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MONDAY, 6 MARCH 2000

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Mr SPEAKER (Mr Neil Andrew) took the chair at 12.30 p.m., and read prayers.

DELEGATION REPORTS

Delegation to Tonga, Cook Islands and French Polynesia

Mr NEHL (Cowper) (12.31 p.m.)—I present the report of the Australian parliamentary delegation to Tonga, the Cook Islands and the first Pacific Community Conference in French Polynesia, 27 November to 9 December 1999. I am pleased to table the report of the Australian parliamentary delegation to Tonga, the Cook Islands and the first Pacific Community Conference held in French Polynesia. Unfortunately, I was required to attend the sittings of the House of Representatives which commenced on 6 December 1999 and, therefore, to my regret, I was unable to attend the historic first meeting of the Pacific Community Conference. Accordingly, the member for Robertson, Mr Jim Lloyd, became the official Australian government spokesman at the conference in my place. I understand he proposes to address his remarks substantially to this part of the delegation’s activities. Therefore, I will concentrate my comments on the bilateral visits to Tonga and the Cook Islands, although, with limited time, I can make only a few general comments and touch on a couple of the more notable highlights of the visit.

The delegation undertook an extensive program of meetings with parliamentary, government and business representatives in both Tonga and the Cook Islands. These meetings enabled the delegation to foster and strengthen existing ties between our countries and to gain an appreciation of the ambitions and needs of our hosts. The visits also gave the delegation members an opportunity to assess at first hand the success of AusAID projects in the region and to try to gauge whether the limited funding that is available for aid is being put to good use. The delegation’s visit started inauspiciously on the Saturday evening, with several pieces of luggage failing to arrive in Tonga. Sunday flights are not permitted because of Tonga’s Sabbath observance and we had to wait until Monday afternoon to be reunited with our bags. Our hosts went out of their way to ensure that we were not too badly affected, including getting a local shopkeeper out of his bed—at about 20 to 12 on Saturday night—to enable us to buy essential items such as clothing.

The delegation spent three days in Tonga. In this time, we met with many people and organisations to discuss the system of government and the state of the economy. The highlight was, undoubtedly, an audience of some 90 minutes duration with the King of Tonga, His Majesty King Taufa’ahau Tupou IV at the Royal Palace. During our meeting His Majesty spoke at length about his time as a student at Newington College in Sydney, in particular his rowing and rugby playing exploits, and it was clear that he recalls his time in Australia with great pleasure.

Turning to the Cook Islands, the delegation shared its four-day visit between the main island of Rarotonga and the outer island of Aitutaki. The Cook Islands are internally self-governing but have a very close association with New Zealand. Its citizens hold New Zealand citizenship. Again the delegation met many island representatives and discussed political and economic issues. Australia’s victory in the Rugby World Cup seemed to be mentioned with a degree of monotony, although often through gritted teeth, given the failure of their local heroes—the All Blacks. The Cook Islands government changed only two weeks before the delegation’s arrival, amid claims of corruption and mismanagement on the part of their predecessors. The delegation met the new Prime Minister, Dr Terepai Maoate, who, having been a parliamentarian for 15 years, emphasised his appreciation of Australia’s past assistance. Having reached something close to financial ruin in 1995, the Cook Islands government, under Maoate’s leadership, appear to have the resolve to get to grips with the fundamental problems they face.

I wish to address two broad issues relating to Australia’s relationship with the small Pacific Island nations such as Tonga and the Cook Islands: firstly, AusAID programs and, secondly, the Pacific Patrol Boat Program. The delegation examined two of AusAID’s projects in Tonga which were aimed at im-
proving the delivery of health and tourism services and a water supply project on the island of Aitutaki. It was clear to the delegation that these projects were highly valued by the local residents and that Australia’s efforts were greatly appreciated. On the delegation’s behalf, let me state our strong support for the continuation of projects of this nature.

The delegation also visited the patrol boat facilities in both Tonga and the Cook Islands. The program is about two-thirds through its scheduled life and is currently being reviewed by a consultant on the government’s behalf. It was clear to the delegation that these boats play a very valuable role in the lives of the small island nations and we believe the government should give serious consideration to continuing the Pacific Patrol Boat Program.

I believe the delegation was a great success. I wish to acknowledge the significant contributions of my colleague Jim Lloyd and the member for Greenway, Frank Mossfield, and his wife Mrs Jan Mossfield, in ensuring that success. I also thank the delegation secretary, Michael McLean, for performing his role in a highly efficient manner.

Mr MOSSFIELD (Greenway) (12.36 p.m.)—It was my pleasure to be part of an Australian parliamentary delegation to Tonga, the Cook Islands and Tahiti between 27 November and 9 December. The delegation’s meeting with the King and Prime Minister of Tonga and the new Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, Dr Terepai Maoate, and other senior ministers and public servants from both nations meant that personal friendships were established at the highest level. The delegation’s meeting with the Tongan Minister for Health, Dr William Tangi, who retains a medical practice and has previously trained and practised in Australia, enabled us to receive a report on an AusAID project in Tonga which is aimed at improving the health sector administration in that country. We also met with the Director of Tourism and discussed the tourist project funded by AusAID. The delegation was informed that the NSW TAFE were conducting a number of tourism courses on behalf of the government of Tonga. The delegation also had informal discussions with Australians working in a voluntary capacity assisting with disability and health programs.

A person who was of particular assistance to the delegation was Ms Fatai Pale, who was one of the presiding officers in the Tongan parliament and was part of the Speaker’s welcoming committee that met our delegation at Nukualofa airport and continued to provide assistance to the delegation during our stay in Tonga. Also of assistance was the Australian High Commissioner in Tonga, Andrew Mullin, and Mrs Mullin who included the delegation in their farewell function. This enabled us to meet local and expatriate workers in many fields, which helped to improve our knowledge of the general Tongan community. The assistance of Mr Peter Brooks, an Australian High Commissioner officer in Fiji, was also appreciated.

During our visit to the Cook Islands, we were able to meet with the new Prime Minister and a number of ministers, and the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Immigration, Mr Edwin Pittman. These were important contacts, as the new government is settling in after being in opposition for a considerable period of time. One issue raised in our discussions was the number of skilled people who were leaving the islands and settling in New Zealand and Australia. The Cook Islands authorities indicated that they were concerned about the loss from the local skills base. It is estimated that some 50,000 Cook Islanders live abroad, mainly in New Zealand and Australia. The remittance from people living abroad is, nevertheless, important to the islands’ economy.

One of the ministers who was of particular help to the delegation was the Hon. Ngamau Munokoa—or ‘Aunty Mau’, as the Minister for Public Works in Dr Maoate’s government was known to her constituents. The question was asked: why were there no women in the Australian delegation? I felt that the fact that one of the delegate’s wives accompanied her spouse and took an active interest in the delegation’s activities provided for a more informal communication with our hosts.

The main AusAID project inspected in the Cook Islands was the overhauling of the freshwater reticulation system on the resort island of Aitutaki. In our inspection, our
The delegation had the assistance of Mr Bruce Dudgeon, an Australian engineer who is an adviser to the project, and Mr Ross Sansom, AusAID project coordinator for the Cook Islands. Australia’s involvement includes project management, employment of local workers, purchasing of reticulation equipment and ongoing monitoring. The project is for a four-year period, at a cost of $1.04 million, and is due to be completed in October 2000. The purpose of this project is to provide the local population with a reliable freshwater supply and to provide for an expansion of the island’s tourism and agricultural industries.

Another issue that was brought home to the delegation while on the island of Aitutaki was the shortage of basic medical supplies at the local hospital. The husband and wife Burmese doctors who were the senior medical staff at the hospital were very appreciative of the whip-round that was organised amongst the delegation, which produced a supply of pain relief supplies and other basic medical supplies for the hospital’s use that were surplus to the needs of the delegation.

I would like to thank Mr Michael McLean, the delegation’s secretary, for his assistance and the leader of the delegation, the member for Cowper, and the member for Robertson for their pleasant companionship during the trip. I am sure our visit will contribute to the goodwill and understanding between the governments and people of these island nations and Australia.

Mr Lloyd (Robertson) (12.41 p.m.)—I am pleased to make some comments in relation to the report of the delegation’s trip to Tonga, the Cook Islands and French Polynesia. As indicated in the remarks from the member for Cowper, I took on the role of head of delegation for the official Australian government delegation at the First Pacific Community Conference in Papeete. French Polynesia. I will largely restrict my remarks to that conference’s proceedings. I am very grateful for having been given the opportunity to take on such an important role on my country’s behalf. I have also been the Chair of the IPU for the Pacific Island Nations and Papua New Guinea since November 1998, and I am sure that my experiences in Papeete will prove invaluable to me in that role in the future.

As is described in the delegation report, the First Pacific Community Conference was in fact the 38th in the sequence of conferences previously known as the South Pacific Conference, or SPC. The change of title to Pacific Community Conference was adopted at the 37th SPC, which was held in Canberra in 1997 to commemorate the fact that it coincided with the 50th anniversary of the first meeting in 1947 which was also held in Canberra. As an indicator of the development over the last 50 years, in 1947 there were just six inaugural SPC members. The Pacific Community now has 27 members, and the conference in Papeete was attended by 25 of those 27 members, which is a positive indicator of the high regard in which it is held by the member nations.

The conference itself is akin to the board of directors for the organisation’s operational arm, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, which has responsibility for the administration of a budget of some US$25 million. This naming of the organisation’s central body has rather cleverly retained the SPC acronym, thereby ensuring that its positive reputation built over many years will live into the future.

The conference was held on Monday, 6 December and Tuesday, 7 December, in the Outrigger Hotel at Papeete on the beautiful French Polynesian island of Tahiti-Nui. The day before the conference began, a formal flag raising ceremony was held in central Papeete involving the presentation of each member nation’s flag and anthem followed by a spectacular display of Polynesian dancing and music.

Because Australia had hosted the previous SPC meeting in Canberra, under the conference rules I was the incumbent conference chair and it fell to me to perform the function of officially opening the conference. That was a particularly significant personal role for me and I certainly enjoyed the opportunity. In my opening remarks, I noted that the title ‘Ta’imoa’i’, given to the conference by our French Polynesian hosts, which means ‘sounds that come from across the water’, was particularly apt for the occasion given
that it was from the shores of French Polynesia that the ancient Polynesian navigators had set out on their long journeys.

I do not have the time to go into the conference program in detail. However, one highlight for me was to see the success of an Australian, Mr Bob Dun, as the SPC’s Director-General. It is clear that Bob was held in the highest regard for his achievements during his four-year term, which was scheduled to conclude last month. Bob will be returning to life in Canberra with his family and, I understand, much lower telephone bills. I wish to record my best wishes for Bob’s future career and also to wish his successor, Ms Lourdes Pangelinan, well in her new appointment.

I would like to conclude by thanking those who contributed to the success of the delegation through their assistance: the Hon. Gary Robertson MLA, Minister for Tourism and Commerce for the Norfolk Island government, and the DFAT officers, Mr Joe Thwaites and Ms Kirsty Mitchell, and AusAID’s Geoff Miller. I would also like to thank Mick McLean who was also of great assistance to us, and Mr Gary Nehl, Mr Frank Mossfield and his wife Jan for their companionship and assistance during the trip. It was very much appreciated. I would also to thank Minister Downer and the Prime Minister for giving me this opportunity. I realise that it is a fairly rare opportunity for a backbencher to head a delegation of this significance and to represent Australia at a conference of such international importance. I hope that I carried out the role in a way which has enhanced Australia’s role in this region.

COMMITTEES
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
Report

Mr HOLLIS (Throsby) (12.46 p.m.)—On behalf of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, I present the committee report on our visit to East Timor on 2 December 1999, together with the minutes of the proceedings.

Ordered that the report be printed.

Mr HOLLIS—This visit was particularly timely for the committee not only for the foreign affairs implications but because it covered areas of two other inquiries that the committee is currently involved in. The first inquiry covers the suitability of the Australian Army for peacetime, peacekeeping and war, and the second covers our relationship with the UN. Of course, it also covers the important work the committee does on human rights.

Despite the media coverage of Timor, nothing prepares you for the senseless destruction that became so much a part of the life there, not only in Dili but also in other parts that we visited such as Suai. There has been some discussion on possible changes to the Australian defence forces. I believe that our defence personnel have performed magnificently in Timor. They had no idea when they arrived of what to expect on the ground or whether they would be forced into a confrontation with the Indonesian military or the militia. Despite this, they carried out, and continue to carry out, their role. When we talk about our troops there, we should bear in mind that most of them are only young—18-, 19-, or 20-year-old men and women. They have done Australia and its defence forces proud.

There has been some debate in recent days about military training and if the correct emphasis is placed on training, whether it is for peacekeeping or for combat areas. The debate has been made more interesting by the New Zealand Prime Minister’s statement last week that New Zealand troops would place a particular emphasis on a peacekeeping role. I am firmly of the view that troops trained for combat can readily adapt to the peacekeeping role. I am not so convinced that the reverse is true. While we are all justifiably proud of the role our forces played in East Timor—and they will be honoured at a luncheon in this building tomorrow—many important issues for Australia have been thrown up by the Timor situation. What would have happened if our forces had had to be replaced by the same number of troops, or what if Australia were committed to other responsibilities at troop level of the same number, or what if another conflict had emerged in this increasingly conflict ridden part of the world? Australia certainly would not have been able to
provide two forces of the same strength as were provided in Timor. I suspect that Timor will become like the Falkland Island war. Whatever it is you may wish to prove or indeed disprove, you will be able to make reference to the events in East Timor.

Although the committee was only in Timor for a short time, our visit was well planned and coordinated. One area of concern that did emerge and has become more obvious since our visit is that there are large numbers of aid agencies there. It seems that for domestic purposes every agency wants a presence in Timor. I believe this will inevitably lead to a duplication of efforts. There must be more coordination between aid agencies, but most importantly there must be a strong local Timorese presence in the planning, coordination and work of the relief effort. No-one should dictate to the Timorese or indeed impose their cultural values on them. Geography and history dictate that we will have a close relationship with this new nation, but it will be a nation whose destiny will be decided by the Timorese. It is too easy for us to bring our own local preconceived ideas on development or what we think is needed. Aid agencies must work with the Timorese. They must let the Timorese determine the pace and direction of future developments.

I wish to thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs for making this visit possible, and the Minister for Defence for providing air transport. I also thank the committee secretariat and other members of the committee. I thank the committee secretary, Margaret Swieringa, for another outstanding report. I know that for each member the East Timor visit was profoundly moving and a rewarding experience. I hope our report will make a contribution to the ongoing debate on East Timor. In the years ahead, East Timor will figure prominently in Australia’s strategic and economic thinking. We managed to ignore what happened in Timor for too long. A price has been paid for this. Hopefully Australia has learnt a lesson. I must say that the Timor people have suffered dreadfully to achieve their independence.

Mr JULL (Fadden) (12.51 p.m.)—I too would like to make some comments in relation to the tabling of this report as I served as a member of the group that went to East Timor in early December last year. I commend the member for Throsby for some of the points that he made. I know that my colleague following will also be talking about some of the human rights aspects of what went on and what will go on in the future in East Timor. I also commend to the House the publication of a book by the Hon. Tim Fischer. I read his book during the recent parliamentary break, and I think it is quite a good introduction for anyone here who is thinking of reading this particular report because it does build up the scenario in which Australia found itself when our forces first went into East Timor in September of last year.

The member for Throsby is perfectly correct when he said that nobody really has any idea of the total destruction and devastation that is East Timor. I think that all members of the delegation, especially those who had been there for the vote, found this just by driving into Dili. In fact, Dili is probably not necessarily the greatest example of what went on. I think I have worked out why we get no concept of the range of the destruction: it is simply because we have seen it on television. Virtually the entire footage came from Dili itself and most of it is taken at ground level. It is not really until you take off in a helicopter and get into the countryside and see these great areas of burnt out villages, and the utter destruction and devastation that has gone on, that it really comes home to you just how thorough the destruction has been and the tremendous challenge that is before the East Timorese as they try to build their new nation.

I also commend the Australian troops. I know that accolades have been given to them all over the place but I think that at every opportunity we should praise the efforts they made. One of the highlights of this visit by members of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade was the fact that we managed to go down to Suai, which was indeed one of the hot spots near the border, to meet with our troops, who were operating in the most appalling conditions. We were there at lunchtime. The heat was 40 degrees, and I would hate to think what the
relative humidity was—if it was 290 per cent I would not have been surprised. The troops were there in full battle fatigues. They were headquartered in the old courthouse, which had been burnt out and virtually destroyed. The only protection they had was galvanised iron, and all these people working their hearts out in the most appalling conditions. Yes, all of a sudden they had been granted access to some provisions that had come up in refrigerated containers, but for something like nine weeks they had endured on basic army rations. There was nothing for them to do in terms of any sort of recreational activity. There was nothing in the town to do, and they were working very long hours and very long days. But there was that sense of determination and that sense that they were achieving a great deal, and I think that we must be particularly proud of the efforts they made and, of course, particularly proud of the work of Peter Cosgrove, who has been lauded not only in this country but also around the world for his particular contribution to that effort.

The challenge for East Timor in the future is enormous. One of the things that came through to the committee as we were driving around some of these areas of destruction was the tremendous warmth of the reception that we received from the locals. The V for victory sign was there, and the graffiti on the wall praised Australia and New Zealand for their particular efforts. There is no doubt that these people are thankful. But theirs is a tremendous challenge, one for which we must be sympathetic. I agree with the member for Throsby about the coordination of the aid efforts. Something must be done so that we do not get duplication because the needs are going to be just so great. The challenge for Australia will be there for many years to come. We are already there once more with the United Nations forces, and one would hope that we will have the capacity to be able to sit back and give help where it is required and when it is asked for, and that the East Timorese themselves will have the capacity to be able to build their own nation, one which will be truly free, independent and, hopefully, democratic.

Mr NUGENT (Aston) (12.56 p.m.)—I support the comments of the previous two speakers, the gentlemen from Throsby and Fadden. The first point I would make is that I think it is important that the parliament, in addition to ministers, the executive, the bureaucrats and officials and so on, actually does go out and inspect where our troops are deployed and come back with a first-hand view of what has been going on. Therefore, we were appreciative of the opportunity for 10 members of our committee to go to East Timor last December.

As has already been said, the performance of our troops has been outstanding in very difficult and trying conditions. Whilst we say that, and I do not want to take away anything from the performance of our defence forces, I think we also need to acknowledge, however, that they were up against a situation where they had been invited into the place and, although there were difficulties with the militia and some difficulties with the TNI on the Indonesian side, our troops have been trained for war. Clearly their opponents were not particularly competent in a war situation; they were much more attuned to a civil disturbance situation. The two things are different, and therefore our troops were able to very quickly establish a military ascendancy. They did that competently and efficiently.

One of the questions that it raises, when we look at the difficulty we had in mustering the numbers and the extra defence budget we have now had to come up with, is that we do need to look at what our role is going to be in the region, if any. We therefore need to look, once we have decided that strategic view, at the tactical issues of what shape and size our defence forces ought to be. Whilst we performed outstandingly in East Timor, I think it does in fact prompt some further questions that this country needs to pay attention to.

We should also acknowledge the contribution of other countries. I think it is important that, in the euphoria about how well we did, we need to recognise that we performed as part of a United Nations force and that many other countries were there on the ground with us. There is also no question in my view, gained as I travelled around the region—and I have talked to many visitors from overseas
in particular in the last couple of months—
that the action we have taken there has im-
measurably improved Australia’s standing as
a country in this region of the world.

Other speakers have mentioned the extent
of the destruction in Dili and there is no
question that, from a helicopter, you get a
very good view of that sort of destruction. As
we went into Suai, which is a town of about
10,000 or 12,000 people, we could see that
every single building was absolutely burnt
out—no roof, no doorways and no window
frames. They were just burned out hulks.
Where there had been wooden buildings
there were just scorched marks on the ground.
So the situation and the devastation there is
absolutely complete, and we are talking now
about East Timor having to rebuild its society
from the ground up. The spirit of the people
is good. The spirit of relationships between
the Australian troops and the local people is
outstandingly good. Of course, now we are
seeing the country move into a new phase.
The new part of the United Nations mandate
has taken hold. There are still, however, some
key issues. One of those I think is that we
still need to address more vigorously the
problem of refugees who are still in West
Timor. Secondly, we need to be conscious
that we now have a lot of particularly young
men back in East Timor who really have no
employment and nothing very much to do. I
think we will start to see some terrible social
issues unless the United Nations can get the
economy working fairly quickly.

In terms of the aid organisations, I echo
the comments of my colleagues. I think there
is also a need to look at the impact of the
training of our military. It is quite clear that,
whilst we are very good as a war fighting
force, there is a need for some special train-
ing for this peacekeeping type of operation.
Frankly, if it had not been for the special ex-
pertise shipped in from the United States, we
would have found ourselves deficient in that
regard, and we need to look at that. As a
quick aside, let me say that one of our body-
guards in fact was a lady soldier. Whilst
probably in an ideal world that should not be
something remarkable to comment on, there
is no question that, culturally, as a former
serviceman I found it a change, but it is
something to be welcomed.

We met with the United Nations human
rights team, who were conducting an investi-
gation of abuses of human rights. There is no
question that there have been human rights
abuses on a huge scale. We must support the
United Nations in its investigations, and also
Indonesia in its investigations, and pursue
those who are responsible for those abuses.
Apart from the troops, we should also re-
member the police and others who served in
the East Timor area. For many months before
the civilian police were in there, and we need
to recognise them as well. I commend the
report to the House.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The
time allotted for statements on this report has
expired.

Mr HOLLIS (Throsby) (1.02 p.m.)—I
move:

That the House take note of the report.

I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER—In accordance
with standing order 102B, the debate is ad-
journed. The resumption of the debate will be
made an order of the day for the next sitting,
and the member will have leave to continue
speaking when the debate is resumed.

Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
Report

Mr ANDREW THOMSON (Wentworth)
(1.02 p.m.)—On behalf of the Joint Standing
Committee on Treaties, I present the com-
mittee’s report, No. 29, entitled Singapore’s
use of Shoalwater Bay, Development coop-
eration treaty with Papua New Guinea, and
Protection of new varieties of plants, together
with minutes of proceedings and evidence
received by the committee.

Ordered that the report be printed.

Mr ANDREW THOMSON—The report
I have just tabled deals with three treaty ac-
tions that were originally tabled in parliament
on 12 October last year. The first concerns an
agreement with Singapore to allow the Sin-
gaporean Armed Forces to use the Shoalwa-
ter Bay training area near Rockhampton in
Queensland. As part of its inquiry, the com-
mittee travelled to Rockhampton to speak to the local community, to inspect the training area and to meet with visiting officers from the Singaporean Armed Forces. These meetings were very useful and gave us a clear understanding of the commercial and the environmental impacts of this treaty. Although we have no hesitation in recommending that binding treaty action be taken, we have made a number of recommendations aimed at improving the links between the Australian Department of Defence, the local business community and local environmental groups. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank everyone we met with in Rockhampton. It was certainly a successful visit.

The second treaty is the treaty on Development Cooperation with Papua New Guinea, which is our nearest neighbour. Papua New Guinea is a nation with which we have very close historical and contemporary ties. This treaty is intended to replace a similar agreement which was first negotiated in 1989. The new treaty gives effect to a significant change in the development cooperation relationship between the two countries. I should add that development cooperation is really the modern politically correct term for aid, for those who are unfamiliar with the jargon. Under the original aid agreement, Australia made untied cash payments to Papua New Guinea for direct budget support—that is, we put the money straight into their Treasury, and they spent it. Over recent years, prior to the existing government and the previous government, there has been concern that this sort of direct support should be phased out. This new treaty completely replaces that direct support with a program of funding for specific projects, which are jointly agreed between the governments of the two countries.

The new treaty also establishes an incentive fund, which is a very good measure designed to encourage and to reward those agencies of the Papua New Guinea government to perform well and to promote reform within their portfolios. The fund will allow money to be channelled directly to provincial or even to district government agencies and to community groups, which in many cases is a much better way of delivering the aid than jumping through all the usual hoops.

Although the new treaty is a framework document and does not specify the amount of aid money to be provided to Papua New Guinea, AusAID advised us that in its forward estimates it has set aside a maximum of $A300 million per year in aid money for each year until the end of 2002-03. This is an important treaty, and we support its direction and aims. It will, of course, have to be implemented with particular sensitivity to avoid the impression that Australia is interfering in Papua New Guinea’s development priorities. We have to acknowledge that we have a position historically that does sometimes give rise to sensitivities within Papua New Guinea about our role in helping them.

The Australian government will also have to be conscious of not fuelling any political difficulties by trying to force certain types of aid too quickly. The wonderful thing about Papua New Guinea is that its traditional culture is an integral part of its attraction in many ways. They are very affectionate towards Australia, and their traditional culture is a very important part of their pride, but it can sometimes be difficult to navigate around that in delivering aid, which is something that the government has to be conscious of.

In this report, we also express support for the International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants. The government’s proposal to accede to this convention follows the enactment of the Plant Breeder’s Rights Act, which gives plant breeders greater control over the management of their intellectual property, which is a good thing. Although some concerns were expressed in submissions to us, we have concluded that the convention represents an appropriate and workable balance between the interests of plant breeders, producers and the broader community. I commend the report to the House. (Time expired)

Mrs ELSON (Forde) (1.07 p.m.)—The Joint Standing Committee on Treaties report No. 29 covers three international treaties, but today I wish to focus on the inquiry into the use of the Shoalwater Bay army training area by the Singaporean armed forces. Under the reformed treaty making process, this inquiry
provided an opportunity for a local community to have their say on a proposed international agreement which may provide additional employment opportunities to a regional area of Queensland. I would like to thank everyone who took the time to participate in this inquiry and to provide the committee with some fresh insights on the importance of these agreements to local communities.

While I was unable to visit Rockhampton personally, I have discussed the success of the visit with my committee colleagues. The delegation inspected the training area and spoke with members of local community groups, local and state government representatives, local environmental groups, officers from the Singaporean armed forces and Australian Defence officials. The economic benefits the visiting forces bring to the region are fairly substantial. There were some concerns, however, about the extent of consultation with local community businesses and the level of awareness of opportunities and processes available to local businesses. This is something that can be improved upon with simple changes to the administrative and consultative processes over the duration of the agreement so that local interests are taken into account to the maximum extent possible.

Committee members were able to view first-hand the benefits of the department’s managerial expertise in maintaining the higher conservation value of this area. While local environmental groups expressed some concerns about the activities undertaken in this area, many of these reflected the fact that they felt that they did not know enough about the proposed activities or the protection measures imposed. These concerns related to the use of the area generally rather than its specific use by the Singaporean armed forces. The local community representatives spoke very highly of the excellent behaviour of the Singaporean soldiers and commented that they were a credit to their country. This agreement provides important economic and social benefits to the local community and there are benefits to Australia’s international relations. The consensus of the inquiry was that this agreement is in Australia’s national interest but that there is scope for some improvements. The inquiry highlighted a number of opportunities for the department, the local business community and environmental groups to be more proactive in maximising the potential benefits of an agreement such as this to regional areas of Australia.

I am very proud that the national interest is the benchmark upon which we measure the value and worth of international treaties. I am also very proud of the fact that, under the Howard government, all Australians can have their say on Australia’s proposed international treaties. It is a matter of public record that the Labor government signed up to over 800 international treaties without any consultation with either the public or even the parliament. Under the Howard government the process of agreement is transparent, everyone is encouraged to contribute and the ultimate measure is the national interest, which is as it should be. I encourage the people of Australia to take a keen interest in proposed treaty actions being considered by the government. The treaties committee provides an excellent opportunity to ensure the government is made aware of the potential benefits or negative impacts of a particular treaty. Public participation in our treaty review process is crucial if we are to ensure that international agreements reflect and advance Australia’s national interest. If you have any concerns about the impact of a particular treaty and whether it is in Australia’s national interest, then you have the opportunity and the responsibility to make the treaties committee aware of your views. I commend the report to the House.

Senator BARTLETT (Queensland) (1.11 p.m.)—Of the three treaties covered in this 29th report of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, I want to focus my comments on the Treaty on Development Cooperation with Papua New Guinea. Papua New Guinea has been the highest priority of Australia’s aid program for most of the last four or five decades—in fact, consuming close to a third of our total aid. The reasons for this are quite obvious: its close geographical proximity, our strong historical links with Papua New Guinea both of a formal nature, starting with the mandate under the League of Nations in 1920 right through to independence in 1975, and the less formal but nevertheless very
close historical links, particularly through World War II for example, and certainly the high level of need of a very close neighbour has made it quite appropriate that we focus so much of our development assistance on Papua New Guinea.

It has been a very special relationship indeed. This treaty continues Australia’s strong commitment to Papua New Guinea and continues to build on that special relationship. Admittedly, the approach of this treaty is somewhat different. It involves a switch from the more traditional budget support basis to a project based approach to aid. This in no way diminishes our commitment but in fact enhances it. It is a way of endeavouring to ensure that we get the best outcomes for Papua New Guinea out of our aid program. Under the 1989 treaty there was a combination of broad budget support and jointly programmed project aid. During the 1990s we saw a gradual switch from the untied cash payments for budget support towards project based funding. This 1999 treaty, which will come into effect in July this year, means that the budget support approach will be completely replaced by a project based approach—an approach based on projects and activities jointly agreed to by both the Papua New Guinea and the Australian governments.

The main aims of this new approach, of course, is to ensure not only increased accountability in the use of Australian aid spending—and certainly Australian taxpayers will be keen to see that happen—but also increased effectiveness in delivering tangible outcomes. We want to see our aid programs delivering real, tangible improvements on the ground for the people of Papua New Guinea—delivering grassroots benefits to the people of PNG. This reflects a general change in emphasis in Australia’s aid. We want to see that Australian aid dollars are delivering maximum benefits for people in developing countries.

The main features of this particular treaty include that the Australian government will continue to determine the level of aid each year. As the honourable member for Wentworth, the committee chairman, has indicated, it will be an indicative level of probably around $300 million a year, but it will be subject to meeting agreed performance targets; that is, there will be established benchmarks by which the ongoing aid program will be measured, such as school enrolments, infant mortality rates, et cetera to ensure that we are seeing real progress as a result of the aid as part of this treaty. Secondly, the aid program will ensure support for Papua New Guinea’s medium term development strategy. Thirdly, we are determined to see that a high priority goes on education, health, infrastructure, rural development and law and order. As part of this new treaty, we will see the establishment of an incentive fund. This will support Papua New Guinean agencies that perform well in delivering real benefits to the citizens. As well, we will see for the first time direct support to community groups, Australian NGOs, which are delivering positive aid outcomes, the organisations there with their sleeves rolled up and their hands-on approach delivering positive outcomes to the people of Papua New Guinea.

Some fears have been expressed that this might give an appearance of Australian interference or paternalism or arrogance in our approach. This is certainly not the case. Our determination with this treaty is to see that there are tangible benefits from this aid program so that the people of Papua New Guinea benefit. Certainly there are many challenges facing the country in terms of infrastructure, low literacy levels—the adult literacy rate is still only 28 per cent and across the board it is 65 per cent to 70 per cent—low life expectancy, still an average of about 54, and significant infrastructure needs due to geographical isolation, language barriers and so on and obvious problems of law and order. We want to see Australian aid bringing maximum benefit to the people of Papua New Guinea. (Time expired)

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Nehl)—Order! The time allotted for statements on this report has expired. Does the member for Wentworth wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a future occasion?

Mr ANDREW THOMSON (Wentworth)
(1.17 p.m.)—I move:
That the House take note of the report.
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I seek leave to continue my remarks later.
Leave granted.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 102B, the debate is adjourned. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting and the member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS BUSINESS

Rugby League

Mr BAIRD (Cook) (1.18 p.m.)—I move:

That this House acknowledges Rugby League as one of Australia’s national sports and congratulates the players, referees, fans and administrators of the game on:

1) the expansion of Rugby League into non-traditional geographic areas during recent years;
2) the establishment of a Rugby League Foundation which will provide additional funding to junior development in regional areas of NSW and Queensland;
3) the victory of the Melbourne Storm in the 1999 National Rugby League Grand Final in only its second year of operation;
4) a rise in average game attendances of 30% in 1999 with over 3 million Australians attending NRL games in 1999; and
5) the successful implementation of the 1997 peace plan between the Australian Rugby League and Super League which will see the NRL conduct a 14-team national competition in 2000.

It is my pleasure to move this motion today and to congratulate rugby league on its enormous achievement as one of the premier sports in Australia today. There is no doubt that rugby league has expanded into non-traditional, geographic areas during recent years—and, of course, we welcome the Storm’s great achievements during this past year to become the premiers. That is the first time they have done so. To do so so quickly after they entered the league was an incredible success, and they did it because of their incredible skills, as has been demonstrated only within the last week. There has also been the establishment of the Rugby League Foundation, which provides additional funding to junior development in regional areas of New South Wales and Queensland, a rise in average game attendance of 30 per cent in 1999, with over three million Australians attending National Rugby League games in 1999, and the successful implementation of the 1997 peace plan with the Australian Rugby League, which will see the NRL conduct a 14-team national competition in 2000.

There has been much negativity focused on the NRL and on the competition by a relatively small disenfranchised group of fans. I thought it was important to put this motion to the House to give the debate some sense of perspective. It is important to commend the NRL for all that it is doing for rugby league, and there is certainly much to commend the NRL for. Rugby league has entered a new era, with the future looking very good for the sport. Last year, average game attendances were up 30 per cent, with over three million people now attending games annually. Television ratings in New South Wales and Queensland are up 20 per cent from pre NRL times. Sales of merchandise, including jerseys and beanies, et cetera, are up 150 per cent to nearly $40 million. Sponsors like Kellogg’s and FAI have been signed up in recent weeks, office tipping competitions are growing and the health of the game has never been stronger. The New South Wales government has put out a report on last year’s grand final. It found that the grand final contributed $19 million to the state’s economy. Rugby league can take much of the credit that one of the growth sectors in the Australian economy is sports tourism.

Contrary to popular myth, rugby league has not become only about money; one need only look at the passion it still inspires in local communities, like in my electorate and the Sutherland shire. The Sharks are a real community team. The club is one of the area’s biggest employers. Most of the first grade team members are locals, having grown up in the shire. Other sports like local netball and cricket are affiliated with and are promoted by the rugby league club, and currently the administration is looking at fostering sports like soccer in the summer. The Sharks bring a lot of tourism to Cronulla. The players are heavily involved in junior league development and make trips to visit sick kids in hospital. I met one such young lad from a country hospital a few weeks ago and his
grandfather said if it had not been for the visit of the captain, ET—Andrew Ettingshausen—he doubted whether the young guy would have pulled through. This is the type of team they are and this is their level of involvement in the community.

I have heard the member for Grayndler speak in this place about the Sharks' financial position when eulogising the non-inclusion of his team, South Sydney, in the competition. The Sharks was the natural choice because of its strong financial record, the team's performance and its fan base. In the 1997 financial year the Sharks group's net operating profit was $2.18 million. In the last financial year, as just announced at the annual general meeting, the Sharks' net operating profit was $3.31 million. The team has played very well, being the minor premiers last year, 'Shark Park' is a great place for the community to go on a Saturday night and the electorate is well behind the team. In 1998, it was Sydney's No. 1 club in terms of crowd attendance rates, with an average crowd of over 14,000 per game last year. Of course, there have been joint ventures in terms of the West Tigers, the Northern Eagles and St George-Illawarra. St George-Illawarra made it to the grand final last year. The West Tigers' first trial game this year attracted 12,000 supporters.

I have a great deal of sympathy for the supporters of Souths, a foundation team with a passionate support base but with a chronically poor financial record. I accept the NRL's position that it was better to make this hard but fair decision rather than let the club wither and die on the vine. The door is still open to Souths to enter the NRL competition through a joint venture. The logical choice would be with Sydney Roosters because of the club's strong financial base.

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton) (1.23 p.m.)—I have pleasure in seconding the motion, and I congratulate my colleague on moving a worthwhile motion. I express my appreciation for his not commenting on last Friday night's game between St George-Illawarra Dragons and Melbourne Storm. On the subject matter of this motion, it was an imperative for the league to move to 14 teams on the basis of simple logistics. It was quite inappropriate to remain at 20 teams. During the 26-week competition of club games, it was not possible for each team to play each other twice. So you had a situation where, for instance, clubs would play a weaker club on two occasions, guaranteeing a virtual four points to that club, whereas others had to slog it out and battle for every point because each and every game was a tough game. It is inequitable to have a competition based on that situation, and it was quite unfair and did not achieve a fair result across the board. And the stakes are very high. To win a premiership, as Melbourne Storm did last year—I note the motion congratulates them on that victory—is a very significant thing, both in terms of pride to the club and the city and in terms of what it means for future financial success. So to win a premiership is a very significant thing.

I note that the member for Cook was gracious in noting the success of St George-Illawarra Dragons in their first year as a joint venture team. They were extremely successful and they really went into the grand final as favourites. They were beaten on the day, but I think they served the district, and themselves, with pride, and all with the solid backing and vision of the administrators behind them, Brian Johnston and Bobby Millward, who brought the two sides together so well. They show just what success can occur when resources are combined and focused. In the current competition of 14 teams, each team gets to play each of the other teams on two occasions so that there is no unfairness. The other significant thing to bear in mind in the restructure of the competition is that there has always been a tension in rugby league to strike a balance between the interests of the media outlets and the clubs. The media outlets, of course, want people sitting down in their living-room chairs watching it on TV, but the reality is that the clubs receive most of their money through gate takings, through spectators going to the ground. So it has always been necessary for the clubs to focus on creating a spectacle. When you had a disparity of strength in the differing teams, it was difficult to guarantee a worthwhile contest for spectators to see. Now when people go to watch a rugby league
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Representatives

Game each and every player running out onto the field is an elite athlete. The reduction in teams last year certainly contributed to greater competition and higher crowds, and I am sure this year’s figures will show that too.

There is also a significant resource issue involved in the reduction of teams. Obviously, if the overall income of the game is divided among 14 teams, it will be a more significant slice of the cake than if it were divided among 20 teams, and that is important. This is not intended to be a political motion I know, but it is significant in the context where rugby league teams, sporting teams generally, are going to suffer a heavy burden with the introduction of the goods and services tax, because all the sponsorship money that they receive will effectively be diminished by 10 per cent. It will be important that they offset that loss of revenue as much as they can, and the reduction in the competition to 14 teams will at least partially, but certainly not totally, offset that impact from the GST. I would urge the government when they are considering the imposition of the goods and services tax on sporting teams to give sympathetic consideration to exempting the contribution which comes from registered clubs to the football clubs.

Mr Somlay (Fairfax) (1.28 p.m.)—I support the motion by the honourable member for Cook. Out of respect for my colleague the member for Barton, I was not going to mention the result last Friday night either, but it was good to see that Melbourne proved the victory in the grand final last year was no fluke. If the GST were applied to the score, it would have been 77, not 70.

If I had placed this motion on the Notice Paper, with respect to my colleague the member for Cook, I would have placed more emphasis on the bottom-line fact that, first and foremost, rugby league is a sport. Rugby league does not belong to anyone; it belongs to everyone. I grew up in the western suburbs of Sydney, in the Richmond district, which was part of the Parramatta Junior Rugby League district and is where I played all my junior football. I attended Patrician Brothers, Blacktown, where rugby league was a religion, revered only second to Catholicism. Sometimes I thought it was the other way round.

When I entered this parliament 10 years ago, I became an active member of the Parliamentary Rugby League Group. This group of parliamentarians existed to foster rugby league as a sport. The chairman of the group was a Labor MP, Steve Martin, and the vice-chairman was a National Party MP from Queensland, Ray Braithwaite. I do not recall many New South Wales or Queensland MPs who were not members of that group. We had regular meetings with league president Ken Arthurson and league general manager John Quayle. We had Neil and Meninga from the Raiders along and many other representatives from other clubs. There was real interest and passion among MPs in the interests of rugby league.

That group disappeared. The Super League drama killed rugby league, and rugby league became a pawn in the tug of war between corporate giants. The only motivation was big money of the corporates. Rugby league became entertainment, not sport. Forgotten were the fans and followers who were faithful to their teams and heroes year after year, who would attend games week after week, rain or shine. Then the crowds left. Suddenly it was time for peace and rebuilding. Hopefully, the corporate giants learned a very valuable lesson.

This motion is about peace, rebuilding and development in rugby league. Fundamental in the development of all sports is junior development. I do not mean only the talented juniors who are destined for high honours as elite players, who become big money commodities between the clubs. I mean the thousands of kids who start to play the game for the sake of sport, to be part of a team and to represent their towns or their schools. This motion is also about the dedicated parents who take their children to training and to different grounds week after week. It is about coaches, mostly former players, who love the game and are putting back a bit of themselves into the sport.

We now have a 14-team competition in the NRL, sadly—I say this with all sincerity—without the presence of South Sydney, Rugby league is bigger than ever. The players are
fitter and faster than ever and we have seen some games this year which have been absolute beauties. Not only is there rivalry between the clubs but rivalry between the states. Who would have predicted a Melbourne premiership, their achievement in 1999? I will finish on this note: no matter how big, successful and financial rugby league becomes, its future depends on juniors, and mums and dads, the schools and the volunteers.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (1.33 p.m.)—Perhaps the motive of the member for Cook in moving this motion arises from the problems he had when he made comments in February of last year about the Sydney Olympics and the deals that were done with media proprietors, and this is an attempt to resemble a human vacuum cleaner in regard to those media proprietors. But I suggest that it will not be successful. It also does not stand up to the facts. I want to acknowledge the presence in the gallery today of a great of the game, a legend, Mr Bernie Purcell, 1956 Kangaroo tourist, Australian representative and, of course, a legend of the mighty South Sydney rugby league team.

This motion fails to acknowledge the fundamental point which the member for Fairfax has emphasised today: that rugby league is a sport, not a big business. Rugby league is suffering from the fact that it is being run by the corporate dollar without regard to the greater shareholders of the game, the fans. If you examine the problems with rugby league at the moment, I think one particular fact that should be borne in mind is the Inside Sport survey in which people have been asked which of the following best describes their feelings about rugby league. It is back better than ever, 10.39 per cent; it is back as good as ever, 13.12 per cent; my interest is slowly returning, 14.44 per cent; I barely give a damn any more, 28.26 per cent; and RIP, 33.8 per cent of respondents. The game is hardly healthy when those sorts of poll results are there.

The member for Cook inadvertently I think misled the House by saying that somehow South Sydney had financial difficulties. The fact is that South Sydney have always paid their way and have not had the sponsorship of corporate giants such as News Ltd; unlike his team, the Sharks. It is notable that throughout his speech he referred to them as the Sharks. He spoke about local commitment and local involvement. Why is it that they have dropped Cronulla and Sutherland out of the name? What we are seeing is an attempt to de-subsurbainise, to get rid of the geographical names from the sport and to make it such that it is just Sharks v. Panthers, Raiders v. Eagles and Bulldogs v. Eels. What that means is to take away the local community base that has been the basis of rugby league since 1908. We also have to look at the sponsorship that has occurred.

Souths are not dead. South will be in court in June, represented very ably by Tom Hughes QC and Richard Whyte QC, with Nick Pappas the instructing solicitor. We will be in court because we believe that the criteria were grossly unfair. To give one example, in the last week it has come to light that the ACT government guaranteed the Canberra Raiders a subsidy of $1.37 million a year to play at Bruce Stadium. What that means is that no-one has to actually pay to get through the gate. One figure that is being cited is that the actual income the Raiders got from Bruce Stadium was $55,000 and the rest of it came from the ACT taxpayer, just as some $20 million was subsidised by the taxpayers, state and federal, to build the stadium on the Central Coast where the Northern Eagles now play some of their games. We have also seen shonky figures used throughout this debate. Last Friday night Chris Johns, one of the founders of Super League, was caught out when he announced the crowd at the opening game at the MCG to be 31,000. The MCG Trust got in touch with him and said, ‘Hang on a tick, there were actually 23,239 there.’ It is typical of the fudging that has gone to justify the decision which had already been made to exclude South Sydney from the rugby league competition because they did not fit in with the determination, which had already been made before the criteria were established, to exclude South Sydney from the competition.

When sport simply becomes run by big business it loses the support of its fans. That is why we have had 50,000 people march in
Sydney. That is why we have been able to raise $2 million. That is why at the concert we held with a bunch of old blokes, with due respect, playing touch footy at Redfern Oval, we drew 17,000 people whereas the double-header at the new Olympic stadium could draw—between them—only 60,000. We drew more for one team than those four combined. *(Time expired)*

Mr ANDREW THOMSON (Wentworth) *(1.38 p.m.)*—It is true to say that the game of rugby league has come a long way since the original New South Wales competition began and, as members who have spoken in this debate have made clear, some of the directions in which it has been heading in recent times have caused some ill feeling in the community. Since the time competition began, you have to say that on the positive side of things it has moved into areas of the country that have been traditionally dominated by other codes of football. This expansion is testimony to the vision of administrators who believe that the game not only is strong enough to survive in the non-traditional areas but could flourish there. It certainly seems to be doing that. In particular, the victory by the Melbourne Storm team in the last grand final of the century was, I think, an indication of the game’s potential for future success.

