand the benefit that early childhood education has brought to my local community through the assistance of the Gillard government. Last month I attended a sod turning for a new Aboriginal child and family centre in Mt Druitt, called Yenu Allowah, which will replace their temporary premises. Yenu Allowah will bring together a range of early childhood health and family support services to improve the overall health and wellbeing of children and improve support for their families.

The Australian government has provided New South Wales with more than $74 million to set up nine Aboriginal child and family centres across the state. Now that we have achieved access to early childhood education for Indigenous children, supporting regular school attendance and engagement will be the challenge of the coming years, building upon this solid foundation.

Chifley electorate has historically suffered poor high school completion rates, not just among Indigenous students but across the broader population. That is why it remains important that we fully implement our national plan for school improvement. In 2008 the Prime Minister set us the challenge of halving the gap in year 12 attainment by 2020. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders aged between 20 and 24 in 2006 only 47 per cent had achieved year 12 or equivalent at qualification. In the 2011 census that figure had risen to 54 per cent, putting us ahead of schedule in meeting this Closing the Gap target. In that same period I have seen similar improvements in high school completion across the broader student population. I can point to the opening of a number of trades training centres across Chifley as having helped to start building on this figure.

While we have achieved great improvement in closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students completing school, the gap remains nonetheless, so there is clearly more work to be done. Among all students the gap remains between advantaged and disadvantaged students, and that can only be properly addressed through our national plan for school improvement. Last month the Prime Minister reported that another target was within sight. That was to halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade, which is probably our most significant of all targets. This has been brought about by significant investment in improving antenatal care, access to public health services, immunisation and neonatal intensive care. Is there a more critical target than this one?

Progress is being made to halve the gap within a decade in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The 2011 census figures showed that the number of Indigenous Australians in mainstream employment has risen from 42.4 per cent to 44.7 per cent. Frankly, that is only a slight improvement. Although it is heading in the right direction again, we have to do a hell of a lot more there. There can be no greater role model for young Indigenous children than having a parent, caregiver or older sibling engaged in mainstream employment, with the routine and commitment that goes hand in hand with this. I want to talk about this later.

Given the economic conditions of the past five years and the employment pressures right across the economy, these employment participation results are perhaps much better than they seem. It shows the cost-benefit of having specific Indigenous employment programs and a dedicated minister overseeing them. I applaud the efforts of everyone involved in these
programs, which are helping to close the gap. I am extraordinarily proud to be part of a government that his delivering such life-altering results.

Last year I was particularly pleased to showcase a terrific local community organisation named Marist Youth Care to the Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development, Julie Collins, who visited the Chifley electorate. I have had a lot of dealings with Marist Youth Care over many years, and I have a great deal of admiration for the work they do. They are engaged in a broad array of programs aimed at improving circumstances for local Indigenous youth. We had the opportunity to meet with graduates of their Aboriginal Trainee Support Worker program, which is designed to provide guaranteed employment to between eight to 12 long-term unemployed Aboriginal people per year with low education and skill levels. The training program provides Certificate IV training in community services plus on-the-job paid work experience across Marist Youth Care's own services. In-house mentoring is offered to each trainee to overcome barriers and to assist with staying on track. Once the participants have completed their training they are offered permanent employment with Marist Youth Care, which is fantastic. So it is not just the training but the fact that they are then given an opportunity to go into employment within Marist Youth Care. Again, it is a terrific organisation. It is headed up by Cate Sydes and is located in Blacktown, but it also has premises and operations in Whalan in the Chifley electorate. Over the last four years 29 trainees graduated from the program. Nine new trainees started in November 2012 and of those 29 trainees, 23, or 78 per cent, remain employed with Marist Youth Care or have taken their talents as youth or support workers to other organisations. It is a perfect example of the work being done to close the gap in the electorate. Anecdotally, too, when the graduates completed their training and started working with Marist Youth Care, this then helped in families where some of these trainees had seen intergenerational employment firsthand and were now becoming role models. As I mentioned earlier, they are now showing others what can be done with the application of training to improve their skills. Their parents and even their grandparents are finding motivation through the success stories that had been triggered as a result of the fantastic work Marist Youth Care have been doing.

As much as there is good news, there is other news on the other targets that is not so good. We need to redouble our efforts to address these. Halving the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children within a decade has frankly produced results. The Prime Minister gave the example of year 3 writing, where 78 per cent of Indigenous children reached or exceeded the national benchmark in 2012, a gap of 18 percentage points compared with non-Indigenous students. However, the year 9 results were disappointing, and there is no sugar-coating that: the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, at 35 per cent, is almost double that of year 3 students.

The Prime Minister reported that some results, such as year 3 reading, actually declined in 2012 after improving between 2008 and 2011. Also, only three out of eight indicators in reading and numeracy are tracking as expected, and the other five will need more work. I think the fact that we are able to frankly and transparently report on success and also on areas where we are not doing so well is absolutely critical in giving people confidence about the way in which government initiatives are operating. I certainly commend the fact that it is so transparent and that Closing the Gap statements are delivered by prime ministers who will
seek to hold government departments and other organisations accountable, including ourselves, in reaching success.

In a similar vein, last year I was involved in the inquiry into Indigenous languages in Australia. So many Indigenous languages in this country are just disappearing from day to day and it is a matter of concern. I was involved in the inquiry as a member of the House Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. The inquiry found overwhelming evidence that giving recognition to Indigenous languages and incorporating them into mainstream education has an impact on literacy and numeracy learning outcomes for students. While we saw great work around the country in this area, again, more can be done to promote Indigenous languages. The chair, the member for Blair, reflected upon this during his contribution in this section of the discussion. I want to reinforce his words. He said that to keep alive some of the oldest cultures in the world and to better engage Indigenous students there is value in being able to promote Indigenous languages and also see placenames in Australia embrace Indigenous names more and more—as much as you do see this from time to time—so that we can help in our own way to keep languages alive.

The other thing is that the ability to keep these languages alive is important insofar as it provides a critical bridge between generations and also ensures that cultures remain alive. You cannot underestimate the value this plays in being able to maintain identity and ensure engagement with the broader community. I certainly encourage the government to better resource the teaching of Indigenous languages, because you will see the benefits flow from that.

I commend the Prime Minister on the statement and the efforts we are making to help close the gap.

CONDOLENCES

Morrison, Hon. William 'Bill' Lawrence, AO

Debate resumed on the motion:

That the House expresses its deep regret at the death on 15 February 2013, of the Honourable William Lawrence (Bill) Morrison AO, a former Minister and Member of this House for the Division of St George from 1969 to 1975 and 1980 to 1984, places on record its appreciation of his public service, and tenders its profound sympathy to his family in their bereavement.

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton) (11:50): I thank the member for Riverina for his courtesy and allowing me to speak at this point. Bill Morrison AO was a most distinguished member of this House. He was proud to be the member for St George which in his days covered the regional area, in his days, of Hurstville, Bexley, Rockdale and Arncliffe, and, indeed, most of those suburbs have since been moved into my constituency of Barton, which I have represented since 1996. I can say that many people that I have met and certainly many people obviously associated with the Labor Party remember Bill from those halcyon days of the 1970s and the 1980s. Bill served St George diligently and conscientiously from 1969 until 1975 and again, after losing in 1975, from 1980 to 1984, when he retired from active service in politics. He then became Australia's ambassador to Indonesia from 1985 to 1989 and again he was highly regarded for his work on our nation's behalf in those days essentially working to establish a relationship that has become so important to us. At one time, Bill was also a councillor on Rockdale Municipal Council.
Many excellent remarks have already been made about his parliamentary and diplomatic service, and I will not take up unnecessary time recounting those stories other than to mention of course that at all times he had the loyal support of his wife Marty who was and is still an impressive and forthright woman in her own right. What I first want to say is that, from the time Bill stepped into the seat of St George, he and my father became great mates. Indeed, my father played a prominent role in 1969 in helping to secure preselection for Bill for the seat of St George, and for the sake of posterity I might record how that occurred. My father, who with Bill subsequently became ministers in the Whitlam government, tells a story of how one evening in the Old Parliament House Gough Whitlam called him in and effectively instructed my father that he wanted Bill as the Labor candidate for St George. Gough appropriately insisted that there must be a preselection, and his instructions to my father were simple: 'And you will get him elected, comrade.' Even though at that stage Bill was a complete unknown in St George, there was no proviso, no excuse. Bill had to be our candidate; Gough had said so.

At this time, my father had never met Bill—indeed never set eyes on him. Bill was then the Deputy High Commissioner in Malaysia, but Gough knew him and was very impressed by him and thought he would win the seat. Indeed, Gough told my father that Bill was so keen to represent Labor in the federal parliament that we was prepared to run in the seat of Mackellar against Bill Wentworth, but Gough thought he had real prospects of winning St George. If I pause to mention there, it is a credit to Bill's character that he did not expect to be shoehorned into a safe seat, but rather had to work and work very, very hard to win a marginal seat, and I think others could learn by his example. Anyway, Doug got to work and, with help particularly from the late Bill Rigby and the late Jack Heffernan, who was then the Federal Secretary of the Sheet Metal Workers' Union, they literally visited every home of the Labor Party members in St George; and, to cut the story short, Bill did indeed, according to Gough's instructions, become the candidate through that preselection process.

Shortly after securing his selection, Bill, Marty and the family came back to Australia from Malaysia to work in the Department of Foreign Affairs and each weekend Bill would drive from Canberra to Sydney to campaign in St George. Quite often he would spend the Friday and Saturday night at our home in Blakehurst. I was a lad of about 11 years old at the time but in any event there are a few things I can remember from those days. One that sticks out in my memory was my amazement that Bill, when he had breakfast, would plaster his breakfast sausages with marmalade. I gave it a try on one occasion, but I would not recommend it. Nonetheless, that was how he started the day.

I can also recall my father and Bill working in our place one evening on an election brochure, which was a huge aircraft—they had photos around the table—landing in the dark of the night with its full landing gear on and lights beaming. The caption on the brochure was 'Vote Morrison to keep the jets grounded at night.' Bill won the election against Len Bosman by a mere 69 votes after going through five recounts. I am pleased to say that 44 years later there is still a night curfew on Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport.

I can also relate, if I may, another light-hearted story about Bill. Part of the folklore in the St George area was that on the day that the Whitlam government was dismissed in November 1975, Bill had been having lunch with someone and he arrived at the chamber a little late and as he was walking in he walked towards his seat on the front bench ready to sit down. At that stage Labor's most junior of ministerial colleagues, the young Paul Keating, said to him, 'It's
no use going in there, Bill, you've been sacked!' Of course, Bill, in complete and utter astonishment, responded, 'Good God, mate, what have I done?' The government itself, of course, had been sacked.

Just to add one more thing about Bill's amazing life and to indicate the texture of men of those days—and fortunately still these days, at least in some cases—I am told by the former President of the Senate, Kerry Sibraa, who is very, very keen on not only rugby league but also the surf, that Bill's photo as a young and successful surf lifesaver at Freshwater still adorns one of the walls of the surf lifesaving club.

When I was first elected as the member for Barton, Bill would often attend meetings of the Arncliffe branch of the Labor Party. He subsequently moved away from the area. But he was certainly, I can say, a man of substance who continued to make a great contribution. He was a man with a great sense of humour and a genuine desire to improve the lot of his fellow Australians and certainly continued to make contributions to that. He was practical in many ways—in all ways, really—but he was a man who was very concerned about the civil liberties, in particular, of fellow Australians.

He took his role in politics very seriously, but not himself. He was a very, very articulate man. In actuality he was extremely well spoken—he had a real diplomat's voice. But he always appreciated the larrikinism that was part of the personality of many representatives of their time. Certainly at that time it was pointed out to me that the Labor Party had some 29 different occupations that were represented in the parliament during the time of the Whitlam government. I think it is sad that we do not have the diversity of cross-section.

Bill Morrison was certainly one of those people who had spent time in the real world and brought that experience to bear, representing his constituents and representing the Labor Party and passionately pursuing what he believed to be in the national interest. Again, there is much that the newer generation of representatives can learn from people such as Bill. I am certainly proud to have had Bill Morrison as one of my mentors. It was a privilege to know him and I give my condolences to Marty. The electors of St George thank Bill and also Marty for the enormous assistance that they provided to them and also the excellent representation they provided on their behalf. In summary, Bill Morrison, congratulations on a job well done.

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina) (11:59): It is a pleasure to follow the member for Barton on this condolence motion for Bill Morrison. William Lawrence Morrison AO was born 3 November 1928 and passed away, sadly, on 15 February aged 84 years.

It is interesting to hear the member for Barton talk about Bill Morrison as one of the true believers of Labor, as one of the old-style Labor, because that is exactly what the former member for Riverina John Sullivan said to me this morning when I spoke to him about Bill Morrison. I asked for his recollections because I think it is important. Sometimes the public see the argy-bargy of question time and politicians having public scraps all the time and they do not believe there are relationships formed between members of this side and members of the other side, and good relationships too. I know you and I, Mr Deputy Speaker Mitchell, have formed a good relationship in the short time that we have been in parliament together. But it is important that the public does know and are aware that there is mutual respect from members of both sides of the House. Indeed, the member for Barton spoke of Bill Morrison as always working for the national interest.
John Sullivan's recollections of Bill Morrison was that he was old-style Labor. He always tried to do the best for the constituents he served. Certainly, that is so. I must say, Mr Sullivan, at the same age, 84, is still serving on the Narrandera Shire Council as a councillor elected in the last local government elections. He is still serving his country and his constituents. He recalls asking quite a searching question of Mr Morrison when he was the defence minister in the chamber after which the two had somewhat of a frosty relationship. Nonetheless, there was quite a mutual respect there because both men realised that the other was always steadfastly representing their constituencies. Both men realised that they were representing their parties as best they could and both men realised that the other was always acting in the national interest. If nothing else, we should always strive to represent our constituencies.

The member for Barton spoke of Mr Morrison becoming a member of the Select Committee on Aircraft Noise, which was certainly of relevance to his now defunct St George electorate, which was close to Sydney airport. There is a night curfew on jets landing now, as we all know there needs to be.

Bill Morrison gave his all not just for the Australian parliament and not just for his St George electorate but certainly for the Labor Party, and that is to be admired. He did the best that he could always. There was no self interest as both John Sullivan and the member for Barton have expressed this morning. I do pass on my condolences to the family and friends of Bill Morrison.

Mr Jenkins (Scullin) (12:03): I join with others in this debate to pay my tribute to Bill Morrison. Bill Morrison was first elected in 1969, which was the election that my father was first elected as the member for Scullin. The intake for Labor in the class of '69 set the scene for the victory by Gough Whitlam in 1972. Independently of the preparation that the member for Barton has done in his contribution, I have also come to the same conclusions about the importance of making sure that we place on record our admiration of Bill Morrison for his efforts not only as a member of the House of Representatives, not only for his efforts as a member of our government but also for his efforts as a member of our foreign service.

What struck me about Bill's career was that, unlike modern politics and modern representatives, he had—to use the same words as the member for Barton—real life experiences. Gough Whitlam, as the Leader of the Opposition, was able to convince Bill to consider standing even though he had a senior position in the foreign service. The '69 election was very important.

The fact that, after a very fine career in this place, a defeat and then getting himself re-elected, he returned successfully to the foreign service in a position such as that of ambassador to Indonesia also is of great moment and importance. The member for Riverina stressed that Bill was an example of somebody that acted as a true parliamentarian and acted in the national interest—that is important. We can use this debate to make sure that people understand that that should be the intent even now in the 21st century. In the way we go about the hurly burly of our politics, that is important. He was quite a presentable representative of the Australian Labor Party. The member for Barton has stressed that he continued to keep those values right throughout his life. It is important that, when we have people of the stature of Bill Morrison, the House does take some time to thank him for his contribution, as I said,
through his membership of the House, through his executive government positions and through his other work in the foreign service. I also want to pass on my condolences to the members of his family and his friends. This is an important notation that, especially within the Labor Party during those preparation years for the Whitlam government, we had people that had the life experience of the likes of Bill Morrison.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Mitchell): I understand it is the wish of honourable members to signify at this stage their respect and sympathy by rising in their places.

Honourable members having stood in their places—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I thank the chamber.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (12:06): I move:

That further proceedings be conducted in the House.

Question agreed to.

Child, Hon. Joan, AO

Debate resumed on the motion:

That the House records its deep regret at the death on 23 February, of the Honourable Joan Child AO, former Speaker of the House of Representatives and Member for Henty and places on record its appreciation of her long and meritorious public service and tenders its profound sympathy to her family in their bereavement.

