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FORTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FIFTH PERIOD

Governor-General
His Excellency General the Hon. Sir Peter Cosgrove AK, MC (Retd)

House of Representatives Office holders
Speaker—Hon. Bronwyn Kathleen Bishop MP
Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Mr Robert George Mitchell MP
Members of the Speaker’s Panel—Mr Russell Evan Broadbent MP,
Mr Alexander George Hawke MP, Mr Ian Reginald Goodenough MP,
Mrs Natasha Louise Griggs MP, Ms Sarah Moya Henderson MP,
Mr Stephen James Irons MP, Mr Ewen Thomas Jones MP, Mr Craig Kelly MP,
Ms Michelle Leanne Landry MP, Mrs Jane Prentice MP, Mr Donald James Randall MP,
Mr Ross Xavier Vasta MP, Mr Brett David Whiteley MP, Mrs Lucy Elizabeth Wicks MP

Leader of the House—Hon. Christopher Pyne MP
Deputy Leader of the House—Hon. Luke Hartsuyker MP
Manager of Opposition Business—Hon. Anthony Stephen Burke MP
Deputy Manager of Opposition Business—Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC MP

Party Leaders and Whips
Liberal Party of Australia
Leader—Hon. Anthony John Abbott MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP
Chief Government Whip—Mr Scott Buchholz MP
Government Whips—Mr Andrew Alexander Nikolic, AM, CSC and
Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP

The Nationals
Leader—Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Barnaby Thomas Gerard Joyce MP
Chief Whip—Mr Mark Maclean Coulton MP
Deputy Whip—Mr George Robert Christensen MP

Australian Labor Party
Leader—Hon. William Richard Shorten MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Tanya Joan Plibersek MP
Chief Opposition Whip—Mr Christopher Patrick Hayes MP
Opposition Whips—Ms Jill Griffiths Hall MP and Ms Joanne Catherine Ryan MP

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<th>Party</th>
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<td>IND.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Williams, Mr Matthew</td>
<td>Hindmarsh, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilson, Mr Richard James</td>
<td>O'Connor, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wood, Mr Jason Peter</td>
<td>La Trobe, VIC</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyatt, Mr Kenneth George AM</td>
<td>Hasluck, WA</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zappia, Mr Antonio</td>
<td>Makin, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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**PARTY ABBREVIATIONS**

ALP—Australian Labor Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia; NATS—The Nationals; 
IND—Independent; NATSWA—The Nationals WA; CLP—Country Liberal Party;  
AUS—Katters Australia Party; AG—Australian Greens; PUP—Palmer United Party

**Heads of Parliamentary Departments**

Clerk of the Senate—R Laing
Clerk of the House of Representatives—D Elder
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—C Mills
Parliamentary Budget Officer—P Bowen
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Indigeneous Affairs</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Nigel Scullion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Michaelia Cash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister</td>
<td>The Hon. Charles Porter MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister</td>
<td>The Hon. Alan Tudge MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>The Hon. Julie Bishop MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Trade and Investment</td>
<td>The Hon. Andrew Robb AO MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>The Hon. Steven Ciobo MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Trade and Investment</td>
<td>The Hon. Steven Ciobo MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Employment</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Employment</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Deputy Leader of the House)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attorney-General</td>
<td>The Hon. Michael Keenan MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for the Arts</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. George Brandis QC</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Vice-President of the Executive Council)</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. George Brandis QC</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Justice</td>
<td>The Hon. Michael Keenan MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon. Joe Hockey MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Small Business</td>
<td>The Hon. Bruce Billson MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon. Joshua Frydenberg MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon. Kelly O'Dwyer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Agriculture</td>
<td>The Hon. Barnaby Joyce MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Leader of the House)</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Richard Colbeck</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Agriculture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Education and Training</td>
<td>The Hon. Christopher Pyne MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Leader of the House)</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Education and Training</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Scott Ryan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education and Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Social Services</td>
<td>The Hon. Scott Morrison MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Social Services</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Mitch Fifield</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Manager of Government Business in the Senate)</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Marise Payne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Human Services</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Concetta Fierravanti-Wells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Social Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Industry and Science</td>
<td>The Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industry and Science</td>
<td>The Hon. Karen Andrews MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence</td>
<td>The Hon. Kevin Andrews MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Veterans’ Affairs</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Michael Ronaldson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for the Prime Minister for the Centenary of</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Michael Ronaldson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Minister</td>
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<td><strong>ANZAC</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Defence</td>
<td>The Hon. Stuart Robert MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence</td>
<td>The Hon. Darren Chester MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Communications</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Communications</td>
<td>The Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Immigration and Border Protection</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection</td>
<td>The Hon. Peter Dutton MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment</td>
<td>The Hon. Greg Hunt MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Finance</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Minister of State</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Mathias Cormann</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Michael Ronaldson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Health</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Sport</strong></td>
<td>The Hon. Sussan Ley MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Health</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Fiona Nash</td>
</tr>
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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 Human Services in the Social Services portfolio and 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>Hon Bill Shorten MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Senator the Hon Kim Carr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister Assisting the Leader for Small Business</strong></td>
<td>Hon Bernie Ripoll MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business</td>
<td>Julie Owens MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Cabinet Secretary</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Jacinta Collins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition</td>
<td>Hon Michael Danby MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition</td>
<td>Dr Jim Chalmers MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deputy Leader of the Opposition</strong></td>
<td>Tanya Plibersek MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development</td>
<td>Auditor Claire Moore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC</td>
<td>Hon David Feeney MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>Hon Matt Thistlethwaite MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leader of the Opposition in the Senate</strong></td>
<td>Penny Wong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Trade and Investment</td>
<td>Dr Jim Chalmers MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Trade and Investment</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Stephen Conroy</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate</strong></td>
<td>Hon David Feeney MP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Cities</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Hon Julie Collins MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Western Australia</td>
<td>Hon Warren Snowdon MP</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Manager of Opposition Business (House)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shadow Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water</strong></td>
<td>Mark Butler</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Environment, Climate Change</td>
<td>Senator the Hon Lisa Singh</td>
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<tr>
<td>and Water</td>
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<tr>
<td>**Shadow Minister for Higher Education, Research, Innovation and</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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Wednesday, 4 March 2015

The SPEAKER (Hon. Bronwyn Bishop) took the chair at 09:00, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

BILLS

Tax and Superannuation Laws Amendment (2014 Measures No. 7) Bill 2014
Excess Exploration Credit Tax Bill 2014

Returned from Senate

Message received from the Senate returning the bills without amendment or request.

COMMITTEES

Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights

Report

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Werriwa) (09:01): On behalf of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights I present the committee's 19th report of the 44th Parliament entitled Human rights scrutiny report.

Report made a parliamentary paper in accordance with standing order 39(e).

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON: by leave—I rise to speak to the tabling of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights 19th Report of the 44th Parliament. This report provides the committee's view on the compatibility with human rights as defined in the Human Rights (Parliamentary Scrutiny) Act 2011 of bills introduced between 9 and 12 February 2015, one bill introduced on 3 December 2014, and legislative instruments received between 23 January and 12 February 2015. It also includes consideration of legislation previously deferred by the committee, and responses to issues raised by the committee in previous reports.

Of the nine bills considered in this report, four were assessed as not raising human rights concerns and five required further correspondence with ministers. The committee has deferred its consideration of the remaining bills. Bills considered and scheduled for debate this week include:

• the Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 2) 2014-2015; and
• the Defence Legislation Amendment (Military Justice Enhancements—Inspector-General ADF) Bill 2014.

As always, the report outlines the committee's examination of the compatibility of these bills with our human rights obligations, and I encourage my fellow members and others to examine the committee's report to better inform their consideration of proposed legislation.

As members would be aware, the committee's purposes are to enhance understanding of and respect for human rights in Australia and to ensure appropriate recognition of human rights issues in legislative and policy development.

The committee seeks to achieve these outcomes through constructive engagement with proponents of legislation, and this is primarily done through a dialogue model in which the committee corresponds with relevant ministers and officials to identify and explore questions of human rights compatibility. The committee then reports its findings and recommendations,
thus striving to provide reports that clearly signpost the committee's analytical framework and the content of various human rights. The reports are intended to simplify and succinctly set out the human rights analysis of legislation, and ultimately provide clear assessments of the compatibility of legislation that are accessible to members of parliament and to the public more generally.

In this regard, I would like to draw attention to the committee's consideration of the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Psychoactive Substances and Other Measures) Bill 2014, about which the committee provides its concluding analysis in this report. The bill makes a number of amendments to relevant acts to improve Commonwealth criminal justice arrangements, including in relation to regulating psychoactive substances that are designed and manufactured to mimic the effects of illicit drugs. These substances have presented particular challenges to law enforcement because, while they can be banned as they are identified, manufacturers have been able to easily alter their chemical composition to avoid the law. To address this problem, the bill introduces new offences for importing substances presented to be serious drug alternatives and for importing psychoactive substances. However, to address the ease with which these substances may be created and altered, these offences were drafted to include both a reverse evidentiary burden—whereby the defendant is required to provide evidence that they can rely on a prescribed exception to the importation offences—and an extremely broad definition of what constitutes a 'psychoactive substance'.

While the committee noted the extremely challenging nature of responding to the emergence of new psychoactive substances, the committee raised a number of issues relating to the right to a fair trial, fair hearing rights and quality of law considerations. The committee also raised a number of issues in relation to other measures in the bill, including in relation to the imposition of mandatory minimum sentences for certain firearm trafficking actions and its potential limitation of the right not to be arbitrarily detained and the right to a fair trial and fair hearing rights. The committee's concluding remarks on these and other issues exemplify the benefits of the human rights scrutiny dialogue and the way in which it can both inform the legislative process and improve legislative outcomes. For example, in relation to the new offences, the report notes that the information provided in the minister's responses constructively and comprehensively addressed the matters raised by the committee, such that the committee could conclude that the offences are compatible with fair trial and fair hearing rights and quality-of-law considerations. In respect of concerns raised in relation to the imposition of certain mandatory minimum sentences, the minister undertook to make a clarifying statement in the explanatory memorandum to the bill, which the committee regards as having provided some greater protection of judicial discretion in sentencing.

Another case which I believe reflects on the ultimate purpose and benefit of human rights scrutiny can be seen in last Friday's report of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security, the PJCIS, in relation to the Telecommunications (Interception and Access) Amendment (Data Retention) Bill 2014. The committee reported on this bill in its Fifteenth report of the 44th Parliament tabled on 14 November last year, and will soon report on a response recently received from the Attorney-General in relation to the matters raised by the committee.

It is gratifying for the committee to see that the substance of its analysis and concerns were clearly used to inform a number of the submissions to the PJCIS inquiry. This serves as but
one example that the committee's scrutiny dialogue is one that is able to inform the parliament and the public in the broadest sense. It is important to remember that the greater recognition of human rights in the policy and legislative process is well served through an inclusive human rights scrutiny dialogue model, and that the advancement of human rights should not be regarded as only belonging within the preserve of human rights practitioners and international courts, tribunals and other bodies.

I commend the committee's Nineteenth report of the 44th Parliament to the House.

Public Works Committee
Approval of Work

Mr McCormack (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (09:08): I move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, it is expedient to carry out the following proposed work which was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works and on which the committee has duly reported to Parliament: Project AIR 7000 Phase 2B—Maritime Patrol Aircraft Replacement Project.

As I advised the House when referring this project to the Public Works Committee, the Department of Defence is replacing the Australian Defence Force's existing fleet of AP3C Orion aircraft with eight Boeing P8A Poseidon aircraft. As a result, Defence proposes to construct new, and refurbish existing, facilities to support operations, maintenance and training requirements.

The facilities will be at the main operating base, Royal Australian Air Force Base Edinburgh, and forward operating bases, RAAF Bases Darwin, Pearce and Townsville. The project will also refurbish the existing torpedo maintenance facility and construct new explosive ordnance storage facilities at HMAS Stirling. The proposed works will support Australia's advanced maritime intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and response capability.

The committee has conducted an inquiry and is of the view that that project signifies value for money for the Commonwealth and constitutes a project that is fit for purpose and it is expedient to carry out the proposed work. The committee also commended Defence for its community consultation—in particular, with traditional owners and Indigenous communities. On behalf of the government, I would like to thank the committee for one again undertaking a rigorous and timely inquiry. Subject to parliamentary approval, construction is expected to begin in late 2015 and to be completed on all sites by 2020. I commend the motion to the House.

Question agreed to.

Public Works Committee
Approval of Work

Mr McCormack (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (09:11): I move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, it is expedient to carry out the following proposed work which was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works and on which the committee has duly reported to Parliament: Project AIR 9000 Phase 7 Helicopter Aircrew Training System Facilities Project.
As I advised the House when referring this project to the Public Works Committee the Department of Defence proposes to conduct new and refurbished facilities at HMAS Albatross at Nowra in New South Wales and at Jervis Bay Airfield in the Australian Capital Territory to support the introduction of the new helicopter aircrew training system capability. The facility will provide the Australian Defence Force with the capability to integrate live flight training with virtual training devices, including flight simulators and computer based training platforms. The facility will better prepare the ADF aircrew for conversion to Defence's modern and more advanced operational helicopter types.

The committee has conducted an inquiry and is of the view that the project signifies value for money for the Commonwealth and constitutes a project which is fit for purpose and it is expedient to carry out the proposed work. On behalf of the government, I would like to thank the committee for again undertaking a rigorous and timely inquiry. I am pleased that the committee had the opportunity to visit HMAS Albatross in Nowra to see firsthand the need for these works. Subject to parliamentary approval, construction is expected to commence in mid-2015 and to be completed on all sides by mid-2017. I commend the motion to the House.

Question agreed to.

Public Works Committee
Reference

Mr McCormack (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (09:13): I move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, the following proposed work be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for consideration and report: Multi-user barge ramp facility at East Arm, Darwin, Northern Territory.

It is proposed that the Department of Defence and the Northern Territory government's Land Development Corporation construct a hardened barge ramp, a marshalling area located adjacent to the ramp and a roadway to link the barge ramp to the existing staging area at East Arm in Port Darwin in the Northern Territory. The proposed works will support the Royal Australian Navy's new landing helicopter dock capability. Defence is providing an $18.3 million capped contribution to the project, which is valued at $20.2 million excluding GST, which includes management fees, construction costs, environmental management measures, contingencies and an allowance for escalation. The Land Development Corporation is funding the remaining costs associated with the project. The Land Development Corporation and Defence have reached an in-principle agreement which addresses access rights for Defence, appropriate governance and maintenance arrangements. Subject to parliamentary approval, Defence will finalise the deed of licence agreement. Construction is expected to begin in mid-2015 and should be completed by mid-2016. I commend the motion to the House.

Question agreed to.

BILLS

Australian River Co. Limited Bill 2015

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.
Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (09:15): I am pleased, today, to speak on behalf of the Australian Labor Party on this legislation, the Australian River Co. Limited Bill 2015. The bill gives effect to the abolition of the Australian River Co. Limited, ARCo, which was announced in the 2014-15 budget. It allows for the transfer of functions, assets and liabilities from the Australian River Co. to the Commonwealth ahead of the Australian River Co.’s deregistration. The bill also contains provisions to ensure that the Commonwealth is the Australian River Co.’s successor at law in relation to contracts and other instruments including insurance policies.

This is an administrative piece of legislation, which the opposition will be supporting as it is certainly noncontentious, but it does raise the history of the Australian shipping fleet around our coast. It raises that history in the context of previous governments, of either political persuasion, which have certainly seen the need for an Australian flag to have a presence on an island continent such as Australia where 99 per cent of our exports are carried by ship, and where of course there are a range of advantages in having an Australian shipping fleet.

The Australian River Co. was originally created as the Australian Coastal Shipping Commission way back in October 1956. At that time it operated about 40 ships. It became the Australian Shipping Commission in 1974, and was subsequently incorporated as ANL Limited. In 1989 it became the Australian National Line, and it finally took on its current name in 1998. The original purpose of the company was to establish, maintain and operate, or to provide for the establishment, maintenance and operation of, shipping services for the carriage of passengers, goods and mail. In 2002 the then Howard government wrote to the board requesting that the company be managed with a view to it being wound down. Its operations have been geared towards its winding down ever since. The company arose from a time when there was a view that the only way to secure an Australian shipping presence around our coast was to have a directly government owned and operated fleet. Of course, over a period of time, that has changed.

The Labor Party certainly share the view that there is no need for a directly government owned Australian shipping fleet. That is a service that is best provided by the private sector with an appropriate competitive framework. However we certainly maintain the view that it is in Australia's national security interest, in our economic interest and in our environmental interest that there be that Australian flag presence not just around our coast. We would like to see a far greater Australian shipping presence around the globe, carrying Australian resources and Australian goods, and of course carrying goods back to Australia. We need to be a shipping nation, not just a shipper nation—a distinction which is very important in terms of a starting point.

The company itself ceased to trade in August 2012 when the last of the two ships that it had, both bulk bauxite carriers, were sold in 2012. According to its last publicly available annual report, as at 30 November 2013, its only ongoing operations related to the management of legal and insurance matters for the company, particularly workers compensation liabilities. The company has no employees and no premises. It does still have a board comprising three members and a company secretary. Upon deregistration, the remaining activities, assets and liabilities of the company will be moved and taken on by the Department of Finance.
Given that this bill is about the proper process of winding up a company in accordance with decisions made by previous governments, the opposition will be supporting this bill. But we do believe this is an opportunity to remind ourselves of the important role that an Australian shipping industry has for our national economy, for environmental protection, including of the Great Barrier Reef, and for national security. I believe that this is a debate that requires far greater consideration by members of this House and the other place than has taken place up to now.

A briefing was given to industry months ago about proposed legislation from the government that has not been exposed to a public exposure draft or to any public process. I think that is not appropriate. It is important that we have a debate which is hopefully beyond partisan lines about whether we want to see the Australian flag on the back of ships around our coast, because that is literally under threat. If we are complacent, that will disappear. That is why, when I was the minister, we undertook a program of reform for Australian shipping.

The first thing we did was invite the House of Representatives committee to do a report into Australian shipping.

Ms King interjecting—

Mr ALBANESE: Indeed it was chaired by the member for Ballarat. The deputy chair was the former member for Hinkler, someone who I have the greatest respect for. What was significant about that report was that it was bipartisan and unanimous. It was this parliament working at its best. All sides came together on the basis of evidence before a committee and made recommendations that were then put in place by the former Labor government. The reforms were absolutely vital, given that the number of Australian flagged ships around our coast had fallen during the period of the Howard government from 55 to less than half of that, 22, and was ready to fall down to just 19 due to decisions that had already been made prior to the change of government in 2007.

I must say that the position that was put forward by the member for Hinkler was consistent with the general approach that the National Party and its predecessors have tried to take in terms of recognising the national economic interest, rather than the view that sometimes their coalition partners have of pretending that there is this absolute free market that operates out there when, in an area like shipping, the analysis shows that Australia, including after the 2012 reforms, has the most open market in the world.

Many people would look towards the United States of America as the free market leader in the world. Well, have a look at the way that it operates its shipping industry. You cannot, if you do not have the flag of the USA on the back of your ship, take goods from San Francisco to Los Angeles or anywhere else operating around the coast. Not only that, the ship has to be built and maintained in the United States of America. This defends jobs, but is also a recognition by the US that there is a real national security issue by having a merchant fleet. There is a relationship between the merchant fleet operations and our defence operations, which is something that any student of history who looks back—as we are this year commemorating the anniversary of Gallipoli in World War I, and when you look at the operation in World War II, or more recent operations—would know: there is a direct linkage between the two. There is a real national interest—and the US recognises that, as do all of our competitors. There is no advanced nation in our region, in Europe or in North America that has a free-for-all around their own coastline. But that is a direction that the current
government is heading towards with the discussions they have had with industry—and that is of real concern.

The 2012 reforms were the result of recommendations from a bipartisan committee. The reforms were a comprehensive plan that looked at coastal trading around our coast and our international register and that looked at workforce issues. It looked at it from a perspective not of retreating back to a protectionist model, but of looking at an expansive way in which an Australian flagged ship could compete with foreign flagged ships, whether it be around our coasts or in the international trading sector. It was very much not a protectionist model, even though many of our competitors do have either an absolute protectionist model such as in the United States, or a relatively protectionist model such as in our region.

We established a shipping advisory task force that involved industry, including the Australian Shipowners Association and Shipping Australia. It involved the unions. It involved major companies such as Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton. It involved major operators such as CSL, Maersk and other companies that are involved in the shipping sector. Significantly, it came up with a plan that was then released for public comment. We had exposure drafts of legislation. We had a process whereby there were subcommittees to look at taxation issues that were chaired by the Department of the Treasury. We had industry chairing the task force that looked at workforce planning issues. We involved the Navy because we recognised that they have the skills that are required in our merchant fleet. There is a direct relationship and there is a lot of transfer between the two—as there is in the aviation sector between people who will get training in the air force and then go into the private sector. The same thing happens in terms of our shipping industry.

An Australian shipping industry is vital for areas such as controlling our ports. Our harbour masters, by and large, will be people who started at the bottom as workers and got skills as they went through their working life. That is why it is absolutely extraordinary that this is being walked away from due to, I believe, a false assumption that somehow this has everything to do with the Maritime Union of Australia. These reforms are supported by industry, the workforce and the sector, but they are being undermined and walked away from with real consequences.

Our reforms sought to establish a level playing field. They did this by requiring foreign-flagged vessels operating on Australian domestic trade routes to seek permits. The permits required that, if an Australian-based ship was available, an Australia-based ship would have the opportunity to bid for the work. They also required those vessels to take on Australian crew at senior levels and as trainees. They certainly were not protectionist. There was other legislation that required ships operating on Australian domestic routes, even if they were foreign flagged, to pay Australian-level wages. This is at the core of the assault that is going on at the moment. It is misguided, it is not thought through and it is not in the national interest.

If a truck that is owned and operated by a Philippine company wants to take goods from Sydney to Melbourne, there would, I believe, be no-one who would argue that the driver of that truck should work under the standards of the Philippines in terms of the training for the truck driver, the fatigue laws and the wages. They would argue that the wages, training and other conditions needed to be Australian level. Otherwise what we would have is people
driving up and down our highways—particularly in regional communities—earning $2 or $3 an hour. That would be absurd.

It is just as absurd to argue that the people who work on a ship going from Sydney to Melbourne—an Australian domestic task, carrying Australian goods from one Australian port to another Australian port—should not be paid Australian wages, that they should be paid $2 or $3 an hour, with fatigue laws being applied from a foreign jurisdiction rather than an Australian jurisdiction. This is essentially the argument that the current Leader of the Nationals and Deputy Prime Minister is putting forward, and I think that it is very short-sighted indeed. By all means, be as critical as you like of the Maritime Union of Australia and engage in the argy-bargy of politics, but do not argue that the idea of attacking the MUA is to be achieved by replacing Australian workers with non-Australian workers who are paid non-Australian wages. It is an extraordinary proposition, but at its core that is the case that the government is putting forward.

The maritime sector does provide jobs for thousands of Australians—at least 2,000 seafarers plus many more land-based workers associated with the industry. It also supports skills. There is good economic reason to defend these jobs and these skills. The minister clothed his planned changes as the elimination of red tape, but that is, of course, nonsense. This government simply wants to get rid of this Australian industry in line with some bizarre anti-union ideology. Yes, people who work on the ships tend to be members of unions. That does not make them bad people. That, indeed, is a recognition of the history of that industry and a recognition that, when you work in a workplace such as that, the consequences of a workforce not acting collectively are bad for the company and are bad for the national interest. When we have wages being driven down, we see what the consequences of that are in terms of a deskilling—but that is their position.

This is Work Choices on water—nothing more and nothing less. What a lack of ambition for this country. We have a government that wants to eliminate Australian jobs and replace the Australian flag on the back of ships with those of foreign ships. We believe that we should be supporting our industry. I want to see Australian flags flying from Australian vessels, that carry Australian goods and that benefit the Australian economy. Indeed, I would like to see the Australian flag flying proudly over the shipping lanes of the world, which is what our reforms were aimed at— aspiring to its growth.

The red tape argument that the minister puts forward is a red herring. Many in the industry have told us by their submissions to the coastal review that the paperwork involved in the new system put in place from 2012 is basically the same as the former system. You do not have to take my word for that. Let us have a look at the submission by CSL, which is the largest dry-bulk shipowner in Australia—you should go for the biggest. In its submission to a 2014 departmental inquiry into shipping laws, CSL said that it neither opposed nor supported the current arrangements but was more interested in the impact on shipowners from another round of reform, another round of changes. Referring to coastal trade, CSL made this telling point.

The cost impost on Australian shippers of engaging coastal vessels on coastal trades since the introduction of the Coastal Trading Act in July 2012, as a standalone piece of legislation, is minimal. When compared to the previous Navigation Act 1912 and associated Ministerial Guidelines for Granting Licences and Permits to Engage in Australia’s Domestic Shipping, as originally introduced by
the Howard government, it is seen that there has been little cost increase…. The administrative burden of the Coastal Trading Act has slightly raised business administrative costs, however these are not significant.

What is significant about this is a couple of things. One is that you have the largest operator saying 'no significant increase in costs at all'. You also have in that quote a reference to the Navigation Act 1912, which was in place for 100 years until we reformed Australian shipping. It had been put in the too-hard basket for 100 years. Prior to our legislation, there were all sorts of extraordinary provisions in the act—provisions that allowed a ship's captain to literally shoot—and I quote from the legislation—'a lunatic on board'. And they would be free from prosecution if they were to do so. There were all sorts of provisions in there that had been appropriate in 1912. But the parliament put it in the too-hard basket, because shipping is out of sight for most of the time.

Can you imagine having a road safety act, a trucking industry act or a railway act that had been in place with all of its provisions since 1912? What we did was embark on the most significant reform process in a century. We got the support of employers, industry and employees, and that reform came in in 2012 and was immediately undermined by those opposite. For the reforms to work, they needed to be given time. The time in which a business can make a decision to invest in infrastructure, such as having an Australian flagship operating on the international trade routes, is significant. You cannot make a decision one day and have a ship operating the next day. But, because of the uncertainty in the industry created by this government's ideological obsession with anyone who is a member of the Maritime Union of Australia, you have had businesses saying very directly, 'We would want to engage in investment to have an Australian flagged ship because of the incentives that were put in place to create a level playing field with our competitors such as Singapore, and yet we have not done so because we are not sure that the legislation will still be there in a year's time or two years time.' These investments are investments for decades, not for a year or a term of parliament.

That is why the reforms that we had—for example, the creation of the Australian International Shipping Register; of a zero rate of taxation for the Australian flagged ship; and of a zero rate of taxation, on a personal level, for Australian-based seafarers—were the way to go—not a protectionist model that said, 'Unlike our competitors, you must have our national flag on the back of your national operator ship, in terms of exporters, as many of our competitors do,' but a model that said, 'We will look at international best practice and we will enable an Australian flagged ship to have a neutral competitive position with our major competitors such as Singapore.'

We convinced Treasury and Finance—not an easy thing to do, to convince Treasury and Finance—of a zero rate of taxation for a company and a zero rate of income tax for a seafarer. Why did we do that? Because when you looked at the detail it actually was not a cost, because at the moment the Australian seafarers working on a ship with a foreign flag somewhere else are not paying Australian tax anyway. An Australian company is not paying tax, because there are not Australian companies significantly involved in international trade. So this was a smart move.

Then you look at the environment. You look at the incidents that have occurred. On 11 March 2009, off Queensland's Sunshine Coast, the Pacific Adventurer lost the first of 30
shipping containers containing ammonium nitrate. At least one of those containers damaged the ship as it tumbled into the water. A 60-kilometre-long oil slick hit the beaches of the Sunshine Coast and the northern part of Moreton Bay. The cost of cleaning up that spill reached $34 million. Just a year after, on 3 April 2010, the Shen Neng 1 ran aground on the Great Barrier Reef east of Rockhampton. The vessel was 10 kilometres away from normal shipping lanes. It created an oil slick more than three kilometres long. There was no Australian pilot on board. It could have been an absolute disaster that would have cost billions—not millions but billions. An incident on the Great Barrier Reef would have such an impact on our industry. There was no Australian flag there either. Earlier this month, police arrested the captain of a Chinese coal ship for sailing through part of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park without a pilot. Police said the bulk carrier, China Steel Developer, sailed through Hydrographers Passage off Mackay without a pilot as required under law. Since 2004, Australian inspectors have detained 122 international flagged oil tankers because they were overloaded or had defective equipment. In the same period, they detained no Australian flagged oil tankers. That is why it makes absolute sense. Have a look at the incident in New Zealand off Auckland that almost shut down the economy of the North Island as a result of that incident there. This is a huge issue.

In Queensland, the government's rhetoric is already resulting in Australian jobs being lost. Coral Princess Cruises have been transferred to Singaporean interests. To quote the company's founder, Tony Briggs:

The decision will cost Australian jobs and tax receipts … Mr Briggs said the company was enjoying record patronage and had been considering building another $30 million cruise ship but was concerned by cabotage reforms he believed had already been made.

He said that a foreign-crewed and Bermuda-flagged cruise ship, the Caledonian Sky, began operating last year on the Kimberley coast of Western Australia on an itinerary that competed directly with Coral Princess Cruises and a big domestic fleet.

Mr Briggs said changes to cabotage were stupid.

"There will never be another passenger ship built in Australia if there is no certainty on how we can operate," …

He continued: 'It's exporting jobs.' (Time expired)

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (09:45): I would like to thank the member for Grayndler, in his capacity as shadow minister for infrastructure and transport, for his contribution to the debate on the Australian River Co. Limited Bill 2015. The importance of shipping to trade and to our economy means that retaining a viable industry is a must—we all know that. The current coastal trading licensing system has resulted in a substantial increase in the freight rates experienced by shipping users. For example, Bell Bay Aluminium recorded a 63 per cent increase in freight costs in one year.

Mr Albanese interjecting—

Mr McCORMACK: Stay and you will hear some really sensible points being made in this. There are around 1,000 extra administration hours per year on the industry to meet the red tape of the scheme, as estimated by the Business Council of Australia. Between 2000 and 2012 shippings' share of national freight fell from 27 per cent to less than 17 per cent. Over the same period the volume of Australian freight grew by 57 per cent. The government is
continuing, led on this matter by the Deputy Prime Minister, to consult with industry on plans
to implement a more flexible regulatory framework, and that is so very important.

As part of the 2014-15 smaller government budget measure it was announced that
Australian River Co. Limited would be wound up. The government's smaller government
measures involve the abolition or merger of government bodies, where possible, to eliminate
duplication, to remove waste and to streamline government services, thereby reducing the cost
of government administration for taxpayers. That is something we all want. This bill
demonstrates this government's commitment to its smaller government policy, its smaller
government agenda.

The bill will facilitate the transfer of Australian River Co. Limited's assets and liabilities to
the Commonwealth, and it provides for the Commonwealth to be the company's successor at
law. The bill enables the Australian River Co. Limited's current and future claims and
liabilities, including workers compensation, to be managed by the Commonwealth. The date
and transfer of Australian River Co. Limited's assets and liabilities to the Commonwealth
will be set by proclamation. This will allow time for issues relating to the Australian River Co.
Limited's assets and liabilities to be identified and resolved prior to the transfer. Once the
transfer has been completed Australian River Co. Limited can begin its voluntary

I again thank the member for Grayndler for his contribution. With that, I commend the bill
to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance)
(09:48): by leave—I move:
That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

Defence Trade Controls Amendment Bill 2015

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr FEENEY (Batman) (09:49): I am very pleased to rise to speak on the Defence Trade
Controls Amendment Bill 2015. This is of course a bill which seeks to amend the Defence
Trade Controls Act 2012, an act that received royal assent on 13 November 2012. It is a bill
that was of course crafted by the previous Labor government. As a footnote to history, it is a
bill that I took through the Senate in my previous life as a senator. So it is a bill with which I
have a little bit of familiarity. It is a bill that has always enjoyed strong and important support,
at least by the two parties of government represented here in this parliament. That
bipartisanship continues today—and this is of course a bill that is being supported by the
opposition.
I take this opportunity to address the House on a number of key aspects of both the bill and the amendments as they pertain to the substantive act. The act was of course implemented by the previous government so as to meet our international obligations as a nation as set out in the Wassenaar Agreement, the missile technology control regime, the Australia Group and the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Critically, the act also gave effect to the treaty that was made between the government of Australia and the government of the United States concerning defence trade cooperation. One of the remarkable things about this treaty is that it passed the US congress with such swiftness that it was implemented in the United States before it was implemented in this country. For anyone who knows anything about US politics and government, that is a rather remarkable happening.

For Australia, this act brought into place a regime that essentially gave life to our nation's commitment to counter-proliferation activities for weapons of mass destruction. It underlined Australia's commitment to stopping goods and technologies that can be used in conventional, chemical, biological, nuclear and weapons of mass destruction programs and making sure that those technologies do not get into the wrong hands. It is an act that dealt with the fact that Australia had changed obligations pursuant to its treaty with the United States and arising from the Wassenaar Agreement, which brings together the international community in a counter-proliferation regime.

Nonetheless, the act, in seeking to control technologies that can be used in conventional, chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, did mean that we were introducing a regulatory regime in Australia that involved change—for some, quite significant change. The act applies equally to the defence industries, to industry more broadly and to the university and research sectors. The act introduced new export controls on the intangible supply of technology listed in the Defence and Strategic Goods List, the prohibition of publication of Defence and Strategic Goods List technologies and the regulation of brokering activities. These were all significant things.

Brokering activities might mean an Australian entity is involved in the purchasing and sale of materials and that transaction happens entirely outside of Australia. As a consequence, that transaction would not previously have been one that was regularised by Australia, it was not controlled by any Australian agency, but by virtue of our international treaty obligations it became an activity that Australian policymakers now needed to take an interest in—and from that resolve quite a deal flows. Also important for the university and research sectors was the fact that a lot of technologies, including dual-use technologies, were now prohibited from being published—because when published they can no longer be controlled. This was potentially of great significance to our university and research sectors. Dual-use technologies might be entirely legitimate subjects for research, for business transactions and for investment but can also be used in weapons of mass destruction. As a consequence, they suddenly attract a control aspiration from government.

So there were a number of significant challenges in this act, and today's bill seeks to amend the act in certain ways that realise stakeholders’ concerns and experience with the act and make sure that this regulatory regime operates all the better.

In particular, in order to strengthen Australia's export controls there are now new provisions that are aimed at stopping goods and technologies that can be used in weapons of mass destruction, as I have just described. We need to remain alert to the fact that these
provisions apply equally to the industry, university and research sectors. The Defence Trade Controls Act 2012 restricts the non-physical export of military and dual-use technology through supply by electronic means, publication and brokering. I have already touched upon those briefly.

The transition period that was offered in that act was a two-year implementation period. That two-year implementation period delayed the onset of the offence provisions found within that act. So the transition period was of great importance. The provisions of the act came into force at the end of that two-year period and the offence provisions then became active.

One of the most important things about this bill that is now before the House is that the Defence Trade Controls Amendment Bill will seek to amend the act and extend the delay to the offence provisions found in the substantive act. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is broad stakeholder support for the amendment bill. From the university sector's perspective it is important that the bill be passed as soon as possible. While this bill does not address all of that sector's concerns, it greatly improves the situation in relation to publication and verbal supply of controlled technologies. It also enables organisations to obtain broad permits at the project level, permits that would be valid for five years, and streamlined permit processing for lower-risk suppliers.

The Senate Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade Committee has played a key role in identifying problems with the original act and championing ongoing scrutiny. Following its original report in October 2012, it has been conducting regular six-monthly reviews of the implementation of the act during that 24-month transition period.

As I said, the transition period of the Defence Trade Controls Act 2012 ceases on 16 May 2015. At this time the offence provisions within that bill would activate unless this amendments bill, with a further 12-month delay to the offence provisions, is passed. So, this bill will amend the Defence Trade Controls Act 2012. It will continue to strengthen Australia's export controls. It will continue to make sure that we have a regulatory regime here in Australia that meets our international obligations. This is a bill that demonstrates that we have sought to establish a regime that is responsive to stakeholder concerns and continues, in an organic way, to listen to the concerns of stakeholders.

Due to the stakeholder concerns about the impact of the new export controls the commencement of these controls were delayed by the transition period. A Strengthened Export Control Steering Group was established under section 74A of the act, and that export control steering group was to test the legislation and continue to advise government on legislative amendments during the transition period.

During this transition phase the Department of Defence, in partnership with that Strengthened Export Control Steering Group and the Department of Industry has conducted extensive consultation on the potential impacts of the act, and proposed measures to reduce those impacts. And there have been significant conversations and discussions there about the cost to universities, research and industry of the regulatory impacts of this bill.

The consultation has informed the development of the amendments to this bill and, in broad terms, the amendments found in this bill provide an additional 12-month implementation period before the offence provisions that are found in sections 10, 13, 14, 15
and 18, and the record-keeping requirements in subsections 58(1) and 58(2) commence operation.

It provides two new exceptions to the supply offence in section 10—firstly, for the oral supply of defence and strategic goods listed technology, where the supply is not the provision of access to DSGL technology and is not for use in a weapons-of-mass destruction program or for a military end use; and, secondly for the supply of dual-use DSGL technology, where the supply is preparatory to the publication of part 2 DSGL technology. It extends the exception to the offence of supplying DSGL technology without a permit to or from members of the Australian Public Service, the Australian Defence Force, the Australian Federal Police, the state and territory police and to include employees of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation and the Australian Secret Intelligence Service.

The bill allows for applicants to apply for supply and brokering permits on behalf of projects and for permits to be issued to project participants. It narrows the publication offence to publishing military DSGL technology where no approval has been given or the publication is in contravention of a condition of an approval.

It allows the minister to prohibit publication of military or dual-use technology where that technology would prejudice the defence, security or international relations of Australia. It allows the Secretary of the Department of Defence to issue an interim prohibition notice for the publication of military or dual-use technology where the secretary considers there may be grounds for the minister to introduce a prohibition notice.

Further, the bill amends the brokering definition of 'arranges' to be an exhaustive definition and to include that the broker must receive money or a non-cash benefit, which includes property or services in any form other than money.

The bill narrows the scope of the brokering offence in section 15(1) of the act to apply to the brokering of goods or technology listed in part one of the DSGL and it establishes new offences for brokering dual-use goods or technology without a permit or in contravention of a condition of a permit where the broker knows, is reckless or negligent as to whether there goods or technology may be for a weapon of mass destruction program or even a military end use. The bill extends the exception for the brokering offence to include employees of ASIO and ASIS.

The bill includes two additional exceptions to the brokering offence found in section 15(1). Firstly, where either the brokered supply is from or the broker conducts their brokering from within a state that is a member of the four main export control regimes—those are the ones I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks—the Wassenaar Arrangement, the Missile Technology Control Regime, the Nuclear Suppliers Group and the Australia Group; and that that state is listed in a legislative instrument or the brokered supplier is in connection with a contract specified in a legislative instrument, and these contracts may include a government business.

The bill also allows the minister to direct a person to seek a permit for the brokering of dual-use goods or technology so that such conduct, where identified, can be regularised. It requires the minister, a delegate of the minister or the secretary of the department to consider criteria prescribed in the regulation and have regard for any other matters the decision maker considers appropriate before making any decision under the act that requires the decision
maker to consider whether an activity would prejudice Australia's security, its defence or its international relations.

Perhaps, finally, the bill provides for the continuing review of the operation of the act except for parts 3 and 4. The review will occur initially two years after the commencement of section 10 and then, subsequently, at intervals of not longer than five years. The minister must table a copy of the review report in each house of parliament so that the scrutiny of this legislation remains front and centre for our legislators.

It is fair to say that the original act raised serious concerns for a number of universities in relation to both publication in the formal sense and restrictions on verbal supply of information about potential dual-use technologies. They of course can range from engineering products to information about biological diseases. There was opportunity for those concerns to be considered prior to the passage of the act following a Senate Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade Committee report on the original legislation in October 2012. The Strengthened Export Controls Steering Group was established to work through the issues for universities and other research bodies and that group has been led, and led well, by the Chief Scientist.

This continues to be a legislative regime that is of great importance to Australia. It is our continuing claim to be a nation that supports strengthened international regimes that counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and that we are an international citizen that seeks to work in multilateral forums collaboratively with other nation states to make sure that these sorts of technologies are not misused and do not contribute to a heightened threat in our world. In that sense, our work in this space goes to Australia's international reputation and our conduct as a nation.

In this act, we find Australia gave expression to and realised its treaty obligations, and now in this bill we see that our legislative regime is subject to continuing strengthening and refinement as Australia seeks to meet its treaty obligations and demonstrate its credentials as a power committed to opposing proliferation.

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Minister for Social Services) (10:05): In summing up the Defence Trade Controls Amendment Bill 2015 on behalf of the minister responsible, I note that the bill will enable Defence to focus its regulatory attention on higher-risk activities with respect to the non-physical supply and transfer of defence control goods while dealing more efficiently with lower-risk activities.

The original act established a two-year transition period during which stakeholders had an opportunity to work with Defence to address concerns and provide feedback through the Strengthened Export Controls Steering Group chaired by Australia's Chief Scientist, Professor Ian Chubb AC.

The steering group has tested the legislation over the past two years and has advised the government on the amendments contained in this bill. The work of the steering group has been critical to the development of these amendments, and the government will seek to extend the steering group's appointments to cover the extended implementation period detailed in this bill.

I thank the opposition for their support of this important legislation and I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Minister for Social Services) (10:06): by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015

Second Reading

Debate resumed on the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms BIRD (Cunningham) (10:07): I move:

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:

(1) notes that:

(a) whilst this bill is designed to improve regulatory oversight of the sector, it does not address the damage to individuals that has already occurred or propose action to engage with the community to minimise future problems;

(b) the actions of unscrupulous Registered Training Organisations and brokers have had serious impacts on vulnerable individuals; and

(c) reports of people being left with large debts and no qualification or useless qualifications must be addressed; and

(2) calls on the Australian Government to:

(a) act with more urgency to ensure the protection of students is prioritised;

(b) immediately seek a consumer protection information campaign by the ACCC, including advice for people who need to seek redress, and consider other mechanisms available to strengthen consumer protections; and

(c) support Labor's call for the Auditor-General to conduct an audit on the use of VET FEE-Help."

I want to speak to colleagues today in support of the amendment that I have moved on behalf of the opposition to this bill and express my hope that the government sees that it is a reasonable amendment and supports it. I would also foreshadow that we will propose a detailed amendment that I believe is also sensible and reasonable and I hope the government will be able to support it.

Having made those comments, I would indicate that Labor supports the bill passing and we seek to make some constructive amendments that will strengthen the message and the operation of the changes. We are acutely aware of the individual stories of stress, hardship and suffering of vulnerable individuals that are emerging every day—indeed, again last night on the ABC. We read them in newspaper stories, we see them on television news items and we hear them in our electorate offices. We strongly believe that the government needs to act swiftly to deploy any and all consumer protection activities at its disposal. We recognise that this bill seeks to improve the powers, effectiveness and responsiveness of the national regulator and the national standards, and we of course support that. We do believe that this is not the right time or environment to lengthen the automatic time frame for registrations.
However, we will suggest some alteration to seek to make this an earned benefit for high-performing and low-risk RTOs rather than the standard.

However, Labor is very concerned that the government's sole focus to date has been on the regulation and investigation side of the story, and now the timing is imperative. It is well overdue for the government to take action to strengthen the consumer focused actions that are available to them. We must be out in public spaces providing well developed and usable consumer guides and information to the general public to make them more aware of the unscrupulous activities that are taking place in their streets and shopping malls, as well as on websites and social media sites they visit. We need an organisation such as the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to develop a full package, as they have done for other sectors that have proven to be susceptible to these sorts of aggressive and unprincipled marketing and recruitment practices.

On the consumers' page of the ACCC website are listed debt and debt collection; groceries; health, home and car; internet and phone; misleading claims and advertising; online shopping; petrol, diesel and LPG; prices and receipts; and sales and delivery. It is our view that we need a section of resources developed for consumer advice and information on vocational training courses, fees and debts. The extensive information available in each section provides sound advice to everyone, with checklists, warning signs, suggested strategies for decision making and ways to find a reasonable recourse when things go wrong. All of this information is needed in our communities now to be able to provide preventative advice to people and to help those who have been caught already, signed up to courses they could never complete or that were so shoddy that they would not be able to provide a pathway to work or further study as they had hoped and, indeed, were promised.

The situation is even more distressing and difficult for those people who signed up for debts, usually unaware that they were doing so and subsequently discovering that they had a debt for, on average, $20,000 and very often no qualification to show for it. These people need advice and assistance to seek redress, whether that is a direct refund from the training provider or waiving of debt by the Commonwealth. They need information on how to go about that and what their rights might be.

On Monday of this week, the Senate committee inquiry into the private VET sector tabled its interim report. This indicated the evidence received by the committee specifically addressing the significant growth in the volume of VET FEE-HELP loans. Under the section of the interim report headed 'Marketing techniques used by private providers', they stated:

The committee has received a number of submissions that highlight concerning reports of aggressive marketing techniques used by private education companies and education brokers. The committee is concerned about the link between access to government funding and a subsequent increase in targeted marketing, particularly that which de-emphasises the real cost of undertaking VET and misconstrues the costs associated with VET FEE-HELP.

I would encourage interested members to look at the submissions that have been made to this inquiry. In relation to the consumer matters our amendment seeks to address, I would particularly draw members' attention to the submission from the Consumer Action Law Centre. Much of the evidence and recommendations of this submission describe the abuses that are occurring in the VET market and make recommendations about the powers of ASQA, as the national regulator, to address consumer protection and consumer rights issues. I
particularly draw members' attention to recommendation 6 of that submission, where the Consumer Action Law Centre says:

We recommend that ASQA's jurisdiction be extended: a. to ensure that appropriate policies exist in relation to selling techniques, unfair prices and quality. These factors should be taken into account when accrediting a provider, and determining whether accreditation should continue; b. to regulate education brokers and unregistered subcontracted providers; and c. to consider consumer protection issues, including unfair contract terms in private VET provider contracts within the meaning of section 23 of the Australian Consumer Law. Consideration of standard terms and conditions should be an aspect of accreditation.

The submission gave a number of examples. I would like to share what the Consumer Action Law Centre found in their own review of what was out there. The first example they give is:

Tuition fees are not refundable or transferable after the commencement date, except in the case of extreme illness which precludes a student from staying in Australia. This must be supported by a doctor's certificate and the refund of unused tuition fees will be sent to the student's home country. All applications for refund must be in writing and must be received by the Institute no later than three months after the commencement of the course. Applications received after three months will not be granted.

A second example is:

A full refund less a $370 administration fee will be given to students who cancel or withdraw their enrolment in writing within five days of enrolment. If you are studying certificate III-IV in fitness, the student kit will not be despatched until after the five-day cooling off period. No refunds will be given after five days of the date of enrolment, and the student is liable to pay the balance of any fees owing.

It goes on with some other examples.

The Consumer Action Law Centre was very concerned that the insertion of these detailed requirements was causing confusion to some students and leading to them to miss out on their protections and rights. The submission goes on further to specifically talk about VET Fee-Help. It says:

We are also concerned that the VET Fee-Help model encourages private VET providers to provide barriers to withdrawal before the census date, being the date they receive guaranteed payment from the government. Students have reported difficulties with withdrawing from courses prior the census dates and being referred to marketing teams that persuade them to continue with or to defer a course that actually does not suit their needs or that they will never complete. Once the census date has passed, there are limited incentives for unscrupulous VET providers to provide ongoing support to students.

The marketing of VET Fee-Help loans to disadvantaged and vulnerable students is also worrying. We are particularly concerned about studying now, pay later slogans that fail to highlight the actual costs of study and marketing TAFE Fee-Help loans to students who are unlikely to be able to repay their loans. These sorts of slogans draw upon behavioural biases such as myopia and overconfidence and are more likely to result in students enrolling in courses that are inappropriate to their needs.

So what do the serious consumer issues mean in reality, in the lives of real people living in our communities? This has only been well documented recently and, if members of the House have missed the media reports, I would like to take them through some of the stories that have been publicly aired. Last night on the ABC’s 7.30, we had another report of a large training provider recruiting students from a shopping centre with incentives such as free iPads and laptops, with these people then heading straight to the local pawnshop to sell them. The report spoke to Dylan Palmer in Lowood, Queensland, who was travelling three hours each day to
Brisbane to study digital gaming. Dylan has Asperger's Syndrome and found that the teachers at the college provided very little support when he was running out of time. He is now left with $27,000 VET Fee-Help debt and he is unsure whether he will ever be able to finish the qualification. He was excited, he said, to be studying digital gaming—he was obviously very interested in it. What is so devastating is that Dylan's experience with training may now seriously affect his confidence and put him off participating in a training course again.

On 28 February ABC radio reported another example of a single mum, Samantha Saxton, who had enrolled in a diploma of salon management and Cert III in hairdressing. She now has a $33,000 VET Fee-Help debt and has had to go to TAFE and start again. She said that she figures that she would have learnt more from Youtube than she did at the college. Her employer said that Samantha was unable to perform tasks, such as cutting men's hair, restyle cutting and foils—tasks that a graduate should be able to complete. Samantha said she complained at least 10 times about the quality of the course, but no steps were taken to rectify those problems. On 26 February ABC's 7.30 did another report on another provider targeting disadvantaged areas and welfare recipients and selling door-to-door. Sales staff were pressured to sign up students, and many sales staff completed the literacy, language and numeracy test on behalf of the students they were signing up. A former careers adviser said the free iPad or laptop was very influential in signing up these students.

Last year in Hobart Nola Smith encountered a door-to-door salesperson from this training provider. The double diploma in counselling and community services online courses appealed to the single mum of three, as she was able to stay at home with the kids and show her oldest child that she was also doing some study. She was promised no up-front course fees and advised that if she did not turn over $53,000 she would not have to repay the fees. She was influenced by the free laptop, as she has a 13 year old in high school and could not afford to buy him a laptop. When she went to complete the online course application, the salesperson took over and filled it out for her. Nola has been informed that she will probably still have to pay the money back and finds it a very scary prospect as a single parent.

In The Age on 16 February, a Melbourne job hunter was targeted after entering her details in jobs advertisement site. A broker cold-called her and persuaded her to enrol in a diploma of management. The broker guided her through the enrolment, saying there was no need for her to read the details. She did not even start the course and, at 19 years of age, she has a debt of almost $24,000. On 27 January ABC am reported Shaquille Ray's experience of the training provider in Parramatta. He was enrolled in a digital media degree; he found the course content had been copied directly from Wikipedia, which he said he knew because he had authored the Wikipedia entry. He is trying to have his $20,000 debt reversed but the college has refused. He referred to his concern about his fellow students, one of whom was illiterate. He said there were no prerequisites, except for a questionnaire for enrolment in the course. On 14 November last year The Australian had a report from United Voice, this union representing childcare workers, that 80 per cent of childcare RTOs had recently failed audits. The National Secretary, David O'Byrne, said some of the qualifications were clearly not worth the paper they were written on because some childcare centres were refusing to hire applicants who had graduated from courses, some of which had only lasted a few weeks. Those students were being told by employers that the time and effort they had put into those courses was not going to be recognised because of the quality of the course.
In October last year, on ABC radio, the chief executive of Adult Learning Australia, Sally Thompson, said that she saw many disadvantaged students being recruited to training companies outside the local Centrelink office. She said the promoted courses were expensive and that they were not appropriate for long-term unemployed people with higher needs. In particular, she said:

Our members often deal with people with quite low skills; they often deal with people with English as a second language, people with literacy difficulties and they've been telling us for a long time that they're just inundated with these kinds of spruikers … The spruikers tend to hang out in places where they think marginalised people will be.

These are the sorts of concerns we have seen over recent months in the media—real stories. I think those should, if nothing else, drive us to urgent action. In the second half of last year, when these reports were getting more regular, the shadow minister for higher education, research, innovation and industry, Senator Kim Carr, and I wrote to the Auditor-General to ask for an inquiry into the use—and indeed misuse—of VET FEE-HELP to ensure that skills funding is being used in accordance with the intention of the legislation and not being squandered by unscrupulous providers. We were pleased to receive advice in January that the Auditor-General has requested that a performance audit of VET FEE-HELP be included in the Australian National Audit Office's 2015-16 work program.

This amendment invites the government to publicly state again its support for that review. This situation is so serious, and its impact on vulnerable people so distressing, that it does require urgent action. For these reasons, Labor is calling on the government to support the amendment before the House today. I would like to take some time to talk to the specific details of the bill. Protecting and enforcing regulations and standards that seek to protect the quality of the vocational education sector and ensure its viability and reputation are critically important tasks for government. I have spoken at length on many occasions about the significance of the postsecondary education sector to participation and productivity achievement of the nation and its contribution to growing national wealth and economic diversity. It is also a key driver of the ability of individuals from diverse educational experience to achieve the knowledge and skills they need to participate in work or further education.

The nation was well served for many decades by our public TAFE system. Unfortunately, over recent years we have seen the undermining of the funding and staffing of our TAFEs across the nation. The serious concern this has caused among the general public has been well demonstrated by the prominence of TAFE campaigns in the Victorian and Queensland elections and in the upcoming New South Wales election. I believe that for the preceding decades, when TAFE was the major provider in our system, many other countries in fact looked to Australia, looked at the strength and depth of our TAFE system, to learn from our world-class vocational training. Indeed, as many of us know if we have family and friends with young people who have completed a trade or training in our TAFE system, if these young people travelled they were snapped up overseas because the quality of our skills education was so well regarded. We have also had many strong performers in the private training sector, as well as large and medium employers who have developed their own effective training sections. These providers also benefit from a rigorous quality focus in the
sector, as the sharks that are feeding in this market are uncaring of which genuine providers have their viability destroyed by their unscrupulous activities.

The proposals in this bill that go to providing improved definitions and clarifications to enable better regulatory coverage are worthwhile, including the increased capacity for more prompt and effective action to protect quality as problems emerge in the sector. As I indicated at the start, the proposal that does give Labor some concern is the amendment to the registration period from five to seven years. It seems to be exactly the wrong time to be loosening the regulation by requiring registration reviews after a longer period of operation. If it is an option, I believe it should be earned and therefore an incentive for providers to be more rigorous in their own quality management and student protection systems. I understand from the comments of national regulator ASQA’s CEO to Senate estimates last week that it is intended to increase the focus of resources on the intelligence- or complaint-generated audits and reduce the focus on the known, predictable periodic audits. While that would seem on face value to make perfect sense, it is our view that at this time it sends a contrary signal to the broader VET market, at a time when the message should be consistent, until the serious market issues are well resolved.

I am aware that many members of the government have made public comments also on the concerns that have been raised with them in their community from people who have been caught up in these unscrupulous practices. I believe the opposition's amendment provides an opportunity for us to join together in calling for a renewed focus and a very public conversation about the consumer protections we need to prioritise in order to protect vulnerable people who are being manipulated for a profit in so many of the examples that have been brought to our attention. For that reason, I commend the amendment to the House.

In the bit of time that I have left I want to take people to the issue that I think is at the heart of so much of our concern about this, from my own experience in my electorate with people who have raised these issues with me, and my colleagues who have talked to me. The issues about the operation of the market, the quality and reputational importance of the sector, and the national education and economic development task are all critically important. They are absolutely significant tasks for our national government. And I think that at a critical point in time we have an opportunity here to build a very sustainable, high-reputation sector and to stem what is an emerging flood of problems. But within that there are individual people who are having their dreams slashed, their confidence and sense of wellbeing demolished and, I would argue, their ability to continue to engage in the future with training and education seriously undermined by what is happening.

These people—such as the single mum we talked about, the young man with Asperger's syndrome, the refugee who has arrived with poor literacy and numeracy skills or the young person who has come out of school in an area with high youth unemployment and is struggling to get a foothold in the employment market—very often are out in our public spaces. They are particularly in Centrelink queues, in shopping centres, at train stations or online, desperately going through job seeker websites.

I encourage members to go online and search for a job you might have been interested in if you were a young person starting out, perhaps a shop assistant or sales type job. Just watch what comes up. I have heard stories from individuals who thought they were applying for a job through one of these sites—and there is the example we heard of in the media report—but
suddenly discover they have actually signed up as having an interest in doing training. They are then pressured and told, 'If you do this, there will be a job at the end of it.' All sorts of promises are made to them.