You would have to say that the NRL decision makers have made some tough decisions in recent times. I have to acknowledge that a large number of my constituents had their feelings hurt very deeply by the decision to axe one of the foundation clubs, South Sydney Rabbitohs. I was disturbed by the way in which this was done. Certainly the success of any code of football must basically be built on a strong network of clubs, much as the South Sydney Rabbitohs are. I offer these views not just from a parochial point of view because I represent a lot of the club’s fans but really as a supporter of sport in general and its positive role in the community.

I would like to acknowledge, along with the member for Grayndler, the presence in the gallery of Mr Purcell. He was an international, a Kangaroo. He held the scoring record as a forward, broken I believe only recently by David Furner of the Canberra Raiders. It is very good to see in the gallery of the national parliament people who represent something real about the debates that take place here. Likewise, I should also mention the club that I support in Sydney, the Sydney Roosters. This club is more than simply an organisation of people who provide a team for the competition; they are an integral part of the community in the eastern suburbs of Sydney. They devote a lot of time and resources to the development of the game at a junior level. Senior players and staff visit local schools and provide some coaching assistance. Senior players act as role models for young people, generally boys, in the eastern suburbs who are interested in the game.

The improvement in participation at a local level is something that must always be bolstered in any code of football. Over the last four years there has been an increase in the number of players competing in the Sydney Roosters junior league by 48 per cent and the number of teams fielded by 58 per cent. This is a very good indication of the club’s success. Last night’s result aside, particularly the large margin of victory, I think they are going to do very well this year and I wish them the best in the future.

This debate also gives us the chance to reflect in general on the position of the fan or the supporter not only of rugby league but of other codes of football and other spectator sports. The AFL in Melbourne appears to have announced today a proposal to split the traditional Australian Rules competition into two conferences, as they call it, in order to give the weaker clubs a chance somehow whilst maintaining their position in the league. I hope this is really not some cover for a more corporate approach to the game. I grew up in that city. My father, my grandfather and I suppose his father too were always supporters of Carlton. I will be so until the day I breathe my last, but I hope that some of the sponsorship inflation that has wreaked so much damage on various sports as technology progresses will not be allowed to do as much damage to the code as might otherwise be the case. *(Time expired)*

Mr SPEAKER—Order! The debate is adjourned, and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.
STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Drugs: Strategies

Mr LEO McLEAY (Watson)—Today I want to make a brief comment about drugs in our society. The recent death of a young man at a rave party in Sydney has resulted in a spate of articles about drug use. It seems that everyone has an opinion about drug use. But what progress are we making with the problem of drug usage in our society? What have we achieved? I would have to say not much. The safe injecting facility in Sydney and the one in Canberra still have not been opened. Obstacles are put in the way at every opportunity by those who are opposed to such places, often on the spurious ground that to recognise illicit drug taking is to condone it. Yet deaths from drugs, crime related to drugs and other tragedies continue to occur while people argue about what they think should happen.

We do not live in a perfect world. The fact is that illicit drugs exist and people take them for social or recreational reasons. Fear of breaking the law, or even dying does not seem to stop them. While users are dying, some people believe that we should all be perfect. Many lack real compassion and draw their inspiration from the American zero tolerance campaigns. In the USA there are over two million people in jail. In some jurisdictions a majority of these people are there for drug related crime. Jailing drug users or condemning them to an early death from hepatitis or overdosing is not the answer. I would like to see more compassion and more willingness to be flexible in our attitudes. More informed understanding rather than interfering disapproval would see us treat drug use as a health issue rather than a law and order issue. Otherwise, there is no prospect for us as a society of being able to work through the problem of drug abuse. (Time expired)

Chiswell, Right Reverend Peter

Mr ST CLAIR (New England)—Last Tuesday in Armidale at St Peter’s Cathedral I attended the installation and commissioning of the new Bishop of Armidale, the Right Reverend Peter Brain. The ceremony, which was the first for 23 years in the Armidale Anglican Diocese, followed the retirement of the Right Reverend Peter Chiswell, who was the Anglican Bishop of Armidale from 1976 to 1999. Today I would like to reflect on the Right Reverend Peter Chiswell’s 23 years of service to the Armidale Anglican Diocese. During these years there were floods, droughts, bushfires, falls in commodity prices and great changes in the rural areas of his diocese. The Armidale Anglican Diocese covers a large area from the Queensland border in the north to Quirindi in the south, and from Walcha in the east to Lightning Ridge and Walgett in the west.

Peter Chiswell had a love for teaching the gospel and believed that everyone had the right to learn about the gospel. He worked hard to introduce and maintain the presence of the Anglican Church in every town in the diocese. He worked hard to maintain three Anglican schools in the diocese, these being the Armidale school and New England school in Armidale and the Calrossy in Tamworth, and he was instrumental in opening a fourth Anglican school, the William Cowper Primary School, in Tamworth. The Armidale Anglican Diocese became more unified under the leadership of Peter Chiswell, and I congratulate him on the work that he has done and wish Peter and his wife, Betty, a comfortable and peaceful retirement in Armidale. I know the church is in good hands. (Time expired)

Commonwealth Recognition Awards

Ms GERICK (Canning)—Mr Speaker, I am pleased today to speak about the function I held in Armidale on the Sunday before last to present certificates and recognise the work done by 10 people living in Canning. It is important that communities take the opportunity to recognise the work of volunteers, who make such a contribution to where we live. Volunteers do much of the work that becomes the glue that binds our communities together. When preparing for the ceremony and reading the recommendations, it was incredible to learn of the amount of volunteer work that these people had done. There was one lady who had spent over 50 years doing volunteer work and being a member of various boards. These people act as an inspiration for each one of us. On behalf of the community of Canning, I would like to thank and con-
gratulate each of the following people: Elsie Brown, Doug Chantler, John Cumming, John Davies, Isabelle Hilgert, Joy Jeffes, John Murray, Phyllis Pepper, Ronda Raftery and Edna Trickett. Many of the recipients said to me that they had not realised how much work they had done; they had just done what they felt was needed by the community. This is the spirit that has built Australia.

Macquarie Electorate: Windsor Road

Mr BARTLETT (Macquarie)—Mr Speaker, the New South Wales transport minister, Carl Scully, was on Sydney radio last week trying to defend his inaction over Windsor Road and, worse, trying to blame others. Hawkesbury residents are sick and tired of the state government’s deceit and procrastination. They want to see action on Windsor Road and they want to see it now. Windsor Road is rapidly becoming Sydney’s longest car park. It is unfair to Hawkesbury residents, it is a burden to commuters, it is an impediment to local economic development and it is a serious risk to its many users: there were 12 fatalities last year on Windsor Road. Meanwhile the state government’s irresponsibility allows further residential development in the north-west sector while doing nothing for essential infrastructure.

In February 1995 Bob Carr promised that Windsor Road would be upgraded to four lanes within his first term of office. Five years later, still nothing has been done. There is nothing but more empty promises of a starting time some years down the track. There is a vague four-year plan that does nothing for the Hawkesbury or Windsor Road and a vague 10-year plan which is way off in Labor’s never never land. That really is not good enough for the residents of the Hawkesbury. Hawkesbury residents are tired of the state government’s inaction over Windsor Road. They are sick of being treated with contempt by the state government. They want to see action on Windsor Road. It is time the New South Wales government honoured its promises. It is time it addressed the needs of the Hawkesbury and it is time it did something about tackling Windsor Road as a matter of urgency.

Memorial: Thomas Currie Derrick

Mr SAWFORD (Port Adelaide)—I am extremely disappointed to inform the House that the memorial to Port Adelaide’s greatest wartime hero and in fact South Australia’s greatest wartime hero, as well as one of Australia’s most inspirational soldiers in World War II, Thomas Currie Derrick, has been severely vandalised and the bronze plaque celebrating and commemorating his bravery stolen. Tom—or Diver, as he was known—Derrick served in the famous 2nd/48th Infantry Battalion at El Alamein and Tobruk. He won a Victoria Cross for an amazing set of actions in the capture of Sattleburg in Papua New Guinea in November 1943. At a distance of some five or six yards, Sergeant Derrick destroyed 10 enemy posts up a precipitous cliff, and his actions saved the lives of many of his Australian troops in the capture of a most strategic position.

The memorial was opened in May 1995 and was a joint project by the Australia Remembers campaign and the City of Port Adelaide. In one of the great tragedies of World War II and in one of the last set piece actions by Australian troops, Sergeant Derrick, as he was then, lost his life on the island of Tarakan off the Borneo coast. The memorial can and will be repaired; however, the return of the two original bronze plaques commemorating a great Portonian would be greatly appreciated.

In conclusion I would like to make a comment about Dame Roma Mitchell. She was a great South Australian and a great Australian. Many in South Australia, and particularly in Port Adelaide, regret her passing. Her state funeral will be one of the great celebrations in South Australia. (Time expired)

Simpson Prize

Mr LLOYD (Robertson)—Mr Speaker, on Monday, 21 February this year I had the honour of representing ministers Dr David Kemp and Mr Bruce Scott at a function in Parliament House to present the awards to the winners of the Simpson Prize, which is one of the most significant literary prizes offered by the federal government. Each of the state
winners receives as their prize a trip to Gallipoli on 25 April this year. They will be accompanied by the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, Bruce Scott. It is a magnificent prize. I had a chance to read all of the winning entries. The level of entry was outstanding and I would like to congratulate each of the winners: Chloe Ey, Gabrielle Metherall, Kate Nisbett, Laura Grumley who comes from Gosford High School in my electorate, Tessa Finney Brown, Caitlin Hurley, Birra Reithmuller and Alysia Dehowski. They were all of the state winners. As I said, they attended the function in Canberra recently. One of the themes that came through in all of their entries was how the spirit of Anzac relates to modern-day Australia, and it was quite heartening to read how they see the spirit of Anzac as still being alive today. They often referred to our conflict in East Timor and the role Australian soldiers played in that. *(Time expired)*

**Mitchell, Dame Roma**

Ms GILLARD (Lalor)—Like the member for Port Adelaide, I seek to add my voice to the tributes flowing today for Dame Roma Mitchell. As a young undergraduate student I was privileged to serve on the Adelaide University Council with Dame Roma. I was in my early 20s and an undergraduate representative; she, of course, was at that stage the Senior Deputy Chancellor of Adelaide University. By that point in her life she had already recorded many historic firsts, including having been appointed Australia’s first female Queen’s Counsel and having been appointed Australia’s first female Supreme Court judge.

After I left the Adelaide University Council and moved to Melbourne, she was appointed the first female chancellor of a university, and it is important to note that she was the first woman outside of the royal family to be invested with a chancellorship of any university in the British Commonwealth. As a young undergraduate student pushing student concerns on Adelaide University Council, I was always impressed with Dame Roma’s ability to listen and her sympathy for student concerns. Like many thousands of other women, and I presume many thousands of female law students, I found her and her life a great inspiration. I regret, as I am sure many thousands in the community do, her passing.

**Regional Forest Agreement: Otways**

Mr McARTHUR (Corangamite)—I wish to refute an article in the *Geelong Advertiser* written by Mr Chris Tipler about the regional forest agreement process going on in the Otways. In his article, he makes observations about woodchips and suggests that woodchips are the key element of the Otway timber industry. Nothing could be further from the truth. Woodchips are a by-product of the timber industry—lesser value timber—and saw log is the key element of the timber industry in the Otways.

Mr Tipler goes on to say that tourism is the key industry in the Otways. Obviously, tourism is improving, as it is in other parts of Australia. However, the logging industry does supply jobs to the local towns of Colac, Birregurra and Apollo Bay, and he gives no reason why the cessation of timber harvesting would improve the tourist operations. Everyone knows that the lack of rainfall in the Otways is a factor of the 100-year drought and nothing to do with the removal of timber harvesting. This article has no foundation, no factual accuracy and is not based on any science. It is typical of the sort of article that people who are against logging put in newspapers in the Geelong area and in Victoria. *(Time expired)*

**Oil Industry: Port Stanvac**

Mr COX (Kingston)—This morning brought the news that another 40 jobs have been lost from Mobil’s Port Stanvac oil refinery. This was the result of changing from operating separate control rooms for the fuels and lube refineries to a single facility. This is part of the process of reducing costs to improve the refinery’s viability. The people at Port Stanvac are indeed in a battle for their jobs as they work to improve the facility’s gross profit margin. On Saturday, in the *Advertiser*, BP and Shell suggested Mobil had made its decision to end the product exchange agreement, to shift the blame for a possible future decision to close Stanvac. The reason Mobil ended the exchange agreement was that it needed to obtain a realistic price
for product to maintain Stanvac’s viability. I have been advised that the price it asked of BP and Shell was lower than the cost to them of bringing fuel in from interstate or overseas. They apparently now dispute that.

The reason they have refused to take fuel from Stanvac is that they are positioning themselves for the rationalisation process the Howard government’s new oil industry merger policy is actively promoting. Unlike the Howard government, while Labor recognises that there will be changes in the Australian refining industry, our vision for its future does not include the closure of either Port Stanvac in South Australia or Kwinana in Western Australia. I call on the Minister for Industry, Science and Resources to rule out the government supporting oil industry merger proposals that would cause either of those refineries to close.

Roads: New South Wales

Mr BAIRD (Cook)—I rise today to speak about the road situation that confronts the residents of my electorate. There is no doubt that one week ago on Tuesday we experienced the worst traffic jams the Sutherland shire has seen in its history. People were missing flights on a widespread basis and were extensively delayed in going into the city. That was because of the failure of the state government to recognise the road needs in the southern area. There has undoubtedly been a significant shift of road funding into the west of New South Wales, in particular into the western suburbs. Undoubtedly there has been nothing spent in the south. The worst black spot of anywhere in New South Wales is located in my electorate. We have a road reservation that has been there since 1948.

Mr Zahra—Why don’t you go back to being leader of the Liberal Party?

Mr BAIRD—The pressure that is on the roads in that area has been very significant.

Mr Zahra—I hear there’s a vacancy coming up!

Mr SPEAKER—Order! The member for McMillan!

Mr BAIRD—As has been illustrated, Mr Carr is asleep at the wheel. He shows no interest other than in being a correspondent for the Herald in Berlin, and that is why he is doing extensive German training. He shows no interest in the real needs of the people of New South Wales, particularly those who live in Cook, as illustrated by the gross neglect of the roads. No new initiatives have been shown in this area. (Time expired)

Child Abuse: Purple Ribbon Project

Mrs HOARE (Charlton)—I want to bring to the attention of the House a project known as the Purple Ribbon Project. With the intention of breaking the barrier of silence on child abuse, the aim of the project is to establish the month of July each year nationally as Purple Ribbon Month.

Purple signifies compassion, and community members would be asked to wear a small purple ribbon as a protest against all child abuse in all of our communities. The Purple Ribbon Project was adopted by the Wyong Shire Council, in the neighbouring electorate of my friend and colleague the member for Dobell, to raise awareness of the extent and effect of child abuse of all types.

I have approached my Labor colleagues on Lake Macquarie City Council to urge the adoption by that council of this worthwhile project. I would like to congratulate Jan Watson from the electorate of Dobell on her initiative in instigating a campaign to establish the project nationally. I also support my colleague the member for Rankin for facilitating the support of government members and of you, Mr Speaker, to bring about a national Purple Ribbon Month.

Mr SPEAKER—Are there any further statements by members? There is a certain unusual reluctance of members to make statements. It being 2 p.m., in accordance with standing order 106A, the time for members’ statements has concluded.

CONDOLENCES

Mitchell, Dame Roma

Mr HOWARD (Bennelong—Prime Minister) (2.00 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, with the indulgence of the House, I refer to the death in Adelaide yesterday of Dame Roma Mitchell, AC, DBE, CVO, at the age of 86. I think it is fair to say that Dame Roma Mitchell has been a person who has made an enormous contribution to Australian public and profes-
sional life over a period of more than 50 years. In many respects, she was a role model for professional women in Australia. She was one of Australia’s most distinguished women, who achieved so many firsts in a pioneering career in the law and in community, academic and state affairs, culminating as Governor of South Australia and becoming Australia’s first female governor. She was educated at St Aloys College, Adelaide, where she was dux, and that set a pattern of firsts for the rest of her public and professional life, being the first female Queen’s Counsel not only in Australia but in the entire Commonwealth, the first female judge appointed in Australia, the first female governor, and a person who chaired the Human Rights Commission. Right up until her death, she played a very active role in public affairs.

Dame Roma is remembered with particular affection in her home state of South Australia, where she was Chancellor of the University of Adelaide—once again, a first: she was the first female chancellor—having previously served 11 years as deputy chancellor. She became Governor of South Australia in 1991 and served in that position until 1996. She was honoured on numerous occasions—Companion of the Order of Australia in 1991; Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1982; Commander of the Legion of Honour, France, in 1997; and Commander of the Royal Victorian Order earlier this year. She led a very remarkable and exemplary life. She was, in so many ways, a leader and a role model and I know the House and the Leader of the Opposition will want to join me in recording our sadness at her passing, to mark a remarkable life and to honour the enormous contribution that she has made.

Mr BEAZLEY (Brand—Leader of the Opposition) (2.03 p.m.)—With the indulgence of the House, Mr Speaker, Dame Roma Mitchell has been an inspiration to countless Australians, especially in her home state of South Australia. Throughout her long life she was a pioneer for equality and social justice. She said she was inspired to study the law by injustices that she saw around her in the Depression years. The Prime Minister has pointed to her many firsts. In 1934, at the age of 21, she was admitted to the bar but then, in 1962, she was appointed Australia’s first female Queen’s Counsel. In 1965, she was the first woman to become a Supreme Court judge and, in 1983, the first woman to become chancellor of an Australian university. In 1991 she was invested as Governor of South Australia, the first woman to be so honoured. In 1981, she became the first chair of the Australian Human Rights Commission, becoming a human rights worker of international acclaim.

Among these pioneering achievements, Dame Roma never lost her personal and healing touch. Whether it was talking to Aboriginal elders or speaking to school children, her good humour and willingness to listen to others shone through. Dame Roma was particularly interested in the barriers to equal rights posed by women’s desire to fulfill their work and family commitments, an issue of enormous importance around this nation. Dame Roma had strong views on the need to change attitudes towards working wives, the need for refresher courses for women graduates wanting to return to work after rearing children, and the need for housework to be shared. Dame Roma was greatly loved in South Australia for her personality, her humanity and her words of wisdom. She had this piece of advice for others: ‘If you have a particular ambition, follow it. Don’t be put off by thinking it’s difficult. I think you have just to go on trying at the thing that you think you can do best.’ She certainly exemplified, in her own life, the advice that she gave to others. As a lawyer, judge, governor, patron of the arts, human rights activist and an inspiration to young women, Dame Roma will be sadly missed.

Mr SPEAKER—On behalf of the House, I thank both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition for the way in which they have encapsulated the life of a remarkable fellow South Australian.

Allan, Mr Archibald Ian

Mr SPEAKER (2.05 p.m.)—I inform the House of the death, on Sunday, 13 February this year, of Archibald Ian Allan, a member of this House for the division of Gwydir from 1953 to 1969. As a mark of respect to the
memory of Mr Allan, I invite honourable members to rise in their places.

Honourable members having stood in their places—

Mr SPEAKER—I thank the House.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Nursing Homes: Riverside

Mr BEAZLEY (2.06 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Aged Care. Minister, is it a fact that a report by your Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency on Riverside Nursing Home in July 1999 found problems with infection control and the administration of medication at this facility? Isn’t it a fact that the concerns raised in the July 1999 report remain problems identified in the inspection conducted on 16 and 17 February this year, one month after further serious complaints about this home were received in January this year? Minister, aren’t the elderly residents at this home simply paying the price for your inattention, inaction and incompetence on this issue? Why have you taken so long to act on these complaints and why have you only acted when prompted by media and public pressure?

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—The history of the Riverside Nursing Home does it no credit at all. It has form back to 1988. Opposition members interjecting—

Mr BRONWYN BISHOP—I ascertained that during 13 years of Labor government you only closed one home in those 13 years. When the new legislation came into effect, those homes which under the old system were designated as ‘homes of concern’, which included Riverside, were referred to the agency. The agency worked with that home to bring it up to standard—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—which it did. On 16 January of this year, an incident occurred that is, quite frankly, beyond belief in this day and age. Members will recall that I came into this House in the last week of sitting and said what I had found out on the evening of 15 February and what action I had taken and put in place on the morning of 16 February, having worked through the night to achieve that end.

The fact of the matter is that for a registered nurse in this day and age to order that elderly patients, some with open wounds merely taped up and others with catheters, be placed in a bath containing kerosene is unbelievable.

Mr Brereton—So what did you do?

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—The action taken by the department was that it received a complaint on the next day, the 17th. It appears from the record that it received that complaint at first instance from the infectious diseases department of the Victorian government. The Victorian government have a responsibility to do with infectious diseases and responsibility under their own act. However, on 17 February, the department contacted the approved provider, and the approved provider was asked to rectify the situation. At that point, if this was not done, it should have been referred to the Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency for inspection and investigation. A decision was made by the department not to do this. The system was in place but the process was not followed.

It then came to my attention, at 10 p.m. on 15 February, that this incident had taken place. The matter was referred to the agency by the department at 1 o’clock in the morning and by 9 o’clock there was an inspection team of three nurses, an assessor from the agency and a departmental official who conducted a thorough two-day review. It is the department which makes the decisions about this matter. It is the secretary who has the authority under the act, and the delegate of the secretary makes the decision. As a result of the report written by the inspection team, the decision was made that sanctions should be put in place and that the provider status should be revoked, which meant that all federal funding would cease. The delegate recommended that this action be suspended, conditional upon an administrator being appointed and certain health standards and things about the building being brought up to standard. We then had agency and departmental nurses in that facility every day, at random times, looking after the safety of the residents.
We then had the situation where we received a report from those nurses, who said that nothing was being done to bring anything up to scratch. Accordingly, the department asked the agency to do another full audit review and report to the department. Under the act the provider had an entitlement to 14 days in which to respond. That 14 days would have been up tomorrow. As a result of the second review, the delegate made a decision that sanctions should be imposed—this means that federal funding of the value of $1.96 million per year is totally withdrawn—and that the licences, which on the open market if they were sold would be worth around $2 million, should also be revoked. The contingency plans worked out were these. Under the act, once the determination is made and the process is served—and I was advised that that occurred at about 8 o’clock this morning—plans have to be in place for the residents to be evacuated. We had an arrangement with the Victorian government to use their ambulances. Before the action was taken, a communication and a residents kit went from the department to each resident and to the loved ones.

Mr Snowdon interjecting—

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Mr Speaker, this is not an amusing matter. This is a very serious matter—

Mr Crean—And you did not treat it seriously.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—It is being treated very seriously. The fact of the matter is that my concern all along has been for the residents. By remaining in that home, their lives are at risk. There was an incident last week of a lady who had a broken arm. She described a pain on 19 February. It was not discovered or sent for an X-ray until 26 February. When she came back from the hospital—this is despite the fact that doctors were called—she was put in a position where her life could be at risk because she was not properly put into her bed. In other words, the evidence that was found by the nurses that went in was sufficiently of concern for the most serious of all sanctions to be taken.

This does mean, as I said, that licences have been revoked. It does mean that recurrent funding is withdrawn. I would like to express my thanks to the Sisters of Charity at St Vincent’s for working with the department so well and for providing what is a lovely facility—indeed, residents and their relatives are presently being taken on an inspection tour. Residents may then be brought back so that their fears may be dealt with. Under the act there is no provision for notice, and that I believe is something that needs to be remedied because the speed of the action does indeed make things difficult for people when they are told they have to move. The problem of the Victorian government trying to make a political headline on Saturday morning was quite unconscionable.

Mrs Irwin interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Fowler!

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—It meant that there were fears that started for the residents—

Mr SPEAKER—The minister will resume her seat. It is evident that no-one wants to have this question answered, or at least the behaviour of the member for Fowler would tend to reinforce that point of view. When the House has come to order, I will recognise once again the minister.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. This matter is one where older, frail Australians have firstly been bathed in kerosene and subsequently have had blisters occur. We have had situations where the building itself is deficient, where there is evidence that bandages that have been used to dress wounds have been washed and reused, where a dressing on a wound that has seeped has been simply taped up and no new dressing applied. Indeed, our department officials went out and spent $400 in order to make these resources available, and this is despite the funding that has been made available to this person. It is no longer acceptable for that money to be paid to that provider. Again I go back to the residents and their need for care and safety. They are not safe in the Riverside home. They will be safe with the Sisters of Charity at St Vincent’s.
Indeed, the action that we have taken has been speedy; it has been accurate. We have been at great pains not to make any statements that would pre-empt the action that the delegate might take which would impugn any of the legality of the action taken. Mr Speaker, I can say to you that I do hope that those in the opposition who think this is an opportunity for political activity will instead see that this reform act is the one that was greatly needed, that the history of this home alone—going back to 1988—means that the reforms were needed. And indeed, since this act has been in place, we have raised standards enormously.

**Goods and Services Tax: Roll-Back**

**Mr GEORGIOU** (2.18 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Treasurer. Would the Treasurer advise the House of the financial implications of rolling back the goods and services tax and the effect of such a policy on the complexity of the tax system and the ability to fund social services.

**Mr COSTELLO**—I thank the honourable member for Kooyong for his question. He may have been as intrigued as the rest of Australia with a recently announced policy from the Labor Party. They are rare but they come along every now and then. After conducting this apparently ferocious campaign against the goods and services tax, it now appears that the policy of the Labor Party is that, if they are ever elected, they are so opposed to it that they intend to keep it. What is more, they intend to add additional layers of complexity by so-called ‘rolling it back’. If you roll back goods and services tax and you guarantee revenue to the states, as the Leader of the Opposition has, the first consequence of that would be that the only way you can make up the difference is through new taxes to raise new revenue. There have now been 30 occasions on which the Leader of the Opposition has been given the opportunity to rule out a policy of increasing income taxes, and on each and every single one of those 30 occasions he has taken the opportunity to keep open the prospect of Labor’s increasing income taxes.

What a policy we now have from the Labor Party! They want to keep GST and they want to roll up income taxes as well; roll back GST, roll out the barrel on the spending, roll over on union claims—rolled gold disaster from the Leader of the Opposition. When you actually ask him to outline where he intends to roll back GST—something he has been thinking about for the last four years—as reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 1 December 1999, he says this:

The Opposition Leader, Mr Beazley, conceded yesterday that promising to roll back the GST, the Labor Party was travelling an uncharted road with an unknown destination. An ‘uncharted road with an unknown destination’. He cannot tell you where, he cannot tell you when and he cannot tell you how he is going to get the income but he is in favour of a policy of roll-back. The *Financial Review* of 23 February 2000 reported that Labor Party frontbenchers:

…pushing to hold off on releasing details of the GST policy fear that revealing early concessions would lead to a bidding war, with demands to exempt more and more politically sensitive items. “Where do you draw the line—children’s clothes, pensioners’ electricity bills?” asked one front-bencher.

So they are now confronting the problem of rolling back with no charting of the road and no end in sight—just a promise out there and one commitment to make up any revenue that is lost. We might well ask the question: how are you going to know the revenue that is lost without asking those industries which you have exempted to file GST returns anyway to tell you what they would have paid had they been in the system?

I think this is obviously starting to worry the faithful, as Malcolm Farr reported on the Labor Party chat room. A Mr Leonard McCarthy wrote in to say this: ‘Initial reaction will be to call me mad, but I prefer shadow foreign affairs minister Laurie Brereton as leader.’ The next morning, Simon O’Toole agreed. He said, ‘I must be mad too, Len, because I have always thought Laurie Brereton would not be that bad, particularly in the lack of talent environment the federal parliamentary Labor Party finds itself in.’

This is a policy of roll-back on an uncharted road with no destination, no means of funding it and no serious thought. This is an
opposition that will say or do anything because it wants this government to do the hard work and it wants to try to slide in on all of the hard work that we have done. This is an opposition that has no policy and no leadership.

**Nursing Homes: Riverside**

Mr SWAN (2.24 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Aged Care. Minister, why wasn’t the Riverside Nursing Home subjected to spot checks following the report in July 1999 by your Aged Care Standards Agency, which found the need to monitor the home to ensure that standards would be maintained? Minister, why were spot checks not carried out for seven months, a period in which you say that the elderly were suffering?

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—The period that I said that the elderly are at risk is right now. That is why the delegate said that this action should be taken. The fact of the matter is that the accreditation system—the first time it has been introduced—is designed to exclude from the system those providers who ought not to be in it. In other words, the standards that were tolerated before will not be under this system. The answer to the question of the honourable member is that there were contact visits between the agency and the facility. As I explained to you, it was one that was handed over from the list of homes of concern under the previous act. The agency then worked with the people on that list to bring them up to standard. And there are some very good news stories about it where, indeed, people have been brought up—

Mr Kerr—How many spot checks have you done?

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—They work continually, with contact visits. In the course of that the agency has carried out 1,250 visits to facilities and 825 support visits, and this is in addition to the system of inspection that goes on pursuant to the resident classification scale, where some 14,000 checks of individual residences have been made, with 1,500 visits.

Mr Beazley—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order which goes to relevance.

Mr SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition is not being assisted by those behind him.

Mr Beazley—A specific question was asked on action taken at this specific nursing home after the initial whistle was blown in July 1999. What spot checks were undertaken to ascertain the performance of this home since that point?

Mr SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition has made his point and will resume his seat. The minister is in order and I invite her to continue her answer.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Thank you, Mr Speaker. The point that I am making here is that the whole system is designed to bring poor standard residential aged care up to standard. I would have hoped that members of the opposition, who would have homes in their electorates where they would want the best care to be given, would be interested in knowing how the reforms are working. With the aim of achieving this outcome, I can only say to you that, where this sort of incident occurred, I do not think I ever again will hear of a registered nurse ordering elderly Australians to be placed in a bath of kerosene. I do not think I will hear of it ever again. I think the fact that the subsequent report has shown that this action was required shows how much the reforms were needed and how well they are now being implemented.
Private Health Insurance; Rebate

Dr SOUTHCOTT (2.29 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Health and Aged Care. Is the minister aware of recent comments regarding the government’s 90 per cent rebate on private health insurance? How successful has the rebate been and what would be the effect on the health system if it were abolished?

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms Macklin—Ninety per cent!

Mr SPEAKER—I invite the member for Boothby to repeat his question, and he will be heard in silence.

Dr SOUTHCOTT—My question is addressed to the Minister for Health and Aged Care. Is the minister aware of recent comments regarding the government’s 30 per cent rebate on private health insurance? How successful has the rebate been? What would be the effect on the health system if it were abolished?

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—I have no interest in recognising anybody in this sort of hubbub. The House will come to order!

Mr Leo McLeay—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Is it proper for the member to substantially change his question? Will you ask him to ask only the question that he originally asked?

Mr SPEAKER—The Chief Opposition Whip will resume his seat.

Dr WOOLDRIDGE—I thank the honourable member for Boothby for his question and for his interest in this issue. I am aware of comments. They started two weeks ago when a number of newspapers reported a senior opposition figure as saying that the opposition was seriously considering scrapping the rebate. I can inform the House that that opposition figure was the member for Jagajaga, the shadow minister for health, who was actively and openly briefing journalists that the opposition was thinking of scrapping the 30 per cent rebate. Her foray into policy lasted 24 hours, when the opposition leader went on ABC radio and was asked by John Fayne, ‘So will you scrap it?’ The reply was, ‘But it’s impossible to scrap.’ A very reluctant turnaround!

The opposition continue with their difficult position on this, with the member for Fremantle, immediately after the Leader of the Opposition said they were not going to scrap it, being quoted in the paper as saying, ‘The policy has to be questioned.’ The fact is that this was put into some perspective by the Leader of the Opposition in the interview with John Fayne, when he said, ‘You’ve got thousands of people out there who are elderly, who if you suddenly rip the rug out from under them, you would find them in a situation where they couldn’t afford private health insurance.’ I think it is illustrative to tell the House how we got into the position we were in with private health insurance in the first place. We got into that position after 13 years of abject neglect and failure by the Labor Party. We got into that position because of the abolition of the Commonwealth bed day subsidy, because of the abolition of the Commonwealth’s contribution to the reinsurance pool and because of the reduction of Medicare rebates to in-patients in private hospitals. We got into a situation where premiums went up by 17 per cent in one year—in 1991-92—so much so that, in the first full financial year of this government, private health insurance funds lost $131 million.

We have had a startling turnaround in the last three years. We have had the best results in terms of increased members—nearly 294,000, but over a million if you look at the long-term trend of decline. Premium increases are at the lowest for 10 years. We have made health insurance far more affordable, the gap is being addressed, funds are now back into profitability and prudential arrangements are appropriate for the industry. The only threat to the private health insurance industry is the Leader of the Opposition, who has not ruled out reducing the rebate from 30 per cent to something less, and who has not ruled out a means test on the rebate, which means people would go in and out of it over the period of their lives. The industry has been turned around after 15 years of decline, and the Labor Party has no clue what they will do to address their abject neglect and failure.
Nursing Homes: Riverside

Mr BEAZLEY (2.34 a.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Aged Care and it follows that asked by the member for Lilley. Minister, again, why wasn’t the Riverside Nursing Home subject to spot checks between the report in July 1999 and February this year? Why not?

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—I will explain it for you again. Very simply, the aim of the accreditation system is to raise the standards of all homes to a standard where individual Australians are receiving only good care. To do that, it is necessary to use the agency to have support visits in order that they may determine whether or not improvement is being made. Spot checks are a method that may be used—and it was used on the morning of 16 February—when there is a need for it to be used, and indeed it was used. The answer is that, just as there had been complaints with this home in 1992 and 1993 under ministers such as Peter Staples, Mr Howe and Carmen Lawrence, under our system we have a targeted and systematic system of inspections where spot checks are used when they are needed, as they were certainly needed on 16 February when it was necessary to go in and make that report.

Tax Reform: Analysis

Mr BAIRD (2.37 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Treasurer. Can the Treasurer advise the House of the results of independent work undertaken on the impact of the new tax system? What were the findings in relation to individuals and families, and how do these compare with alternative tax proposals.

Mr COSTELLO—I thank the honourable member for Cook for his question. I was quite interested to read in the Herald Sun and I think also in the Telegraph on the weekend an analysis which had been done by Access Economics on the new tax system under the heading 'More dollars in your pocket'. The story reported:

From July 1, Australian households will benefit to greatly varying degrees from mostly forgotten tax cuts. The biggest tax cut winners will be single income families with young children, and sole parents. A single income family on $30,000 a year with two children will gain an extra $73 a week from tax cuts while paying about $14 extra in GST.

This analysis done by Access Economics appears to have been done making allowance for the effects of the GST on the basis of a uniform CPI inflator but of differences in the cost of living in consumption baskets for each of the categories of cameos it selected. It does not allow for differences in consumption patterns within each of these groups. That is a different basis to that which the government itself presented in the policy which it took to the last election—a new tax system. Nonetheless, the analysis shows that in every category at every income level people are better off due to reductions in income tax and increases in family allowances. In fact, it is families who are the biggest winners under the new tax system. As Mr Richardson said—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr COSTELLO—The volume of interjection always goes up when they are most embarrassed. Let me say again: families will be the biggest winners under the government’s new tax system. As Mr Richardson says in this article:

If you are a single income family on $30,000 which has been waiting for years to update your family car all your Christmases will have come at once. In technical terms, this is a bloody big tax cut.

I do not know if that is parliamentary language, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER—Not precisely, but I understand it was a quote from somebody else.

Mr Howard interjecting—

Mr COSTELLO—It was not even technical language, as the Prime Minister says. A one-income family on $40,000 with two children, one below five, with not only income tax cuts but also increased family benefits will be a total of $47.57 better off a week.

That is the government’s policy. What is the Labor Party’s policy? The Labor Party’s policy is to keep the GST and to take away the income tax cuts. They have form on this. This was the position before the 1993 election. Before the 1993 election, Mr Speaker, you will recall that they were going to oppose the GST, and when they got elected they in-
creased every level of wholesale sales tax and the income tax cuts, which they had said were l-a-w, were taken away in their entirety. The l-a-w tax cuts never saw one dollar for one day whilst they increased every indirect wholesale sales tax, took leaded and unleaded petrol up—one by five and one by seven cents, as I recall. What a policy—a policy to keep GST and increase income taxes. On this side of the parliament we have always believed that families deserve benefits, and that is why we are cutting income taxes, why we are increasing family benefits and why we are bringing a new tax system in Australia.

Nursing Homes: Complaints

Mr McMULLAN (2.41 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Aged Care. Minister, is it not a fact that there have been over 4,000 complaints received about nursing homes since 1998? How many spot checks were undertaken of nursing homes in 1998 and 1999?

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—The fact that we have had 4,000 complaints means that the promotion of the scheme is actually being paid heed to. We established a complaints mechanism whereby, for the first time, complaints could be made anonymously so that residents or their loved ones could make complaints without feeling intimidated. Indeed, I will repeat the free-call number: 1800 550 552.

The fact is that 90 per cent of those nearly 4,000 complaints have been resolved to the satisfaction of all parties. Many of those complaints are important to residents but they may not seem important to you. It can be an allegation that somebody stole underwear or a nightdress. It can be a complaint that food does not taste nice. It can be a whole range of things that are properly dealt with—

Mr McMullan—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order which of course goes to relevance. I specifically asked how many spot checks had been done in 1998 and 1999.

Mr SPEAKER—I do not need any help from people on my right. The minister was asked a question about both the number of complaints and spot checks, and she was responding to that question. I have ruled.

Mr McMullan—Could I just clarify a point with you, Mr Speaker?

Mr SPEAKER—You cannot ask the question a second time, if that is what you wish to do, as you are aware.

Mr McMullan—But I want to get it right, Mr Speaker. What I am saying is that the first part of the question about the 4,000 complaints was, ‘Isn’t this a fact?’ That does not need a long answer. That is either yes or no. Then I asked how many spot checks there were and we have not heard one word.

Mr SPEAKER—Nonetheless, as the Manager of Opposition Business is aware, the minister is, under the standing orders, being relevant to the question, and I call her.

Mr Reith—I rise on a point of order, Mr Speaker. My point of order is that we have had a number of points of order which amount to frivolous points of order.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Reith—This minister has been entirely relevant, comprehensively addressing the questions which have been put to her.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The Leader of the House will resume his seat. It is obvious that there are members in the House who consider that the Speaker's nomination of them to draw attention to the noise they are raising is merely done in a throw-away line. For that reason, I now warn the member for Fowler and I will treat firmly others who deal so flippantly with my own rulings. The member for Fowler is warned. I call the Leader of the House.

Mr Reith—I simply make the point, Mr Speaker, that they have been frivolous be-
because the minister has clearly been answering the questions put to her. She has answered them comprehensively, right to the point. It is true that the opposition always want the answer that they particularly want to dictate. We understand that. But the fact is that on each and every occasion these points of order are simply to make a debating point against the minister, and she is entitled to be heard without interruption and without frivolous points of order.

Mr SPEAKER—The Leader of the House has made his point of order and will resume his seat. As all members know, the standing orders only require that the answer be relevant to the question. The minister has been relevant to the question and I call her.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. It is very important to understand that the reforms are designed to bring transparency to the system and to see that there are sanctions that can be used when they are needed. There was never a complaints mechanism before which enabled people to make anonymous complaints to bring to light those things which need to be got out into the open in order that they can be dealt with. It was legion: everybody knew that there were problems with residential age care, with nursing homes, for decades. It was common parlance, but nothing was done. It was not until we put in place the whole reform package that we started to see some transparency brought into the system where we could address the needs.

Mr Beazley—I rise on a point of order, Mr Speaker. It goes to relevance. There were two questions asked. Have 4,000 complaints been received? How many spot checks in 1998 and 1999? Two simple questions. The answer now is just way away from any relevance.

Mr SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. I have already ruled the minister’s answer as relevant to the question and I invite her to conclude her answer.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Just to conclude, Mr Speaker, I would simply say to anyone who has a complaint to make: please make it so that we can investigate it.

Job Network: Second Contract

Mr SOMLYAY (2.49 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Employment Services. Minister, would you inform the House of the progress made in the implementation of the outcomes of the second Job Network tender? How is the Job Network performing overall? Would you also inform the House of any other recent proposals for the delivery of assistance to job seekers?

Mr ABBOTT—Last December the government announced the 205 organisations that were being offered work under Job Network 2. Eight small agencies ultimately declined those offers, but I am delighted to tell the House that Job Network 2 still represents an unprecedented expansion of the scope and reach of employment services.

Mrs Hoare interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Cheltenham may find it rather inconvenient not to be in here at the end of question time.

Mr ABBOTT—The total sites are up from under 1,400 to nearly 2,100; non-metropolitan sites nearly double in number from 600 to about 1,100. In the electorate of Fairfax, for instance, there were just two employment service sites in the days of the old CES; there were 14 under Job Network 1 and there will be 18 under Job Network 2. On day one of Job Network 2, which was last Monday, 90 per cent of sites were open for business. I am advised that nearly 2,000 Job Network sites are now open, with the rest to follow by the end of the month. Job Network 2 meant creating more than 1,000 new sites from scratch in under three months—hundreds of new sites, thousands of staff, millions of dollars worth of new equipment. It was in fact one of the largest and most complex logistical operations ever undertaken in Australia, and I would like to congratulate all Job Network members and my department for managing such a smooth transition.

I have been asked about other recent proposals for delivering employment services. While the government has been getting on with the job, members opposite have been trying to devise a policy. Last March the Leader of the Opposition said that he would shortly deliver a speech containing the
‘skeleton of a substantial series of initiatives’.

As it turned out, the speech devoted just 35 words to employment issues—a very rare example of the Leader of the Opposition failing to be interminably prolix. Last week the ALP finally produced a policy document—

Ms Kernot—It wasn’t a policy document.

Mr Abbott—It was not a policy document—she admits it. So they still have no policy! It certainly was not a policy for today; it was actually a piece of crystal ball gazing for 2010.

The member for Dickson said that policy should be about skills, skills, skills. Unfortunately, Labor’s 2010 document said that the number of skilled jobs in communications and finance would actually fall. In fact, the document which the opposition is so proud of said that 40 per cent of new jobs would be for clerks, sales assistants and labourers, presumably with university degrees under Labor’s skills policy. The member for Dickson said that employment services should be available to everyone, not just to people who have lost their jobs. This has been conservatively costed at an extra $600 million a year—so goodbye to the GST roll-back and goodbye to income tax cuts if the ALP are ever lucky enough to get into government again.

For families, the bottom line is that, if you have one child, you are expected to get at least an extra $140 per year. With children under five, it is $350. As the Treasurer very accurately said, for families with children under five, we are talking about their being an extra $47 a week better off. It is about getting better payments to assist in child-care assistance and family assistance. Why would Labor want to take this away? Why would they? Let us look at the policy, or lack of policy, of the Australian Labor Party—lack of policy because they are more interested in scaring families than in supporting families. A very good element of this is the so-called family insecurity index of the member for Lilley which is based more on scaremongering than on substance. Perhaps we should look at this farcical index, which I know that the member for Lilley is very proud of.

The first point, of course, is that the index was created going back to 1995. People were not particularly secure then, were they? Of
course they weren’t, when he was the member of the caucus committee. Let us look at how the index is put together. There are 61 numbers used in the construction—29 of them are wrong. If you are going to have a good index, I would imagine that you should have good social indicators. Of course there are none of those. Most of the index components are irrelevant and they are weighed incorrectly. This is their policy for families: a bogus insecurity index. We know that you are very good at cooking the books, we know that you are very good at scaring people, but our policy is very simple: we are here to support families through big tax cuts, through extra child-care assistance, not through scaring people with bogus insecurity indexes.

**Nursing Homes: Spot Checks**

Ms MACKLIN (2.58 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Aged Care. Minister, do you recall your statement in the House on 31 August last year when you said:

Government makes policy, bureaucrats carry it out. The policy is that there will be spot checks. And:

... we will continue to have spot checks.

Minister, didn’t you tell the House that spot checks were being carried out last year when this was clearly false?

Mr Tanner interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Melbourne is warned.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Without looking at the Hansard, what I recall telling the parliament is that we still had the power to do spot checks. Indeed, I recall going into some detail as to where it was provided for in the legislation. I also recall saying that we would use tools when they were necessary.

I might say that the agency needed the tool to be used on 16 February and, if I might add, it was used on 6 March when a serious complaint had been given that a resident had told a doctor that a male carer at a particular home had hit him. That was the subject of a referral to the police, as it ought to be, but in order to follow up where there is such a serious allegation a spot check has been made. This is the sort of use when you need that tool. Otherwise, targeted and comprehensive visits in order to bring homes up to standard is the policy that is pursued. Spot checks are there to be used when the agency believes there is the need to so use.

Mr Beazley—Mr Speaker, I seek to table the answer the minister gave in August last year.

Leave not granted.

Mr O’Keefe interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Burke.