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina) (12:07): It is with great respect I rise today to speak about Joan Child AO who was the first woman to be Speaker of the Australian House of Representatives, and what a marvellous achievement that was. What a pioneer she was. What a trailblazer she was. Up until the election of Anna Burke on 9 October last year she was the only female Speaker of the lower House. The woman I succeeded as the member for Riverina, Kay Hull, was a trailblazer as well, not just for the National Party but in so many aspects of her life. She had the utmost respect for Joan Child as a person and certainly as a politician. I spoke this morning to John Sullivan, who was the tenth member for Riverina, from Narrandera, served the electorate from 1974 to 1977, a period which overlapped with some of the time that Joan Child served in the House of Representatives. He recalled Joan Child as someone who always stood up for her rights, who never forgot that she came from Yackandandah in Victoria. She never forgot her regional origins. She was someone who, in John Sullivan's words, blossomed in her political life by becoming the House Speaker and always did the right thing, not just by the parliament and not just by her electorate, but by the Labor Party. Mr Sullivan said that she was 'old Labor' and there was a great respect for those people who have those old Labor values, those old Labor principles. Whilst he did not agree with everything that the old Labor style politicians espoused, he certainly had great admiration for the fact that you knew where you stood with them. They meant what they said and they said what they meant.

Sadly, Joan Child passed away on 23 February. She leaves a great legacy. She was a pioneer. Her family will miss her greatly. We will always remember her for her wonderful achievements in this place and for being the wonderful role model that she was. The fact that she was the first female Speaker of the House of Representatives will live on in the memory of this place.
Mr JENKINS (Scullin) (12:10): It was with great sadness that I heard on Sunday three weeks ago of the death of Joan Child. Mr Deputy Speaker Mitchell, as you will recall, at a function that was held the night before—the night of her death—I made remarks about Joan. The way that events transpired is quite eerie. I will take this opportunity to share the very heartfelt remarks that I shared at a gathering in my electorate on that night.

I am very proud that when I entered parliament Joan Child was the Speaker. That came about for the same reason that I became the member for Scullin: my father had resigned both as Speaker and as member for Scullin. I arrived in Canberra as a pretty raw recruit; I probably had some tickets on myself. I have realised over the last 27 years that the product that I sold back then was pretty raw. I think it is a better product now, but that is for another debate. Joan of course was elected Speaker. As I said, I was proud to enter the parliament with her as the first female Speaker, and I am proud that when I leave the House will be in the charge of the second female Speaker, Speaker Burke.

The other thing that I shared with that gathering on that Saturday night, the Saturday night of Joan's death, is that when I arrived in Canberra I had a Victorian perspective of Labor Party politics. Being a member of the Socialist Left, I actually thought—with all due respect to you, Mr Deputy Speaker—that members of Centre Unity were pretty bad people; they were as gruesome as it got. But I soon realised that they were actually lovely people. Of course, Mr Deputy Speaker, you are an example of the cuddly nature of Labor Unity. But it was Joan who helped me understand it. I thought: 'This is really radically different. When all the tribes come from the states and gather nationally you get a different perspective.' I remember that Joan said one day: 'But, Harry, you've got to understand that when the Left and the Right in Victoria say something to each other they actually really mean it and they deliver, warts and all. But there's a great trust.' That is one of the things that I have thought is really, really important about this place.

Much as been made—quite correctly—of the very important fact that Joan was the first female representative of the Labor Party in the House. It has made me realise that, while I have only been here for 27 years of Federation, I have actually served with every female member from the Labor Party in the place. I served with Joan and with the others who were there when I was first elected. She had that down-to-earth ability to work with everybody and to communicate on whatever level was required. Down in the old house there was a card school that used to play a couple of nights a week in the party room; it is something we have really lost in coming up the hill. There was only one female player in that card school and that was Joan. I never entered into it, but I understand that she was fairly good at it and she was able to make sure that she was on top of things.

The other story that I will share, and this is a difficult story because you never know how public to make these anecdotes, but Deputy Speaker Mitchell, you will know of my great admiration of a former member for McEwen, the late Peter Cleeland. Peter was as anti-uranium as you can get within the Labor Party. I have not quite researched the circumstances of what was actually going on at the time, but we were debating a matter to do with uranium within the caucus and numbers were fairly tight. Members of the Right caucus were being asked to do the right thing by executive government. This led Peter into a real dilemma because he was a very loyal member to those that he hunted and ran with—the right—but had
really strong views about matters uranium. One day he went off to have a meeting with some people from his faction and I bumped into him soon after he returned from this meeting. Peter was a pretty strong person, he was not a shrinking violet, but I struck a colleague that was ashen faced and it did not take much to realise that whatever his recent experience had been, that it had been pretty tough for him. I said, 'What happened?', and he rattled off who he had gone to have the meeting with, and there were a number of luminaries of the faction who were there, and he said, 'It was amazing. I expected what I got from most of the people in the room, but the person that shocked me was Joan, and she was as tough as all the rest of them, and that surprised me'. I only share this because the point is that Joan did not want any favours because of her gender. She was here as a member, and she was one hell of a tough cookie, and I think that if you look through her life she had to be that. I believe that that is the way that we look upon the contribution and the ongoing contribution of female members of this place. They can be as determined and they can be as driven as anybody else, and Joan certainly was. She conducted herself in the chair with great dignity and she of course goes into the history books as the last Speaker in the old House, and the Speaker who brought us up the hill.

I was looking at the portrait of the 1988 House, when we were first here. I think that there are only three of us who are still members: myself, Warren Snowdon—as an aside, I will say that in the portrait Warren does not look any different, although I have aged—and Philip Ruddock. Phil looks really young in that. It is on only Phil, myself and Wazza that were here, so for me it is important that, as somebody that was here we make sure that we put remarks about how Joan was such a good Speaker and tried, like we all try, to make people welcome in this place.

I read her comments in an article from 6 December 1987, in which she said:

If members, by their attitude, appear to lack respect for the institution of parliament and the standing orders, their attitude will be reflected in the community. If the House manages its affairs with appropriate dignity, the public perception of the parliament will be enhanced.

All I say is: Hear, Hear! How the wheel continues to turn. I think that those are things we should always remember.

In preparing for this speech I looked at her final speech in the House back in November 1989. The circumstances were that she stepped down before the election that she was retiring at and gave the opportunity for the election of her Deputy Speaker McLeay. In her speech she really shows her great love for the Australian Labor Party because predominantly this last speech is about the Labor Party's role not only as a political party but also as a parliamentary party. She said:

First there can be no true understanding of the nature, meaning or history of Labor except by understanding its central role as a parliamentary party. Secondly, there can be no true understanding of the Parliament of Australia except by understanding the critical role of Labor in shaping the Australian Parliament. Just as the work of Labor for the past century has uniquely shaped the Australian nation, so its work in the Parliament has uniquely shaped our Parliament into a uniquely Australian one. I make a third assertion that it is the House of Representatives through which this great national work has been done, and it is through that House alone that Labor can continue its central task of shaping the destinies of our people and our nation.

I know that could provoke debate, but I think that people in the Federation Chamber would understand that, where I have tried to consistently come from, I could not think of a better way of summing up. I stress that the thing that struck me was this evidence in one of her last
speeches in this place of the importance she placed on the actions that we can achieve through the Australian Labor Party. For all the troubles that we have at the moment, I think that can continue to be a driving force. What it emphasises to me through Joan's own words is that we can be a political party and operate in the wider community as a political party and when we come here operate as a parliamentary party which is a subset of everything that we do. I think from time to time it is important that we remind ourselves of that.

As Speaker, I was lucky enough to have a special afternoon tea for Joan, who had not really visited the place much. She had missed the 21st anniversary function that we had. I was able to be her host. She appeared on that occasion to enjoy the day. She had a great love of the institution.

She perhaps had similar views to some of us who made the journey from down the hill to up the hill—that there were aspects of the old place that we missed. I do not think that you can wind the clock back. Many of the things that this new house has achieved could not be achieved in the old house. Joan shared the responsibilities with President Sibraa in bringing us up the hill. It was done really well. She could be very proud of her endeavours: (a) as the Speaker, (b) as a member of the House of Representatives, (c) as a political person that was able to get herself first elected, leave the place and get herself re-elected and, finally, just simply as a great Australian who through her family who should be intensely proud of her continued to make a mark.

I pay my respects and send my condolences to her family. My regret is that, because I was overseas, I was unable to attend the state funeral. I am not a person who looks for many funerals to go to but this is one that I would have wanted to attend if I could have. I send my condolences to her family and her friends. She is somebody that we all, as members of this place, whether we are Labor or not, should be intensely proud of.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (12:24): I too rise to pay my own tribute to Joan Child, the first female Speaker of the Commonwealth Parliament of Australia. I just want to thank the member for Scullin for that beautiful tribute to Joan Child. It was wonderful to get that personal connection with her from someone who obviously had a very long relationship with her. I also want to thank him for reminding us of our wonderful Labor Party and the values that drove us on this side to get into parliament and for reminding us of the very strong connection that Joan Child had to them. Thank you to the member for Scullin for that beautiful tribute and also for that tribute to our wonderful Labor Party.

Joan Child was an inspiration for so many women. Unfortunately, I did not know her, but it was wonderful to get the member for Scullin's reflections and personal responses to knowing her personally. Last week on International Women's Day I made a number of speeches to the community here in Canberra, to Soroptimist International and also to one of the unions. I used that opportunity to pay tribute to Joan Child and to dedicate those speeches to her because, as I said, she was an inspiration to so many women at a time in the seventies particularly when women were finding their voice through the feminist movement and were being empowered through the changes that the Whitlam government was introducing at that stage.

As a young woman I was interested in politics, and it was politicians like Joan Child who showed me that there was a pathway and a place for us to succeed in politics. Like my great-grandmother, my grandmother and my mother, Joan Child was a single mother. Like my great-grandmother, my grandmother and my mother, Joan Child was also a cleaner. Her
experiences made Joan Child a strong and outspoken fighter for the rights of working women. She understood how difficult it is for single mothers trying to help their children get through life and get an education. I have firsthand experience of that as a result of my mum being a single mother, which is why I am a very strong advocate on a range of issues to do with single mothers.

Joan Child was a pioneer, a forerunner who led the way for women and showed that we can reach the highest levels. I was thinking of Joan Child's achievements this week when I attended Canberra's 100th birthday ceremony in the Federation Mall. To see the national capital's centenary being marked by a female Governor-General, a female Prime Minister and a female Chief Minister was a significant milestone, and it made me very, very proud. When I was a young political activist at university, I never imagined that in a few decades we would be able to achieve so much and achieve this, and for me, sitting here as a member of parliament, as the member for Canberra, it was quite an extraordinary and moving moment. It took the strength and courage of women like Joan Child to make this possible.

In 1974, Joan Child was first elected to the Melbourne seat of Henty. At the time, Joan was the very first female member of the House of Representatives for the Labor Party, and, incredibly, she was only the fourth woman—this is only 30 years ago—elected to the House of Representatives. Today there are 37. But Joan was not content to be just Labor's first female member of the House. In 1986 she was elected Speaker of the House, and she served in that position until 1989. Joan Child was, until our current Speaker, Anna Burke, was elected, the only female Speaker in our history. By all accounts, Joan Child ruled this House pretty effectively and with her renowned humour and patience. We heard about some of that from the member for Scullin. We all know that she had some very robust characters to control. We heard yesterday about her management, so to speak, of the young Paul Keating, which would have been an interesting task in itself.

Perhaps the greatest tribute to Joan Child is that, despite what many would consider incredible and inspiring achievements, she was always considered a normal woman. She loved her garden, her books, her sport and her family. It is a great honour to be a representative in the federal parliament of Australia. For women this was not the norm 30 years ago. For us, Joan Child was an inspiration and a pioneer in so many ways. In closing, I recount her mantra: everybody counts or nobody counts. It is one that should guide all of us who serve the Australian parliament, each and every day. I pay my respects to Joan Child. I send my condolences to her family and friends—lest we forget such a wonderful woman.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (12:29): Many fine words have been said in tribute to former Speaker Joan Child; I would like to add my voice to those. She has had a wonderful life story, an inspiration to many. She overcame adversity, as the member for Canberra has just outlined: raising five children as a single mum, finding time to get involved and interested in politics, being a part of the campaign that led Gough Whitlam to office, being elected herself and making a great contribution to her electorate, our party and to this parliament in being a role model for future women to come. Indeed, it is because of the contribution of women like Joan Child that we subsequently, within the Labor Party, set up EMILY's List, to ensure that women like Joan Child are no longer an exception—a grand exception—but that they become the norm.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Mitchell): I understand it is the wish of the honourable members to signify at this stage their respect and sympathy by rising in their places.

Honourable members having stood in their places—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I thank the Federation Chamber.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (12:31): I move:
That further proceedings be conducted in the House.
Question agreed to.

STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE

Harvey, Mr Peter

Debate resumed.

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (12:31): There is no better known sign-off in the Australian media than 'Peter Harvey, Canberra'. It has resonated down through the ages. It has shaped so many Australians' knowledge of politics and of this city, Canberra. Canberrans, or people who have recently moved to Canberra, will often choose to use Peter Harvey's unique pronunciation of Canberra to define our city. It is just one mark of the man, just one mark that he left in a decades-long career covering Australian politics in journalism.

He started as a cadet at the Sydney Telegraph. He covered the Vietnam war, the Dismissal, the fall of Marcos and the Gulf War. He covered Australian prime ministers from Menzies to Gillard. And for much of that career, from 1975, he was part of the Channel 9 family, dealing with the irascible and innovative Kerry Packer in all his various phases, and reporting on a vast range of stories. His two children, Claire and Adam, have followed him in the great tradition of journalism. He is also survived by his wife, Anne, and his grandson, Rory.

Claire Harvey wrote in the Daily Telegraph on 3 March an extraordinary obituary to her father of which she should be greatly proud. It included wonderful stories about Peter Harvey, including his devotion to rock music. She writes that his devotion:

... had always been more about Dr Dre than Andre Rieu. From The Boss and Freddie Mercury to Architecture in Helsinki and Eminem; he loved it all.

Including, she points out, Lady Gaga. She said that Peter Harvey was not just a political journalist, he also loved covering fashion week, Mardi Gras and the Easter show:

... if it was fun and full of razzle-dazzle, he wanted to be there.

She writes about Peter Harvey bucking her up after criticism from politicians and recalls his favourite metaphor: 'The dogs may bark, but the caravan rolls on'—a good life motto for all of us in this place, I think. Claire Harvey tells the story of how, as a young Kerry Packer journalist, Peter Harvey was sent to find Sir Frank Packer's escaped dogs in Bellevue Hill and how, as a 40-year-old political correspondent, he found himself down on his hands and knees in the backyard of Kerry Packer's Canberra home measuring out space for a helipad. She writes about Peter Harvey's great sense of enthusiasm—how he would read them Roald Dahl books, acting out all of the voices. One can only imagine what it would be to be a child being read stories by Peter Harvey's baritone.

In reporting from Old Parliament House, Peter Harvey played as part of a lunchtime tennis tournament—a reminder that, while this new place may be a little more spacious, parliament
has lost some of the informality and collegiality that marked the pre-1988 parliament. Claire Harvey also recalls what it was like when Peter Harvey reported from Vietnam. Apparently the advice he was given at the outset was: 'Go and get the loudest Hawaiian shirt you can find and make sure your notepad is always on display. You want to look like a jouno.' There was never a risk that Peter Harvey would look like anything else. He was a unique and valued part of the Canberra landscape.

At the end cancer took him, as it does so many Australians; but Claire Harvey writes that her father's experience was the opposite of that written about by Christopher Hitchens in his book *Mortality*. She talks about how, in her words:

We had a long, sweet, precious goodbye. Everything was said. We had great conversations about memories and the future. Dad cracked bad jokes … "Every day's a great day … Be of good heart, darling."

He lived a life of which many Australians would be proud and he passed away at the end with nothing left unsaid; an extraordinary life and an extraordinary career. Australia is the poorer for his passing but the better for having known him.

**Honourable members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr McCormack** (Riverina) (12:37): Peter Harvey was a distinctive voice in Australian journalism—that deep, gravel voice; the famous sign-off, as the member for Fraser just quoted: 'Peter Harvey, Canberra.' We all know it; we have all done it—whether we were schoolchildren in a playground, whether we were at a barbecue or whether we were at a very important meeting. Businessmen and women alike—we have all done the Peter Harvey sign-off. As the member for Fraser just indicated, it has become synonymous with Canberra. It has certainly helped place the national capital on the map for a generation of Australians who grew up with Peter Harvey's news reports and succinct comments at the end of the *Sixty Minutes* show each Sunday evening.

Sometimes the issues of the day were controversial, and when people were up in arms Peter Harvey would come out with a succinct, reasoned and measured comment that would really put issues into perspective. I do not want to get too political but Warren Truss, the Nationals' leader, has that same ability of putting something into perspective—of taking an issue and really bringing it down and enunciating it in such a way that you think, 'Well, yeah, he's right, you know,' when everybody else may be thinking something different.