Their commitment as individuals to seeking either a training place or a job is something that we should commend them for. Despite the difficulties they are dealing with, they are actively out there, trying to get a start. The fact that somebody can come in at that point in their life and with foresight and knowledge unscrupulously take advantage of them and walk away with a profit and leave them with a significant debt is absolutely disgraceful. I have heard in some examples from my colleagues that some of these 'spruikers', as Sally Thompson from Adult Learning Australia described them, make comments to people such as, 'Don't worry about the debt. You will never have to repay it. Until you earn $53,000 a year, you will not have to repay it.' In actual fact, the reality for them is that it is still going to be a debt of concern in their life.

I would hope that for those individuals who are told, 'You can sign up for this debt for this course and you will never have to repay it because you will not earn $53,000,' the reality is quite the opposite and that they actually do well and go from strength to strength and get past the threshold for domestic students to start repaying the debt. I would hope that is the wish of all of us for them. One group of retired people in a community group that just wanted to get some computer skills were told, 'Sign up to this diploma to get them, and don't worry about the debt. You are all retired. You will never have to repay it.' I would hope that some of these spruikers and companies start to understand that, whether they have to repay it or not, for vulnerable people on limited incomes a debt hanging over their heads is a serious stressor in their lives. These are, at heart, the human stories. These are the real stories of people in our community who simply out of a wish to better themselves and being not well-informed consumers in this market are being specifically sought out and unscrupulously used by these operators.

I can think of no greater task for a parliament such as ours than to encourage people to engage in education. I think that is what we all want to do. I have been working on education for many years in this parliament and I have found good, solid commitment to it from people across all parties. We want people to engage. We want them to participate. We want the disadvantages that they may have carried with them from life circumstances to be addressed so that they can get a good-quality education and have access to work and full participation in our communities. That is an absolutely critical task for government.

So when we see this sort of activity I do not think we can drag our feet. I do not think we can consider that the need for action is not urgent. There are people out there today walking the streets of suburbs, knocking on doors. When I returned to my electorate last Friday, I had a letter from a lady saying that she was visiting a friend in one of my suburbs when somebody knocked on the door and asked, 'Are you permanent residents and under 65?' She said, 'No, we are over 65. Why do you want to know?' He said, 'The government is giving away free laptops. But you don't qualify, so I will keep these.' To be fair, if they had been under 65, he may then have sat down and gone fully through what the training was that he was going to sign them up for, what the debt requirements were and so forth.

I have no doubt that these people are out there in the suburbs now as I speak. As they go through those suburbs, I think we need to be acting swiftly. I hope that the government's bill
is one way in which we can do that by strengthening those regulations and by looking to improve the speediness and effectiveness of the ability of the government and the regulator to act. I think that is good, and I commend those amendments.

I would say to the government that I think including at this point in time an amendment that says that instead of five years registration people get seven years registration is just the wrong signal. I understand the intention of the regulator and the argument that those are well known, predictable audits and so therefore you are not going to catch terribly much in them. I do understand that. And I do understand the auditor's desire to focus on the place where they are getting intelligence, reports and media stories saying that there is a problem. I understand that as well. I also understand the argument that in the higher education sector under the TEQSA university regulator people are registered for seven years and so there is some consistency, particularly for those who are dual sector providers and have to be registered with both. I understand all of that. It makes sense. But my argument would be that this is exactly the wrong time for this. Until we get on top of these practices and put action in place to ensure that, as much as possible, we have strangled off this sort of behaviour and this sort of unscrupulous exploitation of very vulnerable people, it is the wrong time to be moving a proposal in the bill such as this. So I would ask government to rethink that. It might be something to revisit further down the track, but I think it muddies the whole message at this point in time and heads us in exactly the wrong direction.

I commend the opposition's amendment to members, and I hope that they have a look at it in the spirit it is intended. I know that members opposite have also been making public comment about their concern about vulnerable people in their communities who are coming to them with a great deal of worry about what is happening. So I hope that we can get to that point in the debate, and I commend the amendment to the House.

Ms PRICE (Durack) (10:38): I rise today to speak on a bill the subject of which is at the very core of the quality of our vocational education and training—the quality of service providers, which impacts upon the quality of graduates. It therefore has a direct impact on business and Australia's productivity. The National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015, once implemented, will have the effect of improving the quality of Australia's vocational education and training scheme by: enabling the Australian government to create new quality standards to quickly address problems with vocational education and training providers or courses; requiring anyone and everyone who is marketing a course to clearly identify which registered training organisation is providing the qualification; extending the registration period for RTOs from five to seven years to enable the national training regulator to focus its attention on investigating and acting upon high-risk and poor quality providers; and making technical amendments to improve the administration of the act.
I have chosen to speak on this bill for three reasons. First, it is pivotal to the future of young Australians. Second, in Durack, my electorate, I see remarkable VET institutions and teachers, and young students who are doing very well and securing great jobs both here and abroad. Third, I am distressed by the less than complimentary anecdotes and comments about aspects of the system generally as it relates to quality of training and to waste. Therefore, I say loud and clear that service providers are on notice. It is taxpayers' money, after all, and providers must be accountable. We are all watching. Not only is poor service, in the broadest terms, unjust to our young people and students; it is also damaging our productivity, as a nation, and our reputation. We heard from the member for Cunningham about unscrupulous training providers. We must put an end to this and be able to quickly address problems with vocational education and training providers or their courses. Of course, there are many high quality service providers in Australia who already meet the quality standards. They are to be congratulated.

My large electorate of Durack, of some 1.6 million square kilometres, occupies a hefty portion of the great state of Western Australia, and VET courses are taught in a range of ways and places—in the old TAFEs, in schools, by private organisations; the list goes into the thousands in Western Australia—and tighter controls are needed to achieve consistent quality outcomes. To provide some context, here are some key facts about vocational education and training in Western Australia. In 2013, there were 164,000 public VET students in Western Australia. The Australian government will provide Western Australia with $199 million in funding to support the subsidisation of VET training. In 2012, there were 52,000 VET qualifications awarded through the public VET system. There are approximately 42,000 apprentices and trainees in Western Australia, and 2,200 of these are currently in Durack. There are 507 registered training organisations in Western Australia, as at January 2014. Western Australian students undertaking a VET qualification have a 34 per cent likelihood of completing that qualification compared to 36 per cent nation-wide—not great stats, I am afraid. In 2013, approximately 11,000 international students enrolled in VET qualifications in Western Australia.

So, we are talking large numbers—masses of student, domestic and international, regional, rural and remote, and over 500 service providers who are responsible on behalf of the government for the delivery and quality of the system and its outputs. This is where the bill we are debating today is intended to have some gravitas, effecting some powerful and positive changes. Western Australia undertook an independent review of the vocational education and training sector in 2013, leading to the publishing of a report. The report recommendations had a flawless focus on improving the structure of the sector, governance arrangements and training outcomes. The Western Australian findings are well aligned to the intent of the bill we are debating today—which will have the effect of improving the quality of Australia's vocational education and training scheme, primarily by improving accountability and governance and quickly addressing problems with providers or courses.

In my introduction I mentioned that there were three reasons I wished to join the debate today. One is my distress when I hear comments about aspects of the system generally relating to the quality of training and training providers and to waste. The introduction of a quality standard via this bill should go a fair way towards addressing this matter. The Standards for Registered Training Organisations, established in 2012, were intended to ensure
national consistency and compliance across Australia's VET system. As part of the government's reforms to the VET system, new standards are set to take effect this year, which will strengthen requirements on RTOs and third parties. Importantly, they must advise prospective and current students of debts and government subsidies before students sign up to a course.

Secondly, in order to overcome the change cycle for standards, which is around 12 months, a new instrument, equivalent to emergency powers, is being introduced, to be used only for serious and critical issues impacting on the quality of training being provided to students. Known or emerging quality issues that compromise the student and, let us be frank, the industry in Australia as a whole can be readily and quickly addressed. It gives industry, states and territories a direct avenue for action by the Commonwealth to deal with their concerns.

Let us look now at the marketing of training. A measure being introduced in this bill has come about in direct response to the negative impact of marketing by third parties in the training sector and, in particular, in the VET FEE-HELP market. In my electorate and, indeed, more broadly in my travels across Western Australia, I hear many worrying comments about this issue. The new requirement will firmly address the actual marketing of training and the type of information that must be provided to prospective students, including VET FEE-HELP loans, state entitlements and subsidy arrangements they sign up to. This is a matter of providing good information and ensuring people understand it, as well as its impacts, which were referred to by the previous speaker, the member for Cunningham. It must be clear to all students what they are signing up for, every single time their debt level is due to increase—and, hopefully, if someone is being offered a laptop, they also understand what their ultimate exposure is going to be. The standards make it clear that RTOs are responsible for service delivery by brokers on their behalf, thus providing clarity, accountability and better governance. This accountability has been problematic.

On the performance of RTOs, new mechanisms to assess performance, albeit of poor-performing providers, include targeted and random investigations and audits, leading to early detection of noncompliance. Having visited students in vocational education and training institutions across my electorate of Durack—in places like Geraldton, Exmouth, Carnarvon, Broome, Kununurra and Morawa—and discussed the merits as well as the problems of the VET system, I feel strongly that the amendment moved to this bill will not only benefit the students but also benefit local businesses who employ these students.

The introduction and successful passage of this bill builds on the work the government is already doing to improve quality. The bill adds to the strong reforms the government is instigating to expand quality across the VET sector, including new national standards for training providers, reforming the National VET Regulator and a new National Training Complaints Hotline. The government could not be more serious about supporting vocational education and training, together with higher education.

The National Vocation and Education Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015, once implemented, will effectively improve the quality of Australia's education and training scheme. No-one can argue with that. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms MacTIERNAN (Perth) (10:47): Labor support this legislation, the National Vocation and Education Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015. We think it is incredibly important
that we provide stronger protections for people entering into vocational education and training programs. We are in fact deeply alarmed by what is going on across Australia in this regard.

I start by saying, though, that these are very complex issues, and their relationship with policy decisions can have profound consequences. For example, in Western Australia, since 2013, TAFE fees increased by 515 per cent. That seems extraordinary, but that is the case. We are seeing vocational education and training becoming an incredibly expensive model. What that has done is put TAFE, publicly provided vocational education and training, out of the financial reach of many people, and obviously this has created an environment where people are increasingly looking to private providers for something that is much more financially achievable.

The explosion of concerns about the quality of product coming from private providers must be seen in the context of the massive walking-away by government, by state government, from the responsibility of providing, at a reasonable and affordable cost, access to vocational education and training. Indeed, I note that, in the United States of America now, they are so concerned about the quality and the level of skill formation that state jurisdictions are going in the opposite direction and reducing or even removing altogether fees for vocational education to ensure that they get more people into vocational education and training. So you have to look at the context. These things do not occur in a vacuum. The proliferation of companies that are behaving in a questionably ethical way arises in the context of public sector providers becoming more and more expensive and driving people from that system.

I will talk about a couple of cases. For example, in Western Australia, concerns have been raised about a company called iCollege, which offers a whole raft of programs, including some 26 business courses. The fees range from around $300 to $2,000 per course. Because they provide programs across state borders, unlike others which are offered only in Western Australia, these are subject to ASQA regulation. These programs, which are in most cases not accredited anywhere, are attracting lots of students. Now, there has been an inquiry by ASQA into the courses that are being offered, but ASQA found that they were not in violation of any law. Quite clearly, the reason these investigations emerged is that people were investing in these programs, signing up for up to $2,000 per course, only to find that the qualification they received was not accredited anywhere that was recognised within Australia.

ASQA quite rightly points out that because iCollege is not a registered training organisation it is not in violation and that really this is a case of buyer beware. We think that that is a very irresponsible attitude for government to be taking, hence the amendments that we are moving here. We want it to be recognised that there are issues of consumer protection that need to be taken into account. This is not simply a question of raising the standards for the registered training organisations but of recognising that there are people operating outside the system or even RTOs operating in a way, with their marketing, that is unscrupulous and is leading many vulnerable people into an unacceptable situation where they are paying good money, taking on board what governments of all persuasions are telling them—that they have to get out there; they have to get themselves skilled; they have to get themselves trained—undertaking these programs and then, unfortunately, finding that they are left with a qualification that is worth nothing. For a government to say that it is a case of buyer beware is extremely unfortunate. Many decades ago we recognised that buyer beware was not a fair principle for us to be operating under and we put in place a whole range of consumer
protection mechanisms. It seems to me that today, as unemployment is increasing, when the skills gap is increasing and when the cost of government provided vocational education is increasing dramatically, we have an absolute obligation to make sure that these practices are stamped out. That is why we do not believe that this legislation, whilst we do support its general thrust, is going to cover all the bases that need to be covered in providing adequate consumer protection for those people, many of whom are unemployed and desperately seeking to obtain a qualification.

In Western Australia, ASQA covers only international students and RTOs that operate outside as well as inside Western Australia's borders. The rest of the sector is regulated internally by the WA Training Accreditation Council. I am not being critical of the TAC and I perhaps understand why Western Australia decided that it wanted to preserve its own entity, to ensure a proper focus on Western Australia. It is unclear, and I cannot see anything in any of the papers that have been produced that will clarify how this legislation is going to permeate its way into Western Australia, which has not signed up to ASQA. I certainly hope that the minister in the reply is able to provide some clarification. We would be very keen to find out what arrangements, undertakings or negotiations have taken place with Western Australia to ensure that we see these provisions paralleled in the work of the WA Training Accreditation Council. That is an important query that we have. We do not know, because it is not evident from the materials that have been made available, whether or not these protections are going to permeate into Western Australia with its Training Accreditation Council.

I want also to reflect on one of the anomalies that arise out of having two of these entities. I understand that there are resource issues, but we are getting feedback that ASQA is coming over to Western Australia and spending time auditing TAFE courses which have already been audited by the WA Training Accreditation Council. Given that there is so much concern about the operation of RTOs and about people operating in an unethical way, it seems to me that our duplicating auditing processes is quite bizarre. We have a TAC which is able to audit the TAFE institutions. I would have thought that we should be working to establish a greater degree of cooperation so that TAFE staff do not have to go through two sets of accreditation while we clearly have so much unattended business going on. Last night on 7.30, there was another expose—there has been a mounting volume of these—showing a college that has a graduation rate of 10 per cent, despite claiming something like $290 million in government funding by VET FEE-HELP.

So we have two separate problems. We have the problem that those companies operating outside of the system that are not registered RTOs really need to be subjected to some form of scrutiny so that people are not being led down the wrong path; we also have an even higher level of obligation where we have federal and state government or federal government funding going into the proliferation of private RTOs that are reeling people into the VET system and delivering very much substandard training. I think this is where we have to be very, very careful about what we have been doing generally. We see it in the university sector. As Vice-Chancellor Greg Craven said, under the current funding models that we are looking at, we will get Ma and Pa Kettle universities being formed to milk the system. We already see Ma and Pa Kettle RTOs in operation here.
We support the legislation because it gets tougher—it gives us the capacity to take a tougher line—but we do not think that it goes far enough. We think we have to do more to protect both those students who are doing accredited courses and those students who have been seduced into non-accredited courses.

Mr HUTCHINSON (Lyons) (11:01): I rise to speak in support of the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015 and the related bills. I note the comments of the member for Perth and also the previous speaker on the other side, the member for Cunningham, in respect of the fees, the cost and the impediments to young people to go on to vocational training in this instance. That is right and that is proper. I draw their attention not specifically to this bill but more broadly to the discussion of the bill that was passed recently in this House a second time and is now again before the Senate—the higher education bill—and the needed reform bills. I make the point of what will be forgone. Let us make no mistake: if this legislation does not pass the Senate, the abolition of all FEE-HELP and VET FEE-HELP loan fees, which are currently imposed on some students undertaking higher education and vocational education and training, saving those students money and putting all students and institutions on a level playing field—and they love a level playing field on the other side—simply will not happen. So I ask those on the other side, who I have no doubt are supportive, as we all are, of seeing better opportunities and more opportunities in education for our young people, particularly in my state of Tasmania, to consider that.

We have failed our young people for too long by the participation rate that we have either at university or in other vocational education and training courses. Part of that goes back to the structure that we have in years 11 and 12, or the lack of structure. I commend the Minister for Education and Training in the state of Tasmania, Minister Rockliff, for the major reforms that he is undertaking in expanding the number of high schools that are able to offer year 11 and year 12 courses in my state. It is a staged process. Some schools have put up their hands to say they want to be part of this process and have not been successful in the first round, but the state government is doing really good work. This is so critical, particularly critical for the students who come from the remote and regional areas within my electorate of Lyons.

I also remind those opposite that funding to the Tasmanian state government from the Commonwealth, remembering that only 15 per cent of the funding for government schools comes from the Commonwealth, has increased over the forward estimates by 34 per cent. This is a good thing. This demonstrates how committed this government is to improving the opportunities not only for students going onto higher education but also for students going into vocational training—and also, in the case of Tasmania, there are opportunities to go on and complete years 11 and 12, which is required, obviously, to go into many of these other courses.

The purpose of this bill is to allow the government to create a new quality standard to enable problems with the VET providers or VET courses to be quickly addressed; to require anyone who is marketing a VET course to clearly identify who is providing the qualification; to extend the registration period for registered training organisations from five to seven years so that the national training regulator can absolutely focus on investigating and acting on high-risk and poor-quality providers—I think that makes a lot of sense—and to allow technical amendments to improve the administration of the act. The bill contains an amendment to improve transparency in the marketing of training—and a number of speakers
have referred to this. This measure has come about in direct response to the negative impact of marketing by third parties, often referred to as brokers, in the training sector and, in particular, the VET FEE-HELP market. Potential vocational students must be able to clearly see what they are signing up for and who is the registered training organisation.

In my home state of Tasmania, Australia’s smallest state in terms of geography and population, there are more than 100 Skills Tasmania endorsed RTOs. They range across a huge part of the employment and training sector, from child care and retail training to nursing and primary industries such as the timber industry. The providers are not just locally based companies; many are part of nationally accredited organisations. I do appreciate that it is a daunting experience for a young person and their family to find the right course and the right opportunity for their education needs. So it is imperative that the information that they receive is accurate and the RTOs and the organisations are, indeed, operating legitimately and responsibly.

As we try to improve employment opportunities, particularly for our young people in Tasmania—I know that we are not the only jurisdiction that has challenges, but we do have a real challenge with youth unemployment—the number of training courses to upskill those looking for jobs has grown. You can study for a certificate in sport turf management, shearing, or beekeeping.

In terms of the shearing industry, I think of people like Jack Monks, who is doing a wonderful job working with Australian Wool Innovation, and getting young people involved in an industry which requires a lot of skill and a lot of fitness to be able to make a good career. I think of people like Evelyn Archer, who has made a career out of wool classing, and is now the training provider for those people who want to go on from being shed hands and different things, to undertaking a career in wool classing. They are doing good work.

You can undertake business administration training, training in aged care or early childhood education, or you can get a certificate IV which will equip you with the skills to be involved in youth justice.

In my own office, NDA is a local training provider that undertakes a lot of the training that my staff have the opportunity to participate in. Recently, in correspondence sent to my office, their newsletter said:

RTOs have been in the news recently for all the wrong reasons: think ripping off clients and delivering meaningless 'instant' qualifications to name just a couple. I mention this because the Skills Fund is about to open a new round of funding and NDA would like partner with your organisation in a tender. You can do this with some confidence because:

- 70% of NDA clients complete their qualifications successfully, in comparison with the national average for completions of around 29%.

Indeed, there are good RTOs. It is those RTOs that we want to see supported.

This bill ensures that registered training providers are ultimately responsible for services delivered by brokers on their behalf. And all parties involved, including the brokers, are required to clearly identify which RTOs will be responsible for the qualifications that students sign up to receive. In fact, under the proposed amendment, the Australian Skills Quality Authority will have the power to take action against those who do not make it clear who is responsible for the quality of the training. Our young people, in particular, deserve training of
the highest standard and consistency. The federal government has committed $68 million over four years to the Australian Skills Quality Authority to enforce the tough new standards.

In terms of research, in *The contribution of education to economic growth in Australia, 1997-2009* Tom Karmel estimated the impact of increasing education levels on economic growth and found that raised education levels contributed to improved productivity in the order of nearly 0.2 per cent per annum in the years of his research. He also found that this change in education levels led to an increase of about three per cent over the eight years in the average hours worked in the 15- to 64-year-old population. This was almost entirely due to increases in the number of women with degrees and post-graduate qualifications.

I look forward to the Treasurer's release of the *Intergenerational report* tomorrow. It is something that, I think, every Australian should contemplate. Opportunities arise because we have with a nation that is living longer. That is something that we should all celebrate.

I also noted some data in the Karmel paper about a comparative country, Canada. Interestingly, if in this country we had the same level of female workplace participation as in Canada—and I think most Australian's would understand it to be a comparative jurisdiction with many similarities, such as being a big country with a small population—the Australian economy would be, every year, $25 billion larger. I think that is something to contemplate. It is a challenge for all of us. It starts with the sort of reforms that we are trying to make in terms of the legislation before us today.

It is agreed that productivity—innovation, if you like—is enhanced by workers who possess the skills and knowledge required to undertake the occupations for which they have been trained. The role of Australia's VET system, supported by the government, is to provide students with the skills needed for work in various occupations and trades.

This government has already done much in this field to provide top quality vocational training and make students feel secure in the training that they are receiving. It has launched the National Training Complaints Hotline, a joint initiative with the states and territories to provide a single point for complaints to be heard and actioned. It will also crack down on inducements like free iPads or cash rebates, and enhance duty of care for training providers to abide by the date they sign a student up to a student loan.

These reforms have come about partly because of the rapid expansion of VET FEE-HELP and its misuse by some providers. It was a direct result of Labor's failure to properly administer and implement the program—isn't that a story we have heard before?—and failure to protect vulnerable students and taxpayers from unscrupulous training providers. The Australian Skills Quality Authority will undertake 23 audits of RTOs who have been identified trying to exploit the VET FEE-HELP program.

The federal government will provide nearly $6 billion this year to support vocational education and training courses through direct funding for programs, support to the states and territories, and student loans. In particular, we have replaced the grants that were previously given to those people undertaking apprenticeships, because the problem was that half of them did not complete the courses—yet, we were giving them a grant up front. The system has been changed and the new trade support loans are something that I am particularly excited about. I can see just how helpful they will be in my home state of Tasmania. I have spoken to
a number of employers and a number of apprentices about these, and they all welcome them. We are trying to boost the number of skilled tradesmen and tradeswomen.

Trade support loans will provide support of up to $8,000 in the critical first year of an apprenticeship and up to $20,000 over four years. If you complete your apprenticeship, we will knock 20 per cent off. It is the best deal these young people will ever get in their life. It is a system that is accountable not only to the people that it is supporting but also to the taxpayers of Australia. These loans have proved so successful in the six months since the scheme was introduced that 16,000 people across Australia have already taken them up. The loans are to help apprentices with the costs of living and learning, particularly in the early years of their apprenticeship, when wages are low, to try to stem the flow of young people dropping out of training because they do not believe they can afford it. Those who take out a loan will not be charged interest or fees on the loan and are not required to start paying back their loan until their income is above $53,345, in 2014-15.

Research last year proved that the VET system offers a cheaper and less stressful entry point to the education sector for people who have experienced some social disadvantage in their lives. Tabatha Griffin found that financial stress was one of the biggest barriers to students moving from lower level qualifications to higher level VET and higher education. So we are moving to alleviate that. Other research last year by academic Sonia White found that the inherent differences in the two sectors mean that transitioning students have to adjust to two different learning cultures, expectations and models of assessment.

Our higher education reforms introduced by Minister Pyne last year recognise the potential of a collaborative framework between VET providers and universities for facilitating the smooth transition from the VET sector, which is critical in my state, through those pathway courses to university. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms CLAYDON (Newcastle) (11:16): I rise today to speak on the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015, which is currently before the House, and to support the amendment moved by the member for Cunningham. I do so because, whilst this bill is designed to improve regulatory oversight of the vocational education and training sector, it fails to provide adequate protection for students and taxpayers from unscrupulous providers and proposes no sustained course of action to engage with the community to prevent this type of behaviour from continuing into the future.

We have heard numerous examples this morning of the actions of unscrupulous registered training organisations and brokers. These actions have had serious impacts on vulnerable individuals. The situation of people being left with large debts and no qualifications or useless qualifications must be addressed. It is Labor's view that the government must act with more urgency to ensure the protection of students is prioritised. To this end, the government should immediately seek a consumer protection information campaign by the ACCC, including advice for people who need to seek redress, and consider other mechanisms available to strengthen consumer protections. They should also support Labor's call for the Auditor-General to conduct an audit on the use of VET FEE-HELP. And they should, in more detail, look at amending the proposed registration period so that the extension from five to seven years is granted only to existing low-risk providers at renewal of registration.

Importantly, the bill contains amendments to the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011 that support ongoing reform measures, including reducing the
regulatory burden for NVR registered training organisations, protecting the integrity of the VET system, giving the regulator capacity to respond to emerging issues, and technical amendments to improve the efficiency and operation of the act and, consequently, the regulator. The bill also contains an administrative amendment to extend the maximum period of registration able to be granted by the regulator from five to seven years, a point on which the member for Cunningham has moved an amendment, which I referred to out the outset.

This bill itself contains no specific consumer protection provisions in its current form, and that is something that must be remedied. Hence the amendments moved this morning. In recent months there has been an explosion in media reports of unscrupulous RTOs preying on vulnerable students and signing them up for large VET FEE-HELP debts. In many cases, the students are not even aware that they have signed up for a course, let alone a significant debt of around $20,000. Under VET FEE-HELP students are able to access up to $97,728 in total for most courses offered by eligible registered training organisations. The problem is exacerbated by RTOs employing brokers to recruit students on their behalf and then attempting to distance themselves from the actions of the brokers. This bill takes some steps to put responsibility on the RTOs for the actions of their brokers. There is also a change to allow a more rapid response to quality standards issues by the minister and the regulator. I hope that the bill will help address some of the unprincipled behaviour that is being seen across the country, including in my electorate of Newcastle, where RTOs or brokers are providing inducements to potential students on street corners, shopping centres and train stations.

A constituent of mine recently shared her experience of being approached as she was waiting outside a busy well-known shopping centre in Newcastle. She was not sure whether it was by an education provider or broker acting on their behalf. Not surprisingly, these people were notable in their reluctance to be identified, so it is unclear exactly who she was dealing with. But they did make clear that there were great gains to be had in undertaking enrolment in a course with their institution. An inducement of the offer of a laptop was one such incentive they were providing her while actively encouraging her to enrol in a course of study. They promised there would be no up-front costs. So you get a free laptop with no up-front costs whatsoever. All costs were to be deferred and paid back.

This in itself was of some concern to that constituent, who is on a disability support pension with a very low fixed income and is clearly not aware of what the extent of that debt might be but, like many people on low fixed incomes, is extremely nervous about locking herself into any form of debt. These are people who are often living fortnight by fortnight and who are very, very careful about the way they budget. They have constrained household incomes and are extremely reluctant to take on some kind of additional burden.

But the kicker in the approach that is being made to these people is that at no point is it really made clear what that level of debt burden is going to be. The said provider vaunted their extremely—allegedly—high success rate in terms of the college and at no stage asked about my constituent's capacity to repay a debt that she would obviously incur; nor did they ask her anything about her specific interests or needs for additional tertiary education in the first place. It was a loan that, if taken up, she could not have repaid, so eventually that debt would have been called in and she would have been pushed into severe financial hardship. She is not alone in that story. It is a story with multiple variations that has been repeated to me...
in my electorate of Newcastle from people who, as I said, are embarking on the weekly shopping and are having people just outside the checkout attempting to sign them up to a vocational education and training course which may or may not be of any use to their particular life circumstances.

I would also like to touch on an assertion that was mentioned by the previous speaker and also by the Assistant Minister for Education and Training. The allegation is that somehow Labor in government failed to protect students and taxpayers from unscrupulous providers and wasted billions of dollars as a result. Indeed, a number of speakers on the opposite side of the House have put that proposal forward again today. I would suggest not only that that assertion is completely false and quite unhelpful in this particular debate but also that Labor is very proud to stand on a strong record of having invested in skills and helping students and workers to obtain the skills they need to participate and compete in a modern workforce, as well as introducing regulation and quality assurance into the vocational education and training system. We are here to offer constructive, useful, sensible amendments that we hope the government is willing to pick up, but it is of little value to go back over the years and try to blame Labor yet again for a shortfall of action at this present time.

For over a year now we have been having these discussions around the actions of unscrupulous RTOs. We really have been too slow to act, so I welcome this bill coming before the House today. The problems for both potential students and these vulnerable people in our community are very much at the forefront of my mind and, I know, the minds of many others in this House. Measures that we can take to prevent that from happening are absolutely worthwhile and worthy of bipartisan support. But, having failed to stand up to those unscrupulous providers so far, this government, in addition to demonstrating that slowness of action, has also cut $2 billion out of the skills and training sector. In my electorate of Newcastle those cuts are hurting—and hurting people badly. The axe has already fallen on the following programs and services: the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency; the Tools For Your Trade program—gone; the Australian Apprenticeships Access Program—gone; the Australian Apprenticeships Mentoring Program—gone; the Accelerated Australian Apprenticeships Program; the Apprentice to Business Owner Program; the National Workforce Development Fund; the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program; the National Partnership Agreement on Training Places for Single and Teenage Parents; the Alternative Pathways program; Productive Ageing through Community Education; the Step into Skills program; the Joint Group Training Program; and base funding for industry skills councils.

When you take all of those programs and forms of assistance out of the vocational education and training sector, you cannot be surprised that people in communities seeking to enter into vocational education and training are hurting as a result of those cuts. These are critical programs, for young Australians in particular—the next generation of skilled men and women who will shape the future of this nation. Cuts to vocational education and training are short-sighted. They hurt us both now and into the future.

While federally we have an issue with the Abbott Liberal government sending TAFE and vocational education and training backwards, in my home state of New South Wales we have the double whammy of the Baird Liberal government cuts to deal with as well, winding the VET sector even further back. Since 2011 the New South Wales Liberal government has cut
an additional $1.7 billion from education and training. They have sacked 1,100 TAFE teachers and support staff, cut TAFE courses, slashed class contact times and drastically increased student fees by up to thousands of dollars. In 2015 alone—this year alone—fees have already risen significantly, with 40 per cent of students being slugged an extra $500 to $1,500 for their courses this year. In my electorate of Newcastle, the 2014 fee for a Diploma of Electrical Engineering, for example, was $3,636 for a full-time study course over two years. This year, that fee will be $7,280.

At a time when unemployment in Newcastle has hit a staggering 10 per cent—more than doubling in the last 12 months on this government's watch—this government should be doing everything they can to make training and retraining accessible and affordable, but instead Mike Baird and his mate the Prime Minister are pricing some students out of an education altogether. Not only are students being slugged; RTOs are being abandoned with the rollout of the NSW Premier's Smart and Skilled program.

An editorial in the *Newcastle Herald* from November last year describes the situation well. It said:

Governments have an over-riding responsibility to the tax-paying public to be as efficient as possible with the allocation of financial resources.

And companies that lose tenders or contracts will naturally complain that things have not gone their way.

But judging by the growing disquiet around the state government’s 'Smart and Skilled' vocational training reforms, something appears to have gone seriously wrong with a process that is part of a broader, national overhaul of non-university education funding.

Something certainly has gone wrong, and I urge this government as of today to stand up to those unscrupulous providers to support Labor's amendments. I join with my Labor colleagues in calling on the Abbott Liberal government to accelerate the introduction of consumer protections for vulnerable people being exploited by unscrupulous training providers.

**Mrs McNAMARA (Dobell) (11:31):** I rise to support the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015. This bill builds upon this government's reform of the vocational education and training—VET—sector to ensure that Australia is equipped with a skilled workforce and a productive economy.

This bill introduces measures to enhance the integrity of the VET system; provide an effective balance between protection and regulation of the VET system; and improve the efficiency and operation the NVETR Act and, consequently, the Australian Skills Quality Authority.

This government is working constructively to enhance the operation of Australia's VET system. The federal government will provide almost $6 billion this year alone in support for vocational education and training through direct funding for programs, support to the states and territories, and student loans. In electorates, such as Dobell, it is essential that this funding is directed at proven programs that meet the needs of our local labour market and sectors of the economy with a high demand for skilled workers.

The 2011 census identified in Dobell that 24 per cent of residents aged over 15 had a certificate-level qualification. Only 18 per cent have attained undergraduate and/or
postgraduate qualifications. The census also identified that manufacturing, trade, accommodation and food services, construction, health care, and social assistance made up 62 per cent of all employment within Dobell. Furthermore, one-third of employed persons aged 15 years and over nominated their occupation as labourers, machinery operators, technicians or trades workers. With only one in two students in Dobell obtaining a year 12 qualification, these numbers highlight the importance that vocational and education training plays on the Central Coast.

I engage on a regular basis with local job service agencies, apprenticeship support providers and other training organisation to ensure that the training they deliver is aligned with local job requirements. No benefit is derived from training for training's sake. Government funding must be directed at addressing local skills and job needs, and providing training that addresses skill shortages within the local economy.

Sadly, over recent years, this has not always been the case. For too long, we have seen taxpayers' money wasted on training that has failed to meet employer and industry requirements, and has also failed the student. In addition, the previous government failed to safeguard quality standards and allowed unscrupulous providers to operate unfettered. This has resulted in students, who have completed training, being unable to secure employment, due to their skills and knowledge failing to meet workplace requirements and standards. For example, I have been informed by cafe owners in Dobell of situations where young people have presented with a Certificate II in Hospitality; yet, when placed in a practical workplace environment, they lack the necessary skills to meet the business needs, including face-to-face customer service skills.

In fact, it would appear, particularly in Dobell, that we now have an oversupply of certified baristas and fitness instructors in the job market. This is an example of training program failing to consider the needs of the local employment market. Not only are these examples a misuse of taxpayer funds; the results are psychologically damaging to job seekers who are trying to do the right thing only to be let down by a training providers who have failed to equip them for the workplace. This also places the student at an unfair financial disadvantage.

The intent of this bill is to improve the quality of Australia's VET system by enhancing the quality of education and training provided by the VET sector; improving transparency in the marketing of VET courses; reducing the regulatory burden by lengthening registration periods; and amending administrative arrangements to reduce red tape and better position the national regulator to investigate unscrupulous providers. Above all, this bill seeks to protect the integrity of the VET sector. This sector needs strong quality assurance in order to deliver high-quality training outcomes for students.

Employers are entitled to have confidence in the training received by potential employees. Regardless of which organisation has provided training, there should be consistently high standards to ensure that relevant knowledge and skills are taught to students.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Education and Employment, a strong vocational training sector is an area I strongly believe in. Our recently concluded inquiry into TAFE demonstrated the vastness of Australia's VET sector.

The TAFE sector is the largest education and training provider in Australia with 61 government owned TAFE institutions and university TAFE divisions. While the federal
government has no direct administrative role in TAFE, it exercises a regulatory function through the Australian Skills Quality Authority by registering training organisations and accrediting courses.

Through COAG, various levels of government have agreed to six objectives for the VET system, including: a national system of streamlined industry defined qualifications with flexibility to respond to major national and state priorities and emerging areas of skills needs; a modern and responsive national regulatory system that applies a risk-management approach and supports a competitive and well-functioning market; and ensuring that consumers are provided with the information they need to make choices about providers and training that meets their needs. These objectives, while focused specifically at TAFE, form the basis of amendments within this legislation.

The bill is addressing concerns that have been raised in relation to the ability of the VET sector to respond to emerging issues promptly and effectively. Such delays have the potential to impact upon the quality of training offered by registered training organisations. The bill establishes the capacity for the Minister for Education and Training to develop and enforce standards in relation to quality in the VET sector. Quality standards will focus the quality of training by establishing a new standard to address emerging issues which impact on the quality and integrity of training for individuals and students. Importantly, the quality standards will ensure that unanticipated changes in the VET sector can be quickly addressed in a timely manner.

These new powers will provide the Commonwealth the equivalent of 'emergency' powers to address known or emerging quality issues that compromise student interests and the quality of outcomes. They will also provide industry and individual states and territories a direct avenue of action to the Commonwealth to urgently address issues of concern. Prior to the issuing of a standard, the minister will consult with key stakeholders, including state and territory ministers, along with industry partners. Furthermore, standards will be issued within weeks, providing better protection for students. Currently it can take up to 12 months to change a standard. This is simply too long to make a change if there are critical issues impacting on the quality of the training being provided to students. The quality standard will become a condition of registration for registered training organisations.

This bill will also enhance the requirements of advertising and offering of VET courses. This is in response to concerns raised in regard to methods undertaken by some registered training organisations with respect to the marketing of their courses. Current arrangements mean that it can be at times unclear to students enrolling online who is responsible for delivering their course. This bill will provide greater transparency by requiring individuals marketing VET courses, including brokers, to be explicit in their communication and advertising to prospective students about which organisation will be responsible for issuing the qualification or statement of attainment. Under these reforms, when a student receives marketing material they will be able to clearly identify the registered training organisation responsible for the qualification they are signing up to complete. Under this amendment, the Australian Skills Quality Authority will be able to pursue anyone, not just training providers, who fail in their obligation to demonstrate who is responsible for the quality of the training. This government is committed to ensuring that students receive the highest quality education
and training through our VET system. These reforms continue to build upon the work the government is undertaking to improve quality in the VET sector.

Already we have introduced tough new regulatory standards for training providers which came into effect on 1 January 2015 for new providers and will apply to existing providers from the 1 April 2015. In addition, the Australian Skills Quality Authority is moving towards a risk-management model of regulation to ensure focus is on those who are doing the wrong thing. On the 19 January, the government launched the National Training Complaints Hotline, which is a joint initiative with the states and territories to provide a single point to make it easier for complaints to be heard and actioned. Following this announcement I visited Peter Willcockson, managing director of local small business, Express Lube, in Dobell. Peter, who employs nine apprentices across his business, welcomed the news, saying:

As a small business operator it is important that apprentices are well educated and are able to adapt to working in a workshop. However this isn't always the case. From experience I see apprentices arrive at my business not knowing basic mechanical theories. In some cases we are talking about second year apprentices.

Peter's comments back up the actions of the government and the need to improve the quality and standard of training provided to students in the VET system. It is inexcusable to see people arriving at work with training under their belt, not knowing basic theories and unable to do their job. This is the sort of feedback that can be reported to the National Training Complaints Hotline and investigated.

The government's reforms require an effective national regulator. We want the Australian Skills Quality Authority to spend less time dealing with compliance and more time addressing unscrupulous practices and dodgy operators. The bill makes a suite of administrative amendments to strengthen the national regulator and to better place them to fulfil the above objectives. The regulator has, in the course of conducting its functions, identified a number of areas where administrative improvements may reduce regulatory burden and improve efficiency. These administrative amendments seek to streamline and improve processes in addition to reducing the regulatory burden on the sector. These include: enabling the regulator to request information from persons holding themselves out as a regulated entity; clarifying that all organisations that are constitutional corporations covered by the civil penalty and offence provisions and prescribed in part 6 of the NVETR Act; and improving the sharing of VET information between agencies.

In another step to reduce the regulatory burden on the sector, the bill seeks to increase the registration period for providers from five to seven years. This amendment allows the Australian Skills Quality Authority to better target its resources towards higher risk registered training organisations. We are continuing to fulfil our commitment to reduce red tape and compliance in order to strengthen our economy and reduce costs to business. Importantly, this is a cut in red tape for those registered training organisations that do the right thing. Rather than having to re-register every five years, organisations will only have to go through the process every seven years.

This amendment will allow the regulator to redirect its effort away from the renewal process and focus on better targeted and more random auditing, compliance and enforcement actions against poor-quality providers. This is in response to findings by the Australian Skills Quality Authority who stated that re-registration based auditing is a less effective approach to
quality assurance when compared with targeted or random audit activities. Our reforms are forged in partnership with students, employers, training providers and the states and territories, with the common goal of improving the quality of Australia's VET sector. The days of training for training's sake are over, as are the days of unscrupulous operators taking advantage of students and the Australian taxpayer. This government is looking at further action beyond this legislation before the House. We will crack down on inducements, such as free iPads or cash rebates, tighten marketing practices and enhance duty-of-care provisions for training providers to abide by, when they sign up a student to a student loan. It is unconscionable for training providers to offer incentives in order to sign up students and receive government payments. If this is their approach to attracting students, you do have to wonder what level of training and education they are providing to vulnerable young people.

The lack of a regulator compliance framework has unfortunately seen vulnerable students taken advantage of by these dodgy training providers. We will be seeking to address the rapid expansion of the VET Fee-Help and its misuse by providers. The Australian government has committed $68 million over four years to the Australian Skills Quality Authority to enforce these new standards, and we will continue to reform the Australian VET sector to ensure that the needs of students are front and centre and that they receive the necessary education and training to address labour-force shortages. This is the only approach that, we believe, will deliver lasting benefits for students, such as those on the Central Coast—where VET accounts for a quarter of our post-school qualifications. It is the only approach that will best prepare residents on the Central Coast for employment in the local labour market. With over 50 per cent of local jobs found in industry, which is heavily dependent on vocational training, we must ensure that students are spending their time preparing for work in fields where there are available jobs.

I am proud to be a member of the government that is delivering real support to students undertaking vocational training and education, including Trade Support Loans and a new Australian Apprenticeship and Traineeship Support Network to commence on 1 July. I will continue to work along with local VET providers on the Central Coast and ensure that this government strengthens our VET providers—(Time expired)

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (11:46): It is a great pleasure to speak on the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015. As the House knows, we will be supporting this bill but with amendments. They are important amendments, which seek to insert some consumer protection information from the ACCC into the legislation, as well as seeking an audit by the Auditor-General of the VET Fee-Help program. The amendments and extensions of this bill improve the government's ability to regulate vocational education.

Vocational education is particularly important for the electorate of Wakefield. Many years ago I looked at some of the maps of higher education versus trade certificates in Adelaide. If you overlay that, you can see very clearly that places like Elizabeth and Salisbury have high proportions of people with trade certificates or vocational education, and that is because they make and do things—they work with their heads in their hands to create the wealth that helps to sustain Adelaide. If you go to any farming community north of Elizabeth, you will find the same sort of industry and talent exhibited by the farming communities. Vocational education has particular importance to my electorate, and I have seen numerous organisations do vital
work in this area, such as Civil Train. In my own professional life, when I worked for the Shop Assistants Union, I saw a lot of vocational education in retail—some of it good, some of it not so good. It is always important to keep the standards up and have government overseeing all of this.

This bill does have some important provisions in it: extending the penalty provisions to trading corporations to create a new offence of prohibiting a person from advertising or offering to provide a VET course without including the name or registration code of the registered training organisation; extending the period of registration to be granted by the regulator from five to seven years—which is obviously important for the good operators and helps to keep red tape down for them. The bill also provides that a minister may, by legislative instrument, make for quality standards a condition of registration; it also states to whom and for what purpose a regulator may disclose VET information; it improves the regulator's ability to issue a written direction; and it allows the issue of a search warrant in a court in any jurisdiction for the premises of a training provider to be searched. Schedule 1 makes transitional provisions for some of those amendments.

We support all of that. It is a sad fact of public life these days that legislators of all party colours have to be cognisant that whenever we draw up legislation we may need to come back to revisit it and put in stronger safeguards to protect consumers and to stop unethical behaviour by corporations and individuals in accessing taxpayers' money. We have seen this phenomenon take hold wherever the Commonwealth is involved in providing assistance, rebates or any financial incentive, we have to be very careful in choosing the parameters we put around it. This area of vocational education and training is particularly important, but I do not think anyone anticipated the behaviour that this bill is attempting to stamp out. We do need to be cognisant of some of the behaviours that occur out there. I have seen this in my own electorate, and it has been widely reported on: training providers sitting out the front of Elizabeth Centrelink and recruiting people, as they come out, to courses.

On the face of it there is nothing wrong with providers advertising their wares and making themselves available to people who might want to improve their qualifications and thus get a job. That would be a good thing. But you really do have to question some of the behaviours that go on, and these behaviours have been reported. One young man, Lukus Whitehead—my office has had some interactions with his mother—came out of Centrelink and was persuaded to embark on a new course on the proviso that he would get a laptop. We saw this behaviour reported on the ABC on 21 October. Lukus has an intellectual disability, and he was sold two diplomas. Fortunately, that matter has been, in part, dealt with with the VET FEE-HELP loans, which basically went from $18,000 to $30,000, which is an extraordinary debt. Lukus signed up for two diploma courses at a level just below a bachelor degree level. He did not finish the first one and then was signed up to a second one. You do have to question it when providers are behaving in that way. They really are undermining the integrity of the system.

We also saw, on 23 December, a very similar story with trainees in Tasmania who signed up to courses, incurring big debts to the Commonwealth for these courses and often being unable to repay those debts, because they will not get jobs because of the nature of the training. We have seen these sorts of problems and practices going on, and they are very concerning indeed. The use of incentives is particularly concerning—laptops being given to students as part of their course. On the face of it, that sounds like a reasonable proposition: a
person might need a laptop to complete the training to get a job. But if the incentive is the laptop and not the training, if the incentive is, 'Well, you get a laptop; don't worry about the debt, don't worry about the course, because you'll never have to pay it back unless you get a job', then that is a concern. It is maybe not a concern to the training company, or even to the individual, but it is certainly a concern to the Commonwealth taxpayer, who at the end of the day will foot the bill.

These are particularly concerning developments. I do not think any legislator would necessarily have anticipated it, but, unfortunately, it is a fact of life these days that we have to think about such things when it comes to this legislation. We saw on 16 February this year the headlines 'Unscrupulous education brokers harvesting job-seekers' details, Senate inquiry told'. So, there is a question about some of the information that is being put around. We have seen a number of stories which would give us cause for concern.

This is somewhat related, because we have a private market here, but the Commonwealth is, in effect, incurring the debts, and particularly if they are bad debts then the taxpayer gets stuck with that bill, and it is a bit of a hurdy-gurdy. We do have to be concerned about that. The United Kingdom, which has a similar process in place for higher education, had a report, Too good to fail: the financial sustainability of higher education in England, which talked about a deregulated system providing 'the worst of both worlds, where all parties feel they are getting a bad deal' and where 'government is effectively funding universities by writing off student debt rather than investing directly in teaching grants'. We know that Professor Bruce Chapman, who was the architect of HECS, has warned the Senate inquiry on the higher education deal:

The problem, as I see it, is that doubtful debt is a cost to the taxpayer but the universities are essentially controlling what that cost is going to be because the doubtful debt is a direct function of the loans that are outstanding and if the universities control what those fees are then that they will ultimately be controlling the levers that determine what that doubtful debt is and what the taxpayers pay. It is akin to a blank cheque being handed from the government to the universities on the matter of doubtful debt.

The same can be said for the vocational education sector in this case, because if we have unscrupulous colleges going out there and signing up students who have no reasonable prospect of finishing their courses then, in effect, the Commonwealth taxpayer is the bunny that gets the bill at the end of that process. I do not think that is the intention of the parliament. I certainly know it is not the intention of the previous government or of this government. No sensible legislator would think that was a good outcome. What we want is a vocational education system that trains people for work, and that there be real work at the end of that training. There is nothing more frustrating for the community and for legislators than seeing people trained for no discernible outcome.

When we come to look at this bill, what we want is a vocational education sector which has good links to industry, which provides jobs, where good providers are rewarded, where bad providers are penalised and where unscrupulous and unethical behaviour is run out of the system. You cannot expect people to have any faith at all when people are being induced into courses and into student debt with free tablet computers or otherwise. Just last night—you would not credit the timing—one of my constituents, Mr Tim Bedford, was cold called by a diploma course provider pushing him to sign up for a course and advertising these sorts of inducements. You just would not think that they would still be at it. These providers are
completely ignoring the very clear signals being sent by this parliament about such behaviour. In this line of work, we are constantly surprised by the behaviours that occur when the Commonwealth puts some money on the table to do any function of government business. We really do have to drive this sort of behaviour out of the system.

For that reason, as I said before, we have amendments that put in place consumer protections by the ACCC and provide advice for those people. We are calling on the government to support our call to have the Auditor-General look into this area, which I think is a sensible thing to do. I certainly welcome this bill. The government is doing the right thing in this area, so I will not bash them on it. But as legislators we do need to be absolutely cognisant of the need to constantly update out legislation to prevent this sort of behaviour in any area of Commonwealth spending.

Mr VARVARIS (Barton) (12:01): I am very pleased to speak on this important bill today because I know how significant it is to the many students and vocational training providers we have in Australia. The National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015 will enable better regulation and enforcement of our registered training organisations to ensure students and taxpayers are not left in the dark as to the viability of their respective careers or finances. This is an important piece of legislation for many reasons. First and foremost, it affects our vital employment sector and those who specialise in trades. When you think about it, this is far reaching. Every hairdresser, plumber, electrician, mechanic and so forth that we encounter in our lives has gone through the vocational education training system. They have developed and refined a specific and tailored form of procedural knowledge that significantly contributes to our economy and labour market, not to mention the essential services their trades provide to society. Not only do we all rely on the services of a vocational education graduate at some point, but as these professionals eventually leave the labour market, it is critical they are replaced by those who are equally skilled.

This last point is increasingly significant because our nation is facing an increasingly ageing population, with retirees set to outnumber workers. Five years ago every Australian who had reached 65 years of age was supported by five working adults. By 2050, it is projected that one retiree will be supported by only 2.7 working adults. Our labour market is declining every year, and the need for skilled workers to continue the services and goods they provide cannot be stressed enough. We not only need more workers but, critically, we need skilled workers who have the right training in their choice of profession.

It is disappointing to me and to the constituents who have flagged it with my office that there are a number of registered training organisations who are not providing adequate training to equip these workers. Some of my constituents are seeking a career change, whilst others have finished school and are keen to take on a trade that they are passionate about. Yet many of them are baffled by the lack of consistency in quality and training materials provided as well as the difference in costs between the different providers. A few of them were unaware of the financial assistance that is there to assist with course fees, whilst others felt the government's financial assistance on offer had been marketed rather forcefully to them—they were being offered free electronic gadgets and other incentives unrelated to their course. You can imagine that with so many choices of provider, so many courses to choose from and uncertainty about how funding is actually delivered, they have come to my office very
confused. These people have a dream and a passion to fulfil. The lack of uniformity, the dramatic difference in costs and the various reputations of course providers has often left them demoralised.

As a federal representative, I know that my colleagues and those opposite want all Australians to be actively engaged in their vocational courses, with training organisations that can deliver what they promise. I know that all members of this House want our students to obtain qualifications from training providers that enable them to successfully complete their studies and take on a job that can reward them accordingly. We certainly do not want to have organisations that exploit students and vulnerable individuals by offering unrelated incentives and not disclosing their fee structure. Unfortunately, some of these hypothetical scenarios are a reality for many individuals. I was perplexed to learn from one constituent that her qualification in child care still left her with an inability to find work despite an industry demand for childcare workers. I was disturbed to learn of a young apprentice who did not know how much the total loan for his fees was or how the fees were calculated to begin with.

I was disappointed to learn that one constituent was solicited repeatedly by an education service provider that she had never heard of, cold calling her on her mobile, who had somehow gotten her details even though she never registered an interest with that organisation or course. Marketing in education is not new, and this is not the issue at stake. What becomes a problem is unscrupulous marketing that centres the focus on the organisation's profitability, with no consideration for the student's best interests. Today's bill seeks to redress the balance by enabling new quality standards in vocational education to be enforced, not just regulated. It will also enable the Australian Skills Quality Authority, our national training regulator, to investigate those breaching the rules and act upon poor-quality providers.

The bill will also allow for significant reforms across our vocational education sector, through the provision of a national VET complaints hotline. It will reduce the regulatory burden on high-performing VET providers, through extension of registration from five years to seven years, and it will allow clear identification of providers who issue a qualification certificate. The bill today will amend the National Vocational and Education and Training Regulator Act 2011 to strengthen the protection of students, to ensure those providers who continuously deliver high quality training do not suffer from over-regulation, but it will also enable those who provide inadequate training to be audited, and sanctions enforced.

We cannot afford to have a poorly educated workforce. It is unfair to the students and to our taxpayers. In addition, it is also dangerous to have inadequately trained professionals. Think of the electricians, whose services are life-time guarantees, and the mechanics, whose training is there to ensure our vehicles are safe and roadworthy. These are just two critical examples of why we must have high-quality graduates.

It is our role to ensure a duty of care to those learning, and that these provisions are adhered to by the training organisations. It is unfortunate that some providers in this vital sector have not been able to undertake all their proceedings having regard for the best interests of their students, in particular the quality of training and the abuse of the sector's VET FEE-HELP. Like the tertiary sector's HECS debt, a student can borrow every dollar of the cost of their course, with no repayment obligation until they reach a certain salary. Furthermore, some organisations have increased or varied the cost of their courses to take advantage of VET FEE-HELP, which they market as 'study now and pay later' to lure students...
in. Unfortunately, some students have been unable to repay their loans because they were unable to get the job they had hoped for, due to poor-quality training. Some students, as I mentioned previously, have been unaware of how much they owed until they received an invoice. This is not the solution to having a better trained workforce. In actual fact, it would altogether put students off from entering the vocational market. So it is pleasing that this bill will allow our national regulator, ASQA, to make it mandatory that students are aware of what they are signing up for, and that they are notified of their loan fees. This will extend to the brokers who market these educational providers and programs.

In addition, the National Training Complaints Hotline, a joint initiative with the states and territories, will act as a triage system for complaints to be heard and investigated. It is regrettable that whilst most registered training organisations provide exceptional value and support for students, there are those who deliver substandard training to learners.

I implore members from all sides to support this vital bill, to ensure the viability of our vocational sector and that they have regard for the best interests of their students. There is a clearly demonstrated need for enforcement, not merely more regulation. The bill is not about increasing red tape. It is about realigning the interests of students, tax payers and employers so that our skilled labour market is high in quality. It is essential that ASQA is given the resources and support to regulate and enforce the rules of our vocational education providers so that the abovementioned stakeholders do not lose out.

I cannot stress enough the importance of ASQA. Its increasing focus on compliance and auditing has been critical in identifying those providers who are not up to scratch. Our community deserves to have full confidence in the training and assessment framework being delivered in this country, so that trades can continue in their high standards and students learn the right skills to take on a career of their choice. It is our role and the intention of this bill to ensure that there is good faith in the vocational sector, and that the system is carried out with integrity. We want current and future students to have the freedom to choose their path of study without being restricted by fees; however, that should not mean they are exploited by rogue training organisations. The viability of a robust, quality VET sector is needed so that Australian businesses can continue to thrive. This bill is one part in reducing malpractice and inefficiency in this vital sector.

Whilst we all recognise that individuals must research carefully the institutions that provide these studies, we must also take into account those who are unable to make informed decisions by themselves and who might be exploited. Both ASQA and the coalition government will work together to ensure students are provided with the right training and skills needed for their trade and not just saddled with debt. We are committed to creating a framework where funding and support go to the right participants, so that students receive the right qualifications and skills to enter into the labour market.

I ask members of this House to strongly support the bill, which will ensure the best interests of our vocational students, tax payers and employers. Today's bill is essential to strengthening and maintaining Australia's quality vocational education training system, so that everyone can benefit from our trades sector. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms Ryan (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (12:12): I rise with colleagues on this side of the House to support the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015 and to welcome some of the changes that are being addressed, but also to suggest further
changes that may address a serious issue that has been highlighted in the press and in the chamber this morning as speaker after speaker has told stories from their electorates.

One of the reasons we all are fully aware of this is not just because people have been walking into our offices to talk to us about it, because, bluntly, a lot of our most vulnerable are not big complainers. They do not necessarily have the assertiveness or the confidence to raise a complaint about these issues. I think that has been one of the issues as to why this has been going on for so long.

The report from the University of Sydney has certainly shone a light on the area of VET provision and some of the things that have been occurring. It has done so recently, and a Senate inquiry has assisted with that. The study by the University of Sydney shone a light on some of these practices merely through looking at the figures. The report identified businesses in the vocational education sector making super-profits of 30 per cent. That surely should be ringing alarm bells. Clearly it points to a problem. A 30 per cent profit is not usual, and one might argue that it is not possible if you are delivering quality education in any sector.

Another alarming statistic in that report concerned the TAFE sector in Victoria, which is the traditionally trusted provider of VETs—one that provides the quality we expect in our training and skills programs. It has been dramatically marginalised. In fact, it has gone from providing 70 per cent of VET training in Victoria down to 20 per cent. Both of those things clearly show that there is a structural problem occurring in this sector and it needs to be addressed. Of course, it would not be a problem if this Victorian reduction to 20 per cent were being replaced with high quality education. But, given 30 per cent super profits and the stories we are hearing that have been highlighted in the press of late, we now know that that is not true. We certainly know that these things need to be addressed. Therefore, I welcome the amendments in front of us this afternoon. This sector certainly needs reform. The market based mechanisms have no place in the case management of our most vulnerable on their journey to secure training and employment.