Mr O’Keefe—Mr O’Keefe interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Burke is warned!

**Regional Forest Agreement: Queensland**

Mr CAMERON THOMPSON (3.01 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Forestry and Conservation. Would the minister advise the House of the impact of the Queensland government’s forest agreement? What will be the effect on the small timber communities in my electorate of Blair? Why can’t this Queensland government agreement be endorsed as a regional forest agreement by the Commonwealth?

Mr TUCKEY—I thank the member for Blair for the question, and I would like to congratulate him and his colleagues of the backbench in Queensland for standing up to the campaign being run against them by the Queensland state government for one reason only: that these people have analysed a particular proposal, have found it detrimental to the constituents they represent and are standing up for those constituents. I also thank the Prime Minister for agreeing with their representations.

The simple fact arising out of that particular proposal is that 100 direct jobs will be lost in Eidsvold, Theodore and Cooroy in the reasonably near future because those mills have been bought out by the Queensland government and the previous owner told to close them. This, of course, has got to be added to the fact that there is very regular opinion arising from mayors in the district and contractors in the district that the promised sawmill quotas that have been given under this agreement cannot be sustained and there will be further mill closures.
It is very clear what the local coalition members have done. They have analysed the situation, consulted with the local people and stood up for their people. In that period of time have I received one representation from a Labor MP or senator? Not one. There is a senator in Queensland whose father runs the AWU—noted for their silence but not for their action on this issue. The National Forest Policy Statement was written by the Labor Party and, like every other policy that they used to have, they have found it easier now not to have them at all because you cannot get into trouble that way, they think. But the reality is that that policy says that you must consider the social impacts, and not one Labor member is contacting me and saying, ‘Look, here is a solution. If you did it this way instead of that way would it help the people in the Queensland region?’

In other states we continue to proceed with the negotiation of regional forest agreements under the National Forest Policy Statement. There again local members in New South Wales from the coalition have been constantly in contact with me, constantly bringing issues to my attention, constantly making suggestions that allow us to match environmental demands with the social impact. Have I received such efforts from the member for Paterson? Not one. He keeps standing up in this place talking about some RFA that is supposed to be on my desk, but never ever does he say anything.

Mr Horne—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order.

Mr TUCKEY—And it is not a point of order to make a personal explanation.

Mr Horne—My point of order goes to relevance. The minister knows he has received questions on notice from me about the RFA agreement—

Mr Speaker—The member for Paterson will resume his seat.

Mr Horne—Well, he might like to tell the House—

Mr Speaker—The member for Paterson is warned!

Mr TUCKEY—It is one thing to try and ask questions to prove a political point. It is another to write and ask for information for the benefit of your constituents. I have never received anything by way of direct representation from the member for Paterson that has put an argument to defend workers’ rights or in fact to suggest how additional timber supplies might be made available to keep them in work.

The same applies in Victoria where we and the new state government are working through a very difficult issue. But do I ever get representations from the member for McMillan on how to try to fix the problem? He writes me a letter and says, ‘I am in favour of the RFA,’ and when the legislation comes into this place he makes sure he is absent when his side voted against the only measure that will guarantee the sort of investment that is so necessary in his electorate.

Mr Zahra—I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. The point of order is that the minister is clearly misleading the House. He knows full well I was helping the workers in Swifts Creek on the day the legislation was in the House.

Mr Speaker—The member for McMillan will resume his seat.

Mr Zahra interjecting—

Mr Speaker—The member for McMillan is warned.

Mr TUCKEY—The only time I see the member for McMillan is when he is pushing up against me trying to get in a press photograph so that someone knows he exists.

Mr Tanner interjecting—

Mr Speaker—The member for Melbourne will excuse himself from the House under the provisions of standing order 304A.

The member for Melbourne then withdrew from the chamber.
Mr Zahra—On a point of order, Mr Speaker—

Mr SPEAKER—I remind the member for McMillan that he has already been warned. Obviously, he has the right to make a point of order, but he cannot expect tolerance from the chair if the point of order is a frivolous one.

Mr Zahra—My point of order is this, Mr Speaker: it is clear that the minister is misleading the House because there is no way in a million years I would ever get my photo taken with him.

Mr SPEAKER—The member for McMillan must know, after 18 months in this chamber, that that is a frivolous point of order.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—Members know that the facility for indicating if someone has in fact misled the House is a substantive motion. The member for McMillan is choosing to ensure that the electors of McMillan do not have a voice in this House for the next hour and I invite him to excuse himself from the House.

The member for McMillan then withdrew from the chamber.

Mr TUCKEY—There is a fundamental issue in all of this and that is the representation of the people who live in your electorate. The fundamental issue here is that the National Forest Policy Statement was endorsed by this government when it was in opposition, by every state Premier and by every state opposition for one reason: it was a good balanced proposal.

Mr Edwards—Why do your Liberal colleagues in WA call you ‘Esmeralda’?

Mr TUCKEY—The embarrassment of the Labor Party—the party of no policy—in being reminded that they have ratted on their own policy, is made obvious by silly interjections of that nature which he made up as he sat in his chair. In fact, no self-respecting Liberal would talk to him because we know him as a creep.

Mr Beazley—

On a point of order, Mr Speaker: even with the most generous interpretation, this is irrelevant.

Mr SPEAKER—Yes.

Nursing Homes: Riverside

Mr WILTON (3.11 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Aged Care and concerns the Riverside Nursing Home in my electorate. Minister, when did you or your office first become aware of the findings of the audit review conducted on 16 and 17 February this year at the Riverside Nursing Home and of the decision to impose sanctions on the nursing home? Why did you not immediately release this information? Is it a coincidence that you chose to announce sanctions against the home on 24 February when you learnt that reports of kerosene baths being given to residents would appear in newspapers the next day?

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—I came into the House on 16 February and explained to the House that I had found out about an incident on the 15th at 10 o’clock and that we had worked through the night. I referred it to the agency and put in a spot audit, a review audit, at 9 o’clock the next morning. That was a two-day audit, as is required under the legislation. The agency wrote the report and referred it to the delegate of the secretary, who made a decision that sanctions should be applied. That was communicated to the approved provider on the 22nd. Fourteen days can then run from that period, in which he has the time to respond. The publication of that report runs from a further 14 days from response.

That was the situation that we were in when we received a further report from the nurses whom we had sent in on a continuing basis that there had been no apparent improvement at all, nor attempt to do so, that the administrator had not been put in place—the name is put forward by the provider; it must be approved by the secretary—and that there was sufficient concern on the part of the department who asked the agency to do a further two-day review, which it did, which resulted in the delegate of the secretary making the decision. That decision is what has transpired today—after the notice was
served between 7.30 and 8 o’clock this morning.

**Visas: Visitors**

Mr SCHULTZ (3.13 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. Is the minister aware of comments regarding the different rejection rates that apply to visitor visa applicants from different countries? Would the minister inform the House of the outcome if Australia were to assess all visitor visa applicants as having the same risk of overstay? And has this system of risk assessment been radically altered in the past four years.

Mr RUDDOCK—I thank the member for Hume for the opportunity to comment on some observations that have been made in relation to the way in which visitors are able to access Australia. The first point I should make, of course, is that the way in which this matter has been treated has not varied in all of the time that this government has been in office. In fact, the arrangements that we have in place are arrangements that were implemented under the former government. The implementation particularly of a risk factor profile, whereby some 43 countries are listed on the basis of past behaviour by visitor visa holders from those countries, where we assess that they are likely to overstay, has been a longstanding part of that system. The fact is that those measures were reviewed by a committee of the parliament in 1996, chaired by Senator Jim McKiernan. The committee at that time reported that, ‘The committee supports the principle of the risk factor profile that, while certain visitor refusal rates from posts in certain risk factor countries are high, large numbers of visitor applications at such posts are being approved.’

In the light of the fact that the system has not changed and is applied by officers of the department with integrity, I am surprised that there have been comments by members of the parliament, particularly the member for Stirling, who in an article in the *Sunday Telegraph* of 27 February said that this is a ‘subtle form of racism’. I know that racism is the cheapest shot in the locker, but I was disappointed that the shadow minister, the member for Bowman, joined in those comments. He called the rejection statistics a ‘national disgrace’. He said that there are ‘similar problems with other nations such as Greece’. He said that, despite Greeks being the third biggest ethnic community in Australia, Greek women between 20 and 29 are classified as high risk and are almost automatically refused entry.

Mrs Irwin interjecting—

Mr RUDDOCK—I am sure that, if the member had followed the practice of seeking some information in relation to this, he would have been advised by my officers that some 7,456 visitor visas were granted to Greek nationals in 1999, with only 16 refusals—a rejection rate of 0.021 per cent.

Mrs Irwin interjecting—

Mr RUDDOCK—I do not know where he was picking it up from; maybe he has been talking to the member for Stirling. Maybe he thought that he should join in these sorts of cheap attacks in relation to a policy that is applied to benefit Australia.

I would like to tell the member for Hume, because he asked the question specifically of what would be the impact of imposing the selection criteria that we use for high risk posts—which I might say simply involves us assessing all applicants against the criteria to see whether or not their visits are bona fide—that the impact of that would be to subject the millions of visitors to Australia, regardless of risk profiles, to the same sort of examination. If the policy of the Labor Party is to close down tourism in Australia and if the policy of the Labor Party is to deny all of the significant economic advantages by getting bona fide visitor applicants entered into Australia as effectively and as efficiently as possible, then let them put it openly. But do not let us have this covert game of some of your members going out like the member for Grayndler did, separating themselves out from the others—

Mr Albanese—Press the button.

Mr RUDDOCK—and suggesting—nudge, nudge, wink, wink—that maybe you will get a different approach from a Labor Party—

Mr Albanese interjecting—
Mr RUDDOCK—because some of us are able to go out and say—
Mr SPEAKER—The member for Grayndler is warned.
Mr RUDDOCK—‘We are not following the policy line; we will be different’—
Mrs Irwin interjecting—
Mr RUDDOCK—If you are going to settle some policies and you are going to be able to be credible, sit down and work out a coherent response rather than hiving off in every direction.
Mr SPEAKER—The member for Fowler will excuse herself from the House under the provisions of 304A.
The member for Fowler then withdrew from the chamber.

Nursing Homes: Riverside
Mr BEAZLEY (3.19 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Aged Care. Minister, do you recall telling the House on 31 August last year, ‘There are nursing homes that exist today that ought not to be open’? Minister, was Riverside Nursing Home one of the homes to which you were referring last year?

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Mr Speaker, when I spoke about the concept that there were nursing homes that were operating that should not, I recall that I was speaking in the context of something about which I have spoken a considerable number of times, and that is that it became necessary within the last two years for my own father to go into a nursing home. I made the statement that, in the course of finding a residential aged care facility for him, there were some that were, quite frankly, not acceptable for my dad. I subsequently made the statement that, if it is not acceptable for my dad, then it is not acceptable for anybody else’s dad either.

Mr O’Keefe interjecting—
Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—I would ask you to kindly recall that that is something about which I feel quite passionate; I feel quite personally indebted for the care that my dad did receive in a nursing home, which provided excellent care.

Mr O’Keefe—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order.

Mr SPEAKER—I remind the member for Burke that he has been warned and therefore this ought to be a point of order that is, in fact, legitimate under the standing orders.
Mr O’Keefe—Let me raise my point of order, Mr Speaker.
Mr SPEAKER—The member for Burke has merely been reminded of the standing orders and he has been recognised by the chair.
Mr O’Keefe—I take this point of order under the standing order relating to relevance. The minister was asked a specific question about whether the Riverside Nursing Home was being referred to. Instead we are getting this drivel. What about making her answer the question?

Mr SPEAKER—The minister was asked a question about the status of the Riverside Nursing Home and it was perfectly reasonable to presume that that was part of what she was answering.
Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—I do find that comment of ‘drivel’ quite offensive. I would like it to be withdrawn.

Mr O’Keefe interjecting—

Mr O’Keefe—D-R-I-V-E-L—drivel!
Mr SPEAKER—Order! The member for Burke leaves me, as he knows, no choice but to indicate that clearly the electors of Burke are deemed by him to be able to survive without a representative. The member will excuse himself from the House.
The member for Burke then withdrew from the chamber.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—Quite clearly, what was in my mind at that time was that we needed to bring all aged care facilities up to standard. There was no particular one to which I was referring at that time.

Literacy: National Standards
Mr St CLAIR (3.23 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs. Would the minister advise the House of the progress of the release of results of the Australia-wide literacy assessments conducted late last year? Is
the minister aware of any impediments to the national literacy plan?

Dr Kemp—I thank the member for New England for his question, and I know his great interest in literacy. Parents now have the best ever indication of the state of literacy in Australia as all states but one have released the results of the 1999 assessments against the literacy benchmark. The one exception is New South Wales; under the Carr government the process has ground to a halt. Last year’s results have not been released. The education unions have refused to test students for literacy in the early years of high school and the New South Wales Labor government has capitulated to the unions.

One of the greatest impediments to lifting literacy standards in Australia is the willingness of the Labor Party to capitulate to union pressure on this vital issue. This is one of the most disgusting attacks on students in need that we have seen in Australia and one of the greatest assaults on equal opportunity for young Australians in education. And do not think that the Leader of the Opposition is going to stand up to the unions when they put pressure on him. Do not think he is going to take a stand for literacy. He had four lines in the policy at the last election. Indeed, we know his priorities. Peter Fitzsimons, on page 374 of his biography of the Leader of the Opposition, quotes him as saying:

Everybody talks about the need for computers in schools, the need for literacy and all those sorts of things, but really the heart of the problem in the education system, I thought, was the morale of the teaching profession.

Morale is important, but parents might be forgiven for thinking that literacy is important, that literacy has priority, that it is important to stand up for the rights of young people to learn to read and write, against the pressure of the unions. In the last election campaign, you capitulated to the unions with your literacy policy, and you are still capitulating to the unions with your literacy policy. That is why, when you were minister for education, 30 per cent of young Australians could not read and write properly. You were not interested in the portfolio, you were a failure in the portfolio, you were a weak minister—and it is time for you to show that you are prepared to stand up and be counted.

Mr Speaker—Before I recognise the Manager of Opposition Business, I will remind the minister, just as I had cause to remind the Leader of the House in the last sitting day, that references to ‘you’ are quite unparliamentary in that they reflect on the chair. I do not recall, in the last election campaign, deliberately capitulating to anybody.

Nursing Homes: Riverside

Mr McMullan (3.27 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Aged Care. Minister, given that you have told the House today for the first time that the decision to impose sanctions on the Riverside Nursing Home was taken on 22 February, why did you announce the sanctions only on 24 February? Is it a coincidence that you chose to announce these sanctions on the day that you learnt that reports of kerosene baths being given to residents would appear in newspapers the next day?

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—The announcement that I made—that sanctions had been imposed and were then suspended in order that an administrator could be appointed and that certain other undertakings would be made to bring up the standard of the building and the care—was made in the public interest so that people could know. Those statements were made publicly by me, and a press release was issued that outlined fully and precisely what action had been taken. Subsequently, I have outlined to you today what other action was taken.

Workplace Relations: Collective Non-Union Agreements

Dr Nelson (3.29 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business. Has the minister’s attention been drawn to reports of moves to abolish all collective non-union agreements? Could the gains achieved by Australian workers under the Howard government’s workplace relations policies be threatened if such measures were adopted?

Mr Reith—I thank the member for Bradfield for his question. There is no doubt that those gains which we have seen in recent years are at risk. We have seen 600,000 jobs
created, a big improvement in productivity and higher pay for workers, particularly low paid workers. We have seen a big improvement in the real value of their pay. Contrary to all the claims of our political opponents, the number of industrial disputes in Australia has come down as a result of reforms, amongst other things, that we have introduced.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr REITH—That figure on your long-term disputes is wrong as well. There was a conference in Melbourne, I am told—I did not attend this section of it—where the shadow minister made that very claim and he was soon put down by Mark Wooden, who really does know what he is talking about. We see the same threat federally as we are seeing happen in reality in the state of Victoria. A Labor government has been elected and already, without any legislation, the climate for investment and the creation of jobs is taking jobs out of Victoria, at a very heavy price for all Victorians.

The framework of policy under Labor, if Labor were ever to be elected, is slowly coming out into the marketplace. We had the submission by the member for Charlton the other day. She is in favour of the abolition of all individual agreements—Australian workplace agreements. These would be abolished under Labor. Labor have already said they will abolish the Employment Advocate, one of whose jobs is to protect employees and provide basic protection of their rights as employees. And now we see from the Financial Review this morning that another document is out and about. This one apparently is entitled ‘Draft of ALP policy’. As we always say, their policy is drafted by the unions. This one actually says that on the front of it.

Under this proposal we have all the usual pro-union policies so enamoured of the Labor Party and the people who push them around, namely, the trade union leadership. There will be right of entry into every business. Whatever your small business, the Labor Party will give a union official—even when there are no union members in your business—the right to walk in and push you around. The unions will be given a right, effectively, to veto agreements between employers and employees even when not one member of that business is a member of a union. In that respect there are something like 200,000 employees covered by direct agreements with employers. Those agreements will be out the window because they are not union agreements as required by the Labor Party.

The latest union membership numbers show a further decline in trade union members. Yet, as their numbers decline, the power and influence over the frontbench by the trade union movement grows. Under their policy, you would have patent bargaining given a complete green light—industry-wide sectors being allowed to bargain, regardless of the circumstances of business. The unions are talking about setting up sectoral councils, so you will have a manufacturing council, a maritime council and a building industry council. Those opposite laugh, but that is their policy being dictated to them by the trade union movement. It will do nothing but cost jobs. Not only do they look after their mates in terms of increased power to the unions; there is also a proposal to provide new funding for unions to allow them to take legal action against employers, paid for by the taxpayers at substantial cost. But, again, who is in the gun? It is the small business person who cannot afford the legal fees when being pursued by their union mates.

Mr Adams interjecting—

Mr REITH—The fact is that, in the end, this is just an attack on small business at the behest of an increasingly irrelevant trade union movement which finds nothing easier than pushing around—

Mr Adams interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—I warn the member for Lyons.

Mr REITH—the Leader of the Opposition when it comes to policy and pursuing their own benefits. On tax, as the Treasurer says, it is a roll back policy in dealing with Labor state premiers and giving them what they want. When it comes to the unions, it is a rollover policy.

Nursing Homes: Riverside

Mr SWAN (3.30 p.m.)—My question is directed to the Minister for Aged Care, Min-
ister, do you recall a number of articles published on 15 February this year, including a page 1 article in the *Courier-Mail* headed ‘Aged homes escape spot care checks’, which were critical of the government for not carrying out any surprise inspections on nursing homes? Do you stand by your claim on the *Life Matters* program on 18 February this year that ‘coincidence can be an extraordinary thing’ and that your intervention on the Riverside Nursing Home at 10 p.m. on the same day was in no way due to these media reports?

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—I have said again and again that it was at 10 p.m. on Tuesday, 15 February, after a long meeting with officials in my office, when one official brought the matter to my attention. It was then that we moved straight into action, worked right through the night—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—It might come as a surprise to you, but this is the time of the year when meetings are held with regard to budget initiatives and it is very important that work is continuing. It was at the end of a long meeting when I was told by one of my officials that this had occurred. That is when we moved. We moved speedily and effectively and we have brought ourselves to the current outcome.

Aviation: Air Traffic Control System

Mrs MAY (3.36 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Transport and Regional Services. Can the Deputy Prime Minister detail to the House how Australia will benefit from the new air traffic control system that was commissioned last week?

Mr ANDERSON—I thank the honourable member for her question. I am sure the House will be pleased to learn that Australia now has the best and most advanced air traffic control system in the world. Last week I was able to commission the Australian advanced air traffic system, or TAAATS. TAAATS is the first fully integrated air traffic control system in the world. It pulls together the results of radar surveillance, GPS position fixes and aircraft flight plans to provide controllers with the best information available about the planes under their control. It is, as I say, quite simply leading edge globally. It has been completed with more than 60 per cent of Australian involvement, including John Holland Constructions and AWA Plessey, which is a company that has had a very long involvement in Australian aviation.

It is worth noting that Airservices Australia has won no less than three prestigious awards over recent times. In 1999, it won the Eagle award from the International Air Transport Association as the best provider of air traffic services in the world. That is something that all Australians can be very proud of. In fact, something like 20 countries are now lining up to look at what has been achieved here in this country, including the United States, China and Indonesia, who have all sent inspectors to have a look at the new approach. It is widely rumoured that one country has spent several billion dollars trying to achieve what we managed to pull together. They gave up. We have got it in place for $377 million.

There are real safety advantages. There are real gains in efficiencies. There will be real cost reductions for the aviation industry and therefore for the travelling public in the future. This is very much a good news story. It is a story of outstanding project management. It is a story about great team work. It is a story about Australian innovation in the high-tech field where we have been able to show that we can outdo the world’s best.

Mr Howard—Mr Speaker, I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.

Mr Crean interjecting—

Mr McGauran interjecting—

Mr Reith interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—I would remind the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that his behaviour is anything but acceptable—and the behaviour of the Minister for the Arts and the Centenary of Federation and of the Leader of the House is no more acceptable, either.

QUESTIONS TO MR SPEAKER

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders: Reconciliation Week

Ms HOARE (3.39 p.m.)—My question to you, Mr Speaker, is: will it be possible to hang the Aboriginal flag in the House of
Representatives chamber during Reconciliation Week?

Mr SPEAKER—I thank the member for Charlton for her question. I will have a look at the precedents that have applied in the past and come back to her with a reply at an appropriate time.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr HORNE (Paterson) (3.40 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

Mr SPEAKER—Does the honourable member claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr HORNE—Most certainly.

Mr SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr HORNE—During question time, the Minister for Forestry and Conservation claimed that he had never received a representation from me regarding forests. I have here a copy of page 9439 of *Hansard* which has questions on notice and answers. Not only did I ask the questions but the minister answered them. I can understand why—

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Paterson has made the point at which he has been misrepresented. I call the member for Bowman.

Mr Adams interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Lyons might recall his status in the House.

Mr SCIACCA (Bowman) (3.40 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

Mr SPEAKER—Does the honourable member claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr SCIACCA—I do.

Mr SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr SCIACCA—During question time, the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs made comments that implied that somehow in a newspaper report I had called him a ‘racist’ or said that actions of his were ‘racist’. That was the implication.

Mr Tuckey interjecting—

Mr SCIACCA—You keep quiet. I am making the personal explanation.

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Bowman will either come to his personal explanation or resume his seat.

Mr Tuckey interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The minister will resume his seat.

Mr SCIACCA—At no time did I make any such reference. In fact, I was invited by a number of journalists to make those sorts of references, which I did not. The minister knows that I am not capable of that. Really, he should apologise for accusing me of it.

Mr NEHL (Cowper) (3.41 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

Mr SPEAKER—Does the honourable member claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr NEHL—I do, indeed.

Mr SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr NEHL—A media release by a man called Peter L. Black, who is the state member for Murray-Darling in New South Wales, has come into my possession. He has made various imputations against me. It is rather difficult to get any sense out of it because it sort of goes all over the place.

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Cowper must indicate where he has been misrepresented.

Mr NEHL—What he said was that I attended a meeting with the Sydney Airport Corporation—a meeting of Liberal and National Party leaders, although I do not qualify there. I did attend a meeting at the Sydney Airport Corporation, to be briefed on their future thoughts. I attended that, together with a large number of local government representatives of New South Wales, and of course Senator Sue West, the—

Mr Price—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. The member must show where he has been misrepresented.

Mr SPEAKER—I understand. I appreciate the member for Chifley’s intervention. I was about to ask the Deputy Speaker to come quickly to the point at which he has been personally misrepresented.

Mr NEHL—He called on the New South Wales National Party leader, George Souris,
to publicly disown those of his colleagues who attended the meeting ‘such as MP Garry Nehl’. He went on to suggest that I was in favour of transferring regional airline services to Bankstown. That is not true. I am not in favour. I am totally opposed to it.

**Mr Speaker**—The member for Cowper has indicated where he was misrepresented.

**QUESTIONS TO MR SPEAKER**

**Questions on Notice**

**Mrs Crosio** (3.43 p.m.)—I put a question on the Notice Paper to the Minister for Aged Care, question No. 1106, on 9 December 1999. I request you to write to the minister and ask whether she would answer that. I know it deals with nursing homes, but I would appreciate an answer.

**Mr Speaker**—I will take up the issue with the Minister for Aged Care.

**BUSINESS**

**Mr Reith** (Flinders—Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business) (3.43 p.m.)—by leave—I move:

1. The House, at its rising, adjourn until tomorrow at 2.30 p.m., and
2. so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the routine of business for the sitting tomorrow being as follows, unless otherwise ordered:
   1. Questions without notice.
   2. Presentation of papers.
   3. Ministerial statements, by leave.
   5. Notices and orders of the day, government business.

Briefly, in explanation, I think it has been agreed with the opposition. There is the East Timor lunch tomorrow. With the passage of this motion, members will not be required to attend the House until 2.30 p.m. and the bells will ring at 2.25 p.m.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**QUESTIONS TO MR SPEAKER**

**Goods and Services Tax: Seminar Charges**

**Mr Speaker** (3.45 p.m.)—The Department of the House of Representatives has provided me with advice concerning the application of the goods and service tax to seminars sponsored by the department. Members will recall this matter was raised during question time on 17 February. The current price for these seminars was set in 1998. It is based on the recovery of direct costs rounded down one per cent to $215. Over 90 per cent of seminar costs relate to staff salaries and other internal costs which do not incur wholesales tax and which will not decrease with the introduction of the GST. At this stage, only two seminars are scheduled for after 1 July—one in July and one in August. Keeping in mind that materials used in the seminars have been purchased well in advance, the department set a GST charge consistent with the subsidised price. Cost recovery on the same basis as that used in 1988 would justify a current charge, similarly rounded down, of $285 per participant compared with the proposed charge of $236.50.

However, the principal aim of these seminars is not to make money but to have the activities of the House, its committees and members known to the widest possible audience. The department kept charges in 1999 and 2000 at the 1998 level. This was done on the grounds of serving the House and the community and of keeping the costs competitive and within the means of likely participants. It also had the added effect of recognising possible tax reform savings. The application of the GST to the price of these seminars is entirely consistent with arrangements which apply to the provision of similar services as from 1 July 2000. I am advised that the department recognises that, with the introduction of the GST, there will be some cost savings across its activities. These savings are now being examined and a review of pricing practices across the department will subsequently occur. Any savings identified as a result of this process will of course be passed on.

**Mr Crean**—With your indulgence, Mr Speaker, I seek clarification on that answer. Do I take it that the two seminars set in train will attract the full 10 per cent GST and that the embedded costs the Treasurer says have to be passed on immediately from 1 July will not be, and that those will be considered only for subsequent seminars? Isn’t what you have
just told us inconsistent with what the Treasurer has been telling the country?

Mr SPEAKER—I respond to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition by indicating that the statement has come from the department and me and has not had the Treasurer’s input. I would have thought that my comment was entirely consistent with the fact that there will be a fall in costs as a result of the GST but that the 10 per cent is added on the 1998 price, reflecting the fall that is anticipated.

Mr CREAN—Given that the Treasurer has indicated consistently and only recently that the embedded taxes that go and the advantages there from have to be passed on immediately, I ask the question why has that not been taken account of by the House in setting the GST adjusted prices for the two seminars in train? From what you have told us, they go up the full 10 per cent—no deduction for the embedded costs. It is true that you have said that they will be taken account of later, but the government has consistently argued that those embedded costs have to be passed on in full from 1 July.

Mr REITH—I do not intend to enter into a debate on this issue. I merely want to point out to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that, as my statement indicates, the embedded costs in this case are relatively incidental.

Mr SPEAKER—I have a further question on that matter. Mr Speaker, do I take it from what you have said that prices have effectively been frozen for seminars for a 12-month period or thereabouts?

Mr REITH—In fact for a two-year period.

Mr REITH—Therefore, the fact of the matter is that the pricing structure reflects the fact that there has been a freeze in the prices over that time.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—Members are at liberty to examine this statement in detail. I do not intend to enter into any further debate on the matter.

Mr LEO McLEAY (Watson) (3.50 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, you will recall that I was the person who asked that question.

Mr SPEAKER—I do indeed and that is why I have been prepared to recognise you, if it is the statement you want to refer to.

Mr LEO McLEAY—The question had two parts to it. The second part was: will you refer the issue to Professor Fels for a ruling? Can you advise the House when you intend to do that?

Mr SPEAKER—I apologise to the Chief Opposition Whip for not addressing that. I indicate to him that I will enthusiastically refer the matter to Professor Fels.

PETITIONS

The Clerk—Petitions have been lodged for presentation as follows and copies will be referred to the appropriate ministers:

Food Labelling

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.

The undersigned citizens and residents of Australia call on you to:

Label all Genetically Engineered foods that may be approved for sale;
Ensure pies contain meat and jam contains fruit;
Make food labels reflect the true nature of the contents;
Ensure that the Australia New Zealand Food Authority (ANZFA)—the food safety watchdog—is adequately resourced to protect citizens)

by Mr Griffin (from 94 citizens).
by Ms Hall (from 45 citizens).

Goods and Services Tax: Charitable Institutions and Non-Profit Organisations

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

The Petition of Certain electors of Australia draws the attention of the House to the unfair burden the GST will place on charitable organisations, particularly:

the increased administrative costs to charities of GST compliance that will force these organisations to reduce service delivery to people in need;
the imposition of the GST on fundraising activities that will reduce funds available to help provide additional services to people in need, and;

increasing the running costs of many smaller charitable organisations by forcing them to pay the GST on goods and services they buy.

Your petitioners therefore request the House to amend the GST legislation to remove charitable organisations from the GST net.

by Mrs Crosio (from 1,955 citizens).
by Mr Martin (from 127 citizens).
by Mr Alan Morris (from 21 citizens).

Asylum Seekers: Political

To the Speaker and the Members of the House of Representatives in Parliament assembled:

Whereas the 1998 Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne carried without dissent the following Motion:

‘That this Synod regrets the Government’s adoption of procedures for certain people seeking political asylum in Australia which exclude them from all public income support while withholding permission to work, thereby creating a group of beggars dependent on the Churches and charities for food and the necessities of life;

and calls upon the Federal government to review such procedures immediately and remove all practices which are manifestly inhumane and in some cases in contravention of our national obligations as a signatory of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.’

We, therefore, the individual, undersigned Members of St John’s Anglican Church, Wantirna South, Victoria 3152, petition the House of Representatives in support of the abovementioned motion.

And we, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

by Mr Nugent (from 36 citizens).

Goods and Services Tax: Exercise Physiologists

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws the attention of the House to the exclusion of Exercise Physiology Services from the listing of health services contained under S38-10 of the proposed A New Tax System (Goods and Services Tax) Bill 1998.

Your petitioners therefore request the House to recognise the importance of Exercise Physiologists in the provision of mainstream rehabilitation services in Australia. We further seek recognition of the Exercise Physiologist (as defined by the Australian Association for Exercise and Sports Science) as a fundamental health professional concerned with the provision of exercise rehabilitation services to Australians.

by Mr Andren (from 1,624 citizens).

Immigration: Dr James Yap

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

The petition of certain residents of the State of New South Wales draws to the attention of the House the urgent need for our local doctor, Dr James Yap, to have his permanent residency in Australia reinstated in order for him to practise in his own clinic in Coonamble, NSW 2829. Dr Yap originally had permanent residency. He was trained and graduated from the NSW University. Because of the shortage of doctors in rural communities we are very anxious to retain his services.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the House favourably considers his application.

by Mr Anderson (from 572 citizens).
Coolangatta Airport: Runway 32
To the Honourable the President and Members of the House of Representatives in the Parliament assembled:
The petition of the undersigned respectfully sheweth:
That we consider the imposition of all Coolangatta Airport southern arrival jet aircraft for Runway 32 on the instrument arrival flight path (CG 130° over Kingscliff, East Banora Point and Barney’s Point, to be an unreasonable and unjust outcome of the Coolangatta Airport Noise Abatement Consultative Committee meeting of the 4th November 1999. Based on irrelevant grounds and considerations, in that the Committee recommendation was made on the basis of misinformation, from Airservices Australia, in relation to flight track widths, with under estimation of the number of residents impacted by 70dB(a) aircraft noise in suburbs not previously under the ANEF 2010.
We accept the pre-existing instrument arrivals as our contribution to flight path sharing.
Your Petitioners most humbly pray that the House of Representatives, in the Parliament assembled, should urge the Government to:
Direct Airservices Australia to immediately return Coolangatta Airport flight path Runway 32 Arrival visual (VMC) to Runway 32 centerline (CG 139°). That is: Directly over the Banora Point water tower at Banora Hills Drive. Thus restoring the status quo pre the Flight Path Review 1997/98.
And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.
by Mr Anthony (from 806 citizens).

Discrimination: Racial and Cultural
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.
We the undersigned draw to the attention of the House our rising concerns in regard to political parties whose ideologies are based on the politics of racial and cultural division.
We believe that candidates and political parties who do not place One Nation, and the like, last on their preferences are placing political expediency ahead of the best interests of this nation and such, are harming Australia’s social, cultural and economic interests both at the domestic and international levels.
Your petitioners therefore ask the House to support our call for all candidates and political parties to rise above short term political expediency at the next Federal election and place any party which is based on the politics of racial and cultural division last on their how-to-vote cards.
by Mr Danby (from 179 citizens).

Deaf and Blind People
To the Honourable Speaker and members of the House of Representatives in Parliament assembled.
We, the undersigned, believe that the people and government of Australia are depriving deafblind people of their human rights when they have committed no crime. It is we who commit a crime every day that these most vulnerable among us are left in a figurative prison of utter isolation and a literal prison of institutional care.
People who are deaf communicate using sign language and lip reading. People who are blind use Braille and electronic speech devices. People who are deafblind have greater needs and fewer options.
Nowhere are the impacts more appalling than when they fall on deafblind children. They need skilled help to learn such fundamental concepts as that objects have names, to have such fundamental experiences as the love of their families or to express even their most basic needs. These are the very bedrock of relationships, education, employment, self-determination and citizenship.
We therefore respectfully request that: The Parliament provides funds beginning with the next budget to ensure that every family which includes a deafblind child has access to the skilled help it needs to learn to communicate and that every deafblind child has access to an interpreter to remove the communication barrier to education.
by Mr Danby (from 653 citizens).

Superannuation: Same Sex Couples
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:
We the undersigned, draw the attention of the House to the discrimination experienced by same sex couples in the provision of superannuation benefits.
Your petitioners therefore ask the House to reintroduce and pass the Private member’s Bill, entitled the Superannuation (Entitlements of Same Sex Couples) Amendment Bill, introduced into the House by the Member for Grayndler, Mr Anthony Albanese and seconded by the Member for Melbourne Ports, Mr Michael Danby.
by Mr Danby (from 653 citizens).
And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

by Mrs Draper (from 183 citizens).

SBS Television

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

The petition of certain electors of the Thursday Island region, which includes Horn, Hammond and Prince of Wales Islands of the Division of Leichhardt draws to the attention of the House that we wish for the broadcasting coverage of SBS to be extended to include our region. We are a multicultural region consisting of a large population of Torres Strait Islanders, residents of European and Asian descent, consequently we believe our community would greatly benefit from the great range of multicultural programs screened on SBS Television station. Presently, we receive ABC and Central Seven Television stations, therefore we are extremely limited in our choice of Television programs.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the House intervene on our behalf and give consideration to our request.

by Mr Entsch (from 506 citizens).

Banking: Regional Services

To the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.

We the undersigned residents of Auburn Municipality, and locally employed and interested citizens urge Government action to pressure the Banks against persistent withdrawal of services. We especially deplore the decision to close the Commonwealth Bank’s Berala branch.

Previous Government decisions to reduce Government regulation of Banks and liberalise foreign entry has accomplished little. The reality has been burgeoning profits, excessive salary packages for the executives, reduced local services, and a persistent strategy by the Banks to determine how people will operate their banking.

The climate for banking and investment is heavily influenced by Government policies.

The time is past when the Australian electorate will continue to tolerate a free hand for the Banks to essentially close down shopping centres and reduce services.

We request that the House take action to reverse these trends.

by Mr Laurie Ferguson (from 669 citizens).

Goods and Services Tax: Dermatological Medicines

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

Considering that many people in Australia suffer chronic skin disorders which require them to outlay large amounts each week to treat or relieve conditions such as eczema or psoriasis;

Considering further that the entire range of products used to treat these conditions have been exempt from Sales Tax but that, with a GST, some only will be GST-free.

Therefore, your Petitioners request that the Parliament request the Minister for Health to determine, pursuant to section 37-48 of the A New Tax System (Goods and Services Tax) Act 1999 that all goods registered on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods as safe and efficacious for the treatment of dermatological conditions be GST-free.

by Mr Griffin (from 5,801 citizens).

Goods and Services Tax: Middle to Lower Income Australians

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.

The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House that a majority of Australians voted against the introduction of a Goods and Services Tax (GST). We believe a GST is a regressive and unfair tax that impacts savagely on middle to lower income Australians.

Your petitioners therefore respectfully request that the House does not support the introduction of a Goods and Services Tax.

by Ms Hall (from 13 citizens).

Australia Post

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.

These petitioners of the Division of Shortland and adjoining areas are opposed to the National Competition Council (NCC) Report proposals to deregulate Australia’s postal services. We are gravely concerned that this would drastically reduce the revenue of Australia Post and result in adverse impacts on most Australians (including increased postal charges and reduced frequency of services), especially for those in rural and remote areas.
Your petitioners respectfully request that the House call on the Government to reject the NCC Report proposals in their entirety and to support the retention of Australia Post current reserved service and the uniform postage rate, and the existing cross-subsidy funding arrangement for the uniform standard letter service.

Further, we ask that the existing community service obligation of Australia Post be extended to encompass a minimum level of service for financial and bill paying services, delivery frequency, a parcels service and access to counter services, through either corporate or licensed post offices.

by Ms Hall (from 14 citizens).

Centrelink: Cuts

To the Honourable Speaker and members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.

The Petition of the undersigned shows we are opposed to the Government’s funding cuts to Centrelink, which will mean the loss of 5,000 Centrelink jobs.

This staff cut will mean increased waiting times, reduced access and reduced service levels for clients.

It will place more stress on an already under-staffed and underfunded service.

It is an attack on our right to an efficient and accessible social security system.

Your petitioner’s request that the House of Representatives should stop the Centrelink staff cuts.

by Ms Hall (from 35 citizens).

Aged Care: Queensland

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

The Petition of certain residents of the State of Queensland draws to the attention of the House that, under the Aged Care Act 1997, basic Commonwealth subsidies for providing high level care to residents of Residential Aged Care Facilities are paid at a different daily rate according to the State in which care is provided. The rate of funding for the highest level of care varies from a high of $111.17 per day in Tasmania to a low of $91.47 per day in Queensland. The Government’s own agency, the Productivity Commission, has stated that this situation particularly disadvantages Queensland.

Your Petitioners therefore request the House to:

- Immediately act to remove the inequities between the States and introduce national rates of funding
- Adopt the recommendations of The Productivity Commission and immediately provide additional funding for high level care in Queensland Residential Aged Care Facilities.

by Mr Jull (from 32,036 citizens).

China: Bears

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.

The petition of certain residents of Australia draws to the attention of the House that approximately 8,000 bears are being kept in cages in China for the purpose of extracting bile for medical purposes and that the cages are so small the bears cannot move, which results in some of them going mad. It is further brought to the attention of the House that the Chinese plan to increase the number of bears, for these purposes, to 40,000.

Your petitioners therefore respectfully ask the House of Representatives to object most strongly to this horrendous and tragic practice and ask that steps be taken to stop it immediately.

by Ms Jann McFarlane (from 3,819 citizens).

Goods and Services Tax: Mobile Home Parks

To the Honourable Speaker and members of Parliament of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.

We the undersigned request that Parliament take urgent steps to ease the unacceptable burden victimisation of the 10% GST being placed upon permanent residents who rent accommodation in mobile home parks such as Parklea Gardens in NSW.

Members of Parliament should understand that many of the permanent residents are pensioner couples and pensioner singles and/or war widows who are living in such residences for security and economical reasons. The 10% GST impost will cause even greater stress upon such Australians who should not be stressed at their time of life and it should not be continued.

Your petitioners request that the House of Representatives do everything in their power to ensure the unfair 10% GST is lifted from the permanent residents of mobile home villages.

by Mr Mossfield (from 137 citizens).
**Petrol Prices: Rural Areas**
To the Honourable Members of the House of Representatives in Parliament assembled:

Re: Petrol Pricing in Rural Areas

Rural consumers in South Australia are extremely discriminated it is felt with petrol pricing. We the undersigned, believe this discrimination should cease immediately with the lowering of petrol prices to come in line with metropolitan petrol pricing.

And your petitioners humbly pray.
by Mr Secker (from 1,252 citizens).

**Australian Embassy: Jerusalem**
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

The Petition of the citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House that the Australian Embassy is not situated in Israel’s capital, Jerusalem, even though this is where the Israeli Government, the Knesset, is located and from where the affairs of the State of Israel are conducted.

We bring to your attention the following facts:
Jerusalem has been the spiritual and political capital of only the Jewish people for 3,000 years.

Since 1967 the Israeli government has demonstrated sensitivity to the concerns and needs of all Jerusalem residents, including arabs calling themselves Palestinians.

Israel’s biblical right to Jerusalem as a sovereign capital is by divine mandate and is secured by God’s irrevocable covenant made with Abraham (Gen 12:7 and 8.15:17-21) and reiterated to Isaac, Jacob, Moses (Lev 26:44-45) (Deut 7:6-9) David (2 Sam 7:12-16) and to Abraham’s heirs, (Ps 89:34-37, 105:8-11).

Judaism is the only religion in which the city of Jerusalem is an inseparable part of religious faith.

Jerusalem is mentioned 800 times in Jewish text and not once in other religious holy books.

In accordance with international law, Israel is the only state which can show legal title to Jerusalem having occupied her in an act of self defence against a belligerent aggressor.

Your petitioners respectfully urge that the House take immediate steps to establish the Australian Embassy in Israel’s capital, Jerusalem.
by Mrs Vale (from 390 citizens).

**Constitution**
To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives in parliament assembled.

The humble Petition of the Citizens of Australia, respectfully sheweth:

That we re-affirm our support of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia established by our Australian forefathers “humbly relying on the blessings of Almighty God...in one indissoluble Federal Commonwealth” (Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act, 9th July 1900). We recognise its importance in ensuring the ongoing stability and unity of our nation.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the Parliament of Australia will oppose any attempts to undermine our national stability and unity by making any changes or implementing any legislation that could achieve the status of a republic in Australia.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.
by Mrs Vale (from 123 citizens).

**Aged Care: Regional Variations**
To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives assembled in parliament:

The petition of residents of Western Australia wish to draw to the attention of the House that:

We the undersigned, verily believe that the existing national benchmark and criteria set down by the Commonwealth government in respect to the allocation of aged care facilities throughout Australia is totally inadequate and inappropriate due to the complexity of the extreme variation of ages in the respective regions.

With some regions in this state exceeding the target number, unfortunately the distribution is not evenly divided, with some regions being overbedded whilst other regions do not have sufficient places to meet the demand.

We believe that the present system is advantageous to particular towns in some regions whilst others are disadvantaged due to ‘mortgage belt’ regions where younger families prevent the criteria from applying because of the geographical location and the age of the majority of the residents.

Your petitioners therefore pray, that the House will give consideration to the aforementioned matter and seriously consider the issues of reviewing the present system for a more amenable and favourable criteria which would be more equitable and beneficial to all Australians and to Western Australians in particular.
by Dr Washer (from 617 citizens).
**Community Pharmacists**

To the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

The petition of electors of Swan points out to the House our desire to see community pharmacists retain their unique position in Australia’s health system.

We trust and respect our local pharmacists and are opposed to any moves to allow supermarkets to compete against them. We believe that the community benefits from pharmacies being owned by pharmacists.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the House heeds our wishes and allows our local pharmacy to continue to play a vital role in our health care.

by Mr Wilkie (from 2716 citizens).

**Medicare: Office Closures**

To the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

The petition of electors of Swan points out to the House our desire to see a Medicare office located in the Belmont Forum.

The recent closure of the Medicare office has left many in the local community with delays and inconvenience in obtaining appropriate Medicare services.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the House heeds our wishes and allows a new Medicare office to be located in Belmont.

by Mr Wilkie (from 1,268 citizens).

**Australian Ballet**

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

The petition of certain Friends of the Australian Ballet (SA), P.O. Box 101, Kensington Park, S.A. 5068 draws to the attention of the House:

The Australian Ballet is our national dance company, partially funded by taxpayers from all States and Territories.

Currently the company visits Adelaide once a year and would, ideally, like to increase its number of visits to two per year.

We are outraged and devastated that visits to Adelaide may be cut back due to the costs of touring.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the House will ensure that the level and distribution of funding to the Australian Ballet supports at least one annual visit of the company to Adelaide.

by Ms Worth (from 4,204 citizens).