Born 16 September 1944 in Belleuve Hill, Sydney, Peter Harvey became one of the nation's most respected and revered journalists in his long career with the Nine Network. He actually began his journalism cadetship at the Sydney newspaper the *Daily Telegraph*. He won a Walkley Award in 1964. A Walkley Award is the highest pinnacle that a journalist can achieve. He worked at radio stations 2UE and 2GB before moving to London, where he worked for BBC radio. He then went on to the *Guardian*, the very respected British newspaper, where he received the British reporter of the year award. He worked with the American *Newsweek* magazine as a reporter in Vietnam during the Vietnam War. It was such a controversial time and such a turbulent period in global history, yet Peter Harvey was there and he was reporting it with that measured and balanced view that he always had over any issue.

He was a member of the press gallery here in Canberra for some 20-plus years. As his daughter, Claire—now Deputy Editor of the *Sunday Telegraph* in Sydney—said, her father's
The love of 'the Nines', as he called the network, is something now etched into the nation's memory. That he was such a good journalist was shown by the fact that he was able—and not many can do it, mind you—to work across the three mediums. He went from print to radio and the airwaves and on to television. He certainly excelled in all three spheres of reporting and in all three spheres of the media.

The Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition have this week rightly and justly paid tribute to Peter Harvey's infectious enthusiasm for the news and for making sure that the news was balanced and fair. We certainly live in an age when there are so many different forms of media—social media and traditional print journalism and radio and TV, of course. Peter Harvey was able to cross all those mediums but do it in a very balanced and very fair way. A lot of aspiring journalists and young people who are entering the industry could learn a lot from the legacy that Peter Harvey left behind. He was always measured, always fair, always balanced—reporting both sides of the story. Even when he did his wonderful comment pieces, he always made you sit back and think: 'Yes, that is so. I hadn't thought of that aspect of that story and, yes, Peter Harvey, as always, is right.'

I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that much of Peter Harvey's appeal to the Australian people was his unique turn of phrase. I love journalists who have that unique turn of phrase. Adam Walters, who was my best man, works in television in Sydney and started in newspapers. He was a bit like Peter Harvey: he went to radio and ended up in TV. He also has that wonderful, unique turn of phrase—almost cheeky, perhaps, sometimes. Aside from the balanced reporting they make you laugh at the end of the story, as Peter Harvey did when he referred to the Canberra Summernats festival as 'a kind of Floriade for revheads'. Wonderful stuff!

What I think people will perhaps most remember of Peter Harvey was his very distinctive sign-off at the end of stories, which, as the Prime Minister indicated, has become synonymous with the city of Canberra. He was proud of Canberra. He was proud of the press gallery and he was proud of his years at Channel 9. One of his first stories as a journalist here in the nation's capital was the dismissal on that fateful 11 November day in 1975. From that point on, Peter Harvey covered the rough-and-tumble of politics, the challenging policy debates, and even the more humorous stories which come out of this place, with poise and with dignity. He made sure that he was accurate, too. That is something that journalists could learn a lot from—the way he reported the news. He did not go for the story if he was not sure of the facts. He made sure he got it right. He made sure he reported it in a way that would be measured and balanced.

I join with other members in passing on our sincere condolences to his wife, Anne, his children, Claire and Adam, as well as his extended family and friends. Those friends are many, as they should be. I did have the pleasure of meeting Peter Harvey in this place once. He was one of those people who had great presence—those people who, when you do meet them, almost have an aura around them. You see them on the small screen and you grow up listening to their voice, but when you see them you are almost in awe of the fact that you are in their company. He was taking drinks to his friends. His friends, as I recall, were younger journalists. There was Peter Harvey doing something to help younger people.

The other thing that I have learnt whilst doing some research for this particular speech, is that Peter Harvey believed in mentoring young people. He certainly had an eye and vision for
the future of his industry, and he wanted to make sure that the young journalists who were coming through were, perhaps, shaped by his experience and by what he had learned over the many years that he had broadcast, and over the many years that he had been in the printing trade—in newspaper reporting.

Peter will remain in the nation's hearts for evermore, with that lovable catchphrase etched into the nation's memory. Vale Peter Harvey, Canberra.

COMMITTEES

Regional Australia Committee

Report

Debate resumed on the motion:

That the House take note of the report.

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (12:45): The mining boom, that began under the Howard government, has been hugely beneficial to Australia in a broad range of ways. It has provided royalties and payroll tax to state governments, company taxes to the federal government, employment to a generation and, in particular, addressed disadvantage amongst rural, remote and Indigenous Australians. It has provided training and skill development, and construction of multi-use ports, railroads and other significant infrastructure. The mining boom and superior economic management allowed the Howard government to pay off the $96 billion net debt left by their Labor predecessors and to turn it into a very healthy surplus.

Along with these benefits, Australia has been subjected to a number of difficulties born of Australia's two-speed economy. It has kept the Australian dollar at record highs, which has made Australia a comparatively expensive tourism destination, and the federal government has applied untimely and avoidable extra pressure in the following ways: the $750 million in accumulated travel taxes and charges over the next four years, which were added in the May 2012 budget; $500 million in further visa hikes announced in the MYEFO, including the 457 visa, which now costs $450—up from $350 per applicant; the working holiday visa, which is now $360, up from $280 per applicant; successive cuts to Customs staffing, lengthening customer processing times; passing on the cost of AFP security to airports, which is passed on to airlines and which is then passed on to the passengers; cutting regional aviation grants; and imposing multimillion dollar costs on aviation security upgrades at regional airports. And let us not forget one of the biggest impacts: the carbon tax. To quote an example, we only need to look at Virgin's recent fall in profit for the period because of the amount of carbon tax that they had to pay.

The two most significant problems that this Labor government has created include labour force pressures and Australia's record outbound tourism numbers. In fact, last year 132 million bed nights were spent overseas by Australians and this year it has skyrocketed to 139 million bed nights. To quote but one of the submissions—by the chairman of a coal company in January 2013—to the FIFO inquiry which led to the Cancer of the bush or salvation for our cities? Fly in, fly out and drive in, drive out workforce practices in regional Australia report:

Noting the importance of a profitable resources sector and a vibrant services sector for Australia’s future, and recognising there is no foreseeable end to growth for Australian coal exports
(notwithstanding some recent softening of demand from China), the tourism and hospitality sector is taking the mature and sensible policy approach of looking for synergies and areas for mutual benefit.

The resources sector stands ready to work with the services sector. I welcome these sentiments and I commend this approach. It is not a winner-takes-all approach. As our Minister for Resources, Energy and Tourism, Martin Ferguson, has said, mining and tourism are compatible. Over the past week there has been much debate over the needs of the mining sector for staff, the pressure this has placed on other sectors that are bleeding staff to the mining industry and the need for properly thought-through labour force plans that include staff retention, school-leaver recruitment, assistance for unemployed Australians and, only after exhausting local labour supplies, recruitment from foreign sources.

This government must undertake a study to properly map out the economy's total skill needs across all of the sectors. This would assist the immigration minister in deciding the granting of skilled and semiskilled visas. It would also help the training minister in planning to train Australians in both the mining and tourism sectors. Australia needs a holistic and long-term planned approach to Australian skill needs, not just a short, stopgap measure.

A review of BHP Billiton's workforce supply and demand situation is telling. A total of 1,010 fly-in fly-out roles are required for BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance's Caval Ridge and Daunia mines, with 250 to be recruited from Cairns and 760 from Brisbane. Of the 1,010 roles, there are approximately 530 operator roles, 185 trade roles and 295 functional roles—management, administration, professional engineering, health and safety officers et cetera. As at 8 March approximately 30,000 applications had been received for the 715 operator and trade roles, comprising 9,400 applications for the 250 ex-Cairns operator and trade roles and 20,600 applications for the 465 ex-Brisbane operator and trade roles. The 295 functional roles—in management, administration, professional engineering, health and safety et cetera—are ex-Brisbane and are advertised and recruited on a role-by-role basis. A recruitment target of 60 per cent new to coal mining is being applied to the operator and trade roles.

I do not need to remind the House of some facts—Australia's low labour force participation rate, Australia's 5.4 per cent unemployment rate and the tourism sector's 36,000 worker shortage that is expected to grow to 84,000 by 2020. I have been previously critical of the Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism for not properly addressing the conflicts between mining and tourism. Speaking to a mining audience, Minister Martin Ferguson delivered a speech entitled 'A new age of energy' to the Sydney Institute in 2010. In answering a question on labour force supply the minister said that Cairns will not be in the future what it has been in the past for tourism and that unemployed tourism workers in Cairns will simply go to work in the mines.

In more recent times the minister has indicated he will bring a focus to these challenges. Despite the announcement in May last year, I have not seen anything concrete come from the other side. I do not intend to be overtly critical of the minister, because I know the difficulty he faces with an erratic Prime Minister. We have all seen her complete about-face on 457 visas in the past fortnight. Through the Senate estimates process I have finally obtained a proper assessment of the seasonal guest worker scheme and the government says:

Several reasons have been identified for the low number of workers recruited to date, including global economic conditions, a lack of flexibility in the regulations under which growers can recruit workers, a
potential lack of economies of scale from piloting on such a small scale, and the existence of a pool of competing seasonal labor in Australia including illegal migrants …

I am not sure if it was an intentional typo in that Senate estimates report to point to 'competing seasonal labor', but I agree that the government has been as changeable as the seasons, racked with internal competition. It is a poorly kept secret that there has been competition between cabinet ministers for immigration, tourism and agriculture over the working holiday-maker program. It seems everyone in the ALP wanted additional foreign guest workers until the PM's announcement to appease the union movement.

It is interesting also to note that the government has highlighted the existence of illegal immigrants as one of its challenges. If only the government had retained the Howard government's sensible policies on border control we would not be faced with this problem. Putting aside the government's official line, the official assessment report into the seasonal guest worker program points to extra incentives to recruit foreign workers and states:

… recent modifications of the policy have changed slightly the cost-sharing arrangements, allowing employers to recover up to A$100 in costs of internal transfers to and from the airport in Australia …

The World Bank report cites the DEEWR interim study, but the government appears to have removed it from the department's website. I am not sure if the government removed this evidence after the CFMEU launched its television commercials that would have us believe that the government is determined to ensure Australian jobs for Australians.

Beyond the eminently sensible notion that there should be an economy-wide mapping of skills, as mentioned, other recommendations to the FIFO inquiry included: (1) creation of Indigenous tourism opportunities (2) creation of demand driven tourism opportunities (3) mining to create a legacy of accommodation stock (4) establishment of a regional and remote aviation bookings portal (5) a register of mining related CSI projects (6) creation of geological tourism opportunities, and (7) royalties for the regions. I do not have time to address all of these in the time allotted, so I shall focus on the concept of a regional and remote aviation bookings portal.

While many airports servicing regional mining communities saw increases in passenger movements over the past five years, many were flights solely servicing the mining industry rather than increasing scheduled capacity for leisure travellers. Indeed, some regional airlines have chosen to transfer some of their aircraft which previously operated scheduled services to service the more profitable FIFO market.

In 1997 there were 54 regional carriers operating 237 regional routes, and today that figure, I believe, is fewer than 20 who are flying around 125 routes. The coalition believes more effort should be made to foster some positive and mutually beneficial policy development. Innovative measures should be investigated so that the real benefits from the resources sector are clearly shared by our nation's tourism industry in these areas.

The coalition believes the resources sector stands ready to work with the services sector. Indeed, in many cases, they already are working together. Arrangements already exist where regional carriers whose aircraft have been designated as primarily for FIFO services are used for scheduled services at those times when they are not needed to transport workers to the mines.
It is no secret that carriers are finding it harder to obtain regional aircraft, which are no longer being built in the same numbers as they were in previous years. An obvious solution could be that regional carriers, through innovative financial measures, are encouraged to purchase larger aircraft with extra seats being used to stimulate tourism demand in rural, regional and remote communities. Private sector expertise should be utilised so that leisure travellers, either as individuals or through travel agents, have the greatest possible access to flights through the establishment of regional aviation and tourism bookings websites. Such a project should be led by the Regional Aviation Association of Australia, utilising the knowledge and expertise of individuals like Jayson Westbury, the CEO of Australian Federation of Travel Agents, and the Hon. John Sharpe, the former transport minister and current Chairman of Rex Airlines.

At the end of the day, we need industries working together to provide the maximum benefit to all Australians. It should not be one industry at the expense of another. With a bit of forethought, planning, investment and creative working together, we can build all of these sectors and provide sustainability in town, profits for the mines, and benefits for all Australians.

Mr McCormack (Riverina) (12:58): I was part of the Standing Committee on Regional Australia, which produced the report Cancer of the bush or salvation for our cities? There was certainly some excellent work done by that committee. The final report had 21 recommendations, a similar number, in fact, to the report of the Murray-Darling Basin inquiry, which we conducted previously. Had those 21 recommendations of the Of droughts and flooding rains report been adopted by the government, I do not think that we would be in the mess that we are now in with water policy. I do hope that the government seriously looks at the 21 recommendations made by the Cancer of the bush or salvation for our cities? report of February 2013 into the fly-in fly-out workforce practices in regional Australia.

Interestingly, the first recommendation that the committee made—that the Commonwealth government fund the Australian Bureau of Statistics to establish a cross-jurisdictional working group to develop and implement a method for the accurate measurement of the extent of FIFO and DIDO workforce practices in the resource sector and service populations of resource communities—is perhaps the most important of all the recommendations. I hope earnestly that it is taken up by the government.

Sitting suspended from 13:00 to 16:00

Mr McCormack: During the report and getting all the information for the report, Cancer of the bush or salvation for our cities?, the regional Australia committee conducted 26 public hearings, from 2 November 2011 to 12 September 2012, and one of the things we heard the most concerned the health service aspects of fly-in fly-out, drive-in drive-out practices.

This morning I attended the Rural Doctors Association of Australia breakfast, at which we heard that at Kalgoorlie, where there is a population of 31,000, there are limited general practitioners available. I spoke to the member for O'Connor this afternoon, who told me that the city is 17 short of GPs. At nearby Kambalda they actually do not have any doctors at all. At Mount Isa there are only four GPs servicing a population of 22,000. This is in line with exactly what was told to us during these hearings.
It was certainly borne out this morning, when the Rural Doctors Association of Australia President, Dr Sheilagh Cronin, said that for two areas—and I notice the member for O'Connor has just joined us in the chamber—Kalgoorlie and Mount Isa have produced billions of dollars for this nation, and to have such limited access to doctors is nothing short of a disgrace.

The member for O'Connor told me that there was a three-week wait to get into a doctor in parts of his electorate. I know he is doing everything he can, but we as a parliament should be doing so much more. Somebody who is certainly doing his utmost is a man who I believe is the gutsiest politician in Australia at the moment, and that is the Hon. Brendon Grylls who on the weekend won the seat of Pilbara, a Labor stronghold. He went from a safe seat in the central wheatbelt—this 39-year-old politician—and stood for the Pilbara and won the seat.

I do not want to get too political, but Brendon Grylls was one of the architects and one of the promoters of Royalties for Regions. Certainly the Royalties for Regions program was mentioned at length. I notice that currently in this chamber we are all regional members. We all should be fighting for our fair share for our regions—and I know we all are—because far too often governments of all persuasions are too city-centric. They are too focused on coastal capital cities. Certainly so much of the wealth comes out of our regions. All of the food comes out of our regions and we are all in there fighting for our fairer share. Certainly Brendon Grylls, with his Royalties for Regions program, is transforming Western Australia, with more than 2,500 projects and programs initiated under this wonderful state government program.

In the progress report for Royalties for Regions for the financial year ending June 2012, Brendon Grylls said:

Royalties for Regions is addressing significant shortfalls in infrastructure and services across the state, giving those who live, work or invest in regional WA a renewed sense of optimism, enabling them to capitalise on opportunities for growth and plan for the future.

Certainly I know the member for O'Connor is very much in favour of what they are doing over there in the West—certainly what his WA Nationals colleague is doing for his state.

We heard some great evidence in the course of our inquiries. On 22 February 2012 at Moranbah in Queensland in the electorate of Capricornia—whose member Kirsten Livermore is sitting opposite—we heard some great evidence from Laura Terry from Moranbah Medical. She told us how her area was fighting to provide services. It has many fly-in fly-out workers coming and providing such a strain to the Moranbah Medical Service.