Last year, the shadow minister for vocational education, Sharon Bird, and I met with about 30 apprentices at the Werribee Plaza site in my electorate. This is a huge building project that is underway, employing 700 tradespeople. Pleasingly, there were a healthy number of apprentices employed. In the meeting with these young Australians—all proud of having secured an apprenticeship and a great start to their working lives—they were also keen to share some of their negative experiences. The conversation soon turned to the off-site training that they were going through. Two common topics were cost and quality. The apprentices told of starting with one RTO, which had lobbied their employer as a so-called cheaper option to TAFE, only to switch after a term because the quality was so poor.

These stories started to come through. The apprentices spoke of teachers with poor English and of assessment where the answers were provided. As a former teacher, I do not think that I need to lecture the chamber, but, if you are going to give a student a test, that is a test of your teaching more than a test of their learning, and you certainly do not provide the answers to give yourself a pat on the back when they get 100 per cent. They also complained of classes that were cancelled and never made up.

The apprentices and their employers were genuine in trying to gain real skills and real training—and they had a genuine desire to learn and improve—but this was not what they had found in the sector. Many of them had changed providers in order to find one with quality.
Most preferred the TAFE options, as they felt the quality was so much higher and the teachers were genuine in wanting these young adults to acquire real skills. The employers could see the benefit of utilising a quality provider. We also heard similar stories about quality from the preceding member's contribution in this debate. The quality could be found if they went out to look, however, if you were an employer with less scruples or an apprentice that knew no better, would you go and look for it? That is the question. I did not ask at the time whether any of them attempted to make a formal complaint regarding the poor providers, but I suspect not.

Last week, I met with a community leader in my office, who is a representative of a growing ethnic group in my electorate. As part of that meeting, which was wide-ranging, he mentioned that he had been approached by several women in the community who had been placed in training. They were very proud and happy to participate in the training, and a large number were training in certificate courses that enabled them to become child carers. Although they had participated and qualified, they actually had limited knowledge about how to establish themselves as a carer. The training did not actually provide the skills they needed to lift themselves into employment and start making a valuable contribution to our society. I know that I will not be the first person nor the last person today to speak of this happening in communities. This also follows recent stories of various childcare centres refusing to take graduates from some RTOs who had a reputation for poor quality. I know that some will argue that this is the market doing its work. However, for those people who have done those courses, had that one-off opportunity and cannot do a course of a similar accreditation again in a different field and get that kind of support, it is too late.

As last year's high school graduates are weaving through the maze of options for post school education, there seems to have been an increasing number of media reports about these unscrupulous RTOs preying on vulnerable students. Again, we are hearing about that today. Students are being hoodwinked into enrolling for courses that are poor quality with no real job prospects at the end of them. Sometime these people do not even realise they have signed up to a significant debt. It is pleasing that this bill goes some way to address these issues. It builds on the work of the previous government, which of course established the Australian Skills Quality Authority, ASQA, in 2011. We on this side of the chamber know and understand that strong regulation of the sector is important to ensure young people receive quality training and are not signing away for a large debt.

I am pleased to see that the current government allocated a further $68 million to ASQA last year and that they have established a National Training Complaints Hotline. I am also pleased to see that new standards are being implemented next month. These are important because the stories are growing in our communities. They are growing because, amongst the for-profit operators, there are unscrupulous providers hawking VET courses door to door or, worse, cleverly hiring community learning centres to add a level of legitimacy to their activities. They are preying on the vulnerable.

One story from my electorate, which has a happy ending but carries a moral with it, is about a young man. He was a jobseeker. He had not been unemployed for a long time. He had left school and had a couple of jobs. As with most young people, he was utilising the internet and the modern recruitment tools. He found a position advertised on SEEK to which he promptly responded. He sent in his resume and got an interview. He attended the interview,
but he came home, not with the job, but with a course already signed up. He received no independent career guidance, which, you will understand, as a teacher I value highly. No-one had explained the regulations around certification and Commonwealth funding, and he had no understanding of the full array of options if he had seriously considered re-engaging in education. His story stunned me, not just for the fact that he had responded to a job advertisement and come away with a course, but also for the fact that he had signed up for a vast array of certificates. They all looked good on paper. He was going to do a 10-week course. He did; he attended. He was told during the eighth week that the last certificate would not be completed in the 10 weeks, but would occur when they got the numbers, and they would call him. He did not get the call. It will not surprise anyone in the chamber to know that this last certificate was the most expensive certificate and also the one that probably made him the most job-ready.

He pursued the issue by phone several times but the promised call backs did not eventuate. Some months later he saw the same ad in SEEK and he rang the number. He secured another interview and he got his 'gotcha' moment. He ultimately got the certification and the Commonwealth got value for money. He is employed and has been employed since gaining that certification. So it is a happy ending but a moral tale about unscrupulous for-profit operators.

Labor recognises the importance of quality assurance and today we have suggested what we think are some sensible amendments to go with the amendments being put forward by the government. We must free the regulator to chase the real dodgy providers, those making superprofits off the back of our taxes and vulnerable students. We have seen reports of RTO businesses making superprofits of 30 per cent in the vocational education sector and that clearly points to a problem. In the process, people are being exploited and that also needs to be addressed.

Senator Carr and shadow minister Bird have been fierce advocates in calling for action. They recognise that the market-based mechanisms have no place in the case management of these vulnerable people. The fact is that, amongst the operators motivated by profit, there are unscrupulous providers. So we have suggested some amendments that we think strengthen the bill and that take a few steps further to, importantly, improve the regulatory oversight of the sector but also provide support for those people who have been caught up in this system, the vulnerable individuals, who have possibly been left with large debts and, in some cases, with no qualifications or useless qualifications.

As a case in point, one amendment addresses the notion of extending the registration to seven years. Our amendment calls that that only be offered to low-risk providers, with the view that it sends the wrong signal to extend the period for registration and therefore the length of time without an audit, although we recognise that the intent of that part of this amendment is in fact to free up the regulator from doing continuous audits. We think that that measure would reverse that signal to the market and ensure that those low-risk operators are free to continue and would free up the regulator to do so some of that work.

However, we also call on the government to act with more urgency, to ensure the protection of students is prioritised in this process and to seek a consumer protection information campaign by the ACCC, including advice for people who need to seek redress, and consider other mechanisms available to strengthen consumer protections in the sector.
Labor supports the call for the Auditor-General to conduct an audit on the use of VET FEE-HELP.

This is obviously an area of passion of mine. I have left the most compelling argument to the end of my contribution and that is around schools. I will give you this example. These unscrupulous providers are not just knocking door to door; they are not just trying to engage people who have lost their job or who have been long-term employed. They are actively pursuing current secondary students. I will give you a scenario that might help you understand. In a high school such as the one where I worked for many years we have many vulnerable students—at-risk students—who have many things in their lives that make them at risk. One of the safest things for them to do is to maintain their enrolment and attendance at a school. To that end, schools put wrap-around support in place for some of our most vulnerable children, with a view of keeping them at school as long as they can. I know that, currently, in schools around the country some of those children are coming back to school, and saying, 'I'm here to exit because I'm going to do a course.' The course will not come with careers guidance and it will not come with welfare support. You will have a year 9 or a year 10 student, aged 14 years and nine months, heading off to do a course that they have signed up to and, unbeknownst to them, it will disconnect them from their education.

Ms SCOTT (Lindsay) (12:27): Firstly, I would like to commend the member for Lalor for her passionate and heartfelt remarks. It is good to see a schoolteacher in this place stand up for her community. So thank you.

I rise today in support of the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015. This bill sees a lot of bipartisanship on both sides of the chamber and it really brings out the best in what this place does. The bill seeks to addresses many of the challenges faced within my electorate of Lindsay. Further, this bill will provide clarity to both education providers and students alike.

For too long, vocational training has been treated as the poor cousin when it comes to attaining workplace skills. Some of the certificate courses being offered are foundation stones for our youth to gain entrance into the workforce.

Every day, right across western Sydney, hundreds of registered training organisations do extraordinary work. I myself have been a product of the Western Sydney Institute of TAFE where I gained early vocational courses in marketing and graphic design and, finally, a diploma in marketing management. This provided a gateway opportunity for me to then go to the University of Western Sydney and study a Bachelor of Business, with a major in marketing and, finally, a Masters of Business Administration from the Australian Graduate School of Management.

I would never have been able to achieve these things and have that gateway if I had not attended the TAFE college in my local community, on Henry Street, in Penrith. I am very passionate about this sector because I really can see what it will actually do for so many of our youth. But, like so many of the brilliant RTOs, we are all equally disappointed when we see rogue operators partaking in unscrupulous activities and bringing the entire industry into disrepute.

I stand here today, a product of the VET system. Now, in my capacity as a member of parliament, I feel that it is my responsibility to ensure that other young people are provided
opportunities and that other young people can trust the vocational training that they sign up to. Further, accessibility and affordability of the system are essential, as is a system that continues to provide a diversity of program formats designed to meet the varying skills and levels, the individual learning outcomes, of students. These are all crucial elements of the sector.

Currently, for many students working their way through the system, this is not easy. Understanding which registered training organisation is providing which course and what gateways they will potentially open is, for many students, obscure and ambiguous, and students will often be forced to sign up to courses through third-party organisations. Sadly, some of these training bodies have gone door to door with sales techniques whereby potential students have been enrolled in courses with the enticement of an iPad, a laptop or even some form of tablet and maybe a couple of hundred dollars.

I was at a multicultural event over the weekend and was pulled aside by a couple of the elders at that event. They were extremely distressed and very, very upset. A few of their youth who had not been in Australia very long and were still coming to grips with English were signed up to a training program. They ended up being saddled with large amounts of debt. They were given a laptop computer—one of them was given an iPad—and told, ‘Here you go, on your way, off on your course.’ They were so, so upset. They were upset for their youth, but they were also upset about the waste of government dollars in this program. This community group really has been one of the most innovative in my community. To see these men, whom I respect so much, so upset about this program made me very, very angry.

What also made me angry about this was hearing through my office from nursing homes which have had individuals signed up to these programs. The fact is that these rogue operators are absolutely targeting our most vulnerable, targeting people who may not necessarily know what they are signing up to. This is an abhorrent thing that they are doing, and it must stop.

This amendment is designed to clean up this mess, with one simple requirement: if you offer a course, you must identify which certifying body that course is with. Not only is this amendment good for openness and accountability; it is good for transparency. I would have thought that this is a bonus for organisations in showing they have a credible product to offer.

Registered training organisations must meet curriculum and quality standards. All major representative organisations overseeing these providers would also agree. All the stakeholders are cognisant and supportive of the need to address quality issues in vocational education and training. As for setting the quality standard, the government will further consult with all states and territories, employer groups and the sector to develop the quality standard.

The Australian Council for Private Education and Training is one of the many industry bodies which firmly believe these changes will deliver better transparency for the sector. Rod Camm, the chief executive of the council, says that requiring the registered training organisation to be listed is something that students have a right to know about. He further goes on to say:

As the peak body representing quality private providers, ACPET—the Australian Council for Private Education and Training—has been a vocal supporter of measures that strengthen the VET system … These measures are necessary to protect both students and colleges …
Finally, Rod says:

After a necessary and welcome period of consultation by the government, I think we can all agree these reforms are urgent, and must be passed as soon as is practicable.

TAFE Directors Australia have a similar view. Malcolm White, the CEO of TAFE Directors Australia, said:

The legislation is an important step in enabling the regulator to act quickly to address the practices of a few unscrupulous training providers that are damaging the reputation of VET—vocational education and training in Australia. Importantly it will also allow the regulator to respond effectively to the questionable actions of some brokers and third parties engaged in 'selling' courses on behalf of registered training organisations. TDA calls on all members of the House of Representatives and the Senate to support this important legislation.

That is the key to this bill. It is to prevent the system from being further rorted. It is to put confidence back in the system. And it will lay bare those charging exorbitant prices for their services.

Jim Barron, the Chief Executive Officer of Group Training Australia, goes further. He believes the legislation will help to ensure that providers will ensure that training is of a high quality to meet the needs of apprentices, trainees and employers. It is an important reform that will help bring equality of opportunity for those who partake in such training.

In New South Wales alone there are more than 564,000 students involved in vocational education. About 10 per cent are international students. This government will subsidise New South Wales to the tune of $579 million to keep those courses affordable. That money will be spread across 1,100 operators right around NSW. Two hundred and fifteen of those 1,143 registered training organisations are in Western Sydney. With such money involved, we really need to ask: are we getting value from that money? With 101,000 apprentices reliant on these courses for their careers, can we afford this? Can we allow for this damage to the training and career opportunities of our students and our communities to continue? Of course the answer is no.

In 2012, 150,000 people were awarded their qualifications through these organisations. It is essential that these qualifications meet basic standards. What we do not want to see is more nightly television exposes, like those that we have seen over the past fortnight where people are being awarded hairdressing qualifications but are unable to carry out basic cuts. These are not the first stories of operators selling courses as part of immigration scams or of other institutions that are just not delivering on their promises. This brings me to the next part of the bill.

The bill ensures that organisations have their registration periods extended from five to seven years. It will ensure that the national regulator can better meet the 2012 standards and the 2015 amendments can be better enforced. Under the current system too much focus is being placed on the audit assessment at accreditation time. Under the changes in the bill, the national regulator can work between these periods to ensure quality is maintained over a length of time and not just at renewal time. The aim is to cut the red tape from strong performing operators, while placing greater focus on the poorer performing operators in the spectrum. Further, it is a strange quirk that the existing legislation makes it near impossible for the national regulator to investigate non-registered training organisations, even if they...
make claims of being registered. This bill will strengthen the national regulator's power. Under the amendments, anyone purporting to be registered can be investigated. Very simply—and common sense would say, I think—this is definitely a necessary amendment.

The bill will also complement a number of changes that are taking place right across New South Wales, and part of those changes is a new national entitlement, Smart and Skilled. This program provides a range of new subsidies for non-apprentice courses, assisting those studying for Certificate Levels I, II and III. Alongside this program are a range of Commonwealth programs, including the Industry Skills Fund and Trade Support Loans, which were introduced as part of the 2014-15 budget. To support these measures in this amendment bill, there will be the creation of a new National Training Complaints Hotline. On the hotline, Rod Camm, from the Australian Council for Private Education and Training, said:

The message to all providers is clear: tidy up your act or leave the sector … There’s no place for unscrupulous behaviour in this sector and we fully support the government’s measures to stamp it out. These are very, very strong words. This is good legislation. It will shore up an important educational sector. It will help build on the confidence of the industry, and it is for that reason that I commend the bill to the House.

Ms HALL (Shortland—Opposition Whip) (12:40): I argue very strongly that the amendment to the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015 should be agreed to, but in doing so I would firstly like to pick up on a comment that the previous speaker made. I agree with much of her contribution to this debate but not her comments about the New South Wales government’s Smart and Skilled program. This program is actually an attack on vocational education in that state. For her to stand up here, in this parliament, and praise Smart and Skilled is really praising an attack on vocational students in New South Wales. I will talk a little bit more about that later in my contribution to this debate.

I support the amendment put forward by the member for Cunningham. Unfortunately, under this government's watch and the watch of the New South Wales government, vocational education and training is in free-fall when it comes to vocational and education training providers—I will refer to them as VET providers from here on in—being poorly monitored. In New South Wales, the government is slashing funds to TAFE.

This bill is long overdue and it does make some significant improvements in this area, but it does not go far enough, unfortunately. All members of this House will have constituents who have been in touch with them about how they have been duped by private providers who act irresponsibly and who sign people up to inappropriate and substandard courses. This legislation is an improvement, but, as I said, it does not go far enough. I will in a moment spend some time highlighting just how ineffective the monitoring of this area is and how little recourse people—usually young people—have when they are signed up to undertake a course with providers who, in many cases, are very unscrupulous.

As the previous speaker mentioned, there have been media reports of unscrupulous RTOs, registered training organisations, preying on vulnerable students who end up with large VET-FEE HELP tax debts. I will talk a little about a constituent in the Shortland electorate, Leah. I met with Leah's mother at one of my mobile offices and she told me the story of Leah. Leah received an ATAR score of 33 per cent, and so she enrolled at the University of Newcastle to improve her ATAR score—academically, not strong. While Leah was at the university—she
was actually in the library—she received a phone call from Careers Australia. This is the organisation that I am going to talk about here—'The fastest way to a better job'. Well, it has not been a fast way for Leah. Leah was offered a double diploma in business and management. She thought a double diploma in business and management. She thought: 'That sounds reasonable.' This is a double diploma in business and management for a young person who had a very, very low ATAR score and who needed to improve her academic achievement before she could enrol in something at that level. Ten minutes later she received another phone call from them, from which she understood that the government was covering the cost of the course and that it was going to be an online course. She was directed to a link to sign up online while she was sitting in the library. When signing up to this diploma, Leah was not informed about the debt that she would incur to the tax office, the full costs associated with the course, how FEE-HELP would affect her financial life later or what the sets of data were or what they meant.

Leah submitted her first assignment three times and did not receive the competency. Until she received her first letter indicating that she had incurred a cost for the first part of the course, she was not aware of this aspect of the implication of signing up. She then brought it to her mother's attention. She felt that she had been taken advantage of and that she did not fully understand the system. The process to sign up was quick and she thought it was a government paid course. She did not have any time to see what was involved in the study or to assess her ability to achieve the competencies it required. Regardless of her academic level, through the whole process the cost was not explained to her properly. Her mother has written to Careers Australia explaining this and is still waiting for a response. At the moment her total debt is $16,787.97 and she does not have any competencies. Instead, what she has is a large debt, and her opportunity to find employment has not improved at all.

That is the type of situation that this legislation is addressing. We on this side of the House have a strong record on helping students and workers to get the skills that they need. I am a particularly strong supporter of school based apprenticeships and apprenticeships within my local community.

FEE-HELP was a direct result of a Howard government initiative in 2007 and commenced in 2009. We established a national regulator—the Australian Skills Quality Authority—and in 2012 increased coverage of VET-HELP to diplomas and associate diplomas. We acknowledge there is a role for them, but the thing is that they have to be properly monitored. That is what I would argue strongly has not been happening. The Australian Skills Quality Authority, ASQA, regulates RTOs. It says that it has received 4,000 complaints and conducted 3,000 audits since it was established in 2011. It needs to be strengthened. It needs to have more power and greater authority, as is set out in the amendment by the minister.

There are more than 4,500 private training colleges in Australia. The number has grown exponentially since this government came to power. The government has allocated $68 million to clean up the industry, but it has also cut in other areas. So whilst it has given lip service to addressing this issue I do not think that this government's performance in this area has been nearly strong enough. There have been 350 colleges cancelled, suspended or refused registration. In addition to that, we have report after report of issues such as childcare centres blacklisting accredited training organisations because they provide poor training to enrolled students. There are industry cowboys providing quick, dirty services. There are students
saying that teachers forget to teach half the content of courses. There has been action, as I mentioned, against hundreds of providers. Unions have called for a national inquiry into training. I must say that I feel that, from everything I have read, that is something that needs to happen. In Victoria the situation has been particularly bad. I know that when the new minister for education and training took office he was horrified at the extent of the problem.

But what really concerns me is that in its minibudget this government is cutting $200 million in important skills funding. It has cut $66 million from Support for Adult Australian Apprentices and slashed over 10,000 training places from the Skills for Education and Employment program. The Support for Adult Australian Apprentices program was put in place to remove barriers to completing an apprenticeship and to encourage upskilling for adult workers. Unfortunately adult apprentices are now in an unenviable position because of the cuts to programs. It has been a devastating blow to adult workers. This is added on to the 2014 cuts of almost $2 billion.

The Abbott government has also axed $43.8 million from the Skills for Education and Employment program. That funding was for over 10,000 places in training programs that help job seekers who have poor literacy and numeracy skills bring their reading, writing and basic maths skills up to speed. That is very important if you are going to be seeking employment. The government does not understand how hard it is for somebody with poor numeracy and literacy to keep a job or how hard it is for somebody with poor literacy and numeracy skills who is unemployed to find a job. This government does not have a plan to help people find a job; rather, it has a plan to extend their training to private providers, and that will lead to more young Australians ending up with debts.

At the commencement of my contribution to this debate I indicated that I would refer to the New South Wales government. The New South Wales government has been privatising vocational education through funding policies such as Smart and Skilled, which came into effect on 1 January. My office and I have received many complaints, and we receive them because there is no point going to the office of the state member. He was a Liberal Party member but now he is an Independent after his appearance at the New South Wales ICAC. This policy has led to cuts in programs, it has led to cuts in specialist positions like disability support workers in TAFE, and it has led to a decline in vocational education through the TAFE system.

Premier Baird has attempted to divert attention from the state government's Smart and Skilled policy to privatise TAFE. It is designed to take money out of TAFE and hand it over to private for-profit organisations, when the Baird government has already slashed TAFE funding and TAFE courses, has sacked teachers and support staff and has increased fees. The New South Wales election will be held next month and voters will have a chance to say no to the Smart and Skilled program. Labor does not support the Liberals' Smart and Skilled privatisation program and have committed to scrapping it, TAFE fees will be frozen at 2014 levels, indexed to inflation, and a 30 per cent cap will be placed on the amount of public funding contestable by private operators.

The unfortunate thing is that whenever a Liberal-National Party government is in power it impacts upon the students and it impacts upon the public sector—it diverts money from the public sector to the private sector. There needs to be proper monitoring of the private sector, but they do not include that in their privatisation push. The Liberal Party and the National
Party are the parties of privatisation, and in New South Wales this has been exhibited very clearly. The people of New South Wales have a very clear decision to make at the end of this month.

Mrs SUDMALIS (Gilmore) (12:55): Australia's work and training relationship needs quite a shake-up. There was a time where our gender determined the stream of training subjects that we were directed towards. This week we celebrate International Women's Day, and it is significant that we as women are no longer directed towards secretarial studies or home-maker courses; in fact, girls these days, thankfully, can pretty much take on any career choice they want. Our youth can choose from a huge career range.

Whilst many of us have successfully aimed for and achieved a degree or other qualification at university, young men and women, also people choosing to change careers, can attend a different, often more practical, application of education learning. We call this, in general terms, vocational education and training. Our Australian scheme is envied in many places around the world as a quality alternative educational pathway. In recent years, we have finally begun to re-realise that our vocational education is not only desirable but absolutely essential. Following this recognition, as we developed several areas of skills shortage past governments scurried to shore up the gaping holes in our skilled labour force. Rather than the slow, steady, methodical approach that was needed, there was a frantic process of registration of a number of organisations that supposedly offered training, education and qualifications. While this superficially looked to be the solution pathway, many of these training organisations did not train and many students could barely grapple with the English language, so education was 'off the whiteboard' and, as for qualifications, they were not worth the certificates printed. Businesses were crying out for tradespeople, students really did want a recognised and full qualification and the government wanted a return on its investment dollar.

Over recent years, various attempts have been made to remedy the situation, without a lot of success, hence the need to introduce the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015. This bill will improve the quality of the VET system and help the Australian government to create new quality standards in order to quickly address problems with VET providers or VET courses, and require anyone marketing a VET course, including brokers and other third parties, to clearly identify which registered training organisation is providing the qualification. It will also extend the registration period for RTOs from five to seven years, which will help the national training regulator, the Australian Skills Quality Authority, to focus its attention on investigating and acting upon high risk and poor quality providers. At first I was a little unsure of this extension but on talking to some of my fair dinkum RTOs it makes perfect sense—more time for them to just concentrate on getting great results for their students, rather than fussing around with paperwork, which in turn means more time for ASQA to check out the other RTOs.

In 2012, the original standards for ASQA were put in place. The standards are the instrument ASQA uses to ensure nationally consistent, high quality training and assessment across Australia's VET system. Compliance with the standards is a requirement for all ASQA-registered training organisations, but these standards have not always been met. The standards describe the requirements that an organisation must meet in order to be an accredited training provider in Australia. Training must be delivered by a training provider meeting industry requirements, as set out in the training package or accredited course, and it must have
integrity for employment and further study. Also, training providers have to operate ethically and consider the needs of both their students and industry. However, there have been some pretty significant problems, so some major reforms had to be put in place: new standards for new RTOs from 1 January this year and for existing RTOs from 1 April. The standards strengthen the requirements for RTOs and third parties acting on their behalf, including the requirement to advise prospective and current students of any debts and government subsidies before they actually sign up to a course.

Often, for a government to create new standards, negotiations must take place with all the states and territories and approval must be secured from the ministerial council. But this can take around 12 months—way too long for the current problems, with unethical RTOs giving great RTOs a bad name. As a consequence, a quality standard has been devised and is introduced with this bill. Essentially, this will give the Commonwealth the equivalent of emergency powers to address known and emerging quality issues that compromise student and, eventually, industry interests and the quality of outcomes. It will also give industry and individual states or territories a direct avenue to the Commonwealth for action to urgently address issues of concern. In addition, these stakeholders will be part of the development of the quality standards. The Australian government will consult with employers, training providers and the state and territory governments to deliver the new quality standard within weeks.

The quality standard will be a condition of registration for RTOs. This also provides government and registered training organisations with the ability to respond far more rapidly to emerging issues than the current structures allow, sending a clear signal that, when required, the government can take action against those who are undermining the quality of the training sector.

These new standards also apply to the type of training in the information that must be provided to prospective students, including VET FEE-HELP loans, state entitlements and subsidy arrangements they sign up to. It must be absolutely clear to all students what they are signing up for, every single time their debt level is about to increase. The standards also make it clear that registered training providers are ultimately responsible for services delivered on their behalf by brokers, including that these third parties have to have a written agreement.

This measure of third-party notification has come about in direct response to the negative impact of marketing by such parties in the training sector and, in particular, the VET FEE-HELP market. There are a number of young students who are terribly confused about what their load currently is. A potential vocational student should be able to clearly identify the registered training organisation responsible for the qualification they expect to get. Under the proposed amendment, ASQA will be able to pursue anyone, not just training providers, who does not make it clear who is actually responsible. In line with this amendment, the bill will also clarify the coverage of ‘person’ to include organisations that are constitutional corporations, for coverage of civil penalty and offence provisions in part 6 of the act, so ASQA can take action.

To improve the effectiveness of ASQA in dealing with unscrupulous practices, this bill makes a suite of administrative amendments. Currently, the act only allows the regulator to request information from a regulated registered training organisation, which kind of defeats the purpose. ASQA cannot request information from a person or an organisation that is
pretending to be an RTO. Another improvement is gained by amending the definitions of vocational education and training information so ASQA can share that information wherever necessary. Some changes are as simple as terminology changes, like from the Australian Quality Framework, a very current Public Service term, to the more user-friendly VET Quality Framework.

ASQA has advised the government that renewal, or re-registration, audits are the least effective method of identifying poor-performing providers, leading to less sanction activity than other types of audits. Extending the registration period will enable ASQA to redirect its resources from re-registration audits to more-targeted and random investigations and audits which will actually find the providers who are doing the wrong thing.

In doing so, the bill brings registration for RTOs into line with current registration under the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, TEQSA. With a number of providers offering both higher education and vocational education and training, this will mean that the process is duplicated across them rather than having two separate processes. Finally, a system where the standards make training providers responsible for their services delivered by brokers is a much better checking system.

The government is so serious about making sure this works that there is an allocation of an additional $68 million over four years to allow ASQA to really enforce these standards. This is a complete change, managing risk to our students and their education, as opposed to the policies of those on the other side that caused ASQA to spend time and resources on cost recovery rather than checking up on dodgy RTOs.

As part of this suite of changes, there is also a new National Training Complaints Hotline. On 19 January 2015, we launched this National Training Complaints Hotline—and it has actually been a 'hot line'. It is a joint initiative with the states and territories to provide a single point of contact to make it easier for complaints to be heard and actioned. Gilmore residents can call 133873, email skilling@education.gov.au or visit the training complaints website.

The government is looking at further action to crack down on inducements such as 'free' iPads or cash rebates, and increase the duty-of-care provisions for training providers to keep when they sign up a student, make sure that the student loan is actually spelt out and address single-unit qualifications where the full loan amount is levied up-front. That is totally inadequate, and we must address this.

The rapid expansion of VET FEE-HELP in the last few years and its misuse by providers is a direct result of Labor's failure to properly administer and implement the program, failure to establish a strong compliance regime and failure to protect these vulnerable students and taxpayers from unscrupulous training providers.

You might wonder, Deputy Speaker Broadbent, what else this government is doing to support vocational education and training. We are going to provide almost $6 billion this year in support of vocational education and training through direct funding for programs, support to the states and territories, and student loans. We have introduced the new trade support loans, which is up to $8,000 in the critical first year, up to $20,000 over four years, with almost 16,000 of these already taken up in the first six months of offer.

There is a new Australian Apprenticeship Support Network, to start 1 July this year, to cut red tape and improve apprentice commencement and completion. This will offer tailored
support to Australian apprentices and their employers from pre-commencement to completion, entry-level screening and testing to ensure assisted apprentices find the right training pathway and are well matched to their employer. How many times do we hear about a young person going into the wrong career and being stuck there? This individual case management and mentoring will be available to those at risk of noncompletion. The $476m industry skills fund will be a key component of the government's Industry Innovation and Competitiveness Agenda. It is absolutely critical. Most importantly, as part of this entire initiative the government is conducting a full review of training products in the VET system.

There will of course be more reforms, following periods of consultation that occurred in the first part of 2015. One initiative as a result is the introduction of the vocational education in schools framework, preparing our secondary students for work. A second series of national VET reform consultations hosted by the VET Advisory Board was held throughout January and February, and the results will be taking into consideration by the government when rolling out reforms. As part of the broader reform of training packages, the government is moving to a more contestable model for training package development and maintenance from 1 July 2015.

The coalition worked with all stakeholders to review and revive the vocational education in schools framework, to help our students get the right training for the right place, the right job and the right employer. Updated for the first time in more than a decade, the framework marks the start of an exciting phase for students who choose to pursue a vocational pathway to their preferred career and for those who develop and implement VET programs in our secondary schools. Elevating the status and quality of the vocational pathway is critical for the skills audit that we need in our nation. Throughout 2015 we will be working with the schools involved and other stakeholders to establish the curriculum, recruit year 9 students who will join the recently announced P-TECH for year 10 in 2016 and engage industry partners. These concerns emphasise the study of science, technology, engineering and maths, all extremely important and absolutely dear to my heart. Over the next four years we have also budgeted $1.9 billion in loans to apprentices under our Trade Support Loans, $1.79 billion in apprenticeship incentives, $1 billion for adult migrant English and so on. We are actually getting on with the job of investing in our students.

As part of the inquiry into TAFE education we saw examples where dodgy RTOs have been allowed to flourish at the expense of well-known and well-respected TAFEs. The Labor Party say they are the friends of TAFE—really? When you allow unchecked, unaudited, non-compliant organisations to expand exponentially while TAFEs and very effective private RTOs are struggling to survive, I have to question the value of Labor's friendship. In fact it is more a case of: with friends like that, you don't need enemies.

To conclude, Labor failed to support training, but I would like to congratulate the member for Cunningham for the introduction of this amendment. It is really just a shame that it did not come about in the last government, as so many students now have difficulties that they will have to deal with in the future. I congratulate the member for Cunningham for bringing this forward, because it addresses the issues that developed, and they needed to be addressed. Now we have a bipartisan approach to look out for the betterment of our students, our industry and their training.
Mr GILES (Scullin) (13:10): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015. I note that the previous speaker touched on the relationship between Labor and the TAFE sector. That was of course a very significant issue in the recent state election in Victoria, as you may well recall, Deputy Speaker Broadbent, as may the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, who is at the table. There is no doubt in the minds of the Victorian community who the friend of the TAFE sector and, indeed, vocational training is. It is the Labor Party and it will continue to be.

The purpose of this bill is to amend the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011 to protect the integrity of the VET system and to give the regulator capacity to respond to emerging issues. It also makes some technical amendments designed to improve the efficiency and operation of the act and consequently the regulator. The bill would also extend the period of registration able to be granted by the regulator from five to seven years.

I note that the member for Cunningham has moved a series of amendments to this bill which would have the effect of amending the proposed registration period so that the extension from five to seven years would be granted only to existing low-risk providers at renewal of registration. It is a sensible amendment, which I support. The further amendments introduced by the member for Cunningham are similarly sensible and worthy of the support of all members of the House in so far as they call on the Australian government to act with greater urgency to ensure that the protection of students is prioritised—that is a matter that many contributors to this debate have touched upon—to immediately seek a consumer protection information campaign through the ACCC, including advice for people who need to seek redress, and consider other mechanisms which might be available to strengthen consumer protections, and also to support Labor's vital call for the Auditor-General to conduct an audit on the use of VET FEE-HELP.

A little bit of context is important in this debate. When we debate the future of vocational education and training we need to think about the present high unemployment rate, particularly the high youth unemployment rate. We also need to acknowledge the very significant cuts that have been made to a range of relevant programs that are denying people access to the training that they need.

In recent weeks we have seen a spate of disturbing media reports and some powerful stories recounted by contributors to this debate. I think of the contribution by the member for Shortland, earlier, who detailed the travails of a constituent of hers. These reports are, I am sure, concerning to everyone in this place and highlight the importance of proper regulation and of the enforcement of that regulation. We have seen some shocking cases of exploitation, often of very vulnerable people. Indeed, just last night on 7.30 there was yet another story about a registered training organisation, Evocca College, allegedly doing the wrong thing. What is especially concerning about this story is that it is not about one of the so-called fly-by-night operations that we hear about from time to time. In fact, this is one of the largest registered training organisations in Australia. The ABC reported that Evocca College has a graduation rate of about 10 per cent despite claiming more than $290 million in government funding via VET FEE-HELP. The ABC's figures go on to suggest that, out of 38,000 students who signed up to its diploma courses in the past four years, only 2,000 were handed diplomas by October last year. There were over 16,000 students who officially cancelled and almost
4,000 who timed out of their courses. The college says about 15,000 are still on track to graduate. I was pleased to hear that the Australian Skills Quality Authority is investigating this college, although I note that the allegations contained in the 7.30 report last night were not matters it was aware of.

Last night's report featured a student, Dylan Palmer, who has Asperger's syndrome and is enrolled to study digital gaming at Evocca's Brisbane campus. It appears he was referred to the course by a friend who received $100 cash from Evocca, and Dylan received a free laptop. He now has a $27,000 VET FEE-HELP debt to go with it, and he still has not finished and is struggling to finish this course. This is, sadly, one example of many whereby RTOs have, it appears, actively targeted vulnerable members of the community. I note that other contributors to this debate on both sides of the House have highlighted these shameful practices. There have been a slew of stories in the media of this nature. They are deeply concerning.

I note that this bill will do nothing for Dylan and people in his situation as it does not address the damage to individuals that has already occurred or propose action to engage with the community to minimise future problems—hence the amendments moved by the member for Cunningham. The actions of unscrupulous RTOs and their brokers have had serious impacts on vulnerable people. The reports of people being left with large debts and no qualifications or useless qualifications, as we have heard in this debate, must be addressed. The government must act with greater urgency to ensure the protection of students is prioritised.

But we have heard instead the minister and government members continue to blame Labor for supposedly allowing RTOs to behave in this manner. I note, in passing, that this government has now been in power for 18 months, as we await the beginning of good government, but still blames the Labor Party for everything. What did the former minister, who is now, rather ominously, the Minister for Health, do on her watch? Very little, it would appear. Those opposite conveniently forget that it was the Howard government that extended the use of FEE-HELP to include the VET sector for approved diploma and advanced diploma courses. It is true that VET FEE-HELP commenced in 2009 and that Labor amended the legislation in 2012 to increase the coverage to all diplomas and associate diplomas and also conducted a trial to extend VET FEE-HELP to cert IV courses; but it is also true that, in order to maintain quality in the VET sector, in 2011 Labor established a national regulator, the Australian Skills Quality Authority. When the Howard government first extended the use of FEE-HELP to VET, it should have done what Labor did in government and establish the regulator—appropriate regulation for a sector in receipt of very large sums of Commonwealth funding. In government, Labor had to react to a situation that had already begun to show signs of problems arising, in large part, from major changes to the VET market in Australia. This is why those RTOs that are doing the right thing will benefit from greater oversight and accountability in their industry—it is in their interests as much as the general public's for these cowboy operations to be reined in.

There is a bigger issue here that needs to be discussed, and that is the orthodoxy of allowing a totally deregulated marketplace to operate unfettered by government oversight but accompanied, of course, by much government largesse, where the only real winners are those RTOs who get money regardless of the education they provide and regardless of the outcome.
for students. What we have seen is fees go up and quality go down. I am very grateful for the work that has been done on behalf of the Australian Education Union in research into just how much money some RTOs are making, despite the limited information that is available.

Those opposite will no doubt continue to trot out their ideological world view that the market will respond negatively to dodgy operators and that those that provide a good quality education will prosper. But I ask members opposite: how is that going? We have had more competition but, oddly enough, vastly increased profits—extraordinary levels of profit. This does not add up until you look at the lack of quality being delivered by so many RTOs.

Mr Tudge interjecting—

Mr GILES: It is pretty clear where they are making their super-profits. I am very glad that Labor introduced a regulator to oversee this industry, but now it is time for this government to stop being an opposition in exile and start acting appropriately to address all of these matters.

I note for the benefit of the parliamentary secretary that this is occurring in Victoria under the Andrews Labor government, which recently announced a review of quality assurance in Victoria's VET system. This will feed into the Mackenzie review, which is anticipated to recommend a model of sustainable, high-quality training right across the training sector. This year the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority will conduct regulatory campaigns targeting specific qualifications and occupations and will be on the lookout for inadequate supervision, work or duties that do not match the qualification an apprentice is enrolled in and employers who do not release apprentices to attend training or pay them to attend training. Once again, Labor is setting an example of what to do. I remind the House that in Victoria we had four years—four long years—of a coalition government engaged in brutal TAFE funding cuts and issuing carte blanche to RTOs. Frankly, judging from what I have heard from constituents and what we all see in the media, it has been a mess for many students, taxpayers and the community more generally. This was, of course, a major issue in last year's state election right across Victoria but also locally, with the sell-off of the Greensborough campus of NMIT and the overall starving of funding to these providers in Melbourne's north being very major issues.

This is not limited to Victoria. Nationally, the regulator has cancelled, suspended or refused registration for 350 colleges. The reports we have been discussing in the course of this debate suggest that this is just the tip of the iceberg.

It is worth asking the question: what is wrong with supporting TAFE more effectively, as this government presses on with extending very, very significant Commonwealth subsidies to higher education private providers? I anticipate that those opposite will make the point that TAFEs are a state government responsibility—and of course they are—but, when students of private operators are allowed access to large Commonwealth government backed loans, the TAFE system and its integrity are under threat. This is because the standards and qualities of TAFE are generally much higher than many RTOs, meaning that in many cases, again, the costs are higher too. I just do not accept the furphy that private operators, through sheer competitive force, have driven costs down. The evidence is not there to support that in any event. The only thing which has been driven down is quality, and that is something we will all pay for. Unfortunately, we have seen less and less money spent on a per-student basis while
RTOs prosper—prosper to an extraordinary degree. Surely, it is not in the interest of students that this continues.

I referred, briefly, to work done on behalf of the AEU looking at the profit and practices of a range of RTO operators. In considering the structure of vocational education and training in Australia, we would do well to return to the objectives that were set out in the 2012 National Partnership Agreements on Skills Reform, which included improving training accessibility, affordability and depth of skills; encouraging responsiveness in training arrangements; assuring the quality of training delivery and outcomes; and providing greater transparency through better information to ensure consumers can make informed choices and governments can exercise accountability. This bill, of course, goes some way to achieving these objectives, but it was too little and too late. The amendment moved by the member for Cunningham obviously picks up on some of these issues.

What is at stake for students? We are seeing more and more students, in this sector, loaded up with debt they will never repay, and often with qualifications that will not get them a job. I mentioned Dylan Palmer earlier in my contribution. It is worth noting that Dylan is still keen to finish his course, but his disability makes this difficult. That Dylan travelled three hours a day to attend his course in Brisbane is a strong indication of his dedication. Students like Dylan are not at fault here. There is not an independent source of information where they can find out beforehand about the provider, the course on offer, or the likely job prospects.

Increasingly, the prospective and current students that RTOs are targeting are not sophisticated consumers. They do not speak English, they may have a disability, and, in many cases, they are financially illiterate. That VET students have access to VET FEE-HELP loans is problematic at many levels. This encourages the RTOs to advertise, 'Study now, pay later.' However, FEE-HELP loans were originally designed for university students with the fees and loans being calibrated at the likely lifetime earnings of a university graduate. This has very limited application to many of the VET courses being provided—in particular, in fields of endeavour like child care. I ask: where is the equity in this approach? It is not something which is readily transferable. The vast majority of graduates of RTOs simply will never earn sufficient money to pay these loans back. This dashes the dreams, confidence and aspirations of these students to engage positively in our community.

It does not stop with the individual students. Taxpayers are also the losers in this situation, as we are all left with a bad debt that will not be repaid. The Grattan Institute's recent research puts these bad debts at 40 per cent. I would not be surprised if it turned out to be higher. More broadly, we end up with a society where unemployment remains high because the training does not meet the needs of today's labour market, much less the needs of tomorrow's labour market. So, we have, in this environment, a very small group of winners—big winners—with the current system. And then there is the rest of us—students and the community at large—picking up the tab for years to come. So much for intergenerational fairness.

Education remains one of Australia's biggest exports. We, have a mostly good reputation, but this reputation is being damaged when dodgy RTOs are allowed to operate. I strongly support students getting a vocational education. It is essential we ensure RTOs are delivering the quality that we are all directly or indirectly paying for. It is what these students deserve and what Australia needs.
Mr IRONS (Swan) (13:25): I rise to speak on the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015, which will act as this coalition government's next step towards ensuring Australians have access to high-quality vocational education and training or VET courses, high-quality providers of these courses and, by extension, a highly skilled workforce.

This is a sector which Australia as a whole cannot afford to let down, by allowing its reputation to be damaged by a few unscrupulous providers. Unfortunately, though, this is currently the case. Right now, a 15-year-old student who has decided that higher education is not for them, and who instead wants to pursue a VET course at TAFE or perhaps wants to attend an industry skills centre to gain qualifications, cannot be guaranteed to know which registered training organisation, RTO, is responsible for the qualification he or she is signing up to receive. This is a serious concern to me, and it should be a serious to all members in this place. It is a concern because, how can that student exercise due diligence in selecting the right course for them if they are not even sure that the qualification they will be handed upon completion is appropriately accredited, or that the course they are paying for will provide them with a level of skill appropriate to that course?

Many members in this place would know that I did not receive a tertiary education. I spent my time going through an apprenticeship as an electrician. Fortunately, 60 per cent of my family—the siblings—did get a tertiary education. My parents worked hard to stump up and pay for that education. There was no HECS available at the time, so it was paid for by my parents. I think that the VET training and apprenticeship schemes are as important today as they were back when I left school at the tender age of 16.

In that former life, I started off as an apprentice electrician earning $39 per week—back in 1974. Things have, thankfully, improved since then. I would highlight that it is through the work of this government that the rate of apprenticeship dropouts in Australia is slowly declining, and our VET skilled workforce is starting to once again feel secure and appreciated. This was something that was lacking through the six years of government by those opposite, when they established a VET-FEE HELP system but did not even bother to develop a dedicated compliance strategy.

In comparison, this government has introduced a range of measures to support vocational education and training, including providing almost $6 billion this year, to support VET through direct-funding programs. This includes the new trade support loans, which I have spoken about previously in this place. These loans will provide support of up to $8,000 in the first year to apprentices, and up to $20,000 over the life of a four-year apprenticeship.

The program was railed against by those opposite because we cut out a system that they had established. I know this system is attractive to a lot of young people. It is so attractive that my son took up an apprenticeship as soon as this scheme was announced and established, and he is now working as an apprentice bricklayer. He is working on new projects and new housing in the northern suburbs of Perth. This type of loan will help ensure that he is able to complete his apprenticeship without having to be concerned that he will not be able to afford rent or petrol for his car each week, or the necessary tools that he needs to renew or use during his time as an apprentice working on the tools.

I am sure that members can appreciate that, compared to my $39, I will not be keen to hear any excuses about him not being able to afford that tank of petrol. (Time expired)
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): Order! It being 1.30 pm, the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 43. The debate may be resumed at a later hour and the member will have leave to continue his remarks at that time.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Short, Mr Peter

Ms MacTIERNAN (Perth) (13:30): Today a strong Melbourne woman, Elizabeth Short, was in parliament to continue the passionate work of her husband, Peter, in advocating for the right of all Australians to die with dignity. Liz is joined in this mission by their son, Mitchell.

Peter Short died on 29 December 2014 in palliative care. He had access to Nembutal but decided he did not need to use it in the end. But he said that the access to it had added immeasurably to the quality of his remaining life. Knowing that he would not have to suffer was life-affirming.

Peter was diagnosed with incurable oesophageal cancer early last year. He decided to dedicate his remaining time to fight for legislation so that all terminally ill Australians would have the same access to decide when they were ready to die. He directed extraordinary focus and energy to this task right until the end. Just last November, we participated together in a workshop to plan the campaign to fight for this legislation.

Peter found it hard to fathom how, when all the research in the last three decades showed that the vast majority of Australians supported this right to die with dignity, legislators found it impossible to resolve. Let's prove to Peter that we can do this. Vale, Peter. We will continue the fight.

Medicare

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (13:31): I wish to inform the House of an exciting change to local Medicare services in my electorate of Bennelong. Next month the Centrelink office in Ryde will be expanded to offer full Medicare shopfront services. This one-stop shop facility will allow Human Services clients to receive the full suite of Centrelink and Medicare services in the one convenient location. This is a strong service increase for the people of Ryde and continues the policy of the previous federal Labor government, who completed 112 such co-locations. The transition will occur as a result of the closure of the existing run-down facilities in Eastwood, which had not been renovated in almost a decade. All staff will be retained and relocated to the Ryde office just a few kays away.

Since Medicare became cashless and doctors now offer point-of-service claiming, there has been a significant drop in face-to-face claims. This has caused a significant reduction in the need for stand-alone Medicare shopfronts. This policy of co-location makes sense, and I commend the previous Labor government for introducing it in 2009 and this government for continuing it. It is therefore perplexing to see the Labor candidate for Ryde at the upcoming state election totally disregard his party's stance on this issue and attempt to score political points on a bipartisan matter. This therefore begs the question: if a Labor candidate cannot even understand his own party's policies, what hope is there for anyone else?

Short, Mr Peter

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (13:33): On 29 December last year, Australia lost one of our finest, most tenacious, advocates, Peter Short. I first met Peter last year at a Dying with
Dignity event here in Parliament House and then in Fremantle, where he was spending some quality time with his son, Mitchell, and showing him WA, which Peter knew well from his career with Wesfarmers. The three of us had coffee at Freo's Esplanade Hotel. What struck me was Peter's dignity, his complete lack of self-pity, his determination to use every moment of his last few months of life to see legislative change and his infectious optimism that that day would come.

Peter would speak in person or on the phone to everyone he could, including the Prime Minister just 10 days before Peter died, to explain his terminal situation and to help people to understand the importance of dignity and choice in the matter of one's death. Peter kept a blog called 'Tic Toc Tic Toc dying to a killer clock' and participated in making a documentary film about his daily life with cancer and his celebration of each step in his campaign to bring into law the bill that will be cosponsored in a non-partisan way by Senator Richard Di Natale, Alannah MacTiernan and Sharman Stone.

Today we welcomed Peter's wife, Elizabeth, to Parliament House. Elizabeth and Mitchell are continuing to advocate for their family's shared goal of helping people have dignity through choice. Rest in peace, Peter, knowing that we will not give up the fight. Your legacy will remain, and there are many people who are forever grateful to you.

Agriculture

Mr BROAD (Mallee) (13:34): Today I rise to remind the Australian parliament of the contribution of our agricultural sector to the broader Australian economy. We stand shoulder to shoulder with our agricultural sector and we believe that those in the sector should be able to prosper. If I think over the number of months since the coalition has come to power, we have seen the currency drop, sea freight at low levels, low fossil fuel prices and very low interest rates. In the Australian agricultural sector, every 1c drop in the Australian currency translates to an extra $320 million in producers' pockets. We have opened markets, with free trade agreements with Japan, China and South Korea. In 1982, sheepmeat was exported to 12 countries, and at times we had to shoot sheep because there was no money in it; now we export sheepmeat to 96 countries. This has been a prosperous and good outcome for our producers.

Australia is blessed with innovative producers. We pray that we will have good seasonal conditions in 2015. The Australian government is standing shoulder to shoulder with hardworking Australian farmers. Hopefully, with good seasonal conditions, good government and farmers' hard work, they will be able to continue to grow and prosper as they produce our food and our fibre.

Indi Electorate: Wodonga Arts Space

Ms McGOWAN (Indi) (13:36): I would like to associate with the comments of my colleague the member for Mallee. Well said!

Today I would like to talk about Wodonga Arts Space, one of the many gems located in the heart of Indi—a community space, an arts space, a performance space and sometimes a meditative space. The arts space is supported by Wodonga Council and staffed by four wonderful staff and actively supported by two volunteers. Thank you, Jennifer, Stacey, Tom and Simone. Today I would like to talk about one of the volunteers, Lin Starke, and through her also to acknowledge Kath Thomas.
I asked Lin about her role in keeping the space open. Lin tells me she helps with the mail-out, distributes flyers around Wodonga and, as the gofer, does all sorts of odd jobs to support the paid staff. Lin tells me she loves the ambience of the arts space, the open space, the welcome given to visitors, and says that as volunteer she gets to experience the art, the exhibitions that usually rotate every four weeks and the two nationally travelling art exhibits that come to Wodonga. Lin has a Diploma of Visual Arts from Riverina TAFE and she is generous in sharing her skills, time and experience.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge and thank Wodonga Council for the support it gives to community arts, the work it does in community engagement and particularly for the opportunity it gives to volunteers to be involved in the arts industry.

Petition: Asylum Seekers

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (13:37): I present a petition concerning asylum seekers, which has been approved by the Standing Committee on Petitions. This petition spawned a play. The play travelled from church to church right around my electorate and across South Gippsland. The best part about this story is that the play, called Stormy Waters, that was created out of the talent of Gill Heal, Jennie Deane and other members of concerned groups, is now hitting the big time. It is going to the Wesley Church in the City of Melbourne, for those that do not know what a real city is, on Palm Sunday. On Palm Sunday this play will be presented at the Wesley Church. It is a great play: it has humour; it has sadness; it has a message. That message is: look after people who are under our care in this country.

The petition read as follows—
To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives
This petition of: Members of churches and other concerned residents across the electorate of McMillan and other equally concerned individuals, speaking with one voice draws to the attention of the House:
Our total opposition to the inhumane treatment of asylum seekers by this and the previous Government.
We therefore ask the House to: Affirm its commitment to the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951, and particularly to the humane treatment of asylum seekers.

from 492 citizens

Petition received.

Domestic Violence

Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (13:39): This week has been an important week for women and their children who have been, or are continuing to be, victims of domestic or family violence. I joined the parliamentary friendship group advocating an end to domestic and family violence this week, to hear the incredibly sad news that this year, in 2015, the statistics now tell us that we are having two women a week murdered by their partner or ex-partner in this country. I commend the co-chairs, including the member for Gellibrand, for their work in engaging with the sector and sharing the information that they are gleaning and the strategies that they are gleaning with the rest of the caucus.

We saw the HeForShe campaign also being part of the parliamentary week, at the International Women's Day breakfast. I would like to take a moment to congratulate the Andrews Victorian government on the initiation of the Royal Commission into Family Violence—long overdue but very welcome—and I would like to commend the call of the opposition leader, Bill Shorten, for a national summit and the federal parliamentary Labor
Party for its commitment to the provision of funding that will end the scourge that is driven by a desire to control and born of gender inequity. There is much work to do. Women have waited long enough.

**Eden-Monaro Electorate: Seiffert Oval**

Dr HENDY (Eden-Monaro) (13:40): On the evening of Saturday 22 February I had the great pleasure of joining Queanbeyan Mayor, Tim Overall, and nearly 7,000 fellow Rugby League fans to witness the return of the Raiders to their original home ground, Seiffert Oval in Queanbeyan. The Raiders were hosting a preseason trial game against the Newcastle Knights. The ground itself has been resurfaced and the stands refurbished through a $1.1 million upgrade, of which the Australian government provided $500,000. This is another election promise we have secured for Eden-Monaro.

Despite the threat of wet weather, the crowd turned out to relive those glorious days of yesteryear, when a trip to Queanbeyan for visiting teams meant a brutal welcome to Monaro turf. Unfortunately, the score of Knights 26 to Raiders four was more reminiscent of the very early days of the sons of Seiffert—days when the visitors more often than not treated the local team to a footballing lesson. Nevertheless, we Raiders fans remain ever hopeful that the great days can return, and we fans remain hopeful, too, that Raiders management and the NRL can find more opportunities for the team to host games in Queanbeyan. As the local police noted about this event, 'It was a good family evening.' As a parliamentary friend of Rugby League, I say: may there be more of them. The ground is there, the passion is there, and the crowd will be there if the sports administrators take the opportunity that Queanbeyan's Seiffert Oval presents.

**Parramatta Electorate: Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program**

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (13:42): I am pleased to advise the House that Carlingford High School will be commemorating the Anzac spirit with a memorial on their school grounds with support from the Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program. The sandstone plinth with bronze plaque will commemorate those who died at Gallipoli and those who embody the Anzac spirit of courage, cooperation and mateship. The plaque will also be inscribed with the famous words of Ataturk:

Those heroes that shed their blood and lost their lives ... You are now lying in the soil of a friendly country. Therefore rest in peace.

A big thank you to Mrs Margaret Owens—no relation—the head teacher of history and legal studies, who has taught at Carlingford High School for 22 years and has supported and organised this commemoration. The project also has the support of Carlingford High School principal David Krust and the P and C association.

This project will be a continuation of the school's commitment to commemorating Anzac Day with a large multicultural commemoration for both the school and community, held every year on school grounds. The commemorative piece, to be located in the school's quadrangle, will serve as an excellent reminder to students of the significance of World War I and Gallipoli in our nation's history and can only enhance their learning about this important piece of Australian history. I look forward to seeing the 1,100 students, their parents, staff and the community at the commemoration ceremony on 24 April, when the memorial will be unveiled.
Centenary of Anzac

Mr VARVARIS (Barton) (13:43): This morning I had the honour of representing the Prime Minister at the Lemnos centennial dawn service at Martin Place cenotaph in Sydney. Remembrance of Lemnos is particularly significant, given that this year it is 100 years since the Gallipoli landing by our ANZACs. The Gallipoli campaign remains one of the most important military campaigns in Australia's history and was essential in Australia's relationship with Greece. This morning's dawn service commemorates the arrival of the all-volunteer Australian Imperial Force on the Greek island of Lemnos on 4 March 1915 as they helped the ANZACs prepare for the Gallipoli campaign. The service honours the vital contribution of all the nurses of No. 3 Australian General Hospital and the No. 2 Australian Stationary Hospital.

Lemnos, in the deep blue Aegean Sea, hosted hospitals and recovery camps and housed depots for the Gallipoli campaign. Over 50,000 troops passed through Lemnos where civilians gave the allies their donkeys as water carriers, ferried supplies in small boats and operated a canteen on the landing beach.

The alliance and coordinated efforts of Lemnos and Australia is forever entwined by the events of World War I, and today 148 Australians are buried at Lemnos in one of two Commonwealth war graves. I commend the ultimate sacrifice made by the Australian troops as well as the self-sacrifice and compassion shown by our nurses. I also commend the enduring hospitality shown by the people of Lemnos.

Primary Education

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (13:45): Primary schooling has a critical role in the lives of children. Conversely, the teachers and staff of the nation's primary schools take on a very important but often undervalued responsibility. We entrust into their care young children whose futures are very heavily influenced by their early years at school.

Last night several parliamentary colleagues and I met with primary school principals from public and private schools from around Australia to hear firsthand about the issues that matter to them. Those issues are best summarised in the Context Statement of the Charter on Primary Schooling issued by the Australian Primary Principals Association, which says:

Primary schools are under pressure. Teachers feel that their core business has been devalued and made more difficult as they are expected to provide solutions for a range of social problems. The limited resources available are being stretched to cover increasing responsibilities and demands.

Evidence shows a growing trend:
… to load the primary school with every issue that others are unable to solve.

… … …

The expected role of primary schools is less clear than it once was as public debate sees strong and conflicting public views about the role of primary schools.