**Health: Caffeine**

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House the application to allow addition of Caffeine, an addictive drug, to all soft drinks in Australia. This would bring Australian laws into line with those in New Zealand. This proposal is of great concern, due to the very real possibility of causing addiction and inadvertent effects in all age groups, especially young children.

Caffeine is the most widely consumed pharmaceutically active substance in the world, and is the active ingredient in a number of medications aimed at stimulating the central nervous system. Overdose and withdrawal symptoms (headaches, nausea, numbness or tingling in the extremities, cardiac pain, and tachycardia or rapid heart beat) are well recognised and documented across all age groups, but may not be identified if the source of the drug is unknown.

Caffeine is an active ingredient of tea, coffee, cola drinks and chocolate here and overseas, and is included on the label of these products for those who read the contents list. Attempts are made by many parents to monitor and/or limit their children’s intake of these substances to reduce each child’s intake. If it were to be added to all other soft drinks such control would become considerably more difficult.

Your petitioners therefore request the House to reject the application to allow for the addition of caffeine to all soft drinks.

by Ms Worth (from 84 citizens).

**Genetically Modified Food: Labelling**

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives assembled in parliament.

The citizens of South Australia draws to the attention of the House a recent decision by the Australian government to block the labelling of genetically modified foods.

We emphatically believe consumers have the right to know what is in their food.

Your petitioners therefore request the House to immediately proceed with the previously agreed
labelling requirement for genetically modified foods.

by Ms Worth (from 100 citizens).

**Gippsland: Magnetic Resonance Imaging Machine**

To the Honourable Speaker and members of the House of Representatives assembled in parliament.

The petition of certain residents of the district of Gippsland in Victoria draws to the attention of the House the need for a Health Department Licence for a Magnetic Resonance Imaging Machine in their locale. The residents of Gippsland consider that they are disadvantaged in not having such a local facility.

A locally installed MRI could alleviate the time and cost that members of the public and ambulance services spend in travelling to and from Melbourne for this examination.

This technology available in Gippsland would also enhance the attraction to obtaining and retaining suitable medical specialists to work and live in the area.

Therefore:

Your petitioners respectfully request the House to arrange the allocation of a Magnetic Resonance Imaging licence to a locally based practice owned and run by practitioners and staff who live in Gippsland.

by Mr Zahra (from 3,190 citizens).

Petitions received.

**PRIVATE MEMBERS BUSINESS**

**Television Advertisements**

Mr Emerson (Rankin) (3.55 p.m.)—I move:

That this House:

(1) acknowledges the irritation caused to television viewers by the broadcasting of advertisements at volumes or pitches greater than those of normal programs;

(2) notes that neither the Broadcasting Services Act nor the Commercial Television Code of Practice requires television stations to broadcast advertisements at the same sound level as their programs;

(3) notes that at present the only recourse for viewers unhappy about the volume of advertisements is to complain to the television stations or the advertisers; and

(4) calls on the Government to amend the Broadcasting Services Act to empower the Australian Broadcasting Authority to regulate the volume and pitch of television advertisements.

I want to speak briefly on the origins of this issue. Since I became a member of parliament and the member for Bass became a member of parliament, we have had numerous representations and complaints from television viewers in our electorates about the volume of television ads. Viewers complain to us that the volume of the TV ads is much greater than the volume of normal commercial television programming. Those are the sorts of complaints that we have been receiving, and as a result of those complaints we thought we would look more intensively at the issue and do some of our own research on it.

Having made that decision, I have to say that this summer just passing seems to have been the worst on record for the loudness of television ads compared with normal commercial television programs. Just before Christmas, when the kids were at home from school, it seemed that the people who were advertising toys for Christmas, trying to convince parents to buy those toys for their kids, were hell-bent on driving parents mad with the TV ads being much louder than the normal commercial programs. Then, just when we thought it was safe to turn the television back on on Boxing Day and thereafter, the major retailers turned our attention, unavoidably, to the sales that were occurring in that period by again blasting through to the lounge room these loud television ads. So my colleague the member for Bass and I continued our research. We found to our surprise that there is in fact no regulation whatsoever covering the loudness of television ads. The Australian Broadcasting Authority has been given no power at all in this respect. All that exists is self-regulation. I think that nowadays when we hear self-regulation, we hear ineffectual regulation.

I can point to the veracity of that statement by referring to advice from the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations, known as FACTS. FACTS wrote to me on 15 February after my colleague and I had raised this issue—and I do put on record my thanks to FACTS for having the courtesy to write to us. I just want to refer to their statements
about the effectiveness of the regulation. They say in their letter:

Australian television networks have for some time ensured that all available technical measures to ensure a consistent sound output are in place. Because audio compression is a significant factor in perceived loudness, the industry has agreed on the maximum level of audio compression that is acceptable in television commercials.

All audio signals leaving a station pass through spectral loudness controllers prior to transmission. As their name suggests, these are designed to maintain a fairly constant level of loudness in the station’s audio output.

Now, here is the point:

Once a broadcast reaches the home, the issue becomes one of perceived volume rather than one relating to technical measures taken by the broadcaster.

So we have FACTS saying, ‘Look, it’s all a matter of perception. We’re trying our best,’ yet we get this continual flood of complaints. I want to emphasise this point: we are not arguing or claiming that television stations are turning up the volume of the advertisements. What happens, to the best of our knowledge and based on our research, is that a cassette arrives from the advertisers. It is then lodged into the television station’s system, and the volume of the ads is essentially as loud or as soft as that of the advertisement that was recorded. The stations say that they do apply some measures in relation to this, but clearly those measures are not very effective. I refer again to the FACTS letter, which says:

In response to recent discussion of this issue in the media, FACTS has issued a reminder to members of the need to check audio level settings regularly. We are also reminding advertising agencies and production houses of their responsibility to produce material in accordance with the maximum compression levels set by the industry.

In other words, all is not well. As a result of the initiative taken by my colleague the member for Bass and me, FACTS has had to remind the television stations of their moral obligations in this matter.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the industry says, ‘Look, we know what you are talking about, but technically it is too hard for us to control the volume of television advertisements.’ They say that this is because of compression of the dynamic range of the audio. I refer now to a letter from the Australian Broadcasting Authority, written to me on 27 January. It says:

According to FACTS, the main problem is in the production of advertisements where compression of the dynamic range of the audio is carried out. FACTS advises that this makes the audio louder, although the peaks of the signal that can be seen on a meter are the same as on an uncompressed signal.

FACTS’ approach has been to adopt an Operational Practice for advertisements. The Operational Practice, however, merely provides guidance, and is not mandatory.

Audio compression is a method whereby an advertisement’s sound track is recorded at a constant and maximum loudness level. When such an advertisement is broadcast within a program featuring a range of sounds, the contrast can be disquieting. FACTS has advised that television stations do try to overcome this but technically it is difficult.

So here we have the television stations saying, ‘Oh, it’s all very difficult.’ It is remarkable that humanity can send a spacecraft to Venus. We have sent a spacecraft to Venus—we missed it by that much—but what we are hearing from the television stations is, ‘Yes, we can send a spacecraft to Venus, but we can’t overcome the technical difficulties of controlling the volume of television ads.’

This is an extraordinary statement. We hear, ‘Oh, in the digital age it will all be a lot better.’ I must say I remain very sceptical about that. The industry is saying that, because of this compression problem, the ads only sound louder. We say that if advertisements sound louder then they are louder. We have never said that TV advertisements smell louder or feel louder, we are saying that they sound louder and therefore they are louder, and the industry is saying, ‘Oh no, this is very difficult. We can’t do anything about it.’

The proposal of my colleague and me is simple: give the Australian Broadcasting Authority the regulatory powers to control the loudness of television advertisements. I see it as working in this way: at the moment, when someone makes a complaint to a television station about the loudness of TV ads, the
frequent practice is for them to speak into an answering machine because there is no-one staffing the TV station, particularly at night. Television stations have actually told me that complaints about the loudness of ads receive very low priority because they receive a range of other complaints, so the complainant never knows whether anyone in any position of any responsibility hears that complaint at all. If the Australian Broadcasting Authority had some basic regulatory powers, the authority could receive the complaints and ring up the television station the next day and say, ‘We’ve had a flood of complaints about this particular advertisement. We want you to tone it down. If you can’t tone it down in the television station, contact the advertiser and tell the advertiser that the advertisement, as it is running, is unacceptable and get them to recast the advertisement.’ If the television station remains an offender in this regard, then finally some sort of penalty should apply.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I simply make this point: if the television stations are right and the ads are not louder, they have nothing to fear from our proposal to give the Australian Broadcasting Authority the power to ensure that ads are not louder. If they are not louder, there is no problem. The problem arises because they are louder. This is a lifestyle issue. People are entitled to a bit of peace and quiet in their own homes. That is why my colleague and I are calling on the federal government to amend the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 to empower the Australian Broadcasting Authority to regulate the volume and pitch of television advertisements. It is a perfectly reasonable request. I look forward to bipartisan support across the chamber on this issue and to early action by the government.

(Time expired)

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—Is the motion seconded?

Ms O’Byrne—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Mr HARDGRAVE (Moreton) (4.06 p.m.)—Mr Deputy Speaker, a couple of us in this chamber have worked in what seems to be, according to the member for Rankin, the offending television industry, and the two contributors from the government’s side to this particular private member’s debate today are just those. The member for Herbert is an expert on the television industry from a technical point of view, and I have been involved in the presentation of television programs as an on air reporter over a long period of time. Perhaps we both can give some real life insight into the problem that the member for Rankin has rightly raised in his debate today.

I guess it is one of those forum shopping kind of questions that are put to members from time to time as people go around trying to find someone to take up the cause. There is a great deal of validity to the general impression people have about the extreme sound that they experience from television advertising. But, of course, the test of the level of sound used by all those who broadcast, including those who are in the Sound and Vision Office and currently arranging for this particular offering of mine to be broadcast around this building, is a thing called a VU metre, which checks the level of decibels involved in a particular reproduction or amplification of sound. For the information of the member for Rankin, the television commercials are not so much excessively loud in the sense of being heard to be loud but rather feel louder because of the compression of the dynamic range.

Mr Emerson—So they only sound louder?

Mr HARDGRAVE—The member for Rankin might just like to listen to a couple of real life examples on this. I understand where he is coming from—this sort of stuff is good for headlines. There is nothing wrong with the aspirations he is putting forward but, in the 20 years or so since I first joined Channel 7, there was a 13-year period called the Australian Labor Party in government. The member for Rankin was an adviser to the Prime Minister at some stage, and I do not remember him ever putting a proposition like this forward. Anyway he is out in the real world in the suburbs just to the south of my electorate, so I suppose he is a little more tested by reality than he was during his time advising Prime Minister Hawke.
The fact of the matter is that in some countries there is no television advertising—you are not allowed to advertise your wares, your views and your concerns—and they are very dark and grey countries. In this nation, where there is great freedom to express yourself, a lot of television ads are designed to annoy. I remember when the member for Lilley was the state secretary of the Australian Labor Party in Queensland and—the organisation career politician that he is—he was an expert when it came to annoying television ads. These loud, annoying, invasive ads are really all about trying to get attention, and of course those opposite understand how to entice some sort of sale or point of view. But there is nothing wrong with that. There is nothing wrong with ads that try to get people’s attention or try to entice a sale. By contrast, program content tends to have a broader range of light and shade. Programs are not compressed—that is, the soft sounds and the loud sounds are not brought closer together by artificial means, so the variation in pitch and the variation in volume is very minimal. Program content tends to have the light and shade that television ads do not have. So it is quite understandable that people have the view that they go from watching some very pleasant and quiet movie and, at some poignant moment, are confronted by an ad for Overflow or some other very loud ad for Chandlers or whatever it might happen to be.

I think perhaps a solution to the problems that the member for Rankin and the member for Bass are raising here today would be to look at the compression ratios—looking at the differences that are actually insisted upon by those who record commercials and the television stations that broadcast them—and to also look at the variations in pitch as well as the variations in compression to, if you like, try to deliberately vary the noise factor that people are confronted by. I wish we could do that in here, especially during question time. As the Treasurer said earlier today, ‘The louder the noise from those opposite, the more we know they are in trouble.’ Unfortunately, all too often the big voice tends to win through.

I suspect what we could be looking at seriously is the placement of advertisements—that the noisy ones live within the commercial breaks rather than simply at the beginning of commercial breaks. But of course then we would start to see government intrude upon commercial operations of legitimate companies. A particular company will pay a premium rate to be first ad in the break. Before you go off to make that cup of tea or grab that Tim Tam during a movie, that company wants to see that first ad be their ad because they have paid a premium rate for it. So there is a difficulty there. We could perhaps look at the placement of the breaks. I think this in fact might be one of the solutions to the problem. I have often wondered why we do not have a greater set of regulations or rules governing the placement of ads in the sense of ad breaks. The fact that we currently have regulations governing the number of ads and the number of minutes per hour that ads are allowed to appear means that we could also look at the way that ads intrude on the programs.

I understand that in Germany, for instance, the ads are generally placed at the top of the hour. What a great thing that would be! You would know that from seven minutes to the top of the hour is your latest set of commercials and then for the following hour until perhaps seven minutes to the hour again the program is actually there. When television programs are produced, a 30-minute television program is really only about 24 minutes. An hour program is about 46 minutes. So there is scope in the scheme of things to perhaps suggest that we have a top and bottom of the hour placement of ad breaks. I think that might be a great outcome for consumers. The TNT network I see on Foxtel from time to time has deliberate breaks at the top and bottom of the hour, so it is obviously something that is a fairly standard convention in other countries. I suspect that, if we did have ad breaks in such a way that programs could flow through and ads were located at the top and bottom of the hour, a lot of the complaints that we are talking about would go away. All too often now you find that that important moment in the movie comes along and on comes Daryl Eastlake or some vocal clone of Daryl Eastlake with a big voice offering some particular observation.
The issue before us also lends itself to something else—that is, to ensure that the ABA and those responsible for the production of ads also look at making sure there is truth in the advertising that they offer. I am reminded of course of the recent debacle with the Queensland state Labor government with regards to using taxpayer funds to drive home some innovations in legislation up there, and the ABA just last week found that advertisements by the Queensland government of a political nature were not properly authorised. I think those sorts of matters could also be looked at.

If we are going to start trying to amend the act which governs the ABA intruding into advertising, we should in fact look very closely at making sure that the claims made in advertisements are truthful, because at the end of the day the consumers of products in this country expect advertisers to behave properly. They expect truth in advertising. They expect the advertising that people put forward to be of a decent standard. If consumers find that companies put forward an ad that does not conform to their particular desires as far as the presentation levels are concerned—if it is too loud or if it does not explain things properly—one would suppose that consumers would walk away from those particular companies.

But we live in a free country. A free country means that people can choose their ways of expressing themselves and advertising is, by its very nature, all about the expression of views and of attention gathering, attempting to get people’s attention so that advertisers can perhaps bring about a sale of a particular good or service. So at the end of the day for the government to intrude to the point that the member for Rankin is suggesting may in fact be an impossibility to achieve while also maintaining a sense of freedom that we should enjoy in this country. I think there are other ways, as I suggested in my contribution to this debate, to try to bring about a softer circumstance for consumers, but we should not forget that it is advertisers who pay for the television programs that we enjoy—free to air in name but not really in execution.

Ms O’BYRNE (Bass) (4.16 p.m.)—The needs and concerns of our community members are varied and it is not for this House alone to determine what those issues will be, nor to judge any as forum shopping. Rather, this House should be responding to them. Many of my constituents have contacted me concerned with irritations which affect them in their homes, such as the volume of television advertising. The subject of the motion currently before the House is of concern to many members of the Australian community. The perceived volume at which television broadcasts occur is an issue which affects virtually the whole of the Australian population. There are very few people who will not have felt the irritation which accompanies the broadcast of advertisements at a volume which is perceived to be higher than that of regular programming.

You will note that I actually mention ‘perceived levels’. Sound compression is the use of technology that increases the volume of the quieter parts of a portion of recorded sound and removes any small quiet spaces contained in the recording. While not increasing the peak volume, this has the effect of increasing the mean volume without changing the maximum tested sound level. The reason for this perceived volume change is that, through the application of sound compression technology, the structure of the sound is altered to give the impression of a higher volume.

It has been claimed by a number of people, including on A Current Affair, that there is not a large differential between the volumes of advertising and programming, that sound is only perceived as being louder. The presenter then illustrated the process of manipulation of the sound signal by gradually changing the background noise. There was a significant increase in the perceived volume after the application of sound compression. Apparently, the point that they wish to make is that it only sounds louder. I am not sure what comfort that will bring to the many people who are distressed by this sound technology manipulation.

A Current Affair, however, is not the only body to conduct research. Other tests indicate that there is some disagreement on the reality
of the difference in the volume of regular programming and advertising. I refer all honourable members to research undertaken by the Daily Telegraph in Sydney through independent experts which found that the perceived loudness of the television volume increased by as much as 40 per cent during commercial breaks. This was also reported in the Advertiser of Saturday, 29 January. This article further reported that Dr Harvey Dylan of the National Acoustics Laboratory had found in a separate study that ads were louder than regular programs by an average of three to four decibels. The point I wish to illustrate is that, whilst there is some debate about the actual volume implications of sound manipulation, what people hear is louder. The fact that they are constantly annoyed by ads has not changed; we have just come up with a few theories to explain it.

Many people have contacted my office to add support and encouragement to my involvement in seconding this motion. One constituent characterised the actions to overcome the volume impact as a ‘great crusade’. It may not be that, but it is an important issue. It is important because the inconsistent volume of television programming has an impact on hundreds of thousands of homes each night. And remember: the impact of louder TV ads on people is not something which only occurs now and then. The commercial television industry code of practice allows for the transmission of non-program matter or ads for up to 15 minutes each hour. The requirement of many members of the community to reduce their TV volume during advertisements can therefore cause these people significant difficulty and distress. For some this is not just an annoyance but a significant problem. Louder volumes can particularly affect Australians who need the assistance of a hearing aid. These people, while watching TV, need to appropriately calibrate their hearing aid to the volume of the program and significant changes in the volume cause a difficulty for themselves and their families.

Television viewers who wish to complain about the volume or pitch of television advertising are lacking any real and effective method of resolving their problem. As there is currently no regulatory requirement on the Australian Broadcasting Authority and no reference in the commercial television industry code of conduct, complainants receive polite replies but are not provided with a solution. However, I was very pleased to read in the Launceston Examiner on 18 January that the advertising industry has no wish to have ads broadcast at levels different from those for regular programs:

Australian Association of National Advertisers President Sara Morton-Stone said the industry would not support any variance in volume between ads and regular programs.

This support from the industry is most gratifying and can give all honourable members confidence that amending the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 to include a reference to the volume and pitch of advertising is something that the community wants and that the industry has given its support to. Regulation through amendments to the Broadcasting Services Act—to enable the Australian Broadcasting Authority to ensure that the pitch and volume, both perceived and actual, is correct—is something required by the community and something that we need to act upon. I therefore commend the motion to the House and call on all honourable members to support it in the interests of those in their electorates who are frustrated by the perceived volume differential between programming and advertising because, quite frankly, it’s too hard line just does not cut it.

Mr LINDSAY (Herbert) (4.21 p.m.)—This issue has been around ever since television began in this country. It is an issue that has concerned all Australians and the television stations, but the House should ask itself why nothing has ever happened about it. Before I answer that, I might just say that the motion that has been presented to the House today is simply technically wrong, for two reasons. First of all, it indicates that the Broadcasting Services Act should be amended to empower the Australian Broadcasting Authority to regulate volume and pitch. Volume is fine but pitch is not. Pitch is actually a measure of frequency, so regulating the frequency of the sounds that are broadcast would indicate that the opposition would want to have people
with squeaky or deep voices affected. That is what happens when you regulate pitch. So pitch should not be in this particular motion, only volume.

The second claim is that there is no regulation at the moment. But indeed there is. There is a requirement that all television stations make sure that the maximum deviation of their sound carry does not exceed 50 kilohertz. That is the thing in technical terms that determines the loudness, the peak level of sound that is broadcast. But it is not what is being complained of in this legislation. That is the problem. People do not understand just what they mean by ‘volume’. They mean that in a television program you might have a very intimate scene being broadcast, and then the station goes to a commercial break. In the intimate scene, sound levels are low, soft, passionate and whatever, and the next minute you get a Harvey Norman commercial or a Lowes commercial. It is exacerbated by the fact that that Harvey Norman or Lowes commercial probably has had some form of compression attached. That makes the thing sound doubly louder. In terms of actual level broadcast, it is not louder—it is the compression. It is a concept called sound density. To work out sound density involves an integration process. It is an area under the sound curve which gives the actual amount of sound power that is being broadcast. It is not the peak level; the peak level is always the same. Stations are not allowed to broadcast more than a certain peak level. It is the sound density that occurs, and that is why things sound louder. So you get what is called subjective loudness, and everybody complains about it. I do not have a problem with that—I complain about it—but the problem is that, if you play a symphony orchestra on television or you just play a piano, they both have the same peak level but the orchestra always sounds louder than the piano. So what do you do about that? Do you impinge on the art of that particular program?

Truly controlling loudness has eluded everybody. It has eluded the best technical experts in the world. No country, no television system, no industry body, no consumer body has come up with a solution to this particular issue. As much as the television stations would like to find a way of making sure that the perceived loudness is effectively constant, no-one has been able to come up with a solution. Mr Deputy Speaker, I would suggest to you—and this is the best advice that I have and is my understanding of the industry—that Australia would have a world first if it were able to find some way to regulate this problem that everybody around the country sees as a problem. Simply, it is currently not possible. Ultimately, it may be possible to have very sophisticated electronic equipment measuring in real time the sound power that is being broadcast, the density of sound, but that is currently not available anywhere on the market. So now the system chooses to stay with the regulatory restraints on the deviation of the sound carrier and looks to the good offices of the television stations to do what they can to ameliorate this problem. Of course, if we do regulate, we would then need to know how and who would regulate, but I guess that is just a mechanical operation. It has been around for a long time.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned, and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Ovine Johne’s Disease

Mr SCHULTZ (Hume) (4.26 p.m.)—I move:

That this House:

(1) places on record concern about the continued activity of the NSW Government in relation to the control of Ovine Johne’s Disease (OJD) in sheep being without precedent in animal disease control in Australia;
(2) notes that as at April 1999 over 900 farms were identified as being affected or suspected of having OJD in rural NSW alone, with most of these properties being in quarantine;
(3) further notes the serious economic and social problems being faced by sheep and wool producers because of a growing concern that employment of veterinarians is a greater factor in the current enthusiasm for control than concerns for the disease free status of the industry; and
(4) calls on the Federal Government to freeze all funding under the National Ovine Johne’s Disease program until such time as an investigation is
undertaken into NSW Department of Agriculture procedures to ensure its actions are based on sound scientific and socio-economic grounds.

Ovine Johne’s disease is a slowly developing infectious bacterial disease. Many sheep infected with the bacteria never develop the clinical disease, making it possible for sheep to carry the bacteria with no physical signs indicating this to the producer. The factors which trigger the disease are not known. In New South Wales as early as 1984, a regional veterinary officer at Orange acknowledged that the extent of the infection was unknown and recommended a state-wide epidemiological study. Ten years later in June 1994, Denham et al in a New South Wales departmental document restated the officer’s words: ‘We simply do not have the detailed epidemiological information required for rational disease control planning.’ The federal government has assumed a role in the ovine Johne’s disease debate with its entry into the national program, and Morris and Hussey believed that it was reasonable for the federal government to do this, concluding that it is a national issue. The recommendation by the Morris-Hussey report was that Commonwealth involvement should be subject to review at the end of three years—that is, December 2000. The question that the Commonwealth should ask is: should it continue to support a program which is not based on sound scientific principles and a comprehensive economic assessment?

Even the report from the Australian Animal Health Council to ARMCANZ in 1997 gave as one of the reasons for its inability to report to ARMCANZ on funding mechanisms by 31 October 1997 the fact that there was considerable uncertainty regarding prevalence data and uncertainty regarding the rate of spread of the disease. This report also pointed out that the ABARE cost-benefit analysis for an eradication program varies considerably depending on the rate at which OJD is predicted to spread. It should be remembered that the ABARE report was based on the assumption that the estimated number of infected properties would be around 250, with 140 diagnosed at the time. There was, and still is, uncertainty about the cost of a national program. There were, however, a number of technical strategies proposed in

the Morris-Hussey report which were designed to resolve the knowledge deficits relating to ovine Johne’s disease. These included the development of adequate methods to detect infected flocks and the demonstrated freedom of flocks from infection, and strategies to characterise and quantify the epidemiology of OJD.

In the summary of the proposed technical strategies, ‘Situation analysis’, Morris and Hussey stated that ‘critical aspects of the epidemiology of the disease and the potential merits of alternative control methods are not known, because the required investigations have not been done’. A surveillance program based on a trace forward, trace back system does not constitute an epidemiological survey. In addition, statistical data relating to the number of infected properties under the current surveillance program in at least one state, New South Wales, is flawed because testing sample sizes deviate from the recommended minimum.

To date the national prevalence of OJD has not been established. There has been much said about the question of eradication, but there is no evidence that this is possible. In Australia the prevalence of the disease has never been established. You cannot eradicate a bacteria if you have not established where it is. In the rest of the world, indications are that it is not eradicable. If we are to have a program to manage ovine Johne’s disease, it must be based on valid scientific and economic grounds. The Morris-Hussey report reviewed the need for a Commonwealth commitment to a national ovine Johne’s disease eradication program because there were those at the time, and still are, committed to eradication. Eradication has never been attempted on a national level, the spread of the bacteria is unknown, the presence of the bacteria without the clinical disease is undetectable without testing and testing procedures have limited sensitivity. In addition, the Morris-Hussey report stated that there is some uncertainty over whether the disease can be eradicated cost effectively to yield a net national benefit.

There has never been any appropriate economic analysis of the cost of the disease on the ground and the cost of proposed and im-
implemented control measures. In most cases the regulations have a much larger economic impact on the individual producer than the disease. The percentage of losses in flocks diagnosed with ovine Johne’s disease has never been established. If we are to have a program to manage ovine Johne’s disease, it must be based on valid scientific and economic grounds. Whilst the Commonwealth cannot take responsibility for the administrative procedures in the states, it must assume responsibility for its role in developing the national program. If that program has been developed on the basis of a number of assumptions, then part of the responsibility for the hardship currently experienced by many producers arising from the OJD program must lie with the Commonwealth government. Various assumptions have been made, including that the disease is confined to particular geographical areas; that the disease spreads slowly; that death rates within flocks which have the bacteria increase with time; that the economic control measures are greater than the economic losses from the disease; and that flocks which have not tested do not have the bacteria present because producers have no evidence of clinical disease. Wildlife and other ruminants have never been addressed, yet cross-infection between species has been documented in scientific literature both in Australia and overseas. Other assumptions are that the market assurance program reduces the risk of infection to the extent that properties which enter a de-stocking program can confidently source non-infected sheep, bearing in mind the insensitivity of testing procedures; and that a regulatory system which relies upon producers to submit to voluntary testing is likely to succeed even though the impact from the regulations on individual producers that accompanies a positive diagnosis can be devastating.

Time will show that some of the assumptions may be proven correct by a scientific approach, but currently a regressive regulatory program has been developed on a set of assumptions. The most important assumption was in fact the one which assumed that there was only a small number of properties infected, based on the known 140 and estimated to be no more than 250. The role of the Commonwealth cannot be ignored. The Commonwealth’s role is to provide the leadership and coordination necessary for successfully implementing the proposed approach. The role of the states is to resource administrative and regulatory control activities. Ultimately, the Commonwealth must be responsible to the electorate and it must be accountable. A program such as the current ovine Johne’s disease program will invest funding from the people, and the government must be able to demonstrate that there is a solid foundation for such a program. Such a program must be scientifically valid and economically feasible.

The two key recommendations in every major report are that the prevalence of the disease must be established and that, if the outcome of such a study indicates that control procedures would be appropriate, they must be evaluated in relation to the cost of the disease. These recommendations are fundamental, yet they have been ignored. The real tragedy of the ovine Johne’s disease saga is that in putting policy ahead of the science and economics there has been an incalculable economic and social cost to the individuals caught in the system. The Commonwealth must freeze funding for the ovine Johne’s disease program until scientific proof and socioeconomic matters have been addressed. I call upon the minister associated with the control of this particular disease, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, to ensure that that freeze is undertaken as quickly and as adequately as possible to ensure that the people affected by the decisions that are emanating from the New South Wales Department of Agriculture in particular are protected from the devastating disability of being deprived of their economic function. It is imperative for not only the economics of the individuals involved in this but also the economics of the regions where ovine Johne’s disease has been found to be in existence. We must ensure, as I said earlier, that any actions undertaken by governments, and in particular the Commonwealth government, are based on sound scientific and socioeconomic grounds, in the interests of
protecting those people affected dramatically by the decisions made by bureaucrats at arms-length from their particular economic right to continue their business and remain viable. I thank the House for the opportunity of making these comments on this very debilitating disease of small stock.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—Is the motion seconded?

Mr Secker—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak later.

Mr HORNE (Paterson) (4.36 p.m.)—Having read the motion on ovine Johne’s disease, I thought I understood what the member for Hume was talking about. Having listened to him, I must admit that I am now confused. The honourable member expresses concerns about the New South Wales government’s activity in relation to the control of ovine Johne’s disease. It is worth while highlighting the origins of the ovine Johne’s disease program to understand the responsible role that has been taken by the New South Wales government in battling this debilitating sheep disease. In fact, the New South Wales government response to this disease is a classic case of government listening to rural industry, and that is what it should always be about. Let us be very clear that the ovine Johne’s disease program is being implemented at the request of industry. The Australian sheep industry wants this program. The New South Wales Farmers Association supports the program. The Australian Animal Health Council is actively involved in implementing the program. It is an industry-driven and a national program.

Is the honourable member requesting that the New South Wales government ignore the wishes of industry and break from a national program? I am very much aware of the concerns raised by the Yass sheep producers which have no doubt sparked the honourable member’s motion. These producers’ flocks have been struck with the disease and they are feeling the brunt of implementing the national program to battle the disease and protect the Australian sheep industry. It is a disease which is very much under the microscope. Research work continues in the New South Wales Department of Agriculture’s Elizabeth Macarthur Agriculture Institute to develop the pooled faecal culture test as a definitive test for detection of the disease.

In the meantime, it is vital that all that can be done is done to contain this disease. As unpopular as zoning is for the Yass producers, it is an internationally recognised approach to disease control. Exactly the same thing happened with bovine Johne’s disease, and that was very unpopular too, but it was right. That was the only process that went forward to stamp out bovine Johne’s disease and declared areas free of that disease so that trade could take place. That will be the result of this process, too. It is only by clearing areas of the disease that you can allow that free trade that is so necessary. As the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, who is at the table, knows, we are talking about an industry that is worth $4 billion a year to Australia.

Industry has agreed to the implementation of zones as determined by the National Veterinary Committee. Zoning is needed to control the disease whilst research is being conducted. Zoning has come about as a consequence of industry and government working together at the state level. Rather than condemn the New South Wales government, the honourable member should highlight this example to his colleagues in the federal government.

This federal government needs to learn how to listen to and cooperate with rural Australia. As I said, we are talking about an industry which is not insignificant to rural and regional Australia. It is worth $4 billion a year. Any threat to such an industry needs to be countered in a responsible manner. I think everyone who listened to the member’s speech would be forgiven if they thought that he was advocating that we do nothing about it—ignore it and it will go away. That is certainly not the experience from this type of disease. It has been identified. It is present. Therefore, we need to have a plan in place. This is the plan which is being supported by industry and government alike. If this plan is fully supported, eventually it will work.

It is unfortunate that the major impact of the action that is being taken impacts upon Yass. I empathise with the member because there is no doubt that he is under enormous pressure from his constituents. He is saying,
‘I’ve got to go in there and do my best,’ but at the same time he is here in the federal parliament representing all Australian interests. I am very much aware that the New South Wales Minister for Agriculture, Mr Richard Amery, has met with the Yass producers and has discussed at length their concerns. I am also aware that his office remains in contact with the producers to ensure that a communication channel is kept open. I suggest to the honourable member, if he seeks a complete rethink of the national ovine Johne’s disease program, that the place to start consultation is at the industry level, but it is a holistic approach. You talk to the whole of the industry and listen to what the whole industry wants and what is best for the whole of industry, not for certain individuals. Do not expect the New South Wales government to act in a high-handed manner and go against the request of industry. Their path has been set by industry. I indicated earlier those parts of industry which are the major parts of the sheep grazing industry that support the action taken by the New South Wales government.

The type of arrogance that is being proposed here is the very reason why rural Australia has deserted the federal government. Make no mistake: it has. That is exactly the reason why the Prime Minister, only a month ago, put on his hat and went around rural and regional Australia to try to find out what is going wrong in the bush. As a government, he was saying, ‘I know we’re not acting in your interests. So let me get out there and try to find out.’ I do not think he did find out and I do not think he has changed his course, but I can assure you that the New South Wales government, in particular the Hon. Richard Amery, is out there listening far more than is the minister for forests and whatever else he represents. He comes into this House at question time and gets things wrong and says that he has never received a representation when he has received plenty. I support the action that is being taken by the New South Wales government and the minister because he has listened to industry and he is acting accordingly.

Mr SECKER (Barker) (4.44 p.m.)—I can assure the member for Paterson and especially the stud breeding industry that there are many people rejecting the current policy. If he bothered to talk to a lot of those involved in the industry, especially the stud industry, which has borne most of the cost of testing for OJD, he would find that they are not happy with current policy. I can speak with some experience and expertise on this matter, and I thank the House for the opportunity to speak in support of the motion moved by the hard-working member for Hume.

In a former life, as a stud breeder of two breeds of sheep, I followed the progression of ovine Johne’s disease, or OJD, not only here in Australia but also in overseas countries like New Zealand. In fact, my own flocks are classified MN1 for OJD as part of the OJD control program, so I could probably claim more hands-on experience than any other member of this chamber. That MN1 classification means that my sheep have a relatively good chance of being free of the disease, but herein lies the problem in that the accuracy of the blood test is woeful and one can never be sure of complete eradication. Sheep breeders can only have a disease-free status based on probabilities rather than certainties. Indeed we have to question the possibility of us being able to eradicate OJD when no other country in the world has been able to. We also need to question the economic rationale for trying to eradicate OJD when probably 99 per cent of Australia’s flocks have a natural control in hot, dry climates that inhibits the development of OJD. Even when the disease is present in conditions likely to allow it to spread slowly, there are management criteria that will allow better control and treatment of this wasting disease.

So why are we spending so much when its economic impact is, at worst, limited and, in most conditions, virtually non-existent? Why do we have different applications of control in different states? From my experience in South Australia, where all but one of the cases of OJD have been found in my seat of Barker, the South Australian Department of Primary Industries seems to have been more rational and caring than the New South Wales Department of Agriculture. I personally know of one example in New South Wales— in fact, in the member for Calare’s seat— where I have inspected the flock which, in three years, has supposedly had one positive
years, has supposedly had one positive OJD result on a property that would have the ideal climate and conditions for the spread of this disease. This well-known white suffolk stud has sold many stud sheep to other breeders all over Australia. After this one reaction, all of the stud sheep that were sold were slaughtered and tested—and not one other positive reactor has been found. Nearly 100 sheep have been slaughtered, and there are more sheep on the property concerned, and still no more reactors have been found. Yet they remain in quarantine and they have had their livelihood severely strained, not to mention the worry and personal hardships that have resulted.

After these results, we have to question the role of the New South Wales Department of Agriculture and the accuracy of the first test. After these results we also have to question the economic reasons for the control of the disease when it does not seem to have spread, if indeed it was there in the first place. These people are not even allowed to sell sheep to breeders who, with the full information of the tests, are still prepared to buy from them and who purchased from them in the past when they already had suspect status. All this is from the New South Wales Department of Agriculture, which failed to act in the first place when a well-known New South Wales merino stud was detected with OJD several years ago and which allowed the stud to spread the disease amongst other flocks.

There has been little consistency from this department, and it should carry its head in shame. It seems to be treating people contemptuously and callously, without regard for the effects that it is having on people’s lives. This is why I am supporting the motion of the member for Hume, especially part 4, with the rider that the freeze on funding refers to the New South Wales Department of Agriculture and not its South Australian counterpart, which by and large is doing a better job. Perhaps when a proper independent investigation is undertaken into the department’s activities to ensure its actions are based on sound economic and scientific grounds we can reassess the whole basis of our national eradication program. (Time expired)

Mr ANDREN (Calare) (4.49 p.m.)—Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the member for Hume for putting this again on the national agenda. I brought this up in my maiden speech four years ago and, while I have some reservations about the thrust of parts 3 and 4 of the motion, it is important that we are here debating this. The Bathurst, Blayney, Oberon and Yass area is the epicentre of this particular devastating disease. Like the member for Hume, I have also seen the huge emotional stress and the economic stress that it is causing. It was suggested that the import of Tukidales for carpet wool to the Oberon area in the early 1980s was the catalyst for this particular disease. No-one seems to know, but it is interesting that they came from New Zealand, which has adopted a do nothing attitude to this, as it does with many of the diseases on its so-called level playing field. I would suggest that one infected with every disease would be its level playing field.

I have stud producers now seeking charity because they are being denied finance. They cannot sell their stock. They are going through the motions of keeping excellent stock in their breeding program, but they can only sell them for slaughter at this point. They are absolutely desperate. They are crying out for the sort of assistance that is just not forthcoming. This whole program is unfair and discriminatory. I am not suggesting that we should abandon this national program, though. I think the federal government should take a role in forwarding exceptional circumstance assistance to these particular people because, until we do, we are not treating it as a genuinely national problem. The state minister says he will conduct a formal audit of the trace forward program from the markets. I have been to the Bathurst markets and I did not see any sort of assurance program in place there to know where some of this stock ends up. It has been suggested to me that buyers are picking up stock from suspect pens where they have been quarantined, then fattening them up and selling them elsewhere in the market. Who knows? It is probably outside the residual areas.

While we can attack the state government’s program and the way it is imple-
mented, I think we can also fairly level accusations at the federal government and say that exceptional circumstance should be part of the equation. Mr Anderson said, while he was the minister for primary industries a couple of years ago, that the economic impacts are not known. But I wonder about the social and emotional impacts of this. Rare and unforeseen circumstances are supposed to qualify people for this. I would suggest that all involved should speak to the Ostinis at their stud near Orange to see the huge emotional and economic circumstances that have come down on their heads. The member for Barker referred to the people from Oberon and their particular stud. They, with one blood test, have lost their MM1 status and their business has basically ground to a halt.

The Australian Animal Health Council Circular of 21 December 1999 said:

The possibility that OJD is restricted to some regions is one of the key drivers of the national plan. Well, possibility is not good enough. We need probability and certainty in this whole process. The blood testing process is imprecise. Graham and Jill Williams, wool growers in the northern part of my electorate, are quite unconvinced about the blood sample protocol and still claim that their samples were mixed up—mixed up to such an extent that they can do nothing. They are treated like lepers within the industry; they are treated almost like lepers by their own neighbours. This is the inherent unfairness of this whole program.

I note the concern of the member who moved this motion. I share his concern, but I wonder whether freezing of funding and pointing the finger at the New South Wales government or vets or whomever, alone, is really the answer to this. I think the answer lies in compensation—exceptional circumstance assistance. It is a national industry and government problem. I suggest that the flocks of all producers throughout Australia should be subjected to the faecal test—the new test that is available—if it is as good as is said, and that we treat this, as we did with the brucellosis campaign, as a national problem involving national tests. Then it is ‘one in, all in’ so that all the industry can share in establishing where the confines of this battle are. Unless we draw boundaries around it, we cannot begin to fight the battle. It needs a national test, and I suggest that the pooled faecal test is the way to go. (Time expired)

Mr GIBBONS (Bendigo) (4.54 p.m.)—I will give an outline of the causes and the description of the disease, as did the member for Hume. As has been pointed out before, ovine Johne’s disease is the description given to sheep suffering from a bacterial infection. The symptoms are a general wasting of infected animals. OJD is often mistaken for a range of other problems like abscess, worms, fluke and dietary deficiency. Losses of up to five per cent have been reported in Australia, and in New Zealand and other countries where the disease is endemic anecdotal evidence is that losses stabilise in the range of one per cent to three per cent per annum.

OJD was first detected in Australia in around 1980 in the central tablelands of New South Wales. It has now been detected in flocks in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania. There are reports that many producers are ‘keeping quiet about the potential presence of OJD because they feared huge trading losses’. Whilst nobody condones that sort of activity, you really cannot blame them for that because some of them are actually facing financial ruin. It seems reasonable to infer that what has been reported is only the tip of the iceberg.

OJD is known to be spread by the ingestion of pasture contaminated with infected faecal matter and is known to be spread by the transport of infected faecal matter in waterways. Young animals are more susceptible, and it appears that they can be infected by the ewe’s milk. The bacterium has been reported to persist for longer than one year on the pastures. The question as to whether wildlife can carry OJD remains unanswered, but it is known that bovine Johne’s disease, although a strain distinct from OJD, can be carried by sheep.

With present technology it is not possible to reliably diagnose OJD in individual live sheep. If OJD is present, the entire flock is assumed to be infected. Ovine Johne’s disease could and will affect the sheepmeat and wool industry in many ways. Some of these
are still unknown because there is still much to learn about the disease. The effect on farmers is considerable economic loss because of restrictions on the sale of the sheep. This has the potential to ruin many sheep farmers throughout Australia. Other losses include decreased wool production, lowered reproductive performance and decreased growth. All of these factors have a big impact on the various markets.

I have met with affected farmers in my electorate on two occasions and been given first-hand information on the potential for disaster in the entire region.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—Order! The time for private members business has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting. The honourable member for Bendigo will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Question proposed: That grievances be noted.

Nursing Homes: Riverside

Mr WILTON (Isaacs) (4.57 p.m.)—I grieve in particular today for the residents of the Riverside Nursing Home in the electorate of Isaacs. The latest chapter in this somewhat horrendous saga is that residents of the Riverside Nursing Home are being evacuated, almost as we speak, to St Vincent’s Hospital; exactly for how long one can only speculate, but we can surmise that it might be for some three or four weeks. We do not know simply because neither I nor the residents are effectively being told for how long they are to be so relocated. In similar terms, the relatives of the residents do not know how long the residents will be away from their normal abode at the nursing home. One can only ask: how can the government leave residents and their relatives in a limboland of this nature?

Earlier this morning I took a call—one of several I have taken—from a distraught constituent, Miss Kay Rossborough, who was almost too upset to speak. Miss Rossborough’s 78-year-old mother is one of the residents who is about to be uprooted from the Riverside Nursing Home, which has been a home to her for the past 4½ years. Miss Rossborough is very concerned—quite understandably so—about the effect that the move will have on her mother, who suffers from dementia. If we look at the situation from Miss Rossborough’s perspective, this relocation and upheaval that her mother is currently enduring through being relocated from Riverside to St Vincent’s Hospital could ostensibly—in fact, in reality—have quite a serious and detrimental effect on both her health and her wellbeing.

Despite the excellent professional and counselling services being offered at St Vincent’s by the Sisters of Charity there, one can only be concerned for the welfare of patients. I am certainly not going to suggest for a minute that residents would be better off remaining at Riverside. Perhaps it is a case of quite the opposite. But we cannot ignore this amazing upheaval that these elderly and frail residents will be forced to endure. The ambulance trip, the unfamiliar faces, the strange surroundings and the new routine at the end of the journey will be very unsettling, even frightening, for all the residents, especially those like Miss Rossborough’s mother, who suffer from dementia. The government must take the utmost care to ensure that this transition is as smooth and as brief as possible for Riverside residents.

The shame of this whole fiasco is that the government has been caught totally off guard and is clearly resorting to a quick fix in an attempt to resolve it. What the minister has failed to acknowledge is that she is failing, and has failed for quite some time, to address the underlying systemic problem which, for Riverside residents, goes back two or more years—well before the day that Minister Bishop apparently first heard, in her own words, about the unfortunate kerosene incident. It was way back in May 1998 that Riverside was visited by assessing officers of the then Department of Health and Family Services. At that assessment most of the activities and functions of Riverside were identified as requiring urgent attention and action on the part of the provider in order to meet the government’s standards. In July last year the home was once again assessed and the report subsequently stated that its operations were,
yet again, by and large unsatisfactory. Yet the operators of the nursing home were still able to rake in taxpayers’ and residents’ money to continue what can only be described as a substandard practice. They continued to offer a very poor quality of service to the elderly and frail residents under their supervision. An endless stream of different complaints about the practices at the home have been made to various quarters, including my office, the department, the complaints scheme, the unions, the minister’s office and the state government. Is this not just a case of too little too late for the poor residents of Riverside? Is it not a fact that no action has been taken against Riverside and that it is symptomatic of a flawed system? One can only ask what this government has done to make sure that nursing homes like Riverside get up to scratch and start to provide the quality care that Australians have come to know and expect.