We also heard from Mark Crawley, the CEO of Isaac Regional Council, that has a really interesting program. The council actually built 45 units of accommodation which they call Isaac Views. The units are one, two and three bedroom and are available for service industry workers. They went to see the Anti-Discrimination Commission so that they would not allow mine workers. The council were given that exemption as part of their application so those units are only available to the non-mining workers. This is really important in these areas because people such as childcare workers, school teachers, police officers and any occupation other than mine workers cannot afford to live there. A three-bedroom weatherboard house that in some regional towns and cities in other parts of Australia would be battling to be $120,000 or $150,000 is getting upwards of $3,000 and $4,000 a week rent and places are valued at anywhere between $750,000 and $800,000. You are talking about these lonely outposts where
in some cases, because they are so close to a mine, they are commanding prices equal to Toorak or Double Bay in Sydney, which is quite frankly amazing.

We heard from the students from Moranbah State High School. They were great kids. They all had great ambitions to go on and better themselves and to go to tertiary studies, but one of the worrying aspects was that they talked to us about the safety aspects of their town. Chantelle Winter said, 'I would never walk the streets even at 8 o’clock because there are so many guys driving around and things and it is a bit scary sometimes. I do not really go out at all because I do not feel safe.' A lot of the mine workers abide by the rules, abide by the laws of our land and all the rest, but it is sad that some of the kids who have grown up in these communities because of the absolute boom that their communities are having now no longer feel safe to walk the street at night. That is sad.

I spoke about the price of housing. At Port Hedland, where we took evidence on 29 March last year, Janet Ford, who has her own real estate firm, said that the median house price was $867,000. I asked her, 'What do you get for that?' She said:

Depends where you buy. If you go out onto the rural estate, which is about 20 kilometres from town, you would get a block of land and a shed.

She said that if you come into Port Hedland you get a little bit more but it is still nothing compared to what you would get in another regional town where there is not the mining activity. Lynne Craigie, the President of the Shire of East Pilbara, said:

With the way the real estate has gone, people have to leave. If they are not in the resource industry, it would not be possible for a young couple to buy or rent a house in Newman. If I can give you an example, we had a house rented a few weeks ago for $3,500 or $3,300 per week. What happened was that not a resource company but a related industry, a contractor, rented the house and put five people in—a five-bedroom house, five people. It is cheap rent for him, but it ups the market to $3,000 a week.

These towns are just really struggling under the huge cost of real estate. We had Mr Allen Cooper, the CEO of the Shire of East Pilbara, taking about the Royalties for Regions program. He was glowing in his praise for it. He said it:

… is a great state program. There is no doubt that country people benefit—to rewire a town hall, put a new roof in a town hall, put a new kitchen in a town hall. Things that were probably earmarked have been sped up so it improves the facilities in the smaller towns.

He could not speak highly enough of it. When we went to Karratha, we spoke to Joanne Pritchard who is from the local Soroptimist branch, and she gave evidence on 28 March last year, and it was really telling evidence too. She said that:

Karratha was once a family town consisting of permanent residents in a family-friendly environment where parents were happy to commit to companies on a long-term basis. This has now changed to being a place, not a town, where people come to work, not live. Long-term residents feel their identity and lifestyle and the vitality of the Shire of Roebourne have changed considerably, with our once strong community spirit and community cohesion diminishing as fewer permanent people are living here.

I attended Soroptimist dinners in both Griffith and Coleambally in recent weeks in my electorate of Riverina. It is a wonderful organisation. These people are the heart and soul of their communities and they only want what is best for their communities. When you hear evidence like that from the local Soroptimist branch, it really does drive home to you the problems that they feel they have in their community.
As with so many of the other hearings that we conducted throughout this great land of ours, while we were at Karratha we also heard from students and teachers from Karratha Senior and Saint Luke's College high schools, and the sort of evidence that they gave married up and aligned with the sorts of evidence that we heard in other communities. One thing that I was really impressed with was that many of these young kids, despite the fact that there is so much money to be made in the mining industry, wanted to go out and experience a tertiary education elsewhere and to make the most of their high school certificate or equivalent and to go on and be the best that they could be, which is really impressive.

What I am saying here is not a slight on the mining industry, because I know that the mining industry has made this country great. There is no doubt that mining, and foreign investment in mining, has helped Australia to become the great nation that it is. A fairer share for the regions from which a lot of these minerals were extracted, such as is provided by the Royalties for Regions program, is admirable. In many instances we heard from mining companies who are doing a lot to ensure that they look after the local government areas they go into. They are doing their best, but they can do more. Many of them are accepting of that.

The inquiry that was conducted will be a bit of an eye opener not just for the MPs who were part of it but for the mining companies. It has been a ground-breaking inquiry in as much as I believe that more will be done to help assist those local communities from which a lot of the minerals are being extracted and where a lot of the mining is being done to help those communities to provide better infrastructure, local roads and other provisions that local governments provide, as well as to provide a wake-up call to provide better health services. If that pushes state governments along then so be it. I hope that it will ensure that the Commonwealth government does more to help these local communities which they rely upon so much to help our balance of trade figures.

If I can just speak once again on the Australian Bureau of Statistics, I believe that the census data that we collect has to reflect the numbers of people who actually live in the areas. We cannot have census data that says that 7,000 people live in a particular area such as Moranbah when indeed there are 14,000 people there who are relying on that local government infrastructure, relying on those local GPs, and representing such a strain to those communities in every which way. We did hear from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, from the census people, during the course of our deliberations, but we really need to make sure that recommendation No. 1 of the 21 recommendations in this report is followed through. I do hope, as I said earlier, that the 21 recommendations, similar in number to the Murray-Darling Basin report, will be viewed seriously by the government, as I know that they will. I do hope that they will follow through on the recommendations that have been made by the Regional Australia Committee. (Time expired)

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (16:14): It is a great pleasure to join with my colleagues the member for Riverina and the member for O'Connor, who are here, and of course all of the other members of the Regional Australia Committee who participated in this important inquiry.

It was an inquiry that I was very active in pursuing and initiating within the committee because I saw it was very necessary to respond to some of the concerns that communities in my electorate and other parts of Queensland have been expressing for some time.
Throughout 2010, and for a few years now, proposals have been put forward to expand mining operations in the Bowen Basin, and these have brought the questions of housing shortages, workforce shortages and the increased use of fly-in fly-out and drive-in drive-out workers to the fore. Existing mining communities like Moranbah, Dysart, Clermont, Collinsville, Blackwater et cetera have increasingly stood up in opposition to the loss of balance in those communities. As the local member, I was regularly being asked to come and attend meetings: to meet with the councils, attend public meetings and respond to inquiries in the media about this issue of fly-in fly-out/drive-in drive-out and what that means for the mining communities. And not just for mining communities but also those communities in Queensland that are situated on the coast—places like Mackay. That is the most obvious one, but there is also Rockhampton and others.

When I was being asked to respond to that as a local member I was up against the problem that this is not an area that the Commonwealth government has really been involved in and it is not an area where the Commonwealth government necessarily or obviously has many levers to work with on the face of it. So, as a local member, I was really in the position of responding to the phenomenon of fly-in fly-out workforces as they were impacting on the communities in my electorate very much from a perception or value judgement perspective. I thought, 'Well, that's just really not good enough when you are a member of parliament and part of the decision-making process.' There has to be a more rigorous, comprehensive and sound look at this whole issue. How big is it? What is the scale of it? How many people are involved? How many towns are involved? What are the consequences? What are the projections? Et cetera, et cetera. That is why I was very keen on this inquiry. I thought that a parliamentary inquiry was a mechanism not necessarily to provide answers but at least to scope out and to put on the agenda the issue of fly-in fly-out workers.

We tried to avoid making judgements about people's choices about where they live, what jobs they do and what companies do. Whatever you think about fly-in fly-out, if it is going to be a phenomenon of the scale that it is and that it is projected to be we need to understand what it means. What are the consequences? What are the costs? What are the opportunities? What does it all mean? I thought that it needed to be on the federal government's agenda and that the federal government needed to see where its policies intersected with fly-in fly-out, and that where problems were identified to measure and assess those problems and to be part of the solution.

One of the things that I really was hoping that the inquiry could shed some light on was the whole question of choice. Time and again when I was confronting this as a local member it would just be thrown back at me, 'Well, this is people's choice.' People choose to live on the coast or to live in a capital city and fly to take up work in the mining regions. You are always faced with that, and who can argue with people making that free choice?

On the other side, having talked to councils and people in the mining industry in places like Moranbah, Dysart and Blackwater, they say, 'But there's a waiting list for houses. If people are choosing not to live here and they all want to live on the coast, why is there a waiting list for housing in the town? Clearly, a greater number of people would choose to live here if it were possible.' Indeed, on the day that this report was released and we were fulfilling our media commitments around it, a quite significant article in my local newspaper referred to a developer at Clermont, which is in the heart of the Bowen Basin, who has completed 70
homes in that town and is turning the sod on another 80. Again, if no-one wants to live in the Bowen Basin, why is this developer putting his time and money into building 150 houses in the town of Clermont? I just wanted to pop the bubble of this choice argument.

You will see that a bit of a theme running through the recommendations is a desire to level the playing field. We made recommendations about the fringe benefits tax treatment of company housing, for example, as opposed to the FBT treatment of work camps, flights et cetera, and we recommended changes to the zone allowance. These recommendations are all about making it a genuine choice. When it comes to choice, the other important thing, as everyone in a mining town will tell you, is that there has to be housing. Housing has to be available and affordable in those towns.

One of the problems that I saw with this choice argument is that we were getting to a point where, while companies and state governments were constantly defending people's choice to fly-in fly-out, they were ignoring or completely devaluing the choice that people make to live in mining towns or regional inland centres. If you get to the point where fly-in fly-out becomes the norm and towns are overtaken by work camps, in defending one part of the population's right to choose to fly-in fly-out you are completely denying a genuine choice to people who want to live, make their lives and make communities in those inland mining towns. The towns would become so diminished by the lack of volunteers, pressure on infrastructure, pressure on services et cetera that you would no longer have a choice to live in those towns. So the theme of our recommendations was largely around trying to return choice to people.

The point made by the member for Riverina in his closing remarks about the ABS data goes to that as well. To have a fully functioning town with good services and good amenities, you must have accurate data about who lives in the town and who is seeking services and infrastructure from that town and really get an accurate grasp of what those figures are and how they should then be properly and fairly reflected in the funding that flows to communities. The example given by the member for Riverina is one that I know very well as the local member. The official population of Moranbah, according to census data, would be 8½ thousand. On any given night, there would be at least another 7,000 or 8,000 people, with that number growing by the day, living in work camps in that town. You no longer have a good quality of life in Moranbah if health, education, roads, sewerage, childcare services—you name it—cater for a population of 7½ thousand people when they are being stretched to about 15,000 or 16,000.

The other thing that really motivated me to pursue this inquiry was the question of planning. One of the big myths, as far as I can see, is choice. Another is the mismatch between what companies are ostensibly prepared to do in terms of infrastructure as distinct from what they are prepared to do in investing in communities, housing et cetera. Companies or state governments treat it like a gold rush—'Why would you invest in the town? Who knows how long it will last?'}—and at the same time others say, 'Hang on, everyone is looking to invest in a $6 billion railway line.' Clearly, if people are investing in a railway line and a port, they would figure that it would last for more than three, four or five years. We are talking about 15 or 20 years, which is a whole generation. That is the other mismatch that I hoped this inquiry could get to the bottom of. It is all just go, go, go—build the infrastructure, get the minerals out of the ground and pretend it is all going to be over in four or five years—
when communities are saying: 'Hang on, what about us in the meantime? You can build a railway line, but we cannot build a house.' There seems to be a real disconnect there.

One of the things that we were really impressed by—and this is reflected in recommendation 18 in the report—is what we saw in Canada. There seems to be a very different attitude to mining development over there. Australia and Canada are both resource countries and the places that we are talking about are mining and resource communities. None of us are anti mining, and none of the people in Moranbah are anti mining, for goodness sake; they just want to be able to live a decent life while they work in the mining industry and live alongside the mining activity. In Canada we saw people with the same support for mining, but there seemed to be much more readiness for local governments and communities to stand up and say: 'Hang on, you want this out of the mine, Company X. Here's what we want out of the mine.' At every step of the way the local communities are fully supported by their state governments, which is not something that necessarily happens in Queensland. I will not speak for other states. In Canada we saw a different way. In some cases, the companies operating in Canada are the same that operate in Australia but with a quite different attitude. In Canada, companies are much more prepared to initiate engagement with communities and be very proactive, not just in engaging with communities, local governments and state governments but also in rounding up other companies that are active in a particular region.

Recommendation 18 goes to the notion that the federal government needs to mirror some of what we saw in Canada and take a much more active role in doing some of that planning, projection and collection of data so that we have the ability to map out, region by region, what the resource activity means for the region—for example, what are the time lines; what is the population projection? Instead of making those decisions proposal by proposal, we would have a much more comprehensive view about what is happening region by region, and planning around community needs could take place at the same time as approvals for projects.

This was a very important exercise in putting this issue on the national agenda and in urging the federal government to be proactive about this, because the bill comes back to us in one form or other, whether it is in social costs or infrastructure costs. We need to get on the front foot with this. (Time expired)

Mr CROOK (O'Connor) (16:29): I am pleased to speak in the chamber today, and particularly to follow the member for Capricornia and Michael McCormack from the electorate of Riverina, on this committee report into fly-in fly-out work practices. I acted as a supplementary member on this committee for the purposes of this inquiry due primarily to the prevalence of fly-in fly-out work practices in my electorate of O'Connor. I would like to thank the committee for allowing me the opportunity to act as a supplementary member.

In my opinion, the report has provided a balanced, honest and non-partisan assessment of the situation. That has been reflected in the two speeches that we have just heard from in this chamber. I would like to stress that the title of this report is a question. I believe many have overreacted to the title, which is 'Cancer of the bush or salvation of our cities?' It is clearly a question that poses both sides of this argument. I thank the Lord Mayor of Kalgoorlie, Mr Ron Yuryevich, who posed part of that question. It pricked everybody's ears up at the time. Thank you for that, Ron.

We must also not forget that this is a question that has not yet been answered. The recommendations put to the parliament are exactly that: recommendations. Therefore, I would
like to take this opportunity to assure the mining industry in particular that they have nothing to fear from this report. The mining industry, particularly in Western Australia but across Australia, has every right to be a bit gun shy of this current government. But they certainly have nothing to fear from this report. In fact, they should be embracing it in my view and utilising it to help work positively towards making our regional communities far better places to live and work.

This report only reflects the evidence that the committee received through the consultation process. The recommendations are a direct response to that evidence. There is no doubt about that in my mind. Part of this evidence that I believe is worth noting is the lack of available information, including data and policies on FIFO workforce practices in particular. Both the member for Riverina and the member for Capricornia have stressed that there is a clearly fundamental problem when you have 7,000 people living in a town and 7,000 living on the outskirts. The pressure that that brings to bear on local services and the local community is quite overpowering. The evidence also displayed a number of tragic shortcomings in this government's ability to look out for regional Australia that I will touch on in more detail shortly.

Essentially, this inquiry highlighted two sides of the FIFO coin, the side that showed that FIFO workforces are having a devastating effect on local towns and the side that proved that FIFO can provide Australians with opportunity to access the wealth of the mining industry without uprooting their lives. But we also heard strong evidence that there are social impacts on families within the cities that are affected. When the chair, the member for New England, Tony Windsor, tabled this report in the House, he made particular note of Kalgoorlie, primarily because our lord mayor pretty much named the report. I have lived in Kalgoorlie now for 30 years and I second his comments that the Kalgoorlie people are extremely proud of their town. Going up and down the main street of Kalgoorlie—like in Bendigo and Ballarat—you can see the benefits of the mining boom at the turn of the century. We have wonderful historic buildings in those places. Unfortunately, that is not reflected in our new mining towns of the current era.

One company that I would like to mention is KCGM. If anybody is walking past suite R1 82, which is my suite, there is a fantastic photo of the super pit in Kalgoorlie with the city of Kalgoorlie in the background. That picture typifies how mining and regional communities are inextricably linked. KCGM runs the famous super pit. They have invested in the local community through their policy of employing a local workforce. KCGM should also be applauded for being fantastic community supporters. They are forever being hit up for social and community events and they very rarely knock people back. I fully commend them for that.

Under some of the recommendations, companies like KCGM will be rewarded for keeping a local workforce, whereas they are currently disadvantaged by the tax system. Whilst I congratulate companies like KCGM which only employ a local workforce, I acknowledge that people want choices in their lives. The member for Capricornia mentioned people's choice of where they want to live and work. The ability to choose where they live and where they work is something that many Australians probably take for granted. The sentiment of choice was something that the committee heard over and over again. However, I question whether choice should be the top priority when some regional communities are suffering from...
the mining industry. Where do we end up with that? Where, ultimately, are these regional
towns that support mining communities if they are going to be left basically in the
wilderness?