If governments continue to ignore our primary school staff, it is not those staff that are being ignored but our children and their futures.
Police Service Medals

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (13:46): The men and women of the Queensland Police Service are no ordinary people. They are dedicated professionals who go above and beyond the call of duty on a daily basis.

In a recent ceremony in Mackay, 85 of these professionals were recognised for their service, diligence, skill, resourcefulness and professional conduct. Awards included the National Police Service Medal, National Medal, and the Queensland Police Service Medal.

Unfortunately, time does not allow me to mention them all individually, but I offer my congratulations to all the recipients. I also congratulate Sergeant David Gillies, who was awarded the Humanitarian Overseas Service Medal; Senior Constable Damien Sledge, who was awarded the Cyclone Larry Commemorative Pin and certificate; Senior Sergeant Christine Hinds, who was awarded the Adopt-a-Cop of the Year District Award; Senior Constable Kerri Breen who was awarded Blue Light Life Membership; and Helen Stanton who received the Volunteer in Policing Bronze Award for 200 hours of service.

Queensland Police provide a number of services, ranging from critical protection of the public and response to emergency situation to services like Blue Light and Adopt-a-Cop programs that engage with the community and make us feel safe.

Unfortunately, our police offers are not always shown the appreciation they deserve. When they clock on at the start of a shift, they do so knowing they may be abused, attacked, spat on or even killed in the line of duty while helping and protecting the community.

Knowing what police officers are paid, I do not know that they cop all that just for the pay cheque. They know they are providing an important service for the people and making our community safer every day. And, for that I, and my community, are truly grateful.

Batman Electorate: Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program

Mr FEENEY (Batman) (13:48): The Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program is an initiative introduced by the former Labor government to offer every Australian electorate the opportunity to commemorate the immense sacrifice our Anzacs made at the local level. In my home electorate of Batman, the program has made it possible for a wide range of local organisations and schools to pay tribute as we commemorate the centenary of World War I.

It is my pleasure to congratulate the successful applicants: the Darebin and Reservoir RSL; Fairfield Primary School; Bundoora Homestead Art Centre; the Villa Maria Society; Unsung Heroes of Australian History, which is a live multimedia performance to be displayed to primary and secondary schools; Bell Street Primary School; the National Servicemen Association of Australia Northern Districts Sub-Branch; and the Preston South Primary School.

It will be my pleasure to meet with these groups at a morning tea I have organised at my electorate office in Batman on 13 March to congratulate them on their projects and hear even more about what they have planned in our local community for Anzac Day.

The community of Batman has its own unique Anzac story to tell, and this program is ensuring that it is heard. It is a deep privilege to have been able to work with so many members of our community to ensure we have honoured our Anzacs.
National Security

Mr HOWARTH (Petrie) (13:49): For months now we have seen the threat of terrorism in Australia rise. We have seen Australians fighting with terrorist groups in Iraq and Syria. We have seen foreign fighters return to Australia and we have also seen people in Australia are actively supporting extremist groups.

Radicalisation is becoming a very real choice for some young and vulnerable Australians. As someone who believes that not all Muslims are terrorists, recently we have seen a lot of terrorists say that they are Muslims. I am worried about the perceptions these facts are creating when it comes to Muslims living in Australia.

This Sunday the Bald Hills Mosque in my electorate is holding an open day, and I would encourage people from the Petrie electorate to come along and talk to these people—talk to the families and communities—and ask any questions they might have.

Rest assured: the government is working to improve our national security. We are cancelling passports of radicals and we will strengthen citizenship legislation so dual nationals found to be collaborating with terrorists will be stripped of Australian citizenship.

The best thing that we can do as parliamentarians is to work on our relationships with people and promote strong family values and mentoring throughout all Australian communities to ensure young people remain on the straight and narrow.

Newcastle Electorate: Employment

Ms CLAYDON (Newcastle) (13:51): Last month the Minister for Defence was in Newcastle cutting ribbons with the member for Paterson, and they missed a perfect opportunity to deliver certainty to shipbuilding workers and their families. Rather than secure the future of the industry in Newcastle by expediting naval patrol boat work promised last year, the Minister for Defence and the member for Paterson just offered more excuses.

We are facing the loss of an entire industry, and our shipbuilding capability may be lost forever. Thousands of jobs around the country will be lost, and this island nation will lose its ability to build our own naval fleet.

In the 18 months since the Abbott Liberal government was elected, we have had nothing but a failure to deliver a plan for Australian jobs and industry. Hundreds of Newcastle jobs are in danger, because of this government's inaction, and local shipbuilder Forgacs announced more than 100 job losses this month while flagging that their entire workforce may be out of a job by Christmas.

The Abbott Liberal government has done nothing for the shipbuilders of Newcastle and it is costing hundreds of people their jobs. Since Tony Abbott was elected, the unemployment rate in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie has more than doubled and his government continues to sit on their hands. I have met with Forgacs' workers and unions, I joined them at rallies and had the Leader of the Opposition at the dock. The shadow minister for defence and the shadow assistant minister for defence have also visited Forgacs, and a Senate inquiry, led by Labor, has been to Newcastle. I have consistently raised this issue in parliament. (Time expired)
Banks Electorate: Nan Tien Institute

Mr COLEMAN (Banks) (13:52): Last Sunday, 1 March, I was honoured to attend the official opening of the Nan Tien Institute’s Wollongong campus, cultural centre and art gallery. It was tremendous to have the Prime Minister at the opening of the campus. Last Sunday was a very hot day, but that did not stop literally thousands of people from coming along for this important occasion.

I would like to recognise the founder of the Nan Tien Temple and Institute, the Venerable Master Hsing Yun, who travelled from Taiwan to attend the opening. Locally, congratulations are due to Professor John Loxton, the acting president and foundation dean of the institute, and a number of the members of the Buddhist community from the St George region BLIA, including Francis Wong and Karen Zhang. The campus is located opposite the Nan Tien Temple in Wollongong, which is the largest Buddhist temple in the southern hemisphere. The new building has teaching facilities, a museum, an art gallery, a cafe and a gift shop. The architecture is quite striking. It is designed to look like a lotus leaf when viewed from a distance—the lotus flower, of course, being an important symbol in the Buddhist religion. Congratulations again to everyone associated with the opening of this important new institute. I wish its members every success in the future.

Nurses

Mr HUSIC (Chifley) (13:54): We are often thankful for nurses at the point at which they are there to help us when we are in need, but the question for us is: will we be there at their time of need? By that I mean: at the moment, with the Productivity Commission reviewing workplace relations in this country, one of the things that nurses are concerned about is the future of their penalty rates. At a time when the RBA says that the growth in wages is at its lowest since they began collecting records on wage growth, since 1997, to seriously suggest that now is the time to cut penalty rates and take-home pay is bizarre. For nurses in particular, where penalty rates make up such a big part of their take-home pay, this is something that should cause great concern.

Mr Tudge interjecting—

Mr HUSIC: Those opposite might say that this is a scare campaign. They are absolutely right. It is frightening for nurses, who rely upon this level of money in their weekly pay, to have it taken from them. When they are supporting us at our time of need, we should be ensuring that people on low incomes or middle incomes who rely on that have the support they need. Nursing is already under pressure, needing more people to go into the profession. For us to be seriously suggesting that we would cut wages at a time we need more skills makes no sense whatsoever.

Parkes Electorate: Mr Christopher McHughes

Mr COULTON (Parkes—The Nationals Chief Whip) (13:55): I would like to bring the attention of the House today to the work of a young constituent of mine, Christopher McHughes, otherwise known as Burra Mac. Burra Mac is a year 12 student at Brewarrina high school. He is 17 years of age and has developed a knack for photography. His work has become quite well known right across the West. Burra Mac’s photographs show a wonderful depiction of the life of a young lad growing up in Brewarrina. He specialises in landscapes and sunsets, but he has some wonderful snaps of living on the river. Brewarrina is very much
a river town. When Burra finishes year 12 at the end of this year, he hopes to become a paramedic, and he will need to leave Brewarrina to study further. It is interesting that he has done all of this on a borrowed camera. He is saving up for the $1,200 he needs to buy a camera of his own. Burra is just one of the young people who live in western New South Wales, along with another good friend of mine, Nathan Johnson, who was the school captain of Brewarrina last year and is now doing a fine arts degree at Newcastle university. These young men clearly indicate the spirit, the talent and the drive that the young people of western New South Wales have.

Child Care

Ms BUTLER (Griffith) (13:57): I rise to tell the House that I was recently visited by Kids at Home Family Day Care and by Family Day Care Queensland, each of whom are gravely concerned about the state of family day care funding and child care funding in this country generally. We know that in the Abbott government's first budget—the worst budget in the history of Federation, I might say—there was about $1 billion worth of cuts in child care, and they had the gall to make those cuts in the middle of the Productivity Commission inquiry into child care. They have ignored that to make those cuts to child care funding and they had the gall to do it at a time when they try to claim that they are all about child care. We know better. Those cuts to child care are an outrage; they are great disgrace. I have people from family day care coming to see me concerned about whether emergency services workers are going to be able to get the day care that they need. They cannot use long day care in traditional child care centres. They have shift work. They cannot predict when a bushfire might happen or when a flood might happen or when a cyclone might happen, which is what just happened in Queensland, as everyone in this House ought to know. We had emergency services personnel in Rockhampton and Yeppoon who rely on family day care, who need family day care. That mob over there—cuts to child care funding; cuts to family day care funding. It is an utter disgrace and they ought to be ashamed.

Leichhardt Electorate: Cairns Regional Gallery

Mr ENTSCH (Leichhardt) (13:58): On a more positive note, Cairns Regional Gallery was officially opened on 15 July 1995 and many people had cause to celebrate. The journey has been a long one and has brought the people of Cairns together through the shared passion of art and a vision for the future. The dream of a public art gallery for Cairns began to take shape in 1979. Over the next 16 years, it took the tenacious commitment of Cairns mayors, artists and members of the community to raise over $2 million to re-purpose the historic public curator's building into an award-winning gallery, hosting many outstanding and world-class exhibitions. It is a regional gallery that punches well above its weight.

The gallery's 20th anniversary next Saturday marks an exciting time for the gallery to embark on a range of new and ambitious collecting and program initiatives to improve its engagement with its diverse audiences. It will also be a wonderful opportunity for people to promote the unique cultural heritage in Far North Queensland. I am certainly looking forward to going to this momentous occasion, with the director, Andrea May Churcher, and the team from the Cairns Regional Gallery. My good wife and I will be there in force to celebrate an outstanding achievement. It is one of the best regional galleries, if not the best regional gallery, in Australia.
The SPEAKER: In accordance with standing order 43, the time for members’ statements has concluded.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Domestic Violence

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:00): My question is to the Prime Minister. I know that every member of parliament is alarmed at family violence as the No. 1 cause of homelessness amongst women; and I know that every member of parliament is appalled that this year already on average two women have been killed each week as a result of violence from a partner or a former partner. Will the Prime Minister keep an open mind to Labor’s ideas announced today and meet with me to discuss our idea about holding a national crisis summit to deal with Australia’s family violence epidemic?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:01): It is a very good question that the Leader of the Opposition poses—a very good question, indeed, because domestic violence is a big issue in our country. For too long it has been hidden, and just because the crime happens behind closed door does not make it any less of a crime. In fact, sometimes it can be even more of an even more horrific crime, because it happens in the home, and the home should be a sanctuary for everyone, particularly for women and children. I absolutely agree with the Leader of the Opposition; I take his concerns extremely seriously on this issue. He is absolutely right: not only have two women a week died in domestic violence so far this year, but, in the course of their lifetimes, one in three women will suffer from domestic violence.

I am very conscious of the fact that yesterday both the Leader of the Opposition and I pledged to be men who stand up for women. Yes, it is true that the government has already got Rosie Batty and Ken Lay advising us on this subject. Yes, it is true that the Council of Australian Government—the premiers, the Prime Minister and the chief ministers—have put domestic violence on our agenda for the April meeting. Yesterday at the National Press Club, the minister assisting me pledged $15 million to a national awareness campaign with the states on this subject. I agree with the Leader of the Opposition: this is not enough. This is a big issue; it is an issue that all of us should be concerned about; it is an issue that all of us are concerned about; it is an issue that could easily unite, and should unite, this parliament. I am very happy to agree to sit down with the Leader of the Opposition to discuss what both of us, and what all of us, can do to ensure that we get better outcomes on this issue. That is because the people who are cowering in their own homes and the people who are frightened of those who should love them deserve the care and concern of this parliament.

Economy

Mr COLEMAN (Banks) (14:03): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister update the House on the progress the coalition government has made in addressing the debt and deficit legacy of the former government?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:04): I thank the member for Banks for his question and I can inform him and the parliament that tomorrow the government will release the Intergenerational Report, which has been prepared by experts in Treasury. It details the economic challenges that Australia will face over the next 40 years. It is, if you like, Madam Speaker, the fiscal road map for the next four decades. The Intergenerational Report presents three projections. The first is: what would happen to the budgetary position
under the policies that this government inherited? The second is: what would happen to the budgetary position under the structural reforms that this government proposed last year? And the third is: what would happen to the budgetary position under the measures that have already been passed by this parliament?

I can inform the House that, under the policies of the former government, Commonwealth debt was soaring beyond 120 per cent of gross domestic product and the deficit was blowing out to 12 per cent of GDP. I can inform the House that, under the structural reforms proposed last year by this government, the budget would have fairly quickly returned to substantial surplus and stayed there for 35 years. Under the measures passed so far by this parliament, the budget does in fact get close to surplus and ongoing deficits are halved—ongoing deficits are halved from the levels of the policies of the members opposite would have delivered.

Not only is this government serious about economic reform, but we have very significantly and substantially delivered the budget repair that we pledged to deliver at the election. This is one of the many grounds for confidence in our economy; it is one of the many grounds for optimism about our nation’s prospects. There are very strong grounds for optimism about the Australian economy. Interest rates are low and stable; petrol prices are at their lowest levels in years; power prices have had the biggest fall on record; the dollar is low and competitive; and, above all else, there is a government which is open for business and which takes economic reform seriously. You have a government that has abolished the carbon tax, abolished the mining tax, delivered $2 billion red tape savings to business and has finalised three free trade agreements, which had defeated previous governments for a decade. No wonder, Madam Speaker, jobs growth is now three times the rate that it was under members opposite. You have export volumes up seven per cent, housing approvals up nine per cent, retail trade up four per cent. Thanks to good government, confidence is returning to our economy.

**Defence Force Remuneration**

**Mr SHORTEN** (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): My question is to the Prime Minister. Labor welcomes the Prime Minister’s belated change of heart to reverse his decision on Australian Defence Force pay, but, just to be clear: will the Prime Minister make the new Defence pay deal retrospective from 3 November last year, when the previous deal expired?

**Mr ABBOTT** (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:07): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question, and I am pleased at the measure of bipartisanship which seems to be creeping into this parliament today. But I regret that I will have to disappoint the Leader of the Opposition in this respect. The new arrangements will start from the next pay period after the Defence remuneration tribunal approves the government’s position.

**Economy**

**Mrs SUDMALIS** (Gilmore) (14:08): My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer outline to the House how the government is strengthening the Australian economy, what opportunities tomorrow’s *Intergenerational report* will detail, and what that will mean for the constituents of Gilmore?

**Mr HOCKEY** (North Sydney—The Treasurer) (14:08): I thank the honourable member for Gilmore for her question. Gilmore is a great electorate on the South Coast of New South Wales. I spend my Christmas holidays there, actually, and it is a terrific part of the world. As
the member for Gilmore knows, it is hugely important that we deal with the long-term challenges facing Australia but that we embrace the challenges and opportunities. The member for Gilmore is absolutely right: we inherited a bit of a mess from the Labor Party, predictably. We had rising unemployment and we had a deficit that was never going to be within its means, never going to go back to surplus. The debt kept going up and up, and, of course, there was no credibility on the Treasury benches, thanks to the great efforts of the member for Lilley, who is still here, and the member for McMahon.

Mr Swan interjecting—

Mr HOCKEY: Sorry, I can't hear you, buddy. In fact, no-one can! The good news is that we are turning the ship around and heading in the right direction. We have gotten our job growth up to three times higher than it was under Labor. We are getting the deficit under control, and we are putting in place a whole range of structural reforms and strengthening the Australian economy. Tomorrow's Intergenerational report, which is released by the government every five years, will clearly show that we have made significant progress in dealing with the mess that was left to us by Labor but that there is still much more work to be done. Perhaps even more importantly, the report illustrates the demographic change in Australia's future. It is exciting that there is, in all likelihood, a chance that by the middle of this century life expectancy will be around 100 for every Australian. As we live longer lives, we want to delay the ageing process. We want to keep working until we choose to retire, not until we are forced to retire. We want to be able to continue to contribute, having many careers along the way.

Madam Speaker, you may well be still here by the middle of the century, as Speaker, keeping the other mob in check! We believe Australians have many years in which to contribute in order to improve the quality of their lives. We have an obligation to make sure that our future is affordable and sustainable. Getting the budget back into good shape is part of the equation, but so also is embracing change, embracing new technology and using new technology not only to extend and improve our quality of life but also, importantly, to help create prosperity. We are looking forward with optimism, because Australia's days—Australia's best days—are going to be before us.

Defence Force Remuneration

Mr FEENEY (Batman) (14:11): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to the Prime Minister's statement on Australian Defence Force pay, late last year, when he said:

We won't squib it and that's why we are determined to stick with the 1.5 per cent pay arrangements …

The Prime Minister fought tooth and nail against a fair pay offer for our ADF men and women. Prime Minister: what has changed?

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: There will be silence on my left. We will hear the Prime Minister's answer.

Mr Champion interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The honourable member for Wakefield is warned.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:12): What I said back then was that no-one would receive a better offer than our uniformed military personnel. That is what I said
back then, and it was obvious as time went by that in order to ensure that that was the case it was important that we upped the offer made to our uniformed military personnel. Yes, I do detect a note of reproach in the voice of the shadow minister, who asked the question, and I accept that many people have said to me: 'Is this the best you could do? Is this the best you could do for those heroes who wear a country's uniform and who we often send into dangerous and difficult places to defend our people, our interests and our values?' We decided that a better offer would be made.

I want to thank all the members of this parliament who have made such strong representations to me on this subject. I thank the member for Solomon, who has been making representations on this subject. I thank the member for Gilmore, who has been making representations on this subject. I thank the member for Herbert, who has been making the strongest possible representations on this subject. I thank the member for Curtin, who represents the Special Air Service in this parliament. I thank the member for Hughes, who has the Holsworthy defence complex in his electorate. I thank the member for Brisbane, who has the Enoggera Barracks in her electorate. I thank the member for Paterson, with the great Williamtown airbase in his electorate. I thank the member for Gippsland—and there are many more people in this parliament, and there may even have been some on the other side. The member for Riverina is smiling at me because he wants to be included. I include every member of this parliament.

Mr Burke: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It is impossible for the microphone to pick up the PM's answer when he keeps looking behind him the whole way through his answer.

The SPEAKER: Perhaps we need to turn the microphone up. If that could be arranged, that would be very good.

Mr ABBOTT: Members opposite may, in fact, be disappointed that their pleas, as well as the pleas of members on this side of the parliament, have been heard. One thing that this government will never do is sell short the defence forces of our country. We will never sell them short. We know that members opposite cut Defence spending to its lowest level since 1938. This government will support the defence forces of Australia, and the defences of this country will be in the best possible hands.

Broadband

Ms McGOWAN (Indi) (14:15): My question is to the Minister for Communications. Minister, problems with broadband remain one of the most prevailing issues raised by my constituents in Indi. Can you tell the House what the situation is with the NBN in Indi, and what is the plan to finish the job? A detailed answer by local government areas in Indi, including timelines, and a comment about the situation in Indi more broadly would help me answer constituents' queries.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Minister for Communications) (14:16): I thank the honourable member for her question. The detailed line by line information I will give the honourable member separately. In the last few days, four fixed wireless sites in the north of Indi have been activated. They are at Ebden, Kiewa, Kiewa South and Baranduda. There are now 2,090 premises in her electorate passed by the fixed wireless service, with another 1,100 premises connected to the interim satellite service. While the fixed wireless rollout is...
progressing apace, there is work underway on towers covering more than 6,000 premises in her electorate. This work is going on in almost all honourable members' electorates around the country. I note, too, that the NBN has released its 18-month rollout plan, and that includes another 4,000 premises and a fixed wireless footprint in Alexandra, Chilton, Mansfield, Myrtleford and around Wangaratta and Wodonga. Work on the fixed line rollout will begin by June next year in Wangaratta and Waldara, covering 8,000 premises.

What honourable members will appreciate is that NBN Co is now very much under new management. It is adopting a customer focused approach focused on ensuring that the customer gets the broadband speed they need, will value and will pay for regardless of technology. We are using a mixture of technologies. I want to acknowledge that there is a big difference between our approach and the approach of the Labor Party. Labor thought that they knew everything. They thought they were the depository, repository and, indeed, as the Prime Minister observes, suppository of all wisdom on broadband. But they were not. In the coalition we believe in getting global experience. We looked around the world at what other telcos were doing.

I want to acknowledge today the great help that we have had from Swisscom, the leading Swiss telecommunications company. Their senior project director, Klaus Liechti, is here in the gallery. Klaus has been of enormous assistance to us, and I want to thank his CEO, Urs Schaeppi, for allowing us to benefit from the experience of Swisscom. Like the NBN Co, they started off with an all-fibre model, realised it was too slow and too expensive and are now using a mixed technology model, as indeed is Deutsche Telekom and as is any well-resourced, financially minded telco around the world. What NBN Co is doing today is best global practice, and we have our Swiss engineering friends to vouch for that as well. I thank them.

**Economy**

**Mr CHRISTENSEN** (Dawson—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (14:19): My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer outline what the national accounts data released today tells us about the state of the economy? How is the government building a stronger economy? How will this help my constituents in my electorate of Dawson?

**Mr HOCKEY** (North Sydney—The Treasurer) (14:19): I thank the member for Dawson for the question. I note that he is a great and indefatigable advocate for jobs in his electorate, particularly through his advocacy of the Abbot Point coal terminal expansion, which will create jobs, as he has raised with me and, I am sure, many of my colleagues. The Minister for Communications just mentioned Switzerland. Yesterday I was able to sign an agreement with the Swiss government that ensures that the Australian Taxation Office can find out all those Australian people who have Swiss bank accounts. I bet there are a few people in the Labor Party shuddering at that thought. There is a former minister for communications who has a television program who might have had a Swiss bank account. But I will leave that to another day.

Speaking of accounts, the national accounts data released today showed that the Australian economy grew by 0.5 per cent in the December quarter to be 2.5 per cent higher over the past year. That 0.5 per cent is up from 0.4 per cent in the previous quarter. As a result, it illustrates that Australia now is running a growth rate that is comparable to that of the United Kingdom,
a bit better than that of the United States and Canada and certainly better than that of Hong Kong, Singapore, Germany, Japan and a number of other countries.

We are doing that despite the fact that we have had a massive drop in mining and resources investment in Australia. That has been reflected in the profit results from BHP and Rio, who are two of our top 10 major taxpayers. They had their profits halved—in some cases more than halved. That illustrates the pressure that has been put on the Australian economy as a result of the changes in commodity demand and, more importantly, commodity prices. Despite that, we are seeing the rest of the Australian economy lift. We are seeing an increased level of investment in the services sector. That is directly linked to the new opportunities that this government has opened up through free trade agreements with Korea, Japan and China, and we are starting to see Australian consumers come back writ large—in fact, Australian consumers have dramatically increased their spending in the December quarter, and at the same time housing investment is up 2½ per cent in the December quarter, for a remarkable 8.1 per cent for the year, which is near record levels. This is all flowing through the Australian economy, and it means more jobs and greater prosperity for everyday Australians.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (14:22): I advise the House that we have with us two delegations—firstly, a delegation from the Lao National Assembly, the human rights steering committee, led by His Excellency Mr Phongsavath, and secondly the Chief Justice, the Hon. HL Dattu, and justices of the Supreme Court of India and the Attorney-General of India, together with His Excellency the Deputy High Commissioner of India. We make those delegations most welcome. We also have with us the Hon. Mark Brown, the Cook Islands Minister for Finance. We make him most welcome as well.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Health Care

Ms KING (Ballarat) (14:23): My question is to the Prime Minister. Yesterday the Minister for Health said:

… there are a lot of people who attend the doctor, who pay nothing and can afford to pay a bit more and that's where we have to land in this discussion.

Hasn't the minister just given the game away and admitted the Prime Minister will bring back the GP tax at the first chance he gets?

Mr Abbott: Madam Speaker, the Minister for Health is more than capable of speaking for herself. I absolutely reject the premise of the question and I invite the Minister for Health to respond.

Ms LEY (Farrer—Minister for Health and Minister for Sport) (14:24): It is lovely to take a diverted question from the shadow minister. I advise the shadow minister that her quote of my remarks yesterday is correct. We on this side of the House absolutely understand that if we are to make Medicare sustainable for the long-term it is necessary to ensure that the well over 75 per cent of episodes of care in this country for nonconcessional patients that are bulk-billed need to be reduced. What I have said, and what the Prime Minister has said, is that
those who can make a modest contribution to the cost of their care should be encouraged to do so.

The member for Ballarat is the queen of confusion in the area of health policy. On one hand the Leader of the Opposition is saying that nothing needs to be done but, on the other hand, the member for Ballarat says, 'Well, yes, actually something does need to be done—no area will be exempt and we will have to look at ways to make savings.' And the member for Ballarat says, 'Yes, the rebate freeze—we own that, Labor put it in place', or words to that effect. So I will not take lectures from the Labor Party—a Labor Party which in government broke promises on private health, it promised not to move on the private health insurance rebate; and it jeopardised the listing of new drugs so people with serious illnesses had to wait for their drugs to come on the PBS—that was another minister for health who is no longer in this place—'But don't worry, Labor owns this problem.' We have committed to making those listings happen efficiently and effectively through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee. Labor, the party that hates medical research, in a sneaky measure tried to take $400 million away from medical research and then backflipped—

Ms King: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The minister's answer has just contained an imputation and I ask her to withdraw it.

The SPEAKER: Did the minister cast an imputation? In the hubbub it is very hard to hear.

Ms LEY: I withdraw any offence, Madam Speaker—I am not sure what it was. Labor, the party that attacked medical research by trying to take out $400 million and then went through some dodgy accounting; Labor, who pretended they cared—

Ms King: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. Is the GP tax dead, buried and cremated or is it not?

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Ms LEY: Labor is the party that pretended to care about preventative health by establishing an agency, a group of bureaucrats, to talk about preventative health. What did they do? They spent nearly half a million dollars designing a fat tax, even though both sides of parliament said they would never introduce a fat tax. Labor is the party that inserted itself into hospital waiting lists—that is not the business of federal government. (Time expired)

Death Penalty

Mr LAUNDY (Reid) (14:28): My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Will the minister update the House on the government's efforts to seek a stay of execution for Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran?

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (14:28): I thank the member for Reid for his question and I note his deep concern. It is with profound disappointment and dismay that I report to the House that the Indonesian authorities are making preparations for the execution of two Australian citizens, Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran. Since their pleas for clemency were rejected in January of this year, the Australian government has conducted a sustained campaign of high-level advocacy seeking a permanent stay of execution for both men. The Prime Minister, the Governor-General, the Attorney-General, the Minister for Justice, our officials, our diplomats and I have made numerous representations, written and personal, seeking a stay of execution. I commend the opposition, the Greens and
the cross benches for their support. Indeed, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Australian Greens and I prepared a joint submission to foreign minister Marsudi, and that was received by the Indonesian government.

Successive Australian governments have made it clear that we oppose the death penalty for Australian citizens, whether it is at home or abroad, and I can confirm that we have made it clear to the Indonesian government that there are grounds for clemency in this case. Indeed, their lawyers are still pursuing legal avenues that I understand are open to them.

The grounds are that both men have shown immense remorse for their grave crimes—and I do not for a moment understate the seriousness of what they did. But, over the past 10 years, both men have shown remorse and they have undergone a remarkable, indeed extraordinary, rehabilitation. Andrew has studied theology and has become a pastor, and is providing support to other prisoners in the Indonesian prison system. Myuran has become an accomplished artist, and he is taking art classes and supporting other prisoners in their rehabilitation attempts. Indeed, successive prison governors in Bali have attested to their good character and their process of rehabilitation. As I said as recently as last night to Foreign Minister Marsudi, the Indonesian government can be proud of what they have achieved in their prison system; this level of rehabilitation is what prison systems around the world aspire to achieve.

I know that Indonesia opposes the death penalty as it applies to its citizens when they face death row in countries overseas. So we are not asking the President or the government to do any more than they ask of other governments when their citizens are on death row. We will continue to appeal to President Widodo’s strength and his humanity, to show mercy and forgiveness to these two Australian men who have undergone this remarkable rehabilitation. I spoke to the families of both men this morning—I have met with them and spoken with them before—and, as you can imagine, they are devastated. They are just living day to day.

On behalf of the parliament, I respectfully ask of the Indonesian President that he spare the lives of these two Australian citizens.

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (14:31): on indulgence—I thank the foreign minister for suggesting that I have a moment on indulgence to speak about this important issue. There is a very strong bipartisan sense in this parliament that the death penalty is wrong in this case—that it is always wrong, to whomever it is applied, wherever it is applied. I thank the Father of the House and our own Chief Opposition Whip in particular for the work they have been doing in our bipartisan group against the death penalty.

All Australians’ thoughts are with Myuran Sukumaran and Andrew Chan, their friends, their families, their supporters. We are united in opposing the death penalty in this case as we are in every case, and we would plead with the Indonesian government and the people of Indonesia to understand that, just as they plead for the lives of their citizens around the world, we plead now for the lives of two young men who have made enormous transformations in their lives and who are making enormous transformations in the lives of other people as well.

I know that there are many Australians now who are watching the unfolding news of the movement of these two young men, thinking that all hope is lost. I would say that, while there is life, there is hope. But the legal processes that the lawyers for these young men are engaged in—two legal processes—must be allowed to be completed. Thank you.
Health Care

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (14:33): My question is to the Prime Minister. Does the Prime Minister agree with the member for Bowman, who writes in today's Daily Telegraph:

Announcing a co-payment at last year's Budget and without any real explanation showed the policy for what it was: all about the money and nothing about quality.

Prime Minister, was it all about the money and nothing about the quality of health care for Australians?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:33): I did read the article. I thought it was a very good article. I thought it was rather good of the member for Bowman to, amongst other things, suggest that one of the best-ever health ministers had in fact been someone whom modesty prevents me from naming!

As I said in this House yesterday, one of the things that I should have remembered from my days as a health minister is that effective health reform requires the close cooperation of the medical profession and the other great health professions of this country, and we did not sufficiently take the medical profession into our confidence at times last year. Now, I blame myself for this; I really do. There was much consultation between the then minister and the medical profession—not enough from me. So I think the member for Bowman made a perfectly fine contribution to this debate this morning.

Ms King interjecting—

Mr ABBOTT: What we are determined to do is ensure our great Medicare system is stronger in the future than it is now. That is what we are determined to do. We are determined to protect the vulnerable. In particular, we are determined to protect bulk-billing for children and for concession card holders. We are absolutely determined to do that and we are determined to do—

Ms King interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Ballarat will desist!

Mr ABBOTT: what we can, in close consultation—close and collegial consultation—with the medical profession, to make our great system even better. Unlike members opposite, who gradually eroded Medicare, who were not really concerned about working with the medical profession, we will deliver. We will deliver a much better healthcare system as a result of our efforts.

Iraq and Syria

Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert) (14:36): My question is to the Minister for Defence. Will the minister detail the nature of the deployment of additional Australian troops and personnel to Iraq as part of Australia's efforts to fight the Daesh death cult?

Mr ANDREWS (Menzies—Minister for Defence) (14:36): I thank the member for Herbert for his question. I know how much Defence matters to him in his electorate, being the representative of some 6,000 Defence Force personnel who live in Townsville and around that area. He is a wonderful advocate in this place for those members of the Australian Defence Force and for their families.

The Australian contribution to the building partner capacity program of approximately 300 Australian Defence Force personnel will be joined by about 100 from the New Zealand
Defence Force. It involves the next phase of attempts by international coalition forces, along with the Iraqis, to disrupt, degrade and, hopefully, ultimately defeat the Daesh forces. The troops that will be drawn for this deployment to Taji, near Baghdad, will come largely from Brisbane’s 7th Brigade. I know that the member for Ryan and the member from Brisbane have many of those Defence Force personnel living in their electorates. We wish those personnel well in their preparation and training over the coming weeks prior to their deployment to Iraq in May.

The safety and security of Australian Defence Force personnel serving in missions overseas is of the utmost importance. That is why as part of this total deployment of some 400 ADF and New Zealand personnel there will be a very strong and significant force protection component. It is important to ensure that this training mission is done as best we can to alleviate the risks to the safety and security of those personnel involved. They will be based at Taji, which is a large military base some 25 kilometres north-west of Baghdad. The base measures about seven kilometres by six kilometres, so it is almost half a marathon to go right around the perimeter of the base. It is a very large area. There are already some 500 US troops at Taji at the present time.

Our world-class soldiers, members of the regular forces, will be involved in advanced training. They will be behind the wire. They will not be involved in direct combat. That is consistent with the existing deployment of personnel to Baghdad. This is in addition to the Air Force commitment of the six FA18s, the KC30 refueller and the E7 Wedgetail which to date, through a combination of their efforts and Iraqi and coalition forces efforts, have reclaimed some 700 square kilometres from Daesh. This is a commitment to stability and security in Iraq and the Middle East. It is part of our first priority in this country for the safety and security of our citizens, because if we can disrupt, degrade and ultimately defeat Daesh we are not just adding to the security of the Middle East we are adding to security right throughout the world.

Health Care

Mr HUSIC (Chifley) (14:39): My question is to the Minister for Health. The electorate of Chifley, which I represent, has the highest level of bulk-billing for GP visits in the country. Yesterday, the minister said, ‘At the moment, bulk-billing rates are too high.’ What bulk-billing rate does the minister think is ideal: 50 per cent, 40 per cent or 30 per cent?

Ms LEY (Farrer—Minister for Health and Minister for Sport) (14:40): It is a pleasure to take a question from my friend the member for Chifley. Just to make sure that there is no further confusion on the side of the Labor Party, which is having trouble following, the co-payment, as the Prime Minister announced yesterday, is dead. I repeat: the GP co-payment is dead. In the context of further consultations, the bulk-billing rate is important, but, Member for Chifley, it might be that every single bulk-billed person that you mention should continue to be bulk-billed, because I am aware that you represent a fairly disadvantaged electorate—not everybody, but your indicators of disadvantage are higher than for some of your surrounding suburbs. That means that, when we look at policy, we need to make sure that the disadvantaged constituents that you represent, those on concession cards, are bulk-billed. We need to make sure that we protect bulk-billing for the vulnerable, but we also need to make sure, without picking on electorates or individuals, that those of us who represent areas where incomes are higher and capacity to pay is higher should make sure that policy reflects that
those with the ability to pay a modest contribution towards their visits to the doctor continue to do that.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The members of Jagajaga and McMahon will desist. The Minister for Health has the call, and we will have silence to hear her answer.

Ms LEY: Member for Chifley, I was in your part of the world with my friend the member for Reid, recently, and we met with doctors, patients and practitioners. We had a clear message about working with us to solve the problems with a Medicare system that is rapidly becoming unsustainable.

I was listing Labor's failures in health, before, and I would like to have an opportunity to resume my listing of Labor's failures. It is important that the parliament knows what they are. I have yet to get to the supreme, epic fail of Labor.

Mr Burke: Madam Speaker, I raise a point of order on relevance. Rarely does a minister flag that they are about to be not relevant. The minister having done so, I ask that you bring the minister back to the question.

The SPEAKER: The question was fairly wide ranging. So long as the answer is still addressing the question concerning the level of bulk-billing, the minister is in order.

Ms LEY: My intervention is perfectly relevant. Labor's failures in health are one of the reasons why we are so constrained at the moment. Labor's failure with the budget and debt and deficit are one of the reasons why in making every single health dollar work as hard as it can we are facing the constraints we are. I was talking about the preventative health agency, which came up with a fat tax, that talked about preventative health but actually did not produce any real outcomes—

The SPEAKER: The minister needs to come back to bulk-billing.

Ms LEY: There was another area that Labor inserted itself into, around hospital waiting lists. That would have been okay if it had improved the hospital waiting lists. (Time expired)

Australian Defence Force

Mrs GRIGGS (Solomon) (14:43): My question is to the Assistant Minister for Defence. Will the minister please update the House on support the government is providing for our defence members, both at home and on operations?

Mr ROBERT (Fadden—Assistant Minister for Defence) (14:44): I thank the member for Solomon for her question and for all her work on behalf of the 4,600 ADF personnel and their families up north. I think we all understand that the government has the greatest respect for our fighting men and women, as does our nation. We understand the pressures that our people are under, especially their families. Their work is unique and it is crucial to the security of our nation. The increased burden being placed on our ADF members and their families as a result of the increased tempo of operations will continue for some time, and the Minister for Defence's discussion before about preparing troops to deploy to Iraq underscores this point well.

Due to these circumstances, and, of course, the vigorous representation by our colleagues, many of whom the Prime Minister named in person just before, the government decided to increase the wage offer for our people to two per cent per annum.
Mr Abbott interjecting—

Mr ROBERT: The Prime Minister thinks he has forgotten the member for Macquarie, who has done an outstanding job as well. The decision will be clearly accommodated by efficiencies identified through the first principles review. As noted by the Prime Minister, this keeps ADF pay above the inflation rate, currently at 1.7 per cent and forecast to reduce. In making today's decision, the government has listened to the concerns of the Defence community, the veterans community, the nation at large and, of course, many of our people.

Those on this side of the House have a proud record of achievement when it comes to supporting Defence, our people in general and their families. Earlier this year, of course, we announced free ADF health care for our people. Under this initiative, families will get free ADF visits to GPs and up to $400 per dependant for allied health services like physiotherapy. Over 82½ thousand allied health and GP consultations have already occurred. We have announced the arts program, a nation-first trial to help the wounded, injured and ill through creative arts. We have streamlined post-separation health examinations. We have implemented a full electronic health record.

We have restarted the gap year—I wonder who stopped that. We have reindexed DFRDB pensions—I wonder who would not do that. We have commenced a significant program to widen the cultural and linguistic diversity of the ADF to ensure a strong recruitment base and, of course, greater effectiveness. We have continued the good work started by those opposite under Project Suakin and, of course, we will widen the flexibility within that through flexible ADF super, which is the logical next step. We have delivered on our commitment to drive the budget towards two per cent of GDP, something those opposite failed to do, dropping it down to the lowest levels since '38. We have held our commitment of no cuts after those opposite cut $16 billion to Defence.

We are building on all the good work that has been done to strengthen our Defence Force, and today's announcement of a two per cent increase to ADF pay is recognising the unique nature of those who serve us.

Health Care

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:47): My question is to the Prime Minister, and I referred to a previous answer he gave a couple of questions ago about the government. He said: 'We are determined to protect bulk-billing for children and concession card holders.' Does the Prime Minister's answer signal a government intention to limit bulk-billing to children and concession card holders or to introduce means testing for bulk-billing?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:48): No and no—absolutely no and no. I just want to make it absolutely crystal clear today, as I did yesterday, that any government imposed co-payment, any co-payment, is dead, buried and cremated. I cannot make it clearer than that. It is dead, buried and cremated. But it has always been the case that doctors can charge a fee if they choose to do so. No doctor has ever been compelled to bulk-bill. If members opposite are trying to suggest that doctors should be compelled to bulk-bill, I would like to see the reaction from the great medical profession of this country.

We will do our best to ensure that Medicare goes from strength to strength. That is what we want to do—we want to ensure that Medicare goes from strength to strength. We do want to
protect bulk-billing for the vulnerable. We absolutely do want to protect bulk-billing for the vulnerable. We want to ensure that the vulnerable people of this country continue to get the best possible health care. We want to ensure that the great strengths of our universal Medicare system continue, but the only way we can do that effectively is to keep working with the medical profession to ensure that our system is more efficient and more effective and that all examples of waste are tackled and eliminated so that we can drive every single health dollar as far as it possibly can go.

**Infrastructure**

*Mrs McNAMARA* (Dobell) (14:49): My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development. Will the Deputy Prime Minister inform the House how building the infrastructure of the 21st century benefits those living in New South Wales, particularly in my electorate of Dobell?

*Mr TRUSS* (Wide Bay—Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development) (14:50): The member for Dobell knows full well that this government understands the importance of building infrastructure for the 21st century to make our nation internationally competitive. The coalition's record investment in infrastructure is creating thousands of jobs across the country, building a stronger and prosperous economy and boosting productivity.

But yesterday I had to report to the parliament about the way in which newly elected Labor governments are actually destroying jobs and axing these projects, which are absolutely vital to our nation's future prosperity. In Victoria, I had to report how the new Labor government is threatening to terminate the transformational East West project—a project that would have employed 7,000 people; 7,000 jobs—condemning Melbourne traffic to gridlock for a generation. I also had to report on the Queensland newly elected state Labor government, which is axing at least $20 billion worth of new infrastructure projects, which were promised and paid for by the Newman government—tens of thousands of jobs lost in Queensland, a state where unemployment is being affected by the downturn in the mining and construction industry. These are projects like the Brisbane BAT tunnel, which I know the shadow minister claims that he is very supportive of. The Newman government had a commitment to build it and Labor is axing the project. Let us move now to New South Wales—

*Ms Butler interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Griffith will desist!

*Mr TRUSS:* where Labor is threatening to terminate part or all of the WestConnex project. There are more than 10,000 jobs in WestConnex—Sydney's major new traffic artery left dead in the water. Now, this morning, we woke up to the news that New South Wales Labor is also vowing to halt the NorthConnex project—a project critical to the residents of the Central Coast; a $3 billion project that is already underway—

*Ms Henderson interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Corangamite will desist!

*Mr TRUSS:* and will employ 8,700 people.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Newcastle is not in her seat and she is not entitled to speak!
Mr TRUSS: There are 8,700 jobs at risk.

Mr Albanese: Madam Speaker, I raise a point of order. Given it was Labor that signed the contract for NorthConnex—

The SPEAKER: The member will resume his seat! That particular member knows better than most that that is abuse of the standing orders and he will desist.

Mr TRUSS: It is nice to know that the shadow minister supports this project. But Labor in New South Wales does not; they intend to terminate it and sack 8,700 workers. This is the attitude of New South Wales towards these viable infrastructure projects. Instead of building infrastructure for the 21st century, Labor state governments are putting workers out of their jobs and making it clear that our cities will be in gridlock for all time. (Time expired)

International Women's Day

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:53): My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer him to this—

The SPEAKER: No props.

Mr SHORTEN: I am just quoting from The Courier Mail.

The SPEAKER: Then keep it down on the dispatch box.

Mr SHORTEN: I refer him to The Courier Mail report, which states that the LNP will host its International Women's Day event at a men-only club in Brisbane. As the minister for women, does the Prime Minister think that this is right?

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: There will be silence.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: There will be silence on both sides of the House. If it is male-only, I am interested to hear how the women got in. The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (14:54): Madam Speaker, this is just how wonderful this broad church is that I lead. Obviously, they have now broken down the last barrier, and they have made the men-only club admit women.

Government members: Hear, hear!

Mr ABBOTT: Isn't that fantastic! At last this bastion of chauvinism has admitted women. They have admitted women, and they have done it on International Women's Day because of the Liberal National Party. Good on the Liberal-National Party for smashing the glass ceiling yet again. Yet again, we are smashing the glass ceiling. I say congratulations, and thank God! Thank God that bastion of old fashioned chauvinism has finally collapsed like the walls of Jericho at the trumpet cry of the Liberal-National Party!

Higher Education

Ms LANDRY (Capricornia) (14:55): My question is to the Minister for Education and Training. Will the Minister update the House on the implications, should the parliament fail to pass the government's higher education reforms?

The SPEAKER: We will have some silence before I call the minister.
Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (14:56): I would like to thank the member for Capricornia for her question. Before I answer in terms of higher education reform, I would like to say that I think she has done a marvellous job representing her constituents following the Rockhampton cyclone. And I am very pleased, on behalf of the government, to have been able to provide $50,000 for two industrial diesel generators for the University of Central Queensland—

An honourable member interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Griffith is warned!

Mr PYNE: so that they could start opening for business this week, for orientation week, for their students. It is good to have been able to support the university.

She asks a very important question: what are the implications if the reform bill does not pass? The first implication is that the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Scheme—that Labor de-funded and we want to re-fund—will end this year, costing 1,500 jobs. These 1,500 jobs will go from a program that we want to keep going. If the reform bill fails these jobs will not be able to be kept going. The same goes for the Future Fellowships Program—another program that Labor de-funded and that we want to keep going to support mid-career researchers—which will end if Labor defeats this bill in the Senate.

Eighty thousand low-SES students will not get a chance to go to university because they will not be expanding the demand-driven system to pathways programs—as we would under the reform bill—and they will not be able to expand the Commonwealth Grants Scheme to non-university higher education providers. So, 80,000 low-SES or first-generation students will not get the chance to go to university. There will be no extra scholarships. Sydney University will not be able to go from 700 to 9,000 scholarships, as they have promised—as just one example.

Under Labor, under the alternative of the shadow minister, it is Armageddon for some universities, because what he wants to do is put back the cap. He wants to end the demand-driven system. He said the demand-driven system was for a finite period until the targets were met. The targets have largely been met.

What does that mean? It means that fewer low-SES and first-generation university students will get the chance to go to university. It means less revenue for universities because of the abolition of the demand-driven system, just when universities are recovering from the $6.6 billion of Labor cuts when Labor were in government. It means command and control from Canberra. It means the potential closure of those universities with a high percentage of low-SES and first-generation university students who have those enabling pathways which get mature-age students and others to reskill for the workforce. Some universities will close if the shadow minister for education gets his way. I would ask Labor to rethink their opposition and support a reform which will expand opportunity.

Private Health Insurance

Mr BOWEN (McMahon) (14:59): My question is to the Treasurer. I refer to the decision of the previous Labor government to reform and means test the private health insurance rebate, a decision which delivered $100 billion in savings over 40 years. I refer to the Prime Minister's promise before the election to fully restore the private health insurance rebate.
Treasurer, will the *Intergenerational report* reflect the cost of restoring the private health insurance rebate?

*Mr HOCKEY* (North Sydney—The Treasurer) (14:59): Well, we would love to be able to afford to do so, but you left us with no money. In fact, worse than that, you took away whatever money was there. So we now need to repair the budget mess that you created. We now need to go down the path of making the difficult decisions that Labor failed to take to make sure that Australia can afford its future. Unfortunately, Labor left us with a deficit they said was going to be $18 billion but in fact was $48 billion, and instead of leaving us a budget with surpluses that they not only claimed would be delivered—

*Mr Champion interjecting—*

*The SPEAKER:* The member for Wakefield has been warned. That is his last chance.

*Mr HOCKEY:* in fact they claimed they actually had delivered surpluses. They claimed credit for surpluses that were never delivered. And we have to fix the mess. Therefore, there is not all the money there that we would love to deploy for things that would help to sustain and strengthen the medical system, such as investing more in private health insurance. We would love to do that, but we cannot afford to do that. Why? Because of the budget mess we inherited.

The best way to fix that is to start to reduce your spending. As you will see when the *Intergenerational report* is released tomorrow, we have been able to restrain the extraordinary spending trajectory that was left behind by Labor. We are able to halve its impact on long-term debt, but there is still much work to be done. The second thing in relation to health is we should be welcoming the fact that we are all going to live longer, and that is a great thing. We are about to have an ageing boom, not an ageing bust in Australia—an ageing boom of grand proportions—and we should embrace that and welcome that. But, most importantly with greater longevity, we want to ensure that people have a decent quality of life, that they have decent health care. The things that are going to extend our quality of life, improve our quality of life, include investing in medical research, include the use of new technologies, include—and are embraced by the community—things like preventative medicine, better health care—

*Ms King:* We don’t have the money for it! How much are you spending on prevention?

*Honourable members interjecting—*

*The SPEAKER:* The member for Ballarat will desist. The Treasurer has the call. There will be silence on both sides of the House.

*Mr HOCKEY:* I would say to the Labor opposition just this: please do not blame us for the mistakes you made, but let us get on with the job of fixing the mess that you created, because we are absolutely determined to give Australia the very best future that every Australian deserves.

**Immigration and Border Protection**

*Mr VASTA* (Bonner) (15:02): My question is to the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection. Will the minister update the House on actions the government is taking to give our border protection agencies the support and resources they need to continue to secure our borders?
Mr DUTTON (Dickson—Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) (15:03): I thank the honourable member for Bonner very much for his question. Ladies and gentlemen—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr DUTTON: it is the Abbott government giving our border protection agencies the support and resources that they need. And, ladies and gentlemen, it was the Labor Party that ripped money out of defence and out of border protection.

The SPEAKER: I think we will go back to calling them members.

Mr DUTTON: The people of Australia know this. The people of Australia know that Labor was hopeless when it came to border protection. The Abbott government is putting money in. We are creating a secure border, which is absolutely integral for the defence of our country and for the way in which we can stop the boats and protect Australians from attack. We need to make sure that, through a new agency, we can establish the Australian Border Force, which will bring together the collective energies of our Customs and Immigration officials to ensure that we can address all the threats that deliver to our borders every day.

The ABF will be a single integrated front-line operational border entity within the department that is charged with enforcing customs and immigration laws and protecting Australia's borders. The establishment of the ABF ensures that Australia has the capability at the border to manage this growth effectively and efficiently. The bill also introduces important integrity measures to ensure the support of management and to make sure that we have a professional and disciplined workforce that exercises its powers and functions with the highest standards of integrity. The integrity measures will increase resistance to criminal infiltration and corruption and will enhance government and public confidence.

The reform also delivers important law enforcement and national security capability to stay ahead of the transnational and organised crime syndicates that seek to exploit any weaknesses in Australia's border arrangements. It is only a coalition government that can be trusted to secure Australia's borders. Why do I say that? Because history records that to be fact.

Mr Burke: Because it's on your notes!

Mr DUTTON: Member for Watson, we are going to come to you and your record shortly in relation to border protection, because, whilst there is a lot of competition from amongst your colleagues, you were the worst immigration minister in Australia's history. Sixty-eight boats came on your watch. You were a shocker! We will highlight your record in months and years to come, because you are recorded as the worst immigration minister in Australia's history. We know that 50,000 people on 800 boats came during Labor's watch. They were not able to secure our borders. It is only the Abbott government that can secure our borders.

Ms Bird: Madam Speaker, I raise a point of order.

The SPEAKER: The minister has concluded his answer.

Ms Bird: Madam Speaker, the minister made many accusations against you in the chair. Could you ask him in future to direct his comments through the chair?
The SPEAKER: I did not hear any remarks against me. I did suggest that he refer to members as 'members' instead of 'ladies and gentlemen'. I did not think he was able to make that presumption.

Community Services

Mr CONROY (Charlton) (15:06): My question is to the Prime Minister. The Narara Community Centre on the New South Wales Central Coast faces funding cuts that threaten many of the centre's services. Can the Prime Minister advise why he thinks that it is a good idea to cut funding to the Narara Community Centre, which has been delivering services to the most vulnerable people on the New South Wales Central Coast for the last 44 years?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Prime Minister) (15:07): My understanding is that all of these organisations have had their funding confirmed for the rest of this financial year.

Welfare Reform

WYATT ROY (Longman) (15:07): My question is to the Minister for Social Services. Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member will resume his seat. We will have silence to hear the question from the member for Longman.

WYATT ROY: Will the minister inform the House of the importance of being able to achieve savings in social services in order to fund changes to welfare and child care that will support Australian families?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Minister for Social Services) (15:08): I thank the member for his question and for the great job he does in chairing the social services committee for the government members, who take a keen interest in all these matters. He knows, like all members on this side know and I would hope all members on the other side know, that it takes eight out of 10 income tax payers going to work every single day to pay for our $150 billion social services welfare bill. Eight out of 10 Australians going to work are going to work every day to pay that bill. They need to get value for that spend. They want to make sure that it is going to the people who need it most.

This includes the approximately $7 billion that we currently spend on childcare assistance, where the taxpayer currently picks up two thirds of the bill that is paid for childcare services in this country. Childcare expenditure is rising at a rate of 6.7 per cent per year, and that is expected to continue with no changes if we were not to touch the system currently. That is what it would increase at over the next 10 years. This is not including the changes that have been put forward by the Productivity Commission, which has recommended a simpler, more targeted and fairer system that helps families stay in work and get in work when they have children. It does not include that. The cost of that is in excess of the budget and forward estimates as currently laid out by the government. It also does not include funding for the universal access regime, which is looked after by my colleague, the Minister for Education and Training, which has cost the government some $400 million.

If we are going to be able to fund improvements in these areas, we do need to come to an agreement—and I acknowledge the shadow minister in this area for working with the government and speaking about these issues—about the composition of potential packages. But as we both know, the hard work that is necessary in getting agreement on these matters is
that we have to agree on how they are funded. We need to be up-front with each other about how much these things cost and what is funded.

There has been commentary lately on the cost of universal access and whether it will continue to be funded beyond 30 June this year, which this government has funded. But we should note also that the universal access funding was not provided for under the previous government in their last budget—in their 2013–14 budget. If I go to the figures, in 2015–16 the allocation for universal access in the budget was zero. In 2016–17 it was zero. We have to work together on the solutions, but we have to work together on the funding and we need to be honest about what these funding challenges are. If we can do that, I think we can do some good things for Australian families, but I think we have to be up-front about at what cost, and we cannot just go on shovelling money out the door.

Mr Abbott: I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.

DOCUMENTS
Selection Committee
Presentation

The SPEAKER (15:11): I present report 21 of the Selection Committee relating to the consideration of private members' business on Monday 16 March 2015. The report will be printed in the Hansard for today and the committee's determinations will appear on tomorrow's Notice Paper. Copies of the report are being placed on the table.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

The SPEAKER: I also have to announce that the annual parliamentary versus press gallery soccer match took place this morning, captained by the member for Forde. The result was: parliamentarians, 5; press, 1.

BILLS
Export Finance and Insurance Corporation Amendment (Direct Lending and Other Measures) Bill 2014
Returned from Senate

Message received from the Senate returning the bill without amendment or request.

DOCUMENTS
Presentation

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Education and Training) (15:12): Nothing unites the parliament more than the defeat of the press gallery!

Documents are tabled in accordance with the list circulated to honourable members earlier today. Full details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Domestic Violence

The SPEAKER (15:13): I have received a letter from the honourable the Leader of the Opposition proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:
The need to put family violence at the centre of the national political agenda in Australia.
I call upon those honourable 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 SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (15:13): I thank the House for supporting this debate. It is a matter of public importance, but family violence is a matter of national urgency. It is without a doubt one of the greatest contradictions in our society that an act of hate can be done by people who claim to love the victim. It is not right in this country that Australian women are more likely to be badly injured, or worse, by partners who claim to love their spouse or their partner. For too long, family violence has been regarded as an uncomfortable outsider issue, best left to women's groups, the police or homeless services. The truth is that family violence is not a race, class or ethnic background issue; it is a gender issue. I believe all of us in this place have a responsibility to make it a national political priority.

I know that this issue is of great importance to all who have the privilege of serving in parliament. I know that we are all increasingly antagonistic to the notion that, whilst a neighbour might speak up if they thought a stranger was conducting an act of violence in the house next door, when it is between members of a family in the house next door, the convention is: it is not an issue which we should automatically involve ourselves in.

Today I have asked the Prime Minister to convene a national crisis summit on family violence as soon as possible. I acknowledge that he has agreed to meet with Labor to discuss this idea. In the event that a summit is not viewed by the government as the way to go—and we hope it is—we would convene one within the first hundred days of being elected.

The case for a summit is this. It is not just a government talkfest. It is not just state and territory leaders, as important as they are. There can be no solution to family violence without the voices of survivors being central in the discussions. We need an assembly of the front line—community, researchers, advocates, women's groups, and community legal services.

I am very proud that in the previous Labor government—led by Tania Plibersek and many of my colleagues—we had the first National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children. I acknowledge that the second plan has been adopted and advanced upon. But today I put before the House the proposition that we need to do more, and more urgently. Too often the first public warning sign that a woman is in danger is a report of her injury at the casualty ward, or indeed worse. Too little has changed too slowly.