The minister, Mrs Bishop, says that the safety of residents is her primary concern and that the government, in her view, has a strong commitment to ensuring that nursing home residents achieve an appropriate quality of life. To that end the government has established an agency that is supposed to be responsible for ensuring that nursing homes receiving federal government funds meet its standards and that they provide quality care to their residents. There is also the government’s confidential complaints resolution scheme which is similarly responsible for reacting quickly to residents’ and relatives’ concerns about the goings-on in particular nursing homes. Unfortunately, it is only too clear that the government, the minister, the Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency and the complaints resolution scheme have all failed the frail and elderly residents of the Riverside Nursing Home. Given that the government has known about the consistently poor record of the home through the department’s assessment processes, how can Mrs Bishop explain that none of the complaints received about this nursing home were treated as a red alert? That is a question that the minister must respond to.

There have, no doubt, been reasons enough for the government to investigate the Riverside Nursing Home, reasons enough for Mrs Bishop or the agency to conduct spot checks on this facility. It is hard for us to believe that the minister’s primary concern is for the safety and wellbeing of nursing home residents because it seems to me that the government’s commitment to quality of care for nursing home residents and the mechanisms it has in place to ensure that it delivers on that commitment are completely worthless. They are worthless because they can allow a nursing home with a consistently poor record such as Riverside to continue its operations without what would seem to be any form of investigation, without imposing any method of sanction and without procedures in place to ensure that these standards are uplifted. These commitments proffered by the minister in recent press releases and again in question time today are also worthless because, by and large, they are reactive to the crises that conceivably may occur rather than being proactive to prevent those same crises. I conclude by saying that if the situation is as suggested, the residents of this home could have been spared a lot of pain, suffering and indignity, notably brought on them by the relocation and the stress associated with that relocation. As I say, they are frail and elderly and not up to the stresses that this government has placed on them for too long.

**Mandatory Sentencing**

**Dr NELSON (Bradfield)** (5.07 p.m.)—I use the privilege given to me in the grievance debate to make some comments about and express some concerns in relation to mandatory sentencing. We are entering a new century. Depending on how you count, it is either this year or next year. Like most beginnings, it represents a century and a millennium of hope. It is a time when, consciously or otherwise, each of us contemplates what we will leave in the 20th century and that which we think is important enough to take into the 21st.

Amongst those values and laws this nation now entertains taking into a new century and—as perhaps we tire of hearing—also a new millennium is a sentencing regime which ironically was largely instrumental in the European settlement of this country. My
wife and I recently dined at a friend’s home in Lindfield, which is in my electorate. We parked our car in front of their house. Midway through the evening my host reported to us that he had disturbed two young girls doing something to the side of our car. That something turned out to be removing the side panel indicators from both my car and that of another guest. It would be a trivial crime, perhaps, in the eyes of many people, but in fact I think minor crime, like minor surgery, is something that is happening to someone else. I felt extremely annoyed. Replacing them probably will not give much change out of a hundred dollars. When I told my neighbour about this incident, he said I was ‘lucky’ to be the victim of only a minor crime.

But had this occurred in the Northern Territory and had the kids been apprehended and convicted of their second such offence they would be off to jail for a month. No ifs; no buts. Kids go inside for 28 days on their second strike. Some of the material distributed by the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory suggests that there is some discretion in that these juveniles of 15 or 16 years of age may be sent into diversional programs. In fact, there has not been one person charged under mandatory sentencing laws who has been availed of that provision in Central Australia. In fact, if you come from a place like Groote Eylandt, it is simply not possible to go into a diversionary program, as commendable as such a program is. If you are a victim of these ‘serious’ crimes in which a young teenager steals a packet of cigarettes from a shop or a homeless man steals the towel off your clothes line, at least I suppose you can sleep soundly knowing that the perpetrator is safely behind bars or at the very least in a detention centre for juveniles.

Last month, in this country, a 15-year-old boy died in detention. He had broken into his community council offices at Groote Eylandt to steal pencils, pens and Liquid Paper. The total value was reported to be less than $50. An orphan whose mother died when he was a baby and whose father died in a car accident a few years ago, ‘Johnno’, as he was known, hanged himself after being sent to his room for refusing to help with the chores in the detention centre. Some people have said, ‘Well, as tragic as it is, this is just another case of youth suicide,’ which—another issue—is endemic throughout our country. When you look at the background of his life and the circumstances in which he was living, it could well be argued that this young boy was indeed a suicide risk. It could also be argued that perhaps he was less likely to be able to take his own life in the sort of supervision that is provided in the detention centre than he might have been back in his own community. None of us will ever know.

But there are some fundamental tenets upon which a civilised society is built. One was tested when, two years ago, this parliament overturned the Northern Territory’s euthanasia experiment, upholding the view that, no matter how meritorious the individual circumstances, no-one shall intentionally end the life of another human being. Surely, alongside freedom of speech and religious expression, respect for institutions and equality of opportunity is the conviction that the courts must pass sentences which are appropriate to the circumstances of each and every case. It should not matter whether you live in Arnhem Land, Bunbury, Hobart or Parramatta, whether you are rich or poor, young or old; every single one of us should be equal before the law and its processes. It is cruelly ironic that, a little over a week after this issue came to this level of national prominence, the Australian Citizenship Council chaired by Sir Ninian Stephen issued the Australian Compact for the new century, which sets out seven shared values and commitments in not just a legal sense but what they described as ‘core civic values’. The second of those seven compacts is:

To maintain the rule of law and the ideal of equality under the law of all Australians. What kind of society are we if we are to tolerate children dying in the mandatory care of the state because the penalty is not allowed to fit the crime? Today, people in New South Wales, some perhaps in my own electorate, will be convicted of drink-driving offences. They have endangered not only their own lives and the lives of people whom they love but the lives of innocent people on the roads. Few will face imprisonment, and even fewer when influence and income affords them
first-class legal representation. Yet, in the Northern Territory, a juvenile denied food by neglecting parents can go to jail for stealing biscuits or other items of food.

If I lived in the Northern Territory amongst people flouting the law, I, too, would want some action from my politicians. But the Territory’s mandatory sentencing appears to have had little impact on the problem. In fact, in 1997, a year after its implementation, the ABS reported that there had been an 8.8 per cent increase in unlawful entry with intent. Juvenile incarceration rates in the Territory are four times those in Victoria but without a corresponding decline in crime levels.

There is a dark side in all of us. There is a side of us that wants to grab those kids that were defacing my car, or the people who have broken into my home on nine occasions throughout my adult life, and throttle the living daylights out of them, to wreak some kind of retribution for the harm that they have done to me in stealing and interfering with my property. But there is another side to all of us which my mother described as ‘doing the right thing’. Doing the right thing in particular is what churches and other institutions that consider ethical arguments in our country bring to the political debate—a question of what is right and what is wrong.

The ‘right thing’ has never extended to sending poor, illiterate, geographically isolated and emotionally impoverished kids to jail for stealing pens—even less so if it endangers their lives. Those who are baying loudest in their support of mandatory sentencing, aggrieved by property crime or the fear of it, should stop to ask: ‘How would I feel if this were done to my own son?’ I challenge Mr Denis Burke and his colleagues in the Northern Territory to ask themselves if they can really go to sleep at night believing that it is fair for a 22-year-old man to go to jail for one year for stealing a packet of biscuits and a bottle of cordial on Christmas Day. Can anyone stand up and say that is an appropriate response to that particular crime, whether it be his first crime or his 100th? Jail is an appropriate penalty and people should be punished for transgressions of the law, but not in 100 per cent of cases. Had the kids taking the lights from my car faced such a sentence, these laws would be repealed today; an Aboriginal person in the Northern Territory deserves no less.

Unless we begin to recognise and address the devastating impact of welfare on indigenous people facing vast unmet human need in an environment of existential despair, then I suggest that tragically there may be more ‘Johnnos’. Are we so blind to injustice, deaf to despair and indifferent to basic human values that as a nation we are incapable of resolving this issue by the Northern Territory government being at least prepared to review this legislation both in principle and in practice? (Time expired)

Mr Albanese—A great speech.

Aged Care: Accreditation

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (5.17 p.m.)—I would like to start with something that does not constitute a grievance. Members have said many times that it is an honour and a privilege to serve in this House; and, indeed, I think it is. There are many things that we do—often little things as members of parliament—that can give one a buzz. I would like to read into the Hansard a note and a card that I have received from constituents with regard to 50th wedding anniversaries. The note reads:

Thank you for your beautiful flowers. They arrived on the 10th January in the morning. It was such a lovely surprise. The children’s surprise party—

By the way, I think the children are probably my age.

for our 50th wedding anniversary was absolutely wonderful. We all had a happy time. Thank you once again.

Yours Sincerely

Margaret Malouf.

The card says:

Dear Roger Price, M.P.

We thank you for the beautiful flower arrangement, framed certificate, and your good wishes, on the occasion of our ‘50th’ wedding anniversary 17 December 1999.

It was a lovely surprise for us, and much appreciated. Many thanks to your staff at Daniel Plaza for being so helpful to us. We wish you and
your wife Robyn all the very best for the New Year 2000.

Best regards
From Sydney and Winifred Allen.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I wanted to record in the Hansard what a buzz it is to be able to do small things and receive such wonderful notes in return.

Like the member for Isaacs, I also wanted to talk about—I suppose this is my principal grievance—aged care policy under the Howard government. Rather than calling it ‘all care, no responsibility’, it could be called ‘all kero, no responsibility’. The Minister for Aged Care has on a number of occasions in this House lauded the system of cooperatively working with nursing home providers, as well as introducing an accreditation system. All that sounds very nice. But whether it is for a nursing home or a hospital, accreditation does not actually guarantee service. What it does do is to ensure that there are appropriate policies and procedures operating in a hospital or, in this case, in a nursing home. Often nursing home providers hire a consultant to do all their paperwork, and they do not necessarily consult with very many of the staff who work there. So accreditation is no great tool, as the minister claims, for removing undesirable people from the nursing home system. It guarantees that there are procedures and policies. What it cannot guarantee is whether the policies or procedures are being implemented. The only way you can do that is by unannounced visits—inspections. It is not by giving people a week’s notice or writing to them that you are going to come; it is by arriving on the doorstep unannounced. I thought I should make a point of reading a couple of quotes from the minister. She says:

Let me tell you from a very personal point of view that, having looked at more nursing homes than you obviously ever did when you were in power, there are places where you simply would not have someone you loved be placed. If it is not good enough for my family or your family, it is not good enough for anybody else’s family either. Amen. I agree with that. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that. The only problem is that that was in answer to a question from Ms Gerick, the member for Canning, in August 1999. One might say that, having determined as a minister that there were unacceptable nursing homes, what did she actually do about it? How many nursing homes in September, following the August statement by the minister, were put under pressure? How many in November? How many in December? How many in January? Of course the answer is absolutely none. Let me give you another quote. This is on 2 September 1999, page 9809 of the Hansard. The minister said:

But where there is a case of real risk, where the health or the wellbeing of the resident is under threat, then unannounced visits are available under the Aged Care Act and under subordinate legislation.

How many such visits occurred in 1998 and how many in 1999? The answer is zero, absolutely none—got the power but does not do anything with it. I think this sums up the minister’s sentiments:

Where a provider is a good provider, we exercise the policy reasonably and sensibly. But where there is a home where people are at a risk the unannounced visits are part of our policy. I repeat what I said a few days ago, that we will use all and any tools at our disposal to ensure that we do not allow individuals to be at risk.

Everyone would agree with that, but where was the use of all the tools in 1998? Where was the use of these tools when the minister was at the dispatch box saying this is what her policy was and this is when it was going to be implemented? As for the Riverside Nursing Home, her department, for which she is responsible, found that there were problems on 13 May 1998. It failed 26 out of 29 care standards. Is that a minor failure? Do they actually get a post and can sit it again? It failed 26 out of 29 care standards. If that was not bad enough, on 19 July 1999, a bit over 15 months ago, the standards and accreditation agency report said that it had failed the three areas of care standards—all three areas. They had failed.

Of course, it has all blown up this year. On 16 January, in response to a highly contagious disease, scabies, the residents were bathed in kerosene and suffered burns. Not only that, one of the residents has bed sores. In nursing terms, bed sores are an admission of failure. You do everything for the patient. You move them, bathe them and stimulate the
skin to ensure they do not get bed sores. This patient had not only a bed sore but also maggots in the bed sore. And this is a triumph of this government’s policy and this minister’s policy! I think it is absolutely disgusting.

It is fair that we should disagree politically but let me say this: this minister is responsible for the frail aged in our society. Those who have contributed for a lifetime. They have had families, had children, had grandchildren and contributed a lifetime to this country. In their twilight years when they are not best able to stand up for themselves and are dependent on others for care, this minister and this government have failed them. Not only have they failed them in this instance; they have put accommodation bonds on them so that some of them have to sell their homes.

The dental health scheme that helped not just our frail aged but many of our fellow Australians get dental care was scrapped by this government. It really mouths a lot about wanting to look after the aged in our society but, when the chips are down, it does little. I wonder if it is because Mr Doug Moran, a billionaire nursing home proprietor and heavy contributor to the Liberal Party, is the one who really influenced this policy. He himself has a nursing home that is listed as being at risk.

Member for Fremantle: Defence Fund

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (5.26 p.m.)—This afternoon I would like to ask the Australian Labor Party what has happened to the money that people donated in good faith to the Carmen Lawrence defence fund. In the interests of accountability the Leader of the Opposition, who played an integral role in the establishment of this defence fund, must disclose to the House the answer to several critical questions regarding the status of the defence fund. He must also explain what will happen to those funds now that the Commonwealth is likely to be liable for all of Carmen Lawrence’s legal costs for her representation in the Marks Royal Commission.

Last month Justice Burchett delivered his orders in Vass v. the Commonwealth, a civil action regarding the liability of Carmen Lawrence’s legal fees as a result of the Marks Royal Commission. As a result of these orders, it is likely that the Commonwealth will be liable for that portion of Carmen Lawrence’s legal fees that were not previously approved by the parliament. The train of events that led to the establishment of the Carmen Lawrence defence fund started on 8 June 1995, when the Keating-Beazley cabinet decided that the Commonwealth would be liable for former Minister Lawrence’s legal costs.

Later that month, then Attorney-General Michael Lavarch announced that the Commonwealth would also fund an action in the High Court challenging the legality of the Marks Royal Commission. On 28 September 1995, the coalition confirmed it would oppose legislation making taxpayers liable for these legal costs incurred in relation to challenging the validity of the royal commission in the High Court. The Democrats also announced that they would insist on parliamentary approval for the payment of former Minister Lawrence’s legal costs. From that time, various senior ministers, Carmen Lawrence, Gareth Evans and Kim Beazley, made statements about the issue of Carmen Lawrence’s legal fees that led the public to believe that former Minister Lawrence faced a crisis that could result in her personal bankruptcy. Gareth Evans whipped up hysteria with comments like, ‘She could be faced with bankruptcy.’ On 3 December 1995, then Minister Beazley was reported in the Canberra Times as follows:

Deputy Prime Minister Kim Beazley says it is imperative the Labor Party ensure that Carmen Lawrence is not bankrupted by having to pay legal fees arising out of her court challenges to the Marks Royal Commission. Mr Beazley confirmed that Dr Lawrence would have to step down from parliament if she were made bankrupt.

Then there is a quote from former Deputy Prime Minister Beazley:

We could not let that happen, absolutely.

But, even when they made those statements, did they know that in fact this would never be the case? In fact, did they not already know that the government was locked into paying the legal fees because cabinet had already made that decision? Indeed, on 29 November 1995, former Minister Lawrence claimed:
Cabinet decided that the bills should be met. I would not have undertaken any challenges at all if there had been any suggestion that they would have to be met either by me or the ALP.

In truth, it seems that former Ministers Beazley, Evans and Lawrence were all aware that cabinet had decided the Commonwealth would pay the entirety of Carmen Lawrence’s legal fees. They were also most likely aware that the Commonwealth would be forced to pay, irrespective of parliament’s decision. Years later, even Gary Gray admitted:

We have always believed they [the legal fees] were properly incurred by the Commonwealth.

So, despite former Minister Beazley’s protest that it was not Labor’s ‘intention to fund that element of Mrs Lawrence’s legal expenses by any other method than ultimately a recourse to parliament,’ he was, either by accident or by design, circumventing the superiority of parliament over cabinet by creating an implied contract between the government and Dunhill Madden Butler that their fees would be paid by the Commonwealth.

In response to the hysteria that had been manufactured by the Labor Party, on 5 December 1995 the Carmen Lawrence Defence Fund was established by Gary Gray, the general secretary of the Labor Party, with two other trustees, including the now New South Wales Minister of State, John Della Bosca.

Ms Kernot—So what?

Mr PYNE—So what? You might well ask the question. You will find out why. If you had given money to the Carmen Lawrence Defence Fund, wouldn’t you want to know how it was being spent? We will get to that. From that time, money flowed to the Carmen Lawrence Defence Fund from members of the public, who were led to believe by senior ministers that Minister Lawrence was facing bankruptcy. Evidence produced in the Federal Court on this matter indicated that the Carmen Lawrence Defence Fund has a balance of about $100,000, even though some media reports had previously suggested that the defence fund had collected about $240,000.

Mr Albanese—Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. My point of order goes to relevance. I wonder when the honourable member will mention the fact that the member for Fremantle was recently found innocent.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Andrews)—The member will resume his seat. There is no point of order.

Mr PYNE—I understand that on grievances there is no such thing as relevance, but nevertheless—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER—I will decide that, member for Sturt!

Mr PYNE—Mr Deputy Speaker, that at no stage in this speech will I comment on the veracity of Minister Lawrence. I am delighted that she has been found innocent of the changes levied against her. My point is about the money in the Carmen Lawrence Defence Fund, which is entirely separate from her being found guilty or innocent by any court in the land.

The true balance of the Carmen Lawrence Defence Fund is only one of many unanswered questions. There are several other critical questions that the Leader of the Opposition must answer. Firstly, as the legal fees have not been paid to Dunhill Madden Butler, where are the proceeds of the Carmen Lawrence Defence Fund? Are they sitting at Curtin House, earning income for the Labor Party? Does the Labor Party expect that the Carmen Lawrence Defence Fund will not have to pay the legal fees? In which case, has a fraud been perpetrated on those who donated to the fund, believing that they were doing so to stave off the potential bankruptcy of Carmen Lawrence? If the Labor Party expected the Commonwealth to pay, why were Gary Gray and former Ministers Evans and Beazley promoting the idea that former Minister Lawrence was facing bankruptcy? Why did former Minister Beazley whip up hysteria about Carmen Lawrence’s alleged potential
bankruptcy when, as a cabinet minister, he was a part of the decision making process that had committed the Commonwealth to paying the debt? Has any money been drawn from the Carmen Lawrence Defence Fund? If so, if it has not been drawn for the purpose of the payment of legal fees, what other purpose could funds be directed to? Are the donors aware that these funds have not been applied to date for Carmen Lawrence’s legal fees? Was the Carmen Lawrence Defence Fund a pre-election ruse designed to deflect attention from the issue of her veracity and to create sympathy for her?

The public and the donors to the Carmen Lawrence Defence Fund may well ask why the proceeds have not been used for the purposes for which they were collected. They may also care to ask about interest earned on the fund and whether administration charges have been made. It would also be expected that, if indeed any payment has been made from the Carmen Lawrence Defence Fund—

Mr Albanese—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member is out of order under standing order 80.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER—I ask the member for Sturt to refer to the honourable member for Fremantle by her electorate. If the honourable member for Sturt is referring to a proper name of a fund, then he is entitled to do that.

Mr PYNE—Indeed I am referring to the trust of the Carmen Lawrence Defence Fund. It would also be expected that, if indeed any payment has been made from the Carmen Lawrence Defence Fund, the member for Fremantle would make the appropriate declaration on the register of members’ interests.

Plibersek interjecting—

Mr PYNE—Well, of course. Why wouldn’t she make a declaration on the register of members’ interests? If she has taken a benefit from people raising money to pay her legal fees, that is something to be declared. Maybe you will learn that in the course of your career.

Mr Deputy Speaker, if you were one of the people duped into giving money to the Carmen Lawrence Defence Fund, wouldn’t you want to know whether the money was spent on her legal fees? The Leader of the Opposition, the member for Fremantle and Gary Gray owe it to those people to tell them whether it is going to pay for Carmen Lawrence’s legal fees or whether it will go to $100,000 of direct mail from Curtin House at the next election. The fact is that the Carmen Lawrence Defence Fund was established to pay that part of Carmen Lawrence’s legal fees that parliament refused to pay, and the funds should be used for that purpose. If it is not to be used for that purpose, then the public have a right to know for what purpose it will be used in the future.

International Women’s Day

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney) (5.36 p.m.)—I rise today to speak about my anger and frustration at the policies of this government in relation to Australian women. I think it is appropriate at this juncture to say that it is no wonder that only 33 of the 148 members of the House of Representatives are women, if that is the sort of treatment they can expect from male members of the House of Representatives.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

Ms PLIBERSEK—Yes, that is right. This week we celebrate the first International Women’s Day of the 21st century. What an historic occasion. It is an occasion to celebrate the diversity of women in our community and the many contributions women have made to this country. It is an occasion to map out the work we have yet to do before women truly have economic, social and industrial citizenship, and it is an occasion to support our sisters in the many struggles women face around the world.

Entering the 21st century it often seems this Prime Minister is wistful for the Menzies era—a time when women were second-class citizens and their only role in public life was to press the shirts of the men who wore them. Instead of looking to an unequal past, this Prime Minister should aim to address the structural discrimination that Australian women still face today. Women spend twice as much time on domestic duties and child care as men. Almost 90 per cent of all sole parents with dependent children are women, and most people living in poverty are single
parents and their dependent children. Only seven per cent of private sector board members are women and only 1.3 per cent of executive directors are women. Women’s average weekly earnings are $250 per week less than men’s. If you include part-time women workers, that means that women are earning about two-thirds of what men earn. Of those women who have ever been married or in a defacto relationship, 23 per cent experienced violence by a partner at some time during that relationship. Nearly one-third of women over 15 have experienced violence; one in five have experienced sexual violence. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are doubly disadvantaged, with women and babies experiencing infant and perinatal mortality rates two to three times that of other women.

Instead of working to improve figures such as these, this government has only made things worse. This government has slashed billions of dollars from government services, and we know that women, due to lower incomes and greater responsibilities as carers, are the primary users of community services. Over $851 million has gone from child care alone, forcing the closure of 280 centres since 1996. By the government’s own figures, child-care costs have risen by 56 per cent since 1991, and government assistance has met only half the additional burden. The increasing costs of child care have had serious effects on women’s participation in the labour market. In the year before the last budget, despite government claims about national prosperity, women secured only 86,000 of the jobs created, which compares to 102,000 new jobs for women in the last year of the Labor government. Under Labor, the participation rate for women rose from 45 per cent to 53.8 per cent, with married women enjoying the greatest increase. Under this government, the proportion of married women with jobs has actually declined. The government claims that it has provided choice for women who want to stay at home. The choice seems to be: stay a single income family or spend all of your second income on child care. The number of women who work part-time but want to work full time has increased. The number of women who have been out of work for longer than two years has increased. Indeed, the industrial reforms of this government have been bad for all but worse for women. As women are concentrated in casual, part-time and temporary employment in lower paid work and in industries where their bargaining power is less, every single regressive reform introduced by this government has a disproportionate effect on women.

I spoke earlier of the pay disparity between female and male workers. Under this government’s legislation this is set to worsen dramatically. Crockett and Preston write in their article ‘The future is bleak: enterprise bargaining and gender wage equity’ that, as Western Australia is a laboratory for the federal reforms, we can look to the future by looking to Western Australia. Between 1991 and 1998, the wage gap in Western Australia rose 5.5 per cent, from 17.5 per cent to 23 per cent. Increasing wage disparity is a national disgrace. In the past Australia has led the way amongst nations in wage equity and day by day we are slipping behind.

During 1999 the government amended the affirmative action legislation. Like most of this government’s reforms, this was no improvement. In an important symbolic move, the government changed the name of this act from the Affirmative Action Act to the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act. The new act seriously undermines affirmative action provisions in the name of flexibility, which is a word that we have heard over and over from this government. We now know of course that this is code for a lack of accountability. The act also removed the requirement for employers to consult with unions and employees in creating an equal opportunity program.

The government has slashed funding to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. The cuts have totalled $57 million, a reduction on average of $13 million per year or 55 per cent of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission’s funding. The government has refused to respond to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission’s report Pregnant and Productive, which submitted 46 recommendations for action which could be taken to protect women from pregnancy discrimination in the
workplace. Labor has committed to support the implementation of the recommendations, so there is no reason for this government to delay.

The other area of so-called reform which will gravely and negatively impact on women’s lives is the Howard-Lees GST. One of the most glaring examples of the attitude of this government to women is the GST on tampons. There has not been a tax on sanitary products for 45 years. All women menstruating age use them, yet for the first time sanitary goods will be subject to a consumption tax. We should not forget where the responsibility for this lies: with the Treasurer and the Leader of the Democrats—the woman who says she thought that tampons were already taxed. Well, it is her job to know that they are not. She should be sacked for incompetence.

Ms Kernot—She let the boys do the negotiating.

Ms PLIBERSEK—That is right. The shadow minister for women has been demanding an explanation since December 1998. If the Leader of the Democrats had bothered to listen to the shadow minister, Jenny Macklin, she would have known in December 1998 that tampons are currently untaxed and will be taxed under the GST.

But the tax on tampons is only part of the problem. We know that women earn less than men so have less discretionary income. We know that women are more likely to purchase essential goods and services for the household—goods and services which are currently untaxed but which, after 31 July, will attract the 10 per cent GST. The tax cuts which the government hopes will save its political bacon will provide very little relief for women. Because only five per cent of women earn more than $50,000, the vast majority of tax cuts will go to high income men. With average taxable incomes of just $21,000, women do not earn enough to share in the benefit of tax cuts. As women generally earn less, they also have less money to save and invest. Therefore, the government’s cuts in capital gains tax will not benefit the majority of women who usually spend what little they have on essential items for the household.

But the government just does not want to hear these criticisms. Instead, it has cut avenues for women’s representation to government. The sorry tale of the downgrading of the Office of the Status of Women is well known, as are the funding cuts to non-government women’s organisations. Last year the International Labour Organisation held a conference in Geneva to discuss maternity protection. Naturally, not one woman represented Australia on the official delegation. The Howard government sent instead a 12-member all male delegation, including the Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business. A spokesman for the minister said, ‘You don’t have to be pregnant to present a policy position.’ Sarah Maddison of the Women’s Electoral Lobby responded in the Australian newspaper, ‘No. You just have to be a bloke apparently.’

Australian women have fought hard over a long period of time to secure the gains we have made, and we will not stand idly by while this government tries to send women back 50 years to a past which suited white middle-class men but disenfranchised women. Australian women deserve support from government to assist them in reaching full economic, social and industrial citizenship in this country, full participation in public life and a safe and rewarding private life. Labor will provide that support because we know that women are born equal in dignity and rights.

Regional Forest Agreement: Queensland

Mr ANDREW THOMSON (Wentworth) (5.45 p.m.)—Today I thought I would continue to espouse some of the important facts in relation to the Queensland Regional Forest Agreement that have caused such ire in my electorate. The fact that this Queensland Regional Forest Agreement, which has been put together by the Beattie government in Queensland, fails to address the needs of the Queensland timber industry, of the communities that they support or, for that matter, of environmentalists or of the general community of Queensland, is beyond doubt. What is of concern is the way it is being paraded about the place by the Beattie government and misrepresented in all sorts of manners.
This afternoon I noted that the Minister for Forestry and Conservation, in his answer to my question, referred to 100 direct jobs that would be lost at Eidsvold, Theodore and Cooroy. In fact, there are more than 100 direct jobs; there are 115, of which 65 are at Cooroy and a further 50 are at Theodore and Eidsvold. Those direct jobs are at the mills formerly operated by Boral. In fact, the major job losses, I fear, would not happen at all in relation to those ex-Boral properties. I think the major impact is likely to be on the contractors and other downstream areas that are going to be seriously affected by this proposed forest agreement. For example, in the case of each of those mills, something like a dozen logging contractors are involved hauling logs from areas of state forest down to those mills. I spoke to just one of those logging contractors and he has 37 employees whose jobs are at risk as a result of this exercise.

It is a complete misrepresentation by the Beattie government to make any claim about this particular agreement, this proposal, creating even one job, because before it even starts we are 115 jobs down the tube. There are going to be a hell of a lot more jobs down the tube once some of those contractors’ difficulties are taken into account and even further down the tube when we take into account the impact on the small communities that I and other members of this place represent. It is important to realise that there is not a single person on the other side of the House that represents a timber producing community in Queensland. All the people who take those sorts of positions and have that kind of representation come from this side of the House and, naturally, we are very concerned about this issue.

Apart from those job losses, I should also note that, as the Queensland forest agreement proceeds—if it is allowed to proceed, heaven forbid—we are provided only with a guarantee, for mills to continue operating, of transport subsidies for a period of three years. After three years those transport subsidies cut out, those mills will then no doubt become marginal and they will begin to shut down. When that happens, the impact of this regressive agreement will spread across the whole of the south-east Queensland RFA area. Under regional forest agreements, the first thing that is supposed to happen, whether the agreements happen in Queensland or anywhere else in Australia, is that we come up with sustainable use of the native hardwood forest resource owned by the states. Unfortunately, in Queensland we are not going to make sustainable use of that resource. There will be no use of that resource: it will be fully phased out over a 25-year period and with it the jobs that are dependent on it.

An important issue that was raised this afternoon was: where are we going from here? I think the position of the Commonwealth was made amply clear by the minister in a letter that he has sent to the Queensland Timber Board. In that he made it very clear that the Commonwealth supports the sustainable use of these native hardwood resources. He outlined in that letter the various requirements that would be needed to convert the Queensland plan as it stands into a proper regional forest agreement. I would like to place those on the record, particularly resource security for a sustainable native hardwood timber industry in perpetuity, including a production area adequate to provide a guaranteed wood supply to small mills and a strategic plan for the long-term sustainable development of the timber industry. Queensland’s current demand for the first right of refusal to buy out small mills in regional towns at the cost of jobs and community prosperity must go and there must be a guarantee, given that surrendered licences will in fact be reallocated; otherwise we do not have a sustainable industry at all.

The next requirement is that proper forest management be introduced to stop the further degradation of production areas in the south-east Queensland area; a management system for private forests incorporating the right to harvest in legislation and a forests practice code; and a realistic plantation development and planting schedule. Those are the minimum bare bones of change that would be required in the Queensland agreement as it currently stands before it could qualify as a regional forest agreement that provides sustainability. When we talk about sustainability, it is not just the continued ex-
I cannot see at all why the Queensland Timber Board would have a problem with the government endorsing a plan based on that regional forest development plan. It is a mystery to me why the Queensland Timber Board continues to wallow around, endeavouring to ingratiate itself with the Queensland government, and to support the crazy Queensland forest agreement that the state government is advocating. We need to say that this regional forest development plan can be amended, can be adjusted—perhaps it can remain exactly as is. The point is that it provides for the sustainable use of that resource. If we do not have the sustainable use of that resource, then we will lose that resource. There will no longer be a native hardwood forest resource on state owned land in Queensland. We will not have it.

It seems crazy to me that a state with as diverse timber resources as Queensland should be parading itself like Singapore, like a city-state that has absolutely no resources and to which a tree becomes like a shrine. That is not what we have in Queensland. We have a massive resource, and our need there is to farm that resource and to protect it in perpetuity. That is the purpose of the regional forest agreement that came out of an agreement cooked up by the Keating-Goss governments. I am saying: let us implement that; let us make sure that that occurs. At the moment, we are terribly frustrated by the Beattie government’s obsession with wiping out this important resource. It is a shame that the Beattie government, which talks about jobs, jobs, jobs, delivers zero, zero, zero when it comes to the crunch. We wind up with nothing from the Beattie government. Not one of the 350 jobs that they trumpeted in relation to their forest agreement has come to fruition. In fact, we are starting from a position of being 115 jobs down and looking at further reductions as it flows on to those logging contractors, into the small towns and into every other community in the south-east Queensland area. It is insane for us to continue in this manner when we have such an important resource at our fingertips which should be protected. (Time expired)
Mr Cox (Kingston) (5.55 p.m.)—A few months before Christmas, I started receiving telephone calls from small business people in my electorate. Those telephone calls were about the GST, and they fitted what quickly became a familiar pattern. The callers would say, ‘I am a small businessman. I voted for the GST. I thought it was a good idea. But I’ve just been to see my accountant, and now I hate the GST.’ The simple concept, the promise of tax cuts and the assumption that the GST would be good for the country had been replaced. After a briefing about the detail of the GST from their accountant, they realised that the GST is not simple and that the tax cuts will evaporate and will be replaced by significant set-up costs and a very large ongoing administrative burden. Their reality is that, whatever economic advantages they had been told the GST would offer the country, their business certainly is not going to be a beneficiary. Here I am talking about small and very small businesses: an individual, a husband and wife partnership or a small business with a handful of employees. Overseas experience of the introduction of GSTs shows that it will cause many businesses in Australia to fail. The majority of those failures will come from the ranks of very small businesses.

I was discussing the GST at a community meeting last week. One of the people present was a young woman in her 20s who had migrated from New Zealand. Her parents had been in small business. She had been quite young when New Zealand introduced the GST. For that reason, she could not remember much of the detail. She remembered her parents’ business failing. She says she carries with her the impression of everything falling in around her—the human tragedy that accompanies a business failure. The first reality is that, because of the compliance costs, this tax does not create a level playing field for small business, either relative to big business or even between small businesses. Big business has the scale and the technology to cope with the set-up and compliance costs. Though they are substantial in absolute terms, they will be marginal in relative terms. But, for the very small firm, the costs will be a burden. Compliance will be a much higher portion of total operating costs. It does not take much imagination to realise the implications for a husband and wife partnership, where one of them is doing the books as a part-time job, justifying a part-time wage with a tax-free threshold. If the family finds the compliance burdens too much and has to use an accountant, they lose the part-time wage, the second tax-free threshold and have to pay the accountant. That is a big blow to a family business that just makes wages.

If you have built up your business past that stage, probably by employing several people, you face a different problem. You have a turnover of more than $50,000, so you have to register to pay the GST. But the very small business turning over less than $50,000 does not have to. It therefore has a potential price advantage it can exploit. This particularly applies to businesses providing personal services with few inputs. They can advertise a GST-free price. People who have built up a business and are employing people will find demand for their services falling off. They will be eaten alive on price by individuals operating from home who keep their turnover below $50,000. Certainly it will give some people a choice, but it is not a level playing field.

I have already had three different businesses come and see me about this problem: a driving school, a TV repair business and a martial arts academy. If you think this isn’t going to be an issue, think of the number of accountants, hairdressers and motor mechanics who can get a tax advantage by operating on a sub-$50,000 scale from home. I predict it will cause problems in some neighbourhoods, with commercial activities moving into suburban streets and quite a few headaches for local planning authorities. The logic of the situation tells them they will have to tell their employees, ‘Sorry, there’s no work coming in, I can’t keep all or perhaps any of you.’ The only solution they can offer is to raise the threshold before a business is forced to register. But how far? Even if it were a practical solution for them, it would move the problem to a different group.

Then there is the question of the relationship between big business and their small
business suppliers. A cleaning contractor rang me last week. He and his wife work in partnership. They have a contract with one of the major banks, though for obvious reasons he does not want me to nominate which one. The bank had said to him that his contract was up for renewal. They could not pass on the costs of the GST to their customers so he would have to absorb it. It is a very unequal power relationship, a major bank and a husband and wife cleaning contractor. He has not got too many choices if he wants to keep his livelihood. He has decided to absorb the GST cost, but to do it he and his wife will have to keep their turnover below $50,000. This is going to be the glass ceiling on a great many small business incomes. What was the term the Prime Minister coined a couple of incarnations ago as opposition leader?

Ms Kernot—Incentivation.

Mr COX—Incentivation, indeed. The member for Dickson is absolutely right. It is something that the Prime Minister believes should be very heavily qualified now if you are a small small business. Most big companies will be taking this opportunity to redefine their commercial relationships with their small business suppliers. The bigger they are, the more effectively they will be able to do this. I have obtained a copy of a standard letter sent by one major company to its suppliers. The letter is informative, giving the supplier the details of the Australian Taxation Office’s tax reform web site and explaining that any cost reductions made as a result of the GST must be passed through the supply chain. It then includes this perhaps not so friendly reminder:

The ACCC has been given extensive powers for price monitoring and imposing penalties on businesses that exploit prices by not passing the cost reductions through the value train, thereby increasing their profit margins. Fortunately for the supplier, the company is able to help them avoid these penalties. It:

...has a GST team looking at these issues and the team will be approaching you soon to discuss price reductions resulting from abolition of embedded taxes and the introduction of the GST. We will also be reviewing our existing contractual arrangements to ascertain whether any of the supply that you make is exempt or GST free.

It all sounds terribly reasonable until you think about the level of detail in which the company’s GST team would have to understand your business to be able to identify the level of embedded taxes. That would be information that would be very useful to the purchasing company in future price negotiations, and therefore something which you might quite reasonably want to keep confidential; that is, if you did not want the company you were supplying to be playing you off against the next supplier. Again I am talking about an unequal power relationship between small suppliers and a very large company. What protection is the ACCC going to offer if big companies take this opportunity to cut not just the cost of embedded taxes but also the small suppliers’ margins by using unscrupulous or overbearing commercial tactics? Not much protection at all, I expect.

The final matter that I wish to raise is the operation of the GST Start-Up Assistance Office. The availability of $200 vouchers to businesses with a turnover of less than $10 million who register for the GST to assist them with start-up costs has been fairly widely publicised. What is not as widely known is that these direct assistance vouchers can be used only at suppliers who are registered with the GST Start-Up Assistance Office. Many small businesses, like one printer and stationer who rang me last week, were unaware that they needed to register to get a share of this lucrative trade. They were more annoyed to discover that their big business competitors had been made aware of this requirement and would therefore have a very significant advantage, particularly in terms of government funded advertising in the Registered Suppliers Booklet which is sent out with the voucher. Once again, the Liberal government that claims to be the party for small business demonstrates by its every action that it does not care about them at all.

Queensland: Tree Clearing

Mrs DE-ANNE KELLY (Dawson) (6.05 p.m.)—On the last sitting day of the Queensland parliament last year, the state Labor government introduced its legislation im-
posing draconian controls on tree clearing. The debate was gagged and the legislation was rushed through in utterly indecent haste, and then Premier Beattie sent the Commonwealth government a fax demanding more than $100 million to pay off the land-holders who would be affected by this new law.

Abuse of the parliamentary process and a grandstanding political stunt to try and evade responsibility should not have come as any surprise. They were just two more disgraceful episodes in the Queensland Labor government’s ruthlessly determined campaign to financially cripple Queensland land-holders as a sop to an extreme environmental agenda. Make no mistake about it: that is the bottom line effect if this law does apply. If anybody doubts that the Queensland Labor government is not pandering to an extreme agenda, they should consider the threat by the Queensland Conservation Council. On 11 January, the Courier-Mail reported the council coordinator, Ms Imogen Zethoven, as saying that any weakening of the tree clearing legislation would spark a major backlash by the environment movement against the Beattie government. Ms Zethoven actually described Mr Beattie’s laws as ‘absolutely the barest minimum’ needed. Premier Beattie and his government will not compromise because they dare not compromise—this whole matter is more about holding vital votes in marginal Brisbane electorates for Labor than protecting the environment and in fact consulting with hard-working farmers.

Confirmation of this fact was provided yesterday when Premier Beattie was confronted by more than 1,500 angry farmers in Roma. According to the Courier-Mail today, Mr Beattie told them that they faced further threats to their property rights if they refused to comply with his voluntary tree clearing guidelines. The Premier did not elaborate on what he meant by this heavy-handed threat, but regional and rural Queensland have clearly been put on notice by the Labor Party to fall into line with their agenda or face further retribution.

This brazen bit of political thuggery was capped by the incredible claim by the Labor Premier that rural Queensland had won what he described as a ‘major victory’ with his revised tree clearing laws. The undeniable fact is that the limited victory that regional and rural Queensland has had came as a direct result of the Commonwealth rightly refusing to accede to his demands for funding for compensation. Yesterday, Mr Beattie promised the protesting farmers that the sections of the existing state law, which would restrict clearing on freehold land, would be repealed before they came into effect in December.

Things are going from bad to worse in regional and rural Queensland for Premier Beattie and his government. Last Friday, the Deputy Premier, Mr Elder, spat the dummy and said that the government might scrap country cabinet meetings altogether if they did not get a better reception and if the opposition leader, Mr Borbidge, did not stop—to use Mr Elder’s words—stalk the government. Mr Beattie was forced to override his petulant deputy yesterday, but that outburst provided a crystal clear insight into the mood of the Queensland Labor government and their view of the state outside of the major metropolitan areas.

Last week, Labor’s shabby and shameful campaign saw Premier Beattie come to Canberra to meet the Prime Minister and again demand federal funds. Fortunately, Mr Beattie was sent away empty-handed, thanks to the intervention of federal National Party members of parliament and the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. The refusal of the Commonwealth to bow to his demands has been very warmly received in rural and regional Queensland. The Commonwealth government is to be congratulated for its stand.

This attempt by the Queensland government to grossly and unnecessarily interfere in the responsible management of their properties by primary producers has engendered widespread anger and discontent. Writing in the Courier-Mail last Friday, Mr Larry Aceton, the President of Agforce, summed up that feeling which goes beyond the provisions of this Queensland legislation. He wrote:

What farmers cannot accept, however, is when their own governments start working against them to make their ability to farm well-nigh impossible.
And lately they have grown extremely weary of always being the easy target for governments of all political persuasions out to use them as the solution for the nation's or world's environmental problems.

He continued, and I completely endorse his comments:

It is for this reason and because of concerns about their ability to farm triggered by the new Vegetation Management Act that have brought them together recently at protest rallies around the state. These rallies are not about which party is in power at local, state or federal level. What they are about is people's rights—not just farmers' rights, but people's rights.

The plain and undeniable fact of the matter is that the Queensland Labor government never, ever properly consulted land-holders who, if they ever want a demonstration of bulldozer tactics, need look no further than Premier Beattie and his ministers. This appalling lack of consultation was acknowledged publicly by the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr John Anderson, when he met farm group representatives in Rockhampton. After that meeting, Mr Anderson said:

These things have to be done in consultation. Land managers and owners do want to leave their environment in sound order. They're not the vandals that they're sometimes painted.

That is only too true. The refusal by the Commonwealth to play Mr Beattie's game has had some positive effect. The state government has been forced to abandon—at least temporarily—its proposed controls over freehold land, although it remains determined to enforce these controls on leasehold land. Fines up to $125,000 will be levied on leaseholders who do not retain at least 30 per cent native vegetation, and the state government has allocated a miserly $111 million for compensation, and most of that for administrative measures.

While unsuccessfully seeking $103 million from the Commonwealth, Peter Beattie maintained that the total compensation bill for both freehold and leasehold properties affected by the prohibitions would be $214 million. Demonstrably, that is a paltry amount according to all of us who have any knowledge of the realities of farming and grazing in Queensland, and it only served to remind rural and regional Queenslanders that their state Labor government regarded them not just as environmental vandals but as illiterate hicks who did not deserve anything close to fair and reasonable compensation.

Early last month, the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics concluded that the true cost of such compensation was likely to be some $360 million—a total described by the Queensland Farmers Federation spokesman, Mr Graham Dalton, as a ‘fair estimate’. There are also rumours that the DPI report, which the Premier decided to trash rather than reveal to the public, had a figure in it which is mooted to be somewhere near half a billion dollars—a long way from the $111 million which the state government has allocated.

Not only is Premier Beattie trying to wreck the efficiency of Queensland farms with his laws but also he is attempting to deny those who would be affected a reasonable compensation.

Mr Sciacca—He did not. That's not true.

Mrs DE-ANNE KELLY—I would like to see you on the back of a horse doing some real work for a change. One other particularly offensive and untrue tactic being used by the Labor Party in Queensland is the attempt to mislead regional and rural people into believing that the Commonwealth will use its laws to override the state legislation. This matter was raised in the Senate and I am very pleased that the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Senator Robert Hill, categorically ruled that out. In reply to a question, Senator Hill said:

The responsibility for natural resource management in Australia lies with the states—and in the case of Queensland, obviously with the Queensland government. The failure of the Queensland Premier to be able to negotiate an arrangement with landholders in Queensland that can give them confidence in his legislative response is his failure, and he cannot succeed in passing the buck to the Commonwealth.

Minister Hill made the point that land clearing was not included in the Commonwealth's Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act because the Commonwealth government had decided that this responsibility should rightly remain with the
states. Premier Beattie has been reported as claiming that the biodiversity provisions of this Commonwealth act would be—to use his word—‘triggered’ if the controls under his legislation did not come into force by July 2000. That is simply untrue. In fact, the Commonwealth act generally applies to landholders of non-Commonwealth land only where the likely clearing would have a significant impact on matters of national importance. I am advised that the only matters of national importance relevant to the vast majority of farmers are what are called ‘listed threatened species and communities’.