The committee also noted this point and noted the difference between isolated and remote
projects, or projects in a construction phase compared to operations which exist near
communities. I believe we should be making communities places where people want to live,
meaning that, if there is a mine site next to a town, ensuring that people want to live in that
town, in my view, is a no-brainer. I accept that there is not going to be a town next door to
every mine site, and I certainly accept that in remote locations there will be little choice but to
have fly-in fly-out operations. But, where there is, I would love to see a town with choice
and infrastructure, available housing, good schools and doctor services.

As the member for Riverina highlighted in his speech in this debate, regional Western
Australia is somewhere between 80 and 85 doctors short currently. A provincial city like
Kalgoorlie is down a number of doctors. A small place like Kambalda, 50- or 60-odd
kilometres south of Kalgoorlie, a fantastic mining town through the late sixties, seventies and
early eighties and still a town of 3,000 to 4,000 people, has no doctors at all. These sorts of
things are the things that we need to highlight. It is these vital factors which make people
want to stay in these regional towns. People do not leave the bush because the roads are no
good; they leave the bush because there are not the services there that they expect.

The Nationals WA know this. They know that investing in the regions and making them
better places to live and work is a worthwhile investment. I was very pleased to bring the
committee to WA, including to my electorate as well as to the north of the state, to hear
firsthand about the effects of fly-in fly-out and drive-in drive-out on regional Western
Australia. The committee acknowledged the immense success of the WA Nationals Royalties
for Regions policy, and I am very pleased to see it feature in this document—the Royalties for
Regions policy is the envy of all other regional funding schemes; there can be no doubt about
that—yet highlighted the abject failure of the federal government, particularly the Department
of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport, in managing their issues. To quote
the report, the department's appearance before the committee demonstrated 'a fundamental
lack of understanding regarding the impacts of FIFO workforce practices'. The report goes on
to note that the department showed 'a lack of initiative and leadership' on the 'issue that is
radically changing the social fabric of regional communities'.

The minister responsible for the department of regional Australia has heard from me time
and time again about my feelings towards his department and particularly the Regional
Development Australia Fund. When this fund is compared to the Royalties for Regions fund,
the policy difference in the number of projects funded is thousands and the difference in the
amount of money put towards regional communities is billions. The minister should be
extremely embarrassed by his department's involvement in this inquiry, and I urge him to take
steps to rectify this as a matter of urgency.

I have not gone and will not go into a lot of detail today about the specific
recommendations. However, I want to note that some of these changes relate to the tax system
and aim to remove the current disincentives for regional homeownership. I believe that these
changes need to be considered very seriously by this parliament. I plan on working with my
parliamentary colleagues to ensure that this report is acted on and the recommendations are
examined in detail by both sides of the House. Brendon Grylls, as the member for Riverina said, is an outstanding young politician. He risked his political career on the weekend in his bid to stand for the seat of Pilbara. It is incredibly heartening to see his success, and I once again take the opportunity to congratulate him and the WA Nationals on their success in the last state election. Brendon took this risk because he is unashamedly passionate about regional WA, and the WA Nationals are willing to fight to ensure our regional communities are the best they can be.

I too want just that: I want regional communities to thrive, and our communities only thrive if they have people in them—living, working, visiting. I look forward to working with my parliamentary colleagues on the recommendations in this report, and I urge the government to do all it can to ensure we continue to have a thriving mining industry with local communities equally thriving alongside them.

In closing, I would like to thank the secretariat, particularly Glenn Worthington and Siobhan Lane. They have done a fantastic job in pulling this report together and I sincerely thank them for their efforts. I would also like to congratulate the member for Riverina, Michael McCormack, for the cover photo; he takes great pride in telling everybody that it is his. I would also like to thank my fellow committee members, including the member for Wannon, who is alongside me here today. The member for Wannon did make some notes in the report which I acknowledge and totally agree with. We do not want this report to be a reflection on the mining industry. We do not want there to be more red tape and more costs for the mining industry. I totally endorse that, but I am also satisfied that this report, if handled properly, will not do that. As I have said previously, there is an opportunity for the mining industry to embrace this report, work with the communities, work with government, because there are opportunities, in my view, to embrace regional Australia further.

As I said, I would like to thank the committee members, and I would particularly like to thank Tony Windsor, who I think did an outstanding job in chairing the committee and—obviously with the support of the secretariat—producing this fantastic report. Also, once again I thank them for coming to regional Western Australia. So often we hear in this parliament about how Western Australia is going and that we are the saviour of this nation, but we do have a two-speed economy—the mining industry and elsewhere. At the minute the wheat belt in Western Australia is under an enormous amount of pressure and I think that needs to be reflected. We need to look at these things not in isolation; we need to look at them as a whole. When I argue for a greater return for Western Australia on things like GST, it is not just because we want more money. A 75 per cent floor in the GST will actually provide some equity and some future planning back into regional Western Australia, which I think is critical. I was very pleased to have them visit Western Australia, and very pleased to have them visit Kalgoorlie. I would urge you, one and all, to read this report and take it for what it is. It is a very strong reflection of the evidence we took and I thank the House for its time.

Mr TEHAN (Wannon) (16:43): I would like to endorse the comments of the previous speaker, the member for O’Connor, and acknowledge the work he contributed to our committee. He came on to the committee specifically to deal with these issues, and they are issues that are particularly relevant to his electorate, like they are to other members of the committee. I would like to acknowledge the role of the chair in ensuring that there was a very good balance in the way that the committee looked at these issues, the way this committee got
to all of those regions that are being influenced by what is occurring with the mining boom, and for making sure that it got to not only those states and regions where mining is booming but also to smaller areas where there are impacts. I refer specifically to the town of Maryborough in my electorate, where there are issues around drive-in drive-out. It is not to do with the mining industry there. Where there are public services, we have people coming in, using those public services or working in those public services, but living outside those towns.

But these are very complex issues. They do, as the member for O'Connor mentioned, revolve around choice. I think we have to be extremely careful about how we go about telling people what their choices should or should not be. There is no doubt that there are infrastructure issues in regional Australia. In mining regions this has been exacerbated by what is occurring in the mining industry currently. But in other areas, where there is not a mining boom, there are also issues regarding doctor shortage, such as making sure housing is provided. We have to come up with the long-term and permanent solutions that will address these problems. As the member for O'Connor rightly noted, we have to ensure that rural and regional Australia gets its fair share of the funding pie. It contributes significantly to this nation, and we have to make sure that that contribution is reflected in how government addresses these areas. I note what has happened after the Prime Minister's visit to Western Sydney, where we have seen 19 applications for RDAF funding in round 4 progress to the next level, whereas every other region in Australia is only allowed to have three.

This is not the way to address these problems. This is what makes these problems worse, and this is what we need to get away from because—let's be honest—we do not have the population base in regional and rural Australia but we do make a significant economic contribution. My view is that, if we get government policies right and make sure that we share the pie around properly, then everyone can benefit, whether it be from resources, from agriculture, from manufacturing or from services. But it will not occur if we just continually focus on where the population base is and in particular where we think the important political population base is. This is something that all of us in this parliament need to seriously think about, because these issues will not be resolved if we do not. There are serious doctor shortages in a lot of these mining communities, just as there are serious issues about attracting doctors into regional and rural towns. And I have this problem in my electorate of Wannon.

Another point I would like to make regarding this report is that the—

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 16:47 to 17:05

Mr TEHAN: As I was saying, another important aspect of the report that needs to be taken into consideration is the importance of the mining industry to host communities. I know that the member for McPherson has been a passionate supporter of the need to get the infrastructure right in her electorate because of the unemployment levels there so that people can benefit from what is occurring in the mining industry elsewhere. This is an important point that we need to take into consideration because there are some aspects of our community which make it difficult for people to move. They might include issues like stamp duty or family ties to regions. We have to ask ourselves: what is the best alternative here? Do we want to encourage these people to seek work wherever that work may be? Should we be saying, 'No, being prepared to move is the only way you will get access to this work'? It is an important point that needs to be examined as a whole, and I think we will need to do that. As
globalisation takes place and there is a need for increased mobility in workforces, we are going to have to grapple with these issues.

In conducting this inquiry, we received telling evidence about the different phases that occur when mining projects are initiated. Obviously, the construction phase more heavily involves the need to put a lot more workers into these communities. This is creating significant challenges for those communities that are the beneficiaries of the mining operations in those regions. How communities deal with the construction phase of projects is one of the more complex aspects of what the committee needs to look at. It is incredibly difficult for communities to deal with the huge influx of people knowing that, over time, there will be a reduction in the population base. Once again, ensuring that we have the mobility to cope with that is very important. It might be that, especially for the construction phases of projects, we will need to look at ensuring that the services required for local communities in mining areas have the flexibility for fly-in fly-out or drive-in drive-out to cope with those construction phases. Obviously, when it comes to the operational phases, this is a slightly different perspective. If we can develop sensible policy for those operational stages to encourage a more permanent workforce into those communities, that is an important aspect that we need to take in consideration.

I would also like to raise the point that we should not see this issue purely in terms of an urban-rural or urban-regional divide, because we are seeing that some communities are benefiting from the growth that has occurred in the mining sector over the previous five to 10 years. For instance, I will point to two areas that are relevant to my own electorate of Wannon. We have a regional aviation provider which is also a trainer of pilots. It has been able to use the opportunities that have been brought about by the growth in the mining sector to service the mining communities. It has done wonders for its business. It is basically a commercial aviation business which services regional towns and provides access into urban areas. Being able to offer additional services has given a breadth to that aviation provider that has enabled it to continue to grow and, in very difficult times in the aviation industry, continue to provide very good services.

We are also seeing regional communities providing services and equipment to the miners and their operations wherever they may be occurring. This is supporting local communities in regional and rural areas who are facing difficult times at the moment due to the high Australian dollar and due to the carbon tax and other government policies that have done nothing to benefit them. The fact that they have been able to service and provide goods to the mining industry has enabled them to offer services not just in their local communities but across the nation. It is giving them the opportunity also to build important linkages to be able to service the mining industry across the globe. That is another important aspect that we need to take into account when we look at this issue.

In summary, this report deals with a series of issues which are problematic for the communities which are hosting the growth in the mining industry, which are seeing mines develop in and around their local communities. There are serious infrastructure issues, serious service issues and serious land release issues that need to be dealt with around these communities. There are other aspects that need to be taken into account as well. We have to make sure when we look at this issue that we get the balance right and that we view it as a challenge that has opportunities for the whole nation. We do not want to be dragging the
mining sector down as a way of dealing with this issue. We have to be bright enough and have the breadth of vision to say: 'This industry is providing wealth to our nation. How can we ensure that that wealth is returned to those areas where there are serious issues as a result of population growth and as a result of infrastructure decline? What are the policies we need to get in place to address these issues?' Those are the big questions.

As I said in my dissenting report, we do not want additional bureaucracy, we do not want additional red tape and we do not want to add to the cost of doing business for mining companies at a time when they are facing increased international competitive pressures. These are not the things to address these problems. We need to have a breadth to our vision in how we deal with it. We have raised the issues in this report, and now our big challenge is to ensure that we look at the policies that will address these problems in a very sensible way which will allow our nation to continue to grow. That is our next challenge.

Mrs ANDREWS (McPherson) (17:14): I welcome this opportunity to speak on the report by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia into fly-in fly-out and drive-in drive-out practices in regional Australia. Let me start by saying that I appreciate the work done by members of the committee and the secretariat. I am very aware of the site visits that were undertaken and of the submissions that were made during the inquiry. I do thank the committee for its work.

This is a very significant inquiry for the resources sector, for our rural communities and for what are referred to in the report as the source communities—where the fly-in fly-out/drive-in drive-out workers live and where their families remain when they go to work. I was looking forward to this report. I put in a submission, as did a number of organisations from the Gold Coast, where my seat of McPherson is located.

My initial reaction, when I saw the report, was that surely there must have been a better title? I think that the title of a report is intended to, and does, reflect the contents of the report. Cancer of the bush or salvation for our cities? is quite simply just inflammatory. I think it really sets a poor scene for the inquiry and what the findings of that inquiry actually were. I am very disappointed with that.

But as the member for McPherson on the Gold Coast I am also very disappointed that there was only a very brief reference to the Gold Coast, at section 4.77, as part of the section headed 'Source communities'. This was a section of the report that comprised only 13 paragraphs, so it was really quite brief in terms of the overall report. I am disappointed that whilst there is considerable detail in the report about the impact of fly-in fly-out and drive-in drive-out on rural communities, there is significantly less detail about the source communities and the benefits for those communities and for the families of the workers who live there.

As a member of the federal parliament, I am a fly-in fly-out worker. I do not fly in and out of a mine site; I fly in and out of Canberra and to other parts of Australia. I am acutely aware of the impact that my choice of career has on my family and has on me as a worker. There is no argument from me that the ideal situation is for people to work close to where they live. But for many workers this is not possible, for a number of reasons. It may be that there is no accommodation nearby. It may be that the accommodation is not suitable for families. It may be that the family does not want to live there; it may be for any number of reasons.
What I think has been overlooked in this report is actually very simple: if you have the choice of a job across the road from where you live that pays a certain rate and a job away from home where you have to fly-in fly-out or drive-in drive-out that pays a different rate, then it is an economic and family decision about which job to take. If there is no job across the road then the job away from home may be a lifeline and is very much needed by the individual and by the family. I think that has been overlooked by the committee in its deliberations.

Being a fly-in fly-out worker is not something to be demonised for. The cities and towns that are establishing themselves as source communities should be applauded for the efforts that they are making: firstly, to actively source work for residents, many of whom are unemployed and with little immediate prospects of securing employment close to home; and, secondly, for providing the infrastructure and amenities to support the family of the fly-in fly-out worker.

Establishing these source communities in regional areas is a positive step. I include the Gold Coast as a regional area, and one where there is evidence that there are already many fly-in fly-out workers. I must add that there are many workers who base their families on the Gold Coast and fly-in fly-out of locations around the world. Scotland and the Middle East spring to mind immediately as destinations where there have been people travelling to work in the oil industry for many years, and they have based their families on the Gold Coast. They do that because their families are happy to live there; they have made friends, there are amenities and there is already infrastructure in place to support their families.

As part of this inquiry I did invite the committee to the Gold Coast to conduct part of their hearings there. Unfortunately, the committee was unable to attend due to time constraints. I subsequently found out—and I think this is almost beyond belief—that the committee could not travel to the Gold Coast but could travel to Mongolia and to Canada as part of their inquiry when there was ample opportunity on the Gold Coast for them to speak to some of the workers and to some of their families. I am very disappointed that my requests went unheeded. If they had been able to attend there and visit the Gold Coast they would have seen what the Gold Coast has to offer. I speak only about the Gold Coast but there are other source communities that similarly have a lot to offer for workers and their families.

I believe that the work of the parliament is not yet completed. There is more work that needs to be done. The additional work that needs to be done, and must be done, is to identify how to support fly-in fly-out workers and their families and how to put that support in place. I would respectfully put to the parliament that the work of the committee is not done and that it should be continued as a matter of urgency.

Mr HAASE (Durack) (17:20): I rise to speak to this report and, in doing so, I would firstly like to acknowledge the secretariat for the magnificent job they did in guiding us through this report. The aspect of the report that I wish to specifically address is the issue of taxation zone rebates. Deputy Speaker Scott, you and I have shared discussions on this topic on numerous occasions. The taxation zone rebates boundaries were drawn in 1945 and have remained basically the same since that year. Over time—approximately every 20 years—there has been some rejigging of the rates, some rejigging of the boundaries in a new shape, but basically it remains the same. This rebate—in fact, it was not a rebate initially—was worth to a taxpayer who works for a year in a remote area, perhaps with a wife and small preschool age
children, an amount of money equivalent to about six weeks extra wages per annum. It was a substantial amount of compensation paid each year to those persons who were prepared to do it tough and live in the bush. It was about the toughness of living in the bush. It was about the high cost of living dictated by distance, lack of choice, lack of competition and the general hardships of doing it tough.

In the case of the town that I know the example best applies to, Kalgoorlie in the Goldfields, if you spend 12 months working in the Goldfields these days, and you are a taxpayer, you are entitled to a rebate on your tax of the princely sum of $57 per annum. As many an accountant has said to me, it would almost cost more than the $57 in their time to claim it for you, because it is such a paltry sum.

The lack of equity in the payments from one area to another is incredibly striking. For instance, working in Broome or Port Hedland the amount that one is entitled to is the same amount that you would get if you were working in Marble Bar. Both Port Hedland and Broome, of course, are on the ocean. Marble Bar is not on the ocean. For anyone living in Marble Bar—bless their cotton socks; I love them all—Marble Bar is no Broome and it is no Port Hedland.