We need a national summit to capture this momentum. Like every Australian I was proud that the 2015 Australian of the Year is Rosie Batty. Her story of struggle is unimaginable to all of us, frankly. I appreciate that—from the Victorian royal commission through to the Queensland government's report, Not now, not ever, released two days ago by Dame Quentin Bryce, the South Australian parliamentary inquiry, ANROWS, and work by the current government—work is being done.

Indeed this debate today stands on years and decades of effort by many people. This parliament has an opportunity to add our effort collectively to something which many people
have worked on. I am proud, amongst many, to have Jenny Macklin serve alongside us in this parliament as she worked on the first Canberra women's refuge many years ago.

Ms Plibersek: Forty years ago.

Mr SHORTEN: Some years ago! But it is important that we end what is called the postcode lottery. The quality of support that one receives should not depend on where you live. It should not depend on the role of the dice or if you find a magistrate who is particularly in tune with working through the needs of a survivor and making sure that the system works.

Every woman is entitled to feel safe in her home and secure in her community. If you cannot find safety in your home, then the system must support you. That family violence can happen to anyone means that the right help must be available to everyone.

We offer this idea of a national summit to the government and we also encourage them to look at our other proposals. On average, women affected by family violence will move three times—three upheavals: away from your support network, your family and friends, moving from your community and indeed your job. Sometimes women are still paying the mortgage on homes that they have had to flee while the abuser sits in the house.

As a starting point, Labor would invest $15 million in a safe at home grants program so that the abuser is not rewarded and the survivor can stay—better security systems, alarms, locks and CCTV would allow women to be safe in their homes and ensure that children can sleep in their own bedroom rather than having to move from their school and their friends, adding distress upon trauma.

We also recognise that when women seek legal protection from their abusers our court processes can be an emotional and financial gauntlet—intimidating, complex and slow. Our system should be built on one fundamental principle: when forced to court, seeking protection from family violence for you and your children, you should never walk through the system alone. Labor will invest $42 million in front-line community services; and, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, who suffer the highest rates of family violence, we would invest another $4.5 million dollars in building capacity for family violence prevention legal services. There is further to go, and I recognise that work has been done on improving security for women in our courts and that training for our magistrates, judges, court official and police officers has improved.

But no act of family violence ever occurs in isolation. Each one can be marked on an escalating continuum of rage. Interrupt the pattern of dangerous behaviour, perpetrators who abuse drugs and alcohol, law enforcement, justice and child protection systems—as a first step, we would provide $8.4 million to develop research and divert perpetrators from the path which leads to escalating grief and harm.

Underneath all of this, the fundamental issue, which will assist, tackle and defeat family violence once and for all, has to be the pursuit of equal treatment for women in our society. We believe that it is possible to teach respect in our schools, sporting clubs, workplaces and the military. We also believe that, if leaders play their role in business, politics and sport, we can also do this in the media. Complaining about political correctness is easy. Dismissing offensive and outdated attitudes to women as harmless fun is easy. But sexism and misogyny carries consequences for women, for children. It is time for us to recognise that the problem is not women; the challenge is men and men's behaviour.
Labor priorities are clear but we would seek a national summit not to validate our views or support our choices. We want immediate action. We want to be guided by the people who know. The principle of having a summit and bringing people together—not just the states and territories, and the national government—is sound. Let’s bring together all of the voices in one place at one time. We have remarkable momentum built upon the shoulders of survivors and their supporters, advocates and research.

Fundamentally, we must also recognise that no discussion of family violence is free from the discussion of gender equality, economic empowerment, seeing women have financial control over their own lives, and women in leadership; work at the grassroots as well. It is not inevitable that family violence will always be with us. Labor does not accept that it is an inevitable course of society and life that women have to be the victims of family violence. There are some things in life that cannot change, but violence against women in the family is not one of them. We have the capacity to do this together. Diversity and support for changing attitudes means that there can come a time in the future when people will look back at the debates we have today and look at the efforts of champions, from Ken Lay through to Rosie Batty, and through to so many others, including, unfortunately, so many about whom we have not heard names or their stories. We can put an end to this.

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Minister for Social Services) (15:23): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for bringing this matter forward for this debate today. Domestic violence is an issue that transcends this place and its politics. We are a great country, but there is a dark corner and we speak about that dark corner today. Having this debate today—importantly, about the many things that are being done, have been done and must continue to be done—will shed light and expose this dark place of our great nation. It is my hope and the hope of the Abbott government that all Australians, collectively and individually, join together in our efforts to reduce and ultimately, as the Leader of the Opposition has just said, eliminate violence against women.

I acknowledge the contribution of all members of this place, past and present, and look forward to the contribution of those in the future who have worked so hard on this goal. I particularly acknowledge you, Madam Speaker, for your work in this area over a long period of time. You have had a very simple message: women must be respected. Throughout your career, you have lived that and you have brought great respect to women in this country. If we share that as a country, that goes a long way to addressing the issues. We live in a country, as we have reminded ourselves today, in which assault and violence are illegal, yet one in three women in Australia will experience domestic violence and one in five will experience sexual violence and one a week is murdered at the hands of a former or current partner. That is not the Australia I want my daughters to grow up in. That is not the country I see for them. That saddens and sickens us that that has been the experience of so many Australian women—our sisters.

I see—as do ministers who have served in the portfolio I serve in today, and they sit across the chamber—both the causes and the consequences of this every day. You get a rare insight in this role, to see it at such a pervasive level across the community. That only stirs us up to address the matters that are before us. Violence against women is exactly that: it is violence and it is a crime and it is completely unacceptable. The government recognises that domestic
violence needs to be a national priority. The Prime Minister has elevated it as an issue at every Commonwealth and state and territory level, through the Council of Australian Governments' agenda. The federal government will be seeking the agreement of all states and territories to the priorities through the implementation of the national domestic violence order scheme, so that a protection order issued in one state applies in all states. These are practical measures. The sentiment that has been expressed here today is important, but I think we all acknowledge that that sentiment must be translated into actual things that happen on the ground that provide the protections and deliver the changes that are necessary. The implementation of a national domestic violence order scheme is an important reform and an important change.

In addition, COAG will work to develop a set of national standards for how we intervene against perpetrators and hold them accountable and will consider the enactment of a national approach to deal with technology misuse and online safety so that we can protect women against newer forms of abuse. This even goes into the area of bullying. All of us who are parents of young daughters live in fear, frankly, of what they can be exposed to in the online space. It is not just young girls but women of all ages. This is something we must be across. The Prime Minister's announcement bolsters the work of the Australian government with state and territory governments and non-government organisations. The Leader of the Opposition has acknowledged their important role, as he should and as we should, through the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022. The Prime Minister has appointed an expert panel on preventing violence against women which rightly has as its foundation members our Australian of the Year, Rosie Batty, and of course Ken Lay, the former Commissioner of Victoria Police.

In July last year, the government launched the second national action plan for violence against women and it allocated more than $100 million over four years to support its delivery. I was there on that day and it was quite a sight to see the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women, Senator Cash, standing with every state and territory police commissioner in the country. The opposition leader was there, the deputy opposition leader was there and there were many members from the government. It was a statement of solidarity amongst our most senior law enforcement officers in the country, standing there resolutely and making it a priority for every one of the police forces. It was a great thing to see, but it was not surprising, because they see it every day. I am the son of a policeman and I know a bit about what police go through every day—the trials that they deal with and what they see every day in this dark corner of our country. It affects them deeply and terribly, so I was not surprised to see them standing shoulder to shoulder with the parliament, with the government, saying, 'We will get this done.'

Under the second action plan, the Australian government is providing over $100 million, as I said. It includes initiatives such as $3.3 million for CrimTrac to develop and test a prototype for a national domestic violence order scheme. There is $1.7 million to take the next steps in developing a national data collection and reporting framework that includes $300,000 for the Australian Bureau of Statistics to augment data sets on victims and offenders. This is important data for planning and aligning your resources to ensure that you can tackle this problem and deploy people and schemes where you need to. There is $1 million is for the 1800RESPECT line—Australia's first national professional telephone and online counselling
service. We have allocated $3.5 million for projects under the Australian Research Council—20 separate projects, I understand, for women's safety under the 2014-16 research program and have made a $1 million investment to establish a sports grants bank, from which national sporting codes can fund violence prevention activities.

The government has also delivered on its commitment of $1 million to White Ribbon Australia to expand their campaign to culturally and linguistically diverse and Indigenous communities. As a former minister for immigration, and as others opposite will know, I know ensuring that you take the message from the mainstream into these quite discrete communities to ensure that they can address the very specific challenges they face. This is critical for recently-arrived migrants who come from quite different cultural settings to what is found in this country—helping women to understand their rights and the country in which they now live, and helping the men understand the country in which they now live. It is important that we roll this program out across the very many different linguistically and culturally diverse communities we have in Australia.

White Ribbon Australia is working to develop a culture of gender equality, which the Leader of the Opposition has also mentioned, and a culture of respect, where attitudes and behaviours that support the use of violence are no longer tolerated. The White Ribbon campaign aims to end violence against women by encouraging men and boys to take positive action to create change. We as a government have also provided $6 million towards the Northern Territory's $18 million domestic and family violence reduction strategy from 2014 to 2017, which is known as Safety is Everyone's Right. In addition, today Minister Cash, the minister assisting the Prime Minister for women, announced that the federal government will work with state and territory governments to deliver a $30 million jointly-funded, national, awareness-raising campaign. I pay tribute to Minister Cash for her work in this area. While the federal government's commitment to ending domestic violence is resolute, the issues of inconsistent and inadequate sentencing and justice administration responses for domestic violence perpetrators must be addressed. The matters, which have been raised today in this debate and will continue with the other speakers, will enjoy much agreement in this chamber. It is important that we have occasions like this to try and stir on the action that I said has been there, is there now and must continue. It must continue, but we also need to take account and stock of the gains that are being made. Your contributions, and those of many others in this place, need to be acknowledged and need to be built on. We must also do the same things that motivated the people who came before us in this place and who acted on issues as well as they could in their times.

The government has this as a national priority; we are demonstrating that through the activities that we are already engaged in. The Leader of the Opposition has put forward proposals today, and the Prime Minister has agreed to discuss those with the Leader of the Opposition. This is a very worthy initiative and I commend this debate to the house.

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (15:33): This morning we woke to another front-page story in The Canberra Times about the brutal murder of Tara Costigan. Tara had sought, and gained, an interim domestic violence order against the man who is now charged with murdering her. She had received that order just one day before her death. Her sister and another man were injured in the same attack. Tara had two sons and a little girl, not much more than a week old. Her family wants us to remember that she died
defending her children. Tara hoped that the company of her family, the provisions of the law and the resources of her government would protect her. They did not.

Tara Costigan is far from the only Australian woman whom our legal system, our governments, our society have failed. Rinabel Tiglao Blackmore died from injuries sustained when, in fear of her life, she jumped from a moving car. Leila Alavi was stabbed to death. Nikita Chawla was found dead in a unit in Brunswick West. Aïnur Ismagul was found dead at her home. Kerry Michael was found beaten to death on Mount Roland. Adelle Collins was stabbed to death at her home. Fabiana Palhares died of injuries from being attacked with an axe in her home. Renee Carter was stabbed to death.

These are just the cases where police have laid charges and identified those charged as partners or ex-partners of the victims. They are just the cases this year. Our usual formulation is to say that nearly one in five, or 17 per cent, of Australian women aged 18 and over have experienced violence from a partner or a former partner since the age of 15. That is nearly one and half million women. More than 130,000 Australian women have been victims of violence by a current or a previous partner in the last 12 months. We have to ask ourselves: how many thousands of women—right now, this afternoon, tonight—will fear for their own lives, their own safety and those of their children in their own homes? How many have fled everything known and everything that is familiar, changed jobs, taken their children in the middle of the night, moved house, moved state, left behind the support of family and friends and—perhaps not for the first time—have moved again and again in a desperate attempt to escape? How many have had to leave their work because the perpetrator of the violence knows where they work? How many have become poor because they are no longer able to work because the perpetrator turns up to their workplace and harasses them. How many are afraid to leave a violent relationship because they know that one of the most dangerous times is when they leave the relationship, that leaving will lead to their murder, or they are terrified that if they leave and take the children, the children will be pursued, or if they leave without the children, the children will be hurt, or worse, in revenge? How many are in fear that the mechanisms of the courts and the resources of the law will not ultimately deter or prevent their abuser from killing them? How many have stayed because they have nowhere else to go?

These women are not statistics. Each and every one of them is a daughter, a sister and sometimes a mother or an aunt, and each one of them is a part of our community, and to each and every one of them we owe an unyielding determination that this will stop. Aside from being relatives, mothers, daughters, sisters and aunts, every one of these women is a human being, and every one of them is a citizen of our country and is owed this. Since the beginning of this year, more than one family every week have been left to mourn a loss that should never have happened. More than one family a week have been left with a hole in their hearts that will never be filled. To them too we owe it to say, 'This must stop.' We call on the government to stand with us today, with all Australians and all of us here, and say, 'This will stop.'

Mr PORTER (Pearce—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister) (15:38): This is my first speech from the dispatch box, and I would not think that there is a more important subject to speak on.

Before politics, I was a crown prosecutor and I prosecuted a very large number of matters at trial and sentenced a very large number of matters that involved sexual offences and
offences of extreme violence against women that would fall into what is known generally as a broad category of domestic violence offences. There are a small number of matters that I remember distinctly and that still, from time to time, invade my thoughts. One in particular involved a young Indigenous woman in Derby, in the north of WA. There is nothing particularly to be gained by relaying the facts of the matter, other than to say that it was a very serious matter. Because of the remoteness of Derby, my efforts to proof that key witness and the victim had proved completely fruitless. I arrived the day before the trial, and I sat in a very hot room in the courthouse in Derby, and I simply could not convince this young woman to take her allegations to trial. The allegations thereby were never tested or proved, and it could not have been said at law that an offence was committed. I felt certain that the trial should have proceeded. As a citizen, I felt that the young woman should go to court, speak the truth and put the alleged assailant to the test before the jury, but, as an officer of the court, my efforts to persuade her had to require a level of dispassion that I felt—and now in retrospect feel—completely mismatched the moral reality of the circumstances.

This young lady had no mother there, no sister and no friend—no-one who would give her any comfort or support and give her the massive courage that she needed to get into that box. The outcome is one that I feel in my deep conscience was completely and utterly unjust, although it was procedurally and in every legal sense fair. In recollection, I think nothing could have been done at that particular point, because at the point that I entered that causal chain of misery that had led that young woman through that courtroom door it was far too late.

After trials, I always had a sort of pervasive and sombre mood, but I remember during the long drive back to Broome from Derby just being gripped by sheer despondency. I must say in retrospect that I had a not very constructive loathing of the alleged perpetrator, and that slipped very easily into this complete sense of despair that the scene I had left was nothing but a wilderness beyond the effect of human improvement. It was completely wrong to feel that way. Things can definitely be done and human lives can be improved, and there can be retreat from the violence against women that we see all around us, on our doorsteps as well as courtroom doorsteps. Even if that retreat from violence is incremental and improvements are hard-fought for, and even if some of them can be overturned at times and reversed, that effort is always worthwhile.

I would say to the Leader of the Opposition, my friends in the opposition and to my own side of this parliament: the key is to enter that causal chain as early as you possibly can in terms of public policy and to do so in a way that is eminently practical and measurable. I tried to do that as a state Attorney-General in a way that I thought was most immediate and most important. Whether there is a summit or whether this conversation continues at COAG, I would put to all of you present that if this is a crisis and if we want to do one thing immediately to make things better then we must ensure that violence restraining orders are worth the paper they are written on. As a state Attorney-General I changed the law, and I was persuaded out of allowing for mandatory imprisonment of those who breached restraining orders, and I now regret it.

In Western Australia—and this plays out in every state and territory in the Commonwealth—at the time that I was Attorney-General you could have breached a violence restraining order against your partner four or more times and have only a 25 per cent chance
of imprisonment. My government changed the law in Western Australia to be just short of mandatory imprisonment, with the strongest possible legal presumption for imprisonment if you were a three-strike breacher of a violence restraining order against your partner, and that figure of 25 per cent increased to 30 per cent. That is, on any assessment, a colossal failure of response.

I do not entirely blame the judiciary, as it is a very difficult thing to show mercy on an individual basis and then have to face the statistical fact that that mercy causes misery at large. But I would say that in a country where an Aboriginal woman is three to four times more likely to be a victim of sexual assault, where an Aboriginal woman is 40 times more likely to be hospitalised after an assault and where 50 to 60 per cent of Aboriginal spousal assaults involve a weapon, we must do something. It is a crisis, and if I could point to one thing for all of the members of this House to think about it would be making violence restraining orders work.

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga) (15:44): Later today I will be able to launch this very important book, which is the story of the Beryl women's refuge here in Canberra. It was the second women's refuge to be opened in Australia, around 40 years ago. I was a young woman when I joined the night shift at the Beryl women's refuge, and it was a time in Australia when young women like me felt that we could do and be anything that we dreamt possible. What I wanted to do was make that so for women escaping violence. To my mind, violence is the way that so many women have their dreams and, sometimes, their lives destroyed. It is this violence against women that takes away their capacity to control their own lives. The women who have made the book I will be launching this afternoon have really understood that. All of the people who have worked at the women's refuge in Canberra and at women's refuges all around Australia understand just how important it is to make sure women have a place to go to escape violence. I want to thank all of the volunteers and staff who work in women's refuges now and who have worked in them over the last 40 years in our country.

The women and children who have sought refuge understand just how critical it is that these services exist. Forty years ago, there were no government supports provided. Now, of course, governments at all levels provide funding, and yet, sadly, it is the case that, every single night, there are women who are looking for a bed for themselves and their children but cannot find one. It is something all of us need to face up to.

For me personally, the nights I worked on the roster at the refuge remain with me. Some of it was just plain fun, as I played with the children. But a lot of it, of course, involved talking with women late at night and it was very difficult. I gained a very real understanding of how violence can destroy so much of a woman. At worst it can mean her life, or the lives of her children, or her health and confidence.

When I was interviewed for the book I am about to launch I was asked how this time at the refuge had impacted on my life as a member of parliament and as a minister. I do want to say today how much I have carried that experience with me over all the time that I have been here in the House of Representatives. It has enabled me to really understand the impact on women of the use and misuse of power and control through violence. It has also driven my commitment to make sure that refuges, homelessness services and the legal support that women so desperately need are properly funded. That is why I am so pleased to see the policies that have been announced today.
This does have to be a priority. It does cost money to make sure that refuges are there every night that women and children need them, that legal support is there for people and that family support services are there for people. We acknowledge how important it is to do everything we can to say to girls who are growing up today that they can expect to take their place wherever they dream they can. But we also want to make sure that, when they grow up, as women they are treated equally at work and at home. Governments have a responsibility—all of us—to make sure that that can be delivered. We can make a difference, and we must.

**Dr Stone** (Murray) (15:48): It is wonderful to see the bipartisan support for an issue which has to be one of the key concerns for a nation which calls itself developed, compassionate and caring. All women have a right to be safe and their children have a right to be safe, not abused, bullied and beaten. But one in five Australian women will experience criminal and cowardly abuse from her current or former intimate partner. We know that, when a woman has that abuse occurring, too often she has her own children who are witnesses to that abuse. We know that one of the characteristics of growing up in a violent situation like this, in a household where the woman is bullied and abused, verbally, psychologically or physically, is that the children learn from it. The little girls learn that this is what you take, this is what you have to put up with, as a woman in our society; and the little boys learn that this is what you do to keep a woman 'in line'. So there is an intergenerational transfer of that abuse—for the victims and for the abusers.

We have got to stop all of this. We have got to have zero tolerance. Australia is a wealthy nation with a lot of medical services and a lot of non-government organisations who commit to looking after the poor, the needy and the disabled. Despite all the infrastructure that we do have—which is more than many other nations—we still have this scourge in our community. It is not confined to low-socioeconomic status persons or neighbourhoods; it is found behind closed doors right throughout our society.

There are, however, some strong risk factors in terms of which women are likely to find themselves abused. With two women a week being murdered by partners in Australia, we know that the woman has probably suffered years of violent abuse leading up to that final struggle when she was hurt too badly to survive. We know that alcohol and drug use is one of the factors which will make it more likely for the male to attack his partner. We know that women with disabilities—whether psychiatric, intellectual or physical—are more likely to be attacked. That is because they are more dependent or are seen by the abuser to be more easily abused and less likely to report it.

We know that boys who have seen abuse in their families are more likely to become abusive themselves when they grow up. We know that if a woman is pregnant, or if the dissolution of the relationship is occurring, she is more likely to be physically and emotionally abused. And we know that more younger women tend to be abused. We also know that Indigenous women are more likely to be abused in Australia—and that probably goes along with the alcohol and drug abuse and the extreme stress experienced, particularly in remoter communities.

So we know there are risk factors that will be more likely to stimulate violence, but that is not enough to understand what the factors of risk are like. We have to understand why men do it. We have to make sure that we get into our schools to our boys and girls at a very young age. Northern European countries do this so very well. We have to make sure that our young
people learn that we must have equality of status, empowerment in terms of job prospects and managerial positions, and economic independence between men and women. We have to see that women in the workplace are given the same respect and engender the same understanding and opportunities as men.

A man does not abuse a woman physically and emotionally, sometimes to the point of killing her, if he respects her and sees her as an equal. This is a situation in Australia that harks right back to us looking at the relationships between men and women. Men have to understand that women are equal and have a right to live a life that is safe and is not going to lead her to injury or death and her children to be emotionally scarred as victims or perpetrators of these crimes in the future.

Restraining orders have to work. The police have to have a zero-tolerance attitude. If we hear screaming or abuse or see someone obviously physically hurt we must go to their aid, not turn the other cheek and say that it is not our business. It is the business of every Australian.

Ms BUTLER (Griffith) (15:53): Last year I heard a constituent speak about being brutally beaten and left for dead, when she was six months pregnant. She is now a well-known advocate for taking more action against domestic and family violence. Last year I visited the Women's Legal Service in Annerley, which I understand is fortunate to have the member for Moreton's wife as a volunteer. They told me that they are really stretched. They said they had helped 3,200 women in the previous year, but there were 16,000 more who had tried to get help but could not.

RISE Queensland visited me in Canberra to call for more action on family violence. Women's House told me they were worried about the state of Queensland's domestic violence laws. And just last week Dame Quentin Bryce released a special task force report on domestic and family violence in my home state. She said:

… there are about 180 reports to police of domestic violence incidents in Queensland every day.

The report includes testimony from people who assisted the task force, like the contributor who said:

The violence would consist of him punching me, spitting on me, choking me, depriving me of sleep and threatening others would kill or rape me. I was often left bruised with multiple contusions, black eyes, pain, on occasion concussion and living in great fear for my life …

Also, this week the bipartisan Parliamentarians Against Family Violence heard from Rosie Batty, whose story everyone here knows. Everyone here knows that stopping domestic and family violence should be squarely at the centre of our national agenda.

As the Queensland special task force report says, 'domestic and family violence is gendered'. As Bill Shorten has said:

There is no clearer symbol of continuing gender inequality in our society than the epidemic of violence against women. The biggest risk factor for being a victim of family violence is being a woman.

… … …

17 per cent of Australian women have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or previous partner …

As the Deputy Leader of the Opposition said, that is nearly one in five.

Eliminating domestic and family violence will take more than talk. But talk is still crucial. Domestic and family violence needs to be at the centre of the national debate if it is to be
eliminated. There must be talk and, of course, there must be action. Without continued
discussion of this issue it will be allowed to fall off the agenda, as it has periodically in the
past. We cannot let that happen.

Today, Labor has called on the Prime Minister to hold a national crisis summit on family
violence. We know that women need to be able to get legal support and to find somewhere
safe to go. We want to make sure they have both of those things. To make that happen we
want the Commonwealth state and territory governments to conduct a national crisis summit
on violence against women, separate from COAG. Governments must agree to implement
urgently coordinated judicial and social services reform. A national crisis summit on violence
against women would bring together community legal services, researchers, experts and
advocates. It is the best way for stakeholders to lay down the key policy challenges and the
changes needed for addressing family violence, in an open and transparent way.

Labor's interim package that we have announced would deliver more than $70 million in
targeted funding to ensure those suffering from family violence can access critical services.
We would commit $50 million to frontline legal services, including Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander legal services, to make sure that women suffering from family violence have
appropriate legal support. The aim of this is to ensure that, at least, the women facing court
have access to appropriate legal services during what is a very difficult time. We will also
make an initial investment of $15 million in Safe at Home grants to help people affected by
family violence stay safe in their own home. In addition, Labor will invest $8 million in
perpetrator mapping, which looks at interactions across family violence, law enforcement,
justice, child protection and related systems, to help identify opportunities to prevent violence
through information sharing.

Labor's plan is for a national crisis summit on violence against women, and for interim
measures. We developed that plan in consultation with experts, academics and advocates like
Rosie Batty. Like my colleagues I urge the Prime Minister to work with Labor as a matter of
urgency to convene the summit. If not, we will do it within the first 100 days of a Shorten
Labor government. This must stop, and we all have an obligation to do our part.

Mr BROAD (Mallee) (15:58): It is really great that we are talking about this matter of
public importance here this afternoon. When Tim Watts from the Labor Party first rang me
and said, 'How about we work with Ken Wyatt, from the Liberal Party, and start the
Parliamentarians Against Family Violence,' the purpose of it was to get this on the agenda to
ensure that this is something we in this House are all talking about. I want to commend the
work of Tim Watts and Ken Wyatt, and their strong leadership on this issue. It is pleasing that
we now are finally able to have this as a matter of public importance that all people in this
chamber are interested in and are looking for solutions to.

My interest in this really stems from a meeting that I had in my office. I had a lady come
and see me, and she wanted to talk about child care. Of course, child care is a significant
issue. I invited her into my office, and we sat down and briefly talked. Once there were no
staff there and the conversation could flow more freely, she pointed out that this was not
really just about child care. As members of parliament know, and as many in the gallery
would not realise, in some regard the role of a member of parliament is in fact a pastoral role.
As is often the way when you get talking to people and scratch a little bit deeper, there is
always more to the community that you seek to represent and serve.
She said, 'How did I get in this situation?' She said, 'I am a young successful woman and university educated, and yet I find myself now living close to the poverty line, having had to flee, with three children, a case of serious domestic violence.' We talked about the issues, about supervised access and being able to exchange those children at a police station and about her feeling judged when she did so—not so much because the police were judging her but because she felt guilty. I thought that this is actually an epidemic in my electorate and it is an epidemic in Australian society. We spend so much time talking about the security of the Australian people, we dedicate a lot of time to issues to do with terrorism, we spend $28 billion in this country on defence, which is for the security of the Australian people, yet there is the loss of many, many family members in their own home. It is appropriate that we address the issue of the security of the Australian people within their homes.

The disturbing part for me is that I fear, perhaps, that we are not winning this debate. It came out on Monday night, when Rosie Batty and the people from Our Watch addressed members of parliament, that community attitudes in 17- to 19-year-olds have actually deteriorated in regard to their views of women. This is a major concern to me. This is the enlightened era, and this is the educated era. We are a First World country, and yet, statistically, attitudes have deteriorated. One of the reasons for this was access to online pornography, and one of the other reasons for this was the gaming culture and some of the things that young Australians are feeding their minds with within the gaming culture. It stands to reason that, just as you are what you eat, what you feed your mind on does translate to changing your attitudes. So, I think that it is fantastic that, today, we heard that the federal government is going to work with the state governments to put $30 million towards a campaign to try to change people's minds and to try to change people's attitudes. We can do this. Together we can do this.

We have done this with smoking. We have drastically reduce the amount of people that take up smoking, but it continues to be an ongoing challenge. We have done it with drink driving, where if you drink and drive you actually are a bloody idiot, and we can do this with family violence. We want a society where the family unit is safe, where a woman and a child can go home and feel safe, but it starts with us. It starts with the leaders in this place, and it starts with the Australian people. I hope that the Australian people are taking notice of the discussion that is taking place in the parliament here.

The great line is: the standard you walk past is the standard that you accept. We must change our attitudes. We must have good policing. We must have Australia-wide intervention orders, strong magistrates who enforce the law, safe houses for women that flee, good support services to tell those women that they have not done anything wrong and that they are valued by the Australian people, and affordable legal services. These are the challenges. I think that it is great that our parliament has finally taken a very strong stand. I commend members of parliament for their leadership on this issue.

Mr WATTS (Gellibrand) (16:04): Before I begin my remarks on this matter of public importance, I would like to say that this debate today has been parliament at its best. I thank all members for supporting this motion today, and I particularly thank the members who have contributed. I have worked with the member for Mallee and the member for Hasluck over some time on this issue, and I know how seriously they and all members of this parliament take this issue.
Last April, a woman was murdered in my electorate in the most horrific and public circumstances. It was a wake-up call for me. It forced me to confront the reality of family violence in all of our communities. I am ashamed to say that before this murder I was unaware of the prevalence of this issue in our community. I did not know that one in five of the women around me, the women in our society, have experienced violence from a current or former partner. I did not know that 17,000 family violence intervention orders were issued in Victoria, alone, last year. I did not know that last year around one woman a week was killed by her current or former partner in Australia—a figure that has tragically grown to two a week this year.

Thanks to decades of hard work from advocates and service providers, more and more people in our community and more and more MPs are becoming aware of this issue and demanding action. More people are learning about this issue in the way that I have over the past 12 months. Indeed, in January, we made family violence campaigner Rosie Batty Australian of the Year, not for what her ex-partner did, but for what she has done over the past 12 months as a powerful, articulate advocate in our community. On Monday, Rosie Batty and the foundation Our Watch addressed members of Parliamentarians against Family Violence Group in Parliament House. Around 50 MPs from all sides of politics—many of whom, I know, are in the room at the moment—came to hear her speak and stayed for an hour. She left us with a message. She asked us, 'What will we do in response to this issue?' I know how much shared goodwill there is on this issue on all sides of this House. We all know that the status quo is unacceptable, and we all know broadly what needs to be done. So, I say to members: let's do it, let's do it together, now.

Today, Labor invited the Prime Minister to convene a national crisis summit on this issue and get to work on ending family violence across Australia. It is a genuine offer, and I hope the Prime Minister takes it up. I welcomed his comments during question time, today, on this. We have said that, if the PM does not take up this offer, we will act on this summit within 100 days of the election of a Labor government. We have said that we will work with state and territory leaders to end the uneven response to family violence across the country—uneven even within states let alone between states.

We have said that we will invite service providers and survivors of family violence to work with the leaders at the summit and to hold them to account. And we have said that we will support a $70 million interim package to ensure that those suffering from family violence can access critical services, to ensure that no woman is forced to confront our legal system alone to ask for protection for herself and her children. That is, tragically, something that happens all across our country every day of the year. Lawyers are often a maligned group, often for good reason, but in this respect they truly do God's work.

Why do we need a national crisis summit? Because two women a week are being killed. This is a national crisis. It is an issue that should be bigger than just another agenda item that we consider regularly at COAG. We need a national crisis summit to ensure that decision makers around the country are held accountable for their actions and their commitment in this space, and to ensure that they honour the work of front-line providers. We need a national crisis summit to ensure that our response to family violence is joined up and tackles the causes of this violence, not only the consequences.
Labor believes in an Australia where every woman can be safe in her own home and where police, courts and governments protect this right. Women and children should only be forced to leave their homes in the most extreme circumstances. Our starting point needs to be an agreement on a national Safe at Home program, something that would be instrumental in assisting women and children to remain safely in their homes. A national Safe at Home program would ensure that there are effective policing, justice and support services to keep women safe where they currently live. At the same time, we need to build the capacity of our judicial system to deal with family violence, strengthen the operation of our legal system and improve police responses.

Finally, and most importantly, we need to change the attitudes and behaviours that enable violence against women. We need to reflect on our own behaviour and ask ourselves hard questions about what we are doing to break down gender inequality in our society. Make no mistake: the heart of this issue is gender inequality.

We do not need to wait for a change of government to take action on any of these issues. I know the goodwill of those opposite is strong. We know what needs to be done. Let's get on and do it.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (16:09): What an indictment of our society that, in this day and age, with more than 2,000 years of so-called civilisation, this issue of family violence is so rife. Two deaths a week, not in some violent country on the other side of the world but here in Australia. It is definitely time to do something. Domestic violence betrays trust, destroys families and leaves long-lasting emotional and physical scars for not only the victim but those around them. Domestic violence in any form is unacceptable and it is incumbent upon all of us to work effectively to eradicate it.

This coalition government has placed domestic violence prominently on the national agenda, in cooperation with state and territory governments. In this regard I would like to place on record my strong support for the Prime Minister's recent announcement that domestic violence will be listed as a priority for the Coalition of Australian Governments, in 2015. The governments will focus on implementing a National Domestic Violence Order Scheme, developing national outcome standards for perpetrator interventions and improving online safety for women. These measures are crucial in keeping families safe from these wicked and violent acts.

I would also note the work of the former Queensland government in commissioning a task force into domestic violence and the receipt of the task force report titled Not now, not ever: putting an end to domestic and family violence in Queensland, which was commissioned by then Premier Campbell Newman.

The report found that, on average, there are 180 instances of domestic violence every day in Queensland and that, between 2011-12 and 2013-14, reports of domestic violence increased from 58,000 to 66,000. The report makes 140 recommendations and I trust that the new Queensland government will study these carefully with a view to continuing the good work initiated by the former government. I place on record my appreciation to the task force chair, former Governor-General Quentin Bryce.

Domestic violence in all its forms is a blight on our country. It is unacceptable. We must take time to consider that domestic violence comes in all shapes and sizes. And the shapes
and sizes are not always what we expect. We must be wary of falling into the path of only believing those who we typically expect to be victims. We must train our emergency service staff, social workers, doctors, teachers and others to look out for unlikely victims, the ones who keep quiet and suffer in silence. Perpetrators of violence all start somewhere. Schoolyard bullies are not always the big kids; it is often the reverse. Not all victims of domestic violence are poor or uneducated. Not all perpetrators are the physically strong attacking the physically weak. Not all domestic violence involves a black eye or visible signs of abuse. Mental torture can be as damaging and sometimes has long-lasting impacts but never heals. Not all domestic violence is perpetrated by strong men on vulnerable women.

The only way to eradicate all forms of domestic violence from our culture is to put aside our preconceived ideas and to look at every victim as an individual, not as a stereotype. We must give victims of violence the courage to speak out, without the fear of ridicule or disbelief. Most importantly, we must say to the victims, 'I believe you.'

The mover of this motion, the Leader of the Opposition, also mentioned our near neighbours in Papua New Guinea where you are more likely to have gender-based violence than elsewhere. I would like to recognise the work of Delilah Gore, a current PNG minister, whom I know you met on recent trips, Mr Deputy Speaker Ewen Jones, and Governor Julie Soso Akeke, up in Goroka, who are working so hard on trying to resolve the issues in that country; and people such as Leniata Legacy and Sister Lorraine, in Bougainville. The issues up there are even more stark than the ones we have here.

This is an issue that cannot be resolved by governments, by talking and by coming up with protocols. It is an issue that we must all take responsibility for. Person by person, house by house, street by street, we must all take responsibility and stand up and be heard.

I commend Air Vice Marshal Mark Binskin, who my colleague the member for Mallee quoted, who said: 'The standard you walk past is the standard you accept.' We must give victims the confidence to come forward and speak up and, when they do, we must believe them.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ewen Jones): I thank the member for Ryan. The time for the discussion has concluded.

BILLS

National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015

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:

(1) notes that:

(a) whilst this bill is designed to improve regulatory oversight of the sector, it does not address the damage to individuals that has already occurred or propose action to engage with the community to minimise future problems;
(b) the actions of unscrupulous Registered Training Organisations and brokers have had serious impacts on vulnerable individuals;
(c) reports of people being left with large debts and no qualification or useless qualifications must be addressed; and

(2) calls on the Australian Government to:
(a) act with more urgency to ensure the protection of students is prioritised;
(b) immediately seek a consumer protection information campaign by the ACCC, including advice for people who need to seek redress, and consider other mechanisms available to strengthen consumer protections; and
(c) support Labor's call for the Auditor-General to conduct an audit on the use of VET FEE-Help."

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ewen Jones) (16:14): The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this the honourable member for Cunningham has moved as an amendment that all words after 'that' be omitted with a view to substituting other words. The immediate question is therefore that the amendment be agreed to. I invite the member for Swan to give us his address in continuation.

Mr IRONS (Swan) (16:14): As I was saying before, my home state of Western Australia has had a very high demand for skilled workers over the past 10 years, in particular due to the state's mining and housing boom. Although the resources industry is currently on a construction phase downturn, major infrastructure developments are still being rolled out and a significant number of homes are still being built, particularly in Perth's outer suburbs.

This of course includes major infrastructure projects such as the billion-dollar Gateway WA project and the $1.6 billion Perth Freight Link project, which are both currently being rolled out through my electorate of Swan. I went into greater detail about these major infrastructure projects in my speech on the cognate appropriation bills earlier this week. For those members who are not aware, these projects are already boosting Western Australia's economy, alleviating road congestion and creating about 1,300 construction jobs just for the Gateway WA project alone, with the majority of works being undertaken by more than 600 Western Australian businesses. Each of these projects requires skilled work men and women who would have completed a national vocational education course to become qualified. Many of the businesses that I have discussed would have apprentices working for them and completing their theoretical units at TAFE, or a fully qualified adult may be undertaking a course to gain further skills to help them in the workplace, such as an electrician undertaking a business course if they are looking to become a business owner in the future.

I might just add, on the Gateway WA project, that it is well ahead of time. It is six months ahead of schedule, and it is now at 60 per cent completion. We see that the coalition and state governments are doing a wonderful job driving that particular project.

As I have said, there are a significant range of VET courses, which are regulated on a national level by the Australian Skills Quality Authority, or ASQA. According to ASQA, these courses include:

… technical and further education (TAFE) institutes, adult and community education providers and agricultural colleges, as well as private providers, community organisations, industry skill centres, and commercial and enterprise training providers. In addition, some universities and schools provide VET.
When encouraging students to undertake VET courses, the government always, of course, promotes those industries listed on the National Skills Needs List, as this assists students to know which industries have greater pathways for employment once they are qualified. The list includes a range of industries from automotive electricians to fitters, plumbers and upholsterers.

What stood out to me, though, is that the air-conditioning and mechanical services plumbers and air-conditioning and refrigeration mechanics are the two top required skills on this national list. As you would know, that was my background for more than 25 years. Even though the list is in alphabetical order, I am sure that members will put that fact out of their minds while I focus a small amount of time on these important industries!

These employment pathways stood out to me because, as many members know, and as I said before, I spent more than 25 years in business in the air-conditioning, heating, ventilation and refrigeration sector. I had good employees, but it is definitely an industry that needs to be promoted and boosted to ensure that high-quality work men and women continue to be trained, which is why the VET sector is absolutely crucial to the Australian economy.

If we want to have Australian owned businesses with locally manufactured products, we need a skilled workforce to create those things and provide the necessary services. After all, we live in the 21st century and have an expectation that, when we flick a light switch on, the light will actually turn on, and if we turn the tap on we expect water to come out. But, if all of a sudden we have a significant decline in the number of electricians and plumbers our country has, we are going to be in a bit of trouble.

As I previously said, this is why this coalition government is implementing key legislation now to support our apprentices and to support vocational education and training to ensure that students are not deterred from seeking a qualification in these industries and to ensure that they are appropriately regulated. I have heard the Deputy Speaker talk about his child before in this chamber, and I just want to reiterate that—as I know I said before—my son is doing a bricklaying apprenticeship at the moment. He has already spoken to me about the idea of going on and doing further studies with VET so that he can not only be a bricklayer but go into running his own business and starting a construction business. So the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015, the bill before the House, is a very important factor.

This idea of regulation in fact goes to the heart of the bill before the House, with the overall aim being to improve the quality of Australia's VET system. This will build on a number of reforms that the government has already implemented, including new national standards for the training providers, which came into effect on 1 January for new providers and will be implemented for existing providers on 1 April as part of the transitional period.

The government has also committed $68 million over four years to ASQA to enforce new regulatory standards under a risk management model. The bill before the House will enhance this regulatory framework on a national level to give greater certainty to students, employers and the government that best practice is being undertaken. It will specifically provide ASQA with greater capacity to respond to emerging issues in the VET system and to more effectively regulate registered training organisations to ensure that dodgy providers are no longer able to damage this sector and also to give the transparency that providers need.
As Australian Council for Private Education and Training CEO Rod Camm said last month:

These measures are necessary to protect both students and colleges from the harmful impacts of a small number of poor quality providers who undermine the integrity of the entire system …

After a necessary and welcome period of consultation by the government, I think we can all agree these reforms are urgent, and must be passed as soon as is practicable.

I guess that is another example of the government consulting with industry and consulting with associations and stakeholders within the economy. And I could not agree more with what Mr Camm said.

With 164,000 public VET students and approximately 42,000 apprentices in Western Australia—according to the relevant 2013 and 2014 statistics respectively—who are undertaking a training course, it is vital that the government and the industry work together to ensure that our students are getting the very best education we can provide. This is also particularly important for my electorate of Swan, which, as of last month, had 4,645 apprentices in training and more than 92 RTOs providing a range of training programs. The government is improving quality of teaching and we are encouraging more students. I also highlight that the government is directly responding to industry concerns about those dodgy providers, who, as I said, are undermining the integrity of the entire sector. The bill before the House will achieve this through a number of amendments to the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Act 2011, including implementing a new instrument known as a Quality Standard to provide the Commonwealth with emergency powers to address quality issues within the sector.

As industry has identified during the government’s consultation processes, the current time taken to respond to cases where a provider has not complied with ASQA’s standards is too long—far too long. This is because the Commonwealth, if it is to change standards, must have the agreement of the states and territories. Although this is an important oversight mechanism, 12 months, to my mind and that of government and industry, is far too long to address issues of concern. These emergency powers will ensure the Australian government is able to consult with employees, training providers and state and territory governments to create a new quality standard within weeks. This rapid response time will ensure ASQA continues to meet its objective to maintain nationally consistent, high-quality training and assessment across Australia’s VET system.

As I mentioned previously, a concern that has been made by students and industry is the lack of clarity around training providers and the qualifications a student will receive under many VET programs. This is largely due to the marketing of training and the type of information that must be provided to prospective students. The bill before the House will enhance the standards in these areas by requiring all organisations involved in the marketing of a VET course, including third parties or brokers, to identify which registered training organisation will be responsible for the qualification. This will ensure that students know which provider they are signing up for and can review the quality of that provider. Under the proposed amendment, ASQA will also be able to pursue anyone who does not clearly identify who is providing the training and to take action against any individual or organisation which contravenes this standard and provides false or misleading marketing material to prospective students.
Although I have discussed this bill in the context of enhancing oversight by ASQA as the regulatory body for VET programs, a key provision in this bill is also in line with the government's overall agenda to cut red tape. As members would be aware, the government has already cut $2.1 billion in red and green tape as part of our autumn and spring repeal days—as we are now into autumn, I am sure there is one coming; and I am sure the member for Chifley, who is at the table, would be interested in that—which is more than double the $1 billion in compliance savings that this government has committed to make each year. The bill before the House will reduce the compliance burden on industry in this context by extending the registration period for RTOs from five to seven years. This is in direct response to ASQA's advice that re-registration audits are the least effective method of identifying poor performing providers and that their resources would be better directed toward more targeted and random investigations and audits. This will also bring the registration requirements for RTOs in line with that of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, or TEQSA, registration.

The bill will also make a number of minor amendments to ensure that best practice is being exercised by the industry's national regulator. This includes provisions to allow ASQA to request information from any person who is purporting to be an RTO but who is not, to permit ASQA to share information with other entities where necessary and to streamline processes for ASQA to issue written directions. (Time expired)

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond) (16:26): I also rise to speak on the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015. This bill contains amendments to the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011 which will work towards supporting ongoing reform measures, including protecting the integrity of the vocational education and training, or VET, system. It also gives the regulator capacity to respond to emerging issues. There are also technical amendments to improve the efficiency and operation of the act and, consequently, the regulator. The bill also extends the period of registration that is able to be granted by the regulator from five to seven years.

As we have heard from many speakers on this bill, a high-quality vocational education and training sector is fundamental to growing our skilled workforce and also fundamental to making sure that we have a very productive economy. It is vitally important for both those reasons. At the same time, there needs to be effective safeguards in place to protect those in the system, particularly those who are young and those people who are vulnerable. As stated by the shadow minister, the member for Cunningham, we on this side will be supporting this bill. She has also moved an amendment to strengthen transparency. I support the amendments that the shadow minister has moved, which will accelerate the introduction of consumer protections for vulnerable people who may be exploited by unscrupulous training providers. Some of these issues have already been identified in the interim report of the Senate Education and Employment References Committee inquiry into the operation, regulation and funding of private vocational education and training providers in Australia, which was tabled recently.

Labor is calling on the government to request the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to develop national consumer advisory information on the VET sector and for the government to explore all options for increased consumer protection. The ACCC has consumer information available for many sectors that have been the subject of exploitation in
the past. Labor has requested that a similar campaign be developed for the vocational education sector to ensure that that oversight is there. We looked at some of the revelations of over 600 complaints to the New South Wales Office of Fair Trading about unscrupulous providers. This really does show that there is a need for urgent action in this space in terms of the transparency required. The fact is that young people deserve to have access to the best quality training, and they also deserve and need to have action to safeguard their rights while they are accessing this sector. This is vitally important. The minister must act now to ensure that consumers are aware of some of those practices are occurring so that people can make informed decisions about who they choose to train with and get the required skills from. This will ensure that they are not being manipulated by the many unscrupulous marketing and recruitment practices that have been occurring in the sector. We have seen a lot of that in the media recently.

The purpose of the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill is to introduce some measures to protect the integrity of the VET system and also to provide a balance between protection and regulation of the system. The bill aims to enhance the quality within the VET sector by protecting the integrity of the sector through quality assurances that will enable the delivery of high-quality training for students, which is, at its essence, what is required in this field. We want to make sure that that high quality is maintained. It is imperative that students gain relevant qualifications and also imperative that employers have confidence that an individual's qualifications are a reliable measure of the knowledge and skills they possess regardless of where they may have been trained.

The bill also aims to improve transparency in the marketing of VET courses. As we have said, many concerns have been raised about the manner in which some VET courses have been marketed and some of the methods used. At times, it can be very unclear to students, particularly if they are enrolling online, who is actually responsible for their course. The bill places additional requirements on the context of advertisements that relate to VET courses, requiring greater transparency in their marketing. This will allow students to clearly identify who is actually responsible for their course. The bill also reduces the regulatory burden through extension of registration periods. The bill extends the period of registration able to be granted by the regulator from five to seven years. The bill will also provide a number of administrative improvements to streamline processes.

But what this bill fails to do is provide specific consumer protection provisions, which is exactly why the shadow minister has put forward that specific amendment. We believe that is vitally important. As many people have highlighted in speaking on this bill, some of the reports in the media have been very disturbing. We have seen reports on the increase of unscrupulous behaviour by some registered training organisations who are preying on vulnerable students, signing them up for very large VET FEE-HELP debts. It is quite disturbing when you see the situation that some people are in. Distressed students have sometimes been completely unaware that they were signed up for a particular course. Further adding to their distress, often they find they have been saddled with quite a significant debt as well.

These reports often identify a real problem with people being misled about the actual debt they will be incurring with the Commonwealth government through the use of VET FEE-HELP. Many of these stories have identified people having debts sometimes over $20,000...
without even finishing a course or gaining a qualification. This is just nothing more than clear exploitation of people who simply want to get out there and improve themselves and improve their chances of getting a job. Unfortunately, we have seen too many instances of people being exploited in those situations. So we really have to see some action taken to stop people who are often already in vulnerable situations being trapped into debts which can lead to more and more hardship for them.

Under VET FEE-HELP, students are able to access up to $97,728 in total for most courses offered by eligible registered training organisations. This becomes something of a double-edged sword in that it provides access to education and training but can also become a very large carrot for those unscrupulous providers. Indeed, some registered training organisations have further muddied the waters through the use of brokers as well. These brokers, at times, have embellished their products to sell them. In this case, it is education and training products to potential students. The use of brokers currently allows RTOs to distance themselves from the actions of some of these particular brokers who are incentive driven. Sometimes, as we have said, their behaviour is quite unscrupulous. The amendments in this bill take some steps to making RTOs accountable for the actions of the brokers they encourage and engage to sell their products, but more needs to be done. With the Grattan Institute warning that almost half of all vocational loans will never be repaid, the financial burden on the Commonwealth continues to grow. When we further consider that the growth of VET FEE-HELP has exceeded all projections, with more than $1.6 billion allocated just last year, action is clearly needed. The community are certainly calling for action in this space as well.

Yet, instead of action from this government, what we have seen from the Assistant Minister for Education and Training, Senator Birmingham, is that he has been out there advancing the incorrect and fanciful argument that it was Labor in government that failed to protect students and taxpayers from these unscrupulous providers. In fact, Labor has a very strong and long record on investing in skills and helping students and workers to obtain the skills they need to participate and compete in the modern workforce. As well, it was Labor that was committed to and introduced regulation and quality assurance. We are very proud of our record in this particular area. But unfortunately for well over a year Senator Birmingham and his predecessor, whilst they might talk tough about action against those RTOs, have failed to take firm enough action to stop these problems which of late, as we have seen, have been quite extensively reported within the media.

While we are talking about providing training and skills, I want to turn to New South Wales and look at what is happening there and the need to have a greater investment in TAFE. I would like to make some remarks about New South Wales Labor and their very strong commitment to a strong, quality TAFE system. That was demonstrated in their recent statement in relation to TAFE. As New South Wales Labor have said: 'We need to grow smart jobs and opportunities for our state, but we can't do that without a strong, well-funded TAFE system.'

The fact is that, since 2011, the New South Wales Liberal-National government has cut $1.7 billion from education and training, sacked 1,100 TAFE teachers and support staff, cut TAFE courses, slashed class contact times and drastically increased student fees by up to thousands of dollars. In 2015 alone, fees have risen significantly, with 40 per cent of students being slugged an extra $500 to $1,500 for courses. These particular cuts have been
devastating for the people of northern New South Wales in areas such as mine. In fact, they blame the National Party for these very vicious and harsh cuts to TAFE. It is the responsibility of the National Party. They have cut funding and cut courses for people in northern New South Wales and in other parts of New South Wales. The National Party will be held to account not just for these massive cuts to TAFEs but also for their cuts to education and health.

Quality education and training is the key to a better job, a better career and a better life. I commend New South Wales Labor for making the commitment to invest in skills and training and ensuring we have a fair and equitable TAFE system so that can give our young people the start in life they deserve. It has been announced that, if elected, a New South Wales Labor government will invest an additional $100 million to help make TAFE affordable and accessible for everyone in New South Wales by winding back the privatisation of TAFE and stopping the course cuts and fee hikes that we have seen from the Liberal-National government. This funding from New South Wales Labor would also allow TAFE institutes to reinstate vital courses which have been cut and restore support services for students. As part of New South Wales Labor's TAFE rescue package, they have committed that within the first term of government they will abolish the Liberal National's Smart and Skilled privatisation program. They will reverse the Baird government's TAFE fee hikes. They will also guarantee funding to TAFE by capping the amount of public funds that can be contestable by private operators at 30 per cent, and they will commission a landmark review of education and training in New South Wales, which is really important as well.

Every day we depend in some way on the services and support of someone who has vocational qualifications. We on this side of the House understand how important that is, and equipping the workforce with the skills required for the jobs of today and those of the future is an urgent challenge in my state of New South Wales. I certainly commend New South Wales Labor for the commitments they have put forward particularly in the context of the state election we face in a few weeks time.

On top of the harsh cuts by the New South Wales Liberal-National government, we also have the harsh cuts by the Abbott government as well. It has cut $2 billion from the skills portfolio since the budget. That is devastating when you look at the extent of some of those cuts. I will run through some of these cuts, because they are quite extensive and I would like to list them because this issue goes to the heart of the need to have people who are properly trained and skilled in our workforce. As I said, they have cut $2 billion from the skills and training sector, with the axe falling on the following programs and services: the Australian Workforce and Productivity Agency, the Tools for Your Trade payments, the Australian Apprenticeships Access Program, the Australian Apprenticeships Mentoring Program, the Accelerated Australian Apprenticeships program, the Apprentice to Business Owner Program, the National Workforce Development Fund, the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program, the National Partnership Agreement on Training Places for Single Parents, alternative pathways programs, the Productive Ageing through Community Education program, the Step into Skills program, joint group training and base funding for industry skills councils.

That is a shameful list of cuts by the Abbott Liberal-National government to skills and training. It is vitally important that people throughout our community can access these
services, and yet the policies of the Abbott government are attacking opportunities for young people. Whether it is those cuts to training and skills programs or whether the cuts are to youth programs, and there are higher education cuts as well, they all impact on the opportunities for young people to get trained, to get ahead, to get a good job. We have spoken many times about the harsh impact of the $100,000 university degrees. In areas like mine, it means that people just cannot send their families to university. Yet again they hold the National Party responsible for this. They tell me it is because of the National Party that their kids will not be able to get to university. They will hold them to account for these very harsh measures. It is unfair that kids from regional and rural areas cannot access university because of the National Party's harsh cuts.

We are also talking about cuts to youth programs and training and skills initiatives. We saw the Abbott government cut those three youth unemployment prevention programs in the budget. Those three very important programs were Youth Connections, Partnership Brokers and National Career Development—all vital to providing, again, skills and training for our young people. I have had a lot of feedback from my area because people are very concerned about the fact that young people cannot access these services.

In conclusion, we need to have a government that is committed to providing effective training and skills for our young people and we need to have that training, as well as our TAFE services, all in place. We also need to make sure there are effective mechanisms in place to provide consumer protections for our younger people—we have to make sure they are aware of exactly what they are signing up to and understand exactly what courses they will be undertaking and paying for. We would certainly like to see some more transparency and consumer protection. Consumer protection is important across a whole range of areas but it is particularly important when you are dealing with younger people or with vulnerable people, so we would like to see an advance when it comes to consumer protections in relation to this bill.

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (16:41): The most used term in that 15-minute contribution was 'the National Party'. The member for Richmond is obsessed with the National Party—the member for Richmond, brought back to the parliament on Greens preferences. She ran a very interesting campaign on coal-seam gas—not that I think there are any coal-seam gas developments in her electorate—and mischievously took out full-page ads against a very good candidate, Matthew Fraser. Matthew Fraser is still campaigning determinedly for the seat of Richmond, and well may he win because he will produce better speeches than the one we have heard for the last 15 minutes from the current member for Richmond—brought to you by the Greens, returned to this place by Greens preferences. And she knows that. She is obsessed with the National Party. Everything she ever talks about involves the National Party—but why would you not be obsessed with the National Party? It is a very good party. In conjunction with the Liberal Party, we form government. I know that is hard for the other side to accept; I know they are in a state of denial about the 7 September 2013 election result, but the National Party have a very good record in delivering for rural and regional children.

I notice all the kids up there in the public gallery. The sorts of reforms that we are bringing to primary and high school education, as well as to tertiary education and TAFE, will help those kids. Our reforms will provide the sort of platform that those kids are going to need
when they choose a career. That will not be far away. I am proud of the efforts and the commitment of the state education minister, Adrian Piccoli—the current member for Murrumbidgee, based at Griffith, who is running for the newly-formed seat of Murray at the state election at the end of the month. He is the father of two young children and he understands the unique challenges that country kids face as well as all the things that New South Wales kids need, whether they are country based or whether they are in Sydney, Newcastle or Wollongong, to help them get better marks and get the best education and put them on the path to a bright future and a great career.

The National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill outlines our commitment to ensuring we have a high-quality education and training system and demonstrates the lengths the government will go to in order to crack down on unscrupulous vocational education and training providers and improve the quality of training. I heard the member for Richmond talk about unscrupulous vocational education and training providers, and on that score she is absolutely right. Some of the other things she said were totally ridiculous. Be that as it may, quality education and training in regional Australia is crucial in continuing to drive development and prosperity.

This bill will enable the Australian government to create new quality standards in order to quickly address any problems with providers and courses. That is important. This bill will require any provider who is marketing a VET course to clearly identify which registered training organisation is providing the qualification. It will extend the registration period for RTOs from five to seven years to enable the Australian Skills Quality Authority, the national training regulator, to focus its attention on investigating and taking action to crack down on poor-quality providers.

The government are absolutely committed to taking strong action against training providers who are taking advantage of vulnerable students, because we are serious about giving students the very best opportunity to obtain a trade of the highest quality that opens doors and job prospects upon completion. Not every school leaver wants to go to university and obtain a tertiary degree. Many of them want to go to a college of technical and further education. I have always argued, as my predecessor did, that a TAFE diploma is every bit as important, every bit as good, as a tertiary degree—every bit as important.