It is ludicrous to even suggest, as the Queensland Labor government has sought to imply, that the Commonwealth legislation will impact to anywhere near the intended extent of their laws. There is a huge difference between clearing scrub or regrowth for efficient farming practices, which Mr Beattie wants to stop, and having a significant impact on endangered species, which the Commonwealth law rightly provides for. The Australian Beef Association’s Mr Ashley McKay, in a letter to the Prime Minister, Mr Howard, on 17 February, asked that the Commonwealth not approve federal funds for compensation, and listed the following reasons: ‘Compensation would be a pittance compared to the actual loss of income to landholders—(Time expired)

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The question is:

That grievances be noted.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

ASSENT TO BILLS

Message from the Governor-General reported informing the House of assent to the following bills:

Ministers of State and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 1999
Privacy Amendment (Office of the Privacy Commissioner) Bill 2000
Import Processing Charges Amendment (Warehouses) Bill 2000
Criminal Code Amendment (Application) Bill 2000

BILLS RETURNED FROM THE SENATE

The following bill was returned from the Senate without amendment or request:

Export Finance and Insurance Corporation Amendment Bill 1999

MIGRATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (No. 2) 1999

Second Reading

Consideration resumed from 15 February.

Mr RUDDOCK (Berowra—Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Reconciliation) (6.16 p.m.)—I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Migration Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 1999 implements a number of the government’s policy initiatives within the Immigration and Multicultural Affairs portfolio. These initiatives will enhance the efficiency of the administration of the Migration Act 1958, while preserving the integrity of that act and the rights of persons affected by the provisions of the act. Schedule 1 of the bill introduces powers to cancel temporary entry business sponsorships and to request relevant information from people who have applied for, hold or have held business sponsor status. These measures ensure that there will be effective cancellation and monitoring mechanisms to provide a balance to the streamlined temporary entry of key business personnel. They flow from recommendations made to the previous government by the Committee of Inquiry into the Temporary Entry of Business People and Highly Skilled Specialists. That committee was chaired by Mr Neville Roach AO, who has made and continues to make an extraordinary personal contribution to issues of national significance, in particular the framework for managing cultural diversity in Australian society.

The committee chaired by Mr Roach advocated a discretionary system of assessment and sanction to allow for the consideration of any breach of temporary business sponsors’ obligations. I am pleased to say that this bill puts into place the final elements of the changes suggested by the committee and agreed to by this government. Schedule 2 of the bill amends provisions related to the ways
in which visa applications may be made. The amended provisions will prevent applicants from making applications that would necessarily be refused under current migration policy. This will save clients time and money that would otherwise be wasted in making applications that could not succeed.

Schedule 3 of the bill introduces a more flexible method of authorising persons, and classes of persons, to be officers for the purposes of the Migration Act 1958. These measures enable the authorisation of classes of persons, in an administratively straightforward manner, without reducing the obligation of the minister to notify the authorisation in the Gazette. Schedule 4 of the bill is intended to ensure that the Australian community is protected from convicted criminals who are subject to deportation. It will amend the Migration Act to ensure that corrective service authorities can detain non-citizens who are liable for criminal deportation on completion of their prison sentence. The government is committed to providing visa applicants who have a connection to the Australian community with merits review of adverse decisions. Schedule 5 of the bill will ensure that applicants for permanent migrant spouse or interdependency visas have merits review rights. It will align the review of such offshore migrant visas with the current availability of merits review for onshore spouse and interdependency visa classes. Schedules 6 and 7 of the bill introduce two beneficial measures in relation to the migration program.

In the early 1990s the former government enacted provisions to assist in the management and control of the annual migration program. These allow for the setting of numerical limits or ‘caps’ on the number of visas that can be granted in prescribed visa subclasses in any one program year. The measures introduced by schedule 6 of this bill will allow certain applicants who would otherwise be adversely affected by successive caps to be granted a visa. The people who will benefit from these changes are those who were not able to meet health and character criteria before the cap came into effect. This will only apply, however, where the inability to meet those criteria was beyond the applicants’ control.

Schedule 7 of the bill will extend from 12 months to two years the period in which a points tested visa applicant who has not met the prevailing pass mark but did meet the lower pool mark may have their visa application held in reserve. The people whose visa applications are held in reserve in the independent category may elect to provide details of their educational qualifications and work experience for inclusion in a skill matching database operated by my department. This database is a key resource for the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme and the state and territory nominated independent category, which are designed to encourage a wider dispersal of the skilled migrant intake. It allows migrants to take up opportunities in regional and rural Australia. The extension of the pool period will ensure that state and territory governments and regional employers have available to them a greater number of pooled applicants with a range of skills to meet identified skill shortages.

Schedule 8 of the bill removes the age limitation for full-time members of the Refugee Review Tribunal in line with the government’s policy to remove the compulsory age limits for public office holders. Finally, schedule 9 of the bill ensures that the integrity of the scheme for judicial review of immigration decision making is maintained by treating decisions of the new Migration Review Tribunal in the same way as those made by the Immigration Review Tribunal. These amendments are required because the Migration Legislation Amendment (Judicial Review) Bill 1998, which is presently before the Senate, has not been passed. That bill, once passed, will enable the courts to speedily dispose of abusive applications. I take this opportunity to urge members of the opposition to support passage of that bill, which is of even greater importance now with the large numbers of unauthorised arrivals being brought to Australia by people-smugglers. In conclusion, the bill before you today contains measures that are beneficial to clients, while ensuring that the government’s migration program is not compromised. I commend the
bill to the House and table the explanatory memorandum.

Mr SCIACCA (Bowman) (6.22 p.m.)—The opposition will be supporting the Migration Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 1999, which is an omnibus bill. As the minister has stated, there are nine separate schedules, and the opposition believes that, generally, the measures contained in those schedules will do what they are intended to do. I do not think I could let this opportunity go without making some comments in the general immigration area, as it has been very much in the news of late, particularly after Saturday morning when we saw a most puzzling display of policy making on the run from the Prime Minister, who I have no doubt completely surprised his own minister for immigration on the issues of immigration and population. Until last week, the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs was beating his chest and trying to be tough, as he often does, such as when he kicked out the remaining Kosovars, and with the East Timorese, or at least the remainder of them; Madam Deputy Speaker Crosio, you might remember that they were plucked out of the UN compound at the height of the trouble in East Timor.

Probably one of the most baffling things that the minister has done recently was to implement the freeze on asylum seekers who try to come to Australia legally. There is a great deal of disquiet in the community about this. I have already received an enormous number of representations from members of parliament from my side, and I am quite certain that you, Minister, have received a lot of representations from your side as well. The ridiculous part of what you have done is this—

Mr Ruddock—So what would you do?

Mr SCIACCA—If you listen, I might tell you what we would do. But you are the minister, not me.

Mr Ruddock—We know what we’re doing!

Mr SCIACCA—You are the one that is in charge; you are the one that has got to do the work. Don’t come this caper about what we would do. You are in government, not us.

Mr SPEAKER—Order! The member for Bowman understands the restrictions, and precisely the same obligation for courtesy is expected of the minister. The member for Bowman has the call

Mr SCIACCA—As I understand it, the minister has frozen offshore applications from asylum seekers on the pretence that there are a number of people that have come here by boat or have come here illegally who will want to make application and will, in many instances, indeed be accepted as genuine refugees. I want the minister at some stage to give me the figures of those he has approved up to now. I understand there is a program of approximately 12,000. The minister has linked them in the past—2,000 onshore and 10,000 offshore. I understand that 5,000 or 6,000 visas have been issued under that program so far, and I take it that, of the illegals that are here at the moment, the minister is expecting anything up to 5,000 or 6,000—to come up to that 12,000—to be in the pipeline. I do not know if that is the case. My understanding is that the total number of boat people that have arrived in the last two years is something like 3,500. I do not know where the rest of them come from; possibly they are people who have come in by air. I do not know. I would be very happy if the minister could give me the figures later on.

Mr Ruddock—You need someone to brief you on it.

Mr SCIACCA—Yes, and I would be very happy for that briefing. The problem is that there are genuine asylum seekers who are presently in the pipeline. Perhaps the minister can advise me how many in that category are in the pipeline and at the moment will be excluded from coming here. Many of them would probably have been on the cusp of receiving visas. These people have been frozen out; these people have been waiting in queues.

Over a period of time, and with my support for the three-year temporary residence visa as against the permanent one for refugees—the whole reason for bringing in the temporary residence visa being that we would not sanction queue-jumpers—the minister intended that these people overseas who had been patiently waiting in UNHCR
camps were the people that we should give preference to. Then, only a couple of months down the track, the minister says, ‘Because you have been waiting over there, we cannot do anything for you because we have got too many illegals.’ What message does that send out, Minister? The message it sends out clearly is that, if people can get to this country by illegal means, they have a better chance of getting a visa than if they apply from overseas. You have frozen it so that nobody can come from offshore. The position is that you are penalising those very people you were professing to be protecting when you brought in the three-year visa as against the permanent visa. What you have done is put up a big sign outside Australia which says, ‘Illegals, if you can find your way here, cross that ocean, find the money to pay people-smugglers and arrive on our shores, then—if you are genuine refugees—you are going to be accepted at the expense of the offshore ones.’

There are many permanent residents of Australia who know people in that category—I do not know the numbers and I would be very interested for the minister to give me those numbers—and who are now contacting their local members of parliament and people in the refugee associations and saying, ‘How could the minister be that heartless?’ A compassionate man such as the minister is stopping genuine people from coming to this country by saying that, if you are an illegal and you can prove that you are refugee, you get precedence. That goes completely against everything you have done in the past 12 months. Every law that you have passed to make it tougher for the people-smugglers, everything you have done—

Mr SPEAKER—I wonder if the member for Bowman would be gracious enough to seek leave to continue his remarks later. That would allow me to make a brief statement to the House prior to 6.30 p.m.

Mr SCIACCA—I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

QUESTIONS TO MR SPEAKER
Goods and Services Tax: Seminar Charges

Mr SPEAKER (6.30 p.m.)—I have taken the action of coming into the chair to make a statement simply because certain press statements have been brought to the attention of my office. These press statements follow the statement I made earlier today in reference to a question asked of me by the member for Watson on the last sitting day. I would like to indicate to the House that, as I indicated to the member for Watson today, I have spoken to Professor Fels, and I have faxed him a copy of my statement to the House. I would like to restate the latter paragraph of my statement to the House earlier today. I quote:

The department recognises that, with the introduction of the GST, there will be some cost savings across its activities. These savings are now being examined and a review of pricing practices across the department will subsequently occur. Any savings identified as a result of this process will, of course, be passed on. Consequently, the department will reprice the seminars referred to and the price will, as anyone can see, not go up by 10 per cent.

Sitting suspended from 6.31 p.m. to 8.00 p.m.

EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING AMENDMENT BILL 1999

Consideration of Senate Message

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Andrews)—Mr Speaker has received a message from the Senate returning the Employment, Education and Training Amendment Bill 1999 without amendment. The message also includes the text of a resolution agreed to by the Senate relating to the bill in which the Senate requests the concurrence of the House. Senate standing orders provide for a bill originating in the House of Representatives and agreed to by the Senate to be returned to the House by message. Senate standing orders allow a motion to be moved at any time to communicate a Senate resolution to the House. The House has similar standing orders for communication with the Senate. These are necessary and sensible provisions in a bicameral legislature. However, the message seeks to include in the formal legislative process on a bill other matters not necessary for the enactment of
the measure. House standing order 372 provides for a time to be named for consideration of a Senate message. However, it has never been the practice of the House for a time to be named for consideration of a Senate message returning a bill without amendment and, in accordance with past practice, I do not propose to call for a motion to do so in this instance.

**MIGRATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (No. 2) 1999**

**Second Reading**

Debate resumed.

Mr SCIACCA (Bowman) (8.01 p.m.)—Prior to the suspension of the sitting for dinner, I was talking about the minister’s decision to freeze the refugee humanitarian program for offshore applications. I was saying just how unbelievable it is that the minister, after one year’s worth of bringing in new laws all the time to try to stop illegal immigrants, would in effect put up a sign outside to the people smugglers saying, ‘If you can get to this country by illegal means, if you can cross that ocean and you can find the money to pay the people smugglers, as far as I am concerned you have a better claim for refugee status in this country than some poor person who has been waiting patiently in some UNHCR camp in Hong Kong or wherever.’ That is exactly the effect of the minister’s freeze on the refugee offshore program.

Australia has a very generous refugee program and we have a hard-won reputation as a humanitarian country. Indeed, our refugee intake of some 12,000 yearly stacks up as probably the best in the world per head of population. The problem is that the minister, having slashed virtually all facets of the migration program in recent times—for example, cutting the aged parents category to 500, or 250 couples, which was done in a fit of pique because he did not particularly like the fact that the Senate overturned one of his regulations—having tried to privatise refugee resettlement services, leaving volunteers stranded, and having slashed the budget of the much needed telephone interpreting service, trying to get rid of them under the user-pays philosophy of the government, is now unable to resist the temptation to slash, in effect, our refugee and humanitarian program. Make no mistake about it: that is what he is doing.

I understand that some 5,000 to 6,000 people have been allowed in so far. That leaves roughly another 6,000 to 7,000. As I said prior to the break, he says that there will be so many onshore, but we do not know whether that will be 6,000 or 7,000. Of the illegals that have come in, many of them are economic refugees and are sent back. It is not as if they are going to take up part of that refugee program. The point is that if the minister wants to cut the refugee program, let him say it. Let him say, ‘I want to cut immigration levels and the refugee and humanitarian program is one I want to cut.’ He should not do it by way of the back door and make it look to the overseas illegals that want to come here that they can do so because they will have a better chance of staying if they are genuine refugees than the people that do it the right way. The minister keeps saying to me, ‘What would you do?’ I am not the minister. The opposition is not the government.

Mr Slipper—Hear, hear!

Mr SCIACCA—I can tell the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration, who is at the table, that it will not be long. He had better watch his seat too. I give that warning to my good friend Mr Slipper. He has been a good friend of mine over many years. You had better watch your seat. You must have caravan park owners in your electorate. I am sure they will look after you. I should know because they looked after me in 1996. If we were in government we would ensure that our international reputation was maintained and we would maintain the integrity of our humanitarian program. That is the first thing we would do. We would not panic like the minister does. The government seems to panic whenever an emergency presents itself. You have to plan for contingencies and ensure that the program is managed in a flexible way because, after all, we are catering for world events. World events change. No-one can say what is going to happen next year, whether there is going to be another East Timor crisis or more people like the Kosovars that we decide to bring in. What is the difference in terms of allowing an extra
couple of hundred people to come in, particularly in the refugee and humanitarian program where you could do what the Labor Party has done in previous years and borrow from the forward program?

Perhaps the minister can give me an undertaking: I ask him publicly in this House tonight. Minister, you would be aware that there are a number of people in the pipeline who would at this point in time have been given an indication that their visas were about to come. I suspect there would not be that many of them. These are the legal ones that are trying to come from overseas. There could be 500, there could be 1,000; I do not know. This is something on which, no doubt, the minister will give me figures. All I say to the minister is this: I know that you have a heart—at least it is there somewhere. You used to have one. I do not know what has happened to it over the last couple of years, but you had a heart. Surely those people—there may be 1,000 of them—who are waiting, have relatives here waiting for them and have been led to believe that their visas are imminent, should be allowed to come in. Let those that are in the pipeline come in. If they are ready to come, why make them wait another year? Who knows what the position will be with illegal immigrants then? The minister might give some consideration to that point because, even today, I have been approached by a number of my parliamentary colleagues who have said to me that they feel so bad because constituents are coming to see them and are saying, ‘They were about to come over and all of a sudden the minister said, “Freeze”.’

It would be fine if we had the problem of tens of thousands of them coming over illegally, but we do not have tens of thousands. My understanding is that only just over 3,000-odd have come in by boat, many of whom have been returned. So I still cannot see where this differential is between the five or six thousand that would be allowed in now and the 12,000 that we would normally let in.

On Saturday morning, the Prime Minister seemed to show a change of heart in terms of the question of immigration numbers and population policy. Until recently, Minister Ruddock has been telling anyone that would listen that the migration program was correct and any increase in migration would be detrimental, and that Australia does not need a population policy. I have just been through some of the old reports from AAP last year. I want to read a few statements out to the House. The first one is an AAP report of 11 August 1999 headed ‘Immigration levels about right—report’.

CANBERRA, Aug 11 AAP - Increasing the immigration intake would do little to combat Australia’s ageing population, a new report has found.

... ...

Immigration minister Philip Ruddock seized on the report as proof the government was on the right track with its immigration program, which currently has an intake of 80,000 migrants per year.

“This research indicates that calls for a significantly larger migration program on the grounds that it would help keep Australia younger are misdirected and ill-informed,” Mr Ruddock said.

Whilst it is in a different context, I wonder whether he thinks the Prime Minister is ill informed and misdirected, because that is what it seems the Prime Minister was saying. On another occasion, Monday, 20 September 1999, a report headed ‘No population is needed—Ruddock’, said:

CANBERRA, Sept 20 AAP - The federal government today rejected opposition calls for a formal population policy, saying Australia’s immigration program was balanced and on track.

Immigration minister Philip Ruddock said research continued to show that Australia’s current approach to immigration was the right one.

He rejected the findings of a report by ALP president Barry Jones which called for a formal population policy to plan future migrant intake.

... ...

Mr Ruddock said the current immigration policy was achieving the right balance between economic, social, humanitarian and environmental goals.

“I have not seen any evidence to suggest that the government should make radical changes to the path that we have set,” he said.

This was in September last year, only six months ago. I put it to Mr Ruddock that perhaps he should speak to the Prime Minister because I think the Prime Minister disagrees
with him. This is the one point that does not seem to have been picked up by the press. There is no question in my mind that Mr Ruddock was absolutely blind-sided by all of this. When he woke up in the morning and saw that front page article in the Australian which said ‘More skilled migrants needed; Prime Minister “open” on immigration’, he must have fainted, because it is exactly the opposite of the signal that he has been sending for some time—certainly over the 12 months since I have been the shadow minister.

AAP do a good job in making sure that a lot of these things are recorded. They are not even up there to hear that compliment. It is very good. What they record here shows a pattern on the part of this minister of saying, ‘What we are doing is correct and there is no need to change.’ Another AAP report, of Monday, 15 November, is headed ‘Business not taking advantage of migration scheme’. It says:

By Deborah Way

CANBERRA, Nov 15 AAP - Australia’s business community has failed to take advantage of the federal government migration scheme despite its calls for more skilled migrants, Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock said today.

... ... ...

Mr Ruddock restated his opposition to creating a formal population policy, saying no comparable immigration countries, such as the US, had such a policy.

“While population policy may be a topical catchcry for those seeking a significant increase or decrease in immigration numbers, the fact is no country in the world whose example we may wish to follow has a formal population policy,” he said.

... ... ...

Opposition population spokesman Martin Ferguson said, Labor remained committed to a population policy for the 21st Century which set itself the broad goal of achieving moderate population growth rates.

“Labor believes that a larger population will culturally enrich us, assist us to achieve stronger economic growth, build our regions and help us afford the extra cost we will face as our population ages,” Mr Ferguson told—

a conference that he was speaking to—

Mr Ferguson said Labor would establish as a priority an Office of Population to advice on a range of population options and ways of achieving them.

I agree entirely with the sentiments of my colleague the opposition spokesman Martin Ferguson and, it seems from the reports on Saturday morning, so does Prime Minister Howard. He is now saying completely the contrary of what was being said by his minister for such a long time—that is, ‘There is no need for a population policy.’

In Saturday morning’s newspaper, the article on page 1 headed ‘PM open to more migrants’ by Dennis Shanahan was the lead story. I welcome that. I welcome the fact that the Prime Minister is prepared to open the debate and, as he says, have an open mind on these issues. I notice the honourable member for Hindmarsh is in the chamber. She comes from Adelaide, an area which is screaming for more people. You want more people, you want an immigration debate and now finally your Prime Minister has said that he wants one too. It is a bit of a slap in the face for the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. I do not think there is too much coordination between those two. Nevertheless, I welcome the fact that there seems also to have been a change of mind on the part of the minister. On Saturday, 4 March 2000, the Australian came out with this front page report ‘PM open to more migrants’. Amongst other things it says:

JOHN Howard has signalled a shift of government policy on population and immigration, leaving room for an increase in the annual migrant intake.

... ... ...

It is the first sign that Mr Howard may be prepared to drop government resistance to having a population policy and sustaining a larger migrant intake.

... ... ...

While Kim Beazley has committed Labor to having a comprehensive population policy, Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock has opposed suggestions that key ministries should co-operate to complement immigration policy with a broader population policy.
... ... ...

“I think we need a comprehensive debate about population and immigration,” he told The Weekend Australian.

The Prime Minister said a population debate could be part of "nation building", a theme he wants to promote after the implementation of the GST.

I want to say a bit about this notion of nation building shortly. At the end, he is quoted as saying:

“One of the things I would like to develop more as we get beyond the GST is the notion of nation building in its broadest sense: not only infrastructure, which is important, but also nation building in terms of knowledge, skills.”

That was on Saturday, 4 March 2000. Lo and behold, the day after the minister had been contradicting that on television reports that afternoon by saying that he did not see any reason for an increase, AAP reports: ‘Room for more skilled migrants—Ruddock’ on Sunday, 5 March at 9.34 a.m. It did not take the Prime Minister long to pick up the phone and say, ‘Phil, mate, you’d better not leave me out there stranded. Better you look stupid than me.’ So what happens the next day? ‘Room for more skilled migrants—Ruddock’, Canberra, 5 March, AAP, and I quote:

Australia’s skilled migrant intake could rise as early as next year if given Cabinet approval, Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock said today.

Mr Ruddock, who has been canvassing public opinion on immigration, said he would take submissions to Cabinet in April.

“There are people putting the view that there should be a rise in immigration,” he told the Seven Network’s Sunday Sunrise program.

“I think I should look at the arguments and hear what is being said, and I am involved in very comprehensive consultations around Australia right now.

“I’ll put to Cabinet a range of options (so) that we can deal with the matter in an informed way.”

Mr Ruddock said there was some room for population growth.

“But the important point in relation to any discussion of increased migrant numbers needs to be in the context of whether we can choose people...”

What an extraordinary change of tack by this minister. It is an extraordinary change of tack. All last year he has been saying exactly the opposite. Having said that, I welcome the fact that the minister has now been ordered by the Prime Minister to engage in a meaningful debate. Immigration has built this country in the past. There is no reason why good quality immigration cannot continue to build it in the future. This country is an extraordinary example of multiculturalism. It is a country of diverse cultures that live together without any pain, without any bloodshed or without any demonstrations in the streets. We are an example to the whole world. Those that are against immigration—whilst in many respects one can appreciate what they have to say and the reasons behind what they have to say—really should remember that.

It sometimes grieves me to see that a lot of people who are anti-immigration are immigrants themselves, and longstanding immigrants. I, as one who is Italian born, know from my own background that a lot of Italians, Greeks, Yugoslavs—people who have been here for years; the postwar immigration people—do not want further immigration either. But I think it is the responsibility of governments and leaders to lead on these issues. I believe that they should be telling the people of Australia—these people who have in their minds legitimate reasons to not want further immigration—’Look, it’s been great for this country and there is no reason for you to have that attitude,’ and try to at least explain to them why this country can benefit from a good, healthy migration program. Instead, over the last two, three or four years, the Prime Minister and the minister for immigration have been sending out signals indicating that really we do not want too many immigrants. We have these high risk factor lists—which I am sure the honourable member for Calwell will talk about later on—which say to people: ‘We don’t want you, even to visit.’

Today in question time the minister for immigration said that I had made some comments with respect to that, where I had implied that there was racism. I have never accused anyone of racism, and I would not—certainly not this minister because I know he is not a racist. There is no way in the world that I would say it. In fact, I said as a matter
I would say it. In fact, I said as a matter of a personal explanation that he ought to apologise to me for even thinking that I would call him a racist because I did not. A lot of jour-nos wanted me to say it, and I said, ‘No, you go and jump,’ because there is no way that I am going to say something that is not true. But I did say to them: ‘There must be a perception out there amongst some people in the community that there is discrimination against certain people from certain countries.’ I will leave that particular point at that.

I was quite chuffed when I read the comments of the Prime Minister in which he referred to the notion of nation building. In fact, I might say that only recently the minister and I were both asked to make contributions to the Committee for Economic Development of Australia. They have put out a book called *Immigration and multiculturalism: global perspectives* edited by James Jupp. I wrote this probably eight months ago and it has only now been printed, and it is headed: ‘Labor nation building for a new millennium’. We have used that term for 12 months. Kim Beazley used it at a global conference on population in Adelaide last year or the year before. I have made a number of speeches to the Federation of Ethnic Community Councils of Australia and the Migration Institute of Australia, and we have talked about that. I am extraordinarily happy for the Prime Minister to have copied our words.

If the Prime Minister is fair dinkum, I can assure him that we will involve ourselves in a meaningful dialogue with him and his minister. If he comes up with innovative programs that we can take on a bipartisan basis to the public of Australia we will do so, provided that the bottom line is what is best for this country, not what is best for the next election. When you start to make something like immigration an issue for election time, you only do it and you are only successful at it by playing wedge politics and by pitting minorities against minorities. That is not what this country has been built on. Immigration has been a bipartisan issue for a long time. Generally, 90 per cent of everything that this minister has put up in this parliament we have accepted, which includes this bill.

Mr Slipper—He’s a good minister.

Mr SCIACCA—A lot of people used to say that he is good minister. I have no doubt about the fact he is a good bloke, but I will tell you something: he is under the orders of the Prime Minister, who vacillates from one way to the other. Go back to 1986 and see what his views were then and now see what his views are in accordance with that article in the *Weekend Australian* this morning. The fact is that this minister has become very tough of late. I think what Mr Howard is saying to him is, ‘Relent a little bit. People out there are pretty intelligent and they do not really believe anymore that good immigration is bad for this country.’ So if the Prime Minister is fair dinkum, we welcome his change of heart. I for one, and I know Mr Beazley and our population spokesman, Martin Ferguson, would be very happy to sit down and have a dialogue that would be of benefit to this country. I look
forward to the minister’s supplying me with those figures. I notice that his departmental officials are sitting over there. Perhaps they can supply us with the figures as to how many people are in the pipeline who would have been granted a visa under the refugee and humanitarian program over the next couple of months, and also the number of people who have received their visas and how many are left from the 12,000.

Turning back to the bill, we support the bill, as we have supported just about 90 per cent of everything that the minister has put up on a bipartisan basis. We welcome the change of heart of the Prime Minister, as it appeared in the Dennis Shanahan article last Saturday morning.

Mrs GALLUS (Hindmarsh) (8.24 p.m.)—That was a very interesting contribution by the shadow minister, who I think missed his true vocation, which is writing fiction. Attending to his speech, he seemed to be inventing conversations between the Prime Minister and the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs.

Mr Sciacca—Hypothetical.

Mrs GALLUS—I think it was more than hypothetical. It was, as I said, an interesting speech but entirely fictional.

Mr Slipper—He has a vivid imagination.

Mrs GALLUS—I think it was more than hypothetical. What was missing from his speech were comments that I heard on the radio from the Premier of New South Wales, Mr. Carr, who I think did not welcome the Prime Minister’s statement about immigration to the extent that the shadow minister did. In what I later heard as a ‘Sydney-centric’ comment, he said that certainly Sydney did not need any more migrants.

I am sure that the Prime Minister would agree with him, and so would the minister for immigration, because indeed Sydney does not need anymore migrants, but the rest of Australia does. This minister and this Prime Minister have been concentrating on a program that is trying get skilled migrants and more migrants into the regions of Australia where they are needed. That was missing from the shadow minister’s attack today: that recognition that it is not migration per se that we need, that migration has traditionally gone to the big smoke, to Sydney, where the premier says, ‘We can’t take any more in Sydney. We are landlocked and we already have too many people.’ But we need migrants in the regions, and that is what this government has been doing, specifically with its state migration program, which I will get to later on. The shadow minister also criticised, amongst the various points that he touched on in what was an extremely wide-ranging debate—

Mr Slipper—Disjointed.

Mrs GALLUS—I would not be so unkind, Parliamentary Secretary, but it was very difficult to find a particular theme. The shadow minister did seem to move in various conflicting directions from time to time. He did criticise the freeze in offshore applications, without actually indicating what he would do. He said that we should be flexible enough to cope with international changes. Indeed, I believe that is what the minister is trying to do. He is saying, ‘We are getting an unprecedented number of offshore illegal arrivals and this will affect our refugee program. So, let’s have a look at how this is going with the numbers that are predicted to come to Australia in the next months and see how that will affect our program.’ So he did the only thing he could to keep an ordered migration program in circumstances that he could not predict but has reacted to in a sensible way. He is indeed catering for the contingencies that the shadow minister asked for.

I will turn now to the Migration Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 1999, which is an omnibus bill with nine different schedules that look at nine different areas of migration. It is mostly for the purpose of streamlining for greater efficiency in the program. I congratulate the minister on the effort he has put in to make an efficient migration program. Almost weekly he is looking at the regulations and the visas and saying, ‘How can we make this more sensible, more efficient and more streamlined?’

Of the nine schedules, several are beneficial to people wanting to migrate to Australia. Schedule 5 allows offshore applications
for spouse or interdependency visas to have the same right of merit review as onshore applicants. That is clearly of benefit to them. Schedule 6 applicants affected by the cap can now get a visa when they would have come in under the cap if delays had not come up, delays not of their making. That now will allow them to come in under the previous cap.

The more interesting one, which I would like to focus on just briefly, is schedule 7. Schedule 7 of the bill extends from 12 months to two years the period in which a points tested visa applicant who did not meet the prevailing pass mark and did not meet the lower pool mark may have their visa application held in reserve. That means that, at present, if you just miss out on meeting the required number of points to come to Australia as an independent migrant, you are put in a pool. If your skills are required, they can be accessed by the regional sponsored migration program. At present, until this bill becomes law, those people will remain in that pool for only a year. After this bill becomes law, they will remain in the pool for two years.

This harks back to what I said earlier about the need in regional Australia not only for more migrants but for more skilled migrants. The minister has requested that the Joint Standing Committee on Migration undertake a study of the specific state specific mechanisms for migration. As part of this, the committee has been touring around, and we have held two public hearings. While I would not want to canvass any of the recommendations or conclusions of the committee, I think it is safe to say that there is a recognition in the regions that they are short of skilled personnel. They are looking to this regional sponsored migration program to provide those skills in the regions, because the truth is that currently they are not getting it from the cities and the more developed regions.

There is out there a desperate need for people such as chefs and people with mechanical skills. The regions are desperate. In my tours lately, not as part of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration but as part of another committee looking through regional Australia on an issue, I have been struck by the number of regional towns that are in decline. Migration will not totally solve their problems, but even one family can make a difference to a town. A family with children can bring the number of people in that town to a level where two teachers are required rather than one, and that can prevent the closure of a school. So, not only are the regions desperate for these migrants with the skills but also for the people to come there to increase the population. My hope would be that the committee will come up with recommendations that will assist this program, because to date this has been an extremely underutilised program. There are only 2,000 people who have accessed it since the beginning, and the minister is keen that more migrants access the regional migration program.

The program has several aspects to it. Employer nominees can bring out employees who fulfil the specific skills that they need and cannot get anywhere else in Australia. It could be used for particular skills that the states want. As I said earlier, these migrants may not meet the pass mark normally required for independent migration, but if they come to the region where their skills are needed, they can move there. There are also fewer points required for family reunion if that family lives in the regions. I commend the minister for allowing migrants who are in the pool to remain there for two months. I commend the minister also for this program. If I can speak on behalf of regional Australia, the message they are sending to us is they want those migrants out there and, in particular, they want the migrants who can provide the skills that they do not have in their towns at the present. There is little else that I can add to this. I commend the bill to the House.

Dr THEOPHANOUS (Calwell) (8.34 p.m.)—I rise to speak on the Migration Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 1999. The member for Hindmarsh suggested that these new schedules and amendments come from the ingenuity of the minister. They do not. They come as recommendations from the department. They are recommendations to put into place a number of measures to fix up problems created by the incoherence of the immigration program. There are difficulties because of the way the immigration program
is now run. For example, there are provisions to deal with the capping issues. But why do we need capping of the kind that we have at the moment? That is an interesting question.

We started off with the idea years ago that we would use the capping mechanism only in extreme circumstances, and now we have capping in virtually every category of the immigration program. We even have capping informally—not formally, informally—because the minister will not admit that it is formally there. But, if you read the DIMA papers, you will see that there is an informal form of capping in the form of queues for spouses. Australian citizens and residents marrying somebody overseas very often have to wait nine, 12 or 15 months for reunion with their spouses. This has nothing to do with a spouse not being a genuine spouse or anything like that; it is simply to do with the way in which the program is structured and the way the numbers are determined. The minister sets a certain level for spouses or for fiancés or for any other category, whether it be for child, parent, interdependency or preferential family. If there happen to be more than that number, then this capping mechanism comes into place. This is in addition to the points system which exists in some of these categories.

We have a situation in the immigration program at the moment where we have the department running the show, running the minister, and not even being prepared to compromise on some of these topics with respect to the minister’s own ideas. The shadow minister, the member for Hindmarsh and many other people in this House have mentioned that the history of the minister appears to be very different from the bizarre statements that he has been making recently in relation to a whole range of issues pertaining to immigration, particularly refugees. Does this sound like a minister who is putting forward his own convictions in relation to his portfolio or does it sound more like a minister whose views are being determined by the bureaucracy of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs and those people in the department who have never been prepared to take into account the realities of Australian life or to take a more humanitarian and sympathetic approach to immigration? Is it any wonder that in the ethnic communities the department of immigration is known as the department of anti-immigration? Most of the time you have people complaining about their treatment—thousands and thousands of people complaining—and many of them go to members of parliament with those complaints in relation to the way in which they are treated.

There is no doubt of course about the ingenuity of the department of immigration when it comes to justifying their position. The member for Hindmarsh mentioned the scheme which gives additional points to people who want to live in the country. I will make an immodest comment to you, Mr Deputy Speaker. That scheme was first suggested by me in a paper to the immigration conference in 1990. When I suggested that proposal, the immigration department gave the then minister and other people information saying that this program would be impossible—it would be impossible to differentiate in this way; it would be impossible to give extra points in the way that had been suggested for people to go to the regional areas. Of course, after many years we finally find that they put into place a program of that kind. But the rationalisations of the department for their behaviour continue.

Today we had the minister becoming very upset about the visitors visa issue. On the question of visitors visas, he asked the shadow minister how he could say that there was discrimination in the visitors visa program. I wrote to the minister last year, pointing out that for certain countries the levels of visitor visa rejections were ridiculously high and outrageous—for example, 46 per cent from Lebanon, 30 per cent from Turkey, 25 per cent or so from China and 20 per cent from Vietnam, just to mention some. Of course, the minister preferred to mention Greece, where the rejection rate is very low—it suited him. What about these countries, Minister? What did the minister do when I pointed this out? Are we really saying that nearly one in two people from Lebanon who make an application for a visitors visa are shonky—they are not genuine people; they do not want to come and visit their rela-
tives or their friends in Australia? Is this really what the department is saying? You might think that if there is a figure of 46 per cent the department might think, ‘Maybe we’re getting something wrong here.’

Does the government of Lebanon not feel insulted when 46 per cent of the people applying for visitors visas—not for immigration—to visit friends and relatives in Australia or to come for a holiday in Australia are rejected by this department? The minister says, ‘Oh, there’s the risk assessment factor.’ But what did I point out in my letter last year? More than 50 members of parliament whom I wrote to wrote back to me with examples in relation to this matter, including members from the government side. What is this risk assessment factor? A risk assessment factor was put in even by the previous Labor government. I pointed out in my letter to the minister that the department’s statements about the levels of risk assessment were mistaken and were in fact fraudulent. Why are they fraudulent? Because the figures relating to the so-called non-return rates include not only people who do not return to their country and whose visas have expired but also people who applied for a second visa. For example, if a person comes in on a visitors visa and they then apply for a second visitors visa—an extension—they are listed under the department’s figures as non-returnees. On that basis, the department then says, ‘There’s a hell of a lot of non-returnees from China. So, in proportionate terms, we will say that China’s non-return rate is 14.59 per cent. Therefore, because of their very high non-return rate they are a very high risk and that explains imposing this factor.’ But as I pointed out with respect to, for example, Lebanon, the deemed non-return rate is 25.5 per cent but, if you take out the people who applied for a legitimate visa here and were accepted by the department itself for a legitimate visa, that rate goes down to 3.65 per cent.

That figure is a bit different, is it not? Does this justify the treatment of Lebanon, China, Turkey, Vietnam or a number of other countries in relation to this so-called non-return rate? This is another example of the fraudulent behaviour of the department whenever they want to get their way. They are misusing these figures and they are claiming that there is a risk factor of the kind that does not exist. As a result of those figures they then say, ‘If you are from the United Kingdom you don’t even have to go to the department of immigration.’ If you are from 29 other countries you do not even have to go to the department of immigration to get a visitors visa. But if you are from any of those other countries you not only have to go there but also are subjected to interviews and requests about your assets and your family as if you were migrating to Australia rather than coming for a visit of six, eight, 10, 12 or 16 weeks.

We have had situations in relation to this matter of a very humanitarian nature—parents who cannot come to visit their children, not come here to stay but to visit. And we call ourselves an enlightened humanitarian country! We are very good at promoting ourselves, but look at the facts and the statistics. The behaviour of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in relation to visitors visas is an outrage and has to be fixed especially for people who are coming to visit their family. If somebody has a wedding, has a funeral, has a baptism or just wants to see their sister or brother after five or 10 years, they cannot come as immigrants because, as we know, we have stopped the family reunion programs—and I will get back to that later—but surely they are entitled to come for a visit. Surely they are entitled to come for a few weeks. That is not happening and, as a result of that, we are being disadvantaged.

We are also being disadvantaged when people from a whole range of countries other than the 29 want to come to Australia for tourism. The tourism industry itself, the tourism councils of Australia, have made representations to the government over and over especially in relation to visitors from Asia. China is a good example. We signed an agreement with China for a special tourism relationship, but the fact is we still have these figures on visitors visa rejections for China. Half the government wants to promote tourism with China and the department of immigration does something else.
I call on the minister to openly reply to these points. He sent a second letter to all the members of parliament. What did he say in that letter? Did he actually meet these points? No, he did not. He said, ‘There is another reason why we have to be careful with people from these countries. There are health checks. There are problems with tuberculosis and things of that sort.’ That was a complete argument ad hominem. That was a nonsense argument. If there are problems with health for visitors visas, any person wanting a visitors visa from this country would be very happy to go and have a health check, even pay for it themselves, if they are going to visit their family or their friends. This is only an excuse. This is not a firm basis for making public policy and are going to talk about the risk assessment, let us at least have the real figures about what is actually happening in relation to this rather than the nonsense that has been put out as propaganda to justify these ridiculous differences in the treatment of people from different countries with respect to applications for visitors visas.

The minister got annoyed earlier today about the allegation that the system is discriminatory. Of course, nobody wants to throw about comments about racism, but the fact is that some of the communities feel that they are being discriminated against, and impressions are just as serious as the reality when it comes to immigration matters and matters of this kind. The minister ought to get his act together. He ought to reflect on what he has been standing for in this place for many years and he ought to say, ‘I had better examine this matter once again, especially the issue of the risk factor, rather than hitting out at the shadow minister or the member for Stirling for daring to raise these issues.’ I can tell him that there are members on his side of the House who have raised these issues about what is happening to visitors visa applications and their treatment by the department.

I want to turn to the other issue, which concerns the way in which the immigration system is operating. Again, we have fictions being created by the department. One of the saddest things that we ever did in this country on immigration policy was to create the fiction about the family reunion program. We took the spouses and fiancées—who used to be, as the department well knows, separate from the total program—and put them into the family reunion program. The minister goes around Australia saying, ‘We have a very balanced immigration program because 50 per cent is family and 50 per cent is skilled migrants.’ But what he does not tell the Australian people is this: previously, the spouse and fiancée component was not part of what was considered the family program in that sense. If you look at the projected program for 1999-2000, there are 32,000 listed under family. But, of those 32,000, 24,000 are spouses and 3,000 are fiancées. That is 27,000, which has left us only 5,000 people out of 70,000 for what is real family reunion.

You cannot talk about a man and his wife or a woman and her husband coming together as part of the family reunion program. But that is a natural human right. Are we going to say that spouses should not be allowed to come together just because somebody marries someone from another country? We have misused this figure in talking about the immigration program. Therefore, we have talked about the family stream and yet the real family stream is only 5,000 people out of 70,000 and of those, if you look at brothers and sisters—the preferential family—it is only 1,850 in the whole world. No wonder people say there is no hope of bringing your brother and sister here. Migrants who came here in the 1950s and 1960s used to say, ‘We had settlement conditions that were really tough.’ I say to those communities, ‘Yes, you had settlement conditions that were really tough; you didn’t have the sorts of services you have today,’ but there was one thing that they had—family reunion. They had the possibility that they could bring their brother and sister or their mother and father, their parents, here.

Look at what has happened in the parents category. This year in the planning program, the minister set the total number of parents, for all countries of the world, at 500. That is 500 positions out of 70,000. This is irrespective of the fact that in the previous year, not-
withstanding that his planning level had been low, he was forced to accept 3,120. So he puts down a program with one-sixth of that as the planning level for 1999-2000. No wonder he has been forced to revise that in recent weeks. What sort of department does this when there are 20,000 people who are prepared to pay? Their children have to sign a paper saying, ‘We will pay the pensions of our parents.’ There are 20,000 people in the queue, and the minister sets the level at 500. These people are prepared to pay for their parents to be looked after. They sign a paper. At that level of 500, it would take 40 years to bring those people here. And what does this mean? It means that in that period of time most of them will die because they are elderly parents.

It is all very well for us to go around internationally talking about what a great humanitarian country we are when what we have done with the immigration program in relation to family reunion is totally outrageous. What is happening with the program is creating a quiet rebellion amongst all our ethnic communities. People are saying, ‘What’s going on with the family reunion program is incredible.’ There are many more things that could be said about this matter. (Time expired)

Mr HARDGRAVE (Moreton) (8.54 p.m.)—The member for Calwell was a strong advocate even back in the days when he first entered parliament some 20 years ago, in the previous Parliament House. Legend has it around this place that my esteemed predecessor, Sir James Killen, was noted to have answered an interjection from the member for Calwell with, ‘Pipe down, Pythagoras.’ I am sure he will take that in the good spirit in which I offer it, because tonight we have heard Theophanous’s theorem, and I suspect all honourable members who have witnessed it would realise that he nearly popped his hypotenuse on a few occasions. It is a bit sad that those who may read these debates for whatever reason cannot pick up the passion with which the member for Calwell has made his contribution tonight.

It is really important that all Australians who follow matters relating to migration in this country understand that at the heart of the way the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Philip Ruddock, a man of great repute, has administered his department is dignity and integrity—integrity of the system, integrity of those in the system and dignity for those in the system. As a member on this side who represents many people from a wide cross-section of migrant communities—some affluent, like the Taiwanese community who are generally quite well off, some extremely poor, like those who have come from the Horn of Africa, Somalia, the Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia—I understand very well how important it is for those people to know that they are highly regarded by all Australians from all walks of life, that they are welcome, that their role in this country is assured and that there is no question about their integrity or the checks and balances which were applied to them before they came to this country.

I do not have the experience in migration matters of the member for Calwell, both in close detail and in policy areas, but I can say that in the four years that I have been proud to represent the electorate of Moreton I have got more than a fair handle on the aspirations of people in my electorate—those who are more recently arrived migrants as well as those who are perhaps longer-term migrants, those who are of well-established families that have been here for more than a hundred years and others. Indeed, I can say without any hesitation that people in my electorate—who are of well-established families that have been here for more than a hundred years and others. Indeed, I can say without any hesitation that people in my electorate expect the government of the day to have in place a policy framework that tests all of those who put a submission to us to come to this country. What is really important about the measures before us again tonight is that they are a continuation of this constant theme of integrity in the system, of making sure that those who do come here can hold their heads high with a great deal of pride and say, ‘I’ve made it through all the hoops, over all the high jump bars through all the tests of the system.’

It is not just a simple matter of testing their bona fides as far as their criminal, health and character records are concerned—they are the absolute basics. People in this country expect to be sure that people arriving here from another nation, either as a temporary visitor or
as a permanent resident bringing whatever skills and assets they have to this nation, are of high character, that they are of competent and safe health and that they bring no problems with them. People in this nation expect those who migrate here not to bring the troubles from their old countries to their new country. They do not want to see a continuation of what may have been a tribal fight in their old country carried on here. We have just seen an instance of this in the southern suburbs of Brisbane in recent times: a tragedy just outside my electorate in the electorate of Griffith involving what is essentially an African community gang versus another African community gang. The African community in my electorate, to their great credit, have met to discuss how they, as a community, can make those who do not understand realise that clashes with machetes and that sort of violence have no place in this country. They realise, even though they have only been in this country a short space of time, the importance of proving their credentials as good citizens, first and foremost as good Australians, and to display this to the broader community. This is an exciting country in which to be a citizen—

Mr Slipper—And a tolerant country.

Mr HARDGRAVE—It is more than just a tolerant country. This is a country whose citizenry right across the board is vitally interested in finding out about other cultures. That is why multiculturalism is so well accepted, that this nation says to people who have come from cultures other than the predominant Anglo-Celtic culture that I guess has been the mainstay of this nation, ‘You can come here in peace, you can come here with enterprise, with aspirations, with care and concern for your families, with skills to help continue to build this nation, and you can practise your own culture here. First and foremost you must be good Australians’—that is the challenge to all those who come here—‘but practise your culture, educate the broader community, teach them something about you and learn something about them.’

Mr Slipper—With hard work you will succeed.

Mr HARDGRAVE—With hard work you can succeed. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration, at the table, is quite correct. One of the great maxims, especially amongst those who have come from the refugee community in my electorate, is a determination to work, a determination to find a job and a determination to succeed. I am going to talk about some of those aspirations and some of the problems associated with that in my contribution this evening.

In fact, it is a very important thing to realise that those who come to this country appreciate being here. Those who are genuine refugees, who have passed the very heavy set of criteria that we set—and quite rightly so—value the fact that they have come through the system and want to make a contribution. There are those in my community whom I see daily who have left behind horrors that I would not want to inflict upon even, if I had such a person in my world, my worst of enemies. I would not want to inflict the horrors that some of those people from Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia, whom I am proud to represent in this place, have encountered during their lives. I would not want to wake up with the smell of burning bodies with the knowledge that your brother, your sister, your mother or your father was killed the night before because of some tribal clash. I would not want to inflict that upon another soul. Those sorts of traumatised people exist in this country, but they are, despite all that, making their way. One of the reasons that they are able to make their way with a great sense of dignity and a great sense of purpose is knowing that there is in place a system of migration which ensures that once they are here they can hold their heads high and be treated extremely well.

This migration bill contains a variety of measures which are all going to ensure that those who arrive as a result of these changes are going to be welcomed by Australians as bona fide migrants to this country. This bill contains measures which are going to assist in the recognition of the skill base that we desperately need to continue to reinvent in this nation. The other week I was privileged to visit the Moreton Institute of TAFE,
named after the same district that my electorate was named after. Although it is in the electorate of Griffith, they adopt me as a namesake on occasions. This occasion was the plastic and rubber industry joint venture with the Technical and Further Education Institute at Moreton, at Mount Gravatt.

Mr Kerr—Plastic and rubber: that sounds like a Tory sort of interest.

Mr HARDGRAVE—That is a disgraceful interjection from the member for Denison, given some of the stories. The PARTEC project is from the plastic and rubber industry that operates in south-east Queensland and is exporting a number of very viable commodities to the world. There is a desperate skill shortage in that particular area, in particular in the area of skilled toolmakers. It is extraordinary to think that in this nation, where we have had a manufacturing base in place for a long time, we are short on people capable of making the sorts of tools to make the sorts of moulds that are necessary for whatever it is that particular industry may happen to make. I was stunned, and I place it on the record here. The Minister for Employment Services, now at the table, looks after things like the Job Network. Minister Abbott would be shocked like I was to know that they are saying that we need to import skilled workers in the area of toolmaking from England and Germany, where there is a surplus. That is a matter which I guess is contained within this bill. If Minister Kemp were at the table, I guess I would be saying that perhaps we as a government need to invest more in that particular area, because I am sure most Australians would prefer to think that home-grown products were more available than those who migrate here.

Nevertheless, this bill does allow those who have something to offer to Australia, who can meet the criteria of what is in it for Australia, and bring skills to Australia, to come here. Schedule 7 of this bill will extend from 12 months to two years the period in which a points tested visa applicant who has not met the prevailing pass mark but did meet a lower pool mark may have their visa application held in reserve. They may miss out on the first brush but they are kept up our sleeve, because of their skills, for another occasion. Those people whose applications are held in reserve in the independent category may in fact elect to provide further details of their educational qualifications and work experience for inclusion in a database for skills matching so that people at PARTEC at Moreton Institute of TAFE will be able to contact the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs and say, ‘These are the sorts of people we need; who have you got?’ They are the sorts of practical measures that are contained in this bill before us.

It also gives me an opportunity to comment that the lethargic nature of the Queensland government in recognition of the skills that a lot of people have brought to this country is robbing people in my electorate of the chance to take a rightful place in the workforce. I spoke before about people who have come as refugees from the Horn of Africa. There are amongst them people who have developed skills or who have received qualifications that are not readily recognised here in this country. That is handled by state and territory governments, and it is important that state and territory governments proceed quickly to understand who we have in our communities, what assets we have achieved among our citizenry and what individuals are lying dormant waiting to offer something in this country and prove their worth to their fellow citizens. State and territory governments should do something about upgrading their understanding so that these people with unrecognised skills can take their place in society and with it achieve even greater dignity than they have already gained simply by passing the tests set by the department of immigration before they actually even come here to this country.

On that note, I want to acknowledge the assistance of the Minister for Employment Services, who responded very quickly, on a visit to my electorate a few months ago, to some very real observations made by the African community about the frustrations that they had in trying to break through the Job Network—although it is a very effective network—because of their English language skills. The minister received a submission from them on the basis of a touch screen, a submission which I know he felt very much
in favour of. He encouraged departmental officials to look at ways of trying to assist them and the department came through with the goods. So the African community in my electorate are very well served by the minister, Tony Abbott, and they think very highly of his ability to respond quickly to their needs and concerns. I would like to place on record my thanks to the minister, seeing that he is in the chamber right now.

Hand in hand with that was the migrant employment program that was established by the Queensland government. It is a sad thing to report that the Queensland government took that migrant employment program and ran it for six or nine months and that now it has gone down a big hole. I certainly would hope that the Queensland government would find the money necessary to try to keep that project going because, particularly amongst vulnerable people, if the program is taken away, there will be a great sense of loss and frustration felt by these people. That really is the last signal that they need to feel from any level of government.

Also, in relation particularly to these refugee members in my electorate and their prospects to go on and become good and productive Australians, they are equally very concerned about what is happening in Australia and the concern that Australians broadly have about this people smuggling racket. The measures that this government has undertaken to try to combat people-smuggling—a heinous crime against individuals, a dreadful thing, a crime against humanity—are being received with wholehearted support amongst those who have been legitimate refugees, who have lived in camps in Kenya, such as the Kakuma camp outside Nairobi and who have gone through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees chain of events which eventually brought them through the system and to our shores. There is a great distaste for those who are perpetrating this crime of bringing people into this country as victims of people smuggling more than just as refugees. There is a great distaste for them. There is, however, an understanding of the frustration, the slowness and the sluggishness of the system that perhaps encourages those who try to queue jump, but there is a great determination among those who have come here as refugees through the system to live as law abiding Australians to play their part in our community, to uphold our laws and to encourage the government to continue this whole of government approach to combating people smuggling.

On each occasion that Minister Ruddock has come into my electorate to talk to people from the various ethnic communities, both as individual communities and as one, he has been well regarded and well received, because the integrity that he has imposed on this system and under which we operate our migration system in this country is well understood and well appreciated by those who come through it. I understand the pent-up frustrations of the member for Calwell in his contribution here tonight, because I too get a lot of people who come through the door of my office who want instant answers to their reasonable set of circumstances. One of the best ideas has been put forward to me by a migration agent who operates out of my electorate and does a lot of migration work for students and others who come out of the People’s Republic of China. In fact, the day after you, Madam Deputy Speaker Crosio, and I visited the Australian embassy in Beijing in April last year this same chap was there. I raised this chap’s idea with migration officials at the Australian embassy and he told me a few weeks later, ‘I know you’ve passed my idea on to all those involved.’ This particular idea is that migration agents themselves should lodge a bond and say, ‘I’m going to vouch for the integrity of the person I am acting for.’ I think the idea has some merit on the basis of the bona fides of the migration agents being up to speed. Of course it is not going to suit everybody, but it may clean out a little bit in the waiting list. It is an idea that I think is worth looking at. It is an idea of self-help and self-start which is born out of a genuine frustration with the fact that the process—which we all endorse in this place—that ensures integrity in the system and that ensures dignity for those who
come through the system does in fact take time. Those sorts of measures and the results that we achieve are very important.

Not too long ago in this place there was someone who sat here for a short time who attempted to divide this nation through race and bigotry, misconceptions and falsehoods about those who aspire to come to this nation to live and about those who aspire to come to this nation to visit. We do not want to see a system which evolves, develops, enhances, creates or even opens up the opportunity for that sort of debate to ever begin again in this country. Very simply, what we want is a system in place—and I believe that the measures contained in this bill will enhance the system that we currently have in place—that has the support of all Australians, whether they were born here or whether they have come here, and whether their family has been here 50 years, 150 years or 50,000 years. Everyone has to feel as though indeed they are a part of the equation in an equal and correct way. I suspect those who come to this country and choose to take an oath or affirmation of citizenship, as a declaration of support, care, and concern and attachment to this country, have something over those of us who have not had to take an oath or an affirmation like that.

I welcome the minister’s initiative to try to give Australian born citizens a chance to get themselves up onto that same platform to say that they care about Australia. What is important is that we do not divide, like those opposite did for 13 years. What is important is that we bring together all people from all communities and from all backgrounds to continue to build a great nation.

Right across Richmond, whether it be in Bridge Road or in Swan Street, there would be shops which would have Greek writing on the front of them, and people of Greek origin would congregate there, speaking their own language comfortably amongst friends. Many people at the time, my father tells me, would say, ‘Those Greeks, they never mix. They will never mix, they just stick to their own. They form ghettos. They do not associate with everyone else. We don’t want them mixing with us.’ It is bitterly ironic that so many people echo that debate now when we see new migrant communities emerging in areas around the inner city, like Richmond, Fitzroy and Brunswick, where some of these new migrants, in particular the Vietnamese community, have quite a few shops next to each other in a number of streets. Some people still, 50 years on, parrot exactly the same arguments which were used to try to denigrate the Greeks when they came to Australia all those years ago.

Of course, the Greek community have been one of the great success stories of Australian immigration. Those Greeks who did have all of those shops and who did congregate and live their lives around Richmond during that time have now gone on to become wonderful Australian citizens and to raise great families here. They have happily formed a vibrant part of Australian culture. Those people now live not only in Richmond but right across Melbourne and right across Australia. They fit very comfortably into Australian life. The previous speaker referred to Pauline Hanson, at least by inference. It is interesting to note that those arguments are 50 years old. They were irrelevant then and they are even more irrelevant today.
I want to reflect, at least for little while, on another great example of multiculturalism in Australia, that being the Latrobe Valley in my electorate. In so many ways, I am a product of that push towards multiculturalism in the Latrobe Valley which took place throughout the 1950s and 1960s. I think most people in this chamber would appreciate that I am from a Maltese family. Both my mother and my father are Maltese, and in fact I was born in Malta all those years ago in 1973. In many ways like the Snowy Mountains project, we had a massive infrastructure undertaking in the Latrobe Valley. Migrants came from every corner of the globe to the Latrobe Valley to contribute to building the massive power generation assets which we all take for granted today. We had people who came from Greece, from Italy, from Malta, from the Ukraine, from the Baltic States, from Ireland, from Wales and from everywhere that you could imagine. These people made an enormous contribution. There are some great Latrobe Valley migrant stories which are told from that period.

An Italian migrant to whom I spoke only last year told me that he stepped onto the boat in Italy when he was just 14 years old. I think in those days the boat trip from Italy to Port Melbourne was at least 2½ months. This 14-year-old boy, after a 2½ month boat trip by himself, met his brother at Port Melbourne, found his way to the Latrobe Valley and went straight to work. These are amazing things for people to countenance today, yet that was just one typical story—a great and courageous story—of people from that period. There are so many other stories which convey just as much courage and dash on behalf of those people who took that great journey years ago.

They did not come here to Australia to not contribute. The thing that I always find in speaking to migrants from different parts of the world is that they came here because they wanted to make a better life for themselves and a better life for their families. They wanted to build a life here which they could not have in the country from which they came. It was a difficult decision for so many of these families to make: a heart-wrenching decision to leave their families, many of whom have been there for literally thousands of years, to come to Australia to build a new life. In those days you did not have the telecommunications or the Internet or any of those things which you have today; the only thing you could do was to write a letter—and you would be lucky if it got there in two months time. It is important for us to acknowledge in this House the hardship which those people went through because it was a hardship they endured in order for them to build a better life for their families.

One of the stories so many migrants who came to the Latrobe Valley during that period always tell me is of how peaceful it was amongst people from different migrant backgrounds. We had people coming to a smallish place in the Latrobe Valley who were from different backgrounds and who, not that long before, had been fighting on different sides in World War II. Yet there was almost no violence, almost no antagonism, and very little in the way of racial denigration or abuse relating to the side that any person’s family had been on during the war. I think this has a lot to do with the fact that, when they came to the Latrobe Valley, all of these migrants came there to work. They did not come to make trouble or cause any sort of disturbance amongst the people. They came because there was work to do, and they wanted a part of that work so that they could build the life they hoped for for their families. There was no shortage of work for them to do in the Latrobe Valley, and the massive assets we have in the Latrobe Valley today are testament to the amount of work they did.

There are a thousand other great stories of hardship and of success built around that period in the Latrobe Valley. Even today we see many of the products of their hard work and of their coming together as communities within the Latrobe Valley. We have wonderful institutions like the Italo-Australian Club in Morwell, the Latrobe Valley Maltese-Australian Association, Club Astoria and, more recently, the Commonwealth funded Gippsland Migrant Resource Centre. All these clubs were formed with the intention of people coming together within Australia, sharing their lives together and making friends, not in a way that would exclude them
from participating in Australian culture but rather in a way that would encourage them to be comfortable and confident enough to participate fully in Australian culture. This is the point of difference that I want to draw the attention of the House to. We often hear criticism of ethnic groups, people from different backgrounds, for coming together in different areas. We often hear the criticism that these people should somehow run about and roam in the country as some sort of group of nomadic workers to meet the whim of any agriculturalist or grazier who happens to want some itinerant workers. It is pretty understandable that, when people from different backgrounds, especially those from non-English-speaking backgrounds, come to a new country one of the first things they will look for is someone who speaks the language they speak and someone who understands the customs and traditions that they are used to. This is not an unnatural thing for them to want to do. There are still quite a few people who believe and who say that these people should be somehow forced to assimilate with Australian culture, whatever that means in their mind. I say to them that they do not understand and they should soften their hearts a little and try to find some understanding of what these people genuinely experience.

I often think of how hard it might have been for those people who came to the Latrobe Valley all those years ago, those people with the courage and dash to actually make that trip. When they arrived at Port Melbourne after the three-month boat trip, that was not the end of their trouble—as if it were not enough. Many of those people came from countries no more than 50 or 100 km long. So they had just sailed all the way around the world, arrived in Australia and, in the case of those who drove to the Latrobe Valley, driven for around five hours on pretty rough old track, as it was in those days. They drove for about five hours on mostly unsealed road through the wilderness and through the forest and arrived in the beautiful Latrobe Valley. I do not know what those people must have been thinking. They must have been thinking that they were arriving at the very ends of the earth. And yet those people stuck it out and did not despair despite how far and isolated they were from their families and loved ones. I admire their courage because, surely, without courage, a trip like that would simply not have been possible. When they did arrive in the Latrobe Valley, they quickly realised that their way to success was to work. The way to build the life they wanted was to build it through work; their industry and their labour.

That is why we have so many success stories in the Latrobe Valley of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds who have built a real life for themselves and their families. There are people from Italian backgrounds who run successful engineering contracting businesses. Di Fabro Constructions, which built the great southern stand at the MCG, is a Latrobe Valley based firm established by two Italian brothers who arrived off a boat in Australia in 1950. There is a place of some significance in the Latrobe Valley called the Ridge, which was an old migrant workers camp. The story goes that their tent was the first one up on that migrant workers camp called the Ridge all those years ago. So we have plenty to look back on in the Latrobe Valley, and we are fond of saying that whilst Australia has just discovered the word ‘multiculturalism’, we in the Latrobe Valley have been practising multiculturalism for some 50 years.

I do not want to confine my remarks to that glorious period of post World War II migration in the Latrobe Valley. It is important to consider what more recent migrants have to deal with. In particular, we have quite a few Bosnian refugees, who arrived in the Latrobe Valley after having experienced awful traumas in their countries—traumas more horrible than you or I could possibly imagine. I have been heartened to see the warm embrace given by the Latrobe Valley community to these people, recognising, as we do, the awful situation they have come from. I have been particularly moved in recent times to see the sensitivity that a lot of the students and staff at Lowanna College, which is the public secondary school in Moe, have shown to a number of students there from Bosnian refugee families. Such is the case as well with the Filipino community in the Latrobe Valley, who are one of our most recent ethnic community groups. Again, these people have fitted very quickly into the Latrobe Valley
scene. I do not think there is an event I go to where I do not get to enjoy some of that magnificent Filipino cooking, which the women in particular insist that I eat every time they see me. It has been a very quick transition for these very hospitable people, the Filipinos, finding their way into the Latrobe Valley culture.

When people talk about new migrants, they often make the mistake of characterising them as either boat people or some type of person who might not make a great contribution and who will probably be a burden as opposed to a wonderful contributor to Australian culture. From time to time, when I get asked questions about migration, I enjoy explaining to people some of the experiences in my electorate. There are at least a dozen doctors that I know of in my constituency who are from non-English-speaking backgrounds. They make a wonderful contribution. I have to say that in many cases I admire their earthiness and their feet on the ground approach to the way they conduct their medicine. It is often in stark contrast to some of the stodginess which is associated with the professional classes and the medical profession.

As you would know, Madam Deputy Speaker Crosio, we have a wonderful university in my electorate—Monash University’s Gippsland campus. You do not have to travel too far at Monash University, Gippsland, to experience the great gift that it has been given in terms of the many academics who are from non-English-speaking backgrounds and who are making a magnificent contribution there in terms of the professional studies which they conduct. I know that we as a community benefit from having them there. Our students benefit from having people from all across the world at Monash University, Gippsland, talking about their experiences in places like India, Sri Lanka or Africa and just speaking with the worldliness which perhaps even as recently as 10 or 15 years ago we simply would not have found at a regionally based university. We thank those people for coming to us and we thank them for the contribution they are making.

One of the terms in this whole debate which most annoys me is the word ‘tolerance’. I often hear people saying, ‘We need to be tolerant. We should exercise tolerance.’ It is a term which makes my skin crawl. What does ‘tolerant’ mean? It seems to me to mean that, hopefully, if we summon all of our goodwill and everything, we should just be able to tolerate one another, as if that is the best that we as a nation can possibly hope to achieve. Two people can sit next to each other on a tram—a lady from a Muslim background who might be wearing a head-dress, and a farmer perhaps even from my constituency—and they can just tolerate each other; they can only just stop themselves hitting each other. I think our language is all wrong. We should be talking about celebrating our cultural diversity because surely this is what is our great strength as a nation. We truly are a nation full of different cultures and full of people who have contributed to Australia as a result of the different culture that they bring to our nation. Yet time and again we talk about Australia’s great reputation as a tolerant nation. I do not ever want us to be a tolerant nation. I do not want the best that we could ever be to be the scene of that farmer from my electorate and maybe a lady from a Muslim background—perhaps from Brunswick in Melbourne—just managing to put up with each other for 15 minutes on a tram on Sydney Road. I do not want that to be the best that Australia could ever hope to be.

We need to be seriously a country that celebrates its cultural diversity. We need to be seriously a nation that enjoys and appreciates every minute where we come across new cultures, where we come across people who bring new knowledge from different nations. We need to be a nation that is not afraid of new things. In 1950, we were a nation that was not afraid of new things. We were a nation that was prepared to open its doors to the world and say, ‘Come and join us. We would welcome you here.’ Yet we still hear some of those same old arguments. (Time expired)

Ms GAMBARO (Petrie) (9.35 p.m.)—The member for McMillan certainly has a smorgasbord of multiculturalism in his electorate, in many forms. I am sure that he could have spoken even further about what multiculturalism means to him in his electorate. I have always had a particular interest in immigra-
tion issues. I am very happy tonight to speak on the government’s initiative in relation to Australia’s migration program. There are several issues covered by this piece of legislation and I will touch on those very briefly. Firstly, I acknowledge the wonderful contribution the government has made in implementing a fair immigration system. I congratulate the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs on his hard work in this particularly difficult period where the migration program has been under constant pressure. I also thank him for meeting with different members of the ethnic communities in my electorate and for the intensity and pace with which he visits Australia. I refer particularly to the public meetings and consultations that he has with various groups. It was interesting to listen to previous speakers tonight referring to their multicultural experiences, either as elected representatives or being part of multiculturalism themselves, including the previous speaker, the member for McMillan. I would like to add briefly to some observations, coming from a migrant family. Madam Deputy Speaker Crosio, I know that you are also a proud recipient of multiculturalism through your association with your husband and the opportunity that migration brought to you.

In the postwar and early 1950s migration, some 3.1 million migrants came to Australia and were willing to give up much from their own homelands. In my own case, my father, grandmother and mother migrated with very limited English skills. In those days, they managed with great difficulty. The greater emphasis on English skills and the way that technology and services have gone in present times would certainly have made it a lot more difficult. My grandmother probably spoke 10 words of English in the whole time that she was in Australia. It was not because she did not want to learn, but it was very difficult to teach someone in her sixties a new language.

One of the things I remember growing up in an Italian household was the hard work, perseverance and determination my whole family had, and particularly my grandmother. She was always in the back of my parents’ small business, helping them in whatever way she could. It is this hard work and determination that really built this country. The wonderful contribution of migrants from all backgrounds needs to be acknowledged. In my electorate, I have a very large number of people of Greek and Italian origin, and from Sudanese, Filipino and Chinese communities as well. They live in a very harmonious manner. They work very hard. I have people from the Sudanese community and refugees who have experienced great difficulties and have come to this country from war torn conditions. The honourable member for Moreton spoke about the horrifying experiences of war and personal trauma that they have experienced.

There have been some wonderful success stories. I would like to acknowledge some of the people from my electorate, from backgrounds from all over the world, who have contributed. We have Raptis seafoods, who are very well known for their contribution to the seafood and building industries. I would also like to acknowledge the De Pasquale family, the family that sold pasta to Italy—the Nanda spaghetti factory. They sold that a few years ago to the Nestle company. There are also people like Nick Tsminas, who runs one of Redcliffe’s most famous restaurants, the Ox, and Joe Camillieri, who has established one of Australia’s most successful Mazda dealerships. I would like to acknowledge all of those people. They have worked very hard.

There are also a number of people in the community who work hard every day to make Australia a much more tolerant society, as the member for McMillan said. I would also say a much happier and more integrated society than we used to be. Some of the things that I do not ever want to see repeated are taunts in the playground that I experienced when I was younger, being called a ‘wog’ and similar things. One of the things that I experienced later in my life was people speaking about immigration and immigrants to me and, because my skin was not olive and my eyes were not dark, they reflected their true feelings about immigration. Sometimes I wish I had not heard those things. But I think we have moved on quite a lot in 40 or 50 years. We have become a proud nation and we have become very proud of immigrants.
and the contribution they have made. They have come from all over the world. That is one of Australia’s greatest strengths. We have a multicultural policy here that is the envy of the world. We do not have people fighting in the streets. We do not have war based on culture or religion. We do not have one side of a street not speaking to the other because they happen to be a different religion. We have a society that is very much in tune with others from different backgrounds.

We have an immigration policy that is focused on finding a balance between skilled migration and genuine refugees. Most importantly, the migration program should serve our national interests together with our international responsibilities. For every migration place that is held up by lengthy administrative matters, there is a possibility of a genuine applicant somewhere in the world not having the opportunity to immigrate. That is the reality that this government faces every single day. With this in mind, the government has introduced today’s amendments which deal with the unnecessarily complex aspects of the Migration Act. The Migration Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 1999 will implement procedures to oversee the temporary entry business sponsorship and cancellation of permits where necessary. Temporary entry business visas are available for skilled applicants to enter Australia temporarily for the purpose of business, cultural, social and other activities. The new sections included in these amendments will ensure that the conditions of this temporary class of visas can be monitored and that the visas may be cancelled where the rules are breached. In addition, the amendments will prevent people from applying who would have been refused under the current migration policy. This saves an enormous amount of time, particularly time wasted by applicants who would have had absolutely no chance of succeeding. It is my belief that the migration program should allow genuine refugees and skilled applicants the opportunity to enter Australia through the proper channels.

Empowering state and territory corrective services authorities to detain non-citizens who are liable for deportation at the end of their prison sentences ensures that migration places can be filled by legitimate migrants as well as protecting our community from convicted criminals who are subject to deportation. These amendments also allow for flexibility in the appointment of migration officers. Under the amendments, the merits review rights are extended to some visa applicants who are not currently merits reviewable. In certain circumstances, visas will be granted to applicants who otherwise would be adversely affected by the visa capping provisions. The period in which a points tested visa applicant can remain in a pool is doubled. On an administrative level, the amendments remove the age limitation on the appointment of full-time members of the Refugee Review Tribunal. Additionally, decisions made by the Migration Review Tribunal will be treated in the same way as those made by the Immigration Review Tribunal. These measures protect the integrity of the Australian migration program while also allowing fair passage for legitimate applicants. The Migration Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 1999 complements other good work that has already been done by the government in this area.

The spate of recent illegal immigrant arrivals is a cause of concern amongst the community at large. There is not a day when my electorate office is not phoned by members of the community concerned about the recent arrival of illegal immigrants by boats. It is fair to say that the media has had an absolute frenzy over this issue over the last few months. They really have not put forward a full picture of how this government is dealing with this particular problem. The other day when some 1,500 illegal refugees were returned, it was interesting to note that one of my local newspapers carried only a very small caption. Yet when 50 or a few hundred boat people arrive in northern Australia, you have full front page headlines and the media frenzy feeds on it for days on end.

The fact of the matter is that the Howard government is doing everything in its power as the government of a democratic nation to ensure that queue jumpers and non bona fide refugees do not take advantage of the Australian community’s compassion. One of the most important steps recently taken by the
Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, particularly in his travels to overseas countries in dealing with illegal boat people and arrivals, has been to ensure that there is a very extensive public education campaign offshore so that people understand that, when they pay a smuggler to bring them to Australia, they will also pay a far greater price. They need to be assured that this is a serious matter, that people smugglers face penalties of up to 20 years jail and fines of up to $220,000, that immigration officers will be at overseas posts and airports and that illegal immigrants will not be sent off to metropolitan cities like Sydney but detained in centres that are quite remote. It is important that these illegal arrivals understand that there is a penalty for coming out here, particularly for people smugglers. I applaud the government on the recent advertising and the harsher measures taken to ensure that illegal boat people do not come to Australia or that they are deterred in the strongest possible way.

Currently, all unauthorised arrivals are detained under the Migration Act 1958. They are returned to their country of origin, unless they apply for a visa or they make claims that invoke Australia’s international treaty obligations. Refugees making claims or applying for visas are then assessed under this protection visa process. If an applicant is refused and subsequent appeals to the Refugee Review Tribunal are also rejected, then the applicant is liable for immediate removal from Australia. This is a point that is rarely made in media reports about illegal immigrants: they are removed. Even if an unauthorised arrival is found to be a genuine refugee, that does not guarantee them permanent residence. Under the new measures implemented by this government, refugees are given a three-year temporary protection visa. This reverses the decision of previous Labor governments that allowed such cases access to permanent residence. In practical terms, while people have the right to work, they will not have the right to family reunion or the right to return to Australia if they go overseas. Additionally, they cannot have an application for permanent protection considered before 30 months, unless the minister decides that it is in the public interest.

These changes send a message to other people considering illegal travel to Australia that we are certainly not a soft touch, and that queue jumpers will be dealt with very harshly indeed. Other changes send a message to people who instigate these illegal entries that trafficking simply does not pay. The border protection bill passed by the parliament on 25 November introduces very tough measures to combat people smuggling by sea. Whilst making our laws for illegal immigrants fairer, we need to also give customs and immigration officials the power to detect and enforce Australia’s border strategies in international waters. Some of those powers being looked at in the border protection bill include detention, forfeiture, seizure and disposal of vessels found to be unseaworthy or a risk to safety or navigation or a threat to the environment, as well as seizure and disposal of ships and aircraft used in people-smuggling operations. It is also important to ensure the safety of officers. Changes to the Customs Act will allow Customs officers to carry and use approved firearms and other approved items of personal defence equipment in certain circumstances for personal defence.

Another issue that has been addressed by the government’s changes is the problem of forum shoppers. People who hold protection in another country will no longer be owed protection by Australia, unless they have taken all possible steps to avail themselves of the alternative protection. News of these tough new measures is being spread via an information campaign that I mentioned earlier, and it particularly targets the countries from which people illegally immigrate. The campaign will alert people to the futility of trying to enter Australia illegally and will inform people of significant consequences of their actions. These measures and today’s amendments are evidence of the government’s hard work and willingness to deliver a fair and efficient migration program. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (9.50 p.m.)—I rise tonight to speak on the Migration Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 1999. I, as does the Labor Party, fully support the bill. To an extent, this bill is the crossing of the t’s and the dotting of the i’s and removes the anomalies
contained in this legislation. This amendment bill provides an opportunity for the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs to tidy up the legislation and to get on with matters of higher priority in relation to the whole process of immigration. I believe these are matters of concern not only to the people of Oxley but to everyone in Australia. The better utilisation of resources and an equitable application and review process are essential if our immigration system is to be effective and efficient. This is particularly important in areas where Australia actively seeks immigrants. We should be making the process as user-friendly as possible and taking into consideration the difficulties faced by individuals in regard to the timing of the process and how this affects not only the applicant but also their family.

Business migration is an exceptional element to immigration in Australia. It is a recognition that a business and the skills that it requires are unique and that they sometimes cannot be satisfied by any individual in Australia. Although I always find it difficult to believe that there is not one person in this country who is not able to do any task or who cannot be trained to do any task in comparison with someone from overseas, perhaps there are circumstances and times when special businesses with very unique skill sets can only be sourced from overseas.

It is essential that this form of migration sponsorship is not abused by either the employer or the employee. The jurisdiction that the minister will be granted under this amendment will ensure that business migration will remain a legitimate program. If a company is genuine in its commitment to commerce in Australia, it will not be threatened by schedule 1 in this legislation.

The majority of the migration detention centres in Australia are in fairly remote locations, with most being in very remote locations. They are nothing like what is sometimes portrayed by the media or those who would have people believe that illegal immigrants are lodged in either 3- or 4-star accommodation with resort-like conditions. I have had the opportunity, through my membership of the migration committee, to visit all of Australia’s detention centres for illegal immigrants. From my inspection of these facilities, I have found them to be adequate to house people for short periods of time but in no way would they qualify for long periods of detention.

The point I am making is that we have a duty to properly house and feed all detainees, regardless of why or how they have arrived here or why they are being detained. No-one expects plush conditions but we certainly do expect fair standards. I believe that all Australians would expect this in our detention centres, hence the urgency to process and make decisions on the status of illegals and to establish their rights as soon as possible. In this way the stress would be reduced not only on our facilities and resources but also on these people themselves.

Queensland does not have a migration detention centre, and so detainees are placed in existing state correctional facilities until they can either be moved or otherwise processed through the system. With the advent of schedule 4, detainees who have committed a criminal offence will be legitimately held in custody for the duration of their sentence and until possible deportation. Schedule 4 will ensure that detainees endure the full force of our judicial system by having to serve their prison sentence before being removed or deported. Schedule 4 also allows DIMA to utilise the exceptional facilities and custodial knowledge of the state correctional systems. Upon the serving of a custodial sentence, the state corrections will have the authority to detain individuals who have been identified by DIMA for deportation or removal.

My own ongoing experiences with DIMA continually reinforce my view that the department needs to place a very high importance on the accuracy and validity of information that is provided by these people. Schedules 2, 3 and 5 tighten this practice further for a very good reason. There are many ambiguous elements to the migration application and review process. Hopefully, these amendments will rectify a seemingly endless source of contention and delay and, might I also say, the cause of a lot of work for the staff in my office in assisting people through the process on matters that otherwise should be straightforward and dealt with in a
timely and efficient manner by the department. I am sure that many applications for migration are completed with an individual’s interpretation of the requirements, supporting documentation and soundness of circumstances.

The clarity of DIMA definitions is essential to the accuracy of the inquiries and applications. The migration process is a very personal and, I believe for many people, frightening ordeal. The precision of definitions and the avoidance of interpretation as being proposed in schedule 2 should alleviate some anguish for applicants and go some distance to reducing the workloads of not only the department but also many federal members across the country, as was alluded to by several prior speakers.

I am often asked to assist people with their migration applications. I do not believe it is appropriate that a member of parliament be involved directly at such an early stage and so, to some degree, I have always declined to directly assist them at that point. But I make it clear that I have always been and will always continue to be very active in assisting people with migration matters and in ensuring that they receive fair and comprehensive assistance from not only me but also the department.

A hidden benefit of this personal practice is that I do not have to enter the daunting realm of ‘DIMA-speak’. If the definition of officer in schedule 3 saves one inquiry, it is very welcome. The clarity of terms, definitions and authorities can only assist the migration process in the end. This clarification of definition and process is also applicable to the review process proposed in schedule 5.

The conditions of review placed on applicants are quite harsh, but at least a non-citizen is given the opportunity to have his or her application considered further.

I am concerned that this addition to the workload of the Migration Review Tribunal will further delay the review process. The applicants, however, are forced to accept these delays, often regardless of personal representations made by members such as me and I am sure many others in this House. Unfortunately, the government continues to fail to realise that an applicant’s decision to migrate to Australia far outweighs the indignity they suffer and the financial burden they endure throughout the migration process. They often come from places where there is nothing to return to, or from places where their lives are in danger. Fortunately, schedules 6 and 7 of this bill rectify somewhat part of the indignity of which I was just speaking.

I have had many constituents contact me requesting guidance with overcoming the frustrating experience of missing out on gaining a visa because of the ‘capping’ process. Having undertaken the lengthy task of providing all the information and documentation required for a visa, their application is eventually refused because of the sheer numbers. These people have satisfied the entire selection criteria of the migration process and have been assessed as successful applicants, but they cannot receive a visa because it has been deemed that there are too many applications before theirs.

An extraordinary number of people accept the capping limit as sheer bad luck. I am very pleased that schedule 6 will allow DIMA to accommodate the legitimate reason for missing the cap as beyond the control of the applicant at least. When a migration application requires interaction with many government agencies, migration systems should accommodate the inevitable delays and misplacement of material that is universal to the Public Service. The lengthening of the pool period for applications is also a very welcome amendment. I believe that anyone who can successfully complete a DIMA visa application should be granted the reward of not having to do it again for at least another 24 months.

I am very pleased to have learned this week that the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs has had a change of heart and wants to increase the migrant intake to Australia. This is an unbelievable turnaround from a minister who has gone out of his way to reduce numbers, to make criteria harder and to reduce access to family reunion. While Australia can obviously benefit greatly from skilled migration, the government’s efforts to attract these people to invest in Australia to start businesses and to live here are failing to meet the same test. It is
often the case that conditions on family members' access to visas and their ability to stay in Australia are very different from those that apply to the original applicant. This causes skilled and business migrants enough problems that this alone can affect their decision on whether to stay or whether to follow through with their application at all.

There is currently a lot of talk about encouraging or forcing migrants, depending on their status, to migrate directly to regional country areas. Most people recognise that regional areas are in need of more people to boost their economies and to create a critical mass that can sustain them. If the government is serious about trying to achieve this, it needs to look closely at the whole process of immigration and the efficiencies, or lack of them, that currently exist. There are clearly a number of anomalies with the government's position on migration matters and issues of overstaying and illegal entry. While on one hand the government spends a great deal of taxpayers' dollars on propaganda and resources on illegal entrants, it is in total disproportion in relation to the number of overstayers currently in Australia and the resources that are spent on either detecting these people or making some efforts to have them leave our country.

The department's and the government's priorities seem to be more focused on keeping people from certain countries out rather than tackling the very large numbers of people who overstay their visas from countries where there are often no visa restrictions or requirements for them to enter Australia in the first instance. There are currently more than 50,000 people overstaying in Australia. This to me is a massive problem and is one that the government and the department are doing very little to address. While on one hand the government is now talking about increased migration, it has reduced access at the same time to family reunion migration. This government is saying that it is okay for you to come to this country, but forget about bringing your family. 'Yes, we want you to migrate under the state specific migration mechanisms, but we will make it difficult for your family to enter or we will not allow them to enter at all.'

The ethnic communities of Australia have much to be disappointed about in this government as do many others in the community. We have a government that says it is pro-family, a government that says it wants to help regional Australia, and a government that says, if only just very recently, that it wants to increase migration. But the claims are a great distance from the reality. The attacks on family reunions have caused many of my constituents great hardship and a longing to be reunited with their parents and siblings. It is not good enough just to cap or to restrict the number of direct family members that can be reunited in Australia based on the current criteria. There are many cases for compassionate family reunion—cases where family members have only a short number of years to live or cases where families have made a great commitment to our country, have come here on goodwill and have been accepted by our country. Yet, when they want to be reunited with their parents, with their brothers and their sisters—with their direct family—this government tells them that that is not good enough and that their family will not be reunited.

I believe a much more compassionate approach is needed. When the government says it wants to help regional Australia through state specific migration mechanisms, it could begin by looking at the difficulties and the obstacles placed in the path of those that may be interested. It is a government that says—and again, if only just recently—it wants to increase migration yet does everything it can to make the process difficult, prohibitive and ineffective, if not at the very least totally inefficient. There are many examples of this, but one that demonstrates the government's position perfectly is the freeze on the refugee program. This punishes the legitimate refugee applicant. The unfortunate message being conveyed is that if you can find the money to pay a people smuggler, you can get to Australia and tell them you are a refugee. But do not bother trying to prove that your human rights are threatened by remaining in your country of origin. Forget about seeking refugee status under the sanction of the United
Nations. Stop trying to prove that in your country you are not allowed to practise your religion or voice a political opinion different from that of your government. Do not think that the daily breach of your human rights is going to be enough to get you anywhere near Australia. Surely you do not think that the Australian government is going to assess your case separately from those who have landed on our shores illegally. I find this absolutely unbelievable. I cannot understand how this government on the one hand says one thing, but then does another thing. It makes it easy for some people and harder for others. It seems to me that, if you are a person trying to enter this country legally, it is made even more difficult by this government.

The common theme of this government’s migration policy today is that every application for migration is a dodgy one. It does not matter how you get here, it does not matter where you are applying from and it does not matter what your background is. The member for Moreton earlier mentioned the need for integrity in the migration system. I honestly believe that a successful migration applicant has been stripped of their integrity and dignity before they get here and certainly stripped of their dignity by the process put in place by this government and by this department. How nice of the member for Moreton to condone the suitable migration of those who have sufficiently survived the humiliation of the application process and now accept the position of immigration in the 21st century so sanctimoniously outlined by the member for Moreton.

The member for Moreton also talked about the expectations these people have of Australia, and no doubt there are many. But the point that he made was more about them not carrying on their own traditions and cultures rather than about what might be our expectations and their expectations of Australia. But progress has been made today with the changes contained in this bill—changes that will be welcomed not only by the members on this side of the House but also by many ethnic communities.

There are probably many examples of immigration cases that could be brought to the attention of the government for special consideration, but tonight I want to use the changes in this bill to highlight one. It is the plight of the 633 stateless Vietnamese living in the Philippines who are seeking a home in Australia. They all have sponsoring relatives in Australia who are willing to support their family members financially and for all their needs. These people have been languishing in the Philippines for well over a decade. These people have close links with Australia, with about 250 of them having sponsoring relatives who are parents and siblings and with the others having sponsoring aunts, uncles and cousins. In a letter that I received from one of my constituents—a constituent who is personally affected by this situation—outlining their plight, he says that the resettlement of these sons and daughters of Australian citizens is not a burden on our society. I agree with him, and I believe that these 633 people would make a great contribution and would be a benefit to our country. He also states that this will not open the floodgates, as the Vietnamese people have stopped fleeing their country since the early 1990s. While these 633 stateless Vietnamese remain in the Philippines, they are denied basic rights—for example, basic rights to own property and, in the case of the Philippines, to work and/or to have access to any public facilities.

I believe a great deal of good could flow not only from the changes that have been made in this legislation and which are being debated tonight but also for the Vietnamese community of Australia by reuniting them with their lost families. I believe 633 people is a small number if we consider some of the recent events of the last couple of years in terms of people who have tried to enter illegally for whatever reason or in terms of the current immigration intake that Australia has. I believe that the message that would be sent out to the world about these 633 people waiting to be reunited with their families is that Australia can be compassionate on immigration and can set about to put in place a process that could deal with a very specific circumstance. I believe that could have a huge impact on our image internationally and for our ethnic communities in Australia. If the minister is serious about increasing the number of migrants, this would be a great place to start and a very compassionate place.
to start. I commend this bill to the House and I ask the minister to examine very closely the case of the 633 stateless Vietnamese in the Philippines and look forward to his favourable response. (Time expired)

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (10.10 p.m.)—What a fine speech my colleague from Oxley just made. It shows you the talent that has come into the parliament for the Labor Party. The Migration Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 1999 is an omnibus bill that is designed to implement a number of initiatives and amendments to the main legislative instrument—the Migration Act of 1958. The proposed amendments cover a wide range of areas, including amendments to the temporary entry business sponsorship and transitional arrangements which reflect the creation of the new Migration Review Tribunal. The opposition supports the amendments, but these amendments really go no way to helping develop a proper immigration policy that will start to bring more suitable people to this country legally. We need to have a larger population, specifically directed, in order to help people in regional areas. The current process is so slow that those who have skills and family and want to start putting together their lives here are finding it very difficult. Information for migrants from immigration officers is always at a premium. Everything seems to be secret. People wanting to know even if their forms have been received and are at least in line to be processed cannot glean this bit of information. These people have also been terrorised into not seeking information because they have been told that it will affect their chances of entering the country and might slow down the process of their papers being passed through the processes.

Yes, we have to have checks and balances, but surely there must be a staged process that each application goes through and surely it would be fairer if, after each stage, that person could be informed that they have passed through that stage of the process. It would be much fairer and would be a more decent way of processing these applications. A person can wait for over 12 months to hear something and then be told no. Then they have to pay again to have the application reassessed if new information comes to light and, if they have to get—as has been the case in several I have come across—certification and qualifications from qualifying certification bodies, they have to pay for them again. That can be very expensive and it certainly does not encourage people to continue to want to migrate.

It was interesting to note that the Prime Minister has pushed his Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs to open the debate to bring in skilled migrants in greater numbers, but what I really see here are the dollar signs in the Prime Minister’s and minister’s eyes. According to the *Australian* this morning, recent research has shown that 1,000 skilled migrants would bring an additional $35 million to revenue over four years compared with family migration, which costs $1.5 million per thousand, and humanitarian migration, which costs $21.5 million per thousand. So, when the dollar signs beckon, this government’s policy is to forget about the existing families who have made their homes in Australia and have made a great contribution and not to consider humanitarian migration as part of that skilled migration, which I think is a major mistake.

Skilled migration means that a person and his or her family have to find a job and that their host has to employ them for at least four years, yet they are still not eligible for things like education and health support until they have been here for the mandatory two years. This automatically rules out other groups for greater access to migration programs, as most of the time they do not have that sort of money. For some time I have been trying to have state specific migration put into the system. While some states such as New South Wales are not keen to have more migrants at this stage—and one could understand their propositions—Tasmania and South Australia, as you will see statistically and as you will note from the comments of their state leaders, are more than keen to add to their populations, but they are finding obstacles all the way to those opportunities.

Why is it so hard? When some of the Kosovo refugees wanted to make their homes in Tasmania—those who were in the safe haven at Brighton in my electorate—they
were told categorically by this government that they were not welcome. Among that group there were a medical doctor, several academics, a well-known artist, many tradespersons of many descriptions, and a number of bright and cheery children who made many friends in our communities. Surely it would not have been too much of an effort to give them temporary resident visas until normal checks could be made to process the proper immigration applications. So here were some people who would choose to live in Tasmania and wanted to do that not being given that opportunity. I think that was a tragic and foolish policy pursued by the minister.

Just for the record, many have been forced to return to a totally unsatisfactory situation in Kosovo. Those that remain are tied up in camps and are not allowed to participate in their communities. In trying to trace friends that have returned, a number of young people in Tasmania have contacted my office to say their letters have been returned. I have made inquiries through the postal systems and the United Nations and I have found that letters go to Belgrade and no further. There is no mail or contact system set up in Kosovo. People are still living in tents and temporary accommodation, many ordinary services just do not exist and there does not appear to be any way of contacting those who have returned and have been scattered throughout that country. One shudders to think what the rest of the conditions are like there and about the difficulties that people are having. From time to time we read of those continuing difficulties, and of course those people are in the middle of their winter.

Tasmania needs people who are prepared to have a go, people who are prepared to work in all the sorts of areas that many of our brightest have left. If there were a program to encourage those who are prepared to work and be trained in the new areas in our state, that would be to everyone’s advantage. Additional people living in an area provide additional jobs: they need to buy or build a house, they need to put their children through schools and they need to buy groceries, clothes and transport, just like everybody else. Australia receives only 80,000 immigrants per year, coming into a population of 19 million. This figure has become fewer in recent years. We allowed in 150,000 immigrants a year after World War II, and that did not count all those British immigrants who came in as automatic citizens in that period.

Australia would benefit by a greater population. Labor has identified that a greater population would achieve higher economic growth rates in rebuilding rural areas, in improving the quality of life in rebuilt rural areas and in strengthening international relations. It would also assist us in affording the extra costs associated with an ageing population. Labor recognises that it is not a simple question, but this country cannot afford to have a falling population. Pressures from outside our shores are already here. Our regions are just dwindling away as what is left of the work force moves to where work can be found. The country is emptying. The economic situation in rural areas is chronic.

I understand that only 369 migrants came to Tasmania last year. That is a quarter of the number of those who came 10 years ago. We have been told by the federal minister that we could use a special program for sponsoring skilled migrants, but of the 2,000 migrant places filled under the scheme last year none came to Tasmania. When you link migrant intake to specific jobs, Tasmania is going to be left behind the eight ball. That is because of the time taken for people to come through and the fact that many of the jobs we would like those skilled migrants to undertake have either not yet been invented or need more people to set up, as the skills are not readily available in the state. We might be able to put on a few things like call centres, but we have many people looking for work, people who are quite capable of being trained in those sorts of jobs. What we want are new skills to help those with the ideas to develop the new jobs. I think the shadow minister for population has hit upon the right combination: we need to link skills, regional development and immigration. If we link skilled migration to regional skills shortages, there will be the potential to contribute to the local economy while breaking down some of the misconceptions that many people have about immigration.
Many wish to come to the state and start something up or redevelop an existing business, but not only do they have to provide up-front a large amount of cash to prove their bona fides but also they are stuck with the expenses of dealing with their children and spouses for the statutory period of time while awaiting permanent status. They are treated like overseas visitors and have to pay overseas rates for everything, including the university education of their children. Their health costs also have to be paid without the opportunity of tapping into our national health scheme. It can be very expensive for a business migrant putting all his capital into a business to then try to educate two or three children at university, while paying the same price as for an overseas student. That needs to be looked at, and we need to apply our inventiveness to overcome that problem. Frankly, it is putting a lot of people off the business migration scheme, and we need to rectify it. We need to have more user-friendly sorts of schemes to attract the people we would like to see settle in our country. So far, we are only stopping people that we do not want.

The amendments recommended to the House in this legislation really only tinker around the edges of the existing legislation. There is not much innovation or deep thinking from the minister or this government in the amendments. There is nothing concrete yet to assure me that increasing the numbers which are being bandied about at the moment in the skilled migration program will address the whole problem with migration in my state. I hope that, once the Joint Standing Committee on Migration has finished its deliberations on state-specific migration, the federal government will take some notice of the outcomes.

There is another matter I want to touch on. The member for Oxley, who preceded me in this debate, touched on several very important points. Recently, with him and others from the Joint Committee on Migration, I was able to visit some of the detention centres. I had read articles in which commentators had built these centres up as four-star accommodation set aside for those who had arrived illegally by boats. I can assure the Australian public that the facilities are not four star, but I can also assure them that, in humane terms, they are quite adequate for a short-term stay. The staff in these centres are very well trained and adequate, and I believe that they are doing an excellent job. They certainly look after the health and education of these detainees. There are many children among them. It is very sad to look at these children who have certainly come through a very stressful situation, as I agree the adults have.

I was very interested to discover that there are 21½ million people in the world who are of refugee status, are under threat or have nowhere to go. It is an enormous amount of people, and we take only 12,000 a year under the refugee program. I think the general public of Australia is very decent, and if we can explain to them that there are that many people out there who are looking for a genuine home we might be able to increase that 12,000 in the future. Every time there is a conflict in the Balkans, Afghanistan or Iraq, people are displaced—ordinary people who lose their homes, their opportunities and their educational facilities, who are usually separated from their family. Sometimes families are split up and contact is lost altogether. That is very sad, and those people should be given opportunities to improve their situation.

The other thing I want to mention tonight involves people who overstay their visas. Although we focus a lot on boat people and the illegal immigrants arriving on our coasts, just the other day I discovered that about 50,000 people overstay their visas. Most of those people come in by plane. The people receive a visa through the normal channels and then overstay that visa. There are about 50,000 people a year in Australia with that status. The 2,000 people who arrived by boat recently are really only small in number, but we seem to spend an enormous amount of money and effort on those 2,000 people compared with what we spend on the 50,000 people. That needs to be given some consideration as well.

Immigration in this country has been extensive in the postwar period, and I think it is time to look again at its role in building our
nation. In Tasmania, many immigrants post war and in the 50s and 60s helped build the infrastructure of our road and energy systems. They fitted into our community very well and have become great Tasmanians, as have their children and their children’s children. We can look with pleasure at improving opportunities in the future. The opposition does not have any objection to what is being proposed, and we would like to see some more useful programs put in place to try to attract more people to Australia so we can continue to develop the nation.

Debate interrupted.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr SPEAKER—Order! It being 10.30 p.m., I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Grape Growing Industry

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (10.30 p.m.)—I rise tonight to speak on a matter of concern to my electorate, to Western Australia and probably to Australia as a whole. It is a matter that goes to the heart of concerns of the grape growing industry principally in my electorate, but it is a matter that concerns others as well. AQIS is currently going through a process of examining the issue of the importation of table grapes to Australia. There is strong pressure coming from growers in California and from some retailers to export table grapes from California to Australia. The growers in the Swan Valley have raised some serious concerns about the process adopted by AQIS and question the rigour of the highly technical pest risk analysis.

Page 8 of AQIS’s own handbook states that the process is designed to ensure that the risks of entry, establishment and spread of pests and disease and their potential impacts are fully evaluated, that the risk is managed in a manner consistent with Australia’s very conservative approach to acceptance of pest and disease risk and that stakeholders are fully informed and satisfied with the process followed and understand the basis for the decision. It defines stakeholders in this handbook as including the applicant/proponent for a specific proposal and all interested parties.

Unfortunately, the reality is that the time for consultation for this process was very short. Agriculture WA had 60 days to consider the draft import risk analysis but it had only 11 days to consider the pest risk assessment. This assessment is a highly technical and critical part of the analysis. Agwest met with growers 30 days into the process and were very surprised to learn that none of the key grape or viticulture groups in Western Australia had received copies of the draft. I understand that AQIS was unable to provide a list of stakeholders to the WA growers, so the stakeholder consultation could not be checked against those organisations that should have been consulted with. This is a highly technical matter involving pests and diseases that could potentially destroy Western Australia’s outstanding reputation for near disease free table grapes. Responding to the report within the time frame represented a significant effort by technically competent people.

The future of the industry is at stake, and it would be reasonable to expect the early dissemination of both the import risk analysis and the pest risk analysis to all stakeholders. It is reasonable also to expect that the time for response should take into account that growers are at their peak period at this very moment, at a time when they are expected to respond to this report. It is absolutely imperative that there be application of technical rigour in this matter so that this issue can be properly examined and so that pests and diseases do not wipe out the crops of our growers and the livelihood of a large section of Australian industry. According to independent technical people, they do not believe that this rigour has been applied. I understand from my growers that AQIS has not been prepared to provide the scientific reasons behind the draft data so that technical rigour can be reasonably assured and measured.

I remind the House that the gross farm gate value of production of currants, raisins, wine and table grapes in Western Australia is around $29 million. In addition to that, value adding is very significant in the wine industry at about $50 million.

I have taken the opportunity to outline my growers’ concerns to the Secretary to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and I have also spoken to the minister,
because I think these are serious matters. My growers are not afraid of competition, but they have protected Western Australian industry from pests and diseases and they recognise just how important that is to their livelihood and also to Western Australia overall. I had a letter from the growers that outlined a number of issues. As I said, there are genuine concerns about the health of the viticultural industry if this process is not entered into properly. AQIS have set out the terms for going into this analysis and they seem to have just ignored the requirements set out in their own handbook. I think it is a serious matter and it is one I certainly wanted to draw to the attention of the House. I have appreciated the assistance of the Grape Growers Association in Western Australia and Agwest in being able to put this information—(Time expired)

Isaacs Electorate: Chicquita Reserve and Chelsea Heights Primary School

Mr WILTON (Isaacs) (10.35 p.m.)—The City of Kingston in my electorate of Isaacs has for the past 25 years leased from the Department of Defence a large area of public open space known as Chicquita Reserve. The department had indicated to the council towards the end of last year that it did not intend to renew the lease and that it may be disposed of under the asset disposal arrangements of the government for residential purposes. I have undertaken many initiatives, including a petition and meetings, to attempt to persuade the department and the government to at least allocate some of that land to retain it as public open space, given that it not only contains, for example, a scout hall but also provides an opportunity for residents to exercise in what is one of the only such open areas in the vicinity.

This is the only scout hall in the area and it supports 60 children, of whom some 30 per cent come from single parent families. A further 25 per cent in that scout group fit in the category of special needs. Scouting for many of these children, as the scout group writes to me, is the only positive activity which enhances their self-worth and gives them a real feeling of connection and belonging to the community. I do implore the government once again to reconsider selling all of this land and to reallocate some of it to the City of Kingston, which would retain it and administer it as much needed public open space not only for the scouts but also for the large population that surrounds the Chicquita Reserve.

On 7 February, I had cause to attend the centenary celebrations of the Chelsea Heights Primary School, ably led by Mr Danny Mulqueen, who is generally regarded by his peers as the best primary school principal around. This proved typically to be a great day, highlights of which included a student’s birthday party complete with massive cake, a presentation by the school choir which, throughout the ceremonies, sang a range of old standards such as Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag, It’s a Long Way to Tipperary and others. Indeed, there was a presentation of a portrait of Miss Kate Louisa Boardman, who was the first head teacher. That was presented by her great granddaughter, Julie Malseed, to grade 6 students Kelly Omond and Russel Pollard. There was also a joint cake cutting by Mr Robert Robertson, the oldest living ex-student of the fine Chelsea Heights Primary School, accompanied by Ashleigh Connell, who is the youngest student of this great school. It was wonderful for me to see school stalwarts such as Dimity Pollard shed a few tears at this wonderful occasion. I know I speak on behalf of the entire federal parliament when I wish the school well in its forthcoming centenary celebrations which will reach right across the year 2000.

Parkes Electorate: Flood Damage

Mr LAWLER (Parkes) (10.39 p.m.)—I rise this evening to draw the attention of the House to the disastrous situation in the north-west of New South Wales, which obviously is in the electorate of Parkes. About 10 days ago we had 10 inches of rain in that area from one lunchtime to another. Ten inches of rain in some of the coastal areas may not be anything to get excited about, but out in that area, where they are not used to receiving that much rain and where the landscape does not cope very well with that much, it finished up being an absolutely disastrous situation. I was unfortunate enough to fly over some of the district that was affected by the flooding
about a week ago and it was not a pretty sight. The big storm occurred north of Broken Hill and areas that were affected included areas around Tilpa, White Cliffs and north of Little Topar. In the 1970s they had similar flooding—not as great but similar. The situation faced by pastoralists today is somewhat different from that of the 1970s. In the 1970s they were not coming off about 10 years of drought. Most of them had a little bit of money in the bank and probably had spare fencing material lying around that could be used to fix some of the damage. But here we are in the 1990s and the lead-up to this unfortunate event did not give the pastoralists similar preparation.

I have spoken to many people out there, including the families Turnbull and Hams, who are amongst the people affected. When flying over there, we were unfortunate enough to be able to see one particular house that had water up to its roof. They had lost graders, aircraft, Nissans, Suzukis, front-end loaders and all sorts of machinery, as well as all the personal valuables in their house. As well as this, most of these people have lost hundreds of kilometres of fencing, and dams, which, although they could not afford it, in the preceding dry time they had cleaned out in preparation for their anticipated rain, but this new rain washed the entire dams away. One gentleman I was speaking to had had 15-foot high wings around the sides of his dam to catch whatever rainfall might come and those entire 15-foot high walls of earth are now completely gone. He also lost windmills, a fuel tank which contained about 3,000 litres of fuel and pumps. The water washed and smashed storage tanks and completely obliterated fencing. The fencing wire is completely unable to be reused. Some of the fence posts may be able to be resurrected, but the cost of fencing for someone with no available funds is quite unbelievable.

One of these people had recently bought a property next door. Previously, he had lived in the Brewarrina area and had moved up to New England but, with no disrespect to the member for New England, had found that that was not his lifestyle and had moved back to the area north and west of Wilcannia. He and his wife farmed 170,000 acres just by themselves. They found goats on logs and in trees. They do not know how many sheep they have lost. After sloshing around in the water up to their knees for several hours, they were not able to drive around the property to have a look at the extent of the damage because they had no fuel. On the bright side, they are very appreciative of eight or nine inmates from the correctional centre at Broken Hill who are there for a week and are looking forward to contributing something back to their community. In the past, these inmates have worked in national parks doing similar community work.

I congratulate the SES, the RLPBs, the police and private individuals who contributed to the rescue effort in that area, but there are some lessons to be learned, including that of communication, which I understand from speaking to some of these people has not been as effective as it was in the 1970s. It might be something that can be looked at, although obviously it is difficult to plan for every contingency. I would like to stress to the House that a very difficult time is being forced upon these people from the north-west of the state and your understanding of their position would be most appreciated.

Parliamentary Delegation to Tonga, Cook Islands and French Polynesia

Mr MOSSFIELD (Greenway) (10.44 p.m.)—Early today, a report was presented to this parliament on a parliamentary delegation to Tonga, the Cook Islands and the first Pacific Community conference in Tahiti. In this report, mention was made of the then Director-General of the Pacific Community, Dr Bob Dunn, who was due to complete his term as director-general in January this year. It is appropriate to acknowledge the work of Dr Dunn in his position as Director-General of the Pacific Community, which has its headquarters in Noumea, New Caledonia, and a community education centre in Suva covering agricultural and forestry programs.

The aim of the Pacific Community is to deliver social and economic development to the region through advisory and consultative arrangements. The organisation has a staff of approximately 80 with a budget of some $38,980,000, of which Australia contributes
one-third. Dr Dunn was asked to stand for the position of Director-General of the then South Pacific Commission by Gordon Bilney, the Minister for Development Cooperation and Pacific Island Affairs in 1995 and subsequently had his term renewed in October 1997 by the current government. By all reports Dr Dunn has, during his term of office, made a significant improvement to the management of the organisation. Under his leadership the Pacific Community has progressed considerably over the past four or five years and it has responded well to requests for improved performance and service.

In his final address to the conference, Bob listed one of the achievements of the Pacific Community under his leadership as beginning the development of a corporate plan which clearly defines the role of the organisation and the powers of the chief executive. The organisation’s previously top-heavy structure has disappeared, with a leaner top administration costing just 9.5 per cent of the year 2000 budget. Bob also noted the retention of the United States as a foundation member and the return of the United Kingdom to membership in 1997 as recognition by these major players of the significant contribution that the Pacific Community is making to the welfare of the Pacific nations.

The success of Dr Dunn in the position of Director-General of the Pacific Community relates, I feel sure, to the wider experience he obtained in the various administrative positions that he held prior to the appointment. Following an early career as leader of an agricultural research station and director of animal production research in New South Wales, Dr Dunn was given a number of missions to rescue from bankruptcy or reinvigorate public and commercial institutions, including the Australian Meat Research Committee and the Homebush abattoir. He worked as deputy director-general for the Department of Agriculture in New South Wales, an organisation that had a staff of over 5,000. He worked as a special adviser to AIDAB on rural development and research, and helped to set up Australia’s technical cooperation program in China. Dr Dunn subsequently became project director for Australia’s contribution to the Thai national agricultural research program. In 1983 Dr Dunn was appointed to lead Australia’s aid organisation, AIDAB. In this position he helped to shape the region’s development agenda and, during his term, supervised a doubling of Australia’s aid funding to the Pacific. Dr Dunn has made a major contribution to several Australian rural industries, and government and overseas aid organisations. I am happy to place on record the valuable work performed by this great Australian and I wish him well in his retirement.

Banking: Regional Services

FRAN BAILEY (McEwen) (10.48 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, those of us in this place who represent regional and rural areas have had to deal with the damage that the four major banks have inflicted on small communities when they have closed banking services. There is hardly a town left in my electorate now that has not been touched by either the closing of banking services or a reduction in those services. The latest towns to be affected in my electorate are Yea, Mansfield and Seymour, where the Bank of Melbourne has closed its banking premises and moved its services into local businesses.

Tonight, however, I want to tell the House about a community that over the past few years has lost its four banks; the town’s biggest employer, the Sanitarium Health Food Company factory; other businesses; and state government depots. I speak of the town of Warburton in the upper Yarra in my electorate. This is not a wealthy community, but it is a community made up of people who were determined that their town would survive and continue to grow. Two years ago I attended the first meeting called to see if Warburton could establish a community banking facility. I would have to say that those who attended that meeting were determined that they
would succeed. In a town of only 900 people that today largely depends on tourism and timber, that was a real challenge. But, with the determination of people like Don Vickers, Ian De La Rue, Bob Murray, Norm Orr, Margaret Hope, Dick Leith, Valda Street, Tim Mepstead and many other people who donated their time to help out at the information centre and helped in hundreds of ways, their commitment became a reality on Friday, 25 February this year.

It became a reality because these people and their supporters saw that establishing a community bank in Warburton was an opportunity for the town not just to retain its financial resources and for the community to share in the bank’s profits but to reignite community spirit. They have succeeded magnificently. On that Friday afternoon of the official opening, I had not seen such a large crowd in the main street of Warburton for a long time. There was a carnival atmosphere, with so many people and so many activities that the local police sergeant had to close off part of the street and direct the traffic. It was a great event.

The community achieved the establishment of the bank themselves. In a community of 900, over 300 members of the community have become shareholders in the company that will operate the bank. In fact, they raised $400,000 to start their bank, which represents a $100,000 oversubscription on the minimum they needed to raise as established capital. No other community bank has performed so well in its fundraising. In his speech at the opening, Don Vickers said:

There have been no strikes, no demonstrations, no deputations to governments, no factionalism, no arguments, no disagreements. We just went ahead and did it. Everybody has been on side, everybody has played a part. It has been a great triumph for community cooperation. I don’t deny that there have been times of doubt, a few moments when our goal seemed a long way off, and while there were one or two sceptics, most people wanted it to happen.

Success in establishing the venture has, of course, been due to all those local people who invested between $500 and $10,000 to provide the establishment capital. But that is not enough. There were many people who pledged their support during the feasibility study and since. I am very pleased to tell the House that on the Saturday morning after the opening there were 130 people lined up to support their local bank. This is how they will generate profit that can be ploughed back into the community, and that is the very essence of community banking.

Warburton is the 25th community branch of the Bendigo Bank to be opened, and I want to congratulate the Bendigo Bank for developing its concept of community banking and for putting those profits back into the community. I congratulate the Warburton Steering Committee, all those people who saw this initiative through, and in particular all the members of the Warburton community—a very poor community in some areas—who not only gave that pledge of their support during the feasibility study but backed it up with cold hard cash. They backed up their promise, and I really congratulate those people.

Goods and Services Tax: Medical Preparations

Mr Griffin (Bruce) (10.53 p.m.)—I would like to know just how sick a person has to be before they are eligible for GST-free medical preparations. Do they have to live with crusty oozing skin rashes? Do infant children have to be hospitalised for fear that their skin diseases will become staph infected? The government’s GST not only has given us new definitions for what food is and what it is not—cooked chicken, cooked cold chicken, cooked hot chicken, chicken-in-a-basket and so on—but also has attempted to redefine what actually constitutes sickness and health. The latest exercise in fitting round pegs into square holes can be found in the small print of A New Tax System (Goods and Services Tax) Act 1999, section 38.50(5), which states:

A supply of a drug or medicinal preparation is “GST free” if:

... ... ...

(b) the drug or medicinal preparation is of a kind the supply of which is declared by the Health Minister to be GST-free, by determination in writing.
On closer questioning the exemption policy by consumer groups, health professionals and organisations, the central factor on which exemptions depend is as follows:

An important principle in providing GST-free status [to drugs and medicinal preparations] is to ensure that the tax should not apply to the treatment of those who are sick.

To this end, decisions were made in May—by whom and by what process remains unclear—that ‘sunscreens, folate pills, condoms and personal lubricants should be GST free’. If you want to be pedantic, the aforementioned product categories prevent sickness rather than treat it. From a public health perspective, the decision to exempt these products is sound. But the rationale for these particular exemptions is inconsistent with the stated policy. On the other hand, for the hundreds of thousands of Australians who suffer from eczema and psoriasis, many of the medicated products that are available without prescription and that they depend on will not be exempted. Why? Using the government’s criteria for exemption, these people apparently are not sick. This will probably come as a surprise to people living with these often lifelong conditions which, at the very least, affect the quality of their lives and at worst can lead to hospitalisation.

I am sure it would come as a surprise to Wendy, who late last year appeared with her infant son on the real-life television program Kids’ Ward filmed at the Royal Children’s Hospital in Melbourne. Wendy is an eczema sufferer herself, and her son Bradley has unfortunately inherited the condition. I have a tape of that episode, if anyone would like to view it, showing Bradley in hospital and covered from the top of his head to his feet in a crusty, inflamed and, in parts, infected rash. As a result of his condition, Bradley was hospitalised for more than a week. I would challenge the Minister for Health and Aged Care to examine this tape and then tell Wendy her child is not sick.

I also have a letter from the mother of a 13½-year-old child who was diagnosed with eczema when only a few months old and has suffered with it nearly every day of her life since. Her letter reads:

Regimes to help control this problem are strict daily regimes of treatments, which involve steroid creams, moisturisers, wet dressings and medications. My daughter is at the stage where the steroid creams—

which will be GST free—
on some occasions exacerbate the problem rather than relieve it, so we have to rely on non-prescription items only.

I ask: how on earth are people expected to continue to be able to afford to look after these children with the added expenses of the GST?

Mr Brough interjecting—
Mr GRIFFIN—They were not on there. You do not understand it. You do not understand your own legislation.

Mr Brough interjecting—
Mr SPEAKER—The parliamentary secretary is ignoring the chair. The member for Bruce has the call.

Mr GRIFFIN—The letter goes on to say:

... on behalf of our family and other families with eczema, I would like you to exclude the GST from items listed—
including Polytar, which has not got wholesale sales tax, Hamilton’s Bath Oil, Egoderm and Pinetarsal—

that are our life support. I realise that eczema is not life threatening but what the child/adult has to go through threatens life quality. The added expenses may exclude people from being able to afford items needed for them to provide their child/adult with as comfortable life as possible. I plead with you to help us.

Again, how can the minister or any member of the government claim that this child is not sick and, under their own guidelines, does not deserve to have GST-free access to products that she may have to rely on for the rest of her life?

Today I tabled a petition of some 5,850 signatures which on top of another component from last year, brings the total to over 12,300, and more are still coming in. They are from all over Australia, from every state and every territory. The government cannot maintain, as the Treasurer and the minister have tried to say, that health is effectively GST free under this system. It is not as it is proposed at this stage. The government ought
to look at this issue very seriously. (Time expired)

Flood Mitigation Works

Mr ROSS CAMERON (Parramatta) (10.58 p.m.)—All of us have been moved by the recent footage we have seen of flooding both in Mozambique and, as the member for Parkes referred to, in Central New South Wales, North Queensland and further into Central Australia. It has been heart-rending to watch those helicopters pulling families out of tree-tops and the suffering of those rescued when finally taken back to land to circumstances filled with disease, absence of food and just great human suffering. We obviously do not have the same extent of human suffering as is being experienced in Mozambique, but I think all Australians have been affected by the plight of those in Central Australia and in the more remote parts of New South Wales and Queensland.

I note with satisfaction that in February the government announced $6 million in funding for regional New South Wales and Queensland for flood mitigation works. I want to draw the attention of the House to the fact that there are plenty of areas in metropolitan centres that are still flood affected. In my own electorate of Parramatta there are 400 houses in Wentworthville and Toongabbie that are flood affected. When you get the phone call from the mother who is literally in tears during a heavy downfall, worried about the home and her children’s safety, it cannot help but have an effect on you.

Mr SPEAKER—Order! It being 11 p.m., the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 11.00 p.m.

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Ms Macklin to present a bill for an act to amend the law in respect of the prohibition of discrimination against pregnant women in the workplace, and for related purposes.

Mr Sawford to move:

That this House acknowledges the historic links between public education and the development of democracy in Australia.

Mr Georgiou to move:

That this House recognises that:

1) the Parthenon marbles are part of a unique cultural treasure that is an intrinsic feature of the Parthenon in Greece;

2) the architectural and cultural integrity of the Parthenon continues to be compromised by the fact that the marbles cannot be viewed in close proximity to the Parthenon;

3) the Government of Greece has guaranteed the safe preservation of the Parthenon marbles should they be returned to Athens; and

4) every effort should be made by the United Kingdom to facilitate the return of these items of immense cultural value to the people of Greece.
QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The following answers to questions were circulated:

**Kakadu National Park**

(Question No. 903)

Ms Hall asked the Minister representing the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, upon notice, on 2 September 1999:

1. Have sites been identified and excised from Kakadu National Park; if so, what are the details.
2. Have negotiations been entered into with companies regarding excision of sites; if so, with whom.

Mr Truss—The Minister for the Environment and Heritage has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

1. There have been no sites identified and excised from Kakadu National Park. The Koongarra Project Area Act 1981 contemplates the possibility of changing the Koongarra lease boundaries, however this Act has not been proclaimed.
2. There have not, to my knowledge, been negotiations in recent times between the Government and companies regarding excision.

**England: Court Ruling**

(Question No. 945)

Mr Kerr asked the Attorney-General, upon notice, on 29 September 1999:

1. Has his attention been drawn to the case of R v Secretary of State for the Environment ex parte Greenwich LBC, The Times, 16 May 1989, in which the High Court (England) asserted jurisdiction to entertain a challenge by a local authority to Ministers who were using public funds to publicise what the applicant authority claimed was a misleading and political case for a controversial tax.
2. If so, has he taken steps to draw this decision to the attention of the (a) Prime Minister and (b) Auditor-General; if so, when.
3. Will he request the Australian Government Solicitor to produce one of its public Legal Briefing papers to address the issue of what limits apply to the expenditure of public funds for public as opposed to political purposes, if not, why not.

Mr Williams—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

1. I am aware of the decision.
2. I do not propose to draw the case to the attention of the Prime Minister or the Auditor-General, given that the decision is not a significant development in English law and not particularly relevant to Australian law.
3. I do not think this issue is of sufficient significance for me to request the Australian Government Solicitor to produce a Legal Briefing paper on the matter.

**Commonwealth Recognition Awards for Senior Australians: Promotions Budget**

(Question No. 948)

Mr Laurie Ferguson asked the Minister for Aged Care, upon notice, on 29 September 1999:

1. Was a budget devoted by her Department to the promotion of the Commonwealth Recognition Awards for Senior Australians; if so, what was the total sum allocated.
2. Were allocations devoted to promotional activities in individual electorates; if so, (a) which electorates received allocations and (b) how were the target electorates determined.
3. Were template advertisements prepared for use by Government Members; if so, what was the cost of doing so.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
(1) A budget totalling $17,024.60 was devoted to the development and distribution of an information kit to promote the Commonwealth Recognition Awards.

(2) No allocations were devoted to promotional activities in individual electorates.

(3) No template advertisements were prepared for use by Members.

**Australian Defence Force: Reserves**

(Question No. 0971)

Mr Price asked the Prime Minister, upon notice, on 12 October 1999:

Did he request a report into the Australian Defence Force Reserves; if so, (a) when did he request the report, (b) what prompted the request and (c) when will the report be finalised and published.

Mr Howard—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

Yes; (a) & (b) the need for a report was discussed over a number of months and the report was formally commissioned in October 1999 following discussions with relevant ministers and the Chief of Defence Force, and (c) a report is currently being prepared for consideration by ministers.

**Aboriginals: Delegation to the Queen**

(Question No. 1029)

Mr Latham asked the Prime Minister, upon notice, on 12 October 1999:

Did the Governor-General organise the visit of an Aboriginal delegation to the Queen of Australia in London during the course of the republic referendum campaign; if so, was the Governor-General acting on the advice of his ministers.

Mr Howard—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

As indicated publicly by the Governor-General’s office, the Governor-General facilitated arrangements for a delegation of indigenous leaders to have an audience with Her Majesty during a visit to London. The Governor-General has in the past facilitated audiences with Her Majesty. The Governor-General regarded the matter as one that was appropriate for the exercise of his own discretion.

**Job Networking: Performance Monitoring**

(Question No. 1031)

Mr Latham asked the Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business, upon notice, on 22 November 1999:

Does the Government monitor the performance of Job Network providers regarding the longevity of job placements, including how many persons placed into jobs are still in work 6 or 12 months later; if so, what do the results show.

Mr Reith—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

Yes. Under Intensive Assistance, the length of job placements is measured for the purpose of determining a provider’s incentive payment. Job Network members are paid incentive payments for placing job seekers into sustainable jobs. An interim outcome payment is made if a participant is still in eligible employment 13 weeks after being placed by a Job Network member and a final outcome payment is made if the participant is still in employment a further 13 weeks later - ie a total of 26 weeks.

In addition, the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business undertakes 2 post program monitoring survey of the participants of the Job Network services, which provides information on whether job seekers are in employment three months after completion of assistance.

Recent information available from surveys of Intensive Assistance participants shows that of those job seekers who were in Intensive Assistance and who had achieved an interim outcome, 77 per cent are in employment nine months after the original job placement.

While survey results are already available at this stage, due to the fact that the duration of a job seeker's participation can be up to two years, there are still a relatively small number of job seekers who have completed Intensive Assistance. We expect more comprehensive results after the employment services market has been in operation for several years and when more job seekers would have completed Intensive
Drugs: Strategies
(Question No. 1059)

Mr Price asked the Prime Minister, upon notice, on 24 November 1999:

(1) Further to his answer to a question without notice (Hansard, 22 November 1999, page 9153) concerning the diversion strategy for illicit drug users, what is the breakdown by State and by program of the $110 million the Commonwealth is making available.

(2) Will drug users be able to opt for a Naltrexone program rather than incarceration; if so, what sum of the $110 million will be to support the Naltrexone program.

(3) If no funds will be made available.

Mr Howard—I am advised that the answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) The following allocations by State and Territory for 1999/2000—2002/2003 will apply under the Tough on Drugs Diversion Program:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Allocation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>$31,873,203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>$22,979,179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>$19,511,052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>$11,135,529</td>
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<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>$9,167,666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>$3,808,163</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>$2,899,040</td>
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<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>$2,729,679</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commonwealth</td>
<td>$7,433,022</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(2) The Minister for Health and Aged Care will approve funding for specific assessment, education and treatment services through preferred providers following recommendations from the State and Territory Reference Groups which will oversee the implementation of the COAG Diversion Program.

Providers will be required to meet minimum national standards for qualifications and experience, and deliver services in line with accepted best practice. Providers prescribing Re Via tablets containing Naltrexone could be considered by the Reference Groups. Re Via tablets were approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration in January 1999 as part of comprehensive treatment programs for alcohol dependence and also as an adjunctive therapy in the maintenance of formerly opioid-dependent patients who have ceased the use of opioids. No funding proposals for specific providers have yet been received.

(3) See answer to Part (2).

Goods and Services: Profiteering
(Question No. 1062)

Mr Danby asked the Minister for Financial Services and Regulations, upon notice, on 25 November 1999:

Further to his answer to a question without notice (Hansard, 23 November 1999, page 9229) concerning prosecutions for GST profiteering, how many prosecutions have been launched against GST profiteers, apart from the instance he cited in his answer.

Mr Hockey—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

I have been advised that there have been no such prosecutions, apart from the case of Mr Ivanoff cited in my answer on 23 November 1999.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has been given strong powers to deter businesses from engaging in price exploitation under the new Part VB of the Trade Practices Act.
It also has powers under Part V of the Act to prevent misleading and deceptive conduct in relation to the impact of the New Tax System changes.

The ACCC has taken an active role in promoting compliance with the requirements of the Act through ongoing consultations with industry associations and individual businesses. As a result, it has not found it necessary to institute any proceedings at this stage. Nevertheless, the ACCC will continue to monitor prices closely during the transition to the New Tax System and will not hesitate to take immediate action against businesses that attempt to engage in price exploitation.

A summary of the ACCC’s price monitoring activities under the Act is provided in its first quarterly report under s. 75AZ, which I released earlier today.

Radio Australia: Transmission Range
(Question No. 1078)

Mr Murphy asked the Minister representing the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, upon notice, on 6 December 1999:

(1) Will the Minister provide funding for Radio National to broadcast with sufficient strength to enable reception and dissemination of information throughout the Indonesian archipelago.

(2) What is the current transmission range of Radio National throughout the Indonesian archipelago and South East Asian region.

Mr McGauran—The Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

For the record I assume the honourable member is actually referring to the broadcast of Radio Australia.

Radio Australia already provides twenty hours of broadcasts daily from Shepparton to East Indonesia and East Timor in English or Indonesian. These broadcasts include news, information and current affairs programming.

The ABC has also chosen to lease offshore transmission facilities to extend Radio Australia’s service coverage to Central and Western Indonesia, which are not accessible from the Shepparton site. Under this arrangement, Radio Australia is currently providing two hours of broadcasts daily to Central and Western Indonesia from leased Taiwanese facilities. I understand that the ABC is pursuing further leasing options.

Radio Australia has also been very successful in building links and organising relays of its programs throughout Asia. In the last twelve months Radio Australia negotiated rebroadcasting deals which put its programs onto 83 radio stations in 23 countries in the region. These arrangements include stations in Jakarta and Northern Sumatra which relay Radio Australia’s news live every day.

Australian Post Offices: Armed Robberies
(Question No. 1082)

Mr Kelvin Thomson asked the Minister representing the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, upon notice, on 7 December 1999:

(1) How many armed robberies have occurred at Australia Post outlets, including Post Offices in (a) 1995, (b) 1996, (c) 1997, (d) 1998 and (e) 1999.

(2) Has there been any increase in the number of armed robberies as a result of Australia Post increasingly taking on over the counter banking functions from the banks.

(3) What security measures has Australia Post installed to prevent itself from being the target of armed robberies.

Mr McGauran—The Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question, based on advice received from Australia Post:

(1) The following table shows the number of armed robberies that have occurred at Australia Post outlets from 1995-1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
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</table>
Corporate Post Offices  8  13  32  33  14  
Licensed Post Offices  63  109  129  175  102  
Totals  71  122  161  208  116  
(includes attempts*)  (2*)  (8*)  (15*)  (29*)  (11*)  

[Note - Licensed Post Offices represented approximately 75% of the total post office network during 1995-1999].

(2) No. The number of armed robberies committed at postal outlets in 1999 represents a 44% decrease on the 1998 figure.

(3) In an effort to prevent itself from being the target of armed robberies, Australia Post has:
- developed and is implementing a national risk assessment model endorsed by ASIO as "ahead of current industry standards";
- developed and implemented individual cash management plans for each outlet, which it continually reviews;
- developed and implemented an extensive cash collection service;
- developed and implemented staff training programs aimed at reducing the threat and dealing with incidents of armed robbery;
- conducted ongoing trials of new security equipment; and
- commenced a review of counter design and office fitout.

Centrelink: Disciplinary Action Costs
(1) How many person hours were spent in developing Centrelink’s case in the recent disciplinary action against Mr Shah Mustafa.
(2) What was the total cost to Centrelink of conducting the case.
(3) What sum was spent on (a) direct costs to Centrelink, (b) cost of counsel and (c) cost of legal aid for Mr Mustafa

Mr Leo McLeay asked the Minister representing the Minister for Family and Community Services, upon notice, on 7 December 1999:

(1) How many person hours were spent in developing Centrelink’s case in the recent disciplinary action against Mr Shah Mustafa.

(2) What was the total cost to Centrelink of conducting the case.

(3) What sum was spent on (a) direct costs to Centrelink, (b) cost of counsel and (c) cost of legal aid for Mr Mustafa

Mr Anthony—The Minister for Family and Community Services has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

(1) Centrelink does not keep records of person hours spent in management of individual employees. Centrelink followed standard APS policy and procedures in the discipline process involving Mr Shah Mustafa after complaints about his behaviour were received from staff and managers. An estimate of the time spent on this case is 245 person hours.

(2) The case has not yet concluded. An estimate of the costs to date is $35,245.

(3) (a) Estimated direct costs to Centrelink - $10,150. It should be noted that the costs that have been incurred by Centrelink were partly as a result of a discipline matter that had followed standard APS policy and procedures. The remainder of the costs are as a result of Mr Mustafa continuing to initiate action in other forums and consequently naming Centrelink as a respondent in these proceedings. Centrelink has had a legal obligation to respond to these matters that Mr Mustafa has commenced. Centrelink’s actions ceased at the time the Inquiry Officer completed his investigation, which was 12 April 1999, any action since that date Mr Mustafa has chosen to pursue.

(b) Cost of counsel - $19,385. As Mr Mustafa had legal representations from the very beginning of the discipline process it was necessary that Centrelink seek legal advice in order to respond to Mr Mustafa’s legal representatives.
(c) The Disciplinary Appeal Committee ordered that Centrelink pay part of Mr Mustafa’s legal costs of the appeal in the amount of $5710.

**Heritage Buildings: Repair Costs**

*(Question No. 1090)*

Mr Kerr asked the Minister representing the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, upon notice, on 8 December 1999:

1. What percentage of the buildings and structures recognised as forming part of Australia's built heritage require urgent repairs simply to ensure they remain structurally sound.
2. What would be the estimated or actual cost of the work.
4. Which are the ten buildings or structures with the greatest significance as part of Australia's built heritage which need urgent repairs to ensure their structural soundness, and what is the estimated cost of the work in each case.
5. What is the timetable for the necessary repairs for these buildings or structure.

Mr Truss—The Minister for the Environment and Heritage has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

1. Such comprehensive information is not available. However, the State of the Environment Environmental Indicator Report on Natural and Cultural Heritage (Environment Australia, 1996) at p21 notes that 'The de facto monitoring of condition of places in heritage registers, while neither systematic nor adequate, does give some indication of condition...'. A Pilot Audit of the Register of the National Estate conducted by the Australian Heritage Commission in June 1997 that examined a sample of historic environment places found that almost 12% had suffered a decline in their national estate values since nomination. The study did not provide comment on the urgency of repairs (connected to structural soundness) that might be required.

   In 69 of the 93 historic places (74%) in the sample there was no significant change recorded for their national estate values since nomination (to the Register of the National Estate). A number of places were found to have some changes in their values. Changes in condition and changes in the management of the place and/or its setting had affected the national estate values in some cases. Eleven of these places could be said to have suffered a decline in their values, while nine places had evidence that their values were being well maintained by improved management practices.’ (pp34-35) ‘The majority of places had not seen a significant change in their national estate values.’ (p38) (Biosis Research & du Cros & Associates June 1997 Pilot Audit of the National Estate. Report funded under National Estate Grants Program administered by the Australian Heritage Commission.)

2. An accurate and comprehensive survey of needs, which has not been conducted, is required to properly address this question.

3. In 1999-2000 the Commonwealth has allocated $4.1m (including administration costs) for a new Cultural Heritage Project Program that is primarily aimed at conservation works for built heritage. The 1999-2000 program was nationally advertised on 20 November 1999 inviting applications to be submitted by 14 January 2000. It is anticipated that a percentage of the applications seeking funding for conservation works will include urgent works. However at this stage this percentage is unknown.

   In addition, $32.045m is expected to be spent in 1999-2000 on heritage projects that were funded under the Federation Fund. A number of these projects include elements which relate to urgent conservation works. However it is not possible to specify what proportion of the total funding is being used for this specific purpose.

4. The Commonwealth does not hold or collect this information.

5. The Commonwealth does not hold or collect this information.

**Defence: Benyo and Bulimba Army Facilities**

*(Question No. 1103)*

Mr Bevis asked the Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business, upon notice, on 8 December 1999:
(1) During the 1998 negotiations and subsequent vote for an enterprise agreement involving Drake Personnel Ltd at Banyo and Bulimba Army facilities, were employees at Banyo asked to sign statements to indicate they voted yes in the secret ballot; if so, (a) who requested this, (b) to whom were the responses provided and (c) what action was taken by Drake or his Department to act on this information.

(2) Have staff at Bulimba subsequently been sacked to make way for staff from Banyo; if so, (a) who made the decision about which staff should go, (b) what selection criteria were used to select staff and (c) what role did Drake or his Department play in the selection process.

Mr Reith—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

My Department has advised me that it has had no involvement in the matters referred to by the honourable member.

I note the honourable member also addressed this question to the Minister for Defence. As it concerns matters relating to that portfolio, it is more appropriate for the Minister to reply on all other aspects of the question.

Forestry: Australian Standard
(Question No. 1109)

Mr Laurie Ferguson asked the Minister for Forestry and Conservation, upon notice, on 9 December 1999:

(1) Who are the members of the steering group for the development of the proposed Australian Forestry Standard.

(2) When was the steering group established and how many meetings have been held to date.

(3) What is the estimated date for the completion of the Standard.

(4) Will the Standard require the endorsement of any Ministerial Council(s) or similar official bodies; if so, which bodies.

Mr Tuckey—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) The Australian Forestry Standard Steering Committee comprises representatives of the Ministerial Council on Forestry, Fisheries and Aquaculture's Standing Committee on Forestry; the National Association of Forest Industries, Plantations Australia, Australian Forest Growers; the Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council’s Standing Committee on Conservation; and the Australian Council of Trade Unions. The members of the Steering Committee are: Dr Hans Drielsma (Chair), Forestry Tasmania, Dr Gary Dolman, Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry - Australia; Mr Gary King, State Forests of New South Wales, Mr Max Kitchell, Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment; Mr Warren Lang, National Association of Forest Industries; Mr Michael O'Connor, Construction, Forestry, Mining and Engineering Union, Mr Richard Stanton, Plantations Australia, Mr Peter Taylor, Private Forests Tasmania; and Mr Mike Ryan (Committee Secretary), Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry - Australia.

(2) The Steering Committee was formally established on 6 December 1999 when it met for the first time. To date there have been no additional meetings.

(3) I am advised that the Standard will take 12 months to develop and that this process will formally commence in January 2000 with a call for public submissions.

(4) The Standard will require the endorsement of the Ministerial Council on Forestry Fisheries and Aquaculture to ensure that it is consistent with Australia's forest policy framework for the management of forests for wood production.

Domestic Violence: Programs in Rural and Regional Australia
(Question No. 1120)

Ms O’Byrne asked the Minister representing the Minister for Family and Community Services, upon notice, on 9 December 1999:

(1) What programs is the Government implementing in regional and rural Australia for victims of domestic violence.
(2) Do the programs offered extend to services for children who are the victims of domestic violence, either personally or in a family sense.

(3) What domestic violence services currently exist for child victims of domestic violence in the electoral division of Bass.

(4) What measures has the Government implemented to audit service provision specifically for children who are the victims of domestic violence.

(5) What delays exist for children who have to access counselling services for domestic violence related counselling in each State.

Mr Anthony—The Minister for Family and Community Services has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

(1) Policy, programs and laws relating to domestic violence are chiefly the responsibility of the States and Territories. However, the Commonwealth Government is involved in various initiatives in this area. These include the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) which provides crisis accommodation and support for women and women with children escaping domestic violence around Australia including regional and remote Australia; and Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV), a Commonwealth Government initiative involving work with States/Territories and the community in establishing innovative domestic violence initiatives across Australia including regional and remote areas.

(2) In addition to the answer provided to (1) above, the Commonwealth Government is showing leadership through a number of initiatives focusing on children who are the victims of domestic violence in rural and remote areas through services and projects funded under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) and Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV) initiatives.

(3) The Department of Family and Community Services does not hold information about States/Territories domestic violence services in the electorate of Bass.

Preliminary 1998/99 SAAP data shows that the electorate of Bass has 9 of Tasmania’s 40 SAAP services, of which 4 target women and women with children escaping domestic violence. There are 2 agencies with multiple target groups (including DV victims), and one agency targeting youth. The Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs held a (PADV) Domestic Violence Prevention Workshop in 1999 for young people in the electorate of Bass, Ravenswood.

(4) The Department of Family and Community Services does not hold information on State/Territory audits of domestic violence services. The SAAP national data collection for children accompanying SAAP clients was undertaken over a 6-week period in 1998 and the findings are due for release in early 2000. The PADV Initiative is currently being evaluated.

(5) The Department of Family and Community Services does not hold information on domestic violence related to counselling in the States.