The reality is that it is high time something was done to create some equity in this taxation zone rebate system. That can only be done with a thorough analysis of the way that it impacts on those who are truly bone fide residents of remote areas and also of how it impacts on those who are not bona fide residents but are entitled to the taxation zone rebate simply because they spend 183 days in a year working in that particular area. The contrast between the conditions of working in those remote areas today and working in those remote areas in 1945 could not be more extreme. Workers that are entitled to this because they work in the area might live in the leafy suburbs of Perth or on the coast as a southern community, and many of them do. Rockingham and Mandurah are wonderful bastions of those that work in my electorate but do not live there. They rarely spend any money there. They enjoy their time living in, as I say, the leafier suburbs. They are entitled to the same amount of payment as if they were working and living in Marble Bar. The conditions that are enjoyed by the average FIFO or DIDO worker today are luxurious compared with 1945, but they are luxurious compared with almost any of the employment situations around the suburbs of our capital cities. They have air-conditioned transportation, they have serviced accommodation, they are presented with multiple choices of meals three times a day, their laundry is attended to in the camp—towels et cetera—and lot of people have to spend a lot of time in the gym, believe me, because the paddock is generally a good one and one of the major problems of being a FIFO worker these days is that weight is easily gained.

So something has to be done. It is time that this whole issue of the taxation zone rebate be addressed to create some equity, because it was designed initially to attract workers to the difficult areas, areas that were hard to populate, and it worked. After a few years of getting six weeks extra wages a year, couples could go back to the big smoke and pay for a house or at least put a very substantial deposit on a house. It gave them a leg up in life. When they did not have the amenities, and when their children became school age, they often left that remote area and moved to the amenities of the city and had those facilities that were required, whereas today all of these areas have pretty good facilities and the payments are abysmal.
Therefore there is no hook, there is no lure and there is no financial incentive for people to go to and live and work in these remote areas.

I am the first to appreciate the politics of any policy and I know that, if we were to do the logical thing and change the system so that those who were not bona fide residents in the area were not entitled to it, there would be some hue and cry. But if the policy of paying it is to attract residents to country areas, remote areas and difficult-to-populate areas then I feel that we have to bite the bullet. There is also the case where a population was very low in particular areas when the system was brought in in 1945, and those same areas are now in excess of 100,000 population. It is hardly justification for a bonus to attract people to live there. Darwin immediately comes to mind. I face the reality that many people, especially my colleagues, will ask how dare I take away the taxation zone rebate for the residents of Darwin. It is a substantial amount of money. Not only is there an additional 50 per cent on family tax benefits paid but there is also about $1,130. To take that away is significant. But if we are to suggest that this money is paid as an incentive to populate hard to populate areas, why should we pay it to those who are living in a populous area where there is competition, amenity and public transport—all of those things that this money was paid to compensate for.

Mr Neville: You have it at two levels.

Mr Haase: Indeed, we have in fact four levels of payment for the taxation zone rebate. We have zone A in the northern portion of Australia, zone B in the southern portion and then we have special zone A and special zone B. A special zone is determined by whether or not a location is more than 250 kilometres from a population centre with a minimum population of 2,500. It is very specific. But even though it is very specific and the Taxation Act clearly outlines what the rules and regulations are and what towns are in and what towns are out, the figures that the taxation department work on are inaccurate and totally out of date and abysmal. Kununurra is listed as being entitled and yet Kununurra has a population well in excess of 2,500. The figures and the facts that the taxation department works on are wrong. Their assumption that this is in some way equitable is wrong, because there are towns in western New South Wales that have far less amenity than places like Darwin and yet they are not in any of the zones in relation to the taxation zone rebate.

The examples are numerous. It is referred to in our report. It is one of the recommendations that I have been concerned with for all of my time in this place. It is well and truly past time now to look at this. When you look at the average period of time that has elapsed for attention to and revision of this taxation zone rebate system, that has well and truly gone. Time was up about 10 years ago. It is time that something was done. It is time that some equity was introduced. Every aspect of this needs to be attended to, including the amount of compensation. Frankly, I believe that it would be embarrassing for members of the taxation department to try and defend why such an outstanding opportunity to get money compensating you from the government amounted to $57 per annum. Anyone who could keep a straight face arguing that I would suggest would have to be brain dead. It is time that something was done.

With those few words on that very specific subject, I seek leave to table a document in relation to the boundaries of the taxation zone rebate at present.

Leave granted.
Mr HAASE: Thank you.

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (17:33): Let me first congratulate the committee, and especially the previous speaker, who is a member of that committee, and the member on duty at the table for this excellent report, *The cancer of the bush or the salvation of our cities?* That is a very provocative title, as well it might be. When you go through the report, you realise that there are no simple answers to this. This is a very complex problem. In saying that it is a complex problem, that does not mean that we can just walk away from it, either.

I looked through a lot of the recommendations. One of them was that there is a requirement for accurate measurement of the fly-in fly-out numbers. I think that is a very important thing if we are talking about taxation, fringe benefits tax, quality of life, comparing one region with another, comparing the degree of remoteness and all those other things. You have to have accurate statistics because otherwise you are making guesses in the dark.

Another recommendation was the allocation of funding to reflect the resident and fly-in populations—in other words, those places with a residential population that have their services overstretched by fly-in fly-out or drive-in dry-out populations should be reimbursed in local government terms or at least the councils of those areas should be given some adequate readvertisement for the services that they have to provide.

The report goes on to call for an assessment of the consumption of local services. That is very important because, whether you like it or not, if you have a camp a kilometre or two out of town, it is going to use a very high proportion of the local services, especially in the smaller country towns. The report goes on to talk about medical services, because you might have one doctor looking after a reasonably small country town. It is another thing to have a doctor looking after a huge mining camp and a country town. It begs the question, although it is not touched on in the report in these terms, of whether or not it should be compulsory in granting status for these projects in the early days of their development to insist that for a population above a certain number of workers a permanent doctor has to be provided on the site. That would certainly relieve localised medical services of heavy responsibility, especially in those construction stages where say you are building a mine and you might be using 2,000, 3,000 or even 4,000 people to do that. When you come back to the operational stage you might drop back to 700, 800 or 1,000. There is a big difference.

Even if during that developmental phase the medical services were boosted by the companies carrying out those developments to take medical strain off the local hospital, that is not to say the local hospital will not be used for emergencies. That is not to say that the local doctor would not cooperate with the doctor on the site and all that sort of thing. All it says is that you would boost medical services to reflect the particular spikes in a very big development. I can think of a case in point. Take Gladstone at present, where you have three LNG plants being built simultaneously. Imagine what that does to services in Gladstone, whether they are civil services or medical services or whatever.

The report goes on to talk about fringe benefits tax exemptions and whether they should be removed where an accessible township exists or allowed in the operational phase of a project. Sure, you would allow perhaps the fringe benefit exemption to get people in there and get the project up and running, but would you allow it once it gets into operational mode? As the member for Durack just said, some of these camps have excellent services of catering,
accommodation and the like. Fringe benefits tax could be one of the keys to encourage or
discourage aspects of fly-in fly-out. The report talks about zonal taxation, as the previous
speaker did. Should the zonal taxation arrangements only apply to the permanent workforce?
That is a tricky one. Your natural instinct would be to say, 'Yes, we'd allow it for the
permanent workforce'—or resident workforce; or the permanently resident workforce to be
completely correct. But then we also have this dilemma going on in Australia at present of the
alleged misuse of 457 visas. If you do not make it sufficiently attractive by way of things like
fringe benefit tax and zonal tax for Australian workers to go out and take on these jobs in
remote parts of Australia, especially in the west and the north, then are you not going to cut
your own throat and find that you cannot get resident Australians to participate in that
development? That too would be a tragedy.

Then you have the other thing to have zonal taxation of where, whether you are resident or
not, would it be appropriate that it was paid. A case in point would be an oil rigger. You are
remote when you are on an oil rig; you cannot get anything much more remote. Therefore,
where you might say where there is a township and a permanent workforce there is no
justification for fly-in fly-out, it is pretty hard to extend that argument when it comes to an oil
rig.

As I said at the beginning of this contribution, this is a very difficult subject. But if you
want to look at the history of the development of Australia, you need to have an appreciation
of what were the driving things that took people into regional Australia and how communities
developed. From time to time in this place we hear criticisms of the National Party leader of
Queensland in the seventies and eighties, Jo Bjelke-Petersen. I, for one, am not a critic of his;
I am a great admirer of his. What he did is he built railways and things by getting companies
to participate, for example, by way of royalty or by way of doing special projects in the
development of those railways. The other thing he did is he insisted the towns—

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 17:42 to 17:56

Mr NEVILLE: Before the suspension, not surprisingly I was talking about Joh Bjelke-
Petersen. I was saying that one of the things he insisted on was that mining companies play a
part in the development of railways and the development of settlements. While I am sure there
has always been an element of fly-in fly-out, during the Joh era whole communities
developed and have survived. A few have gone, like Mary Kathleen, but if you go to Central
Queensland, in the hinterland of the member for Dawson, for example, all the towns that grew
up in that era—Blackwater, Saraji, Moranbah, Dysart—are certainly towns that peaked. They
went back a bit as the peak came off and certain mines closed, but then they serviced those
communities as country towns. So fly-in fly-out is not the only answer. Where you can
develop communities and make it a condition that homes have to be built—perhaps not at the
construction phase but at the operational stage of a mining project—then you are doing what
our early pioneers did in developing this country.

I think we should have a bipartisan attitude to fly-in fly-out. As I said before, there will
always be parts of Australia where you will have to have fly-in fly-out: in remote parts of
North Queensland, the Territory and Western Australia, where you would not want to build a
town; where a mine has a life of only 20 years; where there is not going to be a cluster of
mines; or where it is not going to be in an agricultural area—where it is going to be a solo
operation for the purpose of mining. Certainly, there will always be a need for fly-in fly-out for operations like that, including, as I said before, things like oil rigs. But where we get closer to the coast or along railways, where transport routes exist, where there is prime agricultural land or potentially prime agricultural land that can be developed, we should take a longer view than just mining. We should take a view of how we develop our nation and then we can remove a lot of the problems I spoke about earlier. If fringe benefits tax exemptions were removed where towns exist, then you might have a better chance of making those sorts of things happen—during the operational phase, for example. If you made zonal taxation arrangements such that they applied to only the permanent workforce in a community, there would be an encouragement to build places like Moranbah, Dysart and Saraji. You would also see the expansion of towns, as has been the case, like Springshaw, Emerald, Capella and Clermont.

So I would recommend to honourable members that we look very hard at the Central Queensland experience of the development of those great coalfields of the seventies and eighties and not take fly-in fly-out as a given: where it is necessary, use it; but do not use it in areas where it is not necessarily required. We all know the price paid for that in broken marriages. That trickles down to pensions, child support and other things we see in our electorate offices every day. For young guys and for well-balanced families who are prepared to make some sacrifices in the early years to get a nest egg together, yes I think it is all okay. But to make it the be all and end all of the development of this country would be a great shame. So, while I commend this report, I think we have got a lot more work to do.

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson) (18:01): It is good to follow the member for Hinkler, who is marking 20 years in this place today. His contribution here just shows that in 20 years he has not lost it; it is only getting better, like fine wine.

In addressing this report, can I first say that I think language and how we describe things is very important. I am not too happy with the title of the report, 'Cancer of the bush or salvation for our cities?' FIFO is not a cancer; it is not a saviour, either; it is a work practice. That view is shared by a lot of people in my electorate. In fact, we have got a miner who writes an article in the local Mackay newspaper every week. To quote him, he says: 'Everyone is talking about FIFO, or fly-in fly-out—and DIDO, or drive-in drive-out—as if it is a dirty word. To put it bluntly, I find that insulting. The fact that myself and a substantial number of my workmates don't live permanently in small communities near the mines we work at should not be construed as having no regard for these townships and their permanent residents.' Globally in this whole debate we need to step back and accept that that is a reality for most miners.

There are a lot of strident critics of fly-in fly-out practices. I am a critic of 100 per cent fly-in fly-out—and I will get to that. Even the Moranbah Retailers Association President, Peter Finlay, who probably agrees with the cancer comment, is on record as saying nobody is against FIFO per se but to make it compulsory would have a detrimental impact on businesses and the community. And therein lies the rub: having 100 per cent FIFO—and businesses such as BMA have made it compulsory at some of their mines—really does go against the spirit of choice. It is not about the practice itself, but how it is used by the companies.

The former Bligh Labor government in Queensland gave approval for BMA to have a 100 per cent fly-in fly-out workforce at its Caval Ridge mine near Moranbah. That was opposed by me in this place at the time. It was opposed by the community, by all of the local
governments and certainly by the residents of the Moranbah township. They were not listened to, they were simply ridden over, and now we have a 100 per cent fly-in fly-out operation.

I hear stories, through the press mainly, that when a local goes to apply for a job at this mining operation they are told, 'Sorry, you have to have permanent place of residence in Brisbane.' That is a terrible thing. That to me is geographic discrimination. I would say it should be outlawed. There should be no ability for a company to not hire someone because they do not live in a particular place. Unless it is going to affect the work practices, it should be illegal to do that. I say shame on the state government at the time, the Bligh Labor government, for allowing this to happen and shame on BMA as well for actually proposing it and for having it in action. I am against 100 per cent FIFO and I want that on the record.

There are quite a number of recommendations in this report and a lot that I do agree with. The first recommendation regards the ABS and getting the correct data. Local councils have told me they feel the data is not correct at this point in time because of the manner in which the ABS goes about collecting census data. If we have underrepresentation of population in certain areas because of the data then that needs to be addressed. Quite a few other recommendations go to research that needs to be done so government can have the facts. They include commissioning some research on the actual economic impact of FIFO and DIDO workforces, and on the demand for and the consumption of local government services and infrastructure by FIFO and DIDO workforces.

The report recommends commissioning a study into the health effects of FIFO and DIDO work and lifestyle to develop a comprehensive health policy. The committee also recommends the commissioning of research on the effect of children and family relationships of having a long-term FIFO or DIDO parent. Also, there is a recommendation to commission research into the economic and social impacts of establishing regional centres as FIFO source communities. All of those research requests, I think, are very good.

There is one university that is well placed to do that research, CQ University, which is right on the doorstep of the Bowen Basin. It has looked into a lot of these issues already. I will be writing to the Minister for Regional Australia asking him, given this committee comes under his purview, to consider the university when it comes to doing this research that has been recommended if that is the way the government indeed wishes to go with this.

Another thing I really want to say is we need to be careful with language when we refer to FIFO and DIDO like they are interchangeable. They certainly are not. Statistics from the Queensland government statistician show that 61 per cent of non-resident workers engaged in the Bowen Basin actually reside in the Mackay and Whitsunday local government areas. That is because it is in the same region as them. They can drive to work in less than half a day in most cases and it is convenient. We need to get away from lumping FIFO and DIDO into the same basket. That certainly was the recommendation of the Regional Economic Development Corporation of Mackay, Isaac, Whitsunday which represents the economic development interests of those three local government areas. Isaac Regional Council is where the Bowen Basin actually is. They say that the terms FIFO and DIDO should be treated as mutually exclusive, so they are not the same thing. Page 7 of their submission to the inquiry states:

The long term issue is the allocation of services and infrastructure to communities where the FIFO/DIDO workforces are not counted as resident population although they may spend more than 50% of their life in those communities.
That goes back to one of the recommendations before about local government and ensuring that the figures that the ABS provides are accurate. The issue also extends to DIDO workers, but they do say here:

The interrelationships between regional communities can potentially marginalise these effects. Having large centres such as Mackay, and large tourism destinations such as the Whitsundays in close proximity to the resource communities improves liveability, as it provides residents with options. By having the DIDO workforce reside in adjacent communities, the provision of services and facilities which can be utilised by the direct mining communities’ increases.

So there are benefits from having drive-in drive-out workforce practices. It is very different to FIFO and we need to recognise that.

I go onto the Regional Social Development Centre, an organisation which I was once vice-president of and which does a lot of good work in the Mackay region. They go on to talk about drive-in drive-out workers, as differentiated from FIFO workers, saying:

DIDO workers originate from a larger regional centre within approximately 2.5 hours of their place of work …

I have to say that that is what is said here, but in some cases it might be four hours.

The impacts of DIDO work arrangements for the region differ from FIFO in that:

- As a resident of the region, the worker is more likely to have some sense of connection to, or ownership, of the community in which they work;
- With this connection to the community, DIDO workers are more likely to remain in the region;
- The worker contributes to the region by spending locally;
- The worker will be counted in the Census data for this region.

Again, I urge caution on saying that DIDO and FIFO are the same thing; they clearly are not.

Going to another item out of the RSDC's—the Regional Social Development Centre's—submission to the inquiry: it talks about family relationships. I think this is one of the things where we often look at the economic impacts, and all the rest of that, but we do not look at the impact on families enough. There is some movement in this report on that, and that is good, but the RSDC submission says that there are difficulties in maintaining family relationships amongst FIFO and DIDO workers, as stated by workers who actively participated in an initiative that the RSDC came up with—the Adaptive Communities Initiative. One of them stated:

It was pretty rocky. I missed out on how my son was going at school and my wife was working as well and she had dramas at work and she couldn't talk to me. When you are together day to day you work through it but when you are apart, the other family members feel that they are alone, that there is no help.