Mr Husic: Absolutely.

Mr McCormack: I hear the member for Chifley acknowledging that. I know that he does not beat up on the National Party all the time! Occasionally, he acknowledges the great work that this government is doing. It is a pity his colleague the member for Richmond cannot find it in her heart to do the same.

The VET sector requires strong quality assurance in order for the system to deliver high-quality training outcomes for students, which this bill is seeking to better enable, but also, importantly, to ensure the qualifications a student achieves are a reliable measure for employers of the skills and knowledge they have attained, regardless of where they were trained.

Currently, making new standards to address quality issues can take up to a year. As a result of the measures in this bill, addressing specific concerns or issues can be resolved in a matter
of weeks, which is particularly beneficial to students but also to local industry and business needs—and this government is all about making it easier for business.

The bill also includes simple measures to ensure students understand which registered training organisation they are signing up to for their chosen qualification. It is absolutely unacceptable that training organisations are allowed to offer cash rebates and technological incentives to students in order to increase student numbers. It is inappropriate, because providing education and training should be about increasing the capacity of students, not improving the bottom line for training organisations.

The measures in this bill complement the tough new regulatory standards for new training providers which came into effect on 1 January 2015. Existing providers will be required to uphold these same standards from 1 April 2015 and to make it crystal clear in their marketing and promotions to students what they are signing up to, what the debt provisions are and how they may or may not change into the future.

The Australian Skills Quality Authority is responsible for the regulatory and quality-standard issues emerging in the VET sector. We are committing $68 million, which is not an insignificant amount, over four years to ensure the tough new standards are enforced. Extending the registration period for registered training organisations from five to seven years will enable the Australian Skills Quality Authority to redirect resources and to target the early detection of noncompliance, and that is important. This measure has come from the authority itself, which advised the government that the current renewal audits are the least effective method of identifying poor quality and performance among providers.

In addition to the introduction of new national standards for training providers, this bill further builds on significant reform in the VET sector through the establishment of a new training complaints hotline, improved data reporting and new trade support loans for students.

There are a great number of training providers across regional Australia; and, make no mistake, there are many, many good ones. I would say the majority, absolutely, are very, very good ones. The Nationals are committed to ensuring improved educational services are delivered in rural and regional Australia.

Mr Husic interjecting—

Mr McCormack: I will just say that again, because I do not think the member for Chifley quite heard me: the Nationals are committed to ensuring improved educational services are delivered in rural and regional Australia.

Mr Husic: There are as many references to the National Party in your speech than in the member for Richmond's!

Mr McCormack: I still have about eight or nine references to the Nationals to go before I get anywhere near the member for Richmond, Member for Chifley! Anyway, I digress. I will continue. Regional communities depend and thrive on educational service providers operating locally, particularly in vocational education and training, because it assists in building and in strengthening our communities, and our communities do need help. As I say, there are certain unique challenges in rural and regional Australia, certain unique challenges facing country kids, and one of those is gaining access to independent rural youth allowance. I know the member for Barker, who is in the chamber, is committed to doing something in that space. One third of Australians choose to live, work or operate their
businesses in regional Australia. Those businesspeople, when young people come into their businesses for apprenticeships and the like, want them to be the very best, and this legislation will help that. In the context of this debate, strengthening VET quality standards will benefit regional students, communities and businesses enormously. Regional areas have a vital role to play in overcoming Australia's national challenges and in driving economic development. By investing in employment and workforce skills, we are increasing the potential of our great regional economies and assisting improved productivity, development and economic opportunity.

The Nationals, at our party room meeting last month in Wodonga, collectively agreed to develop further detailed policy and in four key priority areas, one of which is our focus on ensuring we strengthen our regional youth policy by providing quality and improved access to education and jobs in regional Australia. The measures in this bill will play a role in working towards that very aim.

In the Riverina, we have a number of education and training providers, and good ones at that. In particular, the TAFE NSW Riverina Institute offers a wide range of specialist training centres responsive to specific local-sector industry needs. The institute has established long-term partnerships with many businesses and community organisations which are responsive to local needs and provide a tremendous benefit for the local economy, including with both Deakin and Charles Sturt universities, particularly Charles Sturt, which has a huge and growing campus at Wagga Wagga; the Forest Industry Council; and the local Regional Express pilot training academy in Wagga Wagga. The academy is producing pilots not just for Rex but for other airlines as well and giving great incentives to young people, and some not so young, to become pilots for the vital aviation industry. Many of them stay on with Rex, which is a tremendous company, a tremendous airline.

I was pleased early last year to confirm that the Riverina would benefit from more than $5½ million in funding for trades training centres throughout the electorate, and I will say—here you go, Member for Chifley—that this is something that was promised by the previous government that is now being delivered by the coalition government. But I acknowledge the previous government for its initiative in this space.

The schools in the Riverina that will benefit are Ardlethan Central School, which will receive $2,845,000 to establish the Riverina Access Partnership of Schools Trade Training Centre with Ariah Park and Barellan central schools to provide a certificate I in agrifood operations, a certificate II in agriculture, a certificate II in construction pathways, a certificate II in engineering and a certificate II in hospitality; Batlow Technology School, in the Snowy Mountains, $855,000 to establish the HV Smith Memorial Trade Training Centre to provide certificates I and II in engineering; Temora High School—I know that Principal Pat Netthey was absolutely delighted with this, because he mentioned it at his last school assembly, and you never die wondering what Pat thinks—$1 million for the Goldenfields Learning Community Trade Training Centre to provide certificates I and II in manufacturing and a certificate II in engineering; and Tumbarumba High School, that great school up in the foothills of the Snowy Mountains, $1 million for a centre to provide a certificate I in manufacturing and a certificate II in engineering. I know that David Crelley, the Principal of Tumbarumba High School was also absolutely delighted that that money was going to be
made possible by the coalition. Admittedly, it was promised by Labor in the last iteration, but it is certainly going to be delivered by the coalition.

As I said, these six schools in the Riverina are going to benefit from that, but it will not be the schools but the kids at those schools and the teachers at those schools who benefit. Some of the children from those schools will leave the area, but many, many of them will stay because of the great benefits of country living, and they will provide the chefs, electricians, painters, construction workers and the people who are going to work in agribusinesses and in food processing. Who knows what they might achieve, but they will achieve it because of the possibilities provided by this funding and the possibilities that are being been provided by the coalition investing in their future, investing in these four trade training centres. That is so very, very good.

This commitment is further confirmation which demonstrates this government is committed to ensuring there are quality education and training opportunities for young people, particularly those in regional areas. We are delivering these vital centres in a challenging budget environment. We have inherited the debt and deficit legacy of Labor, but we are getting on with the job of paying that down while still providing opportunities for young people. It is important that skill shortages are addressed, particularly in country areas, the food bowl of the nation, and these trade training centres will further provide outstanding vocational training opportunities for students.

This Nationals-Liberal government can be proud of the reforms being undertaken and implemented across the vocational education and training sector. The new registered training organisation quality standards strengthen industry engagement, increase requirements for trainers and assessors to improve the quality of training and assessment and increase transparency of information to students. We will continue to crack down on inducements and dodgy marketing practices and, importantly, we will ensure training organisations exhibit a greater duty of care when signing up students to incur a loan. There is much more to undertake; we appreciate that. The government is looking at further reform, in particular to put an end to the abuse of VET FEE-HELP and misuse by providers. The Assistant Minister for Education and Training, who is doing a good job, might I say, appreciates there is further work to be done and has indicated a comprehensive approach to reforming VET FEE-HELP to end the rorting of the current system established by the previous government.

At the end of the day, we want to enable students to gain the very best qualifications to meet the challenges of a modernised world, to strengthen our communities and to ensure the regions gain from the expertise in the employment sector. We are committed to ensuring we have a vocational educational and training system which places students front and centre and provides the opportunity to attain a qualification of a high quality standard. The National Party will help achieve that.

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (16:56): In beginning my remarks, I would like to comment on a few of the things that the previous speaker said in relation to training kids in the regions so they can go on to jobs in food processing—if those jobs actually exist, which is the big part of this debate that is missing. If we are serious about training kids in the region and getting vocational skills, getting TAFE qualifications, going through the good RTOs and getting a certificate, then let us ensure that they have a job to go to. One of the other problems that we have in the regions, particularly in regional Victoria and New South Wales, is that a lot of
these jobs are being performed by people who are here on 417 and 457 visas. We need more than empty rhetoric from National Party members who stand up in this House and say, 'We are training the kids, and they will go to jobs in food processing in the region.' When they go to that job they are competing against somebody who has been brought in here on a visa, which means that they are being paid less than the person working next to them. Within this debate we need to make sure that if somebody stands up here and says, 'That's okay, they're going to get jobs in food processing,' let us ensure they have jobs in food processing to go to.

Another comment that is being made by people opposite is that this is all the fault of the Labor government, that Labor created this mess and that the coalition are the heroes, riding in on their white horses to clean up the mess. It is not a Labor mess. This mess was started by the former Howard government. In 2007, the Howard government extended FEE-HELP to include the VET sector for the approval of diploma and advanced diploma courses. VET FEE-HELP commenced in 2009. This has been a problem that has been a long time brewing. It was a Labor government that introduced the Australian Skills Quality Authority to try to tackle some of the problems that were being experienced in the sector.

There is at least one thing that both sides of the House can agree on, that there is a problem. There is rorting going on and we do need action. There are countless media reports—not just recent media reports but reports that go back some time—exposing the outrageous rorting that is going on within the system. For example, take what has been going on in our contract security industry for many, many years. You will meet a security officer who is working right next door to another security officer. One of them will have completed their training in a day, where they paid for their course up-front. I can remember security officers telling me that it was a tick-and-flick process. They were presented with the exam and they were also given a copy of the exam with the answers. Basically, they had to go through and tick and flick. They got the paperwork that they required from their RTO, submitted that and, on the basis of that paperwork, were issued a security licence.

This is clearly and obviously a rorting of the system. There is no way that this particular security officer could have the skills or qualifications that are needed to work in the security industry. To work in the industry, a security officer in Victoria is required to go through compulsory restraints training to ensure that, if they have to restrain a member of the public, it is done in a safe way. There is no way you can physically learn to do this through a tick-and-flick program. This is a problem that has been occurring for quite some time in the security industry and has started to be investigated by the Australian Skills Quality Authority, an institution that was set up by the former Labor government to crack down on this behaviour.

Another industry which has received some media attention recently is ECE, early childhood education. It is unfortunate that we learn that childcare centres in this country have started their own black list of accredited training organisations providing poor-quality graduates that they are not willing to employ. The ABC reported in September last year that the childcare centres had started an unofficial black list of training providers that they were not willing to use because the graduates were so poor. They argue that there had been an explosion in the number of trainers being offered cert IIIs and diplomas in child care after the government made qualifications mandatory. The childcare centres say that they know some of these organisations have created tick-and-flick systems, where the students were effectively buying their qualification. What we have seen happen is a policy which was about
encouraging skills and qualifications in early childhood education being exploited by these providers, where they set themselves up as fly-by-night operations and tick-and-flick organisations. The way the models of these organisations work is that they wait to be caught. If it is an organisation or a training provider in security or child care, they will rip off as many students as they can, wait to be caught, disappear and then set up as another training organisation under a different name the next day. We have to ask ourselves: at what point do we declare the system broken and start looking at a better way to deliver vocational skills in this country?

I should note the comments of some students who have been refused work or have tried to work in the childcare industry after receiving their qualifications from one of these dodgy providers. One particular young woman, who was doing a diploma in early learning, said that half the class dropped out after two years because they realised they were not going to get the skills that they needed to work in the early childhood education sector. For the half of the class that dropped out, not only did they then have debts to pay back to this government but they also were left without qualifications to get them work. This young woman said that, when she started working in a childcare centre, she realised she did not have the skills to cope as she did not have the training that she needed to do the programming for the children and she struggled with the class sizes. This brave woman says that she has such a passion for the sector that she has now restarted her diploma with a better provider. So she will end up with two debts in order to get her qualifications. She says: 'It's not really fair that I undertook a course in good faith and I went through this experience.' These are the kinds of people that we should be working to protect when they undertake study in this country. It is up to this government and our state governments to ensure that the study that students undertake will in fact result in a qualification that will be acceptable to employers.

Another childcare worker, in Melbourne, said that her cert III course involved rewriting slabs of a textbook into work sheets. She said they were assigned homework but were told, 'Here's your textbook, here's your notebook; just fill it in in your own words. You don't need to use your own words, really; write it as it is in the book because, that way, you can guarantee to get the best mark.' If we think about what is involved in early childhood education and what our early childhood educators do in centres, it is a practical job. You need to be working with children. Apart from the programming, which is quite technical and book based, a large part of the role is hands-on. To suggest that, to qualify for an early childhood education diploma, it is good enough just to copy word for word out of a textbook without stepping into a childcare centre is beyond what is acceptable and another example of why reform in this area is so important.

When it comes to skills and ensuring that we have a workforce that is ready and ensuring that we are getting good value for money as taxpayers, I believe we need to start looking at the kind of structure that we have in Australia. We need to start reinvesting in TAFE and the public institutions that we do know deliver good-quality vocational skills and training. In my own area of Bendigo, I am grateful and proud that the new Labor government has committed extra funding to ensure that there are no further job losses at the campus like the job losses we saw under the former government and that some of the courses are coming back. Bendigo is an area of growth and it has quite a lot of new housing developments going ahead, yet Bendigo TAFE last year closed their cabinet-making course. It is a bit hard to build a kitchen
if you do not have cabinet-makers. One of the reasons they cited for having to shut down the course is that they did not have enough students enrolled in the course. When speaking to the TAFE, they said that part of the problem was that they were being undercut by a number of RTOs and that some young people were going into those other courses and being promised the world. They were told that they could fast-track their skills and fast-track their certs and start earning money sooner in the industry.

Because we have not had enough action in this area, and because we have these dodgy providers out there, there has also been a knock-on effect in our TAFEs, who are delivering quality. Some may say that this is the demand-driven system. Some may say that this is what happens when you have a market and that those that are less popular will drop out. But those that are less popular—like our TAFE courses—tend to be the courses that take longer, and tend to be the courses where people actually get the skills they need. They are the institutions that we should be investing in and making sure are a priority for funding when it comes to this area.

The proliferation of registered training organisations has, in my opinion, backfired. We are now increasingly seeing report after report, from industry after industry, of people coming forward to say that they have paid for a course but have not received the skills that their employers require. Last year, the TAFE inquiry that was set up by this House came to Bendigo. I can remember hearing from one of the people giving evidence that they had completed an apprenticeship in hairdressing. Yet, when they started their job, on their first day, the principal hairstylist came up to this young graduate and said, ‘You can't cut hair. You're going to have to start again. That's not how you cut hair.’ This young apprentice had just completed her apprenticeship. She had what she thought were qualifications, and she now had to start again. These are just some of the many examples of students who are being, in many ways, ripped off and taken for a ride by these dodgy providers.

As I said earlier in my contribution, this is not a problem that has occurred in just the last few years. This is a problem that goes back to the Howard government, when they first extended FEE-HELP—which was a good idea, but we needed to make sure that the education providers were ready. It is good that we are introducing stronger regulations requiring RTOs to declare their relationships with sales brokers. It is good that we are seeing more reform in this area so we can catch out more of the dodgy providers, but I would argue that not enough is being done.

I would also argue that we need to do an analysis about whether funding this system in this way—providing FEE-HELP to private, profit-making providers—is actually the right call, or whether we need to go back and start investing properly in our publicly funded TAFEs, and ensuring that they are able to deliver the courses. We used to have a very good structure of skills delivery in this country: a strong apprenticeships scheme, and a strong TAFE sector. That has been eroded away and replaced, in many cases, with a shell of what used to be a TAFE system, a handful of apprenticeships compared with what there used to be, and a dodgy RTO system that is not delivering the skills that this country is paying for, that the students are paying for, and that employers expect.

I believe that the government needs to do more to address these shortfalls and really get serious about delivering skills, whether it be at the apprenticeship level or at the TAFE and
vocational level. A start would be to restore the $2 billion that has been cut from skills and training since those opposite have come to office.

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (17:11): I would like to compliment the member for Bendigo on a great speech. On the strength of that speech, I look forward to her supporting this legislation when it comes to the vote. I would point out that it is a great pity, in fact, that the member for Bendigo was not here for the last six years while the training system was run into the ground. Her colleagues turned their backs and refused to do anything to fix up the proliferation of dodgy RTOs.

It is interesting to listen to these speeches, as I have done back in my office at various times today. I was listening earlier in the day to the member for Newcastle, Sharon Claydon. You wouldn't know that there is a state election coming up in New South Wales, would you! She managed to line up the New South Wales government on a number of occasions, and gave great weight to that old saying that there are lies, damn lies and statistics.

I thought that I would go and have a little look, after her speech, at some of the rates she talked about for technical training in New South Wales as compared with my state of South Australia. Therein lies the variation. Of course, it is priced differently in the two states. I could only check for TAFE in South Australia. I do not mean, in any way, to cast any aspersions on TAFE; I have just used them as an example. For certificate III in agriculture, in New South Wales, for instance, it is a flat rate. It is an all-inclusive rate of $2,170. In South Australia you can actually build that qualification and leave some modules on the table, or not. It is true that there is a minimum fee of $1,333, but if you want to take all the modules, which is roughly equivalent to New South Wales, it is $4,500. So, it is a little over double the cost, in fact.

With respect to certificate III in civil construction and plant operations, the comparison is that the cost is $2,080 in New South Wales and nearly $4,500 in South Australia. I am sure that, if I went through all the courses, I could find variations that run in the other direction. I take issue with the argument the member for Newcastle put when she attacked the New South Wales government. I say: we should all look a little deeper and make sure we understand the issues we are talking about, and bring wisdom to this place and not just plain partisan bashing because we have a state election coming up.

I turn to the bill itself. In June last year, I ran some forums in my electorate—one in Port Pirie, and one in Whyalla. They were very, very well attended, I must say. I was assisted by Karen Andrews. It was perhaps on the basis of some of the work that she did helping out some of the members that she is now the parliamentary secretary to the minister. She was very helpful and we had a really good roll up—lots of training providers and businesses that use the courses provided by the RTOs.

It was pretty clear that, while there are some good things happening out there, there are also plenty of deficiencies. As the member for Bendigo has just said, there was a high level of concern about the quality of service providers, particularly the fly-in fly-out providers. For instance, we found that aged-care courses that should take months to complete were being completed in a matter of days and that students with minimal hours on a piece of plant were being granted plant operator tickets and a licence to operate. When such a person rolls up looking for a job, the boss says, 'Can you drive a forklift?' and he says, 'Yes, sure I can,' but when the boss pops him on the forklift, he cannot do it. That has to be fixed. We just cannot
put up with that in Australia. Not only does that attack the student, in that they have paid for a qualification that is substandard; it actually destroys business confidence in the qualifications system. If, on a regular basis, an employer finds that the person who walks in the door cannot actually do what they are qualified to do—whether, as the member for Bendigo spoke about, it is a hairdresser or whether it is a person working in aged care—in the end they do not trust any of the qualifications and it is back to square one, so we really achieve very little at all.

At the forums there were two types of providers—those doing VET training in schools and those providing post-school training. It is a complicated area, because schools are a state responsibility, whereas adult training is largely the responsibility of the Commonwealth. There were a number of issues raised that intersect between state and federal policies and funding lines. All in all, the training sector generally is not a happy place. There is a lot of frustration and disappointment.

This bill addresses many of those key issues and, in particular, the substandard provision of training from RTOs. This government will not put up with shoddy practices and with course attendees being ripped off. We will not put up with the taxpayer being ripped off and we will not put up with employers being driven to regard many of the qualifications of potential workers with suspicion.

The standards for national vocational education are policed by the Australian Skills Quality Authority, ASQA. This bill greatly strengthens their hand. Currently RTOs are registered for five years. ASQA inform us that the regular review of five years is not really a very useful vehicle for keeping an eye on how these RTOs are providing a service to their customers. If you know when the audit or the review is coming, you can tidy things up and make sure that the ASQA inspector sees exactly what you need them to see on that particular day. Acting on that advice, we have decided to extend the registration period to seven years, which will free up some ASQA resources so that they can more actively monitor the quality of RTOs at any time. ASQA will be given an extra $68 million over the forward estimates to police RTOs.

I spoke earlier about the interface and the often tortuous negotiations between the states and the Commonwealth, taking at least 12 months to get modifications to standards in this area. This bill unilaterally introduces a new quality standard, meaning that ASQA can get on with the job. I say: you beauty! When we see malpractice happening in our communities, we want to be able to jump on it straightaway. This will give a great amount of flexibility to ASQA to act. When they see things that are not happening correctly, we can make alterations to the standard and they can then enforce the alteration. As I said, they get an extra $68 million to do that.

We have all become very frustrated—when I say 'all' I mean the Australian public generally—with the delay between the announcements of governments’ intentions or policies and their implementation. It can often take many months, sometimes years, to get to that point. In recent times we have been unable to get legislation through a fairly uncooperative Senate, which adds extra time to that lag. People often think that, when a government announces something, the deal is done. That is not the case, and it is not the case with training either. It is very important that ASQA will be freed up to act in this manner.

The bill also addresses the issue of poor information provided to individuals on the courses that they may be undertaking. RTOs will be compelled to inform their customers who owns or operates a training provider. It will force them to make clear to all students what they are
committing to every time they embark on a new course or a variation to their course. So they will know their financial commitments and they will know just what kind of qualification they will have at the end of their course. That would seem to be dead simple. It is like buying a car. You would expect people to be well informed about what they are buying. But, unfortunately, it is not the case with all providers. All providers are not created equally. Some of them are doing a very good job. As I found at my forums, it is those people, the good providers, that are crying out for increased scrutiny in this area. They lose business to poor operators, who they are able to undercut on price. Sometimes it is more expensive for those who deliver a quality product than it is for those who fly in and fly out after a few days and give you a shoddy qualification. So they are more keen than anyone to get this fixed up.

This is very important to my electorate, which, as I have said a number of times in this chamber, covers more than 90 per cent of South Australia. Of course, hands-on workers are the predominant species in an electorate like Grey. We have fewer professional services but more people who actually work in the trades and the hands-on professions, if you like. So, getting good qualifications, whether it be in the mining industry, the building industry or the fishing industry, is very important. It is a term of trade. In fact, in 2013 there were 160,000 public VET students in South Australia. We will be providing over $130 million in funding and support for the subsidisation of VET training over the forward estimates. That is a substantial investment in South Australia. It comes at a time, of course, when there will also be around $30 million coming into South Australia to help with the training procedures surrounding the exit of the car industry in our state.

In 2012 there were 44,000 VET qualifications awarded through the public VET system and approximately 28,000 apprentices and trainees in South Australia. That is a lot of people, but, from my point of view, I would like to see more. I think there are many occupations in our workforce where the workforce is ageing and where we need upgrading of qualifications. In fact, with our apprentice training system, it must be said at some stage that a lot of employment providers have been burned in the past by the vagaries of the apprentice system. So we also need to make sure that we help them out and provide the assistance, and credible assistance, where it is needed.

By and large these bills are a great advance. I have been privileged to be able to participate in the forums and then give the feedback from my forums directly to the then minister, Ian McFarlane. Of course, I have been able to pass that on now to Senator Simon Birmingham, a close South Australian colleague of mine. I expect that the VET sector will welcome the changes and that we will be able to get on with the job and make sure that our young people are getting the training they need and, more or equally importantly, that businesses are getting the trainees they need with the right qualifications and suitable skills when they arrive at work.

Mr HAYES (Fowler—Chief Opposition Whip) (17:24): The National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015 is a step in the right direction; there is no question about that. It is an attempt to improve what is clearly the regulatory oversight of the vocational education sector. Having said that, it is also right to say that this bill does not go far enough in addressing the damage that has already been done to various individuals; nor does it propose to engage with the community to assist in minimising future problems in the VET sector.
I think everyone in this place knows that there are now too many examples of unscrupulous registered training organisations taking advantage of some of the most vulnerable members of our communities. The main priority of these organisations, as private training providers—and that is not all training providers, but the unscrupulous ones—is clearly profit driven: to enrol students and to take advantage of the VET FEE-HELP arrangements offered by the Commonwealth. Vulnerable members of our community, many very desperate to gain the skills and knowledge that they need to equip them for employment opportunities, are far too often left with large debts, no qualifications and possibly a dodgy qualification at best. Often they have nothing to show for the thousands of dollars that the government has contributed, and the debt that they have run up is likely never to be repaid, because they will never, in many instances, earn above the minimum threshold.

Given the extent of some of these practices operating amongst some of those private registered training providers, I would submit that the ACCC needs to be involved, because that would actually be a path by which to strengthen consumer protection and give greater advice on how people could redress their grievances in respect of these unsatisfactory practices that are emerging in the private VET sector. We also need to see a strict audit of VET FEE-HELP, as it has allowed many in the private provider areas of VET to take advantage of some of the desperate situations that many of the individuals who sign up as students find themselves in. There are now more than 4½ thousand private training colleges in Australia, and that number will continue to grow. More than $1.6 billion worth of taxpayers' money has been allocated to VET FEE-HELP, with 40 per cent of vocational loans expected never to be repaid.

At the same time as this is occurring, the quality of some of our VET courses is being very much degraded. We are now seeing a proliferation of shorter course lengths and larger class sizes, with little or no support for struggling students or those students who are labouring with various disabilities. I know that some private training companies are making huge profits, and sometimes those profits are made from cutting corners in quality. According to recent reports, some of the students, as the result of their training, are getting a paper qualification that has little or no apparent worth in the employment market, if they graduate at all. Coupled with that, we have seen state and federal Liberal governments cutting funding to the publicly funded TAFE colleges or the TAFE system. That is certainly not helping the situation. The Abbott government has taken $2 billion from the skills portfolio since the budget, closely following suit with what is being done by many of their state Liberal counterpart governments.

I can only speak for New South Wales—and some of the impacts on New South Wales TAFE are extraordinary. Since the last budget, we have lost 1,200 teachers—essentially, trade teachers—as well as support staff. They have already been made redundant. We have seen a drastic reduction in course sizes and face-to-face teaching between students and plumbers. For instance, plumbing has dropped from 864 hours as specified in the training package to 720 hours last year, and just 574 hours this year.

With little or no consultation with employers and no say on the part of the students, these changes are occurring and they are not welcome. They are certainly not welcome in industry and, for a student who is trying to get the best possible qualification possible for his or her career prospects, it is cutting corners.
Class sizes in New South Wales, for instance, in basic adult education can be as high as 30 to one, leaving little time for one to one between teachers and students. There is also a lack of support, as I indicated earlier, for struggling students—particularly, students with disabilities.

I have spoken many times in this place about my electorate being very multicultural. It is also an area with significant pockets of disadvantage. Regrettably, as a consequence, we have very high unemployment and extremely high youth unemployment. The opportunity for students to gain skills, which are transferable into employment, is very high on the agenda in electorates like mine.

We need to encourage people, particularly young people, to participate in further education, especially in the VET sector. There is currently a rollout of opportunities in the VET sector to exploit students. It does not help when we are defunding TAFE—maybe to make others more competitive, we are taking money out of the system, a system is universally respected. It also does not help, as a consequence of the changes, that TAFE fees are skyrocketing.

Fees are now being calculated per course, which makes it much harder to compare but, on average in New South Wales, they have increased by approximately 9.5 per cent. Coupled with the other changes—for instance, under this government, apprentices lost their Tools for Your Trade grants and New South Wales has increased the cost per course by an average of $500 per year—it is very difficult to even do source apprenticeships. There is a concerted attempt to restrict the ability of TAFE to compete—some refer to it as making it a more contestable marketplace. For those who believe in qualifications with meaning, this is a repugnant attempt to downgrade what was—and I think still is—in many instances, a world-renowned technical and further education system by opening the doors to private training providers and allowing some very dodgy operators.

A recent story on the ABC shone the light on some unethical practices conducted during enrolment such as targeting individuals in areas of high disadvantage—areas like mine. The program also highlighted the lack of support to ensure that students actually graduate with the skills and knowledge that lead to employment opportunities.

It is simply a matter of signing people up, getting signatures on a piece of paper and moving on. These RTOs should not be allowed to transfer blame onto third parties used as recruitment agencies for their courses. They use third-party brokers to act on their behalf. So when things go badly and young people are ill-equipped to undertake the courses they have been signed up to, the RTOs blame the broker and say, 'It's got nothing to do with us, because we contracted that part of the operation out.'

Some colleges are known to prey on the most vulnerable members of our communities and use third parties or, in some cases, spruikers to promote expensive courses. Often, these courses are inappropriately offered to the long-term unemployed with very high and sometimes very specialised needs. Those who are targeted often have a low-skill base. English for many is a second language, and they have limited literacy ability. Again, this goes to whether a person has been appropriately recruited to undertake a particular course.

Many are not aware of the large debts they are signing up to. Often the lure of laptops, iPads and no up-front fees is enough for people to think; 'I'll put my name down for that.' These are vulnerable people who may not have a clear understanding of the costs they are
running up or the costs that they are running up at public expense. As the ABC report indicated, many students do not have the basic literacy or numeracy skills necessary to complete this course and it has emerged that enrolment brokers have even undertaken the actual enrolment test on behalf of their potential students in order to ensure a sale is made.

There has been a sharp increase in various courses in the private sector. I have heard many speakers in this debate talk about what has occurred in the area of child care and the increase in certificate III and diploma courses in child care by some of the private RTOs. Child care centres that have employed some of the graduates from these colleges have found the majority are lacking in basic skills to do the requisite jobs required. What can we really expect when we are sometimes cutting year-long courses down to eight weeks, we are cutting teaching times down and we are making some courses—particularly in areas such as child care—simply a paper qualification? Yet, in terms of VET, vocational education and training, we should be equipping people with the skills and knowledge they need to undertake further employment opportunities.

There are also reports that some of the private training colleges are stealing curriculum information directly from TAFE and are failing to provide the necessary assistance and support to students. These are critical things in terms of trying to develop a person for future employment. They are things that we should not lose sight of. We need to ensure that, when we bring down legislation like this, it goes further than simply doing what this bill does. We need to put a stop to dodgy private providers, dubious sales methods to vulnerable people and the exploitation of taxpayer funded resources that are not being best used for the interests of the students or their employment outcomes. (Time expired)

Mr PITT (Hinkler) (17:40): It is timely that we put some of these anomalies to bed. I am someone who has actually attended a TAFE course. I was originally an apprentice who commenced almost 30 years ago. I have been through the TAFE system and I owned a private RTO for many years, from inception all the way through a five-year audit, taking that company from an accredited training organisation with one accredited short course through to a business which had over 50 short courses, qualifications and outcomes in skill sets. So I actually have some knowledge in this area. What I can tell you is that some of our speakers have been misinformed. In my view, one of the biggest providers of subcontract training—and this is in Queensland; I cannot speak for the other states—is TAFE. TAFEs provide the majority of subcontract trainers. They are the ones who put the majority of these people in the field. The private RTOs, I acknowledge, have some difficulties, and I certainly struck many of them over the number of years that I was in business in this area.

It is good to see that in this bill there are changes which will make a real difference to the VET sector. The first is the change requiring advertising around any course to identify the RTO. I have been affected by this many times. I made a decision very early in my business career that we would base our company on quality, which would likely give us longevity, and that certainly turned out to be the case. The business, which I no longer have an interest in, of course, due to my role here, is still going strong. It still employs the same people, it still has relatively the same turnover and it provides the same services in the same regions. So that was a good decision, but I must tell you that, financially, it was a very tough one to make, when you have a fly-by-nighter who might roll into your district, advertise in all the local papers and through the local associations and undercut the local prices by some 30 per cent, and of
course everybody rolls up for the new qualification which is much cheaper. You then spend a week being abused by people on the phone because they can get it somewhere else at less cost. However, even though you explain to them that the course that they are doing is not what they think it is, they still continue down that road.

The requirement for VET courses to advertise with, likely, an RTO number to identify the provider is valuable. This will help with third-party agreements. I had very few of them, quite simply because my third-party agreements were very tight. The contracts were very detailed and required people to do particular things, which of course they did not want to do. For those who wanted to stitch the system up, it simply did not work for them.

I must say that ASQA has probably been one of the most difficult organisations I have ever worked with anywhere in my entire working career. They were absolutely appalling. The work that they did resulted in the loss of many providers in regional Australia. As I am sure my colleague here would know, in regional Australia it is far more difficult to get the required training, because there simply are not the providers or the volume. That means that you need someone to come locally or you need someone to travel. One of the issues with TAFE—and, as I said, I am someone who attended TAFE over a number of years—is, quite simply, that they did not make themselves flexible enough. That has changed. There are a number of TAFE providers who now operate on the same basis as a private provider. They all go to the site, they will work around shift work and they will provide whatever is required, and that is working. A number of major TAFE providers have managed to get that over the line. Unfortunately, the concept that you can do a 9.30 to 3 o'clock day in the modern environment, on an industrial worksite, simply does not work. That is the absolute reality.

There is the requirement for a new quality standard provision. As someone who has been through two changes in the set of quality standards, I must say they are relatively dubious, in terms of the auditing and how that works. I will give you a very basic example. I once had four audits in a 12-month period. Given that an audit costs a small organisation some $20,000 to $30,000, that was a very tough period of time for my operation. In the four audits, I had three changes under the same quality standard by three different auditors, which basically meant I ended up back where I started. Every three months, we had to change all of our documents and all of our systems, only to have the next auditor, three months later, tell us to put it back to something else, until we finally got to a different auditor who told us to put it back to where it was at the beginning. These are the types of red-tape challenges the private providers in particular face, because they do not have as many resources as some of the TAFE structures.

I am very pleased to see the provision that the minister can make a quality standard for emerging issues. I think it is important for them to do that. The quality standard system is relatively basic. Of course the change to require a seven-year registration is good news for all providers; a five-year re-certification audit is an enormous exercise, which usually ties up four or five people and a number of auditors, depending on skills you have on your skill set and which costs a large amount of money. The question is: is it necessary? If your business has operated for five years without complaint, without issue, without any problems, why would you need to do an entire re-certification every five years at enormous cost? It is one of the problems that we had with ASQA. Under the former Labor government, ASQA worked on a cost recovery model. What that meant was—and this is a real example—an operator who
worked out of Emerald and had three staff; they worked very hard to meet all the quality requirements and did everything necessary. They were quoted $45,000 for the recertification audit. What do you think the result of that audit was? The result was very simple: it did not go ahead because they did not have $45,000 in cash to do it. Consequently, the business closed and could no longer provide that service in regional Australia. That work then went to somebody else working under this contract, most likely through TAFE.

The $68 million that has been committed over the next four years will be helpful to reduce this costs. Out in the real world, things cost money. Quite simply, whatever gets put in front of a private business it has to pay for. I got to the stage inside my business where I did not bother preparing for audits—we just waited them to show up. It simply cost far too much money to have everything on the table. I know of a number of operators who simply had what they called their audit box. In that audit box would be all the compliance documents and everything else needed to tick and flick the sheet off. When the auditors rolled up, they came out with their audit box, put it on the table and way they would go. That is not a quality system. As anyone who has worked in industry would know, that is not how it should work.

It has been an interesting time looking at the VET system. Of course, the cost to RTOs has been very expensive and the number of RTOs has declined. One of the reasons they increased rapidly, particularly in Queensland, was around the licensing provisions for skills like forklifts, backhoes, end loaders and general load-shifting equipment. One thing I would urge the minister to consider, if the minister happens to be listening, is we need to sort out the national training system around licensing. It is something that costs the country an enormous amount of money—I realise the complications and the difficulties. In Victoria you do not need a licence to drive a dozer or a roller or other earth-moving equipment; you need a competency. However, if you go to another state, you need an accredited short course or a skill set or something else under the VET system. As you move through state boundaries, you move into different licence areas, which costs more money if you do not have the right one. A case in point: I remember one of the fly-in people who rolled into my district and trained a heap of people around load-shifting equipment. In three days they came out with six tickets, which were not actually licences. They were rather a skill set, which was required to operate perhaps in Victoria or somewhere else. I recall this particular one was because in one of my other roles in industry I was lead auditor and did a lot of work on heavy construction sites—on multi-storey buildings. I clearly remember coming to clean up after a private company had failed an audit; there was a subcontractor I had spoken to about this course—I told him that he really should not be doing it, though it was up to him—and he was the packing his gear up. It turned out that one of the reasons they failed the audit was that they did not have the correct skills to operate the equipment. They had been thrown off the site and lost the contract. So that one decision to save some 20 per cent of the cost ended up costing him a very large gig, a very large contract and a lot of money.

Those are the sorts of decisions that people make all the time. I do want to raise an issue that was brought to my attention by one of my constituents, Narelle Casberg. I want to congratulate her on the representations she made to me and to former state members around her son. Her son is autistic and is on the DSP but desperately wants to work. The issue that they had was, of course, with TAFE in that he was not allowed to be a full-fee paying student through TAFE—that was only available to international students. I congratulate Narelle
because her representations got that requirement changed, and her son was able to attend a course. They put forward some $10,000 to attend the course and he completed the course, but then he had the same challenge for the next level. Many of the courses required for trade need time on the ground under supervision, log books and all the other bits and pieces that go with that.

The other issue has to do with red tape and the very rapid changes in trainer qualifications. Over the time I had my business, we went through three changes in training qualifications, which meant that every single trainer in my organisation had to do it again. Of course, these courses take somewhere between three, five or 10 days—15 days depending on what the course is—and whether they could get credit any for their former skills. This happened over and over again. It really did not make a lot of difference to the skill set they had for what they delivered and what they assessed, because the people I used were highly qualified, highly experienced and knew what they were doing and had done it for some time.

I do recall there was a suggestion that in areas of high risk where you had to do licence training there was going to be a requirement for the trainer to have one year in every three back in industry to reset their skills. Life is difficult enough without having to move from your full-time position to find another position in a skill set that you already have simply so that skill set is maintained. There are other ways of doing that. It would be an enormous burden on industry and on the training sector. It would be incredibly difficult if you worked in a regional area, then you would have to shift towns just to get your 12 months' experience back up.

I do take the point about private RTOs. I have seen any number who do the wrong thing and who rob their students. Let me give you a classic example: recent changes to the national standards around asbestos required a new skill set and a new set of qualifications to be able to do asbestos removal. There were a number of different layers, including supervision, occupational hygiene. There was a private provider who managed to do that training online. You could learn how to be an asbestos supervisor in a friable environment in an online course with a click and flick. I am not too sure how it is you do the assessment for a buddy check or for fitting some particular respiratory equipment—which is very important if you work in asbestos; you really want to live. I am not sure that the tick and flick from the online course would actually get you over the line. However, it did make an awful lot of money for somebody—quite simply, you enrol, pay your money, which was 50-75 per cent of an actual course cost. No-one was required to be there, they did not need a facility and they certainly did not need to have any of their practical equipment needed to do these assessments.

One of the reasons that these things should be limited is that you want to get them right. When you work in a high-risk environment, the people who do that work have every right to expect that they are trained correctly and properly, so I congratulate the minister on some of these changes. There are additional reporting requirements now for making complaints, which I find exceptional. However, from experience, in general, the majority of complaints come from competing RTOs. The number that I had over the years basically came from anyone who lived in the district who did the same work. After we had our fifth audit from the same complainant, I put in an FOI request which determined it was the same one, and they stopped coming. We had passed every single one without a nonconformance. It is something you would think they would work out.
High-risk licensing is something which is very important; however, we must ensure that our red tape does not get out of hand. I want to give you a simple example about cost. When I first started in this industry, you could get a forklift assessment for $200 or $250, because basically it was with an accredited provider as an individual under a piece of statute law. It was not a requirement under the VET system. It was not a nationally recognised training; it was a skill set assessed by a person who was approved by the state as having those skills and the required qualifications. That outcome is now $650 on average, as a general measure. You are required to go to training. The assessors are required to log, six days before the assessment takes place, that it will take place for the particular person. This is allegedly so that an auditor can show up; however, it makes for some very challenging work environments if you are in construction or heavy industry where, as I am sure you know, if it rains then work stops. When work stops, you want something else to do, and atypically that is training or skills maintenance. You cannot do that if you have to give six days notice. I am not sure that we can judge when the rain might occur! Those sorts of things make it very difficult and add layers and layers of cost, not only to industry but also to individuals. It makes it incredibly difficult. So, I am very pleased that the minister has put the bill forward with the amendments that are in it. Certainly, the $68 million for ASQA will make a difference to the operations that they perform, but I would encourage them to take practical steps. Not every private provider is out to rob their student. The majority are there to provide a service.

In the short time I have left—and it is a unique opportunity that you do not get very often—I would like to thank very briefly some of my former long-term staff whom I had with me for almost a decade: Theresa Peebles as the training manager; Ronny Lowe as operations manager; Ivan Grills—the indefatigable Ivan—who shows up at every opportunity, who works all day and all night; Jarrod Wilson, the occupational hygienist; and of course Geoff Hatcher, one of our mines trainers, who spent his life as an assessor with Rio Tinto, only to retire to my area, roll through my door one day and say, 'Could you give me a job?' I commend the bill to the House.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (17:55): I support the measures in the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015, and I support the amendment moved by the shadow minister. These measures are designed to improve regulatory oversight of the sector. Regrettably, the actions of unscrupulous registered training organisations and brokers have had serious effects on vulnerable individuals. People have been left with large debts and no qualification at all, or useless qualifications. It is nothing short of a national scandal that the government must deal with as a matter of urgency to ensure that the protection of students is prioritised.

There has been an explosion of cases of unscrupulous registered training organisations preying on vulnerable students and signing them up for large VET FEE-HELP debts. In many cases, the students are not even aware that they have signed up for a course, let alone debts of tens of thousands of dollars. The problem is exacerbated by registered training organisations employing brokers to recruit students on their behalf and then attempting to distance themselves from the actions of the brokers. This bill takes some steps to put responsibility on the registered training organisations for the actions of their brokers. There is also a change to allow more rapid response to quality and standards issues by the minister and the regulator. The growth of VET FEE-HELP has exceeded all projections, with more than $1.6 billion...
allocated last year. The Grattan Institute has warned that 40 per cent of vocational loans may never be repaid. This becomes a financial burden to the Commonwealth, and it needs to be addressed.

The education industry in Australia is highly fragmented. There are almost 5,000 registered training organisations that offer vocational education and over 11,000 that offer language training and other educational services. The number has been growing since the federal government extended student loans to the vocational sector. As reported by the ABC, teachers and education advocates are warning of shonky operators within the private training college sector, saying the federal government needs to do more to get rid of spruikers manipulating and misleading students. The Australian Skills Quality Authority, which regulates the registered training organisations, says it has received almost 4,000 complaints and conducted 3,000 audits since it was established in 2011—4,000 complaints in less than four years, an astonishing record of failure. Many teachers, advocates and other colleges have indicated that the complaints being referred to the authority seem to be falling on deaf ears. The authority has stated that some of their investigations could be lengthy.

In a 19 October 2014 ABC report, Sally Thompson, the chief executive of Adult Learning Australia, the peak body for adult and community education, said she was offended both as an educator and a Footscray resident when she saw disadvantaged students being recruited to training companies outside her local Centrelink office. Ms Thompson stated:

Our members often deal with people with quite low skills; they often deal with people with English as a second language, people with literacy difficulties and they've been telling us for a long time that they're just inundated with these kinds of spruikers … Spruikers hang out in places where they think marginalised people will be … we've had a couple of providers that have gone to our website, copied our whole website … then advertised our courses for VET-FEE-HELP … I just thought they were really misleading and designed to fool people into purchasing a product under false pretences … There were very big letters saying 'zero fees upfront' - no mention at all that the person will be hit with a debt of $10,000 at the end of this program … Now most people who are English as a second language learners … wouldn't know what VET-FEE-HELP was, much less that you'll be saddled with a $10,000 debt.

Mr Boyd Sparrow and his partner set up distance training college Sand Goanna in 2009 because they wanted to get quality employees for their tourism business. Their business name and information has been misappropriated twice by unscrupulous companies. They stated:

We've had a couple of providers that have gone to our website, copied our whole website, then pasted our website onto another website, then advertised our courses for VET-FEE-HELP," he said.

"The reason we caught it out is we don't actually have VET-FEE-HELP funding."

The ABC reported:

The company had to get lawyers involved to get other companies to cease using their name. It did not stop their reputation being damaged among employers. They now have to scan the internet every day to check their details have not been stolen. What a disgraceful situation.

The Australian Skills Quality Authority Chief Commissioner Chris Robinson has stated that the regulator has cancelled, suspended or refused the registration of 350 colleges since 2011. The ABC reported in 2014 that childcare centres have now also started using unofficial
blacklists of training providers that they will not use because the graduate quality is so low. The ABC reported:

There has been an explosion in the number of trainers offering Certificate IIIs and diplomas in childcare after the Government made qualifications mandatory. Childcare centre operators have told the ABC many operate as 'tick and flick' organisations where students effectively buy their qualification.

In many cases it has left students, who spent up to $4,500 on courses, unsuitable for employment. Operators said children also lost out, with young graduates being unable to properly interact with infants during critical formative years.

Students and operators provided the ABC with the names of at least six organisations with questionable training practices. These include offering the year-long Certificate III course in eight weeks, admitting to monitoring student placements by phone and online courses without sufficient supervision for work placements.

However, all still remain accredited training organisations with the Government regulator …

In 2014 the authority has cancelled the registration of one childcare course provider—the Community Training College in Queensland. ASQA said it has an ongoing strategic industry review of training for the childcare and early learning sector. It told the Productivity Commission inquiry into childcare it audited 46 trainers and found four out of five did not meet regulations—four out of five!—

After being given the chance to fix problems, one in five still did not meet the standard.

It is little wonder, then, that the childcare workers union, United Voice, has called for a national inquiry into childcare training. The ABC reported:

United Voice said it was time for a national investigation into childcare training. National secretary David O'Byrne said too many providers ran "tick and flick" courses where poor training was done at high cost. He said it was clear ASQA's regulation was not working.

"We want an immediate review across the country of Registered Training Organisations providing training in the early years," he said.

"It's not acceptable every couple of years, or when there's a complaint, to go and investigate a company. "Families, they want to know when they place their children in these early learning environments that their children are being supported, that they're being educated and cared for. "A child's brain development is crucial. The early years are the most important years."

Indeed, they are.

Last month a private college in Sydney, Australian College Broadway, was accused of claiming federal student training loans for pupils without appropriate skills. Former staff allege that, if students wanted to leave the college, the college hampered their attempts to withdraw from a course by either tearing up a letter or ignoring phone calls. The college, which offers hairdressing, beauty therapy and make-up courses, rejected the allegations.

However, young single mother Sammantha Saxton said she graduated from the college without the appropriate skills and has had to go back to TAFE and start again. Ms Saxton now
has a $33,000 VET FEE-HELP debt from the college. Her employer said Samantha was unable to do many things she would expect from a graduate. Ms Saxton said she complained at least 10 times about the quality of the training during the course but nothing was done to rectify the situation. That college has received more than $50 million from federal government HECS style loans training since 2009.

The ABC has also reported:

Unscrupulous training colleges are targeting people with disabilities and the homeless in order to cash in on government education funding.

The ABC has obtained evidence some colleges are recruiting people with intellectual disabilities to costly diploma-level courses funded with expensive VET-FEE-HELP training loans.

However, this training is totally unsuited as those being targeted have low education and skill levels and high care needs, which means they will be unlikely to ever complete the courses. The ABC reported:

... marketeers have also been spotted outside Centrelink offices and referral services for the homeless and drug addicted.

There are also reports of telephone agents obtaining student details from job websites or disability programs in order to target them for new enrolments.

Students can borrow up to $90,000 under VET-FEE-HELP loans which they start to repay once they earn more than $53,000.

That is, $53,000 a year.

Jacqui Whitehead, mother of 24-year-old Lukus who has a diagnosed intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder, became suspicious when Lukus was recruited to do a business course at Aspire College after being targeted outside Centrelink. The Adelaide man completed year 10 with a special life skills qualification for people with a disability. Once Lukus was struggling, Mrs Whitehead rang the school to inform them he had a disability and to seek extensions for his assignments. The college's response was to sell Lukus another course, and he now has an $18,000 VET FEE-HELP debt.

Single mother Rebecca Warfield was signed up to a $40,000 hairdressing course with a Sydney based training school. Months after signing, and being unable to attend classes due to personal issues, she went to see her accountant and was advised she had a $27,000 debt and the college was chasing her for $10,000. She does not read contracts because she has dyslexia; however, had she been able to read the fine print, she would have known that she did not actually enrol in a hairdressing course but rather a theory based salon management course—a distinction easily lost on Ms Warfield because of her dyslexia.

In my home state of Victoria, the movement of resources and students away from TAFE and into private training colleges of dubious and variable quality has been a disaster. In a media release of 25 February this year, the Victorian government stated that:

A number of employers in the automotive industry have been disqualified from hiring apprentices, following a Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) investigation into low quality training.

Minister for Training and Skills Steve Herbert said the disqualifications followed an investigation of 115 employers in the automotive industry that checked whether 160 apprentices were being properly supervised and trained. The quality of training plummeted under the former Liberal Government’s cuts to the vocational education and training (VET) system.
Eight employers in Dandenong, Burwood, Albion, Campbellfield, Mitcham, Preston, Sunshine North and Glen Iris were disqualified from hiring apprentices. 60 training contracts between employers and apprentices were cancelled and a further 39 contracts were voluntarily cancelled.

The apprentices were all enrolled with a common training provider and those wanting to continue their apprenticeship have been offered support to continue their training with another provider.

Problems uncovered by the VRQA investigation included:
- poor supervision of apprentices
- inappropriate work tasks or facilities
- limited evidence of training, including a lack of contact with the registered training organisation
- apprentices not being released to attend formal training, or not being paid to attend training.

The Andrews Labor Government’s recently announced Review of Quality Assurance in Victoria’s VET System will recommend a new framework, so all training providers that deliver government-funded training meet quality standards. This will feed into the Mackenzie Review which will recommend a model of sustainable, high quality training across the training sector.

A compliance report by Victoria’s education department showed that during 2013 payments were placed on hold for 29 RTOs until ‘issues identified’ were investigated. Private colleges have been exposed for offering free iPads and laptops for students to sign on to taxpayer-subsidised courses they often do not complete. The value of HECS-style loans for vocational students has blown out from $325 million in 2012 to $1.5 billion last year—double the expected rate of growth. Enrolments in these diplomas surged by 170 per cent from 2012 to 2013 and by a further 195 per cent the following year. The 56,000 extra enrolments equates to $770 million in federal government loans.

Whilst the bill is designed to improve oversight of the sector, it does not address the damage to individuals that has already occurred or propose action to engage with the community to minimise future problems. The flowering of second-rate training and scams we have witnessed has been a disgrace. We need to take concerted action to improve and protect standards and make sure that the qualifications and training actually lead to work.

Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert) (18:09): I rise to speak on the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015. What is the problem we are trying to fix? Well, there are a few issues I have with Vocational Education and Training, or VET. I am the current chair of the House Standing Committee on Education and Employment. We completed another inquiry into TAFE last year. I say ‘another inquiry’ because there seem to have been a huge number of inquiries into this field by this place. When we were in Sydney and in other places around Australia, people who gave evidence often spoke of the Senate inquiry from 2001 and the great words and recommendations which came from that inquiry. When asked which of those recommendations had been implemented, and no-one could tell me a single thing which had made it into practice. We even had a Senate inquiry into TAFE and VET running concurrently with ours. I came continually to the same spot on the issue surrounding what we, as a federal government, can actually deliver for TAFE primarily, and VET in general. One of the real problems for TAFE is its acronym. It is synonymous with vocational education and training and therefore it is actually the victim of its own success. Everyone refers to the sector as TAFE and not VET. TAFE gets the blame and the credit travels very slowly.
I will move away from the legislation and speak about why ASQA needs to be a bolder and more prominent body for a moment, and I will address the base reason we have issues in VET at present. Once upon a time, TAFE was the only real player in town. You went there for everything. It was an institution but it was a hybrid form of education with a hybrid form of instructors and teachers. The old saying is that a camel is a horse designed by a committee. I see TAFE as an organisation which started off as a basic instrument and has had bits and pieces attached to it over time with soft wire and chewing gum.

During our inquiry, we saw so much good at TAFEs all over the country. We saw teachers and instructors who cared very deeply about their students and the future of the organisation. We saw fantastic facilities and central locations which are so good for students. We saw students proud to wear their 'I go to TAFE' t-shirts and polos. We saw a commitment to education and to turning out job-ready people who understand their job and why their training is important. We also saw, however, the pressure the organisation was under with inflexible workplace arrangements.

These facilities were also completely uncompetitive with others in the sector. We saw the other side of having great premises—the cost of maintaining building which are decades old, and in which it is almost impossible to make technology compliant and which are hugely expensive to air condition. We saw that open competitive tendering for services had eroded non-capital intensive courses, as they were being won by alternative suppliers of services, leaving TAFE with the high capital cost courses to maintain. If you can provide training with a laptop and a data projector, you can make a great living. If you have to provide the latest MIG and TIG welders, lathes, refrigeration equipment—as the member for Swan said earlier—vehicle hoists, plasma cutters and the like, your margins will be forever squeezed, and your business model will never be challenged by a private sector employer. The capital cost is too high. We saw with TAFE an organisation which took its community service obligation seriously. They know they are a part of our communities and that was even more evident in regional communities. Again, this is not a commercial consideration that its competitors need to take into account. We saw poor use of these expensive assets as well. They can and should do more with what they have. They are a great organisation, but we saw people coming to them with commercial kitchen facilities and asking if they could run courses at night or during holidays, because the TAFEs can be closed for an awful long time. There is a massive amount of investment there, but the TAFE organisation said no—they were not prepared to let other organisations use their facilities, even though there would be no-one else there at the time. That, to me, is inconsistent and wrong for TAFE.

Finally, what I saw was that TAFE was an organisation without a champion. To me it looked like schools were loved by state governments and universities were loved by federal governments, but TAFE was like the unwanted stepchild in the corner. It needs attention but it does not get anywhere near the same attention as the other two.

This is exposed in funding as well. We provide the state governments with massive amounts of money each year for VET, yet we as the inquiry committee were unable to find out—and I do not think the minister can find out—from state governments exactly how much of that money gets to TAFE. What comes up here is: why are we in this parliament continually working in this area when just about everything, with the exception of our funding, is ignored by state governments? One person said to me that, without federal
government involvement, we would still not have national recognition of skills and qualifications. That astounds me. This is why ASQA must be brought to the table, to ensure that we have a national approach to VET.

The other side of the coin is the private providers of VET. While the vast, overwhelming majority of providers go about their business with the interests of their students at the core of their business model, we do see exceptions. These are the flies in the ointment which must be called out and penalised. Again, during our committee inquiry last year, we also heard, as the member for Wills just said, some of the most unbelievable stories about taxpayers' money and, indeed, the money of the people seeking qualification being completely wasted.

We heard about a provider who specialised in training for underground mining. They conducted darkness training by getting the students to sit under a table and then throwing a black blanket over the top of it—to find out whether they could handle the pitch-blackness of a mine. We heard of a provider who trained people in driving trucks on mine sites. They did this in simulators only. This one guy passed the training and was accepted onto a mine. He got out to the mine site and, to get into the big tipper trucks, he had to climb up a ladder. That is when he found out he had severe vertigo. He froze completely. The site had to be shut down while they brought an EWP, a scissor lift, on the back of a tilt tray through the site to go and talk him down. Think of the massive cost of those big trucks and the amount of money that goes through those sites. That this person could get onto a mine site without finding out whether or not he could handle heights, even on a ladder, seems unbelievable to me.

We also heard about the predatory practices of some organisations. Recently, a constituent in my electorate, Ms Susan Stephenson, contacted my office regarding her son Mitchell. Mitchell has been trying to get into work for some time and was hoping to get a position with a warehouse company, which would have given him work while studying and made him less of a burden on the welfare system. The provider did not put him through enough course modules for the right tickets, and he was then left to try and get the job when he was technically unskilled. Mitchell was put through a certificate IV. He was told by the provider that he had to; otherwise, he would lose his benefits. He had told his provider a few months earlier of his plans to do IT, but they still put him through the cert IV before he studied for a cert III. Today, to get that job he still needs a cert III. He and his mum had to come up with $5,200 of cold, hard cash to do the training while working only part-time. My office put Ms Stephenson on to the new National Training Complaints Hotline; and, the next day, the provider was on the phone trying to sort things out. But it should not have got to that stage. Ms Stephenson told me:

I think anything that is going to make these training organisations more accountable will be of benefit to young people. I'm sure there are plenty of young people who are still in Mitchell's situation that because no one jumped up and down about it for them, they are stuck not being able to look at changing to study something they are more likely to get a job in.

On Friday, at my office, I am meeting with a constituent who applied to complete a cert III in an area in which she wanted to improve. As the member for Wills, the member for Cunningham and just about everyone who has spoken in this debate has shown, these stories abound. Her application was rejected because they had it in their records that she already had a cert III. She has never done any VET training before in her life but had filled out a form or something like that somewhere along the line.
We all have heard the stories about these kinds of traders. They see a program and they see an opportunity and they see money to be made. They do not care about the individual. We can go on and on about the student making an informed choice here. But, if you are a desperate 19-year-old and you have a choice of 18 weeks training for a cert III in what you want to do or three weeks for a course where you get a trip to Bali—I know what I would have done when I was a 19-year-old. This is especially so as the people making the sale know exactly how to pitch the idea so that they carry credibility. It is only down the track that the error is detected and regret sets in.

In the end, what we are talking about here is the worst kind of threat. You can lose your money, but what these predators are stealing is people's opportunity. We need to ensure that the cracks in the system, which will never, ever completely disappear, are as small as we can possibly make them and that we react quickly. That is what with legislation goes to. No system is foolproof or perfect. The guy in Nigeria with the $60 million he has to get out of the country and all he needs is your bank details is still getting takers in this country today. If you have a good sales technique, you will find people you can play like a fiddle. What we are all talking about here are taxpayers' funds and the education of our community, and both are precious and should be respected.

What we need to do is to back our good providers and work with them. We have to ensure that our auditing regime is compatible with their business models. Many of these organisations have international students, and the audit process can seem unrelenting and pervasive. It is the guy down the road who operates out of an imported Nissan Skyline that we want to get out of the VET sector, not the providers of quality education.

This bill seeks to improve the quality of Australia's VET system. It will allow ASQA to act faster in responding to emerging quality issues. It will reduce the regulatory burden on consistently high performing training providers. More than anything, this bill allows ASQA to pursue individuals and organisations which want to just rip off people and take the money. It will introduce a quality standard provision. It will allow ASQA to pursue not only RTOs but those claiming to be RTOs.

This sector, to use a colloquial term, needs some love. It has been bashed by dodgy traders who give people and organisations who really care about their students and their futures a bad name.

We need to address the regulatory body to ensure that they can adequately protect not only the people receiving the training but the taxpayer as well. We are putting in another $68 million from the taxpayer to ensure ASQA can play their part. This is on top of the nearly $6 billion this year in support for VET through direct funding for programs, support to the states and territories, and student loans. All this money is courtesy of the taxpayer, who supports it. The taxpayer supports these things because they provide a return to them and our communities.

These amendments continue the government's approach to VET reform. Malcolm White, the acting CEO of TAFE Directors Australia, said in a media release on 25 February 2015:

The legislation is an important step in enabling the regulator to act quickly to address the practices of a few unscrupulous training providers that are damaging the reputation of VET. TDA looks forward to this legislation being supported in both Houses.
We are creating a VET system that supports both the students and the providers, a system that will provide the workforce for Australia's future.

I would like to make one final plea on behalf of TAFE. If we do not watch out, TAFE will end up being a provider of education that is incredibly expensive and of education to the illiterate, the infirm and the disabled, and nobody else. We have an asset in TAFE in this country, and it should be supported, but it has to be supported by the state governments. That is who has to support it, because that is who runs it. We can provide the money, but we have to make sure that we as a parliament stand up here and defend TAFE and drive through COAG the message—the member for Cunningham and I are one on this—that we value VET and we value TAFE for what they do for our community. I do not disagree with a single word of the member for Cunningham's amendment but I question whether this bill is the place for that discussion. I therefore support the bill but not the amendment. ASQA must be supported. ASQA must be Australia-wide and it must be a strong defender and able to move into these places and get these unscrupulous traders out of the game. That is the secret. I thank the House.

Mr THISTLETHWAITE (Kingsford Smith) (18:24): I speak in support of the passage of the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015 and also of the second-reading amendment moved by the shadow minister. We have all seen the emails and advertisements encouraging people to start a vocational training course using phrases like 'Buy now, pay later,' or 'Get a free iPad,' selling to students courses they never intended to study or delivering courses in fewer hours and online. These are some of the aggressive tactics of an increasing number of private vocational training providers.

Educating the population is a noble and desirable objective. There is no doubt that the more educated the population is the more productive our economy is. Over time, the wealthier our nation is the higher the standard of living we enjoy. So we need to encourage people to take on education. But in doing that we need also to ensure that those who are offering courses, particularly in the vocational education market, are offering realistic courses and alternatives for students and are doing so in a way that ensures transparency and an ethical and open manner.

Nobody wins when the service provided is of poor quality or the student is ill suited to the training. It is not just about the number of courses that are operated and offered; it is also about the quality and the ethics behind the offering of those courses. It is crucial that the education suit the person, the courses be appropriate and the outcomes realistic.

In recent years there has been a very large increase in the number of people taking on vocational education and training courses. Unfortunately, in many cases they have signed up for courses they were unqualified for or for courses that the provider or the broker knew or had a very good inclination that the student would have very little chance of completing and ultimately repaying their VET FEE-HELP debt to the government. So it is important that we have greater transparency in the marketing of these courses.

In some cases, people are unaware who the provider is when they sign up for a course. They may go through a broker who will attract them to a course in a particular way. They will sign up online, but it is not very clear to the person when they sign up for the course who is actually providing the training and, ultimately, who provides and qualifies the person in the course they have enrolled in.
In its submission to the inquiry by the Senate Education and Employment References Committee into private VET providers, Inclusion Australia revealed a plethora of troubling stories. It provided firsthand accounts of spruikers signing up individuals with intellectual disabilities to courses that were expensive and offering totally unachievable qualifications and of sales people roaming the streets and signing up students with the promise of free laptops and the likelihood that, as long as they never earn above the threshold of $53,000, they will never have to repay the debt associated with the course. There were even reports of disadvantaged students and unemployed people outside local Centrelink offices being recruited to training companies.

A University of Sydney study has revealed that some of Australia's largest training companies are reporting profit margins of more than 50 per cent. To date, the RTOs' proclivity to distance themselves from some of the tactics of the spruikers or brokers who operate on their behalf has been a significant barrier to linking the RTOs with those who are undertaking the activities on their behalf.

This bill seeks to tie the responsibility between the course provider and the broker operating on their behalf. The bill allows a more rapid response by the minister and the regulator to quality standard issues, creates a new offence of offering to provide a VET course without disclosing the name and registration code of the relevant provider, and extends the period of registration able to be granted by the regulator from five to seven years. These are all good quality transparency measures that the opposition supports and build on the work that the previous Labor government did in establishing the quality framework around vocational education and training.

Whilst this bill is designed to improve regulatory oversight of the sector, it does not address the damage to individuals that has already occurred or propose action to engage with the community to minimise future problems. The actions of unscrupulous RTOs and brokers have had serious impacts on many vulnerable individuals, and many of those have been highlighted in the speeches of members of parliament in this debate. I think we have all been contacted by students, prospective students and parents of students who have had concerns and troubles with the way that many RTOs have operated and some of the activities that they have engaged in to sign people up to courses. The reports of people being targeted and left with whopping great debts and no qualifications or useless qualifications must be addressed. The government needs to look with more urgency at the notion of the protection of students in circumstances such as these. Labor is calling on the government to immediately seek a consumer protection information campaign by the ACCC, including advice for people who need to seek redress, and consider other mechanisms available to strengthen consumer protections.

However, for the time being, the reality, according to analysis by the Grattan Institute, is that 40 per cent of vocational students will never repay their student loans—that is a very troubling figure. In order to maintain quality in the VET sector, in 2011 Labor established the national regulator, the Australian Skills Quality Authority. Since its establishment in 2011, ASQA has received more than 4,000 complaints and conducted 3,000 audits. It was recently announced that ASQA would lead an investigation into 23 vocational education institutions following widespread allegations of students being tricked into signing up for courses.

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It was in 2007 that the Howard government extended the use of VET FEE-HELP to include this sector for approved diploma and advanced diploma courses. VET FEE-HELP commenced in 2009 and, in 2011, in order to maintain quality in this sector, Labor established the Quality Framework through ASQA.

It has been a tactic of the government to seek to blame some of the circumstances that are occurring in this industry on the previous Labor government, claiming that it is Labor's fault that students have been undertaking courses and signed up by providers under predatory circumstances—they have been unable to complete courses; dollars have been wasted; debt has been extended—but this is a really, really narrow focused and baseless attack and is quite plainly and simply wrong. Labor, based on the information that MPs were receiving, conducted a number of inquiries—there was a Senate inquiry involved—and acted on the recommendations of those inquiries. Labor has held a strong belief that there needs to be appropriate regulation of all education sectors to ensure that there is integrity in the system, that there is quality in outcomes but also that there is transparency so people can make informed decisions in a marketplace about whether or not the course is appropriate and whether or not, importantly, they are in a position to complete the course.

In New South Wales, TAFE students have been struggling with a number of issues associated with changes to the system. In 2014, 40 per cent of students were slugged an additional $500 to $1,500 for courses under a new regime. To rectify this, the New South Wales Labor opposition have announced a $100 million TAFE rescue plan designed to abolish some of the measures that have been introduced by the current Liberal government. They have also promised to reverse some of the hikes in fees that have occurred to guarantee funding to TAFE by capping the amount of public funds that can be contestable by private operators up to 30 per cent and commission a landmark review of education and training in New South Wales after year 10.

Federally, the Abbott government has also, unfortunately, removed support for students in this sector, the VET sector. It has taken the axe to the skills portfolio, cutting $2 billion since the last budget. We have all seen programs such as Tools For Your Trade that have been cut. I have received emails from students and, indeed, from small business employers in our community, who are concerned that many of their apprentices will drop out of the trade because that vital support has gone. At a time when people are not earning a realistic and liveable wage because they are on an apprenticeship, they need all the support they can get to maintain a standard of living, particularly older apprentices. It is very important that the government understands that support for vocational education and training is crucial in ensuring that we are keeping a good flow of apprentices coming through the system.

Nonetheless, this bill does have Labor's support. I also support the second reading amendment that has been moved by the shadow minister. We are firmly of the belief that more must be done to protect students and young Australians and provide them with the proper support that they need to better themselves, to attain better work, to contribute to the future of our nature and, ultimately, to ensure that our nation is more productive because we have educated a greater number of people. But that is based on ensuring that the system delivers ethical outcomes and provides transparency and accountability in the marketing of courses so that young students in particular who are undertaking these courses are in a position to make informed decisions about their future and are signing up for courses that are
appropriate and that, ultimately, they can complete so that they can go into the workforce, begin earning money and, where they have taken out a VET FEE-HELP loan, pay that money back. On that basis, we support these increased transparency measures.

Dr STONE (Murray) (18:37): I, too, rise to support the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015. I note the bipartisan support for this bill, and I think that this must be a very special day in the House in the great Australian parliament, given that it is the second bipartisan-supported action since question time.

It is completely understandable, when all of us, from all sides of the Australian political system, know what a terrible situation has been developing over time in relation to the Australian national vocational education and training system. We have an incredible series of great institutions in Australia who have built up reputations internationally and domestically as offering the world's best education, but this sector has often been populated by shonks who have damaged the reputation of Australia's education and training. They have also damaged those who took up many of these courses. Students have been damaged in their career progression, or they have even been so disheartened by their treatment and the debts that they have accumulated that they have become less employable. That is a great tragedy for the Australian community.

It is high time that someone—and of course it had to be us—looked very closely at this national vocational education and training system and put some rigour and quality standards and assurance practices into the system. We are now going to have new quality standards that will quickly address the problems with VET providers and their courses. I know that the opposition is supporting this bill, and their various speakers have been describing all of the terrible circumstances and cases that have been brought to their attention. Why didn't they do something about it? This problem has been well-known for quite a while.

We have an opportunity to start again, in a sense, to weed out the shonks who have made themselves a lot of money posing as the registered training organisations in our education and training sector. We will be extending the registration period for RTOs from five to seven years, but we will not have to wait until their re-registration before we can look closely at how they are performing. We will be able to look at their performance, their quality, the experience of their students, and their courses well before they are up for re-registration. We are going to enable the Australian Skills Quality Authority, ASQA, to focus its attention on investigating and acting upon high-risk and poor-quality providers. They will be given additional resources and a focus to do that.

One of the sad things that has come about as a result of these shonks who operate in the system is that a lot of international students have been attracted to Australia by the promotion of their courses, and they have experienced course outcomes that have been far from desirable. But, many of them were not really looking to do that cooking course, the hairdressing course or the aged care course; they saw these courses as pathways to migration, or permanent residency. That pathway is quite inappropriate when it comes to these education and training courses, and the operators. In fact, what should be coming out of these courses are good employment skills—skills that are relevant for a modern economy. They should not be a surrogate for a back door, or a new way to enter a back door, into Australian citizenship.

I have to say that our welfare system has also played its part in encouraging the huge growth of poorly designed courses with ad hoc curricula and poorly qualified teachers. For a
very long time, you had two options if you were long-term unemployed. If you were looking to comply with the requirements for continuing to receive the Newstart allowance and you went to one of our specially selected employment service providers, they could either find you a job—hopefully they did—or they could put you into a course. Unfortunately, so many of these courses—whether they were in rural or regional centres, or metropolitan Australia—were in things like events management, health and beauty, or management. Management was very popular. A semi-literate or illiterate person was expected to become qualified in a certificate I, II, or III such that they could step into a management position, without their literacy, numeracy, or English language skills having been addressed during the course. There have been a lot of unfortunate outcomes in our system—until we addressed them—which have unfortunately given our vocational education training sector a bad name.

Along the way, we have also threatened the viability of our TAFE sector. Our TAFE sector has, in the past, been responsible for producing some superbly qualified tradespeople, whether in the building sector or in manufacturing skills. But, if they have to compete with an RTO offering courses at a fraction of the price, and with a fraction of the time required to complete the same certificate or apprenticeship, then, obviously, the RTOs will win out, and win consistently.

I want to describe to you one case study that has come to my attention. In my electorate, two young people from the Goulburn Valley had this experience—and I know that it was the experience of many, many others. They both wanted to become qualified builders. Building was in the family. Their father was a qualified builder-tradesperson. They signed up to a Skills Victoria RTO and, in turn, they were directed to a builder who would employ them while they undertook their apprenticeship. There was a trade school that they were required to attend one day a month. Now, a trade school sounds quite impressive. You can imagine classrooms, equipment, very qualified instructors, and the class populated by students or young apprentices doing the same course as you. But in fact this trade school was sometimes held in a footy club anteroom or some other casual space. There were students from a whole range of different courses or skills work—perhaps scaffolding, tilers, painters and decorators—all in together with the building apprentices.

This so-called trade school would run for one day a month. If they had been enrolled in TAFE to do their apprenticeship, they would have been expected to attend for one week a month. You can imagine why this alternative was so popular with the employing building company or tradesman, because they got a very low paid worker who they only had to release one day month, not one week a month. The apprentices were virtually not supervised at all in terms of occupational health and safety standards. These particular young people found themselves dismantling and demolishing buildings full of asbestos. This was of enormous concern for their future health. The owner of that business did not feel this was a problem, since it was, he said, what he had been doing most of his life.

Assessing the competencies of these two young men as they undertook this course was done by on-site ‘verification’. The owner of the business, the builder, or the teacher from the RTO would come to the site and ask the apprentice to pose beside some scaffolding, say, with a hammer in their hand or some other tool, and photos would be taken. The trainee was not asked whether they had in fact had anything to do with that piece of work on the building site, whether the scaffolding had been anything that they had participated in. It was simply a photo.
showing the student standing beside a piece of scaffolding, and the box was then ticked to say that they were competent in scaffolding. You just had to hope for a good day so that the photograph would come out clean and clear. Some apprentices involved in this sort of very unfortunate practice were able to complete a year's worth of trade school theory within a day or two. What normally would have been expected to take a year, they could complete in a day or two. As I said before, apprentices from all different trades were with the same teachers in the same room—for example, in the footy change room.

A trade apprentice would have a qualified teacher for their specific trade, learning together with students from that same trade, using proper equipment in an appropriately set-up site, such as you would find at a TAFE campus. Some apprentices working in the Skills Victoria situation could fast-track their apprenticeship and finish within two years, when at TAFE that same apprenticeship would take four years. So you walked out of that experience, often exposed to quite dangerous occupational health and safety situations, with a piece of paper saying you were a fully qualified tradesperson. You could even go and start your own business, perhaps, in building. The young person was virtually unemployable in the trade, because it would very quickly be established that they had next to no skills and, of course, very little experience.

This was a very difficult and sad situation. It worked well where someone just wanted cheap labour—an apprentice in effect doing a builder's labourer job but not at builder's labourer wages. We had to stop this. Too many young lives have been put on hold while students have had to start again. Those young apprentices who thought they would become qualified builders but ended up with a useless experience have had to go back and try a university course or a TAFE course. In a sense, they have lost precious years of their early lives.

This bill will make sure that that sort of experience will not be commonplace or acceptable into the future. It is particularly important in rural and regional Australia, where we have such a shortage of qualified tradespeople and people working in the health services sector, in tourism and especially in hospitality. We have jobs going begging across the Murray electorate, particularly in the Murray and Goulburn valleys. At the same time, one in four of our young people aged 18 to 25 are unemployed. Goulburn Ovens TAFE has struggled to make ends meet, with further cuts to their budget under Victorian governments. While they knew and understood the terrible damage being done to young apprentices through many unconscionable and shonky RTOs, the Goulburn Ovens TAFE was not always able to attract students or to offer the courses they wanted to. We have jobs going begging and we have the unemployed. This is a terrible situation.

Bendigo TAFE, previously called BRIT, has a campus in Echuca which is probably one of the best-looking TAFE campuses you could find anywhere in Victoria, but it is virtually redundant. There are virtually no courses taught at Bendigo TAFE in Echuca. Apparently its board or its governing body have decided that it is a bit of a bother to extend their educational offerings to Echuca, a regional city some two hours drive from Bendigo. Instead, they have partnered with Holmesglen college; they are quite excited about that. Meanwhile, in Echuca we have some of the highest levels of drug dependency, particularly ice; we have homelessness; and we have extreme levels of youth disappointment in the unemployment
rate. Here is an institute with a glorious campus in the middle of Echuca without appropriate courses being offered or any staff to go along with those courses.

The community college just across the road struggles to teach cookery in a tiny room in an old historic building. The cookery course is oversubscribed. There are too many local young and older people wanting to do cookery to fit into the room. Within the Bendigo TAFE campus across the road is a magnificent commercial cooking facility that is empty, unused. This is the disgrace of the system that we are now finding out about.

This bill is going to make all the difference. I am so pleased that it is now receiving bipartisan support. We must have quality standards assured. Our training and education sector has suffered too much with neglect, with years of misunderstanding and mismanagement. I strongly commend this bill to the House.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (18:52): It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak tonight on the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015. People who have listened to my speeches in this House over the years that I have been here, since 2010, know that I am a big fan of vocational education and training. I am a graduate of the wonderful Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. I was union president of that much-loved institute. It was established over 100 years ago, when access to education was limited really to the wealthy, so it is the oldest workers college in the world. It opened up opportunities to people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, from working-class backgrounds, not just in terms of trades but also in terms of access to opportunities for broader learning. It is a wonderful institute that is now offering world-class education in engineering, architecture, visual arts, fashion design, communications and journalism—which is what I did. Then you have the TAFE sector, where you have the trades being taught in an ever-decreasingly funded environment—trades such as electricians and a range of other areas. It is a fantastic institution.

Not only did I study at the wonderful RMIT but I also had the opportunity, prior to this life, to tutor at the University of Canberra. I tutored both undergraduate and postgraduate students in a range of communication areas, and I absolutely loved that role—seeing the benefits that students get from vocational education, in terms of the confidence that they gain from actually having a skill that they can go out and get a job with, as well as getting a bit more of the arts, a bit of English, a bit of a language, a bit of thinking time as well, in addition to vocational education. The University of Canberra, again, is one of our great institutions here in Canberra. It was wonderful to be associated with those students and that institution and also to tutor there. I miss it terribly. I keep running into the students when I go out to events. They are all very flattering about my tutoring abilities, which is good, but I miss the joy that you get from passing on your knowledge. I had 20 years of experience in a particular industry, and it was wonderful to impart my lessons learnt to those students. That is the beauty of vocational education—you are giving people valuable, tangible skills that they can take on and learn and then use to get a great job and have a wonderful career.

Members in this place do not just know about my passion for vocational education and training but also know about my passion for education more broadly. I have spoken many, many times about how education allowed my sisters and me to escape a cycle of intergenerational disadvantage. My great-grandmother, my grandmother and my mother all lived timid lives, because they did not get the opportunities they wanted because of their lack
of education. My great-grandmother left school at about 11. She was a domestic in the western district of Victoria. My grandmother left school at about 13 and, as many people in this chamber know, worked at three jobs just to keep food on the table and to keep the state away. She was a single mother like my great-grandmother, and the state was knocking on the door because, essentially, she was poor. My mother had to leave school at 15 because there was no money in the house. My working class matriarchy was denied choice and opportunity as a result of a lack of education. Fortunately, my sisters and I, thanks to the tenacity and commitment of my mother, had the opportunity to be educated. It is a powerful transformer. I am not just talking here about schools and universities; I am talking about vocational education and training. It not only generates macroeconomic benefits for Australia; it empowers people: it gives them skills and trades that they can go out and get jobs with, make money and be a contributing member of the community. Education allowed me to break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage, and that is why I am keen for children, adults and even mature age students to gain skills so that they can choose their own paths, so that they can get an education and have a choice in their lives.

We all know that skills and trades are the backbone of our economy. Anyone in this place knows that if you try to get an emergency plumber on the weekend, particularly here in Canberra, it is a very difficult task. I have my Canberran friends here, and they are acknowledging this in their smiles. It is a very difficult task and also an extremely expensive task. But it is not just in Canberra that we have skill shortages, even though we do have a lot of skill shortages here in the national capital. We have skill shortages in many parts of Australia. We need more skilled tradespeople across a range of sectors, so we need to do everything we can to strengthen our vocational education and training sector.

This bill seeks to do that. The bill is designed to improve regulatory oversight of the sector, and that is why Labor is supporting the bill. However, led by my colleague the member for Cunningham and the shadow assistant minister, Labor is seeking to make a number of amendments to the bill, because currently the bill does not address the damage to individuals that has already occurred; nor does it propose action to engage with the community to minimise future problems. The actions of unscrupulous registered training organisations—shonks, sharks, we have heard all the language—and their brokers have had a serious impact on vulnerable individuals. We all know the stories; they are horrendous. The reports of people being left with large debts and no qualifications or useless qualifications have to be addressed.

I think everyone in this place would agree on the need to strengthen the integrity of our VET sector. We have heard some absolute horror stories come out of this sector recently where RTOs have preyed on vulnerable students and signed them up for large VET FEE-HELP debts. In some cases the students are not even aware that they have signed up for a course, let alone a significant debt often around $20,000.

Under VET FEE-HELP, students are able to access up to $97,728 in total for most courses offered by eligible RTOs. In other cases, incentives such as iPads, laptops and shopping vouchers are being used to target disadvantaged communities in Western Sydney—and many of my colleagues who represent those communities have spoken about the shonkiness of these sharks who are taking advantage of vulnerable people and leaving them with a worthless qualification or no qualification at all.
In May last year, *The Daily Telegraph* reported $200 spotter's fees were being paid to people to sign up to courses costing up to $25,000. The problem is exacerbated by RTOs employing brokers to recruit students on their behalf and then attempting to distance themselves from the actions of the brokers. This bill takes some steps to put the responsibility on the RTO for the actions of their brokers. There is also a change to allow a more rapid response to quality standard issues by the minister and the regulator.

Growth of VET FEE-HELP has exceeded all projections with more than $1.6 billion allocated last year. The Grattan Institute has warned that 40 per cent of vocational loans will never be repaid. This becomes a financial burden to the Commonwealth and needs to be addressed.

I want to briefly mention the features of this bill. It contains, as many speakers have outlined, amendments to the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011 that support ongoing reform measures including protecting the integrity of the VET system; giving the regulator capacity to respond to emerging issues; and technical amendments to improve the efficiency and operation of the act and, consequently, the regulator. It also contains no specific consumer protection provisions.

While this bill is designed to improve regulatory oversight of the sector, it does not address the damage to individuals that has already occurred or propose action to engage with the community to minimise future problems. In Labor's view, the government must act with more urgency to ensure the protection of students is prioritised.

This bill creates a new offence of prohibiting a person from advertising or offering to provide all or part of a VET course without including the name and registration code of the responsible RTO. It extends the period of registration able to be granted by the regulator from five to seven years, and this should be amended so that the extension from five to seven years is granted only to existing low-risk providers at renewal of registration. It also makes a condition of registration that an NVR registered training organisation must satisfy the quality standards set by the minister by legislative instrument.

I have only got a short amount of time left, so I want to focus on Labor's proud achievements when it comes to vocational education and training, because we have a very proud track record. The $3 billion we provided for the Building Australia's Future Workforce program provides some 130,000 new training places for apprentices. In 2011, Labor established a national regulator—the Australian Skills Quality Authority. Labor then amended the legislation in 2012 to increase the coverage of VET FEE-HELP to all diplomas, associate diplomas and to conduct a trial to extend VET FEE-HELP to certificate IV courses. This meant that any Australian could have access to vocational training, no matter their background or financial position, which is particularly important—access for all.

Everyone in this place should want to improve the integrity of our vocational education and training sector. Last year our shadow minister Senator Carr and the shadow assistant minister called on the Auditor-General to investigate VET FEE-HELP to ensure that skills funding was being used in accordance with the intent of the legislation. The Auditor General has requested that a performance audit be included in the Australian National Audit Office's 2015-16 work program, and we support that.
It would be remiss of me, while talking about vocational education and training, not to mention the $2 billion worth of funding that has been cut from the skills portfolio by the Abbott government since the budget. I want to begin with something that is dear to my heart: trade training centres. We are talking about nearly $1 billion of investment in trade training centres gone as a result of the Abbott government's cuts. It is not just here in Canberra where we saw planned trade training centres evaporate into thin air—gone—even though the ACT senator ACT had great joy and was actively engaged in opening the trade training centres that Labor had funded. It was appalling that so many trade training centres had their funding cut here and so many young Canberrans have been denied the great benefits that flow from those centres—and not just Canberrans but right across the nation.

We have a suite of trade training centres—thanks to Labor—in Tuggeranong in the south of Canberra and we have a sustainable learning centre. We have a number of trade training centres at Catholic schools and colleges. They are providing fantastic opportunities for students to learn carpentry, computer skills, plumbing and building while, at the same time, learning French and English and continuing with year 12. Not only do they do year 12 but they also get a cert III in a trade—fantastic—and the parents whose kids are undertaking this training through trade training centres absolutely love it. They are quite envious of their children and the fact that they have the opportunity to gain a trade while completing year 12. It is extraordinary. Trade training centres are fantastic idea, and it is an absolute outrage that the Abbott government chose to discontinue funding to those centres.

Labor has a strong record on investing in skills and helping students and workers to obtain the skills they need to participate and compete in the modern workforce. We also have a strong track record on quality assurance. Sadly, the actions of unscrupulous RTOs and brokers have had serious impacts on vulnerable individuals.

The government should immediately seek a consumer protection information campaign by the ACCC, including advice for people who need to seek redress and consider other mechanisms available to strengthen consumer protections.

Mr COULTON (Parkes—The Nationals Chief Whip) (19:07): I too rise this evening to speak on the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015. I might just comment on the member for Canberra's contribution. One of the reasons that the Abbott government has to be financially responsible is because of the mismanagement of the economy by the previous government and the fact that, despite the problems in the VET sector, nothing was done and millions of dollars have been squandered because action has not been taken until now.

I too have some experience in the VET sector. Before I came to this place, I was the chairman of the Gwydir Learning Region, which is a community based learning organisation. We were involved in delivering a whole range of training and education, not only to school students through the local schools in the Gwydir Shire but also to many adults. What we saw was quite transformative as many adults in their mature years, after their children had grown up or at least were at school, obtained certificates in aged care, child care, IT, management, rural skills and retail—a whole range of things—and became actively involved in the workforce. Indeed, I think well over 100 people have been trained in aged care by the Gwydir Learning Region and those people are now working in aged care right across the north-west of New South Wales.
This bill has been introduced as part of the rolling reforms for the sector which are about improving quality, recognising the good work of VET providers and ensuring that students are given the right protections in the VET market. Before I go any further, I will say that in my electorate we have many VET training organisations that are completely legitimate. They do the job that they are supposed to do. They are dedicated to education and the students that they provide it to. I will talk about some problems that we have had, but they have mostly been because of out-of-town organisations and fly-by-nighters that have come through.

This bill is necessary to address the concerns that have had some media coverage about organisations that have been targeting vulnerable people to sign up to courses without a full understanding of the implications. This was brought to my attention at about the middle of last year. I had a meeting with a training operator in my office in Dubbo who came to me quite concerned that there had been some training operators targeting aged-care facilities—going to aged-care facilities and signing up the residents of those facilities to courses for which they had no ability and they possibly had no understanding of what they were signing up to. They were signing these people up to a large debt that ultimately was against their name. It is completely unscrupulous behaviour.

I notified the minister at the time that this was a concern and that we needed to be on the alert for this type of behaviour. Not long after, in November last year, I got alarming reports in the town of Coonamble, which is in the north-west of New South Wales, where an operator—maybe several operators—over a period of time came to town and were offering $50 cash inducements. They set up in a local club and people turned up in their droves. I heard anecdotally that possibly 100 people turned up. They received $50 cash in hand and the promise of an iPad and a laptop to come down the track. They were signed up to managerial type courses, and many of these people were illiterate and really had no concept of what they were agreeing to. They were just told that, if they spoke to a particular person, they would get $50 cash. These people signed up to a debt that is against their name. Admittedly, some or many of them will not get to the income threshold where that would need to be paid off. Possibly, they will never get to a position where they will be able to pay that off. Not only have these people been badly affected but the Australian taxpayer as a whole has been ripped off by billions of dollars.

If the Commonwealth government were going to put money into a town like Coonamble for training purposes, I could guarantee you that there would be many other ways of providing such a large sum of money—as much as these companies have ripped off—that would have benefits to the people in that community. I am very pleased that this bill will clamp down on that behaviour. I certainly believe that there are ongoing investigations into this behaviour. Personally, I would like to see these organisations not only stripped of their licence to operate but prosecuted. This is fraud on a massive scale. The previous speaker mentioned the dollars that have gone into this VET fee program. It is a program that I am very fond of and very passionate about. Education is transformative. People in my electorate, in many cases, missed an opportunity in their younger days to stay at school. This program gives them an opportunity to upskill, to get into their first job or to gain skills that would get them into a better job.

I am a big fan of this program, and it makes me sick in the stomach to talk about this unscrupulous behaviour. The citizens of the town of Coonamble were justifiably outraged at
this behaviour—that someone could blow in from out of town and not only sign all these people up to a debt that would be permanently against their name but also rip off the Australian taxpayer for hundreds of thousands of dollars.

There is a duty to protect students from unscrupulous training providers, and we want good quality vocational training systems that we can trust. We also need to ensure that the link between training and jobs is real. What we saw with the Labor government was that they were interested in training for training's sake. The coalition believes in assisting people into real jobs in order for them to experience the prosperity that comes with employment. The coalition is committed to focusing on helping people to develop the skills that employers want—skills that lead from training to a job. The previous government, as I mentioned before, failed to safeguard the standards, and now the coalition has to go in to clean up the mess that was left. There was an indication that these dodgy operators had been there for some time.

The bill will create a new measure, a quality standard, so that any problems with VET providers or courses can be dealt with quickly. Another frustration I have had is that the people who could see that something was drastically wrong but there was no clear passage for those concerns to be brought to light. It is important to strike while the iron is hot. The current system, established in 2012, requires the agreement of the states and territories and the whole process can take up to 12 months. Through this legislation and the newly-created quality standard, we will be able to deal with emerging and critical issues that are impacting on quality training. This is effectively an 'emergency power', whilst still maintaining avenues for consultation with states, territories and industry stakeholders.

Through this legislation changes will be made so that it must be absolutely clear to a student which organisation is providing the training. I have heard some of the other contributors to this debate say that there is an arm's length approach between RTOs and recruiters. It is a way of ring-fencing their organisation from the dodgy operations and that way they do not have to take responsibility for what others do in their name. Service providers will now be responsible for the services delivered on behalf of the brokers, and these arrangements must all be covered by a written agreement. Once again, I am hearing that some of these people who signed up that day in Coonamble may not have even signed a written agreement.

Through the changes in this bill ASQA will now be able to pursue anyone who does not make it clear who is responsible for the quality of the training. ASQA will have further authority to request information to assist in their investigations and to allow ASQA to share the information that they gather with other agencies.

The bill changes the registration period from five to seven years. It is important to recognise that most RTOs are doing the right thing—I said that at the outset. The RTOs I am aware of in the Parkes electorate are upfront, high-class organisations, and they are doing the right thing. It has been shown that the re-registration process is particularly poor at identifying whether a training organisation is performing to the appropriate standard. Instead, this re-registration funding will be used for ASQA to target those services which are underperforming and are not acting within the guidelines and new quality standards.

What has the government already done? The government has already acted to improve quality in the VET sector. For new providers from 1 January, and existing providers from 1 April, it is compulsory for training providers to make it clear to students exactly what they are
signing up for every time their debt increases. The new regulatory standards make training providers responsible for the services delivered by brokers on their behalf. The government has established a direct line for the public to bring forward any complaints or issues that they have. This makes it easier for complaints to be heard and dealt with. There is a national complaints hotline—133873—and an email address—skilling@education.gov.au—as well as information on the government's education website. When people started to be concerned about the massive fraud in Coonamble, they did not know where to go. They contacted me and, with the help of the minister's office, we could deal with it. But this new service will give anyone who has a concern a direct hotline. They can find out whether an organisation is legitimate and they can have the comfort of knowing whether they are doing something that is above board whether they should be wary of what they have been told. I would encourage anyone who believes that they have been targeted by an organisation which has not been clear about the arrangement to be entered into through VET Fee-Help to ring the national complaints hotline and get an investigation under way.

The government has allocated the Australian Skills Quality Authority $68 million over the next four years to enforce these new tough standards. ASQA will be focusing on those RTOs, marketers and brokers who are doing the wrong thing and allowing those who are doing the right thing to get on with the job of providing vocational training in order for people to get into the workforce. The government is looking at further action to ensure that the right level of regulation and compliance exists to deal with those RTOs who are not delivering a quality service. It is important to get the balance right by ensuring that those RTOs who are doing the right thing get on with the job—and the extended period of registration will help with this—and ensuring that those with poor or dodgy practices are identified and brought up to standard.

I feel privileged to have been able to speak of this piece of legislation—to take an issue that has been of great concern to my constituents, to support legislation that will alleviate their concerns and that will put some stability into what is an essential service for the people of Australia.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton) (19:22): I rise to make some comments in relation to the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Amendment Bill 2015, and I echo the comments made by the member for Parkes. I also have concerns about this sector, and indeed the way in which many students have been left vulnerable and exposed as a result of the failure to properly regulate the provision of such training to these young people. Therefore, anything this bill can do that can provide better oversight for this sector and better accountability to the students—and indeed to the parents of those students, who quite often would be providing support for them—is a good thing.

There is no doubt that there have been some significant concerns about the way in which the VET sector has been operating. Only recently there has been a spate of media reports of unscrupulous registered training organisations preying on vulnerable students and signing them up for large VET FEE-HELP debts. In many cases, the students are not even aware that they have signed up for a course, let alone that they have a significant debt—often around $20,000. It is shameful that we could have a sector that exposes young people to such an awful and vexed situation.

Under VET FEE-HELP, students are able to access up to $97,728 in total for most courses offered by eligible RTOs. One of the real problems with this area is that it has been
exacerbated by RTOs employing brokers to recruit students on their behalf and then attempting to distance themselves from the actions of brokers. This bill, the opposition accepts, goes some way to putting responsibility on the RTOs for the actions of brokers. There is also a change to allow a more rapid response to quality standards issues by the minister and the regulator. We will have to wait and see whether the remedial action by the government will have the intended effect in this area, but we certainly hope it does. I share the concerns of members, not only from this side but indeed the previous speaker, the member for Parkes, who raised real concerns about what has happened to young people as a result.

The VET sector is a very important area and a very significant area, not only for young people acquiring skills in a labour market that is changing so rapidly but also to meet the demands in the labour market, to ensure that we can anticipate the emerging demands in skills and to ensure that employers are able to employ people with requisite skills in those areas of demand. Therefore, we have to have a flexible but very robust arrangement so that people are not being ripped off when they seek to undergo training and so that employers are able to find people with requisite skills to fill vacancies in a very fast-changing labour market. It is this critical area that needs to operate effectively. Beyond even the intent of this bill and its effect, we have to examine this whole area as to its effectiveness in delivering what it is intended that it deliver. We have seen already some state governments make some awful decisions about taking out significant resources in the VET sector and also allowing bottom feeders, if I could use that phrase, to come into this area without the expertise, dedication to the students or rigor required to provide the skills necessary for these young students and trainees.

It is an area that I think has had significant challenges. If this bill can in some way mitigate the problems associated with the exploitation of students and the problems with the relationship between the RTOs and the brokers, then that has to be a good thing. But I think more needs to be done, not only at the federal level but at the state level as well. I think there have been too many providers without sufficient standards. As a result, we have seen students undertake mickey mouse courses, left with debt and therefore not better off but worse off. So, there is a lot to be done here, and not only does the Commonwealth have to attend to these issues but state governments also have an obligation to ensure that they defend the VET sector.

I think a terrible thing was done when money was ripped out of the TAFE sector by a series of state governments—the previous Victorian government and indeed the current New South Wales government—but I do not think these problems are purely the result of conservative governments. I think it is an area that needs attention to the extent that concerns may be properly rectified, concerns that the minister is seeking to rectify with the enacting of this bill. The opposition supports them, and we hope that we see fewer students exploited, that we see fewer students ripped off by dodgy providers and that we see a regime that is there for the students, ensuring that they acquire the skills necessary to be employed in the labour market, to be productive and to be able to contribute to their community and to their country.

Having said that, I think the state governments have to have a rethink in this area, along with some of the efforts by the federal government. I think a lot more could be done to ensure that the training that is provided is going to be something that employers are in need of and something that prospective employees, namely young people looking to enter the labour
market, will be better off with—if that examination of the deficiencies in the system is undertaken and proper reform is enacted.

Debate interrupted.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott) (19:30): It being 7.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

**Parliamentarians Against Family Violence**

Mr WATTS (Gellibrand) (19:30): On Monday of this week, Rosie Batty, Australian of the Year, Paul Linossier, the CEO of Our Watch, and Jennifer Jackson, a survivor of family violence, spoke to the members of the Parliamentarians Against Family Violence group in this place. They all had a different story to tell, but the one clear theme was that family violence is a symptom of gender inequality, that it disproportionately affects women and that it is everyone's responsibility to take action to stop it. I was extremely impressed with the number of MPs from all sides of the House and all sides of politics in attendance on the night. It was clear from the mood in the room that everyone there felt very deeply and were unsettled by the large number of women and children that are affected by domestic violence in our community everyday. This is not a partisan issue. Everyone in this House knows how important it is for us all to work together to end violence against women and their children.

When Rosie Batty addressed the parliamentarians in this group, you could hear a pin drop. Her story is haunting, and we are all in awe of her strength and determination to advocate for change that will mean that no more women or children will lose their lives as a result of this type of crime. Rosie Batty is an outstanding Australian not for what her former partner did but for the incredible advocate that she has become since her tragedy. She reminded us that family violence is everywhere. It does not discriminate. It does not respect differences in ethnicity, class or geography. She reminded us that it is our responsibility—everyone's responsibility—to do what is necessary to end this violence.

When Jennifer Jackson spoke, she also had a powerful story to tell. Jennifer's story answered the question that we ourselves are very used to asking sometimes—But why do women stay in these situations? She told us that there are many explanations for why a woman would stay in an abusive relationship. One of the reasons is obvious—fear, a paralysing fear. Imagine how terrible it would be to not feel safe in your own home. Imagine what kind of state you would be in if you had suffered emotional, physical and psychological abuse, if you had been told every day that everything that you do is wrong, that you deserve abuse and that it is your fault. Then you would start asking yourself: what will happen after I leave? How will I support myself and my children? How will I keep a roof above our heads? Here is my question to everyone here today: how easy would it be for you to leave in these circumstances?

The law is another reason why women stay. Often violence will escalate when a woman decides to leave. In fact, this is the highest risk period for a woman in an abusive relationship. Who will make sure that she is protected if the courts, the police and governments do not intervene?
When Paul Linossier, the CEO of Our Watch, spoke, he told those assembled about the gender inequality at the core of family violence. He got to the heart of the problem. He told us about the importance of targeting the attitudes and behaviours that reinforce negative views of women and enable men's violence against women to proliferate. He reminded us that it is the responsibility of all of us to call out sexism when we see it and call out gender inequality in our community. He also made the very depressing point that, in many respects, the kind of community attitudes that enable men's violence against women are worse today than they were 10 or 20 years ago.

The national community attitudes survey released earlier this year in fact shows particularly worrying figures about the attitudes of our young people on these issues. It is dispiriting to say the least that we seem to be losing traction with a generation that has grown up with the expectation that men and women should be equal. We need to intervene directly in this space today. I welcome the Prime Minister's announcement today of a $30 million prevention initiative to tackle these attitudes, and I would suggest that the attitudes of our young people and younger generations is an area deserving of particular attention in that respect. We need to turn around this backwards trend.

All speakers at this event made it clear that the national crisis of violence against women is a battle for all of us, especially men. This is because it is men's attitudes and behaviours towards women that need to change the most. Earlier today, Bill Shorten invited the Prime Minister to convene a national crisis summit and get to work together on ending family violence across Australia. It is a genuine offer, and I hope the Prime Minister takes it up. We have said that, if the Prime Minister does not take up this offer, we will initiate this national crisis summit within 100 days of the election of a Labor government. All of us in this place know what needs to be done to end this violence—so let's do it. Let's get together; let's do it now. I hope you will join me.

**Wine Equalisation Tax Rebate**

Mr PASIN (Barker) (19:35): I rise tonight to speak on the rising tide of concern both within my electorate and nationwide regarding the New Zealand wine equalisation tax rebate. The electorate of Barker produces 68 per cent of the South Australian state crush, with the Riverland being Australia's largest wine-producing region, accounting for 60 per cent of South Australia's total production by volume. Eighty-nine per cent of South Australian wine is produced for export. My electorate is also home to some of the oldest grapes and most acclaimed wineries, particularly the world-famous Barossa Valley and Coonawarra. That is why I have been listening to the concerns of the people working and living in those regions who have been campaigning hard to have the Commonwealth remove the New Zealand wine equalisation tax rebate, which is currently acting more like a subsidy than a rebate.

I am a grateful to the Winemakers' Federation of Australia, particularly CEO Paul Evans, for their support for this cause. I would also like to acknowledge the work of the member for Kooyong, who has ministerial responsibility for this matter and has listened diligently to my submissions regarding the inherent unfairness of the current position.

The WET rebate was created primarily to provide assistance to small- and medium-sized winemakers and to promote tourism in regional areas through increased incentives to open cellar doors. From 1 October 2004, the cellar door WET rebate scheme was replaced by the current system which allows a wine producer to claim an annual WET rebate regardless of
whether they make cellar door sales. The maximum rebate payable to a producer was initially limited to $290,000 per annum. The amount of the rebate was calculated as 29 per cent of the wholesale value of the wine.

From 1 July 2005, the WET rebate scheme was extended to include New Zealand producers. New Zealand producers became eligible to claim the WET rebate provided: (1) they produced wine in New Zealand; (2) they exported that wine to Australia; and (3) Australian WET was paid on that wine. From 1 July 2006, the WET rebate each producer could claim was increased to a maximum rebateable amount of $500,000 per financial year.

There is a strong case—nay, an overwhelming case—for abolishing the current New Zealand WET rebate scheme. In recent years, New Zealand imports have increased from 21 million litres in 2007 to over 51 million litres in 2012 and 30 per cent of the total value of the leading 20 SKUs sold in Australia are from New Zealand. This loss of market share to New Zealand imports has directly harmed Australian producers. The New Zealand rebate has increased from $6 million in 2007 to $25 million in 2014, with the number of claimants increasing from 120 in 2007 to 213 in 2013.

Providing foreign entities with access to the rebate at a time of high exchange rates and low profitability is not consistent with the original policy intent; indeed, it is directly damaging branded Australian wine businesses that support employment and tourism in local regional communities such as the Limestone Coast, Coonawarra, the Barossa Valley and the Riverland. The extension of the rebate to New Zealand producers in 2005 was inconsistent with the original policy intent of the rebate and has created an unfair advantage for New Zealand producers. In addition to this financial advantage, the other benefits afforded to New Zealand wine producers which are not available to other foreign wine producers include: that approved New Zealand participants are not required to be registered for Australian GST purposes, while Australian wine producers are; that approved New Zealand participants are not subject to compliance costs associated with lodging an Australian income tax return, while other foreign wine producers are deemed to have an Australian taxable presence by receiving the producer rebate; and that approved New Zealand participants are not required to be the exporter of the wine to Australia.

If the WET producer rebate was reformed to remove the preferential New Zealand scheme, New Zealand wine producers would be subject to the same tax compliance regime and corresponding costs that Australian and other foreign wine producers are currently subject to. The extension of the rebate to eligible NZ producers was wrong. I will continue my fight as long as it is needed to achieve its abolition and I am seeking the support of my colleagues to achieve that goal.

Hotham Electorate: Automotive Industry

Ms O'NEIL (Hotham) (19:39): The people of Hotham returned a Labor member to this House because they wanted to be represented by a person, and by a party, who would stand up for their interests and protect their jobs. It is in this spirit that I rise to express the anger in my community about the incompetent and feeble manner in which the government has handled the decline of the auto manufacturing industry and the emerging unemployment problem in the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Just over a year ago the Treasurer stood opposite me in this chamber and goaded Holden and Toyota into ceasing car manufacturing in Australia. Car manufacturing accounts for 6,000 jobs across the four local government areas I
represent—1,000 people in the Hotham electorate alone are directly employed by car manufacturing companies and component and parts manufacturers. Many families that I represent will see their breadwinner lose their job. This will put 5,000 small businesses operating in my electorate under threat and it will threaten the jobs of many others who relied on what was a thriving local economy.

I do not want to list the businesses affected because I do not want to create additional problems by talking those businesses down, suffice to say that I have visited factories that were humming 18 months ago but have for rent signs on the fences today. I have spoken to managers who have already had heartbreaking conversations with workers who have been with them for decades. I want to remind the House that this is a government that came to office promising it would create a million jobs. They could hardly have started their term with a more shocking economic record. Labor got Australia through the global financial crisis with barely a blip, yet today unemployment is much higher than it ever was during the global financial crisis—11 per cent of our workforce are unemployed, and 20 per cent of 15-19-year-olds. The last time unemployment was this high, our Prime Minister was the employment minister of this nation. Underemployment is also rising, with a further nine per cent of the workforce not able to find the hours they want and need.

Imagine a government faced with these figures. They would be spurred immediately into action, because nothing could be more critical than ensuring every worker has a job. And yet what is the government doing? The facts make my blood boil. First, instead of trying to slow the transition of Holden and Toyota out of Australia so we can manage the unemployment that will result, the government is trying to cut an additional $900 million out of the Automotive Transformation Scheme. Labor is holding up this funding cut in the Senate, but if it gets through the car industry will leave much more quickly than the 2017 date they have given us. This is the first key plank in the coalition's policy framework—get them out quicker, leading to an earlier collapse and a disorderly transition.

Second, the government has talked about a $30 million Skills and Training Program. Mr Deputy Speaker, did you know that this program is not money from government but money that Holden and Toyota have pledged to support these workers? Not a cent of that $30 million announcement is money from government.

Third, the government has talked of an Automotive Industry Structural Adjustment Program. I have looked into this one too. When you follow the links online to get information about what this program is, it takes you back to the Job Services Australia site. This $15 million is simply the additional cost the government expects to incur as a result of needing to support an additional 200,000 people and get them into alternative employment. This is not extra money; it is an expense that the Commonwealth would have incurred anyway. These are the only two programs the government has announced to support these workers.

I call on the government to do some very specific things that need to happen. I am not going to criticise and leave them without a solution. First, we need a regional jobs plan for the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Secondly, the government needs to involve investment in innovation to ensure we attract new companies and industries to areas like Hotham. Thirdly, we need specific support for workers. It is that basic—workers will need good advice on regional job markets in the medium term. I want to see every auto worker in my electorate with a realistic pathway to ongoing employment beyond their job disappearing. I want to see
real support for training and skills development, and I want to see that now, not when these people hit the back of a dole queue.

We may need to go further than this, but these are the bare minimums that any Australian citizen who has this government to thank for losing their livelihood should be entitled to. Until the proper support is provided, I will be standing in this parliament and fighting for local jobs in my community of Hotham. That is what my constituents elected me to do.

Page Electorate: Cancer

Mr HOGAN (Page) (19:44): The Cancer Council's Stars of Lismore Dance for Cancer event will launch in May of this year. Money is going to be raised for, obviously, a very important cause, Cancer Council's research for a cure. I would like to introduce you to the 12 dancing identities and their teachers who will be part of this night.

Firstly, we have Angela McCormick. Angela is the Southern Cross University Alumni Relations Coordinator. Her style will be ballroom, which I think is very fitting for Angela; she will look great. Her instructor is John Devoy of JRN Ballroom Dance Tuition. The form on Angela is:

It's not all strictly ballroom for this multi-tasking mum of three. The qualified lawyer also squeezes in a Masters of Business Administration degree, cooking, sewing, philanthropy—all while whipping up Cup Day winning garments.

Contestant No. 2, Garth Brown, is the Nurse Unit Manager of the Oncology (Cancer) Unit at St Vincent's Private Hospital. His style will be jazz. Angela Reid of Sharp Dance Lismore will be his instructor. The form on Garth is:

Although a hesitant contender, Garth has already attracted a huge following from St Vincent's hospital staff. Having managed the oncology unit for six years, he will need to swap his safe hands for jazz hands.

Contestant No. 3, Adam Berger, is the owner of the Goonellabah Tavern. His style will be ballet, so that will be interesting to watch. His instructor is Rhiannon Beardow of Karen Ireland Dance Centre. The form on Adam is:

This lovable publican manager is a footloose favourite at weddings, parties, anything.

Contestant No. 4 is Ashleigh Saunders. I have known Ashleigh for many, many years. She is a journalist at NBN News. Her style will be swing and her instructor is Alex Sexton of Swing On in. The form on Ashleigh is:

Ashleigh is no stranger to being in front of the camera and the local girl is bound to be a popular entrant. But is swing her thing?

Contestant No. 5 is Jason Mumford, City Centre manager. Jason's style will be pole—pole dancing. Lots of kudos goes to Jason for being happy to do that! The form on Jason is:

Someone had to have the chutzpah to brave the pole. The best-dressed man at the council will remain in pants at least for his pole dancing debut.

Contestant No. 6 is Mayor Jenny Dowell. Her style is tap and her instructor is Megan Phillips of INXS Dance Academy. Her form is:

Despite claiming she has 'two left feet' our high-profile mayor is the one to beat when it comes to attracting interest and donations via social media. A few weeks into a personalised fitness regime … Cr Dowell could really 'turn on the tap' in May. Look out.
Contestant No. 7 is Jessica Daley. Jessica works as a radio announcer at both ZZZ and 2LM. Her style is belly dancing. Her instructor is Danielle Sansom of Barefoot Gypsies. Her form is:

We don't know if Jessica can dance but we think she is capable of anything. Prior to her reincarnation as an announcer she worked in the air force as both a linguist, and as an airborne electronics analyst on AP-3C Orion aircraft. She toured Iraq, travelled 40 countries, speaks three languages fluently and is a keen runner. Surely belly dancing should be a breeze.

Contestant No. 8, Laleynya Ryan, is a police officer in Lismore. Her style is rock 'n' roll. Her instructor is Robert Weis of Summerland Rockers. Her form is:

If it's murder on the dancefloor, Lismore police believe Laleynya to be the number one suspect. As a mum of two and a police officer with 13 years experience, she reckons it would be a crime to pass up the opportunity.

Contestant No. 9, Leah White, is a journalist at The Northern Star. Her style is flamenco and her instructor is Serena Joy of Serena Joy Flamenco. Her form is:

What this pocket-rocket journo—

and she is a pocket-rocket journo, Mr Deputy Speaker—

lacks in height she makes up in the courage to let herself look like a goose. This former Lismore High School girl once made a lion jump over her head for a story, so who knows what she'll do on stage.

Contestant No. 10, Mel Carrero, is marketing manager at the Lismore Shopping Square. Her style is hip-hop—I think that will suit Mel—and her instructor is Lynda Rose of Just Dance. She is 'happy to turn dancing queen for a cure for cancer'.

Contestant No. 11, Robert Warren, is a solicitor at Somerville Laundry Lomax Solicitors, his style is 'modern' and his instructor is Roisin Francis of Jump Shake Dance. He is 'building quite a case for dancing' and finds 'any loophole' but 'will do anything for a good cause'.

Lastly, contestant No. 12 is Stephen Manley, manager of radiation therapy at Lismore Base Hospital. Latin is his style and Jacquie Connolly of Sendero Latino is his instructor. He believes in 'no pain, no gain'. (Time expired)

Petition: Asylum Seekers

Mirabel Foundation

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (19:49): First I want to draw attention to the issue of the detention of children of asylum seekers and then I wish to talk about cuts to a social service provider.

I present a petition by a group of my constituents. The group is called Grandmothers Against the Detention of Refugee Children. Their efforts garnered the signatures of 1,990 locals. I present this petition in light of the Forgotten children report by the Australian Human Rights Commission. The report, like the grandmothers behind this petition, called for the release of all children of asylum seekers from detention. No-one likes to see children in detention. The Labor Party supports every effort to continue the work that began under the former Labor government in moving children and their families out of detention. Numerous constituents have written to me to express their outrage at the way the government has treated Professor Triggs since the release of her report. I shared their concern and was pleased to see the censure in the Senate of Attorney-General George Brandis for his attitude.
As shadow immigration minister Richard Marles said at the time of the report's release:

…it is difficult reading for both sides of politics.

Hopefully, if and when Labor resume office, a similar report will not need to be written again. What is substantially different between the former Labor government—and we have a former immigration minister here in the chamber—and the current government is the time it takes to process claims. As Mr Marles, the member for Corio, said when the report was released:

… the fact that time limits have blown out under this Government is a reflection on the fact that through most of 2014 the Government basically shut up shop in terms of processing people in an act of petulance because they couldn't get their temporary protection visa regulation through the Senate.

The petition I am tabling tonight, and others like it, show those opposite that it is not just the Human Rights Commission that is concerned about the treatment of asylum seekers; it is not just academics and media commentators either; it is bread-and-butter Australians, some of the people who will vote this government out of office at the next election. I present the petition.

The petition read as follows—

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of Grandmothers Against Detention of Refugee Children, and their friends, draws to the attention of the House, the issue of children in detention.

We therefore ask the House to ensure that Australian law and practice conforms in every respect with

(a) the UNHCR Refugee Convention (1951) and


Conformity with these Conventions, to which Australia is a signatory, will ensure the release of refugee children out of detention and into suitable living conditions.

from 1,990 citizens

Petition received.

I want to turn to a remarkable backdown that the government made in question time, yesterday. It was a welcome back down. The Leader of the Opposition asked the government to commit to funding the Mirabel Foundation, whose entire federal support, which has continued for 16 years, had been cut. The Minister for Social Services, Mr Morrison, surprised us all when he announced a re-tendering process for those institutions and organisations whose funds had been cut. It is a newer, more gentle minister who is appearing on the public stage at the moment. The Mirabel Foundation assists children who have been orphaned or abandoned due to their parents' drug use. Mirabel currently provides vital support to more than 1,400 children living in Victoria and New South Wales. Yesterday, I wrote to Minister Morrison about Mirabel and the urgent need to restore its funding. I am pleased to report that I will be meeting him tomorrow to discuss this important issue.

In that meeting I will be raising another organisation with the minister. Earlier today I wrote to him urging him to do the same rethink about funding cuts to Reclink, an organisation that enhances the lives of disadvantaged people by providing them with sports programs. Beyond its help to thousands of individuals, Reclink saves the government money. Reclink gets people off the dole. Reclink participants are less likely to be involved in the services of mental health facilities or return to prison. This saves considerable public funds.
On 4 February this year, the Senate Select Committee into the Abbott Government's Budget Cuts released its first interim report. Amongst nine recommendations, the committee recommended that the government immediately reinstate Commonwealth funding for Reclink. I echo that recommendation and urge Mr Morrison to rethink the funding cuts to both Mirabel, looking after children orphaned or abandoned by their drug addicted parents, and Reclink, which takes people in Victoria and interstate who are completely disconnected from society and gets them reintegrated with society, sometimes just by the regular playing of football. I have seen it myself. There is a famous incident where a social worker was driving in an Aboriginal community in Central Australia. She drove past a pub where there had been a lot of heavy drinking going on. She wondered where all the people were who were normally in that hotel. They were all playing football in a Reclink program. This is a continuing pattern with their activities. I hope the minister will consider restoring assistance to both of these worthy organisations.

Ryan Electorate: Centenary of Anzac

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (19:54): I rise this evening to speak on an excellent initiative of the federal government: the Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program. This program has assisted schools and community groups to commemorate Australia's involvement in the First World War and pay tribute to the tremendous bravery and sacrifice of past and current service men and women. I was delighted that of the ten proposals submitted for funding in the Ryan electorate eight have so far been successful, and I would like to briefly mention these projects and their significance to the community.

One proposal that will be appreciated by generations to come was put forward by the Brisbane Boys' College Old Collegians association. A book titled The Fallen will document and honour the 97 former students who lost their lives in the first and second world wars and Afghanistan. A lot of work has already been done to make this book happen. During the past ten years, 11 BBC old boys attended the school every Tuesday to research, write and edit The Fallen. The book will be launched at the school on Anzac Day this year. As a result of this centenary grant the BBC community has been able to bring this commemorative project to fruition.

Kenmore South State School has also benefitted from the program through $4,500 to upgrade the school's Anzac memorial. The upgrade will noticeably improve the aesthetics of the memorial, and make it a much more useable area for Anzac Day services.

Ferny Grove State High School received $12,330 to install their Walk of Remembrance, a wonderful project to honour those who served in defence of our country. It involves the installation of a memorial plaque and wooden posts inscribed with the names of the First World War battles in which local regiments served. There are 89 students at Ferny Grove State High School whose parents are involved in active service, which makes the Walk of Remembrance a pertinent reminder of the sacrifice that is borne by this school community.

Just down the road, Ferny Grove State School received $20,000 for the creation of a memorial garden. The memorial garden, designed in the shape of a Flanders poppy, is a place where students can sit and reflect on the Anzac tradition, and its values of service, sacrifice, selflessness, mateship and bravery.
Toowong State School was successful in securing $4,700 to plant an Anzac garden of remembrance at the base of the school's flag pole with rosemary and Flanders poppies. A visual art piece will be installed in the middle of the new garden, to symbolize the Anzac values of courage, integrity, resilience, mateship, teamwork, duty and sacrifice. Members will recall my sign language speech about Toowong State School and its immersion Auslan program.

The Royal Australian Regiment Association received $16,000 to upgrade the Contemplation Building and install an eternal flame at their memorial walk at Gallipoli Barracks. The 700-metre Walk of Remembrance honours the fallen servicemen and women of the regiment, many of whom are buried overseas, and provides a place of solace and reflection for their families and friends. At the base of selected trees is a plaque bearing the name of each of the 695 fallen.

I was also pleased that Mates4Mates, an organisation that provides support for wounded and injured servicemen and women and their families, was successful in securing $3,250 for their 2014 WW1 Queenslander Challenge. Participants will embark on a 100-kilometre trek, whilst carrying a commemorative brick engraved with the name of a fallen Queensland World War I soldier. The trek begins in Woodford, and includes Mount Mee, Mount Glorious and Mount Coot-tha, and finishes at the Mates4Mates Recovery Centre. The commemorative bricks, 6,967 in total, will be used to construct a memorial at the Walton Bridge, to be officially opened on Remembrance Day 2018.

Finally, I am delighted to report that the Sherwood-Indooroopilly RSL Sub-branch has received $9,000 to assist in the production of their 'Schools' Anzac Centenary Research Project', a book examining the lives of 86 local soldiers who were killed in World War I. The research will be undertaken progressively over the next three years by schools in the local area and, once collated; the stories will be published both in hard copy and as an e-book, as well as on the websites of the participating schools. The Kenmore-Moggill RSL Sub-branch is also supporting similar projects at their own cost with local high schools in the area.

I would like to thank all the people involved in these groups, and the many other community groups who are working to bring these and others projects to fruition. I would also like to thank my community advisory group, the Australian government and the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC for the financial support they have provided for these projects.

House adjourned at 20:00

NOTICES

Mr Dutton: to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Migration Act 1958, and for other purposes.

Mr Porter: to present a Bill for an Act to change the law relating to royal succession and royal marriages, and for related purposes.

Mr Pyne: to move:
I move that the House adopt the following resolution:
(1) The House permits Members’ use of electronic devices in the Chamber, Federation Chamber and committees, provided that:

(a) use of any device avoids interference or distraction to other Members, either visually or audibly, and does not interfere with proceedings—in particular, phone calls are not permitted and devices should be operated in silent mode;

(b) devices are not used to record the proceedings (either by audio or visual means);

(c) communication on social media regarding private meetings of committees or in camera hearings will be considered a potential breach of privilege; and

(d) the use of devices is as unobtrusive as possible and is directly related to the Members’ parliamentary duties;

(2) The House notes that:

(a) communication via electronic devices, whether in the Chamber or not, is unlikely to be covered by parliamentary privilege; and

(b) reflections on the Chair by Members made on social media may be treated as matters of order just as any such reflections made inside or outside the Chamber.

Mr Abbott: to move:

That this House:

(1) note that the 8th of March will mark 12 months since Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 disappeared from radar over the South China Sea;

(2) extend its heartfelt sympathies to the family and friends of the 239 passengers and crew on board, including seven people who called Australia home, who have suffered a harrowing 12 months of uncertainty and sorrow;

(3) acknowledge the hard work and perseverance of all those working on the international search and recovery effort, led by Australia, to locate the missing aircraft; and

(4) note the work of Airservices Australia and their counterparts in Malaysia and Indonesia in leading global efforts to enhance aircraft flight tracking.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott) took the chair at 09:30.

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Chifley Electorate: Community Services

Nurses

Mr Husic (Chifley) (09:30): We all know the Abbott government needs help because whenever you see what they are doing you realise the mess that they are in and the help that they need is massive. What is sadder is that there are groups in our community that are paying the price as a result of the ineptitude of this government. I see it in my community all the time. There are a whole raft of community groups that are being affected as a result of funding decisions that are being made or funding decisions that will see funding taken away. I could use all my time in this constituency statement to list the number of projects and organisations who have seen their support massively cut back or stripped completely, but I just want to mention a few.

Anglicare runs a mobile playgroup that operates in Bidwill, Emerton, Shalvey and Mount Druitt. It provides our children with vital learning skills for working out how to relate to others. They do a massive job in an area of high need. Federal funding for them is going to dry up in June. Just before Christmas I heard that funding has been cut for the Philippine-Australian Community Services Inc, which has been around since 1989 helping in the settlement process for Philippine-Australians who have made a great contribution in our area.

Marist Youth Care's Youth Connections is a program that is helping youth in our area earn and learn rather than slip off the rails. Its funding has gone, slashed in the Abbott government's first budget. As a result of that, another group that had also been contracted through Marist Youth Care, Eagles Raps at Doonside, is facing a bleak future as well. They are an amazing group of people operating a learning facility out of an old fire station. They are helping youth in Doonside achieve basic school qualifications. When I visited them they were very worried about their future and are having to do fund raising as a result because they do not have the funding to support them, and that is just terrible.

The other thing that I wanted to make quick reference to today is the threat of cuts in another area, this time an assault on nursing. The nursing profession is fearful that the review of fair work laws will see a return of the diabolical Work Choices and an attack on penalty rates. I cannot believe that there may be any cut on penalty rates, which help sustain nurses on the weekend in terms of their jobs, and that they are seeing the potential of their penalty rates being cut. It is disgraceful that we could undervalue the effort of a group of people that does so much for us and is there providing support when we need it most. I note there is a national protest on the issue of penalty rates today, including a rally outside here. I want nurses to know that I and the constituents of Chifley certainly value their work and we want to ensure their penalty rates are protected.

Death Penalty

Mr Laundy (Reid) (09:33): I rise here this morning while, as we speak, two Australian citizens are being transported to a prison island to face a firing squad in Indonesia. After nearly 10 years in prison, Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran are being moved to the
prison island where their execution is planned to take place. There is no doubt in anyone's mind that Andrew and Myuran committed a serious and horrible crime that would have impacted on many lives. But it is also undeniable, if you listen to any of the testimonials from people who have grown to know them during their prison term, that Andrew and Myuran are reformed men. Over the last decade these two Australians have grown and are reportedly making a positive difference to the lives of their fellow prisoners and a real contribution to Indonesia.

It is unthinkable and unacceptable that these executions would go ahead while legal avenues are still being pursued by the pair's defence team. It is my understanding that even at this stage the pair's legal team is in the process of lodging an appeal in the state administrative court. I am only asking the Indonesian government to be consistent in their approach to the death penalty. Cases of Indonesian citizens on death row in other countries, including those on charges of drug related crimes, have attracted the full support of their government to obtain an act of mercy for their citizens. This is what I and the Australian people are asking the Indonesian government to display at this time: mercy and forgiveness. We are making this plea to President Widodo, as a forgiving man, to see the remarkable difference these young men have made to many Indonesians in prison, and we appeal, at this time, for him to show true leadership.

I am also aware that similar pleas have been coming from many Indonesians as well, as the attention this case has attracted causes Indonesians to discuss their government's stance on capital punishment. I note the Governor of Jakarta recently made a rare public statement on the matter. He rightly pointed out that the death penalty does not serve as a deterrent, and that if individuals are allowed to live it gives them the opportunity to become better people and perhaps assist others to do the same. This is obviously the case with Andrew and Myuran; I believe that, if clemency is granted, they have so much to give—to give back to Indonesian society and to help other criminals to reform and to become better people. As outlined in the Mercy Campaign for Andrew and Myuran, their reformation is a testament to the Indonesian penal system, which has allowed this process of rehabilitation. Their story is known both in Indonesia and around the world. They serve as role models for prisoners, as an example that there is hope for individuals to turn their lives around.

I know that both the Prime Minister and the foreign minister have been making the strongest representations to their counterparts on this case, and I thank them for that. The government has and will continue to do everything possible to persuade Indonesia to change course and agree to a permanent stay of execution. I sincerely hope that we will see a show of mercy from President Widodo and a permanent stay of execution for Andrew and Myuran, so that they can continue to give back to Indonesia as reformed men.

Domestic Violence

Mr HAYES (Fowler—Chief Opposition Whip) (09:36): Earlier this week, together with a number of other parliamentarians, I attended the Parliamentarians against Family Violence event. We heard from 2015 Australian of the Year and one of the most powerful advocates against family violence, Rosie Batty, as well from Jennifer Orr, a survivor of family violence, and Paul Linossier, the CEO of Our Watch. They talked about the persistent attitudes within our society which allow violence to continue, as well as the shortcomings in our responses to this most serious issue. The grim reality is that one in three women will experience violence
in their lifetime, and one in five women will experience violence of a sexual nature. Already this year, 15 women have been killed by a partner or former partner. That takes our national average up to two deaths per week.

Our three insightful and very inspiring guest speakers last Monday night touched on a number of different areas where change must happen in order to give victims the support that they so desperately need. They identified the lack of safe and affordable accommodation as one of the greatest obstacles preventing women from leaving dangerous situations. At the moment, 423 people on average are being turned away from homeless shelters every day, and many of them are women escaping a violent situation. The 2008 white paper on homelessness—and this is supported by other studies—certainly shows a very clear link between homelessness and domestic violence. In fact, escaping family violence is the major reason for people seeking to access services for the homeless. Thirty-four per cent of people seeking assistance from services in 2012 had experienced domestic or family violence. The white paper also showed—and I think we would all be familiar with this—that 78 per cent of those victims were women. It is therefore concerning that organisations such as Bonnie Support Services in my electorate, which provides support and transitional housing for women escaping domestic and family violence, have faced significant funding cuts. Equally concerning is the fact that this government has also cut $42 million from the community and legal aid services which help victims of family violence.

Family violence needs to be elevated in our national conversation. We need to look at a number of areas where we might be failing the victims, and set up a national conversation to deal with this truly epidemic problem in our society. This is a blight on our nation and one we must address.

**Mallee Electorate: Sport**

**Mr BROAD (Mallee) (09:39):** During the election campaign, the political commentator Antony Green referred to the electorate of Mallee. He said, 'In the electorate of Mallee, people love the National Party and football'. Mr Deputy Speaker, I am not sure that they really love the National Party that much, but what they do love is football. As we come to the start of the season across the Mallee with seven leagues—the Wimmera Football League, the Mallee Football League, the Horsham District Football League, the Central Murray Football League, the Sunraysia Football and Netball League, the Millewa Football League and the North Central Football League—we think about the value that football has for community.

A recent study by Latrobe University said that, for every $1 spent in a club, there is at least $4.40 returned in social value. What we see is the role of community. When I was elected I said, 'We need to have a strategic plan.' Often we are not strategic in this place as members of parliament. I said, 'We should build wealth by building capacity.' So, if you invest in people and give them skills, and they have an entrepreneurial spirit, that translates to building wealth. But we should also build community by building interaction. We want our young Australians to get away from the Wii, the Nintendo and the television and to get out and play some sport. In fact, we want them to be more active more often.

The role of our football clubs and our netball clubs is instrumental to having a strong country community. In fact, when they are not able to field a team it is sort of the death knell of a community. We are now seeing the slightly overweight 'coulda been champions' pulling on their boots to keep the club alive by playing in the reserves team, and we see people trying
to eat a pie and not spill it on themselves—and it is a real classic skill to be able to do that—and we see all the blokes standing around discussing when it is going to rain in the Mallee.

An honourable member: Never!

Mr BROAD: No, this year is the year for a very good season—I hope. I just want to pay testimony to all these local people and the clubs—the people who cook the schnitzel and the chips on Thursday night after training, the people who mow the field and the people who collect the rubbish. Country footy and country netball are so instrumental to our communities. May we have a great season this year with football and netball. May it build our communities. May Collingwood finish last at the end of the year and may the Western Bulldogs finally take home the flag this year. Here is hoping for both a good season with the rainfall across the Mallee and Wimmera and a great interaction of community as we pull together our football and netball clubs. Let us have a great year in the Mallee.

Indi Electorate: International Women's Day

Ms McGOWAN (Indi) (09:42): 'Make it happen' is the 2015 theme of International Women's Day on 8 March. All around my electorate there are many groups and organisations highlighting the achievements of women and furthering the cause of women's equality in society. The Country Fire Authority's District 24, based in Wodonga, are doing their bit to make it happen by organising a women's training and networking event celebrating IWD. Two active firefighters will be honoured by the CFA at this event. These are Marelle Whitaker, a member of the Chiltern Fire Brigade and Tracey McVea, a member of the Beechworth Urban Fire Brigade. A special mention goes to Kimberley Taylor who is the CFA volunteerism coordinator for District 24. She is the driving force behind bringing people together to celebrate International Women's Day. Under Kimberley's watch, CFA districts in Indi have exceeded their objective of 35 per cent of new members being female. with 91 new female members recruited this year. That is 66 per cent of new members. Well done, Kimberley.

The Disability Advocacy and Information Service, DAIS, is hosting a breakfast in Wangaratta with a theme of 'Empowering women with disabilities through access, choice and respect'. The work of DAIS celebrates the achievements and contribution of women with disabilities. These are women like 22-year old Tegan Allen, an ex-Wangaratta High School student and now Everton resident, who is an amazing photographer and happens to be vision impaired. Tegan had to push hard to be allowed into photography classes as there were access issues around concerns with safety in the darkroom. These were resolved and Tegan graduated with honours from all her classes. The IWD breakfast kicks off a series of events DAIS is hosting to advocate for women with disabilities in rural areas who still face significant barriers in access and equity and around violence.

I would like to conclude by mentioning Arts Rutherglen. They celebrate their 10th anniversary of IWD events with a dinner featuring Lois Peeler, educator and member of the Indigenous group, the Sapphires. This event is made possible through the dedication and passion of women like Genevieve O'Reilly who is a founding member of IWD for Arts Rutherglen and who has been leading IWD celebrations for the last seven years.

Congratulations to all women and men in Indi who this year are making it happen for International Women's Day. On 8 March, get involved in existing events. Gather some friends
together for a morning tea or a meal or even a phone call to celebrate the wonderful women in your life, your family, your community and your business.

**Ryan Electorate: VIEW Club**

*Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (09:45):* I rise today to speak about an organisation in my electorate, and indeed throughout Australia, which is carrying out truly valuable work in supporting the educational needs of disadvantaged children. The VIEW Club works in partnership with the Smith Family to assist disadvantaged children and their families through sponsorship and support. VIEW stands for Voice, Interests and Education of Women. Their purpose is to empower and support women while raising awareness of the work of the Smith Family.

The club was formed in 1960 by the Smith Family to provide a service for women and the community. For the past 55 years they have focused on helping women to embrace new opportunities and aspire to top levels in business, politics and the community. The VIEW Club has more than 18,000 members in 350 clubs throughout Australia. These members volunteer more than 50,000 hours of their time annually to help support young people not only through sponsorships and fundraising but also by reading with children, helping with school work, donating school stationary packs, making library bags and mentoring disadvantaged students.

Currently, the VIEW Club sponsors more than 1,100 Learning for Life students nationally. They help to provide these young people with educational support to ensure they have the best opportunity to break the cycle of disadvantage. Learning for Life assists children from disadvantaged backgrounds through their entire education, from primary school through to high school and university. Their sponsors provide financial support for books, uniforms and excursions, and they are also given access to a range of learning support and mentoring activities. The program also assists the families of these children by not only educating them on how to build supportive learning environments but also by giving them opportunities to access education themselves.

Stephanie Heath, a former staff member and constituent of mine, was a beneficiary of the Smith Family program. She was master of ceremonies at last year's inaugural VIEW Club International Women's Day event. Her strong work ethic and commitment to her goals are an example of the success by VIEW Club in empowering young women to achieve. This year, I am delighted to be chairing the panel at the VIEW Club's second International Women's Day event on Saturday. This is an excellent opportunity to acknowledge the work of VIEW while also hearing from inspiring women in our community.

Groups like the VIEW Club often go unnoticed in our community, and this is why it is so important to highlight the work that they do. Their volunteers work tirelessly to promote and support the work of the Smith Family and give children from disadvantaged backgrounds a chance to achieve their dreams. I want to thank the VIEW Club and acknowledge all the work they do in supporting these children to ensure they reach their full potential.

**McEwen Electorate: Kilmore Country Music Festival**

*Mr MITCHELL (McEwen—Second Deputy Speaker) (09:47):* Last Sunday, I attended the Kilmore Country Music Festival. This year's festival was certainly a success with amazing
country music performances, especially from two local acts: Tim Farren and Kaitlyn Thomas, who is only 14 years of age. There was a large turnout to the event with 400 people taking part in the festivities. The majority of attendees travelled from far and wide from places such as Berrigan in New South Wales, Seapray, Gippsland and Blairgowrie to name a few. All visitors came to relish the hospitality of our community and to enjoy some great entertainment.

A further bow to the tie for the festival was the excellent local fundraising opportunities made possible with the Kilmore football club running the bar; the local Little Athletics taking the reins of the canteen; the Wandong Primary School holding a cake stall and face painting stand; the Wallan Scouts hosting a barbeque; and the local SES looking after car parking. The festival raffle proceeds went to the Children First Foundation in Kilmore East.

The festival also hosts a ute competition, with categories such as best import, best 4x4, best street ute, best artwork ute and people's choice. It was a pleasure to participate in the competition as a judge, and I thoroughly enjoyed looking at each of the entries and having a great chat to everyone about their ‘U beauts’. I wish to commend the organisers for putting on such a successful local annual event: Helen Stewart; Gay and Steven George; Taryn Kneebone; We Cole; and Lorraine Pointer. I have to say that, even if you do not like country music—it might not necessarily be your thing—the country music festival certainly has something for everyone.

I also want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to a man who is a beacon of community spirit, a person who has over the past 33 years put his community first and foremost—Mr Allan Penaluna. Since 1972, when Allan started as a junior cadet with the St John Ambulance Brigade at Broadmeadows, Allan has always given his time to volunteer for the community in the best way he knows how. In 1988 he became a paramedic and in 1996 qualified as a mobile intensive care officer. Allan joined the SES in 1982 and spent 33 years in service leadership positions, including 7½ years as controller and nearly 45 years road accident rescue experience both with St John Ambulance and VICSES. He is Senior Instructor in all rescue disciplines. He developed rescue operational procedures, specifically for Road Rescue

Allan has received many hard-earned awards and commendations including the Emergency Services Medal, Service Medal of the Order of St John, the VICSES Service Medal and Ambulance Service Victoria Long Service Medal. His service has included the 1983 Ash Wednesday fires, the 2009 Black Saturday fires, the Craigieburn fires of 2013 and 33 years as a member of road accident rescue teams. He was awarded a VICSES Commendation for Service for his actions during multiple car accidents that occurred on two occasions on the Hume Highway.

I first met Allan in 1996 as part of CADAC and the introduction of Craigieburn CERT training. Allan has a very focused approach to training and lifesaving first aid and he ensured that we also followed that path. If Allan were to receive the Hume City resident of the month I think it would be a fitting acknowledgement of a person who, when it comes to community spirit, leads by example.

**Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month**

Mr HOWARTH (Petrie) (09:50): I rise to thank the thousands of people around Australia who last month joined the fight against ovarian cancer. February was Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month
Awareness Month, an initiative run by Ovarian Cancer Australia to highlight the symptoms of ovarian cancer, to honour the women who have died from the disease—approximately 1,000 per year—and also to raise funds for the organisation's programs.

Ovarian cancer has one of the lowest survival rates of any women's cancer. Seventy-five per cent of women are diagnosed at an advanced stage, with no early test available, and only 43 out of every 100 women diagnosed are still alive five years later. But, as more and more people get involved in fundraising and increasing awareness, we get closer to changing this narrative.

Just last weekend, I joined hundreds of locals at the Legs for Eggs Walk in Redcliffe. This was organised by Karen Bull. The walk went from Suttons Beach to Scott's Point and back and there was a BBQ afterwards. It was a fantastic day. I had the chance to meet Karen Bull and her daughter last Friday at a lunch at the Belvedere Hotel, and I would like to thank her and the Our Village Foundation for organising this walk. Approximately 260 people participated and $7½ thousand was raised for ovarian cancer. Karen was one of the few women lucky enough to be diagnosed early, but she went through quite an ordeal in the process. Karen wanted me to stress that the average person can do amazing things. They can raise money and raise awareness, and every little bit can help save lives.

Last month I joined my colleagues, including the Prime Minister, at the Teal Ribbon Day Breakfast here in Parliament House to hear representatives from Ovarian Cancer Australia speak about their 25/25 Vision. The 25/25 Vision aims to increase the survival rate of women from 43 per cent to 54 per cent by 2025. Part of that vision is to raise awareness. Too many women are diagnosed at an advanced stage, often because they are not sure what to look out for. So what can women look for? They can look for abdominal or pelvic pain; increased abdominal size or persistent abdominal bloating; needing to urinate often or urgently; for those in relationships, uncomfortable or painful sexual intercourse; and feeling full after eating a small amount.

If women can look out for these symptoms, the five-year rate will increase and we will see that 25/25 Vision achieved and it will make a difference in the lives of thousands of women.

Infrastructure

Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (09:54): I rise today to speak about cities. The book City Limits, by Jane-Frances Kennedy and Paul Donegan, was launched this week, and it highlights some of the issues being faced in the electorate of Lalor. Lalor is one of the fastest growing communities in the country, and we have particular issues. This book captures those issues and shines a light on them, and I think it worth everyone in this parliament having a read of this book and taking on some of the lessons that it has for us.

The book identifies that more than 50 per cent of people are moving to suburbs over 20 kilometres from the CBDs in our country. This has an impact on employment and it certainly has an impact on congestion in my electorate. It also highlights the emerging drive-in drive-out suburbs that we are developing, which is having a huge impact on the balance of family life for people living in Lalor. They are moving to suburbs like Point Cook, Tarneit, Manor Lakes and Truganina. Research shows that over 50 per cent of jobs growth is occurring less than 10 kilometres from the CBD. So we are building suburbs more than 20 kilometres away and the jobs are occurring in the city. This causes financial disadvantage. The book highlights
that if you work within 10 kilometres of the CBD the average income is $77,000, but if you
are working 20 kilometres or more from the CBD it drops to $56,000 a year, highlighting a
growing problem with inequity across our cities.

We need all levels of government to work on this problem together because cities are
shaped by the decisions that federal governments make—or do not make—and by the way all
levels of government work together. Under Labor, we understood this. We had RDAF
funding major infrastructure projects in regions. We had Labor working with state and local
governments, delivering much needed infrastructure in growth corridors. In government,
Labor doubled the roads budget and built 7,500 kilometres worth of roads. When Labor came
to power, Australia was ranked 20th in the OECD for infrastructure investment. We took
Australia to first in infrastructure development. We did this because we understood that
federal government action and inaction impacts on the development of our cities, and
therefore on the quality of the life of our people.

But the Abbott government has ignored the needs of growth corridors in its first 18 months
in government. They have abolished the Major Cities Unit. They have attempted to reduce the
independence of Infrastructure Australia. They have cancelled all federal investment in urban
public transport, including the Melbourne Metro, impacting directly on the people of Lalor.
This government does not have a minister responsible for cities. It has no policy, it has no
plan for sustainable, livable cities. I think the book highlights the issues that are being faced
not just in my electorate but across our cities and across the country. I call on the government
to put their heads down and get to work on it. (Time expired)

Moore Electorate: Coastal Pathway

Mr GOODENOUGH (Moore) (09:57): There is a missing link of approximately five
kilometres in the north metropolitan coastal pathway network between the suburbs of Burns
Beach and Mindarie, which, when eventually constructed, will link the entire coastline of
Moore with the neighbouring electorates of Stirling and Curtin to the south. The resulting
dual use coastal pathway will provide a transport link of some 40 kilometres, improving
recreational and sporting amenity for both pedestrians and cyclists, with stunning views of the
Perth coastline. I have been campaigning for this connection since 2007. As a local
government councillor at the City of Wanneroo, I presented a petition with 650 signatures in
support of connecting Burns Beach with Mindarie Marina.

Similarly, at the southern end, the City of Joondalup received a petition of more than 2,500
signatories supporting the initiative. In the years since, there has been increasing demand for
the shared path as a result of population growth in the area. I acknowledge the contribution of
the cities of Wanneroo and Joondalup, as well as the local state member for Ocean Reef, the
Hon. Albert Jacob MLA, in actively being involved in the planning processes over many
years. However, planning red tape and bureaucratic process continue to present obstacles
against community expectations by drawing out the time frame for delivery of projects of
obvious merit such as this. There are a number of complex technical issues which still require
all levels of government—local, state and federal—to resolve them cooperatively.

Firstly, the proposed route crosses a number of jurisdictional boundaries, raising the
question of amalgamating the parks and recreation parcels of land for creation of a regional
park and determining responsibility for the ongoing management of the area. Secondly, in
relation to the alignment of the path, there exists a strong consensus within the community
that the preferred route should be as close to the coast as possible. The preference for proximity to the coast must be balanced against the environmental value of the dunes, the dynamic nature of the coastline and the steeply undulating topography.

Construction of the pathway near the coastal area is likely to involve significant costs. Thirdly, from a federal perspective, confirmation of the presence of the graceful sun moth requires any development proposals to comply with the requirements of the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. To advance this project, all levels of government—local, state and federal—have a role to play in working cooperatively together to deliver this landmark recreational project for the community. *(Time expired)*

**Lilley Electorate: Australia Day Awards**

Mr SWAN (Lilley) *(10:00)*: Across our country there are millions of selfless people who quietly go about supporting their communities through volunteering in a wide range of activities. This year, we were fortunate to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Lilley Australia Day Awards. I think they are probably the longest running awards in the parliament. Once again it was my pleasure and privilege to award many people across our community for their selfless volunteering within our community. One in particular stood out: Sybil Vicary, who is 91 years of age. She dedicates an enormous amount of time to the Burnie Brae Centre where they work with elderly people, where they have a food bank, where they provide help to people in home in terms of construction and assistance to the elderly. A rich source of volunteers in our community work around Burnie Brae, and of course Sybil is pre-eminent amongst that group.

Peter McNamara from the Sandgate RSL also stood out. Peter has been in the Sandgate RSL since 1986 and has made an outstanding contribution not just to the RSL but also to many other organisations. In particular, he has been a tireless advocate for the veterans' community, and he has spent so much of his own time assisting those who require his help. Sandgate RSL is itself more broadly involved in the community, providing support for local schools, sporting groups and senior citizens and it is filled with many other dedicated volunteers like Peter.

This year we had a 70-year age gap between the oldest volunteer at 91 and Michael Kernovske, who, at 21 years of age, also received a Lilley Australia Day Award. He was the youngest recipient that we have had in a number of years and he was rewarded for his efforts with the Nundah Sharks Swimming Club. The Nundah Sharks was the first amateur swimming club in Brisbane and is one of the strongest in our area, with over 700 members from babies right through to adults.

Ted Carroll in Nundah, Victoria Freeman in Zillmere, Cliff Howard in Brighton and Gwen Kelso at Aspley are the quiet achievers of our community who do not ask for recognition. In fact, if you talk to them they will probably say they would rather not receive an award but, when they receive that award, they receive it on behalf of all of the other people in their organisations who contribute their time. They do that in the generosity of acknowledging the importance of volunteers in our community—people like Garth Liddell, Grace Ward, Pat Malcolm, Peter Ham, Steve McMahon, Maureen Abberton, Bradley St Ledger, Marnie Gray, Gwen Kelso, May Bruton, Jean Rodgers, Carmel Gould, Brendan Ryan, Marie Ellsworth, Esme Mew, Deanna Mace, Jan Goodwin, Les Wynn, Peter Cairnes, Ray Murrell, Victoria
Mr WILSON (O'Connor) (10:03): Like the member for Lilley, I rise to commend some of the citizens from my electorate who received Australia Day Awards. I am not going to name quite as many as the member for Lilley, but I do have three wonderful citizens who were awarded a medal of the Order of Australia. Australia Day is not only an opportunity to welcome new citizens but also a chance for the community and the nation to commend the actions of outstanding Australians. In my electorate of O'Connor, I was proud to see three very worthy citizens awarded a medal of the Order of Australia. The purpose of the Order of Australia is to recognise, by national honour, those who have made outstanding contributions that benefit their communities and ultimately our country. The second purpose of the Order of Australia is that it serves to define; encourage and reinforce community standards, national aspirations and ideals by acknowledging actions and achievements and thereby identify role models at all levels and in all spheres of the community. In Esperance, Pastor Sonny Graham was awarded the OAM for his lifetime of service both to the Indigenous communities and the wider community of Western Australia. Sonny credits his success to the mission where he grew up. After completing his tertiary studies he returned to Norseman as the mission’s superintendent. He then began a career in education that extended from the Pilbara to the south coast, working as a linguistics consultant, Aboriginal liaison officer and more. As a Ngadju elder, Sonny has been rebuilding his people's language. He also played a major part in their native title determination which was recognised last year.

Keith Bradby from Albany was awarded his OAM for service to conservation and the environment. In 2002 Keith helped found the Gondwana Link program, a program to protect and restore biodiverse bushland in the South West of Western Australia. Gondwana Link is a world-recognised initiative that has led to changes throughout Australia and around the world. Keith has been actively involved in conservation, biodiversity and community development for nearly four decades. He has held positions in numerous other environmental organisations, such as the Fitzgerald River National Park Association, the Ravensthorpe Land Conservation District Committee and the Western Australian Soil and Land Conservation Council.

Patrick Scallan from Greenbushes has followed in the footsteps of his father, also an Order of Australia medal recipient. Pat received his nomination in recognition of 20 years of service to the Greenbushes community. Pat has had a hand in shaping nearly every aspect of the Greenbushes community: if he was not the president of the Bridgetown-Greenbushes Junior Hockey Club, he was the chairman of the Bridgetown Eco Cultural Discovery Centre, or the vice-president of the Greenbushes Ratepayers and Residents Association—to name just a few of the many hats that Pat has worn in his lifetime. I have had the pleasure of dealing with Pat in his capacity as the secretary of the Greenbushes RSL Sub Branch when I attended the Vietnam Veterans Day celebration last year. Originally from Rhodesia, I think Pat hit the nail on the head when he said: 'It does not matter where you come from, your background, your race, your creed. If you work hard and get stuck in, you are an Aussie.'

Congratulations to all three gentlemen on being recognised with an Order of Australia. (Time expired)
Chifley Electorate: Chinese New Year

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (10:06): At the end of the Chinese New Year festival I want to put a big 'thank you'—an enormous xie xie!—out there to all in my community for their efforts over this wonderful festival period. With over 27,000 people in my electorate identifying as being of Chinese descent, Chinese New Year is by far the largest event celebrated in my community. Starting off the Box Hill festival was the dusk-to-dawn ceremony, two weeks ago, where between 70,000 and 100,000 people trooped through downtown Box Hill to enjoy the fireworks, the lion dancers, the stalls, the community atmosphere, and the enormous number of cultural events performed on the stage—it was an outstanding event. So I would like to say an enormous thank you and congratulations yet again to the hardworking team of the Asian Business Association of Whitehorse. Their dedication to this festival—its growth, its strength and its multicultural embrace of all the community—is amazing. Particularly to my good friends Vincent Liu, Andrew Yu and Frankie To: an enormous thank you for all your hard work, not just over this one day—which starts at three in the morning and ends at about 11 the next day; it is an amazing effort—but thank you for all you do for our community. Money raised during the event is also donated to charity.

In between festival events, the Chinese seniors of Waverley, the Chinese seniors of Box Hill, the Monash Chinese Friendship Association, the Chinese Women's Association, the Chinese Professional & Business Association, and many more in my community have celebrated and hosted wonderful events. Sadly, this year I did not get to as many as I would normally have done, as it was over the two weeks of sitting. But then we ended this festival season, down at Kingsway in Glen Waverley, again with an enormous celebration of multiculturalism—an enormous celebration of everything that is Chinese and is great about my community, with the Glen Waverley Chinese Lantern Festival. Again, an enormous congratulations and thank you to the Monash Chinese Events Organising Committee, and for the tireless work of Vincent Chow to make this event happen.

A big thank you to both city councils—Whitehorse and Monash—for the hard work they put in to supporting these events. Also to Victoria Police, who put an enormous amount of effort into making sure these events are happy and safe festivals—which they are. The wonderful thing about these events is that it is not just the Chinese community who are there in force. Indeed, the event in Glen Waverley opened with Chinese dancers, followed by Irish dancers. It was a wonderful embrace of what is great about our community. As always, the amazing Chinese lion dancers of Glen Waverley were breathtaking. If anybody can go and a look at the video of the work those guys do above the poles, in their lion outfit—it is just a sight to behold. It is a wonderful celebration of all that is good about the diversity of our community. Thanks to all those involved.

Riverina Electorate: St Vincent's Private Community Hospital

Mr McCormack (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (10:09): I was delighted to help the federal health minister Sussan Ley turn the first sod of soil to begin work on Griffith's St Vincent's Private Community Hospital, marking the beginning of construction of a really exciting and much-needed project. The new $20 million private hospital will include 20 overnight beds, 20 day beds and two new operating theatres. This vital piece of infrastructure, which has been talked about for more than a decade, will
help transform access to vital health services for families in the western Riverina. This will ensure the community receives the most appropriate care earlier and builds on the coalition government's ongoing commitment to improving the delivery of health services to regional and rural communities. Coupled with the educational networks now operating at the base hospital next door, the community hospital will complement a fantastic local health precinct. The Murrumbidgee Clinical Teaching and Learning Centre will be co-located with the new private hospital, presenting opportunities to train doctors and health professionals locally.

The federal government has committed $11.4 million to the project, and $1.2 million has been tipped in thanks to a fundraising drive by this wonderful local community. It follows a $1 million upgrade to the maternity wing at the public hospital, and an announcement on Sunday by the member for Murrumbidgee, Adrian Piccoli, and the New South Wales coalition health minister, Jillian Skinner, of a new $4 million ambulance station for Griffith. So things are happening in Griffith on the health front. As the federal health minister, Sussan Ley, said:

We have a simple vision for health nationally. It is to stop people getting sick—preventative health is vital as we move into the next generation, but of course, importantly, once they are sick to have been cared for in a first class setting. Put simply, with rural and regional health my vision is to close the gap.

I acknowledge the previous government promised this $11.4 million for the Griffith community hospital, but our government is delivering on that promise. Our government, along with the local community, is finding the money to fund it.

I took part in the fun run—the fun run committee was chaired by Councillor Anne Napoli—from the city to Lake Wyangan to also help raise funds. Another $200,000 has been tipped in from the fun runs since 2012 to also help this wonderful community project. As I said, $1.2 million was raised through community fundraising. This delighted the Mayor John Dal Broi, who said it was a proud day for the city and he rightly acknowledged the Spagnolo and Casella families for helping to make it a reality.

The crowd also heard from St Vincent's Health Australia board chairman Paul Robertson. St Vincent's contribution has been enormous. John Dal Broi said the council has been very proactive in making the project a reality—and indeed it has. Bishop Gerard Hanna conducted a blessing ceremony and said a prayer before the first sod was turned. It was a wonderful day, and it is a wonderful start for a wonderful vision and project for Griffith.

Grayndler Electorate: Multiculturalism

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (10:13): In the current global political atmosphere, we hear a lot about ethnic and religious tension. That, of course, is understandable. Recent incidents here and overseas have had the effect of making some people feel uncomfortable. There are, indeed, a few lunatics in our midst who want to promote division and disharmony—but I reject such sentiments. Today I want to highlight the positive side to the ethnic and cultural development that has underpinned the development of our great Australian society.

I count myself very lucky to live in the inner west of Sydney, a multicultural heartland where neighbours live side by side in harmony. What I see are good people who care about each other and their communities, people with goodwill raising their families and living their lives in peace. I see people who are prepared to maintain the vibrant cultures from their birth lands but mesh them with Australian values of freedom and the fair go to create a kind of
cultural alloy that is as strong as it is interesting. I see beauty in people's faces, whatever their colour, and music in their voices, whatever their language.

To go into a local school in my electorate is to see the success of modern multiculturalism. To have my son return home from school with a few words of Chinese or Vietnamese or Arabic or Greek benefits not just him but also the whole the community. There is nothing unusual about my electorate. There are electorates right around the country that are just like that. Most people in the community take the same view. The message is simple: we should stiffen our spines as we resist hatred. Diversity is strength; tolerance is natural. We are all part of the same human family.

I will be enjoying that diversity in coming weeks. Just a couple of weeks ago I celebrated the Lunar New Year in Ashfield, which has a large Chinese and Vietnamese community. It was a fantastic celebration, with the local kids from Ashfield Public School, whatever their ethnic background, participating in a Chinese song and dance routine in Mandarin. In a couple of weeks time I will be at the Bairro Portugues celebration of the Portuguese community, which is based in Australia at Petersham—a 'little Portugal'—in my electorate. It is a street celebration that grows each and every year. The Ashfield Carnival of Cultures will be on 22 March. This is the 18th year that it will be held. More than 20,000 people attend that celebration. Diversity is our strength. We must ensure that we protect it, defend it and promote it.

**Durack Electorate: Granny Glasgow Education and Care**

**Ms PRICE (Durack) (10:16):** On 19 February I joined in a triple celebration in Carnarvon in the Gascoyne region of Durack when I went to the highly regarded Granny Glasgow Education and Care centre. All up, the Australian government has invested more than an $850,000 in this centre, which is Carnarvon's only long day care centre. Child care is a major issue in Durack, especially in Carnarvon, with stories of families leaving town or not coming to town to take up work simply because they cannot get appropriate child care for their children. To illustrate the point, the nearest childcare service is in Exmouth, 370 kilometres away, or Northampton, 420 kilometres away. I was thrilled when Chris Shannen of Gascoyne Construction told me that the Granny Glasgow extension works were on time and on budget. We will see the number of child care places expand, with an extra 18 taking the total up to 79, due to the recent federal government grant of $420,000. It will see staff numbers—which means local employment, and that is good news—expand from 19 to 25.

The second celebration was for Gwen Gibson, who retired on the day of my visit. A foundation staff member, she has cared for families and children of Carnarvon for more than 27 years in the same centre. That is dedication for you. Flanked by Granny Glasgow, chair of the management committee, Sue Jordan, and the director, Fawn Law-Davis, who has also been at the centre of some 26 years, which is very impressive, I presented Gwen with the commemorative certificate—such a small token for an incredible dedication. The warmest congratulations go to Gwen, who is a much-loved carer of Carnarvon.

Thirdly, the joy to be able to undertake qualifications, with around $30,000 from the federal government, was palpable amongst the staff that I spoke to. The director, Fawn Law-Davis, has completed her bachelor, and all other staff members are now undertaking a form of study ranging from bachelor, certificate III, diploma or online courses. I was told it was making a huge difference and that the staff members were really enjoying their education.
They are learning so much. Of course, it is imperative that the funding continues through to the next year and beyond to enable team members to complete their qualifications.

It is very clear to me that the Granny Glasgow early learning centre is a much-loved community resource and is vital for parents who need quality day care. The extensions will make this centre an even more enjoyable place for children to learn and grow. A vigorous supporter of local business, I was delighted that Gascoyne Constructions was awarded the contract for the extensions. It is a local business employing local workers, and that brings economic benefits to the whole community in Gascoyne more broadly. I will be very pleased to return next year to see the finished product. 

(Time expired)

Greenway Electorate: Ms Maureen Mackey

Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (10:19): We often have the opportunity as members in this place to rise and pay tribute to outstanding individuals in our communities who do so much—all out of goodness—for their local areas, and who lend their talents for free. And that is why there is such a void when they are no longer with us. It is for that reason I wish to mention the passing of Maureen Mackey on 10 February. How saddened we are to lose Maureen, who was the longtime treasurer of the Blacktown Workers Club. Being Treasurer of the Blacktown Workers Club is no mean feat. The club has substantial assets, significant cash, a large workforce and is probably one of the single biggest employers in Blacktown. Maureen was a role model to all around her. She was frank and fearless in her opinions, but she was also one of the most gentle and experienced people I have ever met. When we bumped into each other, she would always ask me about my family. She would greet me with a gentle kiss, and I know that it was exactly the same as the way that she would treat ordinary members of the club who she would see on a regular basis. She was also a driving force behind the Blacktown Workers Club, not only its expansion but also its drive to be more reflective of the changing demographics of Blacktown—reaching out to Filipino, Indian and Chinese communities to become members and to become active in the club lifestyle and everything that it had to offer; everything from sporting to recreation to dining. I really commend her for that.

Being treasurer of the club is no mean feat. I think that Maureen was a person of tremendous honesty and integrity, as diligent as the day was long. She was passionate about her club and her community. She was one of the loveliest people you could ever meet. It was no surprise that she was consistently re-elected as a director of the Blacktown Workers Club for as long as I can remember. As the public eulogy from the Blacktown Workers Club reads, Maureen was known for her avid participation in indoor and outdoor bowls; she served on many sporting committees; and she was a member of Blacktown Council's sister cities committee. She loved her bingo, she loved the weekly Saturday shows with the champagne, and she had a wonderful passion for Blacktown, and for the Blacktown Workers Club and all its staff. She was particularly noteworthy for her participation in the clubs grants process, and that just highlighted her commitment to the community. I send my deepest condolences to Maureen's family; to Kay Kelly, President; to Neale Vaughan, General Manager; and to the NSW clubs sector, all the board and management, and all the staff. Maureen Mackey: may you rest in peace.

East West Link

Mr WOOD (La Trobe) (10:22): I rise to put the facts on the table as to why we need the East West Link to be built in Melbourne. First of all, there will be 18 kilometres of freeway. It
will remove the 23 sets of traffic lights which are currently there and—importantly—create 7,000 jobs. It will also take pressure off the Monash Freeway, which is otherwise known as the Monash car park! Recently, my federal colleagues, Alan Tudge, Tony Smith, and Michael Sukkar, and I launched the Dan Andrews Build the Link campaign. For those in Melbourne who want to get involved, they can go and sign the petition on why we need the East West Link to built in Melbourne. They need to go to buildthelink.com.au or they can visit my website: jasonwood.com.au.

Bill Shorten was a strong supporter of the East West Link at one stage. He signed a letter dated 15 July 2008 addressed to the Department of Transport, which stated: 'we strongly support the opportunities offered by the Eddington report to address current needs and plan for the future.' So we are calling on Dan Andrews, Bill Shorten and the Labor Party to honour the contracts—and build the East West Link. That is the right thing to do for Victoria. The Australian government has committed $3 billion for the construction, and that money is on the table. The state Labor government needs to invest the money it already has into building the road, not into paying $1 billion of taxpayers' funds in compensation. The federal government is totally committed to the project, as are those residents in the outer eastern suburbs of my electorate.

I note today in The Australian that Robert Gottliebsen, a very respected business reporter, quotes in his article 'Abbott must put a stop to Andrews' East West Link lunacy' from a letter from Professor Arnold Dix—who is actually a resident in my electorate of Latrobe. He says that Arnold Dix is the world's foremost international contract expert. The letter says:

In our extensive collective international experience, it is our firm view that enacting retrospective legislation to alter the rights and obligations to avoid any lawfully executed contract will incur large direct and indirect costs to the State of Victoria and Australia as a whole.

If this project does not go ahead it will not only embarrass Victoria but will potentially damage future investment in Victoria and the rest of Australia. Build the East West Link.

McCombe, Mr Tim, OAM

Mr GRIFFIN (Bruce) (10:25): Tim McCombe OAM died of a heart attack on 31 January 2015. Tim served in Malaya and Borneo during the Indonesian Confrontation and then went to Vietnam. He was seriously wounded as a result of a mine explosion. He lost one leg above the knee; the other was saved but he needed a brace as support for the rest of his life. Tim spent some 12 months in hospital and a year-and-a-half in rehabilitation. But, as is so often the case, the trauma of the event left psychological scars as well. The reduced mobility, the pain and the psychological damage later led Tim into some years of depression and despair. He dropped into a black hole, he later related, and wondered whether he would ever emerge. But emerge he did.

Tim was, for 20 unbroken years, the national president of the Vietnam Veterans Federation. This record shows the high regard in which he was held by the membership. But Tim's contribution to the veteran community began much earlier, in 1981, when he joined the band of Vietnam veterans renovating the storeroom at the back of an old Granville RSL hall. There he joined the newly formed Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia, counselling sick and troubled veterans, campaigning for the establishment of counselling centres and seeking recognition of the harmfulness of exposure to Agent Orange.
Tim became a pension officer and an advocate at both the VRB and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. When the Vietnam Veterans' Counselling Service was established in 1982, Tim was appointed a member of the supervising National Advisory Committee. He maintained a strong and active interest in its functioning till his death. When the Royal Commission on the Use and Effects of Chemical Agents on Australian Personnel in Vietnam—the Agent Orange royal commission—was established in 1983, Tim spent hundreds of hours in the veterans' royal commission office assisting the lawyers to prepare the case.

But it was after the royal commission that Tim came into his own. Unhappy that the royal commission findings had not encouraged the acceptance of Agent Orange compensation claims, Tim, now the national president of the VVF, began sponsoring appeals. By the early nineties, Tim had sponsored a score of successful Agent Orange cases at the VRB and at the AAT. This was a remarkable achievement that marked Tim as a major force in the veteran community.

Since that time, Tim had been closely involved in every important veterans' issue. Memorably, for 10 years he relentlessly pushed the case for fair indexation of the TPI and other veterans' disability pensions. He successfully pursued appeals against decisions of the Repatriation Medical Authority, even taking one appeal through Federal Court hearings. He lobbied for privacy for counselling centre clients, leading to extensive renovations to some centres. Notably, Tim always considered the families as equal victims of war's trauma and fought for that recognition.

The list of Tim's campaigns, many successful and some still ongoing, is a long one—too long to discuss here. Suffice to say that for 30 years Tim was a tiger in his fight against what he saw as injustice and was a campaigner for better treatment and benefits for veterans and their families. He explained that having been through those dark years he became determined to help others suffering war trauma. The veteran community will miss him.

I offer my condolences to his family, Tram, Craig and Stephanie. In my time as Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Tim fought hard for veterans—as hard as anyone did. But he was also always a straight shooter who had integrity—more integrity, I have to say, than many others I have dealt with over the years. May he rest in peace. A veteran has died. A great Australian has died.

Macarthur Electorate: Green Army

Mr MATHESON (Macarthur) (10:28): I rise today to congratulate the first Green Army graduates in my electorate of Macarthur. The Green Army was a key coalition commitment that received $525 million of funding in August last year for a four-year period. It is one of the government's major environmental initiatives. The Australian Botanic Garden Mount Annan endangered woodland regeneration program in Macarthur was fortunate enough to be in the first round of funding, and commenced in September last year. Since its establishment in 1988, the garden has become recognised as a jewel in the crown of south-west Sydney. The garden is a haven for wildlife and has now some of the finest examples of local bushland in the Cumberland Plain Woodland. Listed as a critically endangered plant community, the Cumberland Plain Woodland is threatened by weed invasion and urban and industrial development.
Macarthur's Green Army participants are working to conserve this important bushland by controlling problem weeds such as the African olive tree within core conservation areas. Tree planting on areas now cleared of African olive will create future fauna habitat and link bushland areas within the garden. They are also receiving technical training from the garden's staff in seed collecting and plant propagation. This project would not have been possible without the tremendous support and assistance of Green Army supervisor, Jacinta Rheinberger; the Curator Manager of the Australian Botanic Garden, John Siemon; garden staff Peter Cuneo and Jordan Scott; and Michael Ellison and Michael Beilby from the project's sponsor, Conservation Volunteers Australia.

On behalf of the government and all those involved in the Green Army, I would like to congratulate Macarthur's inaugural Green Army graduates David Lefu, Amy Peacey, Nicole Peacey, Taylor Divine-Litson, Nikitah Smith, Kome Ualesi, Damian Semple, Kane Watson and Graham Devlin. Macarthur's inaugural Green Army graduates have successfully completed work that has had real environmental and conservation benefits in the Macarthur region, and on behalf of our community I would like to say thank you for this great achievement. They have also gained valuable practical training and experience to help prepare them for the workforce or further their training and improve their careers, which has already begun to pay off, with Nicole Peacey and David Lefu securing employment at Holsworthy Army Barracks in Sydney in recent weeks. Congratulations to you both.

The highly successful Green Army project at the Australian Botanic Garden, Mount Annan, is just the beginning of the government's plans for a Green Army in Macarthur. Last month I announced that my electorate of Macarthur had received approval for yet another Green Army project involving Camden Council in which the Green Army participants will create habitats for Camden white gums by removing 2.4 hectares of its main threat, privet, as well as removing 8.85 hectares of African olive and African boxthorn in the Cumberland Plain Woodland at Gundungurra Reserve north and south and at Elizabeth Throsby and Charles Throsby reserves.

Once again, I would like to congratulate Macarthur's inaugural Green Army graduates and all those involved in the Green Army program at the Australian Botanic Garden, Mount Annan. You are doing a great job.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Wicks): In accordance with standing order 193, the time for members' constituency statements has concluded.

Federation Chamber adjourned at 10:32
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Aircraft Noise: Curfew Hours
(Question No. 549)

Mr Albanese asked the Minister for Infrastructure and Regional Development, in writing, on 23 October 2014:

Can he give affected communities his assurance that the proposed changes to the types of aircraft able to access (a) Sydney Airport, and (b) Adelaide Airport, during curfew hours will not increase the (i) noise burden on residents, or (ii) number of flights.

Mr Truss: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The Government has introduced stricter noise requirements for any aircraft added to the lists of light jet aircraft permitted to land at Sydney and Adelaide airports during curfew hours. From 2022, only aircraft which meet stricter noise limits for all small jet aircraft will be able to operate during the curfew. Section 15 of the Sydney Airport Curfew Act 1995 requires all aircraft operating during curfew to take off or land using the runways that direct movements over Botany Bay. Noise abatement procedures apply at Adelaide airport to direct aircraft over Gulf St Vincent wherever possible. The Government has requested the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development to monitor the implementation of new aircraft curfew requirements at Sydney and Adelaide and report to the Sydney Airport Community Forum and Adelaide Airport Consultative Committee respectively.

Australian Multicultural Council
(Question No. 699)

Ms Rowland asked the Minister for Social Services in writing, on 9 February 2015:

(1) In respect of the vacancies on the Australian Multicultural Council (AMC), (a) were they publicly advertised; if so (i) when, and (ii)where; if not, why not; (b) how many applications were received, and (c) did publicly available merits based criteria apply to the selection of appointments; if so, (i) what were the criteria, and (ii) where are they published; if not, (iii) why not, and (iv) how is this consistent with the Government's merits based policy regarding the selections of appointments to Government bodies.

(2) Were the individuals appointed to the AMC recommended as preferred candidates by (a) the bureaucracy, or (b) any member of the Government; if so, who.

(3) Have any of the members of the AMC made a donation or raised funds on behalf of any branch of the Liberal Party, or entity related to the Liberal Party fundraising.

(4) Was any consideration given to the conflict of interest arising from the fact that AMC member Mr Vasan Srinivasan, founded the Victorian Multicultural Liberal Business Club; if so, what was the assessment process and what was the outcome.

(5) Is he aware of the views of the AMC Chair, Dr Sev Ozdowski, on section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act 1974; if so, did this influence the decision to appoint Dr Ozdowski to the AMC.

(6) Who made the decision to appoint the successful candidates to the AMC, and was (a) he, and (b) the Prime Minister, briefed on this decision.

Mr Morrison: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1) (a) No, Ministerial advisory councils and committees are not routinely advertised.

(b) N/A

(c) N/A

(2) (a) No.

(b) Yes, the Hon Kevin Andrews MP.

(3) The Department did not seek this information from the members.
(4) Mr Srinivasan was appointed on the basis of his knowledge and expertise of multicultural communities.

(5) Dr Ozdowski OAM was appointed on the basis of his knowledge and expertise of multicultural affairs.

(6) The appointments were made by the former Minister for Social Services, the Hon Kevin Andrews MP, following consultation with the Prime Minister.

**Australian Multicultural Council**

(Question No. 700)

Ms Rowland asked the Minister for Social Services, in writing, on 9 February 2015:

(1) what are the key performance indicators for, or key outputs expected from, the Australian Multicultural Council (AMC).

(2) What is the annual base salary or daily sitting fee payable to each member of the AMC.

(3) Are members of the AMC entitled to use of a COMCAR.

**Mr Morrison:** The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1) The Terms of Reference of the AMC can be found at www.amc.gov.au.

(2) Members are remunerated equivalent to the Category 1 Level daily sitting fees as set out by the Remuneration Tribunal of Australia (RTA).

(3) No.

**Australian Multicultural Council**

(Question No. 701)

Ms Rowland asked the Minister for Social Services, in writing, on 9 February 2015:

(1) Have the new members of the Australian Multicultural Council (AMC) convened a formal meeting; if so, will he provide a copy of the minutes.

(2) How many times is the AMC scheduled to meet in the next 18 months, and on what dates.

(3) How many staff in his department are tasked with the functioning of the AMC.

**Mr Morrison:** The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1) The inaugural meeting will be held on 25 March 2015.

(2) This will be finalised at the inaugural meeting.

(3) Estimated 0.75 FTE to provide Secretariat support to the AMC.

**Australian Multicultural Council**

(Question No. 702)

Ms Rowland asked the Minister for Social Services, in writing, on 9 February 2015:

(1) Does the Australian Multicultural Council (AMC) have a travel allowance; if so, what sum is it worth per financial year, and if it varies according to location, what is the schedule of rates.

(2) If members of the AMC fly at the Commonwealth's expense, are they entitled to fly business class.

**Mr Morrison:** The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1) AMC members are entitled to travel allowances equivalent to Departmental arrangements for Senior Executive Service (SES) officers.

(2) Members are entitled to fly equivalent to Departmental arrangements for Senior Executive Services (SES) officers.