I have to say, that is a reaction that I get from a lot of families who are engaged in drive-in drive-out and fly-in fly-out. The Whitsunday Industrial Workforce Development group, which is doing a lot of good work in trying to connect local businesses and local jobseekers with the mining industry in that e Whitsundays, also raises this issue:

Social impacts for FIFO/DIDO workers and families—social support to families of FIFO workers is out of the scope of WIWD however it is believed that there could potentially be a lack of support services for families who relocate to the region—that is, regions where there is mining. What they are looking for is:
… attraction, infrastructure and environment for workers to the region there will be various strategies which will be developed to respond to some of the issues associated with retention of workers and their families to the region.

One of the things that is missing from this report which I think should have been in it is a strategy to transfer fly-in fly-out workers to actual residents. Wouldn't it be great if you could actually develop a program where that would happen. That is something WIWD has brought up.

Going back to the issue of the impact on families, I also made a submission to the inquiry here, and it was largely around that issue. I remember being in a country pub in Mackay and having a big burly bloke, who was bigger than me both horizontally and vertically, come up and have a bit of a yarn—he broke down crying actually. All it was about was how long he has to spend away from his family and the toll it puts on him. He went to the bathroom and came out and found his son tucked in the corner next to the door because he did not want to see his daddy go again. Stories like that are heartbreaking.

Something has to be done to help families in these situations. I put a proposal to the committee that we look at the federal government supporting the establishment of community trusts in local government areas where there is mining activity or workforces and give tax deductible status to donations to such trusts in order to support children and families. There is more of that in my report.

I want to quote two organisations. The CFMEU said:

We are not saying that FIFO must or ought to be banned. It is recognised that there are times when there is not a realistic alternative, such as remotely based construction projects. And there are times when a combination of resident based and FIFO may be necessary …

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry also said:

Implemented appropriately, the FIFO and DIDO workforce can deliver significant benefits to regional and State economies, local communities and businesses.

It is finding the balance. That is what it is all about: getting the balance right in terms of relationships and workforce make-up.

Debate adjourned.

Health and Ageing Committee

Report

Debate resumed on the motion:

That the House take note of the report.

Ms O’NEILL (Robertson) (18:17): It is my pleasure to stand in this place and speak this evening briefly on the report that was tabled in the House when we last sat entitled Living with the pain of adhesive arachnoiditis. I want to take this opportunity this evening to put on the record a little information about this disease that is experienced by a number of Australians and is one about which many Australians would know very little.

It is a painful condition. It has actually got nothing to do with spiders, despite the fact that the word 'arachnoiditis' can conjure up that image. It is caused by long-term scarring of the arachnoid membranes. These are the membranes that surround and protect the nerves of the spinal cord and spinal nerves. This tissue can be scarred by medical intervention or infection
and the spinal nerves stick together. The pattern they generate is a little like a spider web, hence the name 'arachnoiditis'.

The committee was very privileged to hear from sufferers of adhesive arachnoiditis. They explained to us some of the symptoms that they experience, including pain which often and most significantly affects their lower back and legs. It can lead to paralysis and certainly affects mobility. Further complications can include bladder and bowel dysfunction and impaired sexual function.

Many of the people who spoke to us said they experience this because of a treatment regime they had at an early stage of experiencing back pain. The drug Myodil was injected into their spinal fluid and they were then able to provide a contrast for radiography to be able to determine the status of their back. Myodil was eventually withdrawn from use. Better technology came along. The people who explained their experiences in testimony were very confident that it was that Myodil experience that had caused their adhesive arachnoiditis. The difficulty with this illness is that there is no clear causal link.

One of the recommendations that we made out of our roundtable inquiry and the report that we are discussing here this evening was that we raise more awareness about this issue. We made recommendations to the RACGP and Medicare Locals to try and increase the awareness of GPs about this issue. Michael Sage, a radiologist and emeritus professor from Flinders University, described it in this way:

Even if there are only a handful of people out there in each city suffering from it, they really are suffering. It is important that people are made aware even if it is too late—to undo the difficulties and challenges that they face.

After this report was tabled in the chamber, a statement was released by GlaxoSmithKline, and I think it is important to read that response into the record. It states:

GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) has reviewed the final report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing into adhesive arachnoiditis … The report makes a number of direct references to GSK, so it is important that GSK communicates its position on the report and related issues. Some of the points below reiterate information that GSK has previously provided in its public statements …

- GSK has the utmost empathy for people who have been, and are, afflicted by arachnoiditis.
- GSK considers it has acted responsibly at all times in regard to the supply of Myodil including appropriate testing and monitoring and timely updates to product information to reflect the available science. We have also engaged in legal settlements where appropriate and been an active participant in the roundtable process.
- All pharmaceutical products may be associated with side-effects. Manufacturers provide prescribing information so that practitioners can make a judgment about the risk/benefit of the product and whether or not to administer it to the patient.
- When GSK became aware of a possible association with arachnoiditis (in 1971), GSK promptly included a precautionary warning in the Myodil prescribing information sheet that there was a possible risk of arachnoiditis following x-ray myelography using Myodil.
- Arachnoiditis is a complex and difficult to diagnose condition that has a range of possible causes such as spinal infections, spinal surgery and procedures and trauma. GSK remains of the view that there is no conclusive evidence that Myodil causes arachnoiditis.
GSK indicated respect for the work of the committee and concern for the people affected by arachnoiditis. The committee thought they might be able to show considerable civic leadership and social responsibility by establishing a charitable foundation to find ways to assist those suffering adhesive arachnoiditis, but that is a recommendation that they were not happy to take up. I will leave my remarks there. Hopefully, we have raised some awareness.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (18:23): I congratulate the member for Robertson on her contribution not only to this debate but also during the report consideration. It was one of the most moving roundtables that I have been associated with. It was a two-phase roundtable. In the first phase sufferers of adhesive arachnoiditis told their stories to the committee. Their saga, their journey, was an incredible one. It was a journey of constant pain. Their illness affected their mobility, their daily living, their employment and every single aspect of their lives. The one thing that each and every one of these participants in the roundtable had in common was that they had been injected with Myodil at the time that they were having investigations into the problems that they were having with their spine. So that was a common factor.

Adhesive arachnoiditis can be caused by things other than Myodil, but when we had this roundtable, the group of people that attended were people that had been injected, at one stage or another, with Myodil because at that time there were not the diagnostic tools that are available now. There were no CT scans, there were no MRIs, but they have subsequently replaced the injection into the spine of Myodil or Pantopaque. When it was initially injected, it was injected into the spinal fluid and left in the spine. Years later, when those patients underwent medical investigations, the oil was still visible in the spine. Later, when technology and knowledge improved, it was withdrawn from the spine, but even then many people who were suffering from spinal pain and spinal injury still ended up developing adhesive arachnoiditis.

I have pointed out how devastating and how life changing adhesive arachnoiditis is. I have talked about the process of the roundtable. I have talked about the first phase of the process of the roundtable where we had those people who were suffering from adhesive arachnoiditis come and talk to the committee. There were a number of tissues being passed around as both male and female sufferers of adhesive arachnoiditis told their story.

The second phase of the roundtable was having representatives of GlaxoSmithKline come along and give evidence to the committee in camera, so I cannot discuss any of the information that was presented there. They gave evidence to the committee. Subsequently, the committee made some recommendations as to how we thought the lives of people with adhesive arachnoiditis could be improved and how it could be handled better within the community and by medical professionals. I also acknowledge that Professor Sage gave evidence to the committee early in the piece where he came along and talked to the committee and explained adhesive arachnoiditis in the details that the member for Robertson has already shared with the House. He very definitely identified that some people who were injected with Myodil and Pantopaque developed adhesive arachnoiditis. That was very definitely identified, and there is medical evidence to support that.

One of the issues that was raised during the roundtable was the fact that there was a drug that did help to some extent, and that was Lyrica. I am pleased to share with the House that the drug has now been placed on the PBS list. That has the potential to make a real difference...
to people's lives because it makes it affordable. It is one of those drugs that actually works to relieve pain that is associated with nerves and nerve damage. That is a really positive outcome, and that actually happened before we even put a recommendation in our report; it was to be one of our recommendations that that be listed. So that is a really positive outcome that has happened.

We do need to raise awareness of this condition. We do need to make sure that not only medical professionals but people in the community know that there is such a disease as adhesive arachnoiditis. There are other issues that are associated with it as far as the knowledge base that doctors need to have and the role of the Medicare Locals and other health professionals can have in helping people who are living with arachnoiditis and chronic pain—helping them to develop strategies so that they can optimise the management of their chronic pain and get the best quality of life. That is recommendation 3 in the report.

Along with that comes the fact that people who are living with arachnoiditis need to be able to access aids and equipment to help them in their daily living so that they can adapt their lifestyles and minimise the level of pain that they have. This is a very, very painful disease, and it is something that has really changed people's lives irreversibly. This report recognises that people living with adhesive arachnoiditis have many barriers that they need to get around and that they have much that they need to cope with in their lives. These recommendations are recommendations that the committee feels very strongly about. I have to say that the recommendation that GlaxoSmithKline work to establish a foundation is one that has nothing to do with admitting any sort of liability. It has nothing to do with GlaxoSmithKline taking responsibility for the fact that people have developed adhesive arachnoiditis. We know that pharmaceutical companies often sponsor similar types of foundations or community activities. We thought that this would be a very community minded act that GSK could undertake. At the same time it would help so many people who have so much pain.

I am disappointed that GSK were not prepared to establish a charitable foundation. It is very disappointing, and we really felt that that was a way which could make a real difference in the lives of people who have been living with adhesive arachnoiditis for many reasons. As has been stated in this debate on a number of occasions, adhesive arachnoiditis is not only caused by the injection of Myodil but by many other sources—meningitis, tuberculosis, spinal injury, spinal surgery, bleeding from blood vessel abnormalities and chronic lumbosacral nerve compression. Then, of course, there is the Myodil and Pantopaque.

Deputy Speaker O'Neill, it was a pleasure working with you on the committee. As I said, previously you made an enormous contribution to this report and I thank you and everyone on the committee for the way that they addressed this issue, the way that they were prepared to work with people that are living with adhesive arachnoiditis. I would also like to put on record my thanks to the secretariat for the fine work that they have done.

Debate adjourned.

Constitutional Recognition of Local Government Committee
Report

Debate resumed on the motion:
That the House take note of the document.
Mr McCormack (Riverina) (18:36): I rise tonight to speak on the preliminary report on the majority finding of the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Local Government: the proposal, timing and likely success of a referendum to amend Section 96 of the Australian Constitution to effect financial recognition of local government. This is a very important debate. The committee was headed by the member for Greenway.

I note the presence in the chamber of the member for Makin who has been a fine mayor of the City of Salisbury in South Australia. I know that some of the members on this particular committee have had local government experience, including the member for Parkes, Mark Coulton, who was a previous mayor of Gwydir shire, as well as the member for Ryan, Jane Prentice, who was a councillor on the Brisbane City Council. They are two of five members of the committee who have put in a dissenting report, the others being the member for Swan, Steve Irons, and Senators David Fawcett and David Bushby.

The first recommendation of the preliminary report says:
The Committee recommends that a referendum on financial recognition of local government be held in 2013.

It further states that:
Given the importance of securing state and territory support, the Committee further recommends that in addition to the efforts of the local government sector, Commonwealth Government Ministers, particularly the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, the Attorney-General and the Special Minister for State, immediately commence negotiations with state and territory governments to secure their support for the referendum proposal.

I know this report came out in January 2013 and the Prime Minister has set the date for the next federal election as 14 September this year. Now that it is already 13 March one has to wonder whether in fact there will be time to secure those important yes votes to ensure that this gains the necessary majority to become a change to the Constitution. In Australian history there have been some 44 referenda and only eight of these have met the requirements of a double majority and passed. The first was in 1906 and the last, interestingly enough, was to do with the retirement of judges which was passed on 21 May 1977, providing for a retirement age of 70 for all federal judges. Eight out of 44 is not a great success rate. This is too important to put to the people of Australia and not to have it passed.

I have 13 local government areas within the electorate of Riverina. There are two city councils, Wagga Wagga and Griffith, and 11 shire councils. The mayors of those local government jurisdictions know, and have told me, how important it is to get constitutional recognition, certainly for financial aspects, to allow them to get funding directly from the Commonwealth, for important infrastructure projects such as roads and for all manner of requirements.

The Tumut Shire Council is in the process of building a new pool at Adelong. The original pool at Adelong—one of the first pools in country New South Wales—was erected in 1930 in the creek which runs through that town and was washed away in the floods of late 2010. Tumut Shire Council General Manager Bob Stewart discovered within the legislation a betterment clause. He fiercely, passionately and diligently followed that through. Only the other day was the first sod turned on the site for that pool, which comes under betterment funding. Mick Veitch, the Labor member of the Legislative Council in New South Wales, was there. He fought vigorously for this. This is really relevant. Mick Veitch lived in Adelong and
now lives at Young. He fought passionately through his channels in the New South Wales parliament. I also fought passionately. I had many meetings with the then Attorney-General, Nicola Roxon. She understood the importance of the project. Through Bob Stewart's fierce determination it was made possible.

Unluckily, that loophole has now been shut. I think governments of all persuasions feared that they would get a run on these projects. Certainly with the natural disasters that we have had in recent years that could well be the case. But that case proved the point that, with a whole-of-government approach, with local, state and Commonwealth governments all working together, such projects are possible. Sometimes middle management, the state government, through bureaucratic means holds up necessary funding projects. It sometimes does not permit the Commonwealth to directly fund local projects of significance. The Adelong pool funding is of extreme importance to that tiny community. I commend the work of Mick Veitch. I commend Nicola Roxon for making this pool project possible. I am sure that next summer the people of Adelong and the Tumut shire will be very thankful for the work that those two politicians did. They might even thank me for the work that I did in making that possible, but certainly the General Manager of Tumut Shire Council, Bob Stewart, who worked stridently to ensure that the funding was made possible, will be thanked. I look forward to attending the opening of that pool next summer.

There was a dissenting report from the coalition members of the committee. They made the very real point that there is no sense in putting a referendum question to the people of Australia if it is not going to succeed. In the dissenting report, they say:

Australia is a Federation of states and, as the evidence attests, the support of State governments can make or break referenda.

That is certainly the case. They continue:

If State governments are largely opposed to change, history proves it is very difficult for referenda to pass.

In the view of Coalition members, the recommendation by the Expert Panel that the Government negotiate to achieve the States' support for financial recognition, is an essential precursor to the committee being able to make a recommendation on the likelihood of the referendum being supported by the Australian people. This view was reinforced by a number of witnesses that for the referendum to be successful, States either had to actively support the measure or at least "run dead" on the issue.

State governments are probably going to be a little bit, and in some cases very, reluctant to support this referendum because it takes away some of the power that they have, it takes away their ability to negotiate in funding allocations and enables the Commonwealth government to directly fund local government projects. This is absolutely necessary, as the pool project at Adelong showed. This is absolutely necessary, as it is in so many other essential projects where the Commonwealth needs to be able to fund local government and at the moment is not able to.

Another project within the Tumut shire that is also related to this debate is Gocup Road. Gocup Road joins the Visy mill, the pulp and paper mill, to the busy Hume Highway. It is a two-lane road that is used by very heavy B-double trucks carrying loads of timber, and quite often that road is also traversed by buses. Buses and heavy haul log trucks are not a good combination on a narrow, winding and hilly road. That particular stretch of road had to be a state criteria road for it to get Commonwealth funding. That, to me, is overburdening local...
government. I know that the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, Simon Crean, is very interested in this particular project—he has been to my electorate a number of times—and I know he is also overseeing this entire report, but I am sure that he, like so many others, would like to see the Commonwealth be able to directly fund this road straight to Tumut shire. As I said, it is now a state classified road—it had to be to meet the criteria of road funding—but, if that could have been skirted around in some way in the past, I think this particular stretch of dangerous road could have been funded by the Commonwealth to ensure that there is not some sort of future tragedy.

I have lobbied hard on this. Certainly it was coalition policy at the last election to fund this road through the state, and certainly, while speaking of policy and coalition policy, at the Nationals' last federal council, local government constitutional recognition was a motion which was debated and carried. The motion read:
That this Federal Council of The Nationals supports the constitutional recognition of local government so as to ensure that the Federal Government can continue to make direct payments to local governments through programs such as Roads to Recovery.

And Roads to Recovery, as the member for Parkes often attests, has been one of the great things that the Commonwealth has been able to do—that is, funding local government directly to ensure that dangerous roads and roads in disrepair in rural and remote and regional areas receive the kinds of funding they need.

The expert panel's final report has stated that a majority of panel members support a referendum in 2013, but it really needs to ensure that it is going to be passed by the people. There is no point putting the question to Australians without the benefit of a full public education campaign on the issues. It is now March; the election is going to be held in September. Does that give us enough time to get the states on board? Does that give us enough time to educate the Australian public? The Australian public are not fools; the Australian public are very knowledgeable. The Australian public are au fait with a lot of issues. They are very switched on; the amount of media that is beamed into their homes and onto their iPads and mobile phones makes them very aware of all sorts of current issues. But does this particular issue, the constitutional recognition of local government, have the necessary support and have the necessary will of the people to be passed in a referendum? I do not know whether the time that we have left would allow that question, and I will be interested in the remarks that are going to be made in a few moments by the member for Makin on that particular theme.

Certainly in the period that we have left, if there is indeed time enough to get the support for the majority that is needed to pass this referendum, then well and good, so be it, and that will be wonderful. But we cannot put this question to the people if it is going to fail, and I think that is one of the reasons why the question of Aboriginal recognition in the Constitution is also very much overdue. I am sure most, if not all, of the members of this House, including, I am sure, the member for Throsby, would agree with me there: it is overdue. That question has been delayed and it is now going to more reviews and committees, and that is probably a desirable thing because when the question gets put to the people it also has to pass for the betterment of not just Indigenous Australians but us as a nation as a whole.

Certainly, this question of the constitutional recognition of local government must also not fail, because to put it up and have it fail would mean that it would be many, many years, if not
decades, before it was put again, if at all. There is no point putting a referendum question on a matter so important to grassroots politics and to the good ratepayers and citizens of this nation if it is going to fail. That is why members of the coalition wrote a dissenting report. It needs to be looked at very seriously and, as I say, I will be interested to hear the remarks of the member for Makin. This is an absolutely crucial matter. Local government needs recognition, but we must be able to ensure that it gets passed by the people.

**Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (18:51):** I begin by thanking the member for Riverina for his kind remarks about my time as Mayor of the City of Salisbury. In speaking on this matter, I want to put the issue of local government in context. There are about 560 local governments around Australia, and each exists and is enacted under state laws and, in the case of the Northern Territory, under the Territory law. They are state laws which can be amended at any time—and in fact often are—and which prescribe the powers and functions of local government. The existence of local government effectively rests with the state and territory governments. Yet local government is and has been entrenched as a level of government in the eyes of the Australian people for decades and decades, and it is now essential to the daily delivery of services to the Australian people across the country.

In fact, the first local government was established in South Australia—it was the City of Adelaide—and councils around Australia formed soon after that. I say that to point out that local government in fact predates federal government by some 60 years. Local government is part of the Australian landscape and has been almost since the time of the first settlement in this country. Many people I speak to are surprised to hear that local government predates the federal government and yet has effectively no legal status other than that afforded to it by each of the state and territory laws. It certainly is recognised within state constitutions, but recognition in state constitution does not give it the national recognition that local government is, quite rightfully, seeking.

There were propositions in both 1974 and 1988 to change the Australian Constitution in order to give local government the recognition it, quite rightly, deserves. In 1974, the proposal was to amend section 51 of the Constitution and related to the ability of the federal government to borrow money on behalf of local government. At the same time, there was a proposition to amend section 96 in very similar terms to what is being proposed now which would have enabled the federal government to directly fund local government. The 1974 proposition failed. The 1988 proposition was slightly different: it was about inserting a new section 119A into the Australian Constitution which effectively gave recognition to local government as a legitimate level of government in Australia in a similar way perhaps to the state constitutions. Again, that proposition failed.

So, 25 years later, we are attempting for the third time to recognise local government in the Australian Constitution. The member for Riverina quite rightly points out that this is an important issue and we do not want it to fail. That was very much at the forefront of the minds of committee members at the time we were deliberating on this issue.

The report follows a previous report that was headed by Justice Spigelman and an expert panel of some 17 other members who reported to the parliament at the end of 2011 and recommended, amongst other things, that a parliamentary committee pursue their recommendations. The recommendations—and I am simplifying them here—were effectively twofold. If you can get the bipartisan support of this parliament, the support of the state...
governments and the support of the Local Government Association and the recommendations they submitted as part of their proposition to go forward with the referendum, then you should proceed with it. The committee looked at those issues. It also heard from some experts in the field. It formed the conclusion that section 96 of the Australian Constitution would read: The parliament may grant financial assistance to any state or to any local government body formed by state or territory legislation on such terms and conditions as the parliament sees fit. The additional words were 'or to any local government body formed by state or territory legislation'. That is the addition to section 96 which currently does not exist in that part of the Constitution.

The importance of what it says is that we can only fund those local governments that are formed in accordance with the laws of the state or the territory in which they exist. That is No. 1 and it is an important element of that change. The second part is that the federal government can directly fund those local government entities.

The issue of including local government in the Australian Constitution and giving it proper recognition has, I believe, got bipartisan support as a matter of principle. That is the message I am picking up loud and clear. The message I have been hearing right across Australia is that, generally, as a matter of principle, it is accepted. The issue is: how do you do it? You can include local government in the Australian Constitution simply by giving it some sort of symbolic recognition or you can actually do so in the form of words that have been proposed in the recommendation of the committee by specifically making reference to it in section 96. Symbolic recognition may be appropriate, but, quite frankly, I do not think that is the way to go. I would like to see specific reference to it.

We gave local government some form of symbolic recognition when in 2006 the Howard government in a bipartisan way in this parliament moved a resolution recognising the importance and existence of local government throughout Australia. But it was not given legal status in the same way that giving local government a seat at COAG meetings, which was also done in the nineties, gave local government a degree of respectability but did not give it any legitimate legal status. The only way we will ever do that is by including the right wording in the Australian Constitution. The wording proposed is similar to the wording proposed by the expert panel, which the parliamentary committee agreed was the best way to go. It agreed it was the best way to go because it also heard from experts in the field of dealing with the Australian Constitution and they agreed that it was the best way to go.

The fundamental difference between what is happening now and what happened 25 years ago and in 1974 is not only that local government, quite rightfully, believes that it should be recognised as a legitimate level of government in this country but because there was a court case, Pape v Commissioner of Taxation, in 2009. That court case effectively found that the Australian government does not have the authority to directly fund local government. So this issue is not simply about doing what we think is morally right; it is also about ensuring that the way this government and this country has operated for decades continues. Programs like Roads to Recovery, which the member for Riverina alluded to earlier, and other programs like the regional development programs, community infrastructure initiatives that we have seen in recent years and even direct services that are provided by local government to communities will be able to continue. That is the purpose of the changes that are being proposed now and it is important they get through as quickly as possible. It is no longer just something that would
be nice to do; it is a matter of dealing with the issue because if we cannot then we have to deal with those funding problems that arise as a result of the Pape case.

The argument has been put that we can continue to fund local government through section 96 of the Constitution. However, that means all of the funding has to go through the states with conditions placed on the states that those funds will be used in accordance with the wishes and directions of the federal government. That means you have to deal with the states before allocating the funds, and that in turn makes the whole process much more cumbersome and adds another layer of bureaucracy to the process itself. That is a problem that I believe we will continue to encounter if the Constitution is not changed.

Questions arise relating to the timing, which the member for Riverina quite rightly raised in his remarks in the chamber. Those were matters that the committee rightly addressed in a very careful and considered way. We listened to the experts about the process that the parliament needs to go through before a referendum question can be put, even in September this year. It was considered that, whilst the timing may raise concerns to some, it is sufficient to enable us to go through all of those processes.

Unless a decision is made by this parliament that we will proceed with the referendum, none of the other steps will take place because everyone seems to be hanging back for someone to make the first move. Having made the first move and recommended that the referendum be held in conjunction with the federal election this year, it now means that every other sector—that is, the state governments and local governments around Australia—has a goal in mind and can work towards it. My understanding is that the local government sector across Australia generally has accepted that and is prepared to get behind a campaign that will enable the education program that has been suggested to be rolled out across Australia with respect to getting the people of Australia to understand what is behind this proposition. It is true that some of the states will never support this proposition. It is also true that if we do not get bipartisan support from this parliament to start with then the proposition will never get up.

For a constitutional question to succeed it needs not only to be passed by a majority of states but to be passed by a majority of voters across the whole of the country. So it is not easy. The member for Riverina rightly pointed out that only eight out of 44 propositions have ever succeeded when they were put to the Australian people. But it is possible. One of the successes occurred in the 1940s when a similar situation arose where it was a case of making a change to the Constitution not simply because it was the right thing to do but because if it was not done then it would impact on the way the government of the day could deliver its services. This is a very similar case. That was one of the arguments put very strongly by constitutional experts that addressed the committee.

We have a proposition before us and we have in principle support generally across the board—a couple of the states have indicated concerns but the others at this stage have not strongly indicated their position one way or the other. Given that we now have the Australian Local Government Association behind the proposition, we should now make every attempt to go through with the referendum question being put in September. The others, knowing that there is a proposition before them, will have to make some hard decisions. I believe they will do so and I believe those hard decisions will result in them supporting the proposition because it is the right thing to do and is the only way that we can effectively ensure the delivery of
services which Australian people have now become accustomed to as a result of the way things have been funded over the last two or three decades.

With those comments I strongly urge members of this place to support the recommendation of the committee because this place needs to show leadership on this issue. If it does, my view is that that will be crucial as to whether the proposition gets up in September.

Debate adjourned.

Economics Committee

Report

Debate resumed on the motion:

That the House take note of the report.

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (19:04): The question we are debating is the report of the Economics Committee, Report on Australia's oil refining industry. I know, Deputy Speaker Owens, that you participated in that—indeed, you presided over that inquiry. I will provide a little bit by way of background. In June 2012 Shell announced that its refining operations at Clyde refinery would be ceasing in September of that year. That added to their announcement that their refinery in Gore Bay was going to be converted into a storage facility for importation of petroleum products. Similarly, in July 2012, Caltex had announced that it would close its refinery at Kurnell sometime in 2013. These announcements, coming together in close succession, caused many in the community to ask: is this the beginning of the end of Australia's domestic oil refining capacity? Indeed, if it is the beginning of the end of Australia's domestic petroleum and oil refining production capacity, what does that mean?

In response to community concerns the minister referred the question to the Economics Committee and asked us to inquire into some specific issues. Firstly, we were asked to inquire into whether the closure of the refineries would affect prices. I should say that the closure of the refineries will lead to a 28 per cent reduction in Australia's domestic petroleum refining capacity, meaning that we are now in a position where we produce about half of our annual demand domestically, the balance of which is imported. Many in the community asked: what is the impact this is going to have on the price that we pay at the browser for our petrol? Will the closing of some of Australia's domestic refining lead to an increase in bowser prices? What does it mean in terms of energy security? What does it mean in terms of our capacity down the track to change our petroleum standards? We have over the last two decades gone through a program of mandating cleaner fuel standards in this country. That has had enormous environmental benefits. What would the reduction in Australia's domestic capacity mean for our capacity to make those sorts of changes down the track? Finally, what does it mean for the employees within the industry? Currently some 5½ thousand workers are employed in Australia's oil refineries? What does it mean for job security within those refineries and across the energy sector more generally?

I would like to make a few observations about each of these concerns. First, in relation to price, the inquiry looked into this and determined that the closure of these refineries would have no net impact on the price that consumers would pay for petrol. The singular reason for this is that over 90 per cent of the terminal gate price for petrol—that is, the price that consumers are paying for petrol—is a consequence of what we now know and commonly refer to as import parity pricing. That is, it is set by the international market. Over 90 per cent
of the price is made up of that parity pricing plus transportation costs plus insurances and the rest. The reduction in our domestic refining capacity is going to have no net impact, certainly not on the upside, on browser prices. It was observed by a number of submitters to the inquiry that indeed the risks might be on the downside in terms of pricing, because, with a massive increase in the South-East Asian region of refining capacity, new more modern plant and technology was going to be able to produce the same or increased volumes at a lower price, providing the availability of refined petroleum at a lower price to Australian importers. It was observed that the new Jamnagar Refinery, in India, one of the most modern and largest refineries in the world, has the capacity to produce over 1,200 barrels per day. This one refinery produces in a day in excess of all the combined refineries in Australia at the moment. It is a very modern plant and it is very efficient and productive. So there is no net impact, certainly on the upside, on prices.

Second, in relation to energy security, I would like to make a couple of points about this, because it is something deep within the Australian psyche. Perhaps it is from the experience of going through two world wars and being an island continent some distance from many other countries within the region. People are concerned about the fact that we should have some security over our energy supplies. I always say in relation to these concerns that open trading arrangements and good relationships with your trading partners are the best form of security you can have in relation to any traded good. In any event we should not confuse energy security with self-sufficiency. I will deal with those two issues.

Currently we import over 83 per cent of our crude oil. That is the raw material that is refined into petrol. So, if there was an issue with energy security in relation to petrol, it already exists. We have seen through the turbulent periods in Middle Eastern politics over the last two decades that those concerns have not been met. To the extent that there have been any interruptions, they have been very quickly addressed by bringing alternative supplies into the world market. The other thing I would have to say is that, now, over 50 per cent of our domestic supply is already imported.

The other observation that was made by numerous witnesses to the committee was that Australia is a net exporter of energy, in its many forms, whether that be coal, natural gas, uranium or any of the other energy sources in common supply here in Australia. We are a net exporter and, if anything, countries around the world are looking to Australia for the security of their energy supplies. So if there are concerns, it is the other way around.

The other thing I would like to say on this particular issue is to do with the other concerns that were raised. Those concerns go to employment within the industry. I have a few observations about that. It is entirely understandable that those who have had a lifetime of employment within the refining industry are quite rightly looking at this and asking what the future of the industry is. They are asking, 'Do I have job security here in my place of employment or within the industry down the track?' It is important to note that over the last 10 years the industry itself has invested over $9 billion in equipment and plant within the oil refining industry. It is necessary because we have a lot of heritage equipment in the industry around the country, so businesses were having to reinvest. But this is not small money. An amount of $9 billion over 10 years has been reinvested and each of the witnesses before the committee said that they were committed to ensuring that we retained a domestic refining capacity within this country.
The other thing that is worth noting is that employment in the broader energy sector, whether that be mining or processing, is actually booming. No witness or evidence before the committee said of the regrettable layoffs that were going to occur—although it did cause enormous concerns to those individuals who were impacted by this—that, when one stretched their gaze to the wider labour markets these people were operating in, there was no untoward impact on broader unemployment levels and there were capacities for both government and non-government actors to deal with the dislocation that had occurred as a result of the closure of these plants.

So each of those concerns, in our view and the view of all the members of the committee, were able to be addressed to the satisfaction of the committee. With those few observations made I commend the report to the House. I thank you, Deputy Speaker, for the work you did in chairing the committee. There are some members of the secretariat staff in the chamber today. I thank them for the excellent work they did in preparing this report and assisting the committee in this inquiry, and for their ongoing work in assisting this very busy committee in preparing its reports and conducting its inquiries. I know that each and every member of the committee is very appreciative of that work.

Debate adjourned.

Federation Chamber adjourned at 19:16.
QUESTIONS IN WRITING
Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme
(Question No. 1329)

Mr Alexander asked the Minister for Health, in writing, on 29 November 2012:
In respect of new medicine to prevent stroke in atrial fibrillation patients:
(a) is it a fact that new medicine has been reimbursed in New Zealand for over 12 months while Australian patients only have aspirin and warfarin available on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, and (b) can the Minister provide any other examples of medicines that have been reimbursed in New Zealand prior to being listed for reimbursement in Australia?

Ms Plibersek: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
(a) On 1 July 2011, dabigatran (Pradaxa®) was listed on New Zealand's Pharmaceutical Schedule. It is approved for use in the prevention of:
- stroke, systemic embolism and reduction of vascular mortality in patients with non-valvular atrial fibrillation; and
- venous thromboembolism post major orthopedic surgery.

(b) No, the Department of Health and Ageing does not hold tables of medicines reimbursed in other countries. It should be noted, that as all health systems are different, it is difficult to make direct comparisons of why a drug might be listed first (if at all) in one country versus another. A country's pharmaceutical reimbursement policies cannot be assessed in isolation from its overall health and industry pricing and policy objectives.

Australian Council for the Arts
(Question No. 1343)

Mr Fletcher asked the Minister for the Arts, in writing, on 5 February 2013:
Why has the Literature Board of the Australian Council for the Arts cut its annual grant to the magazine Quadrant by 50 per cent?

Mr Crean: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:
The Literature Board's decision to fund Quadrant at reduced levels was based on the assessment of its application against the published criteria for Program Funding and in the context of a highly competitive funding round.

For more detail about the Program Funding criteria, I refer the Member to:

To see the Literature Board's Assessment Meeting Report, I refer the Member to: