## CONTENTS

### CHAMBER HANSARD

**Committees**—
- Treaties Committee—Report .......................................................... 19373
- Economics, Finance and Public Administration Committee—Report .... 19377

**Private Members Business**—
- Australian Tourist Commission .......................................................... 19381

**Statements By Members**—
- Canberra Electorate: Tuggeranong Australian Rules Football ............ 19389
- Wansley, Mr Mike ............................................................................. 19389
- Gellibrand Electorate: Vietnamese Lions Club ..................................... 19389
- Tracey, Mr Brian .............................................................................. 19390
- Education: Inequity ........................................................................... 19390
- Eden-Monaro Electorate: Sporting Achievements ................................. 19390
- Refugees .............................................................................................. 19391
- Parkes Electorate: Paralympics ............................................................ 19391
- Fowler Electorate: Cabramatta Project ................................................. 19391
- Cook Electorate: Cronulla Surf Life Saving Club History .................... 19392
- Goods and Services Tax: Savings Bonus .............................................. 19392
- Petrie Electorate: Community Events .................................................. 19392

**Member Sworn** .................................................................................. 19393

**Ministerial Arrangements** ................................................................. 19393

**Questions Without Notice**—
- Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices ................................................. 19393
- Immigration: Woomera Centre ............................................................ 19395
- Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices ................................................. 19396
- Oil: Prices ............................................................................................ 19397
- Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices ................................................. 19398
- Budget Surplus .................................................................................... 19399
- Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices ................................................. 19400
- Tax Reform: Benefits .......................................................................... 19402
- Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices ................................................. 19402
- Small Business: Exports .................................................................... 19404
- Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices ................................................. 19405
- Work for the Dole: Alternative Policies ............................................... 19406
- Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices ................................................. 19407
- Native Title: Mineral Exploration ......................................................... 19408
- Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices ................................................. 19409
- Trade: Parallel Imports ....................................................................... 19410
- Goods and Services Tax: Pensions ....................................................... 19410
- Health: Vaccine Preventable Disease ................................................... 19411
- Older Australians: Deeming Arrangements ......................................... 19411
- Schools: Commonwealth Funding ....................................................... 19412

**Immigration: Woomera Centre ............................................................. 19414

**Questions To Mr Speaker**—
- Parliamentary Library ........................................................................ 19414
- Mandela, Mr Nelson ........................................................................... 19414
- Mandela, Mr Nelson ........................................................................... 19415
- Questions on Notice ............................................................................ 19415

**Petitions**—
- Environment: Cross-Border Contamination ....................................... 19416
CONTENTS—continued

Goods and Services Tax: Beer Prices .......................................................... 19416
Telecommunications: CSIRO Microwave Communications Tower .......... 19416
Car Industry: Tariffs .................................................................................. 19416
Centrelink: Staff Cuts .................................................................................. 19417
Kirkpatrick, Private John Simpson .............................................................. 19417
Kirkpatrick, Private John Simpson .............................................................. 19417
Telstra: Majority Public Ownership ............................................................ 19417
Genetically Modified Food: Labelling ........................................................ 19417
Health: Wallsend After-Hours Service ....................................................... 19418
Refugees: Kosovo ........................................................................................ 19418
Medicare: Ultrasound Rebates ................................................................. 19418
Goods and Services Tax: Feminine Sanitary Products ............................... 19418
Newcastle Customs House: Sale ............................................................... 19418
Tasmanian Legal Aid Commission: Funding .............................................. 19419
East Timor: Aid ........................................................................................... 19419
East Timor: Australian Defence Force ...................................................... 19419
Education: Funding .................................................................................... 19419
Television: Advertisement Volume ............................................................... 19419
Goods and Services Tax: Charitable Organisations .................................. 19419
Australian Broadcasting Corporation: Funding .......................................... 19419
Goods and Services Tax: Banking and Financial Sector ............................. 19420
Private Members Business—
Post Polio Syndrome .................................................................................. 19420
Health: Needle Supply and Exchange Programs ....................................... 19426
Grievance Debate—
Voyager Disaster: Legal Action .................................................................. 19433
Ballarat Electorate: Football ........................................................................ 19434
Ballarat Electorate: Community Initiative .................................................. 19434
Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices ....................................................... 19436
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority .................................................. 19438
Native Title .................................................................................................. 19438
HMAS Armidale .......................................................................................... 19440
Education: Funding .................................................................................... 19442
Veterans' Affairs Portfolio .......................................................................... 19444
Dawson Electorate: Achievements ............................................................... 19447
Second Reading ........................................................................................... 19449
Adjournment—
Ecob, Mr Ernest Charles ............................................................................ 19479
Greenway Electorate: Blacktown City Lions Club ..................................... 19479
Ballarat Electorate: Community Initiative .................................................. 19480
Social Welfare: Policy .................................................................................. 19481
Gilmore Electorate: Road Funding .............................................................. 19482
Gilmore Electorate: Ulladulla Public School .............................................. 19482
International Metallic Silhouette Shooting Championships ...................... 19483
Schools: Curriculum .................................................................................... 19483
Virotec International: Water Treatment ...................................................... 19484
AFL: Brownlow Medal ................................................................................ 19485
Notices ......................................................................................................... 19486
Questions On Notice—
Capital Gains Tax: Averaging Provisions—(Question No. 1560) .......... 19487
Centrelink: Outsourcing Contracts—(Question No. 1564) ................. 19487
Telstra: Share Allocations and Refunds—(Question No. 1565) ........... 19488
International Year of Older Persons: Funding—(Question No. 1582) .... 19488
Goods and Services Tax: Boarding School Accommodation—(Question No. 1609) ................................................................. 19489
Regional Australia Summit: Attendance by Senators and Members—
(Question No. 1612) ........................................................................ 19489
Job Network: Successful Contractors—(Question No. 1618) ............. 19490
Airports: Taxi Rank Feeder Fees—(Question No. 1631) .................... 19491
Colston, Former Senator: Movement Records—(Question No. 1654) .... 19491
Imports: Motor Vehicles—(Question No. 1665) ............................... 19492
Refugees: Applications—(Question No. 1695) ................................... 19494
Immigration: Parent Category—(Question No. 1696) ........................ 19496
Sydney Airport Noise Levy Scheme: Alleged Rorting—(Question No. 1698) ................................................................. 19497
Immigration: Spouse Visas—(Question No. 1703) ............................ 19497
Mr SPEAKER (Mr Neil Andrew) took the chair at 12.30 p.m., and read prayers.

COMMITTEES
Treaties Committee

Mr ANDREW THOMSON (Wentworth) (12.31 p.m.)—On behalf of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, I present the committee’s report No. 34 entitled Two treaties tabled on 6 June 2000, together with the minutes of proceedings and evidence received by the committee.

Ordered that the report be printed.

Mr ANDREW THOMSON—The report I have just presented contains the results of a review by the committee of two proposed treaty actions tabled in parliament on 7 March 2000. They are the proposed agreement with Spain on remunerated employment for dependants of personnel at diplomatic and consular missions; and proposed amendments to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. In this report we express our support for binding treaty action in relation to the agreement with Spain. This is the first agreement of its type reviewed by the committee and it represents a move by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade away from negotiation of similar agreements as memoranda of understanding, which do not have the status of a treaty. To date Australia has three agreements and 19 arrangements concerning the employment of dependants of diplomatic and consular personnel, and negotiations are underway for similar agreements or arrangements with about 14 other countries. We accept that it is very much in Australia’s interest to establish such reciprocal agreements because they positively impact on Australia’s diplomatic representation, in that they demonstrate a commitment from the government to helping its diplomatic staff to balance work and family responsibilities.

The second treaty action is a bit more noteworthy. It concerns the proposed amendments to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. During our investigation a number of issues arose that we considered would impact adversely on the operation of the reformed treaties process. While the committee notes that the proposed amendments are intended to ensure more regulation to address the impacts of international trade on the conservation and sustainable use of the species listed, in particular dugongs, we believe that the timing of their entry into force directly affects the ability of the treaties committee to effectively review these amendments.

There are three proposed amendments that have a direct bearing on Australia. The first of them places the Australian dugong on appendix I of the convention. This improves the international regulatory environment for controlling trade in the species. Although we must note that there is no international trade in Australian dugongs, it does purport to provide added protection for the dugong. Two further amendments that affect Australian flora are the removal of the rainbow plant and the Albany pitcher plant from appendix II of CITES. Neither of these species is considered to be in danger and so trade in the species is limited to any artificially propagated plants.

In the report we note that the opportunities for parliamentary and public consideration of these amendments would be enhanced considerably if the arrangements that we have established with the Minister for the Environment and Heritage were amended to allow for earlier notification of proposed amendments. We recommend changes in this area. The changes recognise the fact that the 90-day automatic entry into force mechanism, which is in this treaty and several other environmental treaties, leaves the committee a very short time in which it can review these amendments before they automatically enter into force. The parliamentary sitting pattern obviously accentuates this problem. Where there is likely to be a large degree of public interest in an amendment to a treaty that contains this sort of provision or concern over the reasons for an amendment, we think the responsible portfolio minister should explore ways of more effectively providing more relevant and timely information to the committee. This is particularly the case...
where Australia itself has made proposals for change. I commend the recommendations of the committee in seeking a review of treaties with this type of automatic entry into force mechanism and I look forward to exploring ways to improve our ability to more effectively meet the transparency objectives inherent in the reformed treaty making process. I commend the report to the House.

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (12.36 p.m.)—Report 34 of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties considered the dugong amendments to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. The committee deliberated on a paper proposing a course of action in relation to the committee’s review of amendments to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. It was felt by the committee that the evidence presented at our hearing was flawed but that, as the amendment was sponsored by Australia, supported by all dugong range states and adopted by the Conference of Parties, the amendment should proceed and that arrangements be put in place to advise the committee of proposed future amendments to the convention before they are agreed to by the Conference of Parties. It was felt that we did not really receive enough information and that we should emphasise the importance of witnesses providing as much relevant information as possible.

The fundamental purpose of the reformed treaty making process is to provide parliament, and through it the Australian community, with sufficient information to allow a judgment to be made about whether the international obligations being assumed by the government are in our national interests. When we looked at the evidence provided, it was clear that no compelling reason was given in the national interest analysis, nor in the hearing, as to why we should go along with their recommendations. There is no international trade in dugongs and the Australian population is quite healthy, and there was no real argument about them in the material we received. It was not until we gathered that a much stronger argument had been put in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, CITES, that it made sense to do something about it. It was apparently assumed by the drafters of the NIA and by the witnesses appearing before us that, as the amendments had been accepted by the Conference of Parties in Nairobi, there was no need to present to parliament a full range of arguments in support of the amendments. This usurps the role of the treaties committee, and it demonstrates an appalling lack of judgment amongst those who assume that we are just a rubber stamp, that we are not worth bothering about and that it will all happen automatically anyway.

I believe that I am not the only one to feel offended by this treatment of a parliamentary standing committee. Where Australia has submitted to treaty partners the proposals for amendments to a treaty that is being reviewed by the committee, these proposals should be made available for the committee’s review. I believe there is a need for a way to provide adequate information to the committee when amendments come into force automatically within three months of the Conference of Parties to the convention. Early notification of the proposed amendments would allow parliament and the community a more meaningful opportunity to comment than the current procedures allow. I really do think that there was evidence to indicate that the consultation procedures used by Environment Australia, the Australian Fisheries Management Authority and Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Australia were deficient in this instance, and this comes out clearly in our report. The recommendations that the committee has made are important, and I certainly hope the government will waste no time in having them implemented. As I said, the report indicates that we give support to the concept, but certainly information was not provided to the committee that should have been provided; there was a belief within those departments that that was okay, that it was only a parliamentary inquiry.

Mr HARDGRAVE (Moreton) (12.41 p.m.)—I am very pleased to join with the member for Wentworth and the member for Lyons in discussing this latest report from the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties and to pick up from where the member for
Lyons ended. It is over four years since the revised treaty making process began reviewing, through this place, Australia’s obligations under international treaties and the impact of them on Australians—which is a legitimate role for this parliament. It is just not good enough, then, for a department or an agency to simply presume, ‘Oh, it’s just a parliamentary report; we don’t need to pass on everything we know.’ It simply is not good enough. It is behaviour that is contemptuous of this place. It is certainly true to say—and we have said this in the report—that it is hard to feel very confident about the way in which Environment Australia have represented Australia’s interests in international fora if they believe that it is up to us to undertake private research to find out some of the things that they did not tell us and that, under the revised treaty making process, they were certainly obliged to tell us. They assumed that this matter was well understood, because of other witnesses appearing before us and because of the amendments, et cetera presented at the Conference of Parties in Nairobi, and they assumed that there was no need to present an explanation to parliament in documentary form. That is very poor work indeed, especially some four years after we began the revised process—it certainly was a false assumption. The fact that the Australian government sponsored two proposals to delete the rainbow plant and the Albany pitcher plant from appendix II was not even mentioned in the NIA. Forget about the details—the fact that that information was not put forward to this parliament so that proper processes were made easy for this committee is very sad in the very least. They did not put forward matters relating to dugongs and to whether or not the issues that were put before this committee were relevant to what was happening, and that in itself is very sad.

It was not until after the hearing, not until the committee undertook its own research on this issue, that we became aware of the Australian government’s submissions to CITES in support of its proposals. They were available from the CITES Internet site. Those proposals should have been brought before the committee, and therefore before the people of Australia, by Environment Australia. It was part of their obligations to this place and to the Australian people. This is quite in contrast to the experience of the committee—of which I was a member—during the last parliament in compiling its 10th report on similar amendments to CITES. In that instance, we felt quite satisfied that the information had been brought forward to us and we had no criticism of Environment Australia. As honourable members would realise, this committee, on behalf of the people of Australia, has never been afraid to put very strongly its criticism of, and disappointment in, the conduct of certain departments. In a whole of government approach, we are working our way through department after department to try to get a consistent dealing on this matter.

It really is vitally important that each department in this government, in this nation, understands that when we are making inquiries about treaties and their impact on the people of Australia we are doing so on behalf of the people of Australia and that the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties takes its subcommittee role in this place very seriously. I commend the work of so many of the members of the committee who managed to dig out a lot of things that Environment Australia had not brought to our notice.

Nevertheless, Mr Speaker, I am sure you would agree that 34 reports in a little over four years is a tremendous volume of work that has been done by the joint standing committee over the last two parliaments. I look forward to our ongoing commitment on behalf of the people of Australia to dig out those matters so that people feel very much comforted by the fact that when we do sign a treaty it is in the best interests of Australia and that there is some advancement for the people of Australia as well as some advancement for our reputation in the world.

Mrs DE-ANNE KELLY (Dawson) (12.45 p.m.)—I rise to speak today to support the honourable member for Wentworth, the chairman of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, and the other members of the committee. The chairman quite rightly pointed out that there has to be transparency and consultation with the parliament and the Australian people. I was very pleased when the Hon. Alexander Downer, the Minister for
Foreign Affairs, who oversees the committee, spoke in Brisbane and said there would be no more secret treaties.

Mr Hardgrave—Hear, hear!

Mrs DE-ANNE KELLY—Hear, hear to that. However, the way in which this particular amendment to the appendices to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora was presented to the committee is regrettable and the committee was in fact taken for granted. There was insufficient time to allow the committee to explore some of the claims made by Environment Australia. One thing I would like to draw to your attention, Mr Speaker, is the fact that there is really no detriment to Australia, or so it was said, in supporting this particular amendment. But the information that was supplied by Environment Australia during the consultation with them was so questionable that one could not be sure about the conclusion that they drew. They say, for instance, that there is no reason to uplift the status of dugongs because of any concern about Australian trade overseas. It was to facilitate enforcement in overseas countries, particularly Indonesia. Asked by a member of the committee, 'But surely that is a matter for the Indonesians, not for us,' the response from Environment Australia was, 'To an extent it is, in that it is up to them to enforce the treaty.' But the resolution under the convention which outlines where a species should be listed on the appendices has a section which says there is good reason for not split-listing a population.

The reality is that during our consultation with Environment Australia we were very disappointed at the quality of information that they brought to bear and also their sometimes evasive responses. They were asked the following:

If we agree to this treaty, what negative implications will that have for our management of our own dugong population?

The response from Environment Australia was:

None. It will not change how they are managed at all.

That may be so. On the other hand, though, bearing in mind the quality of information that was submitted to the committee in support of the amendment, one really could not be sure of that. I felt that Environment Australia took the committee for granted. Their expert in fact admitted during his evidence that he was not an expert on dugongs at all. I thought this was very poor. He said at one stage, 'I am not really qualified to answer the question.' Why did Environment Australia send someone who was not qualified to answer the question?

The reality is, as our chairman has quite rightly said, that there is a great expectation of the treaties committee and of the government that the minister's promise—that there would be no secret treaties but the parliament would be fully involved and the Australian people given the opportunity to have their say, to be listened to and to have their views acted upon—would be kept. I am disappointed that in the handling of this particular amendment the committee was taken for granted, that in fact, no matter what the outcome, there would not have been a proper opportunity to examine the arguments put forward by Environment Australia. However, the committee has supported the amendment and I wish to support our chairman, who I must say is making a great effort on behalf of the government to ensure that the treaties committee fulfils the promise made by the minister to the Australian people.

Mr SPEAKER—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) (12.50 p.m.)—I move:

That the House take note of the report.

I seek leave to continue my remarks when the debate is resumed.

Leave granted.

Mr 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 for Wentworth will have leave to
continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

Economics, Finance and Public Administration Committee

Report

Mr HAWKER (Wannon) (12.50 p.m.)—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration, I present the report of the committee entitled Numbers on the run: review of the ANAO report No. 37 1998-99 on the management of tax file numbers, together with the minutes of proceedings.

Ordered that the report be printed.

Mr HAWKER—This report of the House economics committee examines the administration of the tax file number system. The tax file number system plays a major role across government in ensuring good public administration. In 1997-98 it contributed to the collection of over $110 billion in tax revenue, helped to regulate a superannuation industry with annual contributions of approximately $30 billion and supported the distribution of about $50 billion in Commonwealth benefit payments.

Ensuring the ongoing integrity of the taxation system must be a high priority, hence the importance of this inquiry and why the findings are so significant. In short, we found major shortcomings in the tax file number system, including problems with data and systems quality and a failure by the Australian Taxation Office to strategically manage the system. The impression that emerged from this inquiry is of an organisation that is reactive rather than proactive, where emphasis is placed on strategies that return a short-term financial gain rather than ensuring the long-term integrity of the system and where management philosophies and planning are not well translated throughout the organisation.

Our report reinforces the significant problems identified in the Auditor-General’s 1999 performance audit of the tax file number system. It adds to 15 years of Auditor-General and parliamentary inquiries that have found shortcomings in the quality of the ATO’s data and systems. While the Taxation Office has acknowledged these problems, we do not believe that it has taken sufficient action to address these ongoing concerns. For example, the committee does not consider that the ATO has adequately explained the reasons for the large number of duplicate and excess tax file numbers, including the extra 65,000 potential duplicates found during this inquiry. This is the third report on tax file numbers in 10 months to hear evidence of the fraudulent use of tax file numbers, particularly as part of illegal work by non-residents. We do not consider that the ATO has ruled out the possibility that these known surplus tax file numbers are being used to commit fraud.

The committee also found ATO data and systems management lacking when we compared it to other government agencies. For example, in relation to archiving, Centrelink, the Australian Electoral Commission and the Health Insurance Commission all archive inactive electronic records as part of their data management system—a practice which the Audit Office considers to be better practice records management—yet the ATO claims this is too expensive and so has not archived since the late 1980s.

Again, in the area of recording deceased taxpayers the ATO’s performance falls significantly behind other agencies. In this case, the Australian Electoral Commission has made use of information on recorded deaths since the turn of the century—that is, over 100 years ago—and Centrelink has been matching against fact of death data for several years. The ATO acknowledged the benefits that using this information will have for the quality of tax file number data and have been receiving fact of death data since April 1999. Yet 12 months later, in April this year, they had still not managed to make the systems changes required to actually use this information. The committee has made a series of detailed recommendations in the areas of data and systems quality, data matchings and TFN registration. The primary aim of these recommendations is to ensure the ongoing integrity of the tax file number system. If implemented, these recommendations will improve the quality of information on which decisions are based, assist in reducing fraud and will also contribute to improving tax-
payer service. The recommendations will also have benefits for the other areas of government administration that rely on the tax file number system.

Our report also highlights significant potential for fraud against the tax system, and more broadly. In particular, we looked at the growing problems of illegal work by non-residents and identity fraud. The current taxation system provides significant incentive and opportunity for fraud by non-residents. The tax system provides a range of concessions and penalties to non-residents in different circumstances. Non-residents pay higher tax than residents on income earned from work and yet pay a lower rate of tax on investments such as bank accounts. (Extension of time granted)

The system is further complicated by the fact that there is no close correlation between visa types issued, tax treatment and the need to obtain a tax file number. Added to this is a system of self-assessment where the check on residency status is a box that is ticked on a tax return and anecdotal evidence that tax file numbers are available from youth hostels and for sale.

The problems of identity fraud and theft in relation to the use of tax file numbers and more broadly was raised by financial institutions, government agencies, including law enforcement agencies, and individuals. Anecdotal evidence suggested that false documents can easily be obtained and used. The committee heard that one in four frauds reported to the Australian Federal Police involve the assumption of false identities. We also heard about a pilot study conducted by Westpac and the New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages that found that 13 per cent of birth certificates presented to the bank were false.

Our recommendations in both of these areas emphasise the need for the Australian Taxation Office to get a better handle on the extent of the problem. They also focus on the need for cooperation across the relevant agencies in each area in order to manage these known and emerging risks. This report draws on advice and opinions from a range of members of the public and experts who participated in the inquiry. I thank these people for their contributions.

I also thank the Australian National Audit Office for the significant support and advice they provided during this inquiry. The professionalism and cooperation of the Audit Office officers involved, in particular Richard Mackey, reflects well on their organisation. The committee appreciates the cooperation that we received from the Australian Taxation Office during the inquiry. I would like to thank all the members of the committee, in particular the Deputy Chair, the member for Chisholm, Anna Burke, and the committee secretariat—Melissa Stutsel, Ann Przybylski and the secretary of the committee, Bev Forbes—for their professional support, as always, with the inquiry.

The ongoing quality and coverage of the tax file number system is important for the administration of taxation, income support, superannuation and employment. The importance of the tax file number system for Commonwealth administration must be properly reflected in decision making. The Australian Taxation Office must ensure that the tax file number system is one that treats people fairly and is one in which government and the community can have confidence. I commend the report to the House.

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (12.59 p.m.)—Tax file numbers were first introduced on 1 November 1998. They were first introduced for new applicants for social security payments, then to all new taxpayers. Considering that the TFN was introduced as a less controversial alternative for the smooth administration of the tax system than the Australia card, it is disappointing that the administration of tax file numbers has been so fraught with problems. One has to ask why there are currently 3.2 million more tax file numbers than there are Australian citizens; 185,000 potentially duplicated tax records for individuals; 62 per cent of deceased clients still having active TFN numbers; and 40 per cent of deregistered companies still with an active record. Some of these can be explained away by business requirements for TFNs and trusts and other such instruments, but I do not think this can account for the 3.2 million extra TFNs out there.
The basic finding of the ANAO report, which forms the basis of the review by the Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration, is that the Australian tax office have treated the TFN system as a 10th order priority. The ATO appear to lurch from one project to the next, never able or, it seems, willing to ensure that the fundamentals of the taxation base are correct—that is, that the TFN system is sound. Basic principles of data quality have not been observed or even attempted to be put in place by the ATO. There is no automatic matching of fact of death data against TFNs, a routine process carried out by the Australian Electoral Commission and Centrelink for many years; no cross-referencing against deregistered businesses; there is not even a basic process to cross-reference names to see if a person has already applied for a TFN. The committee heard evidence from numerous tax agents who advised that it is easy to get a duplicate tax file number but it is very difficult to get rid of one if you have more than you want. There were examples given of students in particular who get a summer job, get a TFN and then just forget about it and then years later they go to university and get another TFN for HECS purposes. There is no actual match to see whether that individual has a duplicate TFN. These basic data matching processes which could easily be carried out by the ATO are given no priority.

I appreciate, as I am sure do all members of the committee, that the ATO have been extremely busy with the introduction of the GST and will have ongoing issues to deal with, particularly with the introduction of the new business tax measures. But unless the fundamentals of the taxation system are solid then how can we build on this base? Sufficient resources must be made available to the ATO to ensure all aspects of their work can be carried out. There is no use throwing scores of people at GST implementation and at the same time bleeding the rest of the organisation of staff. The ATO have dropped from 17,005 operative staff at June 1997 to 13,656 operative staff at June 1999. This has led to such issues as the cleansing of TFN data becoming a low priority—in fact, a non-existent priority—and we cannot afford it to continue. The ATO recognised this. The ANAO report states:

The ANAO found that, notwithstanding these initiatives, there is room for improvement in the quality of TFN information. The ATO was advised during the audit, through its own internal research, that the quality of its main databases was probably somewhere between unsatisfactory and average. The less than satisfactory integrity of the ATO’s TFN information is generally acknowledged throughout the ATO. The shortcomings in the data quality have limited the effectiveness of information matching by the ATO. This limitation has a financial cost that neither the ANAO nor the ATO was able to estimate on the basis of available information.

So we do not know what it is actually costing us in lost revenue because the numbers just do not match up. This is particularly a concern when you take into consideration that we now have a new number out there for collecting revenue—the ABN. This, too, is being administered by the ATO and seems to have been designed without any idea about how to ensure the validity or integrity of the numbers. Ted Evans on behalf of Treasury answered these questions on notice put by the committee:

Can you outline the relationship between the TFN and the ABN? In particular, how significant is a TFN when applying for an ABN; and how significant is a TFN to the working of an ABN. The answer was:

From a policy perspective there is no relationship between the TFN and the ABN. The two numbers are designed for different purposes. The TFN is the identification number used by the Australian Taxation Office for the purposes of the income tax system. The ABN was introduced to reduce the number of separate registrations ...

In designing the ABN it was not envisaged that the TFN would have any role in determining entitlement to an ABN.

This is quite surprising considering that when you fill out an ABN request form you have to cite your TFN, so there is a bit of a mismatch there. (Extension of time granted) With indulgence, and very quickly, I would like to put on the record that there are concerns about this matter. I would like to commend the report to the House because, for a change, it has a lot of tangible outcomes. I would particularly like to thank the three
Ms GAMBARO (Petrie) (1.04 p.m.)—I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak today on the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration investigation of administrative, policy and client service issues of the TFN and its report Numbers on the run. This wide-ranging report looked at all aspects of the TFN system in Australia. I was delighted to serve on such an important inquiry with my colleagues, under the excellent stewardship of the member for Wannon, David Hawker, as well as members of the opposition. I am certain that this report and its recommendations will assist in the maintenance of the integrity of Australia’s tax file number system.

The committee was initially established to investigate systemic failings in ATO data and systems quality and the failure of the ATO to take a long-term view of these issues. As the inquiry progressed, the committee heard evidence that confirmed the presence of anomalies in the tax file number system. Some of you may also be aware of the Auditor-General’s statement that ‘$500 million worth of tax is not being collected because of tax file number weaknesses’. The recommendations before us here today are the findings of the audit report, and the issues raised by witnesses during this inquiry go to the heart of ATO operations. These findings included evidence of 3.2 million more tax file numbers in Australia than people; large numbers of duplicate and inactive TFNs; the failure of the ATO to make full use of available information; and deficient computer systems in some areas.

I am very pleased that this inquiry has taken a long-term approach to these issues within the ATO in reference to tax file numbers rather than continuing on with the band-aid approach of fixing only immediate or short-term problems. The integrity and the workability of our tax file number system have implications for all Australian individuals, businesses or organisations receiving federal government assistance or paying taxes. It is important that the tax file number system is fair so that those who operate honestly are not penalised by those who deliberately defraud the Commonwealth through manipulation of the tax file number system. With the implementation of the new tax system, there have also been concerns that the tax file number system would have an impact on the Australian business number. Recommendation 9 deals with this issue, suggesting that mechanisms be put in place to ensure the relevant data is captured and able to be used for data matching purposes. In an age when information technology systems are highly advanced, the potential for improving data matching services is enormous. Most of the recommendations in the report deal with internal ATO procedures, but it is also important that the public understands the system to ensure full compliance.

I am very pleased that this report includes a recommendation that the ATO review the format and content of tax file numbers and advice, particularly to tax file number applicants. As I mentioned previously, this is a wide-ranging report. One of the most important issues is the tax treatment and work rights of non-residents. The issue of fraudulent use and the sale of tax file numbers issued to non-residents was raised with the committee in the course of the inquiry. I applaud the inclusion of recommendation 14, which allows for the introduction of systemic data matching between the Australian Taxation Office and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs.

In a submission presented to the inquiry, evidence was given on ways in which non-residents currently avoid paying tax. They do it by self-assessment, where they tick the resident box on their tax assessment form and pay tax at the resident rate. Students, particularly international students staying less than six months, are treated as non-residents. By applying for a seven-month visa, the student is treated as a long-stay student and is taxed at resident rates. Also, some visitors who arrive on business activity visas apply for a protection visa once they are in Australia, which means that the ATO classifies those individuals as residents and they get working entitlements with resident rates of taxation for up to three years re-
regardless of the outcome of their application or whether they get to stay in Australia.

Recommendation 6.9 makes suggestions for broader use of data matching to improve the quality of data held on the database and to encourage better compliance and, most importantly, to reduce fraud as outlined in the cases above. This is not a big brother approach. It is an intelligent and systemic use of existing data to ensure that the integrity of the tax file number system is improved and maintained.

I fully support the recommendations of the report and congratulate the members of the House of Representatives standing committee. I would also like to thank the members of the hardworking secretariat, including Bev Forbes and the other inquiry staff, Melissa and Anna. I commend the report to the House.

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

Mr HAWKER (Wannon) (1.09 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 adjourned. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting. The member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS BUSINESS

Australian Tourist Commission

Mr BAIRD (Cook) (1.10 p.m.)—I move:
That this House:
(1) commends the Australian Tourist Commission (ATC) in its recognition of the benefit of the Sydney Olympic and Paralympic Games for Australian tourism and for the $12 million four year program it has put in place to maximise the tourist potential of Australia; and
(2) notes the ATC’s plans to:
(a) generate additional publicity for Australia by hosting additional media;
(b) work with major Olympic sponsors on joint promotional programs;
(c) assist with National Olympic Committees’ official tour operators; and
(d) work with international broadcasters who have rights to the Games.

It is my pleasure to rise in support of this motion today. There is no doubt that the Australian Tourist Commission deserve immense congratulations for their promotion of Australia as a result of Australia winning the right to host the 2000 Olympic Games. As former minister for Sydney’s Olympic bid in the lead-up to 1993, I had the opportunity to visit several games as part of the Olympic bid process and subsequently I went to the Atlanta Games. There is no doubt that Australia has capitalised on winning the games more than any other country in recent times that has won the games, using the games to its advantage to win new economic benefits and international investment, particularly through the promotion of Australia as a major tourist destination.

According to Australian Tourist Commission figures, Australia is now the No. 1 preferred destination by a whole range of countries in Europe, North America and Asia. According to Travel Leisure magazine and Conde Nast, the most widely read tourist magazine in the world, Sydney is the No. 1 preferred tourist destination in the world. Much of the credit can be given to the Australian Tourist Commission for their promotion of the games, the enormous benefits of visiting Australia and what Australia has to offer as a tourist destination.

Particular credit goes to the Minister for Sport and Tourism, Jackie Kelly, the head of the Australian Tourist Commission, Mr John Morse, its deputy, Bill Caulderwood, and the other people who are working on the Olympic strategy. It certainly has added depth to our strategy of attracting new investment and visitors to Australia. The ATC has been working on a $12 million strategy which will maximise over the coming four years the number of visitors coming here and our hosting of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. The ATC have harnessed the expo-
sure potential of the games in a way that has surpassed that of other past host nations. Not only will Sydney benefit, but also as part of the government’s regional tourism strategy many of the benefits will flow to regional Australia.

The ATC continues to perform very well in promoting Australia internationally as the world’s best tourism experience. The ATC promotes Australia internationally as the world’s best tourist destination through the Brand Australia campaign and a comprehensive Olympic Games strategy. The organisation works with the tourism industry in a cooperative marketing program. I am aware that the industry is highly complimentary of the role that the Australian Tourist Commission has played in promoting Sydney and the whole of Australia as an Olympic destination and one that that people can visit over subsequent years.

The ATC has worked with the official sponsors, which was an important starting point in the development of promotion, in providing footage of Australia and scenes of key tourism destinations. It is estimated that this is worth over $300 million, taking into account all the Olympic sponsors involved. Australia will be the focus of saturation coverage for much of September, which will flow on through all of the various sponsors—an enormous amount of coverage. This has been done by working in tandem with the Olympic partners to develop mutual benefits from linking the Tourism Brand with their products and services.

The Australian Tourist Commission will also work with other major Olympic sponsors on joint promotions. For example, the ATC is working with Visa on an ‘Australia prefers Visa’ campaign that is worth some $30 million over three years. The Australian Tourist Commission promotions with multinationals include Visa, Bank of America, Kodak, McDonald’s, Southcorp Wines and Lindemans, Adidas, Air New Zealand and Ansett. It is not surprising that friends I have in the United States and also contacts in Europe are mentioning the maximum coverage that Australia is receiving to date. Much of that has originated in the offices of the ATC.

There are both accredited and non-accredited media coming to the games—some 15,000 media people altogether. As one could see in Atlanta, if left to their own devices, non-accredited media often follow stories which are not always complimentary to the city and the country hosting the games. On this particular occasion the Australian Tourist Commission has taken the initiative to invite the non-accredited media to use the facilities of the ATC to promote Australia, and in so doing has provided a whole range of facilities for them. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade will work with them as well, and has done much to assist the non-accredited media.

The accredited media have provided enormous focus on the games. I have noted reports in recent media publications that NBC alone will be bringing close to 1,000 personnel to Sydney for the games. As is the case with other Olympic broadcasters, NBC have had television crewmen around Australia for many months before the games, getting footages from all parts of Australia to broadcast when the games are on so that people visiting the games have an appreciation not only of the city of Sydney but also of the richness of Australia as a tourism destination.

The media coverage will add depth to Australia’s image by looking at every aspect of our lifestyle and culture, including travel, the arts, business, entertainment and cuisine. The program will bring around 2,000 international broadcast and print media to Australia in 1999-2000 under the visiting journalist program. For instance, the ATC hosted around 50 international journalists at Uluru for the arrival of the Olympic torch in Australia. As a result, Australia featured in all continents, including live crosses to BBC, and across the Atlantic to the USA, on all prime time TV news. The ATC has also worked closely with NBC’s Today show to develop a number of Australian segments which were broadcast during their One year to the Olympics show.

The national Olympic committees in all countries have worked with the ATC to promote the sale of tickets and have used the various print ads from Australia and some of
the television footage as part of their own promotions of the tickets in Australia. The impact is that visitor numbers so far this year are up by 9.2 per cent, which is a wonderful start to the year. There has been strong growth in visitor numbers from Korea, up by 57.6 per cent; China, up by 29.5 per cent; Singapore, up by 13.4 per cent; Malaysia, up by 14.2 per cent; New Zealand, up by 7.3 per cent; UK, up by 14.8 per cent; Europe, other than the UK, up by 15.1 per cent; and USA, up by 10.8 per cent. New Zealand maintained its position as the No. 1 source of visitors, followed by Japan and the UK. The number of visitors from Japan increased by 5.4 per cent to June 2000. That is encouraging as we have previously seen some downturn in the number of visitors from that country. It reflects the growing economic strength in these countries.

The Tourism Forecasting Council indicated in their report *The Olympic effect—a report on the potential tourism impacts of the Sydney 2000 Games* that, over the three weeks of the games, 111,000 inbound visitors are expected to visit Sydney, with a small spin-off to the other Olympic football hosting cities. The official estimates are that, from 1998-2004, the total increase in the number of Olympic related visitors will be 1.6 million. If we look at the average spend by each visitor of just on $4,000, this is of enormous assistance to our balance of payments and to the growth of Australia’s economy. It injects around $6.1 billion into the Australian economy, which is obviously very significant.

The Sydney 2000 Games have put Australia and Sydney on the map. The fact that such a large number of journalists are visiting Australia in the lead-up to the games will reap significant rewards for us in the tourism spin-off. During the games, key tourism people from around the world are coming here at the invitation of the Australian Tourist Commission. While other major Olympic sponsors are also doing this, it is important to recognise the significant role of the ATC in encouraging the non-accredited media to come here and in providing them with a range of experiences; in the accredited media’s magnificent coverage, through NBC, in Europe and throughout the world; and, finally, in bringing out the key tourism operators from around the world to enjoy Sydney at its best during the Olympic experience. It is a great credit to the ATC and a great credit to its managing director, John Morse, and to the Minister for Sport and Tourism, Jackie Kelly.

Mrs Hull—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Mr GIBBONS (Bendigo) (1.20 p.m.)—This motion commends the Australian Tourist Commission for its $12 million investment over four years, mainly for working with the media to maximise the tourist potential of Australia but partly aimed at the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games tourists visiting here over the next few weeks and months. I am sure that the member for Cook would agree that, whilst the $12 million is welcomed, that figure could easily be doubled and still barely scratch the surface of the enormous potential that this country represents for tourists from overseas as well as from within our own states. In fact, the national tourism industry estimate that regional tourism is the backbone of the nation’s $70 billion tourism industry. I note that the Australian Tourist Commission has a budget of $91.6 million for this financial year, which hardly seems adequate when you are talking about a $70 billion industry throughout Australia. Indeed, the industry recognise that. I will quote from the press release they released earlier this month:

Regional destinations have a unique appeal which prompts overseas visitors to our shores and Australian residents to explore their backyard, injecting billions into this economy. In turn, tourism delivers economic benefits to regional areas by assisting to diversify their economies and strengthen existing industries which benefit from tourism spending and development.

TCA [the industry] estimates tourism provides 1.2 million jobs for Australians of which regional tourism comprises around 430,000. Results of the Bureau of Tourism Research study, Rural Tourism in Australia, the Visitor’s Perspective found rural Australia attracts 68 per cent of domestic travellers and 28 per cent of international visitors.
In dollar terms, inbound visitors spent about $1.1 billion in rural areas in 1998, of a total of $7.8 billion in Australia, while domestic tourists spent $22 billion in regions of a total $43 billion expenditure—that is over 50 per cent of domestic tourism spend.

This latest BTR data and other regional tourism studies confirm rural Australia is a major drawcard for tourists, attracting over two-thirds of domestic travellers and nearly a third of the inbound market.

We have some magnificent tourism areas throughout Australia, and I am pleased to say that the central Victorian region is up there with the best of them. In fact, in my area of Bendigo alone, almost 1.2 million visitors have visited this financial year. The goldfields region in central Victoria is a prime example, with many outstanding features that are unique as well as interesting. The city of Bendigo owes its existence to the gold rushes during the mid-19th century. The first gold find, in 1851, resulted in thousands of diggers flocking to the region to search for the yellow metal. Some 22 million ounces of gold were taken from the Bendigo fields up until the time mining ceased in 1951, making Bendigo one of the richest goldfields in the world. In this first year of the new millennium, a new underground mining venture is under way in Bendigo. Bendigo Mining is digging a large incline under the city, down to beyond 1,500 metres. From that depth, the company estimates another 10 million ounces should be available to be recovered. I wish Bendigo Mining every success with this important project.

As a result of Bendigo’s golden heritage, the city boasts a variety of magnificent heritage buildings, which are just one of the city’s major attractions. In addition to these fine buildings, Bendigo offers a diverse range of tourism activities, including superb visual and performing arts facilities. The award winning Golden Dragon Museum and Chinese Gardens offer a look into the city’s heritage from the gold mining era, and in particular the role of the Chinese community, which dates back to the 1850s. This museum is unique and offers exhibits not seen anywhere else in the world. The Central Debo rah Mine offers visitors a look at the way gold was mined in the early years and is able to take visitors underground to see first-hand the equipment used by the old-timers.

Central Victoria offers visitors a great range of exhibitions and tourism attractions in places like Castlemaine; Dunolly; Wedderburn; the historic town of Maldon—which is Australia’s first notable town—right up to the Elmore area, where the Campaspe Run Rural Discovery Centre shows the heritage of the grain and wool industries; the Sunshine harvester; early Australian rural life; and local Koori culture. You can even go on a camel trek through the picturesque Sedgwick Valley and sample a camel-chino coffee, surrounded by native ironbark box trees at the Sedgwick Camel Farm. I am not sure which part of the camel makes up this coffee, but I am told it is very good. I have not availed myself of it yet, but I am looking forward to that experience in the future.

Mrs HULL (Riverina) (1.25 p.m.)—I am honoured to stand here in the House today and join the member for Cook in his support for an industry that I am passionate about and that I have been very much involved in promoting.

It has been a long time coming, but the Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games are upon us, and the preparations are being finalised for the staging of the biggest sporting event in the world. While the Olympic Games concentrate on sporting achievements, they are also the largest multicultural gathering in the world. The games allow participants and spectators alike to explore and experience cultures different from their own, and they will also boost Australia’s economy in an extraordinary way. We want to make sure that athletes, spectators and all visitors enjoy their stay in Australia. This is called tourism, and this is the industry that has kept much of rural and regional Australia alive during a very severe economic downturn. Australia’s tourism authorities, led by the ATC—including my very good friends working in Tourism New South Wales—the valuable board members led by chief executive officer Tony Thrilwell, the Sydney Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the other state and territory tourism bodies, have all formed a powerful partnership which will ensure the whole of
Australia reaps the benefits of the Olympic opportunity.

The member for Cook, who is renowned for his splendid and dedicated work within the tourism industry, has drawn our attention to the ATC’s $12 million four-year strategy and the fact that this is unique in modern Olympic Games history. No other host country has ever taken the opportunity to use the games to promote the whole country’s tourism image, including that of rural and regional tourism. No other host country has worked so closely with the Olympic partners to develop mutual benefits from linking tourism with their products and services, including the food and produce of rural and regional areas of Australia like my electorate of Riverina. No other host has developed such an extensive media relations program so as to ensure that every possible publicity opportunity is maximised, including exposure of rural and regional tourism.

The ATC’s Olympic strategy aims to add depth and dimension to Australia’s international image and to build long-term economic and social benefits for Australia through increased export earnings and employment and visitor arrivals and visitor dispersal. The Sydney Olympic and Paralympic Games are the single biggest promotional opportunity Australia has ever had. The games will take Australia to places it could never have hoped—let alone afford—to reach and promote itself in. The Olympic Games create a tourism opportunity that will undoubtedly be the beginning of an increase in tourism to our shores. The 2000 Games are expected to attract a television viewing audience of over 3.5 billion people around the globe, making it the most watched event in history. However, the world will be watching not only the athletes but also the wonders of New South Wales and Australia. The world will switch its television on to the games 20 billion times during the 17 days of competition, and the Sydney Olympic Games web site is expecting seven billion hits. SOCOG and the ATC will ensure that this increased profile translates into Australia being recognised as the most exciting and desirable destination of the 21st century, as we all know that it is.

The ATC recognises the importance of promoting strategic alliances with key traditional and non-traditional stakeholders both in Australia and overseas. This has meant developing relationships with the wider Olympic and Paralympic family and stakeholders such as broadcast rights holders, sponsors, licensees and official tour operators. A key element of that strategy, the visiting journalists program, has already generated more than $1 billion in publicity. The ATC will play a key role in the Sydney media centre facility which has been designed for visiting print and broadcast media during the Sydney Games. The ATC’s unique expertise in dealing with the international media will be invaluable to the centre’s operations. The centre, which is funded by the federal and New South Wales governments, will provide services to inform media about Australia’s achievements, attractions, business and investment opportunities, tourism, lifestyle, arts and culture. The benefits to Australia and to our tourism industry of hosting the 2000 Olympic Games cannot be denied, and the ATC’s role in selling our wares to the world should be recognised. I am proud to support the member for Cook in offering our congratulations. Well done to a great team.

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (1.30 p.m.)—I rise today to commend the Australian Tourist Commission for its recognition of the importance of the Sydney Olympic Games and Paralympic Games for Australian tourism. The Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games are probably the most important events that Australia will host as a nation for many decades. It is a great opportunity for athletes in Australia to showcase their talents and bring home medals and memories that will last for generations. But the games are also about the opportunity for Australians to showcase our wonderful country and all the diversity it has to offer. This international event will be our one big chance to put Australia on the tourism map in an unprecedented manner. Opportunity is always knocking but, unless someone answers the call, the opportunity is lost. Fortunately the ATC has answered the call and has taken on the huge task of promoting Australian tourism to the tune of $12 million over four
years. This is a significant investment that will reap benefits for many Australians for many years to come.

The games in just a few short weeks will culminate years of hard work by many people into one window of opportunity. As a result of the games, Australia is expected to have increased tourism for several years after the games actually take place. The raw statistics of the effects of the games are that 111,000 direct international visitors and about 1.6 million Olympic induced visitors will come to this country between 1997 and 2004, a staggering 15,000 accredited media will be attending the games and, as we heard before, an estimated 3.5 billion people will be watching worldwide on their TV screens. The economic boost to Australia will be around $6.1 billion. These fantastic figures are about what we will be doing for our country and what the rest of the world will be doing for our economy.

The ATC has embarked on a partnership with Tourism New South Wales, the Sydney Convention Centre and visitors bureau, and other state and territory governments to ensure that all of Australia reaps the benefits of the games. The ATC has committed more than just dollars; it has also committed extensively to the process of ensuring that every opportunity is taken to highlight Australia. The ATC’s Olympic Strategy aims to add depth and dimension to Australia’s international image and to build on long-term economic and social benefits through increased earnings, employment, visitor arrivals and visitor dispersal. The campaign involves maximising promotion for Australia overseas through a media relations program. This will involve media visits, new technology and a range of other efforts. It will also involve new partnerships with Olympic organisations and creating trade marketing programs for the tourism industry.

This opportunity will be about getting the message right, and part of that message will be the ‘Australia 2000—fun and games’ campaign. This campaign is centred on the obvious themes of fun and games and that there is no better time to visit Australia than in 2000. It also promotes that it is business as usual for accommodation, pricing, travel and so on. Australia is prepared for the influx of visitors. The ATC has also invested in a website, specifically for those wanting to look and try before they buy. This wonderful site whets the appetite and provides all the necessary information for would-be travellers. But behind the hype there must also be solid, hands-on material and promotion through more traditional methods to capture every market. The ATC has made a few firsts—one being the Sydney Olympics Broadcasting Organisation going live to over one million viewers and listeners in Singapore just recently.

But the bottom line for many Australians is that these initiatives will create jobs and provide new avenues for growth. The effect of tourism is that, for every 10 per cent increase in visitors to Australia, about 30,000 new jobs are created. With the games expected to attract 1.6 million visitors and $6.1 billion in foreign exchange earnings, this translates to an increase in visitors of about seven per cent between 2000 and 2004. So we are talking about, roughly, 21,000 new jobs being created—more than a worthy result for an investment of only $3 million a year for four years to maximise that potential. I congratulate the ATC for its efforts and good work and wish them, the Australian tourism industry and all our Olympians the very best for the 2000 Olympic Games. I hope they do very well. I hope that our athletes bring home a few gold, silver and bronze medals, and that the tourism industry in Australia thrives.

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (1.35 p.m.)—I too would like to support the member for Cook, a former New South Wales Minister for Tourism, in recognising the work done by the Australian Tourist Commission. My first experience with the ATC was when I was a tourism officer in the Southern Highlands and President of the Council for Tourism Associations of New South Wales. While I admired the commission’s work, I did not really get involved with them to a large degree. It was not until I became Regional Manager of Tourism New South Wales that I saw what they actually did in terms of promoting to the world this beautiful country of ours as a desirable destination. It is still a
difficult job to persuade a local tourism operator to promote Australia to overseas tourists. Because many have not travelled extensively themselves, they are not aware of the mystique of Australia for people from other countries and just how magnificent our Australian natural heritage is when compared with that of most other developed countries. Certainly one of the most common comments you hear from people on tour overseas or on their return is that Australia is the best place on earth. It is very important that we showcase our country to overseas media so they may familiarise themselves with the benefits of coming to Australia rather than going somewhere else. I congratulate the ATC in doing so, particularly now in conjunction with the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

In that context, I also congratulate the ATC for showing its commitment and foresight in working with the major Olympic sponsors and broadcasters to encourage their appetite for Australia. The spin-off opportunities that exist for regional and local tourism bodies to extend overseas visitors’ tours into outlying areas are there for the taking, and we should make every effort to share them with the ATC. Our job is to tempt overseas visitors to look beyond the capital cities and before Uluru. Regional bodies need to be developing interesting or even quirky tours for overseas visitors to take from their capital city hotels. We know that once we tempt them and other interstate visitors to our regions, such as my electorate of Gilmore, we will have them hooked. They will need to talk about our region to their friends and they will want to come back for more.

In this, small tourism operators should feel no anxiety about the reach of larger tourism companies. In fact, they need to be supportive of them, for it is only the larger companies that can afford to promote themselves overseas and, in doing so, they promote well beyond their reach. Many people like what they see in advertisements but do not have the big dollars to pay for those larger resorts. That is when they contact their travel agent or get onto the Internet to look for something in the same area where they can do their own thing for a lower price. And to have increased media presence is an absolute opportunity not to be missed.

An example of people doing their own thing was when the Baillieu family disposed of Milton Park homestead and the surrounding land in the Southern Highlands of New South Wales. The group that bought it turned the place into a magnificent country resort. The gardens surrounding the old Baillieu family home are amongst the top 10 gardens in the world. When the time came for the grand opening of the new Milton Park resort, many people wanted to come and see the inside of the home and its gardens, but a lot of people could not afford to stay at the resort itself. I know that my guesthouse and many others were absolutely chock-a-block that weekend, thanks to the extensive advertising undertaken by the Australian Tourist Commission and the Milton Park resort.

This is where the smaller and regional operators can gain from the expertise of the ATC. It is their role to develop leads with potential visitors from overseas that need to be followed up by rural and local tourism groups and individual operators. The Olympic and Paralympic Games in Sydney provide us with a perfect opportunity to do this. For instance, Shoalhaven, in my electorate, is already the number one destination outside the Sydney metropolitan area for weekend and family holidays. But the Shoalhaven Tourism Board have not simply rested on their laurels. Recently, they joined with similar groups in the Southern Highlands and Kiama to promote a series of car trips around my electorate of Gilmore, encompassing the best of each of the local government areas.

Therefore, the proactive work of the ATC in providing opportunities for expanding tourism business, particularly in rural and regional Australia, is vital because—let’s face it—that is where the action is. ATC have the manpower, the contacts, the runs on the board and the expertise. They are funded by this government in conjunction with private enterprise, and they are working very hard to help the industry grow and to provide secure jobs for our children. Finally, may I reminisce for a moment and say that some of my happiest times were in tourism—certainly when the member for Cook was min-
Notes the ATC’s plans to: ... work with major Olympic sponsors on joint promotional programs; I refer to the official web site of the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games where I note that Westpac Banking Corporation is listed as a ‘Paralympic partner’. I further note from the site that: Westpac Banking Corporation is proud to be a major sponsor of the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games.

And, further: As part of the sponsorship, Westpac will provide banking services with branches at ATMs at Sydney Olympic Park including the Paralympics Village. I note that, within a few kilometres of the Olympic Village, Westpac has closed its branches permanently in Homebush, Concord, Croydon Park and Haberfield, which are in my electorate of Lowe.

In doing so, Westpac has demonstrated its selectivity in wishing to be seen as a good corporate citizen. It further wishes to parade itself with the glitterati, whilst ignoring the real people in the electorate—the aged, the frail and those who are denied by limited transport easy access to their money due to the closure of these four branches in my electorate. I am particularly reminded of the impact of these closures on those people with disabilities—those very people Westpac wishes to be seen as supporting through the Sydney Paralympic Games, in particular the Paraplegic and Quadriplegic Association of New South Wales, which is just up the road in Homebush.

When are these corporations going to learn that the proof of their commitment to a particular charitable work is a direct function of what action they take in their core businesses? It is pharisaic to provide money for the Paralympics on the one hand, whilst fundamentally denying people with physical disabilities access to their money. Yet this is exactly what Westpac has done to people with disabilities in my area. Lowe is a constituency of 130,000 persons. So incensed is the community about the heavy loss of banking infrastructure in the area that local community leaders such as Ashfield councillor Emma Brookes Maher and the President of the Homebush Main Street Committee, Marlene Doran, have rallied the community to establish a community bank in my electorate. The response to this initiative is very strong, with a heavy initial uptake from the community of pledges and prospective shareholdings.

Let this be a reminder to the corporations. They must not and cannot assume that a glib sponsorship will win hearts and minds when they are making money while denying their traditional customer base the most basic access to their funds. I make it my pledge to my constituency that I will stand against these corporations which cynically pretend to take a serious interest in the affairs of the marginalised, the weak or the infirm, whilst the most telling conduct of their core business activity demonstrates the utmost contempt for those people by denying them basic services that they have become dependent on.

The recent closure of four branches compels me to conclude that Westpac are totally uninterested in the weak, the infirm and all those with disabilities. They are not interested in providing a broad based distribution of banking services. Westpac are comprehensively consumed with their thirst for profit at any cost, going where the biggest bucks are. They are interested in gaining the most profile and the highest egotistical needs. I will continue to champion the cause against the corporations as they play games of their own. Westpac get a gold medal for pomposity but do not even qualify for compassion and good corporate citizenship. The community in the immediate vicinity of the Olympic Village, the electorate of Lowe broadly and the municipal areas of Strathfield, Concord and Burwood—all within my
electorate—have been decimated by the Westpac flat earth policy of bank branch closures. This is why we must show no clemency to or thank Westpac for their cynical sponsorship, whilst they show such contempt for the very people they purport to assist.

Mr SPEAKER—Order! The time allotted for the debate has expired. The debate is therefore adjourned and the resumption of debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Canberra Electorate: Tuggeranong
Australian Rules Football

Ms ELLIS (Canberra) (1.44 p.m.)—Junior Aussie Rules is doing very well in the ACT, particularly in the Tuggeranong Valley in my electorate. At the weekend we saw a great end to a year of hard work and dedication by many when the Tuggeranong Junior Football Club, the Bulldogs, won the premiership flag in three grades: the under-15s, coached by Barry McEhinney, with captain Justin Searle; the under-16s, coached by Greg Narrier, with captain Adrian Enright; and the under-18s, coached by Ray Ghirardello, with captain Graham Enright. To Jim Cullen, president of the club, his committee, and the team of volunteers, coaches, trainers, parents and every one of the players in the club, well done. I must add that the Tuggeranong Lions under-12s also won their grade flag.

It could be said that Tuggeranong is a great nursery of up-and-coming footballers. We proudly have Hamill of Carlton and Blumfield of Essendon, both ex-Tuggeranong junior players, representing the area at top level AFL competition. Sport is a wonderful recreation for young people. Congratulations to everyone involved, particularly when you see the joy on the faces of those kids as they win a premiership flag.

Wansley, Mr Mike

Mr JULL (Fadden) (1.45 p.m.)—I prefix my statement today by stating that I am a founding member of the Australia-Thailand Parliamentary Friendship Group and have had associations with Thailand for the past 28 years. It gives me no joy to raise this issue, but it must be raised.

I wish to express my profound concern at the long delays in litigation in relation to the murder of an Australian citizen, Mike Wansley. This occurred on 10 March 1999. Eight bullets were fired at him in a crowded van; no other person in that van was hit. More than a year after arrests were made, we have a most unsatisfactory situation where there has been deferral after deferral of relevant court cases and the cancellation of the listed hearing of the case. While I acknowledge that there will always be lengthy cross-examinations in cases such as this, the additional and controversial application for bail for Thai citizen Pradit and the rejection of the appeal against the granting of that bail also raises concerns. My appeal to the Thai authorities is to complete the processes regarding this case as soon as possible.

The House will recall that Mr Wansley was working as a consultant in the reconstruction of a sugar mill when he was assassinated. That mill was in central Thailand. Safety and security issues for individuals and the fairness of the legal system are paramount in terms of business and investment, especially in a country such as Thailand. No one would want to see our relationship jeopardised by the circumstances I have related to the House today.

Gellibrand Electorate: Vietnamese Lions Club

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand) (1.47 p.m.)—I would like to send briefly today a congratulatory message to a new Lions Club that was chartered on Saturday in my electorate. It is the Vietnamese Lions Club. It is a very important thing to recognise in this House. It will join the existing clubs of Footscray, Sunshine and Williamstown in my electorate. It has specifically been set up to be a bilingual club, which is going to be much more accessible to the Vietnamese community. They intend to undertake many of the good works that the other Lions clubs and service clubs in the area undertake, but I believe that it is the first of its kind in Australia. I would like to add my congratulations to President Vinh and the Lions Club for this initiative.
Tracey, Mr Brian

Mr HARDGRAVE (Moreton) (1.47 p.m.)—I rise to praise the conduct of the students, staff and parents of Yeronga State High School. Two weeks ago, the school principal of 13 years, Brian Tracey, died at his desk at work for his beloved school. Brian Tracey cared about the students under his control as well as providing the professional and personal support needed by teaching colleagues and parents alike. He was a quiet and conservative man, deeply religious in his sense of concern for others. Brian earned the respect of many students, quite a feat given that he was dealing with those in the midst of their rebellious years. He always had a twinkle in his eye and a charm that he used to appease and reason.

Brian’s wife, Lorraine, and children, Jane and Gerard, shared their grief with hundreds who mourned in a very public way. Hundreds of students bothered to find their way across town from Yeronga to Kenmore to pay their respects. It was respect they offered back for the respect Brian Tracey always displayed to them. Many students paid the tribute of him being ‘a good bloke’.

The funeral and the school based memorial service gave everyone a chance to reflect on the legacy of Brian Tracey. Hundreds of people wanted to say thanks for his life and the way he put others first. Brian Tracey’s legacy is the thousands of good citizens who proudly call themselves former students of Yeronga State High School.

Education: Inequity

Mr SAWFORD (Port Adelaide) (1.49 p.m.)—The Adelaide Advertiser has recently published a series of articles on inequity in education. The Advertiser also published, on 16 August, a number of letters to the editor on this subject. Three astute letters were written amongst the several published. One was written by Mr Jim Wilson, a former secondary teacher, of Dulwich, who correctly identified the real negative turning point in public secondary education in Australia in the 1970s. He referred, of course, to the well-intentioned, yet wrong-headed, creation of the single comprehensive public secondary school. The second letter was written by Mr Jack Cross of Adelaide. He is a well-known and highly respected educationalist in South Australia. Mr Cross made the very valid point that Australia is developing a two-tiered education system, and that holds grave dangers for everyone in our society. The third letter was written by Julie Bertossa, the education vice-president of the University of South Australia Student Association, who correctly identified the folly and the inequity of access in the abandonment of campuses in the western, and formerly the northern, suburbs of Adelaide.

The educational bureaucrats, administrators and politicians involved in the former closure of Salisbury and the proposed closure of Underdale ought to be exposed. The education writer for the Advertiser, Thea Williams, should apply herself to this investigative task and publish her findings.

Eden-Monaro Electorate: Sporting Achievements

Mr NAIRN (Eden-Monaro) (1.50 p.m.)—I would like to congratulate people for a number of marvellous sporting victories across Eden-Monaro recently. On the weekend the Queanbeyan Tigers came out victors by 53 points in the Canberra AFL grand final against Eastlake at Football Park. The result was Queanbeyan’s third successive premiership win, equalling the efforts of the legendary 1939, 1940 and 1941 Tigers sides. I congratulate all the players, especially the captain, Mark Armstrong, on a brilliant game.

In rugby union, Cooma’s Red Devils were also victors, with all three teams winning their division matches. The first grade side won their grand final match against Crookwell in Cooma, whilst the two junior sides won their matches in Canberra.

The Merimbula Marlins took out this year’s Sapphire Coast Australian Rules Football premiership. Coach Graham McBain has worked hard with all the younger players who have moved up through the junior ranks—and the older players Gary Skelton, Luke Ryan and Drew Kenny. Also
at the weekend, the Bega rugby league group 16 team won their grand final; the Batemans Bay rugby league group 7 team made it to their grand final but were beaten by Shoalhaven. The previous weekend, the Batemans Bay Boars won the far south coast rugby union grand final in a match against the Braidwood Redbacks. The fiery game will be remembered as one of the best for years; it was closely fought out, with a final score of 15 to 13. I can imagine it would have been a tough day for the referee, Denis Bruce.

I would like to congratulate all Eden-Monaro’s sporting teams, whatever place they gained, in this Australia’s great sporting year. Congratulations to all.

Refugees

Dr THEOPHANIOUS (Calwell) (1.52 p.m.)—I want to refer to the plight of refugees in Australia. In the last week I have attended three events which highlight increasing community concern with respect to refugees. The first was a meeting of the National Council of Churches in Melbourne. They had a refugee evening at which a number of speakers expressed their concern about what is happening with refugee policy in Australia, especially the plight of those on a three-year temporary visa. The National Council of Churches has resolved to continue their campaign in relation to this matter. The second was the annual general meeting of the Refugee Council of Australia. At this meeting a number of resolutions were carried in relation to increasing isolation of Australia in the international community with respect to its treatment of refugees and what is happening in refugee policy. The third was a rally on Saturday organised by Amnesty International. That rally, outside the Maribyrnong Detention Centre, highlighted the plight of people some of whom had been held in detention for a very long period of time. I appeal once again to the government to recognise that there is increasing concern about these matters in the Australian community and that the government ought to do something about it. (Time expired.)

Parkes Electorate: Paralympics

Mr LAWLER (Parkes) (1.53 p.m.)—I have spoken in this House before about the efforts of communities in my electorate to assist people in the Paralympics. Tibbooburra was one community and members of the Lachlan Shire were another, but there are many other people working to ensure the success of the Paralympics. Jenny Quigley in Warren and her band of helpers are one such group. When it looked like the Paralympians were going to have to raise $3,000 each to compete in the Paralympics, the call went out for communities to raise a contribution of $3,000. These ladies in Warren had a luncheon catered for by the Warren Central School hospitality class and used a combined art display to raise this money. Numbers in Warren were challenged because of a funeral but, still, 140 people turned up. Raffle prizes were generously donated by local Warren hairdressers, Franklins, and Reading Cinemas. The money raised in Warren equates to about $1 per head of population in Warren—that is, 3,142. Jenny and the team are justly proud and would like to challenge others in other communities to do the same.

Fowler Electorate: Cabramatta Project

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (1.54 p.m.)—I rise in the House to commend the recent launch of phase two of the Cabramatta Project. This project was established in 1997 by New South Wales Premier Bob Carr. Its intention is for government agencies and community organisations to work together in Cabramatta to address socioeconomic problems in the community. The highlights of the project so far include: the opening of a 20-bed detoxification unit at Fairfield Hospital; a drug intervention service in Cabramatta; improvements to urban amenities thanks to the financial commitment of Fairfield City Council; the development of a tourism action plan; and an increase in police numbers. However, more needs to be done and the Carr Labor government has recognised this with the launch of phase two. A great deal of credit should go to the state member for Cabramatta, Reba Meagher, who has lobbied hard for a greater injection of funds for Cabramatta, as well as stressing the need for more police to be on the beat. I should also mention the people who are on the ‘factory floor’. Cathy Noble has been appointed as senior project manager. She has many years
of experience in the health and welfare sectors and I am sure that she will do a fantastic job. Jan Heslep is the project manager for the drugs and community action strategy in south-western Sydney. Jan, too, has much experience and is already working closely with community groups in the area. Superintendent John Sweeney has been the focus of much media debate in the last week over his position as local area commander. I have heard very favourable reports from community groups over his approachability and his dedication. He has been in the position of local area commander for only three months and should be provided with full support. I also wish the community workers on the ground every success. (Time expired)

Cook Electorate: Cronulla Surf Life Saving Club History

Mr BAIRD (Cook) (1.56 p.m.)—I rise today to bring the House’s attention to the recent publication of Building Strong Traditions: The History of the Cronulla Surf Life Saving Club 1908–1957, the launch of which I was at last week. This book, by local author Faye Young, traces an important period in the history of a club that has played a major role in the community life of my electorate of Cook. The book presents an interesting view of events and characters that shaped the early years of the club’s history. It shows, among other things raised in the book, the increasing emphasis that was placed on water sport, particularly surfing, by people in the Sutherland Shire in the early years of the 20th century. It shows the effect of the extension of the Sydney rail system to Cronulla and the further increase in numbers on the beach. Of course, it follows the rising concern about the safety of bathers which led to the formation of the club. From there, there was no looking back. The formation of the Cronulla Surf Life Saving Club was the beginning of a proud tradition of voluntarism in the Cronulla area. Since then, the club and three other surf life saving clubs in Cook have stood as fine examples of Australians giving up their own time to put something back into the community. The book notes that the strong tradition has been set against the backdrop of considerable change in the area—including the transition from a seaside suburb into a holiday destination suburb of one of Australia’s largest cities—ranging from the roaring twenties to the Depression and back to prosperity in the fifties. It is a great book and chronicles the great success of surf clubs in the area. I commend the book to the House.

Goods and Services Tax: Savings Bonus

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (1.57 p.m.)—Two age pensioners in my electorate, Frances and Linfield Hudson, wrote to me on Friday. Their letter read:

Dear Sir

I am writing about the small bonus my wife and I received from the government. $23 each. I contacted Centrelink about it and they told me it was worked out on the money that we had had in the bank 2 years ago 1998—$800. They told me they could do nothing about it. We thought it was a bit ‘light on’.

At the moment, we have $500 in the bank. Each pension day, we take $15 from each pension to put it in our bank account. Reading in ‘The Emerald Hill Times’, August 23rd, Jocelyn Newman, Minister for Family and Community Services, says that more than 70 per cent have received more than $500. How come we received only $23 each.

Over 40 per cent of age pensioners over 60 received nothing, despite the promises of the Prime Minister. Others have received letters from Centrelink informing them that they are eligible for zero or insultingly low bonuses. Some of the low payments are due to assessments made by Centrelink with out-of-date material. I am very pleased that due to representations made by me some of these pensioners and self-funded retirees have received at least some payment or a top-up.

Petrie Electorate: Community Events

Ms GAMBARO (Petrie) (1.59 p.m.)—What a victorious weekend! I would like to congratulate the Aussie Rules under-12 team of Aspley for winning—and also the Broncos. It has been an excellent weekend. Particularly, I have a touch of motherly pride: my son Benjamin played in the winning team as well. It has been a great weekend all round for Australian sport. Also, congratulations to Craiglea State High on their 25th anniversary, where they buried a time capsule. The St Ditmas fair had a
St Ditmas fair had a magnificent start to the day with the wonderful weather. Congratulations to the committee of the parents and friends who organised once again what is the most magnificent fete that I have seen for a very long time. I would also like to congratulate the Kippa Ring State School for holding their wine and cheese afternoon to celebrate their students’ artwork and writing, in a theme called ‘Edge of tomorrow’.

Mr SPEAKER—Order! It being 2 p.m., in accordance with standing order 106A, the time for members’ statements has concluded.

MEMBER SWORN

Mr SPEAKER—As I outlined to the House on 29 June, I issued on 30 June 2000 a writ for the election of a member to serve for the electoral division of Isaacs, in the state of Victoria, in place of Mr Gregory Stuart Wilton. I have received a return of the writ. By the endorsement on the writ it is certified that Ann Corcoran has been elected.

Ms Ann Corcoran made and subscribed the oath of allegiance.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mr HOWARD (Bennelong—Prime Minister) (2.02 p.m.)—I inform the House that the Minister for Trade will be absent from question time this week. He is visiting Indonesia for bilateral trade discussions, en route to New Zealand to attend the Australia-New Zealand trade ministers talks. The Minister for Foreign Affairs is acting trade minister up to and including tomorrow, the 29th, and then the Minister for Defence will act as trade minister for the remainder of the week. I also inform the House that the Minister for Foreign Affairs will be absent from question time on Wednesday and Thursday of this week. He will represent the Australian government at the first anniversary of the United Nations Popular Consultation on East Timor. Finally, the Minister for Defence will act as foreign minister during the absence of the latter.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices

Mr BEAZLEY (2.03 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister, and I refer to his claim last week that he could not keep his promise on petrol because it would blow the budget surplus. Prime Minister, do you recall saying:

If the Treasurer has a budgetary problem, it is his fault and nobody else’s. He should not go crying to the Australian public, saying: ‘Please let us off this promise, please don’t exact any political price out of our hide because we have a budgetary problem. We ask you to overlook the fact that we created the budgetary problem; we ask you to overlook the fact that we let expenditure rip ... Prime Minister, if you thought keeping promises was so important when you made that statement in 1986, why do you think you can get away with breaking them on petrol now?

Mr HOWARD—The answer to the question is a number of things. The first thing is I do remember making that statement in 1986. The second point I would make is that the unacceptably high price of petrol now is not due to a broken promise by this government. The increase in the price of petrol is overwhelmingly due to movements in the world price of crude oil and also exchange rate variations which have moved against the Australian dollar. According to the Shell company’s web site, the refinery price of petrol, that is, before excise and the goods and services tax—repeating before excise and the goods and services tax—has risen by 8.3c a litre between 30 June and 27 August, mainly reflecting the impact of higher world oil prices and a lower exchange rate. That same data shows that the average retail price of petrol over the same period has increased by 6.7c a litre; in other words, at a lower level than the increase in the refinery price.

In other words, the retail price, after you have taken into account the excise and the GST, has gone up by 6.7, yet the refinery price, which is the excise and the GST, has gone up by 8.3c a litre. That figure alone explodes the nonsense that has been peddled by the opposition and by the automobile companies over the past couple of weeks. But—and I do thank the Leader of the Opposition for this—that is really only the half of it, because over the weekend we had what I can only call one of those genius interviews from the member for Batman. The member
for Batman was on a Channel 10 program
and he was his normally expansive and
friendly self. He said, ‘Look, we’re about an
inquiry establishing the facts.’ And he said:
I think it’s a question of what is the nature of the
windfall—

Mr Crean—That’s right.

Mr Howard—‘That’s right,’ he says—
and how that windfall should be used ...
The windfall, what do we do with it?
Before you start thinking about what you do
with a windfall, you have to have a wind-
fall—and there is no windfall.
Opposition members—Oh!

Mr Howard—‘Oh!’ they say. Most of
the arguments of the past few days, particu-
larly from some of the newspapers, some of
the automobile companies and the opposi-
tion, have been based on the proposition that,
because the price of petrol might through the
year be higher than it was at the time the
budget was put together, you are going to
have a much higher take through the auto-
matic indexation of excise. I see the member
for Lowe nodding in agreement with that
argument.

Mr Crean interjecting—

Mr Speaker—If the Deputy Leader of
the Opposition continues to defy the chair, he
will be dealt with.

Mr Howard—Let me say that that ar-
gument is about the worst, the most inaccu-
rate and the most false argument that has
been advanced during the whole of this de-
bate, because the impact of increases in the
rate of inflation and prices has a negative
effect on the budget, not a positive effect.
The argument that, in the automatic indexa-
tion every six months, an indexation factor
that is higher than was calculated at the time
of the budget is going to give more money to
the government is wrong. The evidence that
that argument is wrong is to be found in
Budget Paper No. 1 of the budget papers this
year. The Treasury sensitivity analysis dem-
onstrated that, if there was an increase of one
per cent in prices, the expenses of the Com-
monwealth because of automatic indexation
would rise by $240 million in the current
financial year, yet the revenue would rise by
only $100 million. So, by a factor of 2½ to 1,
according to this sensitivity analysis by the
Treasury—which has not been challenged by
the opposition or by anybody else—the
budget is in fact worse off because of the
indexation arrangement. It is worse off as a
result of the indexation arrangement rather
than being better off. So the argument that
you get a windfall through the excise collec-
tion if the price of petrol is higher than was
calculated at the time of the budget is wrong,
wrong, wrong and that has been the under-
pinning of the arguments that have been put.

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for a
very helpful first question. From the data that
I quoted on price variations, it is clear that
the reason the price of petrol has gone up is
that the world price has gone up. That is the
reason it has gone up. The second proposi-
tion inherent in the question of the Leader of
the Opposition—that in some way the budget
is dripping with additional dollars through
the indexation arrangement—is also wrong.
The other two sources of revenue for the
budget that relate to variations in crude oil
prices are the resources rent tax and the
goods and services tax. Any assumption that
you make now, on 28 August—a bare two
months into the current financial year—is an
unreliable assumption. Anybody who starts
talking about a budget windfall with 10
months of the financial year to go—with
certainly no idea of what oil prices are going
to be for the rest of the year and with no idea
of the impact of those higher oil prices, if
they are sustained, on economic activity and
therefore on company and income tax col-
lections—is talking irresponsibly in those
circumstances, and the government will have
no part of that kind of discussion. The same
comment and observation can be made in
relation to any possible variations in the col-
lection of the goods and services tax.

I say very plainly to the Australian people
that I do not like higher fuel prices and that I
understand how sensitive the Australian peo-
ple are to them. But these higher prices have
been due overwhelmingly to world factors.
Can I say to those who sit opposite, and to
people anywhere else in the Australian
community who are calling for a discretion-
ary reduction in excise, that they are really
saying that either you run down the surplus and thereby put upward pressure on interest rates or you cut payments for schools, for roads, for health and for all the other vital things that the government provides. The government will not be responding to those irresponsible calls. They are not based on fact. They seek, rather, to exploit understandable public concern about the price of petrol. I say again to the Australian public that I share its concern, but the culprits lie amongst the oil producing countries of the world; they do not lie on the front bench of the government.

Immigration: Woomera Centre

Mr ANDREWS (2.13 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. I refer the minister to the outbreak of violence at the immigration detention centre in Woomera, South Australia, this morning. Would the minister inform the House of the latest developments in relation to this disturbance?

Mr RUDDOCK—I thank the honourable member for Menzies for the question. I regret to confirm to the House that there has been a series of incidents at the Woomera Immigration Reception and Processing Centre over the weekend and early this morning. On Saturday evening between 60 and 100 detainees were involved, and this morning between 70 and 80 detainees were involved. I am informed that the same core group of people were involved in both incidents. On Saturday evening, a group of detainees stoned buildings and were throwing rocks and implements at the staff. Those involved had taken steps to conceal their identities. Because of fear for the safety of staff on the site, one canister of tear gas was used to quell the crowd until such time as the rain forced people to return to their rooms.

This morning at 5.45 South Australian time this same group deliberately set fire to a number of buildings. They have caused very extensive damage to a recreation building, two dining rooms, an ablation block and the educational facility, which has only recently been installed, as well as an accommodation block. I understand buildings in the administration area have also sustained damage from rock throwing. In addition, the internal security fence has been pushed over and a perimeter fence has been breached in a couple of places. The detainees have used the fence posts to construct weapons. As a result, tear gas and the on-site fire tender were used to push those people back from the fence to enable some repairs to be made on a temporary basis, and at this point in time there have been no escapes from the facility.

I am informed that the people involved have been attempting to incite others to join in their action and they have resisted that. There are some 800 people at the centre and only 60 to 80 are involved in these incidents, most of them being young men. These are very serious questions. The behaviour is totally unacceptable. The risk to the lives and safety of the staff, as well as the community at Woomera, is obviously a concern to us. We have increased significantly the security staff on site. They have been reinforced by the Australian Protective Services, as well as the Australian Federal Police. The South Australian Police Service has sent extra officers and will be taking responsibility for the security of the Woomera township. Officers from the Australian Federal Police are also undertaking investigations, and I would expect that criminal charges will be laid in relation to this matter. I might say that this is not the first occasion. There have been people convicted of offences relating to the break-outs that occurred at Curtin and Woomera earlier in the year. I do not know that the charges have been finalised in relation to Woomera but certainly there were convictions in relation to individuals at Curtin.

These steps have been taken by individuals involved I think because of a fundamental misapprehension and I think some misleading by some naive people in the Australian community who believe that inappropriate behaviour will influence the outcome of decisions that have to be taken lawfully. There are those who are advocating that there should be no borders—and some of them do not come from here, I might say; they have been associated with other organisations organising other events to take place in Australia. People who are of the view that there should be no borders, that people should turn
up and be released into the community, will in no way change the detention policies which are designed deliberately to ensure that the Australian community is not put at risk in terms of their health, safety and security. Further, I would have to say to those who naively believe that behaviour of this sort might influence decisions that have to be taken by officers of my department, the Refugee Review Tribunal and, dare I say, even the courts, that nobody will achieve a different outcome by demonstrating or purporting to put us under pressure to give a different result.

Some people seem to believe that, because there were demonstrations some months ago and there were releases in accordance with the law, they were in some way connected. Nothing could be further from the truth. I can assure you that there is no way that I, the government nor I think the Australian people will be coerced by behaviour of this sort. The government will be looking at any further action that it can take to ensure that those people who have been involved in rioting, civil disorder and destruction of property are dealt with in accordance with the law and, if the law is inadequate, that the law is addressed.

Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices

Mr CREAN (2.19 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I ask: do you recall telling Jon Faine on radio 3LO last Friday:

... every last dollar that we are going to collect in relation to excise this year has been planned for and included ... in the budget papers.

Prime Minister, precisely what indexation increases in the fuel excise were factored into this year’s budget papers?

Mr HOWARD—I thank the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for his question. I do remember the broad thrust of that interview. As always, I will do a little bit of checking to make sure that he has not relocated a comma or a full stop or a word here and there—which he does occasionally. I know it is accidental, or am I being too charitable?

Mr Costello—You are being too charitable saying it is accidental. I certainly remember that interview very clearly. It was an interview in which I was able to explain that the driver of higher petrol prices in Australia was, of course, the price of crude oil more than tripling from $US12 a barrel to about $US32 barrel. I think in that interview, or maybe it was another one, I was able to point out that the President of the United States was so concerned about the issue that he was proposing to raise it with the oil producing countries. I understand that during his current visit to Nigeria, which I think is the sixth largest oil producing country in the world, President Clinton is expressing the concern of the United States about the increase in petrol prices flowing from world oil prices. I think the point has to be made again and again that the regrettable high level of petrol prices in Australia is a direct consequence, overwhelmingly, of the huge increase in the price of crude oil, from something like $US12 a barrel to something like $US32 a barrel.

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition asked me a question about the figures. I do not carry those figures in my head, but what I do carry is a knowledge that the budget was based on assumptions about the increase in the CPI flowing from the once-only price effect of the introduction of the goods and services tax, the so-called GST spike. All of that was taken into account, and no matter what the individual figure may be, which the deputy leader asked me about—

Mr Crean—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. It goes to relevance—

Mr SPEAKER—The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

Mr Crean—It is a point of order on relevance—

Mr SPEAKER—The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. There is no way the Prime Minister is being other than relevant to the question asked.

Mr HOWARD—I say to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and to anybody who is interested in this matter that, irrespective of what the assumption was, if there is any variation, not only is there extra reve-
nue collected but also there are extra expenses incurred. The extra expenses outweigh the extra revenue by a factor of 2½ to one. I know the Deputy Leader of the Opposition does not like this because it rather destroys the whole basis of the fraudulent fear campaign which the Labor Party and, regrettably, some of the motoring associations have been running that, because the price may have gone up a little more than was expected in May, the budget is awash with billions of additional dollars. That is wrong, Mr Speaker. The budget is not awash with billions of additional dollars. In fact, if it turns out in February of next year that the indexation factor has to be higher than calculated in May of last year, the budget will be behind because the additional outlays will be greater than the additional excise by a factor of almost 2½ to one. The only possible area where you could be ahead would be in relation to resource rent tax and the GST. You certainly do not know that with any degree—

Mr Crean—So you lower excise and increase revenue. Is that what happens?

Mr SPEAKER—Deputy Leader of the Opposition! The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr HOward—They don’t like this, Mr Speaker, because it is the truth. They never like a factual argument. They always like to scare the electorate. They always like to run a fear campaign to scare the Australian people. I say again to my fellow Australians that I do not like high fuel prices, but it is the fault of overseas factors.

Mr Cox—I rise on a point of order as to relevancy, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER—The honourable member for Kingston will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has concluded his answer.

Mr McMullan—I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. That is twice today that you have ruled that people cannot make their points of order but simply state the title. I have to reiterate to you, Mr Speaker, that that is not and has never been an acceptable interpretation of that standing order to us and we will continue to protest about it each time you do it.

Mr SPEAKER—This is a well-worn path.

Mr Tuckey interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The Minister for Forestry and Conservation is not assisting the chair. The Manager of Opposition Business has raised a point of order. The Manager of Opposition Business knows that this is a well-worn path. Concerning the point of order made by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, it was self-evident to everyone in this chamber that the Prime Minister’s answer was relevant to the question. In the case of the member for Kingston, the Prime Minister had indicated that he had concluded his answer.

Oil: Prices

Mr ANDREW THOMSON (2.25 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Would the minister inform the House of the government’s efforts at an international level to ensure that Australian concerns about high international oil prices are being heard?

Mr DOWNER—I thank the member for Wentworth for his question. It is hardly surprising that all of the governments of oil consuming countries are deeply concerned about the rapid rise in international oil prices. As the Prime Minister has pointed out, international oil prices in US dollar terms have gone from $12 to $32 per barrel in the last 18 months. This contrasts with OPEC’s own target maximum of $US28 per barrel. Translated into Australian dollars over that period, these figures show that oil prices have increased from $18.74 per barrel to $54.67 per barrel. In March of this year, the Australian government joined with other governments in lobbying OPEC to encourage it to lift production. As a result of that lobbying effort, OPEC did indeed lift production by some three per cent. Since that time, there has been continual substantial growth in international demand for oil, especially brought about by relatively high rates of economic growth in the European Union, continuing strong growth in the United States and recovery in the East Asian economies. Bearing that in mind, obviously the supply of oil is falling short of demand and that is increasing prices.
The government has now instructed Australia’s ambassadors to OPEC countries to convey at the highest levels to their host governments Australia’s concerns about the high level of international oil prices and to urge them to increase oil production to bring prices to a more sustainable level. Australia has been joined by a number of other countries in this effort. As the Prime Minister mentioned, the President of the United States, President Clinton, is in Nigeria at the moment. During his visit to Nigeria, he has urged the Nigerian government to increase oil production in that country. The Australian government and others in APEC will also be looking to the APEC leaders’ meeting later this year as a forum where the APEC economies can put together a coordinated position encouraging an increase in supply of oil in order to keep the price at appropriate levels. This is particularly important for a country such as Australia in the Asia-Pacific region because many of the economies of East Asia are oil consumers. They have no oil production of their own—although some do—and many of those economies which are oil consumers have emerged only recently from the very deep Asian economic crisis. Too rapid a rise in international oil prices is going to jeopardise economic recovery in East Asia and that is not going to be in Australia’s interests.

It is important that Australia does all it can in the international community to encourage stability in oil pricing. The increases that we have had in recent times have been far too rapid and do have the potential to damage the economies of a number of our neighbours, quite apart from the impact these increased oil prices are clearly having in this country.

**Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices**

Mr **CREAN** (2.29 p.m.)—My question is to the Treasurer. I refer to the Prime Minister’s last answer in which he conceded the potential for a windfall either through GST or resource rent tax collections. Treasurer, didn’t you forecast on 28 April a fall in world oil prices and wasn’t this fall factored into your budget two weeks later? Given world oil prices have risen, not fallen, won’t you now be collecting more revenue from petrol, GST, plus excise, plus resource rent tax than you put in your budget? Treasurer, what is the extent of your petrol tax windfall?

**Mr COSTELLO**—I thank the honourable member for his question. The quote that he refers to on 28 April I obviously do not have, and I have come not to rely on the word of the member for Hotham on anything. But if it was the quote that I saw in the *Australian* by George Megalogenis on Saturday, I was actually referring at that point to the fact that we expected prices to come off in the June quarter, as I recall. If I also recall correctly, August is not in the June quarter; August is in the September quarter—a point which was missed by George on Saturday and, since it got past George, we would not be surprised if it got past the honourable member for Hotham.

In relation to excise, the indexation of excise is based on the budget estimate of the consumer price index. The Prime Minister said that as the consumer price index increases the government loses—overall, it loses money; it does not make it. That is because some 70-75 per cent of Commonwealth payments are indexed to the CPI and, as the CPI goes up, those payments, predominantly pensions, increase. If you were not to index your excise, the corollary of that would be not to index your social security payments. In all of this debate I have yet to hear one of the motoring organisations or the Labor Party say that they are against indexation. No, they would only take the opportunist road: index payments but not revenues. If you do not index your excises, you will not be indexing your payments. I would be taking a lot more notice of the motoring organisations if they stood up and said, ‘We are against indexing excise because we are against indexing pensions.’ That would be a fair position.

In relation to excises, of course, the one thing I have not heard from the Australian Labor Party is that they are going to abolish the indexation of excise. I listened very carefully when the question was asked three times of the member for Hotham on *AM* during the last week, but he did not say on one occasion that it is Labor Party policy to
abolish the indexing of excise. When silence overtakes them, as it now has—there is a deathly silence from the opposition—it means that it is Labor Party policy to index excise. And why wouldn’t it be? Because excise is indexed today under Labor Party legislation that was passed in 1983. We did not change any legislation to introduce indexation; it was introduced by the Labor Party in 1983. Commonwealth excise when Labor came to office was 6.1c per litre but when they left it was 34.1c. And these are the people who are now worried about excise.

Mr Crean—I take a point of order that goes to relevance. The historic record is not relevant to the point that we are asking about, and that is what they factored into the budget and what the extent of the windfall is that they have got through their broken promise. That is the issue and they should answer it.

Mr Speaker—The Treasurer was asked a question, which I noted, about a prediction that he had made about a fall in the price of oil and about what impact indexation and the CPI were going to have on budget revenue. He is answering that question.

Mr Costello—We find that Labor Party policy is to continue the indexation of excise, and their argument against it is, of course, completely opportunistic. Let me come then to goods and services tax. Goods and services tax was applied in relation to petrol after the excise was reduced by 6.7c a litre—which has never been done before; there has never been a reduction in petrol excise—and after wholesale sales tax was abolished. Wholesale sales tax impacted on the oil and petroleum industry at all stages of production, distribution and retail.

The rises in relation to petrol are not the consequence of the goods and services tax. I would have thought that there would be one very clear empirical test of that: the price in the week before the introduction of goods and services tax and the price in the week afterwards where the only change was the goods and services tax. Prices were either stable or in some areas actually declined. If the rise in the price of petrol over the last week—up to $1 a litre in some places—were the fault of the GST, then I would have thought the Labor Party would promise to abolish GST and prices at the bowser would immediately fall 10 or 15c. That would be an obvious point. The Labor Party would now be promising to abolish GST and, if their argument were right, the price at the bowser would drop 10 or 15c.

But again a deafening silence overtakes the Labor Party on this point. If the Labor Party were right and it abolished GST, the petrol price would come down in the United States, in Europe, in France, in Germany and in all the other countries of the world where it is rising. This argument that the Australian GST has caused an increase in the petrol price in America, in France, in Germany and in Britain where petrol prices are going up is because the world oil price has increased, as the Prime Minister said, some threefold over the last 18 months.

Mr Speaker, you come across political opportunists in life, but I have never seen such a concentration of them altogether on the front bench of the Australian Labor Party. As the Prime Minister said, the world oil price is increasing because of two factors—the reduction in supply and increases in demand as the world economy strengthens. Australia is not immune from increases in the world price. That is what is driving petrol prices. As far as the government is concerned, as the CPI drives excise higher, as it does under the Labor Party legislation, the amount expended exceeds the increase in revenue. These are international developments over which Australia has only so much influence as it can bring to bear in international fora. The Minister for Foreign Affairs is doing a fantastic job. I will be taking it up myself. That is real policy rather than the political opportunism of the Australian Labor Party.

Budget Surplus

Mr Somluy (2.38 p.m.)—My question is also to the Treasurer. Has the Treasurer seen reports advocating surplus budgets and responsible fiscal policy? Where has the Treasurer seen such reports and how do they compare with policy outcomes achieved by the government?
Mr COSTELLO—I thank the honourable member for Fairfax for his question. The House will recall the golden words of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, who was in favour of bigger surpluses than the government last week. On the one hand he is totally opposed to all of the revenues but on the other hand he is totally in favour of bigger surplus budgets. He is also in favour of rolling back the GST, which means less revenue. He is also in favour of more money spent on health and education and the regions, presumably less revenue out of petrol and he is going to produce bigger surpluses. He seems to be rather at odds with the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition, one will recall, did have a chance to produce a surplus budget. He was the Minister for Finance during the period of the last Labor government.

Mr Beazley interjecting—

Mr COSTELLO—He leaps to his feet with loud frivolity. The record of the Leader of the Opposition is as follows—in 1994-95 a deficit of $13,181 million. I suppose we call that a negative surplus, produced on a growth rate of 4½ per cent. This is the other point the Labor Party have been trying to get out. They are saying: ‘We couldn’t produce surpluses because the economy wasn’t growing.’ It grew at 4½ per cent and the budget deficit was $13.1 billion. The next year, in 1995-96, the deficit outcome was $10 billion. Again the economy grew at 4½ per cent and the deficit was $10 billion. Excellent growth. An excellent budget outcome, I suppose.

You will recall that the now finance minister, who was extolling his own virtues—$23 billion of deficits in two years—went around the country during that period claiming the budget was in surplus. It was one of the most disgraceful acts of misrepresentation in Australian modern economic history. He said during the 1996 campaign that the budget was in surplus when he was running a $10,000 million deficit. To my knowledge the Leader of the Opposition has never yet apologised for misleading the Australian people. In fact, he is still at it. He went up to the Queensland Country Women’s Association in Townsville on 23 August to perpetuate this misrepresentation. After attacking the government for all of the expenditure restraint which went into producing a surplus budget, he attacked us over the expenditure restraints on universities, public schools, the elderly, dental, public hospitals, the labour market, the unemployed, and welfare programs. He attacked every expenditure reduction that this government put in place. He said, ‘The cuts were supposed to be there because they said they had a budget problem. They never did have one.’

So it was no budget problem to have a $10 billion deficit. The only way in which the Labor Party ever commits itself to surpluses is the kind of surplus which is negative by $10,000 million. That is the only surplus you have ever committed yourself to. You are into the business of revisionist history. You are redefining your own fiscal failure. You have never apologised for misleading the public. Your only surpluses could be produced by redefining the terms and never by real policy.

Mr SPEAKER—The Treasurer will address his remarks through the chair.

Mr COSTELLO—The promises by the member for Hotham that he will produce surpluses should be understood in the same way as the declarations of the Leader of the Opposition in favour of surpluses—a surplus of minus $10,000 million. He never had the decency to do the right thing and could never manage an economy.

Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices

Mr CREAN (2.43 p.m.)—My question again is to the Treasurer. I refer to his last answer on petrol, in which he repeated a claim made on the Today program last week, where he said:
The GST didn’t add anything to the pump price ... Here’s the evidence ... The only thing that changed between 30 June and 1 July was the new tax system. And petrol prices were either stable or overall fell.

Treasurer, didn’t your own prices watchdog, the ACCC, find that on the day following the introduction of the GST petrol prices actually increased in regional New South Wales, regional Victoria, regional Queensland, re-
regional South Australia and the Northern Territory?

Mr Hockey interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The Minister for Financial Services and Regulation! I have not allowed the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to make that sort of comment. I require you to withdraw it as well.

Mr Hockey—I withdraw.

Mr SPEAKER—The Minister for Financial Services and Regulation has taken the action requested of him.

Mr CREAN—Treasurer, is this why the member for Hume told you last week, ‘Get a life, Peter. Start thinking about the people out there who are hurting’?

Mr COSTELLO—I thank the honourable member for his question but, as usual, he completely misleads.

Mr Crean interjecting—

Mr COSTELLO—No, the ACCC is actually right; you are wrong. The ACCC press release headed ‘Petrol price movements on 1 July’ reads as follows:

Major capital city petrol prices have, on average, fallen from yesterday’s prices. Sydney’s unleaded petrol prices increased by 0.2 cents per litre; Melbourne declined by 0.4 cents per litre; Brisbane declined by 0.3 cents per litre... Perth declined by 0.9 cents per litre. The smaller capital cities experienced increases of 0.8 cents per litre in Hobart; 0.5 cents per litre in Darwin...

Petrol price movements on 1 July—major capital city petrol prices have, on average, fallen.

Mr McMullan interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The Manager of Opposition Business is granted a great deal of courtesy from the chair, and the chair expects some of it to be reciprocated.

Mr Crean—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order which goes to relevance again. His own quote was, ‘Petrol prices were either stable or overall fell’. There was no mention of ‘average’. Why don’t you talk about the regions?

Mr SPEAKER—The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. There is no point of order.

Mr COSTELLO—So now the big point is: when you say ‘average’ it means different from ‘overall’. That is his knockout point: when you say ‘overall’ it is completely different from ‘on average’. ‘Overall’ means ‘on average’. It goes through all of those capital cities. It says that on average they fell. The GST came in. If the GST were a cause of a 10c or 15c increase, how was it from 30 June to 1 July that prices were on average the same or fell? How could it be in any capital city that that would be the case? How could it be the case that the change of taxation did not lead to a change of price? What actually happened was that, over the course of the months of July and August, as the world price increased it put petrol prices up in the United States, in Europe and in Japan, none of whom had a new GST introduced according to Australian legislation. I would have thought the real question for the Deputy Leader of the Opposition would be: how did the Australian GST lift petrol prices in the United States? How did the Australian
GST lift prices in Europe? How did it lift prices in Japan? It did not.

**Tax Reform: Benefits**

*Mr JULL* (2.49 p.m.)—My question is also addressed to the Treasurer. Is the Treasurer aware of any recent commentary on the benefits of tax reform for the Australian economy?

*Mr COSTELLO*—I thank the honourable member for his question. I can report to the House that the tax reform in Australia—which may or may not be opposed by the Australian Labor Party; we don’t yet know—has won widespread international support. The Moody’s Investor Service said in its annual report that Australia’s ceiling for foreign currency debt and domestic debt ratings reflects an increasingly flexible economy and sound macro-economic policies. Moody’s said, ‘Australia’s credit strength arises from a service sector oriented economy that is modern and increasingly diverse. Supporting the economy’s growth potential and capacity to adjust to external shocks is a comprehensive program of structural reforms which in recent years has focused on trade liberalisation, industry deregulation and tax and labour market reforms.’

So international ratings agencies note that the tax and labour market reforms which have been introduced by this government are underpinning a strengthening economy which is underpinning our rating. Mr Yves Lemay from Moody’s said in his statement on Friday 25 August 2000, ‘The new tax regime should boost economic growth. The overall growth potential should benefit from this new tax structure and, from a broad macro perspective, the transition into this new tax structure is running relatively smoothly.’ There you have international recognition of the importance of tax reform under this government. We know that it was opposed every single step of the way by the Australian Labor Party, which thought Australia should have a wholesale sales tax instead of a goods and services tax—a tax which is now shared by only one other country in the world, Swaziland; championed only by the government of Swaziland and the Australian Labor Party leadership.

I do not know whether or not the Australian Labor Party are now in favour of tax reform. They keep claiming, when they give speeches, that they are in favour of tax reform—having opposed every single step which was required to get there, in the same way they opposed every single step of balancing the budget and then said they were actually in favour of surpluses. I cannot tell, Mr Speaker. We are awaiting the roll-back policy—where the Labor Party rolls back the goods and services tax—and we await with even greater interest how they intend to pay for that, presumably with increased income taxes and presumably with increased petrol excises. This now is becoming a modern economy. It is being backed up by good strong tax reform that is benefitting people throughout Australia but particularly those in the areas which have been held back by the inefficient wholesale sales tax. It will make Australia a stronger economy and it will lead to more jobs.

**Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices**

*Mr CREAN* (2.52 p.m.)—My question is again to the Treasurer. I ask him: in your last answer, in which you ignored the impact of the GST on regional petrol prices—

*Mr SPEAKER*—The Deputy Leader of the Opposition is aware that he, too, needs to address his question through the chair.

*Mr CREAN*—I ask the Treasurer—through you, Mr Speaker—in relation to his last answer, in which he ignored the impact of the GST on regional petrol prices, why he didn’t refer to the ACCC press release of 3 July which found that, on the day following the introduction of the GST, petrol prices actually increased in regional New South Wales, regional Victoria, regional Queensland, regional South Australia and the Northern Territory?

*Mr COSTELLO*—It is always handy to refer to the actual press releases, because you can be sure of one thing: they will be absolutely misquoted by the Leader of the Opposition. That press release goes through various places, and it finds that in some places petrol prices moved upwards and in some places they moved down. It commences with this sentence:
Petrol prices in the major capital cities fell, on average, today following a similar fall on Saturday 1 July.

It falls on 1 July, it falls again on 3 July, the goods and services tax was applying throughout Australia, including capital cities—

Mr Crean—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order and it goes to relevance. He was clearly asked again about the regional impact, and he is answering only on capital cities. Doesn’t he know where a region is?

Mr Speaker—The Deputy Leader of the Opposition has made his point of order. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition quoted, as I recall, from press releases, and the Treasurer was quoting from the same press releases.

Mr Costello—The press release found that, overall, petrol prices fell. In some areas, as I said, they went up and in some areas they went down, but the GST applied in capital cities. If the GST were the cause of rises, why were petrol prices falling in capital cities? Did the GST not apply in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide—the point I made on the Today show? I do want to refer to one other thing from that press release, because I think it is worth noting.

Mr Tanner—If it wasn’t the GST, what was it?

Mr Costello—I am asked by the shadow minister for finance: ‘If it wasn’t the GST, what was it?’ The largest increases found by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission were, according to the press release, in Hobart. It states:

On average petrol prices in Hobart increased by 2.5 cents per litre since the week prior to 1 July to around 95.9 cents per litre ... There is a wide variation in petrol prices within Hobart and across Tasmanian towns. Tasmanian petrol prices have been affected by the above influences and by the Tasmanian Government’s removal of a fuel subsidy of 1.95 cents per litre—

The largest increases noted by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission in that press release, which I am asked about, were in the state of Tasmania, where the Tasmanian government, under cover of A New Tax System, removed a subsidy of 1.95c per litre. The government of Tasmania is a Labor government. The Treasurer of Tasmania is Dr David Crean. On 1 July, without making an announcement, the Labor government of Tasmania abolished a 1.95c a litre subsidy, sending up prices in Tasmania by 2.5c. It was when the Commonwealth found out about that—and Mr Bacon was in London with the Prime Minister—

Mr Beazley—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order and it goes to relevance. He has been asked why he failed to acknowledge and explain the increase in petrol prices identified by the ACCC in regional New South Wales, regional Victoria, regional Queensland, regional South Australia and the Northern Territory. I have not heard one word from him on that, in two answers.

Mr Speaker—As every member of the House will know, under standing orders that have applied to governments for decades, the chair has no control over the way in which questions are answered. The only requirement is that the answer be relevant to the question. The Treasurer was asked about press releases and is responding by quoting those press releases.

Mr Costello—Fortunately, I actually had the press release that I was asked a question about. There was a subsidy throughout the whole of Tasmania, including the whole of regional Tasmania. It was 1.95c per litre—

Mr Tanner—Have they subsidised Queensland?

Mr Costello—Let’s go to Queensland. As I recall, Labor Premier Beattie, in his last budget, tried to wipe out an 8c a litre subsidy on Queensland petrol. It was because the Commonwealth found out about it, and the Commonwealth said to the Labor government that if they did not reinstate that subsidy we would be cutting the GST revenues, that Mr Beattie reinstated it. The same thing happened in Tasmania. Without any announcement whatsoever, the Labor government and its Treasurer, Dr David Crean, withdrew a subsidy on 1 July. It took some days before the Commonwealth found out about it. When the Commonwealth told the Tasmanian Labor government that we would be deducting their GST payments, whilst
Premier Bacon was in London and Dr David Crean was on leave, poor old Acting Premier Lennon was sent out to say, with great embarrassment, that the Tasmanian Labor Party would be reinstating it.

So here we have the evidence. Queensland Labor withdraws 8c a litre. Tasmanian Labor withdraws 1.95c a litre. Labor asks about regional pricing, the largest increase was in Tasmania, and who was responsible? The Australian Labor Party—caught! Not only is it the same party but there is an even closer relationship with the person who asked these questions. I will tell you where the great threat to petrol price rises comes from: it comes from the Labor Party.

Mr Crean—Mr Speaker, I seek leave to table the press release. That was not referred to in terms of any other region in the country.

Mr SPEAKER—The Deputy Leader of the Opposition has sought leave to table the press release.

Leave not granted.

Small Business: Exports

Mr GEORGIOU (3.00 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business. Minister, would you inform the House of the impact that small business is having on Australia’s export sector, and what is driving this success? Are you aware of any alternative plans to foster the small business sector?

Mr REITH—I thank the member for Kooyong for his question. The question gives me the opportunity to bring to the notice of the House a document which was released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics last week entitled A portrait of Australian exporters. It is a very important document because it highlights the importance of small business in Australia’s export effort. We have seen in recent years a bigger effort by small business, and I want to say to the small business community: ‘Good on you for having a go. It is fantastic for Australia. You are creating more jobs and it is very good for the national economy.’ In 1997-98 there were 21,800 exporting businesses in Australia. Of these, 77 per cent were small businesses. They accounted for 13 per cent of Australia’s gross revenue generated by exports. It is not only your medium sized small business but also the very small businesses—the micro-businesses employing fewer than four people. They have also been expanding. In fact, in 1997-98 the number of those businesses grew by 11 per cent per annum, reflecting a very strong trend. Of the 21,800 exporters, 4,000 of them were in services-only exports. But, here again, small business is a very strong player: of those, 88 per cent were, in fact, small businesses.

I was asked what was driving this growth. There is no doubt what is driving this growth: it is a series of sensible reforms made by the Howard government which gives a bit of encouragement to small business. We halved the capital gains tax. We got interest rates down. We have a better workplace relations system. We are putting a lot of incentives in place for the small business community, and it is great that they are responding. Of course, on top of that, the goods and services tax is great for exporters and is, therefore, great for our small businesses and gives them more encouragement. I was also asked whether there were any alternative plans to foster this growth in small business. The sad truth of the matter is that the Australian Labor Party has absolutely no policy to support small business. In their platform entitled ‘Engaging with the global economy’, in which they say they are after creating better jobs through trade, there is, in fact, no mention whatsoever of small business. Here is this great dynamic sector out there doing a great job for Australia—growing, building, creating jobs, investing and improving their fair share—and do they get a word from the Labor Party? Not one word of interest, support or encouragement. But that would hardly be a surprise. It was only a few days ago—in fact, in July—that the Leader of the Opposition spelt out his attitude to small business when he said:

We have never pretended to be a small business party, the Labor Party. We have never pretended that.

What a statement of the obvious! They used their numbers in the Senate to stop unfair dismissal laws and they used their numbers in the Senate to prevent sensible tax reform
for the benefit of the small business community. Now, of course, we have the old roll-back policy sitting there to create more technical red tape for the small business community. That is pretty depressing for the small business community. It reveals the fact that the Labor Party are not prepared to support them.

I was very interested in the remarks of the Leader of the Opposition on Townsville radio last week. He was asked what his attitude was when somebody exposes the fact that you do not have a decent policy on some particular issue. The Leader of the Opposition was asked about the satirical radio program Cactus Island. In a light moment he said that he was deeply depressed by it. Then he went on to say:

The most devastating things in politics are satire and cartoons. You can pick a fellow’s commentary—

I suppose he was talking about John Della Bosca—

on some activity you’ve done during the day and it will depress you as the logic is sort of turned remorselessly on you and you feel ‘Oh, gee, how will I ever recover from this?’ But the reality is that within an hour of getting to work you realise nobody has read the column—

Mr Adams—Mr Speaker I rise on a point of order.

Mr Speaker—The member for Lyons will be recognised in due course but not when he pretends that he can berate the chair. I call the member for Lyons.

Mr Adams—Mr Speaker, I was not be-rating the chair. Please accept my apology if you thought that was possible. I was trying to make sure that the Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business saw me standing and would resume his seat.

Mr Speaker—The member for Lyons will come to his point of order.

Mr Adams—Mr Speaker, the minister is not answering the question. He has gone off on a tangent on what the Leader of the Opposition said and he is dealing with cartoons and satire. I believe that you should bring him back to the question.

Mr Speaker—The Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business was asked a question about small business exports and alternative policies.

Mr Beazley interjecting—

Mr Speaker—The Leader of the Opposition knows better. It would hardly be fair for anyone to pretend that they should at any stage have the right to interrupt whoever is the occupier of the chair. I believe that the minister had moved some way from the question. I understand that he had moved there as a result of reflecting on alternative policies, but I do not believe it is helpful for the House for members to be too derisory of each other. I call the minister.

Mr Crean—You have probably got nothing to say.

Mr Reith—In conclusion, there is a lot to be said on behalf of the small business community. It is a serious topic that the Labor Party has no policy. Not only do you have no policy, you use your numbers in the Senate—as you will this week—against the interests of small business, which costs this country jobs. When you see the cartoons revealing the inadequacy of your policies, then finally, maybe, the truth is out. So my present to the Leader of the Opposition is a few cartoons of him and his roll-back, speaking the truth, which is something he ought to take into account.

Mr Speaker—The Leader of the House knows better than that. Those papers will be retrieved.

Mr Reith—I will put them on the wall.

Mr Beazley interjecting—

Mr Speaker—I have taken action, as the Leader of the Opposition must have noted.

Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices

Mr Martyn Evans (3.08 p.m.)—My question is to the Treasurer. I refer to the Prime Minister’s previous answer concerning the petrol tax windfall this year: does that include the $1.3 billion tax your budget projects this year from the petroleum resource rent tax? Given that the $1.3 billion estimate was based on a world oil price much lower than it is today, don’t you stand to collect the tax windfall from the resource rent tax worth several hundred million dollars, or do you...
Mr COSTELLO—In a choice between the member for Hotham and the member for Bonython about who has got it right, I take the member for Bonython any time. As he says, the world price has gone up, there is no doubt about that. With regard to the effect on the PRRT, that depends on a number of factors, the first of which, of course, is what the companies themselves do in relation to other exploration that has not any relation to other expenditures.

The idea of the PRRT, when it was introduced—I think it was actually introduced by the Labor Party, by Mr Griffiths from memory; it was certainly introduced by the Labor Party—was, as I recall it, that the petroleum extractors would be taxed on their profits, except to the degree that they used it for new production or other exploration. In fact, that is a good policy aim. If they use it for new production or other exploration, you can actually get to a situation where your receipts go down in the short term, because you are going for longer-term recoveries. I have seen some of this commentary in the press that assumes that the price is fully reflected straight into profit and straight into tax; that is not the idea and it was not the idea when it was introduced, and it does not work that way. The Labor Party introduced it with that in mind, and we have kept it with that in mind. I would certainly advise those people who are considering it to consider it with a proper understanding of how it operates.

Work for the Dole: Alternative Policies

Mrs ELSON (3.11 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Employment Services. Would the minister provide the House with details of the latest rounds of approved Work for the Dole projects. Is the minister aware of any new threats to the program that have emerged in the past week?

Mr ABBOTT—I thank the member for Forde for her question. I note that unemployment in south-east Brisbane has fallen from a peak of 15.7 per cent in January 1993, when the Leader of the Opposition was minister for employment, to just seven per cent now. It is still too high, but it is certainly a welcome improvement under the Howard government. Last week, the government announced more than 300 new Work for the Dole projects, involving more than 4,000 job seekers. This brings the total for the year to nearly 2,000 new projects, involving nearly 30,000 job seekers. These projects involve a wide variety of beneficial work experience such as helping in community child-care centres, designing web sites for community organisations and building boats for sailors with disabilities.

I have been asked about threats to this great program. It is true, as the member for Werriwa pointed out today, that Labor has an honourable tradition of supporting mutual obligation. Unfortunately, that tradition has been completely betrayed by the Labor Party’s current leadership. The Leader of the Opposition originally described work for the dole as ‘a disgracefully shoddy piece of public policy’. The member for Batman described it as ‘evil’. Lately, the member for Dickson has been trying to insist—

Government members interjecting—

Mr ABBOTT—Yes, the absent member for Dickson has been trying to insist that Labor supports Work for the Dole, even though it wants to change the name and the nature of the program—bring in a Claytons work for the dole: the program you have when you have abolished Work for the Dole. Last week, the Leader of the Opposition confirmed Labor’s complete rejection of Work for the Dole when he said in Townsville:

Work for the Dole is about making a small section of the unemployed the target of public opinion. It is a facade. It is about attacking the unemployed and not attacking the problem.

What can you say about a party that says, on the one hand, that Work for the Dole is evil and, on the other hand, that it invented Work for the Dole?

On this subject, the Labor Party have hit more false notes than Tiny Tim. They do not know where they stand. Labor oppose Work for the Dole. They will always oppose Work for the Dole because Labor are too weak to stand up to the ‘all rights and no responsibilities’ brigade which has done so much to hurt and betray the decent people and the battlers of this country.
Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices

Mr SNOWDON (3.15 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Do you recall telling the people of Nyngan in January this year of the ‘empathy between the government and the people in the bush’? Isn’t it true that, when you made that speech, motorists in Alice Springs and elsewhere in regional Australia were paying the same tax per litre of petrol as motorists in Sydney? Isn’t it true that today, because the GST is levied on the retail price, motorists in Alice Springs and elsewhere in regional Australia are paying more tax per litre of petrol than those in Sydney? Prime Minister, why are you making regional motorists pay more tax for their petrol than motorists in the cities? Why are you asking motorists in Nguiu, where the price of petrol is $1.80 a litre today, to pay more tax than the people in Sydney?

Mr HOWARD—I am greatly indebted to the member for the Northern Territory for his intervention, because it gives me the opportunity again to make a point that was made, I thought quite eloquently, by the member for Bonython when he asked a question a few moments ago, and that was that the price of petrol has gone up because the world price of crude oil has gone up. The reality is this. Nothing has happened over the last hour and a quarter. This was the big assault on petrol. We have had a week of headlines and a week of campaigning from the motoring organisations, and this was the big assault from the Australian Labor Party. The member for the Northern Territory introduces—

Mr Snowdon interjecting—

Mr HOWARD—That is true. It is true, as the member for the Northern Territory said, that I went to the beautiful town of Nyngan. I did receive a very warm reception in Nyngan and I did talk about the empathy between the government and the people of Nyngan and about the concern of the Liberal and National parties for the people of Nyngan, our desire to produce better economic conditions and how we had delivered but we still had a long way to go. I say to the people of Nyngan that I do not like the fact that you are now paying more for your fuel than you were a few months ago. I hate that.

Mr SPEAKER—The member for the Northern Territory has asked his question.

Mr HOWARD—None of us likes that. But one of the interesting things that I can tell the member for the Northern Territory is that the gap in Northern Territory fuel prices between city and regional fuel prices following the introduction of the goods and services tax actually fell. In June of this year, the gap in Alice Springs was 9.7c a litre, in July it was 8.7c a litre and in July of 1999 it had been 9.9c a litre. In June of this year, the gap in Katherine was 4.8c; it had fallen to 4.2c by July. In Tennant Creek, it was 8.3c in June and it had fallen to 7.1c in July. This hardly suggests that the introduction of the goods and services tax has worsened the economic position.

Mr Beazley—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. I will leave him time to find his place, because he is a bit desperate on the subject. The question is simple: isn’t it a fact that in Alice Springs now, with a petrol price gap which he is confirming in the answers he is giving here, the petrol price gap basically between the city and the bush is exacerbated by the impact of a 10 per cent tax which comes in on the final retail price? Would that not expand the gap?

Mr SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition has made his point of order, but there is no—

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—I remind members that the chair is attempting to respond to the Leader of the Opposition’s point of order, being ignored by the Leader of the Opposition, and being ignored by members on both sides. The Leader of the Opposition has raised a point of order. The Prime Minister by any measure is being relevant to the question asked.

Mr HOWARD—What matters in this whole debate is what people around Australia are paying for petrol and why they are paying that price. Overwhelmingly, it is because the world price of petrol has gone up. We have now had an extended question time, by any measure, and in an hour and 20 minutes the Australian Labor Party has not pro-
duced one iota of evidence to gainsay the proposition that I put right at the beginning of question time. Let me take the member for the Northern Territory back to what I said at the beginning of question time. I said that the price of petrol at the bowser, which I understand is painfully and unacceptably high to Australian motorists, is due overwhelmingly to the increase in the price of crude oil. If the world price of crude oil goes from US$12 a barrel to US$32 a barrel, it is plain ridiculous to pretend that that does not have a massive impact on the price of petrol at the Australian bowser. I again remind the member for the Northern Territory of the information that is contained on the Shell web site, which points out that the refinery price of petrol, that is, the price before you impose excise or GST has gone up by 8.3c a litre between 30 June and yesterday. The refinery price goes up by 8.3c a litre, and that is directly the result—

Mr Snowdon—I rise on a point of order of relevance, Mr Speaker. I am asking the Prime Minister to tell us if the residents of Alice Springs are paying more tax on their fuel than the people of Sydney.

Mr SPEAKER—The member for the Northern Territory will resume his seat.

Mr Snowdon interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The member for the Northern Territory will resume his seat.

Mr Snowdon interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The member for the Northern Territory is warned.

Mr Howard—I am again grateful for the further intervention of the member for the Northern Territory, because he draws attention to my very next point. Let me remind him that the refinery price went up by 8.3c. The refinery price is the price before you impose an excise or a GST, and, if the retail price against the refinery price rises by 8.3c a litre, if the retail price has only risen by 6.7c a litre, it hardly makes any sense to argue that the GST and the excise have aggravated the situation.

Mr Beazley—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. It goes to relevance. That is not the question he is being asked. We know very well the 10 per cent GST comes in on top of whatever any other—

Mr SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. There is no point of order. Has the Prime Minister concluded his answer?

Mr Howard—Yes.

Mr Snowdon interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The member for the Northern Territory will excuse himself from the House under the provisions of 304A.

The member for the Northern Territory then left the chamber.

Native Title: Mineral Exploration

Mrs De-Anne Kelly (3.22 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Attorney-General. It was reported on ABC radio this morning that the Commonwealth government is working with the New South Wales government to reach a workable agreement on native title as it relates to low impact mining and petroleum exploration. Can the Attorney-General inform the House of these developments. Is the Attorney-General aware of any alternative policies on native title?

Mr Williams—I thank the member for Dawson for her question. The government has made significant efforts to achieve workable native title regimes around Australia. The Commonwealth has been working closely with the Carr government and the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council on native title issues relating to low impact mining and petroleum exploration generally in New South Wales. The Carr government has requested determinations in relation to its low impact exploration regime, which would give native title claimants benefits in excess of those under the Native Title Act. We have been discussing a way of ensuring that, if I make the relevant determination, the additional benefits for the native title claimants under the New South Wales legislation will be secure. We understand that the Carr government and the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council will shortly notify us that they agree with this approach. I have to say, however, that this option is not one available in respect of the Queensland regime. There has also been movement on other fronts in relation to native title. Determinations I
made in relation to opal mining at Lightning Ridge have been through the Senate without a murmur from Labor. Last week, I met representatives of the Western Australian Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander representative bodies to hear their views on the proposed Western Australian alternative regime. At the request of the Northern Territory government, I am reconsidering the Northern Territory’s proposed alternative regime and will engage in further consultation with indigenous bodies in respect of that.

The member for Dawson asked about alternative policies. That brings us to Queensland. The Democrats’ motion to disallow my determinations in relation to the Queensland alternative provisions is due to be debated by Wednesday. Premier Beattie has been pleading for months for federal Labor to deliver certainty to the people of Queensland. On the ABC’s AM program this morning, the Queensland Indigenous Working Group chairman, Terry O’Shane, said:

We would expect, given the assurance by the Leader of the Opposition two weeks ago that they would uphold the full blown right to negotiate, that the federal opposition will vote against the Queensland government’s proposition that is before them in the Senate this week.

However, this morning the ABC also reported the Leader of the Opposition as saying:

We are holding discussions to see if we can arrive at a position which permits that to go ahead and the benefits from a state regime that the Queensland government believes will flow can flow. But at the same time the situation of the native title owners is protected.

The government is engaged in transparent and accountable dealings with states, territories and indigenous groups. At the death knoll, Labor is trying to concoct a secret deal, leaving native title claimants, Queensland miners, the Australian public and even Premier Beattie in the dark.

Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices

Ms GERICK (3.26 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Isn’t it true that until 1 July this year motorists in Kalgoorlie were paying the same tax per litre of petrol as motorists in Sydney? Isn’t it true that today, because the GST is levied on the retail price, motorists in Kalgoorlie are paying more tax per litre of petrol than those in Sydney? Prime Minister, why are you making regional motorists pay more tax on their petrol than those in the cities?

Mr HOWARD—To put it mildly, I think it is a touch disingenuous for a member of a political party that wants to get rid of the $500 million program designed to reduce the gap between city and country petrol prices to have the gall—

Mr Fitzgibbon interjecting—

Mr HOWARD—Your mate from Hunter is up here recommending the abolition of this $500 million program. Now we have the member for Canning asking me a question. The truth of the matter is that, as the Deputy Prime Minister pointed out to me and as shown by those figures I read out in reply to the question from the now departed member for the Northern Territory, the gap between country and city prices is smaller now than it used to be. The reason it is smaller is the $500 million rebate—and the member for Hunter has been up here advocating the abolition of it. He smiles in pleasure at the reminder. It is the best run he has had for six months, because they have been up here advocating the abolition. So I would say to the member for Canning: if you care about Kalgoorlie, go and talk to the member for Hunter. You go and get the member for Hunter to change the commitment he made to the good people of his own electorate—and they are good people—to abolish a $500 million subsidy. That was the program that was designed to ensure that the gap between the city and country prices was smaller historically than it has been for a very long time. Can I say to the member for Canning what I said to the member for the Northern Territory? It is now 3.30 p.m.; we have now been going for 90 minutes, and nothing has altered the central proposition of the government. We do not like these high fuel prices. I say to my fellow Australians: we regret them very much, but they are due to increases in the world price of fuel. They are not due to the GST.
Trade: Parallel Imports

Mr NUGENT (3.30 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for the Arts and the Centenary of Federation. Would the minister advise the House of the benefits to consumers resulting from the government’s parallel importation reforms? Is the minister aware of any alternative policies?

Mr McGAURAN—I thank the member for Aston for his question. The government’s policy of parallel importation removes import restrictions on popular consumer items—CDs, books, software, video games and the like. These reforms will allow Australian importers to obtain these products as soon as they are released anywhere in the world at the most competitive price. So consumers benefit through cheaper prices and a wider array of choice. Vested interests trying to retain the sole rights of their monopoly will cry foul and oppose these reforms. Naturally, that is to be expected because they have had a very, very good run with their import monopoly. The government’s policy is endorsed by the Independent Review Committee on Intellectual Property and Competition, the Ergas committee, which released its report on this issue in April. It said:

... restrictions do allow higher prices to be charged for the protected material than would otherwise prevail.

The ACCC issued a statement at the same time also supporting the government’s position in defence of consumers. So who in their right mind would be opposed to the government’s parallel importation policy? Well, I have unearthed that rarest of documents—an Australian Labor Party policy.

Government members—Oh!

Mr McGAURAN—Well, it is a policy statement.

Government members interjecting—

Mr McGAURAN—They normally do not exist, but this one was released late last week by the shadow minister for industry and technology, the member for Fraser, and the member for Denison, the shadow minister for the arts. It is only two pages, so it skims over the issues very briefly; nonetheless it states that they will continue the import monopoly that exists at present to the disadvantage of consumers. So you can imagine what the Australian Consumers Association, the ACA, said in regard to this policy. Mr Charles Britton, representing the ACA, said the policy was:

... a very poor way of assisting local industry and delivered a pale imitation of parallel importation.

But the real explanation of what lies behind this statement was given by the member for Fraser in a Sky TV interview on Thursday. He said, in relation to the government’s policy, the policy is to:

... try to just drive down the prices. It’s entirely driven by consumer interest which I don’t think will work ...

That is his explanation of the government’s parallel importation policy. I will repeat it. It is one of the great lines of political history. The government’s policy is to:

... try to just drive down the prices.

That is our first crime: to try to drive down the prices. Our second crime, to quote him, is:

It’s entirely driven by consumer interest ...

Good Lord! So the vested interests are running the Labor Party. Who came out in support of the Labor Party’s restrictive, monopolist policy? The AMWU—the good old AMWU—came out, and the Visual Software Distributors Association. So I ask the Leader of the Opposition: is this your policy? Was it endorsed by the shadow cabinet? Is the rest of the frontbench aware of this policy? Because those members told the Financial Review last Friday:

If Labor wins the next election, it will seek to repeal the Government’s parallel importation legislation, introduced in 1998, which allows retailers to import CDs without waiting for permission from the Australian licence holder.

So there you have it: it is roll-back again in a different area from taxation, but again the taxpayer or consumer is the loser.

Goods and Services Tax: Pensions

Mr SWAN (3.34 p.m.)—My question without notice is directed to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, isn’t it the case that some older Australians will lose up to $110 per year in bank interest as a result of the GST and will also lose up to $50 in pension
because you are deeming them to have money that they just do not have? Prime Minister, why is the government so determined to cut the incomes of struggling older Australians and so unwilling to stand up to the banks who are engaging in the same behaviour?

Mr HOWARD—The provisions made by the government in relation to old Australians, as part and parcel of the introduction of the goods and services tax, have been, I believe, very appropriate and they have been widely supported within the Australian community. In contradistinction to the language used by the member for Lilley, let me remind him of the introduction up-front of a four per cent increase in the real value of the pension—

Mr Swan interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Lilley asked his question.

Mr HOWARD—The member for Lilley asked me a question about the financial position of older Australians, particularly those on the pension, and I would have thought the thing that was most germane to their financial security was income security. What we have done is to guarantee that they will always be two per cent in real terms better off than they would otherwise have been, after making full allowance for any increases in the consumer price increase. We have guaranteed something you never did, and that is 25 per cent of average weekly earnings. We have guaranteed an increase in the pension by two per cent in real terms.

Mr Swan—I rise on a point of order on relevance, Mr Speaker. I specifically asked the Prime Minister about deeming.

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Lilley asked about levels of income for older Australians, as I listed them on my sheet of paper here. The Prime Minister is relevant and I call him.

Mr HOWARD—We introduced that. Also, in relation to older Australians—whether they are retired, whether they are dependent on the pension or partly dependent on the pension—I might indicate that one of the consequences of the reforms that came in on 1 July was that tens of thousands more Australians became entitled either to a full pension or to a part pension because of the alteration of the income limit

Health: Vaccine Preventable Disease
Dr WASHER (3.38 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Health and Aged Care. Would the minister inform the House about how the government is working to protect the community against vaccine preventable diseases? Minister, is the fight against vaccine preventable disease an integral part of Medicare?

Dr WOOLDRIDGE—I thank the honourable member for his question and his interest. As honourable members would know, between August and October 1998 we ran a measles control campaign amongst primary schoolchildren which was highly successful. We managed to get to 1.7 million school-children, and the result of this has been that the rate of measles has dropped dramatically—so much so that in September last year there was not a single case of measles in New South Wales, for the first time since 1788.

However, there is one group that is subsequently proving to be difficult, and that is 18- to 30-year-olds. People in this group are too old to have been exposed to the ‘second dose of measles, mumps and rubella’ campaign and too young to have been exposed to measles in the wild. To give you an idea of how the rate of measles has dropped in Australia, in 1993 and 1994 we had between 4½
thousand and 5,000 cases of measles a year, and we dropped to only 236 cases of measles last year. However, that is still too many. Over a third of those cases occurred in Victoria and, interestingly, 90 per cent of them occurred in 18- to 30-year-olds. There was one outbreak that we were able to trace to a single person, a 21-year-old woman who had come back from a holiday in Bali. She worked in a major movie complex in Melbourne, and she had passed it on to 18 different people we could verify with direct contact.

Because of this, I am pleased to be able to inform honourable members that the federal government has decided it will fund vaccines for all Australians between 18 and 30 years of age. We will have state and territory governments deliver it through normal mechanisms, and we will also use general practitioners. We believe that we can do this over the next 12 months, and chances are that this has the very real possibility of eliminating measles completely. An incidental benefit is that, as there are also low levels of immunity to rubella in this age group, we should have a very good chance of dramatically lowering the rate and threat of rubella as well. If we do this and if we eliminate measles entirely from Australia, as we have done with polio, then it would be a remarkable achievement. It shows the benefit of trying to prevent illness rather than just treating it once it happens.

Older Australians: Deeming Arrangements

Ms HOARE (3.40 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Family and Community Services. Minister, are you aware that the National Australia Bank has cut interest payable on the deeming accounts of older Australians, blaming the GST? Minister, did the government anticipate this GST claw-back, and, if so, what action are you taking to protect the savings of older Australians?

Mr ANTHONY—I am aware that that financial institution has made some other arrangements. Certainly, it is the government’s view that banks should be passing on the savings that have been made through the introduction of the new tax system. It is important that people, particularly those on pensions or low incomes, shop around to get the best deeming rate that they can. There are 70 financial institutions that are offering competitive rates. If pensioners in particular wish to access information, they can contact Centrelink or the FACS website. We suggest that pensioners shop around to get the best financial arrangements from banks; there are over 70 financial institutions that are offering these rates.

Schools: Commonwealth Funding

Mr FORREST (3.42 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs. I would like to ask the minister if he is aware of recent comments in respect of Commonwealth funding for schools. If he is, what is his response to those comments?

Dr KEMP—I am aware of such comments, and I thank the honourable member for Mallee for his question. We have heard a great deal from the opposition over the last week about the government’s legislation to restore equity and fairness to school funding. When the Labor Party was in office, there was a decreasing level of fairness and a growing level of injustice in the funding for schools. For many years, the parish schools throughout this country were funded at a level well below their assessed level of need. An inequitable funding system was left in place which refused to fund new schools according to their level of need. This government has restored, through this legislation, fairness in funding so that the neediest parents will get increased support. One of the greatest distortions—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—The minister will resume his seat. I warn all members on my left that I will act very swiftly with anyone who continues to interrupt the minister.

Dr KEMP—One of the greatest distortions that was made by the Labor Party last week was the suggestion that in some way the government’s legislation is unfair because it includes more funding for non-government than government schools. It is the case that for many years there has been an agreement between the Commonwealth and the states that the states will provide...
some 85 per cent of the funding for government schools and the Commonwealth provides the bulk of the funding for non-government schools. So there is absolutely no point whatever in comparing funding for government and non-government schools in this legislation. And that was exactly the case when the Labor Party was in office. The Labor Party’s last school legislation encouraged more funding for non-government schools than for government schools—

Mr Beazley—Not for the richest schools.

Mr SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition!

Dr KEMP—because that has been the basis of Commonwealth funding for schools for almost two decades. Despite that, the Commonwealth government is increasing funding in this legislation for government schools more rapidly than any state government in Australia. Under this legislation, government schools will receive—

Dr Theophanous—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. This legislation is before the House and therefore the minister should comment on this when the second reading debate is finished, not during question time.

Mr SPEAKER—I have been listening closely to the minister’s response. The minister knows that he cannot in fact anticipate debate on the legislation. To date he has not done so.

Dr KEMP—I am responding, of course, to public comment about school funding. The Commonwealth will be spending some $402 million more on government schools this year—not under the new legislation but this year—

Mr Beazley—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. This is manifestly anticipating debate. This is a debate precisely on the amounts of resources that are in the bill and advocacy for it. I would have thought that the minister is now well outside standing orders. He has plenty of opportunity to make these points in the debate and he ought not make them here, at tedious length.

Mr Tuckey—Mr Speaker, on the point of order—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr SPEAKER—Order! I would remind members on my left that, while I have not issued a general warning, the chair is currently what one might call trigger happy.

Mr Tuckey—Mr Speaker, I draw your attention to standing orders 142 through to 144, which are the conditions placed on a questioner, not on a minister. There is only one discipline placed on a minister, and that is that the answer be relevant to the question. Had the questioner raised the issue that anticipated debate, you would rightly rule them out of order. If the minister does so, it is outside of the conditions.

Mr Zahra interjecting—

Mr Tuckey—Write me a letter about it.

Mr SPEAKER—The Minister for Forestry and Conservation has made a point well known by all members in the House who have been here for any period of time, and that is that the minister’s answer is currently consistent with the answers that have been allowed when legislation has been before the House.

Dr KEMP—This year the Commonwealth will be spending some $402 million more on government schools than in 1996 when the Labor Party legislated the amount of funding for government schools. This is an increase of 26 per cent by the Howard government on government schools over the last four years. At the same time the number of pupils in government schools has increased by 2.3 per cent. So there has been a massive increase in funding for government schools by this government and, although we do not have primary responsibility for funding government schools, this illustrates the essential fairness and equity of the schools funding legislation of this government. In addition, for the non-government schools, let me simply make the point that every non-government school organisation—Catholic and non-Catholic, independent, Christian schools—supports the basis on which the Commonwealth government is proposing to legislate to fund schools. As Peter Crimmins, the executive officer of the Australian Association of Christian Schools, has said, choice in schooling is now a reality for working-class families.
You would think from the debate last week that the opposition are violently opposed to this legislation. They do not like it, they do not like its principles, they are violently opposed to it, and therefore one might assume they are going to oppose it. But no, the Leader of the Opposition made it clear on 4 August:

We have accepted the changed basis of the needs arrangement associated with the private schools. He went on to say—

Mr Crean—I thought you weren’t anticipating debate.

Mr SPEAKER—The minister is now engaging in debate on the bill.

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

3.50 p.m.

IMMIGRATION: WOOMERA CENTRE

Mr SCIACCA (Bowman) (3.50 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I seek leave to make a short statement with respect to the matter of the Woomera Detention Centre.

Leave granted.

Mr SCIACCA—During question time the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs mentioned the unrest that was occurring at Woomera Detention Centre at the moment. I want to put it on the record and make it very clear that the Labor opposition does not in any way condone the actions of those people. In fact, I put out a public statement making it very clear that that unrest would not be tolerated and that the destroying of buildings and putting people in harm’s way is not the Australian way. I join with the government in saying that they should lay down whatever it is that they have got as weapons and stop burning the place down and go back to wherever they have got to go. I also want to make it clear that we support any reasonable attempts on the part of the government to make sure that those riots or whatever is happening there are quelled as soon as possible.

QUESTIONS TO MR SPEAKER

Parliamentary Library

Mr ALBANESE (3.52 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, on 17 August, which was the last sitting Thursday, you responded to a number of questions which I had raised concerning the Parliamentary Library and said:

The practice accepted across the public service—and endorsed by successive governments—is that factual information which either is publicly available or can readily be made publicly available is to be provided at officer level to the Parliamentary Library without reference to ministers or ministers’ offices.

Mr Speaker, has the requirement imposed by the Minister for Community Services that requests for information from the Parliamentary Library to Centrelink be made through the minister’s office been duplicated by any other minister in their area of responsibility? Can you ascertain this in both your capacity as Speaker and as chair of the Library Committee and report back to the House?

Mr SPEAKER—I thank the member for Grayndler. I will of course take up the matters he has raised and report back to the House. He gives me the opportunity to add that the statement made by me on the last sitting day was misrepresented in an editorial in the Weekend Australian. I hope members noted the comments I made subsequently in a letter to the editor to clarify the position of the House.

Mandela, Mr Nelson

Dr SOUTHCOTT (3.53 p.m.)—As Nelson Mandela will be in Canberra next Wednesday to receive an honorary doctorate from the ANU, is there any possibility of the parliament inviting Mr Mandela to a parliamentary reception or to address the parliament?

Mr SPEAKER—The member for Boothby raises an issue that is worthy of consideration, although I would point out to the member for Boothby that to actually address this House is an honour that has been accorded to, I think, two serving presidents of the United States. Without in any sense detracting from the magnificent service given to humanity by Mr Mandela, he is not now serving in a capacity as President of South Africa. In that sense, it would be creating something of a precedent. The member for Boothby had earlier raised with me the question of some form of parliamentary reception. As I understand it, Mr Mandela’s
visit is a private one. Mr Mandela’s itinerary has been developed in consultation with Mr Mandela. Given the number of functions on the itinerary and his age, he was reluctant to have any further functions included. I would be happy to raise the matter for conformation with the Ceremonial and Hospitality Section of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet or to ask them for an opinion. I think it fair to place on the record that there has been no reluctance on the part of the parliament to consider a civic reception for someone as prestigious and deserving as Mr Mandela, but there has been some reluctance I believe—and I will confirm this—given his otherwise busy program in Australia and his age.

Mandela, Mr Nelson

Mr LEO McLEAY (3.55 p.m.)—On the same matter, Mr Speaker, if time does not permit it may be a problem, but maybe you could consider inviting Mr Mandela to sit on the floor of the House at question time next week. That would afford an honour to him that we have not afforded to too many. I think the Speaker of the House of Commons and Mr Speaker Dubcek of the Czech parliament are the only two I recall we have given that honour to recently. At least that would have him in the precincts of the House and be one way of showing some honour to him.

Mr SPEAKER—I will investigate the matters raised by the Chief Opposition Whip. Of course, Mr Mandela would be welcome to join us in the distinguished visitors gallery. If that fitted into his program, we would be happy to accommodate that.

Mr Leo McLeay—Yes, please. To invite him to sit in the gallery would be not offensive but a bit cheap whereas, if we invited him to sit on the floor of the House, as we have done with other people of considerable stature, that would be a way for us to show some dignity to him and to take account of the relations between Australia and South Africa and the position that the Australian parliament took in the bringing to power of Mr Mandela and the overthrow of the apartheid regime. That would be a fitting way for us to show him that respect. I think to ask him to sit in the gallery would be—I would not turn up, if I were him—

Mr SPEAKER—The Chief Opposition Whip is not helping the situation with his latter remark. I will of course take up the matter he has raised but, as he and the member for Cunningham are well aware, the Speaker has some obligation to see what the precedent has been and not to create a precedent by taking any other action. The Chief Opposition Whip has acted in a discourteous way in simply excusing himself from the House while I am addressing a question asked by him.

Mr Slipper—He should apologise.

Mr SPEAKER—I believe so.

Questions on Notice

Mrs CROSIO (3.58 p.m.)—Under standing order 150, I request that you write to the Prime Minister concerning questions which I have had on the Notice Paper—No. 1134 since 15 February and No. 1415 since 10 April. I have requested your help in the past, but as they deal with Kirribilli House and the Lodge and spending taxpayers’ money I would request that you write again to the Prime Minister and ask him to answer those questions.

Mr SPEAKER—I will take up the matters raised by the member for Prospect, as the standing orders allow.

Questions on Notice

Mr KERR (3.59 p.m.)—Under standing order 150, I request that you write to the Prime Minister with respect to question No. 1242 regarding a question of 9 March in relation to the Ombudsman and question No. 1283 of 16 March regarding Commonwealth employment in my electorate. Each matter is long outstanding.
Mr SPEAKER—I will take up the issues raised by the honourable member for Denison.

PETITIONS

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

Environment: Cross-Border Contamination

To the Honourable the Speaker and the Members of the Parliament assembled:
The petition of the undersigned citizens of Australia respectfully showeth that:
Contamination of the environment across national borders like the effects of Chernobil or the more recent contamination of Hungary’s second largest waterway, the Tisza river with cyanide as well as assorted heavy metals from a Rumanian-Australian mining joint venture calls for the establishment of international instruments to prohibit and prevent environmental contamination across borders.

Therefore your petitioners humbly pray that:
The Australian Parliament, through its diplomatic means, hasten the establishment of international instruments to prohibit and prevent environmental contamination across borders.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

by Mr Barresi (from 138 citizens) and Ms Burke (from 123 citizens).

Goods and Services Tax: Beer Prices

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

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House that the Government expects prices for sales of draught beer over the bar to rise by around 7 to 9 per cent as a result of the GST package.

This expected price rise is much greater than the 1.9 per cent promised by the Prime Minister before the last election when he said: ‘There’ll be no more than a 1.9 per cent rise in ordinary beer.’ (John Laws Program, 23 September 1998).

Your petitioners therefore request the House to call on the Prime Minister to honour his promise that beer prices will not rise by more than 1.9 per cent as a result of the GST.

by Mr Barresi (from 168 citizens).

Telecommunications: CSIRO Microwave Communications Tower

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

We, the undersigned residents of Clayton Victoria, strongly object to the erection of a concrete communications tower at the CSIRO site in Clayton. The tower is located close to the boundary fence in Bayview Avenue, adjoining a residential area. It will be used for microwave communications. Our objections to the tower are as follows:

1. Residents were not informed of the plans to build this tower.
2. The tower causes a huge and detrimental visual impact on the surrounding area and is visible in a wide arc.
3. The tower may adversely impact on the value of surrounding properties with a flow-on effect for the income of the City of Monash.
4. The impact on health of microwaves is at the very least still not proven. The microwave dish points directly over residential properties.

We request therefore:

That the tower be dismantled.

That a comprehensive environmental impact statement be prepared including an investigation of the health impact of the transmission of microwaves.

3. That a thorough process of consultation be undertaken with residents in the neighbourhood.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the House heed our wishes.

by Ms Burke (from 11 citizens).

Car Industry: Tariffs

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

The petition of certain workers, their families and others whose livelihood is dependent on the car industry, draws to the attention of the House the present crisis in the car industry.

Your petitioners therefore request the House to consider:
Monday, 28 August 2000  REPRESENTATIVES  19417

Immediately lowering the wholesale sales tax on cars to the GST equivalent, and
Ensuring that there is a full public inquiry into the
car industry before proceeding with any reduction
in the car tariff below 15 per cent.
by Mr Cox (from 1,754 citizens).

**Centrelink: Staff Cuts**
To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the
House of Representatives assembled in Parlia-
ment.
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 ac-
cessible social security system.
Your petitioners request that the House of Repre-
sentatives should stop the Centrelink staff cuts.
by Ms Hall (from 18 citizens).

**Kirkpatrick, Private John Simpson**
To the Honourable Speaker and Members of Par-
lament of the House of Representatives assem-
bled in Parliament.
We the undersigned draw to the attention of the
House that under the Imperial Award system, the
award of the Victoria Cross was denied to John
Simpson Kirkpatrick, of Simpson and the Donkey
fame, as the result of some confusion in the original appli-
cation. In 1915 John Monash (later General) rec-
ommended Simpson for the Victoria. In 1967
Lieutenant Casey who also witnessed Simpson’s
work (later Governor General, Lord Casey) to-
gether with Prime Minister Holt and the Chief of
the General Staff, Major General Brand (also a
witness) recommended him for the VC. This was
also denied. The British Government claimed that
a dangerous precedent would be set. Your peti-
tioners request that the House of Representatives
do everything in their power to honour the integ-
rency and wishes of these fine Australians and
overturn the original decision not to award the
VC to Simpson. Simpson is symbol of the self-
sacrifice, mateship and all those values that An-
zacs now stand for and Australians treasure. By
honouring him, we honour them all.
by Mr McClelland (from 41 citizens).

**Telstra: Majority Public Ownership**
To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the
House of Representatives assembled in Parlia-
ment.
These petitioners of the Division of Shortland and
adjoining areas are deeply concerned at any plans
to further privatise Telstra.
Further privatisation of Telstra will result in the
loss of thousands more Telstra jobs, worsening
services to regional and rural Australia, and the
loss of up to $1 billion a year for all Australians
earned from Telstra profits.
We believe these profits, both now and in the
future, should be set aside to secure improved
educational opportunities for our children, in-
creased research and development funds for our
scientists and doctors, and more money for rural
and regional Australia.
Your petitioners therefore respectfully request
that the House reject any further sale of the
Commonwealth’s shares in Telstra and that the
annual profits from Telstra be used for the benefit
of all Australians.
by Ms Hall (from 27 citizens).

**Genetically Modified Food: Labelling**
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of
the House of Representatives assembled in Par-
lament.
The undersigned citizens and residents of Aus-
tralia 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 our food. And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

by Ms Hall (from 54 citizens).

Health: Wallsend After-Hours Service

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

The petition of certain electors of the Division of Charlton draws to the attention of the House that Wallsend Primary Care, the after hours bulk-billing service at Wallsend Hospital Campus will close in September 2000, because of lack of support from other General Practitioners to assist and relieve at the practice.

Closure will place a large burden on emergency services at John Hunter and Mater Hospitals.

Your practitioners therefore ask the House to establish a Commonwealth sponsored after-hours medical service for the Wallsend community.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

by Ms Hoare (from 272 citizens).

Refugees: Kosovo

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 that A number of displaced people from Kosovo were given temporary residence in Australia on Safe Haven visas and later forcibly repatriated.

In view of the original welcome extended and the dangerous and deprived situation to which they have returned, your petitioners humbly ask you:

to use every endeavour to remove any barriers that might impede the return to Australia of those repatriated Kosovars who wish to do so, and in particular,

that appropriate resources be given to either the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs or to UNHCR to allow those Kosovars to comply with the relevant processes and procedures of applying for refugee status,

that such applications be treated sympathetically, and

that the eventual return to Australia of such Kosovars as qualify, be facilitated.

by Mr Kerr (from 911 citizens).

Medicare: Ultrasound Rebates

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

The women of Australia draw to the attention of the House, recent Medicare rebate cuts for ultrasound examinations prior to 17 weeks gestation, resulting in large gap payments for patients. We, therefore, ask the House to investigate the Medical Benefits Schedule dated 1 February 2000 and reverse the rebate cuts therein on the grounds that it discriminates against pregnant women.

by Mr McClelland (from 1,607 citizens).

Goods and Services Tax: Feminine Sanitary Products

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:

That we the undersigned citizens of Australia wish to protest the introduction of a Goods and Services Tax, (GST), on feminine hygiene products, such as tampons and other sanitary items.

The reasons for our objection are because these items have never before been taxed, they are essential for the health and well-being of all women of childbearing age, and a tax on these products would specifically financially disadvantage women.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the House will bring this matter to the attention of the Prime Minister of Australia, the Honourable John Howard.

by Mr McGauran (from 294 citizens).

Newcastle Customs House: Sale

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

The petition of certain Australian citizens who appreciate the importance of buildings listed on the Register of the National Estate, draws to the attention of the House the proposal of the Commonwealth Government to sell the Newcastle Customs House.

Once sold and removed from the protection of public ownership, there can be no guarantee this heritage-listed building will survive in its present superb architectural form. Whatever its commercial value might be, such value is of no consequence compared with its historic, aesthetic and social significance for Newcastle and the whole of Australia.
Your petitioners therefore ask the House to not sell Newcastle Customs House.

by Mr Morris (from 1,100 citizens).

Tasmanian Legal Aid Commission: Funding

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

This petition of certain residents of the state of Tasmania draws to the attention of the House the legal and social consequences arising from inadequately funding the Tasmanian Legal Aid program adopted by the Federal Government.

Your petitioners ask the House to reconsider the Government’s decision to inadequately fund the Tasmanian Legal Aid Programs to this state, thus unfairly removing access to the justice system for a large number of Tasmanians.

Your petitioners therefore request the House immediately rectify the problem and increase the funding available to the Tasmanian Legal Aid Commission.

by Ms O’Byrne (from 78 citizens).

East Timor: Aid—East Timor: Australian Defence Force

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

This petition of certain citizens of Tasmania notes that Australian troops have been deployed as part of a multinational force in East Timor. We further note that the people of East Timor continue to experience suffering as a result of conflict.

We therefore petition the House to require the Government and all responsible Ministers to
(a) Appropriately and adequately resource Australian forces in Indonesia
(b) Continue to monitor and provide aid for the people of East Timor

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

by Ms O’Byrne (from 169 citizens).

Education: Funding

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

The petition of certain residents of the state of Tasmania draws to the attention of the House their grave concerns at increase of government funding to non-government schools and the relative decline in funding for public education.

Your petitioners therefore request the House to restore public education funding at least to 1996 per capita levels.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will every pray.

by Ms O’Byrne (from 3,544 citizens).

Television: Advertisement Volume

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

The petition of certain residents of the state of Tasmania draws to the attention of the House the impact that television advertising which is broadcast at a level higher than programming has upon the community.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the House act to amend the Broadcasting Services Act such that advertising is required to be broadcast at the same volume as the programs in which it is placed.

by Ms O’Byrne (from 68 citizens).

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

To the Honourable the 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 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 Ms O’Byrne (from 53 citizens).

Australian Broadcasting Corporation: Funding

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 concern that the Federal Government’s actions are threatening the future of Australia’s only independent national broadcaster—The Australian Broadcasting Corporation.
We urge the House to ensure that adequate funding is provided so that the ABC remains a comprehensive broadcaster with a high level of in-house production and is not compromised by government interference, advertising or sponsorship.

by Mr Ronaldson (from 1,398 citizens).

Goods and Services Tax: Banking and Financial Sector

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament, we the undersigned citizens of Australia draw the attention of the House to the problems of administration and collection that the GST will cause small business, and we point out to the House that this tax will impact disproportionately on rural Australia, helping to further divide our Nation.

We urge the House to consider the merits of a partial Debit Tax that, if levied on all bank and financial institution withdrawals at a rate of less than 0.1 of a cent in the dollar, would raise enough revenue to replace a GST. It would be more efficient, more equitable, and harder to avoid. We urge the House to legislate to introduce it and replace the GST.

by Mr Zahra (from 7,919 citizens).

Petitions received.

PRIVATE MEMBERS BUSINESS

Post Polio Syndrome

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (4.03 p.m.)—I move:

That this House:

(1) recognises Post Polio Syndrome, as thousands of Australians are now experiencing the late effects of contracting polio some 30 to 40 years after the initial infection;

(2) notes that it is estimated that a minimum of 20,000 to 40,000 people had paralytic polio in Australia between the 1930's and the 1960's and it has only been recently that this syndrome has been diagnosed;

(3) gives support to the Post Polio Network set up around Australia;

(4) helps the establishment of assessment clinics for those that suffer from this disorder;

(5) helps educate medical professionals to recognise this syndrome and encourage further research; and

(6) legislates to recognise the need for post polio sufferers to retire early because of chronic ill health due to past polio infection.

Post polio syndrome is something that many Tasmanians are only too aware of, yet many who know nothing about it poo-poo it as not being a recognisable illness. I can remember the alarm that many parents had when I was young when polio was running rampant. It was very frightening, and most could only watch helplessly as their loved ones, mostly the young, tried to overcome their crippling disease. Now we know that it has an after-effect. Post polio syndrome is a physical disorder with psychological implications. The possibility of having to return to crutches, braces or wheelchairs is once again disturbing and conjures up memories of metal and leather, iron lungs and Kenny hot packs. The symptoms include muscle weakness, joint pain, fatigue, muscle pain or sleep and breathing problems.

The development of this syndrome appears to be time related, occurring between 25 to 40 years after recovery from the initial bout of infection. Many polio survivors, particularly those stricken in the mid-fifties, have not yet begun to experience the painful and often disabling symptoms reported by some other survivors. It is thought by many experts that post polio syndrome may be the result of chronic overuse of polio weakened muscles and joints. Those who went through rehabilitation at the time of their infection and were able to live relatively normal lives after infection did not realise that there was more to come. It is thought that this has now taken its toll and the resulting muscle weakness, muscle and joint pain and severe fatigue have been described as similar to the symptoms of polio.

Although this disease has been acknowledged in the USA for 20 years and in Australia for about 10 years, it is relatively unknown in Tasmania. Yet there are thousands of Tasmanians who suffered from some form of poliomyelitis back then but who did not contract the paralytic form of the virus and so often they went unreported. It is thought that for every person diagnosed there were nine who were not; this is a frightening number that will come home to us.
There are many sad stories because of this, and I have a couple. One farmer was seen to become lazy. He could no longer work as he had in the past. No-one understood what was happening to him, which had disastrous consequences for him and his family. Another man, who died two years ago, had all the symptoms that are now recognised as PPS but not one of the specialists who treated him connected the symptoms with the condition. A correct diagnosis really helps greater understanding. These stories and many others have led to sufferers and their families and supporters setting up an organisation to help themselves as well as trying to educate the health professionals. So when the Post Polio Network in Tasmania contacted me for their initial meeting some time ago, I was only too pleased to go along and assist at that meeting and become their patron. I was amazed that so little was understood about this disease with its latent implications now, and there is a need for education of the community and for people to come to a bigger understanding of what it really means to have this disease.

I feel it is important that all members of this House understand what it means. It really does mean that it is so important to recognise the disease as one that is causing an enormous strain on those who suffered from polio in the past and that it is now recurring just as maliciously as it did before. It means that people’s normal lifestyle is not possible, and there should be a recognition through legislation that some people can no longer continue to work, particularly if that work involves a high degree of activity and/or stress. This really must be recognised. It should be recognised within our social security act and within our retirement legislation; it should be seen for the devil that it really is.

The three major steps that need to be taken are for assessment clinics to be set up around the nation, education packages to be developed for our medical fraternity in order for this syndrome to be properly diagnosed and ongoing research undertaken and, of course, this parliament needs to recognise that post polio syndrome is not some new-fangled social disease—it is very real and has its roots during most of our lifetimes. Along with this is the need to ensure that the Post Polio Network is resourced properly, to allow information to get out to those who were sufferers of polio and who may well be again. These people cannot afford to be complacent about it, nor can their families. Even if they have no symptoms now, their local medical practitioners should be aware that it is in their medical history and that it may be behind some of the symptoms of other medical problems. This can only be done if there is adequate information out in the community. For instance, it was interesting to note that some chronic fatigue syndrome patients are apparently showing up in areas where polio was diagnosed those many years ago. Some believe there may be a link, particularly if these people had been infected in some way or another with polio. I go back to those earlier figures: only one in 10 people were diagnosed with polio back in the early 1950s and the earlier times when the polio outbreaks occurred.

It is important to take action to ensure that both the community and the medical profession are wise to these facts so that they can make more informed judgments when trying to deal with these sorts of symptoms. Let us make sure this malaise does not become such a horror again. At least by being prepared for this syndrome appearing people will not have to suffer without the proper treatment. I would ask that the House support this motion. I thank the other speakers for taking the time to speak to my motion; it is very much appreciated. I intend to continue to follow up the implementation of the ideas put forward today and will continue, I am sure along with many others in the House, to endeavour to bring some of those issues forward to the public and the parliament about the changes that are definitely needed.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenk—Is the motion seconded?

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

Mr WAKELIN (Grey) (4.13 p.m.)—I thank the member for Lyons for bringing this motion to the attention of the House today and I am pleased to rise to acknowledge the great effort going on out there to address post
polio syndrome, a syndrome, I would suggest, is not greatly known to the general community. I am sure that poliomyelitis is well known to many Australians. It was known in Australia as early as 1895 and today, of course, Australia is able to claim that we are free of polio. The last reported case of wild polio virus was reported in 1972.

I remind the House and the general community that poliomyelitis, also known as infantile paralysis, is a neuromuscular disease. There are three types of polio virus. The infection occurs by faecal oral contamination and the virus replicates in the gastrointestinal tract and is carried in the blood throughout the body. In one to two per cent of the infections, the polio virus invades the nerve cells of the spinal chord and, when it does, muscles connected to the damaged or destroyed nerve cells can no longer properly function, resulting in weakness or paralysis of limbs, as well as the muscles controlling speech, swallowing and breathing. It is a very significant syndrome and, as I said earlier, I am sure many Australians are very aware of it.

I know of two specific cases. My first headmaster was very much affected by it, and I admired the way that he dealt with it as a primary school student. I had mentioned to me that a great friend of my wife—a young lady at the time—spent two years in bed with this disease. A great outing for her was to go to the picture theatre in her bed—the patient and the bed were brought to the picture theatre for a great outing. They are a couple of memories that I have and which I bring to the attention of the House.

The post polio syndrome virus lives on in survivors. According to the World Health Organisation it is three years since the last case of community spread polio appeared in the western Pacific. It estimated that between 25 per cent and 65 per cent who have had polio have developed new symptoms many years after the initial infection. As the previous speaker, the member for Lyons, mentioned, the symptoms fall into the three categories: lack of strength and endurance, painful muscles and joints and breathing, swallowing and speaking problems. It is very similar in many ways to infantile paralysis or poliomyelitis.

I would like to focus my comments today on the effort of the support group. I will conclude by talking about a particular example of an individual who has had to deal with this particular issue. The Post Polio Support Group of South Australia Inc. formed in response to the growing awareness of a number of people in the community who have had polio and are now experiencing new problems. They provide a number of services such as mutual support at regional group meetings—individual support from people with similar problems—counselling by trained counsellors, regular newsletters and access to a wide range of relevant information. They can be found at the Neurological Resource Centre on King William Road, Unley, in South Australia.

I also want to acknowledge the work of the Post Polio Network of New South Wales. I note the earlier comments from the member for Lyons about the need to contact the health professionals. I understand that they have information kits on the late effects of polio, having been provided by the over 5,000 polio survivors and 2,000 health professionals. They have quarterly seminars and in 1998 they started holding these seminars in country regions.

Forty issues of their highly acclaimed newsletter have been produced. An international conference ‘Living with the latest effects of polio’ was held in November 1996. Communication channels have been well established with area health rehabilitation centres and divisions of general practice as well as with relevant community organisations and state and federal government departments. There has been frequent and ongoing publicity about polio in late events on national and local radio, television and in the print media. The Post Polio Network of New South Wales also participated in the establishment of the post polio clinic at Prince Henry Hospital and they support research into the late effects of polio. They have established the Polio Awareness Week which, I understand, was from 7 to 12 August this year, on the health calendar. So far they have promoted the positive achievements of polio
survivors and the ongoing need for immunisation and the lifelong challenges faced by polio survivors. They have a comprehensive immunisation information kit, which I touched on earlier. It has been developed as a resource to help members speak to this important subject with knowledge and credibility.

A nominated Network member has recently been appointed to the Minister for Health and Family Services as a consumer representative on the National Immunisation Advisory Committee. A medical alert card and hospital admission fact sheet have been developed for members. Their own Internet site has been in operation for over three years—perhaps a little longer. A post polio library of books, journals, audio and videotapes has been established. Regional support groups exist throughout the state of New South Wales and there is a support group development program. The office is currently being established to further raise their profile and make information support more readily available. That is the work that is being done in one state of the Commonwealth and I am sure it is being replicated throughout many other states throughout the Commonwealth.

In terms of describing individual circumstances, I will refer to a piece from the Canberra Times by Liz Armitage of 1 September 1998. It goes back a little while but it relates to my own experience and shows how it can have a very significant impact. It states:

Roger Smith had just turned 18 and his greatest ambition was to have a career on the land when his life was touched by polio. The young shearer fell ill with a fever and lost the use of his legs. His shearing mates at Parkwood brought him across flooded waterways to the old Canberra Community Hospital. He spent a year in the hospital’s isolation ward. There was a lot of polio around in 1950. Obviously that was the year that he first suffered the affliction. It was contagious and sometimes deadly. Now immunisation has eradicated the disease in Australia and the World Health Organisation has pledged to eradicate it from the Third World countries by 2001.

Mr Smith achieved his dream with the help of two walking sticks. For the past 20 years, he has been running a 105ha farm at Pialligo.

But about five years ago Mr Smith first noticed the symptoms of post-polio syndrome. His left leg began to deteriorate. Now aged 65, he is confined to a walking frame and a wheelchair.

Post-polio syndrome affects about 25 per cent of those who have had the disease, according to Dr Pesi Katrak, a rehabilitation specialist at Prince Henry Hospital, Sydney.

He told a polio conference in Canberra last week that the general opinion was that the syndrome did not affect people who had completely recovered from the virus.

Not many general practitioners knew about post-polio syndrome and patients often complained about doctors failing to take note of symptoms.

Conditions such as anemia, depression and weight gain had first to be ruled out in the diagnosis. There is no cure but the syndrome can be managed with rest, weight control and gentle exercise.

The ACT certainly have their own post polio support group. I cite that experience of one young man of ambition who contracted polio and then the polio came back again some 35 or 40 years later, to emphasise the point of this motion.

In conclusion, this syndrome, as with so many other things, needs to be brought to some prominence to gain greater appreciation. There are many situations like the one I referred to, and I am indebted to the member for Lyons for bringing this matter to the House today.

Ms O’BYRNE (Bass) (4.23 p.m.)—I am most pleased to support my colleague the honourable member for Lyons in this motion, and I acknowledge the comments by the member for Grey, who obviously has a very strong interest in this area as well.

The impact that polio has upon those who suffer from it are well known. Alan Marshall and US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt were two very well-known sufferers of this disease, which many people would like to believe is a thing of the past. A less well-known sufferer was my aunt. Since the introduction of the Salk vaccine in 1955, there has been an incredible reduction in the number of people contracting this very painful
and debilitating disease. But what is much lesser known is the impact that polio continues to have upon those who were sufferers much earlier in life. In their article, ‘Post-Polio Syndrome: Pathophysiology and Clinical Management’, Carrington Gawne and Halstead define the syndrome as:

... a progressive neuro muscular syndrome characterised by symptoms of weakness, fatigue, pain in muscle and joints and breathing and swallowing difficulties ... this may be due to motor unity dysfunction manifested by deterioration of the peripheral axons and neuro muscular junction, probably as a result of overwork.

The Mayo Clinic and Foundation for Medical Education and Research identified the main symptoms of the syndrome as: a past history of polio, usually at age 10 years or older and usually with severe symptoms; a long interval of some 30 years before the late manifestations; gradual onset of weakness over a period of months or longer that may involve muscles not involved with the original illness; weakness or tired muscles later in the day or after mild exercise; and onset usually not before age 30 to 40. Evidence suggests that some 70 per cent of people who suffered from polio 20 or 30 years ago are noting or will note the effects of this syndrome.

The motion proposed by the honourable member for Lyons primarily seeks to achieve two things: firstly, appropriate recognition for the sufferers of post polio syndrome and the impact which it has upon their lives, and secondly, an appropriate response from the House with regard to education for medical practitioners, the establishment of assessment clinics, and the need for early retirement for many sufferers.

Between 20,000 and 40,000 people are estimated to have suffered from paralytic polio between the 1930s and 1960, so the actions of the House today have the potential to affect up to 28,000 Australians who have suffered from polio in the past and may now suffer from post polio syndrome. Many of them remain undiagnosed. Cases of this syndrome have been detected since 1875 by French medical professionals; however, it has only been since the 1980s that the condition has been widely recognised. According to a number of studies, the most common new symptoms for people with a history of paralytic polio are fatigue and joint pain, and these symptoms can easily be misinterpreted and the quality and accuracy of medical treatments can therefore be reduced.

As appropriate medical recognition of post polio syndrome is a relatively new occurrence, the importance of a high level of recognition and the ability of medical practitioners to effectively treat the syndrome cannot be understated. While it is clearly inappropriate for the House to direct or encourage the direction of medical practitioners in the manner of treatment of their patients, the House and, consequently, the government, can rightly play a role in facilitating the education of doctors. This is an important feature of the motion proposed by my colleague and one which I believe all members should support. Specialised assessment clinics would also greatly benefit sufferers.

The symptoms which these Australians are suffering can have a most severe impact on their lives. With an average of 35 years between the onset of the initial episode of polio and the onset of symptoms relating to post polio syndrome, many sufferers are feeling the impact later in life and, indeed, at a time closer to retirement. But close to retirement age, we must always remember, is not retirement age, and we should be aware of treating this illness as a normal condition of aging and writing it off as a priority. Instead, we need to recognise that early retirement by sufferers is not a lifestyle choice—they do not do it because they just want to go home—but a health obligation.

There is a clear need for appropriate legislation to recognise the health situation of those suffering from post polio syndrome, particularly those who are unable to continue working. I wish to clearly state my unequivocal support for this motion and my consequential belief that it is time for this House to act. The impacts of polio can clearly be of a most painful and debilitating nature, and for those who have in the past suffered from this disease to have the long-term impacts forgotten is a travesty.

I want to pass on my thanks and respect to those who are active in the post polio syn-
drome support groups around Australia and particularly those in my home state of Tasmania. I urge all members to support this motion, perhaps partly because of my own personal guilt at not having defined the cause of my late aunt’s illness.

Mr LAWLER (Parkes) (4.28 p.m.)—I too wish to express support for this very worthwhile motion calling for greater recognition and awareness of post polio syndrome. I extend my great thanks to the member for Lyons for drawing it to my attention and to the attention of the House, because, I am embarrassed to say, it was not a condition that I was familiar with prior to his proposing this motion to the House.

As we have heard, the syndrome is occurring in former polio patients. It most often appears as a second wave of chronic increasing disability about 30 years after being infected with the virus. All polio sufferers will experience some degree of this heartbreaking return to illness, according to the Post Polio Institute at Englewood Hospital in New Jersey. An institute director, Dr Richard Bruno, says that a study published last year indicates that up to half of people with chronic fatigue are probably suffering from post polio syndrome. This represents a devastating setback for former polio sufferers, who had long ago fought and succeeded in putting the worst days of the disease behind them.

Symptoms vary but severity levels seem to be linked proportionately to the extent of disability suffered by the patient in the initial stage of the disease and some three decades prior. In the worst cases the re-emerging symptoms can be intense, if not overwhelming, and include fatigue, painful joints, respiratory problems and rapidly diminishing muscle strength. Ironically, the post polio syndrome has emerged at a time when the polio disease itself has been practically eradicated globally, with the exception of 10 countries in Africa and southern Asia. It is estimated that between 15 million and 20 million polio survivors worldwide will soon begin, or have already begun, to experience a sudden decline in their physical wellbeing. On top of the bodily discomfort, victims also suffer a great degree of psychological distress and depression at the prospect of a disease returning to have a dramatic impact on their lives long after they have recovered—or thought they had recovered—or had stabilised and come to terms with the extent of their disability. To be suddenly struck with a polio related health crisis no doubt reproduces the fear, vulnerability and uncertainty that accompanied these patients’ first bouts with polio.

Add to this the number of milder cases of polio that went undiagnosed, where patients suffered no ill effects, enjoying good health for their entire lives. For these individuals the onset of post polio syndrome will be an emotionally devastating ambush—from excellent health and mobility to possibly muscular atrophy and rapidly declining energy levels. From a health care perspective the situation is aggravated by the number of people likely to be affected by the post polio syndrome, which will be much higher than the number of people treated for polio between the 1930s and the 1960s. Dr Bruno, who boasts 17 years experience studying post polio syndrome disability, estimates that almost 40 per cent of paralytic cases were not diagnosed at the time. Furthermore, he points out that the figure for undiagnosed non-paralytic cases would be much higher still, since most people who were infected with polio contracted only a mild strain. It attacked the brain in the same way but did not result in muscular paralysis, resulting in only flu-like symptoms and was never diagnosed. Nonetheless, these people also fall victim to post polio syndrome symptoms, suspected to be caused by long-term nerve damage incurred at the time of infection, leading to premature deterioration often after calling that limb into greater use in the mistaken belief that they were cured. As a result, exercise can make the condition worse by fatiguing damaged connections, though some exercise to maintain movement is usually desirable.

The modern arrival of widespread polio vaccination programs means that today’s doctors have little experience with the disease and, in some cases, can be sceptical about its late effects. I call on this House to recognise this syndrome and note the many
thousands who are at risk or already afflicted. I support in strong terms calls to establish a national network and assessment clinics as well as more research and education, particularly among medical professions. There is also a desperate need for this syndrome to be recognized in legislation as a legitimate cause for early retirement, following of course sufficient work to establish a positive and reliable diagnosis.

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.

Health: Needle Supply and Exchange Programs

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (4.33 p.m.)—I move:

That this House:

(1) recognises the:

(a) positive contribution needle supply and exchange programs have made to curbing the spread of infectious diseases through injecting drug use; and

(b) cost to the community of needle stick injury;

(2) encourages State and Territory Governments to:

(a) extend the principle of reducing harm by needle supply and exchange programs to include reducing the risk to the broader community of needle stick injury from syringes discarded improperly; and

(b) embrace retractable syringe technology across the health sector to reduce the risk and cost of needle stick injury to health professionals and health service consumers; and

(3) calls on the Federal Government to;

(a) initiate trials of retractable syringes for Government-funded needle supply and exchange programs to determine the practicability, clinical effectiveness and cost effectiveness of supplying retractable syringes; and;

(b) embrace the use of retractable syringes in the Commonwealth’s own medical and allied health activities, for example Defence.

My motion before the House today tackles the issue of the use of retractable syringe technology in our community. It builds on my earlier remarks on this subject in the House on 12 February 1997 when I presented what I thought was compelling evidence supporting the take-up of retractable syringes in the health sector. The data I provided identified the false economy of not purchasing the slightly more expensive retractable syringe technology for use in the health sector. The existence of a retractable syringe manufacturer, Uni-Ject Australia, in my electorate encouraged my advocacy of this technology. Uni-Ject has been making inroads into the global syringe market, but has barely scratched the surface of the 400 million or so syringes we import each year—which, as at June this year, included only three per cent as retractable devices.

Today, my advocacy of retractable syringe technology continues. In a nutshell, the motion recognises that retractable syringes have a major role to play in the needle supply programs and the broader health sector, and sets out a pathway for trialing and taking up the technology. Needle-stick injury remains a serious workplace health and safety issue for people in the health professions and health sector consumers. Information on needle-stick injuries in Australia is not always thoroughly and systematically collected. However, the National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research estimated that about 3,100 health workers were jabbed or splashed with blood in 1997. The 1997 Safe Workplace publication suggested that there was a reluctance on the part of needle-stick injured health workers to report their injury for fear that they had been infected and would lose their jobs. In Australia there have been identified problems in the health sector in properly dealing with needle-stick injury. A 1998 survey of 39 incidents in a major Australian public hospital revealed that only eight per cent were followed up by appropriate tests of patients or staff. In the US accidental needle-stick injuries account for 86 per cent of all cases of occupationally related infectious disease transmission. The Federal Centre for Disease Control and Prevention reports that approximately 800,000 to one million health care workers a year receive accidental needle-stick injuries, resulting in about 18,000 health care workers becoming infected with hepatitis, HIV or other blood
borne viruses as a result. Between 250 and 300 of those infected die.

Patient risk management can be improved by the use of retractable syringes. With an incident like that seen at Frankston hospital, where a syringe was reused in surgery after inadequate cleaning, the use of the technology would have removed the threat to patients. Clearly, the use of retractable syringes would avoid this type of clinical error. I have with me today an example of the type of retractable syringes suited to clinical use in the health sector. I will show you how this 5ml Uni-Ject ENSI single use syringe operates. After fully depressing the plunger, the end cap is then drawn in with the needle into the plunger itself and is then withdrawn into the syringe cylinder. Once the needle is fully concealed and the indents in the plunger are exposed, the plunger handle is simply broken off, rendering the needle safe inside the cylinder itself.

The motion today calls for the federal government to provide leadership to the health sector by embracing the use of these types of retractable syringes from the Commonwealth’s own medical and allied activities, such as in the defence forces. In the area of government funded needle supply programs, the evidence clearly demonstrates the positive contribution needle supply and exchange programs have made to curbing the spread of infectious disease. This evidence is compelling and, although there is not time for me today to go into it in any great depth, it is clear that these programs have directly contributed to the containment of HIV and hepatitis. What concerns me is that these gains are being placed at risk. There is a genuine fear in the community of contracting life-threatening diseases as a result of inadvertently becoming the victim of needle-stick injury caused by a used syringe being left in a public place, a transport service or a recreation venue.

In Australia, users of needle supply programs in some areas have a return rate as high as 90 per cent, while in other areas it is as low as 10 per cent. Though many of the syringes not returned are disposed of in a thoughtful manner, such as in sharps bins, many are not. Up to 70 per cent of injecting drug users are infected with hepatitis C, which has an estimated transfer risk from needle-stick injury of between three to six per cent. This is not great, but it is still a threat that we can deal with by the use of single-use retractable syringes being made available through government funded programs. A variety of devices are available. This sample I have here today is a style that automatically retracts once it is fully depressed, activating a motion that sucks the needle back into the syringe itself, automatically, using a spring-loaded mechanism. That automated function ensures that the needle is retracted safely. Regardless of the state of the user or their control of their faculties, the broader public is not placed at risk by an inappropriate disposal of this device.

I am delighted that since my call for action the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy resolved at its 13 July meeting to develop a technical standard for retractable needles and syringes for use by the drug injecting community. The cost differential continues to narrow, and it is now time for a trial of a variety of the retractable syringe technologies for government funded needle supply programs to determine the practicality, clinical effectiveness and cost effectiveness of supplying these devices through those programs.

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

Mrs Draper—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (4.38 p.m.)—I support the member for Dunkley in his call for measures to minimise the harm caused by injecting drug use. I am pleased that he is able to stand up in this place and speak positively about needle and syringe programs.

Like most electorates, Fowler, as the member for Dunkley would know, has a drug problem. Cabramatta, let’s face it, is Sydney’s heroin mega market: the best prices, the biggest supply. The grim residue of those urgently needing a hit is discarded syringes in parks, in lanes, on footpaths, in school grounds and playgrounds, in people’s front yards, in toilet blocks, on windowsills and in gutters and trees.
Fairfield City Council outdoor staff have filed many needle-stick injury reports. They say they are not employed to be human pin-cushions. Their union, the MEU, says Cabramatta urgently needs a permanent safe injecting room to get the syringes off the streets and out of the playgrounds. On a rough estimate of the number of syringes collected, this is the place which is host city to well over a million hits a year. It is truly an Olympic effort. It represents a danger not only to the council workers but also to ambulance officers, police officers, teachers, tradespeople, doctors, nurses, health workers and those civic minded, often older, citizens who do their bit cleaning up, and also the many children in the home units, houses and flats in Cabramatta.

Cabramatta is a great place. It is full of life, it is a foodie’s paradise, but it seems that there are those from another side of Sydney who go there—not for the food but because it is a major distribution point for heroin. A lot of those heroin users shoot up as soon as they get their supplies. It is not the people of Cabramatta; it is the visitors. With heroin becoming more and more commonly used in and around Cabramatta, there is greater likelihood that more and more young people growing up there will develop habits. That is what is worrying parents and others in the community. It is an issue which the community is deeply frustrated with. It is also an issue that is bringing out some anger, especially among traders and businesses. Some take the view that the drug problem can be solved by limiting the supply of needles. It is an argument that is more advanced than the argument that the drug problem can be fixed by abolishing the supply of heroin. Reality does not support either view. They are also entirely separate issues. HIV-AIDS among drug users in Australia, at something like two per cent, is among the lowest in the world. That is because of the availability of clean needles. That is because Australia introduced needle exchange programs in 1985.

It would be a health disaster to go back. We would be letting loose an appalling peril which would take many lives, which would affect mothers and their infants and which would spread through the community as it has done in countries that responded too late. But it is also about other viruses. I understand that there are about 14,000 new cases of hepatitis among drug users reported each year. It is transmitted most commonly through blood. That means needles are still being shared. I have seen reports that suggest almost 40 per cent of needles are shared or reused. People with the hepatitis virus can carry it for life. Hepatitis represents a major public health threat that needs urgent attention and a cure. We need to contain the spread of the virus as much as possible. That means making clean needles reliably available for injecting drug users. Again, it is the same story, different enemy. The war on HIV-AIDS is also the war on hepatitis. The war on drugs so far has not even seen a cease-fire, and world production of heroin continues to skyrocket, offering better quality at cheaper prices to an ever younger market. That is the reality. Society regrettably has little choice; I wish we did. I am sure seeing our public places littered with bloody syringes makes us all uneasy.

This is a cost which is borne most by the residents of Cabramatta and the people who work there. It is also a cost the people of Sydney are bearing, and the people of Frankston, in the electorate of the honourable member for Dunkley. It is certainly one which iron man Jonathon Crowe brought to national attention after stepping on a syringe at Elwood beach in Victoria. While reflecting on the three-month wait for his blood test results, he called for safe injecting rooms. So has Archbishop Carnley, the national leader of the Anglican Church. But we know, or many are gradually coming to realise, that there is no single solution. Safe injecting rooms, which have the support of so many eminent Australians, like Sir Zelman Cowen and Dame Elisabeth Murdoch, are not the only answer.

That it takes so long to make these small steps in the face of a crisis that is taking away our young people at an increasing pace is a tragedy. That the Prime Minister should bring his political authority to bear—driven of course by opinion polling—on such questions is a tragedy too. Even worse, the Prime Minister’s political revision of an important
drugs education booklet for all households, written by his own expert committee, is disgraceful. The booklet might have saved lives. The Prime Minister is one of the reasons we are making such slow progress in halting the number of deaths caused by heroin. He is the Prime Minister who signalled he wanted to take a high profile on the issue when he elevated zero tolerance to a viable policy approach. We should have zero tolerance to war, to famine, to depression, to poverty and to a whole range of things which exist regardless of how much we condemn them. And we should not tolerate highly addictive drugs which bring on serious and perhaps chronic medical conditions. Zero tolerance can never be expected to work on the streets of Cabramatta. There is a need for real solutions. We have to see the problem from the point of view of the addicted person. We have to treat drug use as a public health issue. We need to educate the public; we need to provide medical assistance so that addicts can recover.

The honourable member for Dunkley might have seen some graffiti in Frankston. I saw it on the program Race around Oz. It said: ‘You can lead a druggie to the light, but only the druggie can fight the fight.’ It speaks volumes about the shortcomings of the strategies we are taking to reduce the use of illicit drugs, reduce the crime levels associated with drug use, save the lives of people who could be our sons and our daughters, and reduce the number of used syringes in the streets and parks of Cabramatta, Liverpool, Warwick Farm and elsewhere.

I am also supportive of retractable needle syringes, despite their costing four or five times more than conventional syringes. Although HIV and hepatitis viruses can survive for a few days in a syringe, the chance of infection from a needle-stick injury appears to be less than people imagine. As long as the possibility is there, we should treat needles with caution. And if the ongoing war against HIV and hepatitis is to be sustained while we keep pursuing strategies against drug abuse which simply are not making much difference, we might have to dig deeper for syringes that do not present the ugly situation of three months wait for blood test results. We owe it to those people who are tolerating the users who discard their syringes without thought.

It is also very sobering to consider that the ones who leave their syringes are a minority of users. The fact is that the stereotype of drug injectors is not correct. Most users inject at home and dispose of their needles with consideration for others. The level of drug use is always going to be higher than the evidence on the ground suggests. That evidence on the ground, the used syringe, is likely to have come from a more risky type of user, someone more likely to carry a needle transmitted virus. Safety needles currently make up less than three per cent of the syringe market. The cost structures involved in running public hospitals these days mean that choice in the matter is limited.

But it is the non-medical members of the community who face much of the emotional pain in being tested for infections after a needle-stick injury—people like iron man lifesaver Jonathon Crowe, people who do not know about safety needles. They are being asked to tolerant syringes on their beaches, on their streets, at their work. At the rate we are going, the level of carelessly discarded syringes is going to increase. The federal government would do well to set an example in this regard. The federal government should trial retractable syringes in Cabramatta, at least as a token, because the federal government is doing precious little there to minimise the problem or minimise the harm brought with the problem. It is about time the suffering public were shown some consideration—consideration they are not being shown by some people who find it necessary to inject drugs. (Time expired)

Mrs DRAPER (Makin) (4.50 p.m.)—I rise to second the private member’s motion moved by the honourable member for Dunkley, Mr Bruce Billson. According to the National Drug Strategy household survey 1999, more than three million Australians used illicit drugs in 1998. The survey found that there were 107,800 recent injecting drug users in Australia. Injecting drug use carries with it the risk of infection from blood borne communicable disease such as HIV and
hepatitis B and C. Many of my constituents are concerned that the community is at risk of injury from used syringes that have been carelessly discarded on beaches, in parks, in schoolyards, in children’s playgrounds and in other public areas by injecting drug users.

Concerned about a growth in demand for syringes, the Drug and Alcohol Services Council of South Australia instituted a review of the state-wide needle and syringe program in April 1999. It was established to examine ways of reducing the number of publicly discarded needles and syringes and increasing the return rates. The review found:

There is a large international, national and state evidence base that needle and syringe exchange programs are effective in preventing HIV amongst injecting drug users. There is also evidence that the statewide needle and syringe exchange program (SNSEP) has contributed to the prevention of HIV and hepatitis B and C transmission in South Australia. HIV prevalence amongst injecting drug users has remained low in South Australia since 1992.

2,564,200 needles and syringes were distributed through the SNSEP in 1998/99.

Exchange schemes are a necessary but not sufficient strategy on their own to stem the spread of hepatitis C— and other communicable diseases— amongst injecting drug users.

While 55% of all needles and syringes distributed in South Australia during 1998/99 were returned, this is only one measure of safe disposal. The total number of needles and syringes disposed of safely cannot currently be estimated. Surveys in partnership with local government and needle and syringe exchanges should be done to determine this rate.

Demand for safe injecting equipment is increasing markedly throughout Australia.

In view of these findings, I support this motion, which calls upon the federal government to:

(a) initiate trials of retractable syringes for Government-funded needle supply and exchange programs to determine the practicality, clinical effectiveness and cost effectiveness of supplying retractable syringes; and

(b) embrace the use of retractable syringes in the Commonwealth’s own medical and allied health activities, for example Defence.

One-millilitre retractable syringes are currently available in the United States and would be most suitable for a trial as outlined in the motion. The Vanishpoint syringe is one such disposable syringe which is used worldwide, in which the needle is spring loaded and thus is retracted automatically and immediately after use.

Furthermore, I would support a joint trial between the federal government and the states, commencing with a trial in South Australia. I have had the opportunity to discuss the possibility of a trial with both the federal Minister for Health and Aged Care, Dr Michael Wooldridge, and the Hon. Dean Brown, Minister for Human Services in South Australia. The state minister for health, the Hon. Dean Brown, is also an advocate of the use of retractable needles suitable for drug users, to assist in the elimination of potentially infectious needle-stick injuries to the general community. I share the state minister for health’s view stated in a press release dated 17 February:

A suitable retractable needle needs to be designed and distributed nationally so that any possibility of a needlestick injury is virtually eliminated.

The health ministers conference met in New Zealand three weeks ago and the public concern about this issue assisted in ensuring that this issue was one of the items on the agenda. At the Australian health ministers conference held on 27 July 2000 it was resolved that:

The ministers agreed to the development of a national standard for syringes with retractable needles for use by injecting drug users, taking into account criteria developed by the Australian National Council on AIDS, Hepatitis C and Related Diseases and the Therapeutic Goods Administration.

The ministers also agreed that the standards developments process should involve a committee with broad representation including representatives of injecting drug us-
ers, experts on injecting practice and the Therapeutic Goods Administration, reporting to the joint working group of the Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs and the Intergovernmental Committee on AIDS, Hepatitis C and Related Diseases. (Time expired)

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney) (4.55 p.m.)—It is incontrovertible that the needle supply and exchange program has made a positive impact on curbing the spread of blood borne diseases in Australia. By international comparison, Australia has a very good record on curbing the spread of HIV. To retain that good record and to translate that good record to other diseases such as hepatitis C, it is very important that the needle exchange program is maintained and extended. The next logical step after a needle supply and exchange program is a medically supervised injecting room. I am pleased to say that there will be one up and running in Sydney in a few weeks time.

Needle exchange is an integral part of Australia’s plan to deal with both drug abuse and blood borne diseases. Needle exchange has put users of intravenous drugs into contact with services and rates of transmission of HIV have fallen dramatically. About two people out of every thousand in our prison system have contracted HIV. This contrasts with the United States where three out of every thousand people in the general population have contracted the disease. Much of that spread of HIV in the United States is because of the ‘just say no’ approach to drugs in that country. Unfortunately, 5,700 Australians have died and a further 16,700 are living with chronic HIV infection, but we have managed to keep new infections to about 500 a year. While that number sounds incredibly high, by international comparison it is quite low. We have to remember the evidence that has come out of the recent international conference in South Africa where it was shown that in some parts of Africa up to 50 per cent of the population are currently living with HIV.

While we have managed to deal with many of the challenges of HIV spread, we have not dealt as successfully with hepatitis C, because it has been prevalent in the community for so long and because it is so much more virulent than HIV. The spread of hepatitis C is much quicker and much easier than the spread of HIV and, for that reason, about 11,000 new cases are diagnosed each year. This number would be very much higher if we did not have the needle exchange programs that we have had up to now. As I said earlier, the needle exchange program needs to be part of an integrated package to deal with the spread of blood borne diseases and indeed the harm associated with illicit drug use. In my electorate in 1998, in six months alone there were 410 reported overdoses from heroin. Not all of those resulted in death. They were the ones that had ambulances called to them. Each year, about 700 people die from heroin overdoses in this country. That is part of the reason that the New South Wales Royal Commission, all of the capital city mayors and the recent New South Wales Drug Summit all called for the establishment of the medically supervised injecting room. The Uniting Church will be opening that facility at 66 Darlinghurst Road in the coming weeks.

Overseas experience has shown that the medically supervised injecting room will have a dramatic impact on the health of intravenous drug users. In Frankfurt, after a safe injecting room was opened the number of fatal overdoses fell from 141 in 1991 to only 22 in 1997 and HIV infection rates from between 70 and 80 per cent to about 18 per cent over the same period. The Swiss have tried a number of innovative approaches to drug abuse. About 73 per cent of the Swiss public support a medically supervised injecting room and 70 per cent support the controlled prescription of heroin to drug addicts who have tried other means of giving up heroin abuse. As I said earlier, a needle exchange needs to be part of an integrated policy to reduce the harm caused by illicit drug use and part of an integrated strategy to deal with the spread of blood borne diseases. The medically supervised injecting room is the next logical step and I wish the Uniting Church very well with its endeavours. But as a community we need to be mindful that it is important always to be open to new approaches to dealing with the dual problems
of drug abuse and the spread of blood borne diseases.

Mrs MAY (McPherson) (5.00 p.m.)—If Australia is committed to lessening the harmful and often deadly effects of drugs on our community, we first must address the matters under our control. As a government we can exercise a degree of control over the danger posed to public health from needle-stick injuries by embracing the use of retractable syringe technology. If the federal government, in conjunction with state and territory governments of all political persuasions, were prepared to adopt and fund the use of retractable syringe technology in needle exchange programs and across the health sector, there would be a significant drop in cases of preventable diseases among the drug dependent population and the wider community.

Australia-wide, more than 450 million syringes are used each year for three main purposes: general legal use, such as in hospitals, diabetes and illegal drug use. There is a legitimate concern throughout the community about needle-stick injuries resulting from both general legal use and illegal drug use. Although the greatest concern centres around needles used by drug addicts, there is evidence that we should be concerned about both areas. The spread of drug related infectious diseases is completely indiscriminate. In fact, to become fatally infected you do not even have to be a drug user; you just need to be unlucky. All it takes is to tread on the wrong bit of sand on the beach or on the wrong patch of grass in your local park. In Australia today there are approximately 100,000 serious drug users, who inject themselves at least once a day, and another 80,000 recreational drug users. In Queensland we have the dubious distinction of being the state with the second highest level of drug use, behind New South Wales. Queensland hands out more than 4.3 million syringes through needle exchange programs every year, and it is estimated that about 40 per cent of these needles are used more than once. Another two million to four million syringes are sold over the counter in Queensland each year. Currently, the onus of responsibility is on these drug users to inject their needle only once and then dispose of it safely. This requires a deliberate, conscious act and often a reasonable degree of self-discipline. But if retractable syringe technology were widely adopted by governments, we would not have to rely on drug addicts to do the right thing in order to keep the Australian public safe.

However, contrary to conventional knowledge and public expectations, it is not only drug users whose actions pose a risk to public health; here in Australia a survey conducted by the Australasian Medical Publishing Company found that a staggering 38 per cent of the hospitals which responded admitted to reusing disposable syringes. A similar study in Canada on the reuse of disposable medical devices found similar results. This is a life-threatening practice that is being regularly carried out by well-trained and well-supervised medical professionals in developed countries. It is a statistic that would frighten any patient. Neither the federal government nor any state government can afford to ignore it. It is not unreasonable to expect that, if retractable syringes captured the drug market and were adopted by a reasonable proportion of the health sector, the spread of preventable diseases transmitted through syringes could be all but wiped out.

Although there is an increased cost associated with the use of retractable syringes, this is mitigated by the savings to the health budget from reduced testing expenses for needle-stick injuries. The initial cost of testing and treating a needle-stick injury is approximately $4,000. Of course, this escalates if the patient is found to be infected with a disease such as HIV-AIDS, hepatitis B or hepatitis C. In addition to the costs associated with accidental needle-stick injuries, it costs the public purse $14.32 million for every 1,000 drug users newly infected with hepatitis C. That equates to around $14,000 per person. So, although retractable syringes are more expensive to produce, the long-term health care burden resulting from needle-stick injuries makes them economically viable. Additionally, improvements in medical technology are substantially reducing the price of retractable syringes. Just last week a Queensland company called Occupational
Monday, 28 August 2000

Representatives

and Medical Innovations announced that it had invented a device that will add less than one cent to the production price of a conventional syringe.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Gash)—Order! The time allotted for the 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. The member will have leave to continue her remarks when the debate is resumed.

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Question proposed:

That grievances be noted.

Voyager Disaster: Legal Action

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Reid) (5.05 p.m.)—I raise the government’s continuing failure to resolve the litigation by HMAS Melbourne personnel in connection with the Voyager disaster of February 1964 and Defence’s unreasonable—some might even say vindictive—approach towards the lawyer acting for many of these personnel. In many ways it is absolutely unbelievable that this parliament is still dealing with aspects of the Voyager disaster more than 36 years after a tragedy in which 82 serving Navy personnel lost their lives. The way the whole affair has dragged on over the years has reflected poorly on both the Navy and successive Commonwealth governments. I note in passing that more recent incidents—including the Black Hawk accident, the fire aboard HMAS Westralia and the serious mistreatment of 3RAR personnel—show that there is still plenty of room for improvement before defence personnel and their families can have confidence in our system of military justice.

For many years the focus of public attention on the Voyager affair concerned the Commonwealth’s approach to litigation by the Voyager crew. It is indisputable that many of these personnel were severely traumatised by the accident. Despite this fact, the Commonwealth strongly contested all claims for damages, with the result that the litigation was protracted, costly and stressful for the individuals and families involved. Eventually the former Labor government agreed to establish two separate, mediated settlement schemes for compensation claims by Voyager personnel. The first, in 1993, dealt with claims lodged before December 1988 and the second, announced in April 1985, concerned claims lodged post 1988. I understand the total cost of these settlement schemes was just under $88 million.

These decisions were a significant advance for Voyager personnel but still left unresolved the position of the Melbourne crew. It was clear from statements at that time that the Commonwealth considered the legal position of the Melbourne personnel to be quite different from that of their Voyager counterparts. This viewpoint was demolished by the High Court decision in the McLean case, which found the Commonwealth liable for damages to a Melbourne crewman and awarded damages of almost $700,000 plus costs.

One would have hoped that the McLean case would have prompted a review of the Commonwealth’s approach to litigation by Melbourne personnel. It appears not to have done so. In June last year I received an answer to a question on notice indicating that some 113 personnel had commenced proceedings against the Commonwealth, of which only 17 had been settled out of court. I will stress those figures again: 17 settled of 113 lodged. It is indicated that settlements then totalled $4.2 million. No estimate of the Commonwealth’s legal costs was given at the time, but more recently a Senate estimates hearing was informed that the Commonwealth’s costs to May 2000, in legal fees and compensation, had reached $10.1 million.

In May I obtained a copy of correspondence to the Attorney-General, Mr Williams, from a Mr James Taylor, a solicitor of Myrtleford in Victoria. Mr Taylor acts for a number of Melbourne personnel, 18 of whom had already received a court ordered extension of time to sue the Commonwealth. In other words, they had overcome a hurdle to further their cases. His letter indicated that another eight extension of time applications were imminent. Out of the 18 cases with extensions of time, five had been resolved—three at the courthouse door, another midstream after five days of hearings, with
after five days of hearings, with the fifth being the McLean case.

An aspect of Mr Taylor’s letter that particularly drew my attention was his estimate that defending cases up to the date of the final hearing could cost the Commonwealth around half a million dollars per claim. His letter expressed particular concern that the Commonwealth was still refusing to mediate cases where the plaintiff had obtained a court ordered extension of time. Obviously, if they have got to that stage, if they have managed to overcome those difficulties and proceed to that stage, there are certain indications that the case might have some bona fides. He correctly noted that this approach by the Commonwealth was having adverse effects in three areas: it was causing unnecessary delay and anguish to the claimants, and obviously to their families and friends, and was affecting their whole lifestyles; it was wasting taxpayers’ money in unnecessary legal costs; and it was wasting valuable court time. In that correspondence, he suggested that, instead, a mediated settlement system be instituted for claimants with an extension of time—that is, for those categories alone, not for every person. On 30 May, I publicly endorsed this proposal.

It is of concern that the government has not even bothered to respond to Mr Taylor’s proposal almost four months after it was submitted. It has equally failed to respond to my media release on the matter. I have now obtained more recent correspondence from Mr Taylor that indicates that the Commonwealth is adopting a very aggressive approach towards the payment of legal costs for HMAS Melbourne cases that have already been settled. I repeat: the Commonwealth is adopting an aggressive attitude towards the payment of legal costs already awarded against it. Mr Taylor indicated that Defence is refusing to pay outstanding plaintiff costs of $1.6 million, despite decisions by a Supreme Court cost assessor. The Australian Government Solicitor appears unable to justify Defence’s attitude towards the matter. It has not been too forthcoming as to any reasons why Defence is taking this negative and regressive attitude. Defence has apparently indicated that it is considering an appeal against the decision of the court assessor. I stress again that these matters go back to February 1964 in their origin.

In the meantime, the Commonwealth’s potential legal costs continue to mount as interest charges apply. I stress again that these costs relate to cases that were settled some time ago—two years ago in one case—cases in which part of the settlement was that the Commonwealth would pay the plaintiff’s legal costs. Without canvassing the legal technicalities involved, it appears to me unconscionable that Defence has refused to pay the legal costs of cases that it settled out of court two years ago. Its refusal appears indicative of its whole approach to the HMAS Melbourne litigation. It almost appears determined to punish Mr Taylor for succeeding in obtaining a just settlement for his clients and for taking up their case for justice many decades after the origins of the matter. I call on the government to put a stop to these sorts of tactics. I have no problem with the Commonwealth protecting the interests of taxpayers, but this does not appear to be what is occurring in this matter. It is high time the ministers involved asked some hard questions about Defence’s behaviour. It should honour the settlements that have already been reached and, just as importantly, agree to mediate further cases where an extension of time has been obtained so that this whole sorry saga does not drag on, benefiting no one but the lawyers concerned. I reiterate: the matter has been dragging on over many decades; there has been inaction. The situation is that a significant number of clients have gained an extension of time. It is time that the Commonwealth moved towards mediating outstanding claims dragging back over 36 years and sought to honour the payments and costs made against it.

Ballarat Electorate: Football

Mr RONALDSON (Ballarat) (5.13 p.m.)—It is a great pleasure to rise tonight to talk on the grievance debate. I would like to take up the theme mentioned earlier of great Australian Rules football victories. In this case, unfortunately, it was not a victory, but I would like to pay great credit to the North Ballarat Roosters, who were beaten by San-
dringham in the VFL over the weekend. They were coached by Gerald FitzGerald, and they put up a very spirited fight. It is great for a country team to be competing in metropolitan Melbourne.

_Opposition members interjecting—_

Mr RONALDSON—I am appalled to hear these interjections from Sydney based members of parliament. The Roosters are not sponsored by an AFL club, and they did a mighty job. I know Peter Wilson, the president, will be very disappointed, but he acknowledged over the weekend that he was very proud of the effort of the team.

The Central Highlands Football League grand finals were also on over the weekend. Springbank defeated Clunes. In the reserves Dunnstown defeated Buninyong, in the under 17⅓s Gordon defeated Clunes and in the under 14⅔s Learmonth defeated Beaufort. In the under 17⅓s I say on a note of sadness that the young men involved in that team dedicated the win to the father of Travis, Jarrod and Luke Toohey. Unfortunately, Jimmy Toohey died a month or so ago when he was blown off the back of a truck when a gust of wind took the tarpaulin. This was a win for Jimmy Toohey, and I know that the boys would have been very proud to go out and play the game for their father and to have won it. Jimmy Toohey was a great local Ballarat resident, and to die so young and leave a family like that was very sad.

In the Central Highlands netball grand finals, in the open section Gordon defeated Bungaree, in the reserves Ballan defeated Bungaree, in the under 17s Hepburn defeated Waubra, in the under 15s Clunes defeated Beaufort and in the under 13s Hepburn defeated Buninyong. Congratulations to all those netball players as well.

Last week there was a program of great excitement for Ballarat. It was called Ballarat—Exporting to the World. I will quote from the press release put out in relation to this. It says:

_BETW was organised by the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Australian Industry Group; City of Ballarat; Department of State and Regional Development; Australia Institute of Export; Ballarat Courier Newspaper; Bendigo Bank; and coordinated by Austrade through their TradeStart office._

This was an absolutely sensational week in the Ballarat region. Last Monday Mark Vaile, the Minister for Trade, launched the program in Melbourne. We thought it was important to go to Melbourne to let capital cities know what regional areas can do and what the Ballarat region was going to do with its exporting to the world program. On Tuesday state Minister Brumby and I were involved in a launch in Ballarat. On Wednesday night we had the exporting awards which the Prime Minister attended, and he presented those awards. On Thursday there was a fantastic expo which showcased all exporters and those involved in the service industries as well. On top of that, on Monday and Tuesday a large number of school students were shown around manufacturing areas to talk about exporting and for them to realise that indeed in regional Australia one in four jobs are in exporting industry. It is about one in five of the rest of the population and in countries like the USA it is about one in 10. So exporting jobs in regional Australia are absolutely imperative, and I am very pleased to say that there are some 80-odd exporting companies in the Ballarat region.

Before I go to the finalists in these awards, I pay great tribute to the two major sponsors, the Bendigo Bank and the Ballarat _Courier_. The Bendigo Bank is a local bank which has actually gone out and worked with its communities and is now doing something in conjunction with communities. If I have a grievance, it is the fact that others are not following suit with the Bendigo Bank. I would like to put on record my thanks and congratulations to the Bendigo Bank for its support. I would also like to put on record my support for the Ballarat _Courier_, because it was the other major sponsor and it has done a mighty job. Bruce Morgan, the general manager, and his publications department have put out this magnificent brochure, which we have put into every Austrade of-
office throughout the world. This is absolutely fantastic.

I will go through the finalists and say a couple of words on them, because I was pretty proud and chuffed to see this fantastic week that occurred last week. We should be celebrating success in regional Australia, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I can tell you that this was brimful of success. In the emerging exporter section we had Stoney Creek Oil Products, Athlegen and Oztrack as finalists. Stoney Creek Oil Products is an Australian owned company producing the finest available cold pressed oils. As it says in this magnificent book, proprietors Fred and Corel Davies spent two years researching the health benefits of flaxseed oil before starting the company in 1992. Athlegen makes treatment tables and specialises in producing body treatment and massage tables for the Australian and international markets. The company’s electric treatment tables are used by masseurs, physiotherapists, chiropractors and alternative medicine practitioners throughout Australia and overseas. It was established in Ballarat in 1994. The winner of that section was Oztrack Pty Ltd, which is a developer of applications for the fast-growing markets of data communication. It was established in 1995 to develop and commercialise revolutionary mobile data communication solutions which link global positioning satellite and global systems for mobile cellular technology. It is a very innovative company. Congratulations to Oztrack.

In the small to medium manufacturing section—I am running out of time, unfortunately—the finalists were Gekko Systems, Ferndale Confectionery and Oliver Footwear. Gekko Systems specialises in mineral processing equipment for use in the gold mining industry. It is the brainchild of former windmill mechanic Sandy Gray and his wife Elizabeth Lewis-Gray. They have been going since 1995 and export all over the world. Madam Deputy Speaker, you will have heard of some of Ferndale Confectionery’s products, such as Jila Mints, Jols, Licorette and Jila Gum. It is a fantastic Ballarat company. The winner was Oliver Footwear. I grew up with Andrew Oliver. This company has been producing boots since 1887, and I know that Andrew was absolutely tickled pink, quite rightly so, with this award.

In the large advanced manufacturing section, Bendix Mintex will be known to all honourable members. They are Australia’s leading manufacturer and supplier of automotive and industrial brake friction products and employ 850 people. They are a fantastic local business. John Valves has been operating in Ballarat since 1895 and is one of Australia’s leading valve manufacturers. It is a great company and a very large employer. Mars Confectionery—well known to the sweet tooths in this place—employs 700 people. It is a fantastic company, which I will speak more about in a second because it was the exporter of the year.

In the services information and education section, Causon International Freight is transporting all over the globe—another great firm. J.M. McMahon and Co. is one of Australia’s leading exporters of dairy products and is based near Ballarat producing cheese and cheese powders, butter, butter oil and frozen cream. And as the Sovereign Hill Museum Association representative said, life on the goldfields is very much an export industry.

Congratulations to the exporter of the year: Mars Confectionery. It is a great company and a great supporter of Ballarat. As all the employer representatives said on the night, the one pivotal thing—which impressed every one and is absolutely right—is that without a loyal band of employees none of these companies could possibly work. Congratulations to everyone involved in these fantastic awards. (Time expired)

**Goods and Services Tax: Petrol Prices**

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (5.23 p.m.)—It is very pleasing to follow the member for Ballarat and say that he is very lucky, post-Kennett and under the Howard coalition government, that there is still some manufacturing in regional Victoria because not too many other regions are doing well. I am aggrieved by, and Tasmanians are reeling under, the impact of the cost of petrol now in this country. Prices in Tasmanian cities are much higher than they appear to be on the
mainland. So what on earth is happening? That is what Tasmanians are asking. We have the impact of the GST, we have the rate of inflation and we have OPEC raising the price of a barrel of oil. That means higher prices, despite all the government says to the contrary. According to the government, it is necessary to keep the budget surplus intact. Well, excuse me. There are people in country areas of Australia who are unable to make their household budget ends meet, let alone keep their savings intact, because of all the pressure being put on them.

One of my constituents rang me on Friday—a young man who went into business over a year ago—and one of his biggest cost components is diesel. He was telling me that the price of diesel had just gone up 4c in a day. You can imagine the cost impost on his business. One of my constituents from Exeter—a town on the Tamar River—did a few sums for us. Don Davey of Exeter wrote to his local paper, as well as to me, pointing out the arithmetic of oil and saying:

In winter 1998, crude oil a barrel dropped to $14 and was 69c at the pumps.

As of August 23, crude oil a barrel is $32, a rise of $18.

The government tells us to equate a crude price rise of $1 to 0.8c at the pumps—let us say 1c for those politicians who seem to be at a loss when confronted with basic mathematics. When I went to school, I was not much good at a lot of things but I could count—that is probably why I became a politician. When I went to school, 14 from 32 was 18. Add 18c to 69c and what do we have? We have 87c, which should be the current price of petrol according to government figures. So why are we being fed blatant lies? Mr Davey goes on to say that his figures are from the Australian Automobile Association and are factual. I think Mr Davey’s words mirror what thousands of people around Australia are saying: how come the government has got its arithmetic so horribly wrong? If the GST was supposed to bring the price of petrol down, then why didn’t it?

Simon Kearney, in the Sunday Tasmanian yesterday, quoted the Australian Automobile Association analysis claiming that the Howard government will earn more than $1 billion extra revenue because of rising petrol prices. The AAA reckons that the two biggest boosts of $470 million each come from resource rent tax income from the Bass Strait oil fields and increased tax revenue from the oil companies. A further $50 million will be raised by excise adjustments and an extra $140 million from GST revenue on rising petrol prices. This adds up to $1.1 billion. The government’s argument is that every last dollar in excise is planned for. And the Prime Minister ended up by saying lamely that the government could not control world oil prices and that to cut the price by 5c a litre would cost $1.7 billion. We heard him say that again in question time today. His argument is very poor. He knows that he has touched the people of Australia and it is now coming back to roost on him. The people in regional seats on that side know that as well. They had better put some pressure on him to get him to look at it when it comes to the next excise rise in January or February next year. If they do not, bingo for them.

The poor old service stations that are desperately trying to make ends meet have to be left behind the petrol prices. Some of these guys have to give a cheque upfront to the tanker driver before he will deliver, because of the narrowness of the margin. I do not blame them for giving up—some of them have taken their pumps out and are trying other things. But what is going on in regional Australia? Already many are having difficulties just getting to work and driving their
kids to school. Some are seriously thinking of moving closer to services in order to overcome the cost, but they cannot afford the property prices in the suburbs, nor can they find jobs.

It seems that some of the petrol companies are making hay while the sun shines too. Caltex was reported in the business section of the *Age* as being able to make an improvement in its profit margin. The story stated: ‘The strong oil price resulted in Caltex earning a windfall $66.3 million on the increase in the value of its inventory.’ It reckoned that ‘a lower dollar and higher global refining margins enabled the oil refiner and marketer to lift its June-half net profit to $41.1 million from $35.4 million a year earlier’. No wonder this has angered motorists and their representative organisations. I understand they are getting vocal too.

Several operators in Western Australia are posting the government tax motorists are having to pay—just over 50c a litre with the total bowser price of over $1. Perhaps the rest of the country should do the same. In some places now a litre of petrol is between 6c and 30c over a dollar, depending how far people are from the resource. That is just untenable. People are complaining all over the world about the world prices, but we in Australia do have our own supply of oil and everyone is hurting because the government is making a windfall profit at our expense. The government does not care though. Ministers of course do not pay for their own petrol and they would have no idea what the price of petrol is. They ought to ask their neighbours and friends. People are certainly telling me in no uncertain terms what they think of the price of petrol. It is especially hard on pensioners and those who are unemployed, because their budgets are already so limited.

I believe there ought to be some action and quickly. The Democrats have ruled out an inquiry, because they think it is a political exercise. That is a political exercise in itself—they do not want to blame the GST, which they supported to bring in. That is the political exercise that the Democrats are worried about. Let us have some action instead. The government should freeze any further excise adjustment, reduce the federal excise and then have a transparent inquiry. Something needs to happen and now.

Thirty per cent of Australia cannot afford the current price of petrol; 30 per cent of Australia cannot cope with the cost of living due to the GST. And that is the 30 per cent that is costing the government the most to try to compensate—and it is failing. Are we to go to the US system where people are on the streets and begging, and where those who manage to get a little work have to work four or five jobs that pay peanuts, just to put a roof over their kids’ heads? It really is disgraceful. Gas is no different. There would be an excise on that too. We need to deal with that problem—not the symptom. Gas has gone up. It used to be half the price of petrol, but now that the GST is on it it has gone through the roof as well.

**Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority**

**Native Title**

**Mr LINDSAY** (Herbert) (5.33 p.m.)—I have a number of grievances which I would like to bring to the attention of the parliament this afternoon. The first relates to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and an issue that I faced last Monday in Townsville, in the electorate of Herbert. A dive boat operator contacted me and said that the marine park authority had rung him that afternoon and indicated that he did not have a permit for his charter vessel so he would not be able to go out to the *Yongala* wreck off Townsville, possibly one of the best dive locations in the world. He said, ‘I’ve had this call from GBRMPA and they have indicated that I cannot go, but I have got 12 Americans flying in tonight to leave at 8 o’clock and I need to take them out to the reef. What can I do?’ I had a good look at this and it turns out that this operator had been leasing the vessel from the owner of the vessel and the owner of the vessel had allowed the permit to go to the *Yongala* to lapse. That was an administrative oversight. It was only found out because the Queensland people boarded the vessel at *Yongala* and discovered that the permit was out of date. What to do about it?
We had a situation where this operator, who earns international export dollars for Australia, found that he would be unable to satisfy his contracts with the Americans who had come to dive the Yongala. GBRMPA were very cooperative indeed and most helpful, but they told me that they were unable to do anything other than reinstitute the normal process to apply for a permit. Here was a vessel that had been going out to Yongala for years, but they had to go back to the normal process which involved a delay of some 28 days to go through the native title process. The Central Queensland Land Council, which are involved in this native title process, were most cooperative as well. They indicated that they could probably get through their process within about two days.

The point I make to the parliament today and the one that I grieve about is that in the marine park authority’s act there is no option for GBRMPA to show any discretion whatsoever. In cases like this where there has been an administrative oversight and nothing more it seems to me that there should be the opportunity for this authority—which in all other senses operates in a commonsense way and in a way that is to the benefit of the people of Australia—to have some small discretion to be able to say, ‘This has been just an administrative oversight. We will give you a temporary permit for two days until we get all the paperwork done.’ But it is not there. My recommendation to the federal minister is to have a look at this and to see if we can incorporate that discretion in the marine park authority’s act so that as a customer service organisation it can do what any private business can do—that is, exercise some commonsense when it needs to be exercised.

Following on in relation to native title and so on, a matter was raised during question time this afternoon, through a question to the Attorney-General, in relation to the native title regime for Queensland. The longer the Senate delays approving Queensland’s regime the more difficult it is for the mining industry, for the investment industry and for jobs in Queensland. The mining industry has literally been brought to a standstill. New exploration has basically stopped. It is very sad indeed to see the state of the mining industry, particularly as the north-west minerals province in Queensland is probably the most important minerals province in the world today.

I think the position of the Labor Party on this is just untenable. I believe that the federal Labor Party should accede to the wishes of the Queensland Labor government and move as soon as possible to confirm the native title regime for Queensland as put forward by the Queensland government and approved by the Attorney-General as complying with the federal law. I plead with the Australian Labor Party in Canberra to look and see what this process is doing to the Queensland industry and the impact it is having on the jobs of the geologists, the jobs of the contractors, the jobs in the accommodation industry and the provedore industry and the fact that no new ore deposits are being found. I appeal to the Labor Party to move out of the way, get this through the Senate and be a bit sensible about it in the interests of all Queenslanders.

I have another matter I would like to raise, and again it follows on the theme of indigenous Australian issues. I would like to report to the parliament that a week ago I went to the march for reconciliation in Townsville, where 1,500 people turned out. When we were forming up for the march, I saw a lone Aboriginal woman who had a large sign that said, ‘Howard the coward, say sorry.’ So I went over to talk to her. It was very interesting and she is a really nice person. She was very concerned and the stolen generations issues had affected her deeply. I think those of us who have been with the Aboriginal communities can understand the deep feelings of Aboriginal people who have been associated with the stolen generations. So I had a terrific conversation with her. There were some who thought that I was there to have some kind of confrontation, but that was not so: it was a reason to go and listen to how that person felt and why she was there.

It is interesting, though, that she could not tell me why she had this sign. She could not express to me why it was that she had the sign; she just felt that something was wrong. So I took the opportunity to say to her that recently there had been a court case in Dar-
win, that it had made certain determinations and how did she feel about that. I particularly wanted to know how she felt about the $12 million that was spent on that particular court case. I asked her and the people who were around her: 'If you had the choice and had $12 million to spend on a court case or you had $12 million to put into getting right down there, at grassroots level, to fix problems in the Aboriginal communities, what would you do?' She said, 'Take the money to my people, not to the lawyers.' She was very definite about that, and that feeling was echoed around that reconciliation march. Every Aboriginal person I asked about it genuinely felt that it is time to stop the money going off in endless court battles and that it is time to feed that money down to where it can do the best good for Aboriginal people and to address the very significant disadvantages that occur today.

The final matter I would like to speak about in the amount of time left to me is also in relation to court cases—this is a bit of a common link in this speech this afternoon. I see today that a matter appeared in the Administrative Appeals Tribunal in Townsville in relation to the development of Nelly Bay harbour, on Magnetic Island. The commercial development of Nelly Bay harbour has been on the go since about 1985. It has been the subject of appeal after appeal, of frustration after frustration and of developer after developer, and finally it looks like work is back on; it is on the go again. After all these years of endless inquiries, endless reports and endless environmental impact assessments, we have a situation where the project looks like it is a goer. But we are back in the AAT and we have got the NQCC again trying to frustrate the process—this time over whether the boundary of the marine park might be one foot out or one foot in. That sort of process has got to stop because the Great Barrier Marine Park Authority needs all of its resources to do what it should be doing, not fighting legal battles.

**HMAS Armidale**

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (5.43 p.m.)—Last year this government did the right thing by the people of East Timor—that is, it repaid a long overdue debt from World War II. The government has another debt related to Timor and World War II that has not been repaid. But in this case, we have not done the right thing by one of our own. I am speaking of the tragic yet heroic events surrounding the sinking of the corvette HMAS *Armidale* on 1 December 1942 off the coast of Timor. More specifically, I am referring to the case of an 18-year-old Tasmanian from the township of Latrobe, in my electorate of Braddon—one Ordinary Seaman Teddy Sheean.

Let me recall for you that event 58 years ago. Imagine, if you will, a scene aboard the rapidly sinking HMAS *Armidale* off the coast of Timor. Torpedoed and being strafed by several Japanese planes, the crew were ordered to abandon ship. Teddy Sheean was unwounded and could have tried his luck and swum for it. Instead, seeing his shipmates being picked off in the water, he made his way across the deck and strapped himself into his Oerlikon gun. The moment he strapped himself in, he surely would have known that there would be no escape. He started firing at the enemy, forcing some of the planes to shear away from the stricken vessel and its crew floundering around it. One of the fighter planes was shot down. Another attack wheeled in, the bullets hitting Sheean in the chest and shattering it. The ship was now sinking faster and the water was lapping Sheean’s feet, but still he kept firing. Journalist author and Navy wartime veteran Frank Walker, in his book *HMAS Armidale: the ship that had to die*, described the final moments as recalled and reconstructed from interviews with the survivors of that day:

The men in the water gasped with amazement as they saw the blood-stained desperate youngster wheel his gun from target to target, his powerless legs dragging on the deck. Then came the most incredible sight of all. The ship plunged down and the sea rose up past Sheean’s waist to his shattered chest. Still he kept firing. As the gun was dragged into the sea its barrel kept recoiling and shots kept pouring from it. Even when there was nothing left of the ship above the water, tracer bullets from Sheean’s gun kept shooting from under the water.

In July 1940—that is, two years earlier—a similar feat took place when Leading Sea-
man Jack Mantle RN, although mortally wounded, kept firing his gun right to the end when a swarm of Nazi Stukas attacked HMS Foylebank in the English harbour of Portland. Fittingly and rightly, Jack Mantle was awarded the Victoria Cross. Teddy Sheean, on the other hand, was merely mentioned in dispatches. Why?

The RAN Corvettes Association, the family and friends of Teddy Sheean—particularly his nephew Gary Ivory, sister Ivey Hayes and brother Burt Sheean—and a handful of federal politicians have set out to right this wrong. Recently the Royal Australian Navy honoured Teddy Sheean by naming one of its Collins class submarines, Sheean—the first time in the Navy’s history that a vessel has been named after an Ordinary Seaman. But Teddy Sheean was no ordinary seaman. His deeds have captured the imagination and admiration of his fellow crewmen and many others since. What has happened—or, rather, not happened—about these deeds has captured the indignation of these same people. The RAN has named one of its best and latest after Sheean. Why? Because it recognises what some bureaucrats, defence advisers and ministers for defence and for veterans’ affairs will not—that the deeds of Teddy Sheean must be formally recognised; that the debt must be repaid in full.

Already the Sheean family, the Latrobe community and state and federal politicians in Tasmania have been lobbying the Minister for Defence to have the Sheean commissioned in Devonport. Teddy Sheean is remembered in many ways throughout Australia. In his home town of Latrobe there is a Sheean Walk, commemorating his deeds and those of other World War II veterans and campaigns. His nephew Gary Ivory has produced a musical CD of the Teddy Sheean story and has led the campaign to have the Sheean commissioned in Devonport. In Queensland, there is a major shoot named after Teddy Sheean. A film about the Armidale is also under way, and the heroic deeds of Teddy Sheean will be portrayed in film for posterity.

Noted journalist Mike Carlton has been scathing in his condemnation of this government’s refusal to do the right thing by Teddy Sheean and his memory. In the Sydney Morning Herald on 4 December 1999, in relation to the cases of Teddy Sheean and Commander Robert Rankin RAN, he wrote:

These acts of surpassing courage were witnessed at the time and are not disputed today, and there can be no doubt that they merit the supreme honour for gallantry. Two British sailors who performed similar feats were awarded the VC on the recommendation of the Admiralty in London. He continued:

By an accident of colonial history it was the same Admiralty which then controlled gongs for the RAN but, for whatever reason, Sheean and Rankin were not deemed worthy by their Lordships. In his search for justice for Teddy Sheean, Frank Walker pointed out the inadequacy and the absurdity of the awards system as related to the RAN. Unlike the AIF and the RAAF, where awards were decided by Australians in Australia, RAN awards were not. The Australian Commonwealth Naval Board, headed by a RN officer, had to send recommendations to the Admiralty in London, where the awards and honours committee made the decision. Furthermore, Walker pointed out that commanding officers of RN ships were entitled to recommend sailors for certain awards but the captains of RAN ships were instructed that ‘the nature of the award is not to be suggested’. It is Walker’s contention that ‘it was impossible for Australian officers to recommend Australian sailors for a VC’.

What can be done today, for time is passing? So too are those who directly witnessed the deeds of Teddy Sheean on 1 December 1942. Teddy’s sister Ivey Hayes will be 91 in November, and his brother Burt is 87. If justice is to be done, it must be done soon. What is the problem about resolving this issue—about doing the right thing?

Contrary to popular belief, Australia has retained or adopted the Victoria Cross as the supreme award for military heroism. It can be given on a recommendation from the Australian government to the Queen. It in fact can be legislated for and/or recommended by this present government, so why hasn’t this occurred? There is overwhelming recognition of the merit and authenticity of
this case, but it would seem that bureaucratic stonewalling and deadlines stand in the way.

In a letter full of bureaucratic speak dated 25 October 1999, a senior defence adviser to Minister Bruce Scott pointed out that the End of War List for World War II has been completed and, because Teddy Sheean was not recommended prior to this, he therefore stands ineligible. The adviser wrote:

It is not practical for better judgments about individual actions or merit to be made at this time than were made by contemporary authorities who had direct access to eye witness reports and could test evidence when it was fresh.

The adviser recognises the fact that Sheean should have been awarded ‘a gallantry award of a higher stature’ but not now, in hindsight. The danger? I quote again:

... creating a precedent for unwanted and perhaps divisive comparisons between these ‘hindsight-awards’ and those recommended and granted at the time.

In a remarkably condescending paragraph, the adviser—again stressing the great courage of Sheean—wrote:

... the reality of military life under operational conditions is that men and women enter life threatening situations as an integral part of their duty. That some of those individuals are singled out for gallantry awards is fitting; but again, the reality is that many who do perform acts of great courage are never recognised.

Mike Carlton summed up the letter, ‘Blah, blah, blah. On it went, a blathering, bumbling litany of excuses for inertia.’ Clearly the only thing stopping Teddy Sheean’s receiving this country’s highest military honour for bravery is an unwillingness to tamper with a bureaucratic filing process—an unwillingness, despite the overwhelming public evidence and desire to do the right thing: to reopen the end of war lists.

Unlike the adviser’s steely conclusion, the reality should be that some of those who did perform acts of great courage can still have these recognised. Despite the important role the RAN has played in two world wars and in other theatres of combat, no Australian sailor has ever been awarded a VC. Has it something to do with the peculiar non-Australian participation in the award process in relation to the RAN as opposed to the AIF and RAAF? I suspect so. We have the opportunity now to right the wrong, and I again call on this government to do the right thing by one of its own. A friend of mine wrote to me on this matter, and her concluding sentence is as apt now as it was for them. She wrote:

If this Government has just one ounce of the courage shown by that 18-year-old sailor, the decision would not be too hard to reverse.

I would argue that the Centenary of Federation is a good time to reopen and close this chapter, and the title should be: ‘Teddy Sheean: died 1 December 1942, posthumously awarded the VC’.

Education: Funding

Mr BARTLETT (Macquarie) (5.53 p.m.)—The aspirations parents have for their children quite understandably include a strong focus on education. We all see a good education as essential to maximising the opportunities for our children, yet our schools are under increasing pressure from a number of areas. Firstly, the cost of essential educational resources is growing rapidly, even faster than the number of students for which they cater. The more expensive requirements in many courses, such as the sciences, computer courses and technology courses, as well as growing expectations of parents, add substantially to the pressures on a school’s resource base. Secondly, constantly changing curricula, the need to embrace a greater range of social issues, the increasing need for migrant English programs, and the accelerating integration of schools with industry based and vocational educational courses all add to the financial and administrative pressures of our schools.

Thirdly, the increasingly competitive nature of the job market—even in an environment of declining unemployment—combined with rising expectations and career aspirations, places an increasing emphasis on measurable education outcomes. In addition to expectations regarding literacy and numeracy are expectations of computer literacy, work skills and competition for university entrance. Further, there is growing pressure on schools to respond to social change with things such as counselling and welfare services for students struggling with the ef-
ects of increased family breakdown, dysfunctional families, and greater parent absenteeism through increased employment pressures and social changes. They all add their toll to the burden on our schools. The increased pressures often faced by these families can lead to increased expectations of the role of teachers in dealing with many social and personal issues faced by their students. Added to this are the pervasive and often harmful influences of much of the media, the entertainment industry, and interactive computer games, which often encourage attitudes which are demotivating and certainly not conducive to learning.

All schools, to a greater or lesser degree, face these challenges, and all schools play a vital role in encouraging young people to discover and develop their talents, in motivating them, and in assisting them to reach their potential. The vast majority of teachers in our schools, both public and private, do a tremendous job. Much of the current debate about schooling, particularly public schooling, focuses on issues of resourcing. This is prompted by frustration over school funding levels and by a slow but steady drift of students from the public to the non-public sector, which has seen public school numbers fall from 73.6 per cent of enrolments in 1986, to 71.6 per cent in 1996 and to around 69 per cent this year. Sadly, much of this debate has been based on misinformation or misunderstanding, which has done nothing to help the situation; rather, much of it has further reduced confidence in our public schools. Incorrectly shifting the blame has reduced the chance of finding effective solutions and has created growing tension between the public and the private school systems.

Several points need to be made regarding the question of funding. Firstly, the coalition government’s strong commitment to public education is clearly borne out by the facts—facts that are too often ignored in this debate. Over the past four years, direct federal government funding to public schools has risen by 25 per cent, from $1.5 billion a year to $1.96 billion a year. In New South Wales over the same period of time, federal direct funding has increased from $528 million a year to $649 million a year. Further, the forward estimates for the next four years show ongoing substantial increases in funding.

Secondly, the Commonwealth government has focused strongly on raising standards within our schools, particularly in its efforts to raise literacy and numeracy levels to an acceptable national benchmark. This is essential in terms of personal development, social involvement and employment readiness. Research repeatedly shows substantially higher levels of unemployment for young people with inadequate or below average literacy skills. Last year, an extra $131 million was allocated by the federal government to the literacy and numeracy program for disadvantaged students. In the four years from 1999, there will be a total of $869 million in direct Commonwealth government funding to raise literacy and numeracy standards in our schools.

Thirdly, the Commonwealth government has led the way in assisting schools to prepare students for the workplace and in building those essential links between school and the work force. Over the last five years, the number of school students involved in vocational education and training courses has exploded, from 26,000 to 167,000. There are now 7,200 school students involved in apprenticeships while still at school. These developments have been essential in providing opportunities for the 70 per cent of our school leavers who do not go on to university.

Fourthly, the critical point which is often missed in the deliberate attempt to confuse the debate has been the appalling failure of state governments to support public education. This has particularly been the case in New South Wales where the New South Wales government’s record has been abysmal to say the least. The lack of financial commitment of the New South Wales government to its own schools has jeopardised their resourcing levels and sapped morale within the New South Wales public school system. Over the last four years the New South Wales government has increased funding for its own schools by only 12 per cent; yet, as I indicated earlier, the federal government has directly increased funding to
those schools by some 25 per cent over the same period of time. In fact, in the last two years, the New South Wales government has increased school funding by only 1.9 per cent and 1.7 per cent. By contrast, this year alone, the federal government increased direct grants to New South Wales public schools by 5.3 per cent. The state government’s abrogation of its responsibility is further highlighted by the fact that a shrinking share of the New South Wales government budget goes to its schools. This is despite rampant increases in state taxation and despite a growth in financial assistance grants from the federal government of around five per cent a year. In simple terms, the New South Wales government is redirecting its resources away from its schools. Over the last three years alone, education spending has fallen from 26 per cent of the New South Wales budget to just 23 per cent. This has shown a shameful lack of support for public education. If the state government had merely matched the 25 per cent growth in direct Commonwealth school grants or, alternatively, matched the growth in its financial assistance grants from the federal government, New South Wales public schools would be in a far better position than they are now.

Rather than delivering the required funding, the state government has tried to deflect the blame by attacking the federal government’s support for non-government schools and by unfairly and harmfully creating animosity between the two systems. Since the 1960s federal governments of both parties have supported non-government schools as well as government schools. Three essential points need to be made here. Firstly, it is fair for the government to support parental choice in the type of school in which their children are educated. Australia is a pluralist society, and those parents who choose to send their children to a church school, for instance, should have a right to do so, providing this is not at the expense of public schools. As taxpayers who contribute to government revenues and as citizens with common aspirations for their children, this is certainly fair. Secondly, the existence of non-government schools saves the public education system money. Government spending per student in a public school averages $5,600 a year; for a non-government school student it averages $3,750 a year. In other words, parents of non-government schoolchildren are heavily subsidising their children’s education. If these students were back in the public education system and their per capita funding followed them, the public education dollar would have to be spread much more thinly—that is, the pressure on public school resources would be even more pronounced. Thirdly, contrary to the myth that all private schools are elitist, many students at these schools are from struggling families. In fact, 20 per cent are from families earning $30,000 a year or less. Many parents make great personal sacrifices to send their children to non-government schools.

The point is that the two school systems have coexisted harmoniously for several decades. It is sad to see, for political expediency, the New South Wales government using them as a scapegoat for its own failures. The federal government has shown its commitment to supporting public schools by a substantial increase of 25 per cent in funding over the last four years and, with that, a commitment to ongoing substantial increases. Sadly, the New South Wales government is failing to provide similar support. I urge the New South Wales government to increase its commitment to New South Wales schools and to match the commitment that the Commonwealth government has shown.

Veterans’ Affairs Portfolio

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (6.03 p.m.)—I rise today to speak on a number of issues that I believe have been continuously ignored by this government and particularly by the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs. The veterans’ affairs portfolio is not afforded the proper and considerate attention that it deserves, which has resulted in the frustration and disillusionment of our veteran community. Our veterans gave their all for our country and in return expected little more than understanding, proper health care and a decent shot at returning to full participation in the community. Our veterans need the reassurance that their government is committed to honouring...
Australia’s debt to them, whether it be through compensation, commemoration, income support, health care, aged care or housing assistance. Our veterans have already fought battles in support of our allies, our sovereignty and our way of life. They should not have to fight a further battle to gain the support they have earned and deserve.

Our service men and women have served bravely and gained an international reputation as some of the best forces in the world. Our most recent effort in leading the UN forces in East Timor capped an outstanding record of performance for which our Defence Force personnel have much to be proud. But our history extends much further. Australians have served in the Sudan, the Boer War, the Boxer uprising, the First World War, the Second World War, the Korean War, the Malayan Emergency, the Indonesian Confrontation, the Vietnam War and the Gulf War, and our peacekeepers have served in all parts of the world since the Second World War as part of our obligation to the United Nations. All of these people are national treasures and should be treated as such. Every year on Anzac Day, Vietnam Veterans Day, Remembrance Day and other commemorations throughout the country we remember those who have fallen. It is our way of not losing sight of the sacrifices of others and to pay respect to those men and women who did not return.

So there is much at stake in this portfolio and also much that is yet to be done. There remain many outstanding matters that need urgent redress, and issues that veterans want confronted, acknowledged and finalised. Veterans are self-reliant people who do things for themselves. While veterans work hard to deal with their own issues, the government needs to work even harder assisting with this process. Unfortunately, the government’s attitude to the veteran community is reflected in recent reports, including the review of the service entitlement anomalies in respect of South-East Asian service from 1955 to 1975 and the Vietnam Veterans Health Study, also known as the Morbidity of Vietnam Veterans study. The first thing that anyone will notice when reading these reports is the style in which they are written. The report approach is that of a disclaimer and cautious wording in what appears to be fear of liability. That also becomes apparent in the crude and insensitive nature of the wording in relation to sensitive and personal issues. The commissioning of these reports by the government is welcomed, but the intent of some of the findings and the government’s style in the recommendations and future implementation need more work to be done in recognising the true needs of our veteran community. While I am fully supportive of many of the recommendations in these reports, veterans are yet to see a real commitment to their issues from this government or their minister. To give an example of the attitude I speak of and the approach that is uniformly reflected in all veterans affairs matters by the department and by its minister, I draw the attention of the House to the very first recommendation outlined in the review of service entitlement anomalies in respect of South-East Asian service. It says:

It is recommended that a policy be clearly laid down to ensure that the recommendation for the award of a campaign medal and the subsequent award of such a medal does not carry with it any entitlement to repatriation benefits.

In that one sentence we can sum up the totality of the government’s approach and attitude towards not only our veteran community but also the Veterans’ Affairs portfolio. I, as do many in the veteran community, find this disgraceful paragraph no more than a disclaimer that sets the whole tone and attitude of the government. Genuine empathy for any issues discussed in the report is immediately nullified by cautious terms of reference, clarification, disqualifiers and disclaimers.

I have been following the development and implementation of this report with interest, as the outcomes will impact directly on a constituent of mine. This gentleman asked me the other day what I thought of the paragraph I have just read out and what I thought it meant. Like so many of the veterans whom I speak to, he is completely disheartened by an immediate assumption that while this report is about you—that is, the veteran—it
really is not about any expectation of getting some assistance or help from it.

The minister proudly announced in his budget for Veterans’ Affairs that some of the recommendations from the Vietnam Veterans Health Study would be funded in 2000-01. The injection of resources and funding to the department is always welcome, but the callous Veterans’ Affairs-speak in which this increased funding was justified can be seen as an indication of the general disdain with which this government treats our veteran community. Using the Vietnam Veterans Health Study as a guide, the minister provided useful tables and purpose statements to indicate where this funding would be directed. Outcome 2 of the recommendation refers to the provision of health and other care services. Again, the recommendation includes a disclaimer that fundamentally questions the legitimacy of medical problems suffered by Vietnam veterans. The report states:

The study found that veterans perceive their health as much poorer than others their age, and indicates that they have some chronic illnesses at higher rates than the community norm.

The persistent use of this style of terminology is exactly why many Vietnam veterans continue to feel isolated and unrepresented by this government.

The statement I just read is a manipulation of the results of a personalised questionnaire to suit the desired outcomes of the government. Basically, any Vietnam veteran’s concerns for his or her health are disqualified by the interpretation of an individual’s perception as to their own health status. The only perception, or rather deception, evident here is the government’s continued refusal to acknowledge that almost 30 years after our troops started to return from the Vietnam War many of these people’s problems remain ignored and, therefore, unresolved. In a blatant about-face on a previous policy of the government, the minister also announced in this year’s budget that the eligibility for counselling services for dependants of Vietnam veterans would be increased to include those aged 25 to 35. Did the minister honestly believe that this amendment to the responsibilities of the Vietnam Veterans Coun-

selling Service would be heralded as a windfall by the Vietnam veteran community? Not too many vets that I know would be fooled by the overturning of an adverse VVCS policy introduced in March 2000.

The biggest revelation that comes out of this and other ministerial budgetary announcements is that the government has no understanding of the true nature of the hardship and anxiety that our veterans face daily. I do not believe that the Department of Veterans’ Affairs does not advise the minister of the irregularities of government policy that hinder the fair and equitable administration of veteran recognition and entitlements. One thing I have learned from the veteran community, though, is that many individuals have survived the humiliation of pursuing their rights through the unity and support of their veteran comrades. The dignity and loyalty that we demanded of our veterans in their duty are the very attitudes that give them the courage to continue the fight long after the battle is over. When a veteran asks me for help, I know that they have exhausted the entire line of recourse afforded to them by the department or by the government. I am frustrated that as their representative I am their last option. I am disturbed by these people’s distrust of our political processes—a distrust that was unknown in the honour of serving our nation but has been instilled in them in their attempts to seek help from the government.

I have a large veteran community in my electorate of Oxley, and I am very proud to represent the interests of these fine men and women. What has impressed me the most about this community is their tenacity and their ability to overcome hardship, regardless of whether that hardship was born out of their service situation or whether it is induced by this government or by this minister. I think there is a real opportunity that should not be missed by this minister. I, along with the veteran community, would be very happy to see the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs take a leading role in addressing and redressing many of the Vietnam veterans’ issues that are before him. They are issues that have for many years and for many reasons under different governments not been fully acknowl-
edged and not been fully addressed. There is no time like the present; the time is now for these issues to be addressed.

We have reports that have been commissioned by the government—good reports with recommendations that, in some sense, put forward things that can move us forward. But unless the government acts veterans will see nothing but hollow words such as, as I said earlier, the words in those reports which are filled with disclaimers and what I perceive to be a real fear of what might be any acknowledgment of things that have happened in the past. I call on the minister to take the opportunity, following on from what I have said tonight, to have another look at those recommendations and to take the necessary steps to move the veteran community forward, and I will be the first to stand up here and applaud his actions rather than be disappointed by what the veteran community reports to me about their views and attitudes and what they feel is the lack of representation by their government, by their minister and by their department.

Dawson Electorate: Achievements

Mrs DE-ANNE KELLY (Dawson) (6.13 p.m.)—Tonight, I would like to share with the House some good news from my electorate of Dawson. So often in the parliament we hear so many gloomy statistics and figures, but I think it is heartening when you look around your electorate, as I did—and no doubt, Mr Deputy Speaker, as you have during your break—and see so many good people taking up opportunities and building a better future for themselves. First of all, can I mention in a very general sense the uptake of private health care insurance in the electorate of Dawson. As at 30 June, there are 49.97 per cent of all Dawsonites with private health insurance. This is up from 40 per cent at the end of March. It compares very favourably with the national average, which is 41.2 per cent.

My electorate is probably middle of the average income range of all federal electorates. It is certainly not a wealthy electorate. People are ordinary, hardworking, decent family people who weigh very carefully in the balance every household expense. That half of them have seen the value in signing up voluntarily for private health insurance is a great endorsement of the government’s policy. I know that there is alarm and concern in my electorate that perhaps the 30 per cent rebate could be removed by a future opposition going into government. It certainly made a big difference in my electorate. In the past 18 months, it has represented about 400,000 hospital admissions a year across the nation. It has been a significant benefit, not only to people in Dawson, who have the choice of their own doctor, but also for those who, for very necessary reasons, have had to avail themselves of the public hospital system. And it is a boost to the small private hospitals that we have in Dawson.

I would like to speak about others who have gone out and done something in Dawson, particularly about the non-government schools in my electorate. The head of Catholic Education in Rockhampton, who also services Mackay, Mr Joe McCorley, has been particularly generous with the assistance that has been given to non-government schools. St Joseph's School in North Mackay; Emmanuel in Bucasia; Holy Spirit, also part of Mount Pleasant in Mackay; a new Christian school established down at Airlie Beach—these have all benefited in some way from new buildings, libraries and facilities through an increase in funding for non-government schools. That is not to say that our government schools in Dawson are not valued. In fact, they work hard to educate, train and build young Australians for the future. But many of these schools have struggled in the past. Many of the Catholic schools particularly are in areas where families are not able to give their children everything they would like to. So it is very important that the school is able to make up with facilities. I have been very pleased to see the additional amount put into non-government schools in my electorate, and long may it continue.

I would now like to talk very briefly about the Australian South Sea Islander community in Mackay. Under the leadership of Jeanette Morgan and Rowena Trieve, two very fine ladies from that community, they have launched their own designer label, called Famouri. The genesis of this was a federa-
tion grant from the $200,000 that each federal member of parliament was able to allocate, with the assistance of a committee, to worthy projects in their electorate. The Australian South Sea Islander community put in a project to encourage a resurgence in their own culture, to bring back to the Australian South Sea Islanders some of the South Sea Island culture that they missed in terms of weaving, story telling, painting and carving. Mr Deputy Speaker, until you have seen a club carved by one of the Australian South Sea Islanders, you have not really seen a club. By gee, they can do some magnificent work. The work also includes traditional printing of fabrics. Last Thursday night in Mackay, they launched their own clothing label called Famouri, which means something rising from the ashes and living again. Like all women, I am interested in fashion. Some of the magnificent prints and clothes that they have designed—long dresses and jackets, all with a traditional South Sea Islander theme and motif—were absolutely terrific. To see young South Sea Islander men, who perhaps had not worked before, now involved in carving and selling their works—soon, we trust, through local outlets—was really great. It was a great opportunity for people who had just rediscovered their culture, who found that they had skills they never thought they had. It was truly a moving occasion.

Speaking about other achievers in my electorate of Dawson, I would like to thank the government, and in particular the Minister for Community Services, the Hon. Larry Anthony, for establishing in Mackay a children’s contact service. This is one of only four in Queensland to be chosen for this important initiative. It will be run through the George Street neighbourhood centre in Mackay. They are looking at an annual funding grant of $142,249. Betty Fry and her team at George Street neighbourhood centre have worked very hard and put up a great case for this grant. Unfortunately there is a considerable need in Mackay for a contact service. There is quite a deal of family break-up. In the mining towns west of Mackay, the strain of working in the mines, shiftwork and being away from other family members and friends can put an additional burden on a marriage. So, regrettably, there is quite a deal of family break-up and all of the difficulties inherent in contact between the non-residential parent and the children. The children’s contact service in Mackay had a grant in the past and did an excellent job, so I am very pleased to see that this great little team have got the funding to enable them to continue this very important service.

One of the other quiet achievers in our electorate is the Lions Club of Mackay and Whitsunday. For some years now, some of the hard workers in the Lions Club, such as Warren Hansen and Bruce Fyfe, have been arranging Camp Kanga, outside Proserpine. This is put on for three weeks every year for 46 young people from anywhere round the world to come to Camp Kanga and stay there, supervised and assisted by Lions Club members, entirely voluntarily, to experience some Australian life. At no charge, they are taken abseiling, snorkelling, diving and bushwalking. This year they even hunted for yabbies in the local dam and prepared them for dinner.

Spending time this year with those 46 young people from around the world made me realise that goodwill between nations does not happen only at a government level. Those 46 young people, who were there with some of our own young people from the areas of Collinsville and Mackay, will go back and spread the message that Australia is a friendly country and that we are good-hearted people. At that level, with young people growing up and hopefully taking leadership positions in their own countries, we cannot put a value on the goodwill that has been created. At many different levels in so many places around Australia people of goodwill give up their own time, give of their efforts joyfully and do something to make this a better country. The people of Famouri including Jeannette Morgan and Rowena Trieve and all of the others who helped in setting up the Australian South Sea Islander label, Betty Fry and her team at the George Street neighbourhood centre, the Lions Club of Mackay and Whitsunday, Warren Hansen and his hardworking troops and also all those at the Catholic schools in Dawson who work hard for families who would...
otherwise not have had an opportunity to give their children the education that they seek—all of those people who work so hard—are the good news stories that we never see on the front of the paper, that we do not necessarily read about or see on television at night. But thank goodness they are there. They are the quiet achievers that make such a difference to our community. Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you for the opportunity of speaking of these good people who give so much back in my electorate of Dawson.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

GENE TECHNOLOGY BILL 2000
Cognate bill:
GENE TECHNOLOGY (LICENCE CHARGES) BILL 2000
GENE TECHNOLOGY (CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS) BILL 2000
Second Reading
Debate resumed from 22 June, on motion by Dr Wooldridge:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Mr Griffin (Bruce) (6.24 p.m.)—The Gene Technology Bill 2000 will establish the Commonwealth component of a national scheme designed to regulate dealings with genetically modified organisms. It is expected that, following the passage of this bill, the states and territories will pass complementary legislation. I welcome this bill. It has been a long time coming. Aside from the fact that this type of regulation was first discussed in 1992 as part of a major inquiry into genetic manipulation, we have recently seen two examples of GM breaches that illustrate why legislation rather than administration is the only way to instil public confidence in this technology. I will say more about these later. Gene technology promises much. As a result of this technology, we have new, improved vaccines and for diabetics we have human insulin. In the future, doctors will be able to tailor drug therapy to the individual, leading to fewer adverse events and better outcomes. Pharmaceutical companies are working together with specialist genetic technology companies to identify genes that cause diseases, tests to identify those diseases at an early stage and, finally, drugs to treat those diseases. In agriculture, the public benefits of this technology are unfortunately a little less obvious, although much of the early agricultural technology has shown some benefit for producers and it is expected that developments such as golden rice, which has been enriched with vitamin A, will start to come on the market in the next few years.

Despite these potential benefits, the Australian public remains wary of this new technology, and with good reason. There is no better example of this concern than the recent debate about labelling of genetically modified foods. Poll after poll has shown that the vast majority of Australians want all genetically modified food labelled. This does not indicate that they do not or will not eat the food. The same polls show that there is a minority who would not. But they want to make an informed choice about what they eat and when. Yet, despite this public view, the Prime Minister has tried on several occasions to pressure the group responsible for setting the labelling standards, the Australia New Zealand Foods Standards Council, into watering down the labelling regime. Considering that our Prime Minister is well known for delivering poll driven policy, this behaviour is somewhat puzzling. Given his recent attacks on the United Nations for commenting on Australian issues, I would be interested to know why international views on how we label our foods are any different and require his misguided intervention. Luckily, as we know, the Prime Minister and the Commonwealth were rolled at the last ANZFSC meeting, and Australia will now have the regime that the public demanded—comprehensive and mandatory labelling.

To understand the genesis of this public reticence towards things genetic, we need to go back to the early 1990s and look at how the issue relating to the contamination of British beef by mad cow disease was handled by regulators and scientists in that country. Mad cow disease, better known as bovine spongiform encephalopathy, is a prion disease that affects cattle. It is a slow, progressive neurological disorder that is ultimately fatal. There is no treatment for BSE. In the
early 1990s, it emerged that 0.3 per cent of British cattle were infected by BSE as a result of eating feed containing sheep offal that was infected by scrapie—also a prion disease. The early advice from government regulators and leading scientists was that there was no risk to human health from eating infected meat and that although the disease could move from sheep to cattle it could not be spread to humans. Over the next few years it was revealed that a number of farmers and workers exposed to the infected meat developed Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease—CJD—the human variant of BSE. It was not until 1996 that the CJD surveillance unit identified a previously unrecognised and consistent disease pattern amongst the growing number of people diagnosed with CJD. Even then, the committee concluded that:

Although there is no direct evidence of a link, the most likely explanation is that those cases are linked to the exposure to BSE.

There are now at least 69 people in Britain with CJD and, as symptoms of this disease often do not show for 20 years, there may be many more living with this death sentence. Is it surprising, then, that when scientists, academics and government bodies insist something is safe the public are sceptical? After the BSE disaster, who can blame them?

While this example is probably the most recent and the most high profile, the history of such breaches in trust is a long one—remember when doctors told us smoking was safe. The solution to this problem is a complex one. Science is not always right and there are no absolutes, but there are ways of identifying and minimising the risks that new technology brings in order to obtain the potential benefits that are also attached. This involves including the public in the evaluation process and educating them to understand both the risks and benefits of new technology. Most importantly, the government must ensure that this new technology is studied, regulated and monitored rigorously. Finally, the public must know that their health and safety and the safety of the environment are paramount and will not be compromised for economic or national interests. The Gene Technology Bill 2000 will, at least in theory, address the last two points. It provides for a national regulatory framework.

Mr Griffin—As I was saying, the bill provides for a national regulatory framework through which all GMOs will be assessed for risk and, if the benefit outweighs the risk, they will be released under conditions designed to manage any risk. I do not believe, however, that this legislation or the processes currently in place address adequately the need for public involvement and public education. While the bill before us is certainly a vast improvement on the administrative process currently in place to deal with GMOs, it is by no means the best legislation we could have. In the past 18 months my colleagues and I have spent time talking to as many of the stakeholders who will be affected by this legislation as possible—from organic farmers, genetic researchers and environmental groups to multinational companies, ethicists and constituents. It was as a result of concerns raised by all of these groups that Labor successfully moved to have this bill referred to a Senate references inquiry, which is expected to report in the next few weeks.

Labor believe this inquiry is crucial to addressing some of the serious issues that have arisen as a result of this bill. Many of these issues, which I will expand on presently, could not have been addressed by a legislation committee. Some are ethical, some are legal and some are administrative but Labor believe that all of them are important enough for the public to have their say and to present their views on them. The inquiry process will also allow Labor to better understand many of the complex issues raised by gene technology. As a result, that will enable us to make more informed decisions about amendments to improve this legislation.

Briefly, the major areas of concern identified by Labor are: whether, following the decision by the government not to introduce its Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act amendments, there will be sufficient protection of our unique environment; whether there needs to be an explicit statement within the bill that requires the regulator to take a cautious approach to his
or her decision making; whether the model outlined within the bill is robust enough to ensure that the objectives of the bill are met and that there can be no way that any GMO release applications could slip through the net; whether there is a sufficient role for public input into the process specifically in relation to the operation and influence of the Gene Technology Community Consultation Committee and the right of third parties to apply for reviews of decisions made by the gene technology regulator; whether there should be some provision within the bill for state, territory or local governments to create GM-free zones and/or approve releases on a case by case basis; how accidental contamination of either GM or non-GM crops will be dealt with from a compensation viewpoint; and, last but by no means least, the issue of cost recovery.

I would like to deal with this issue and one other in a little more depth as they have so far proven to be two of the most widely discussed concerns to arise during the Senate inquiry. Firstly, I would like to cover cost recovery and then look a little more closely at how the current administrative system responsible for overseeing GMOs has operated to date and what implications its performance has for the new regulator. In line with the Howard government’s user-pays policy, it is proposed that the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator be resourced through 100 per cent cost recovery. What this means is that all those who have to use the office have to pay not only for the services required to assess their application but for all the costs associated with the running of the office, including those services that may have no benefit for the customer. This may include general policy advice to the minister or, as we have seen previously in this government, the provision of media clips and stock-market advice.

The main concerns raised by the proposed 100 per cent cost recovery policy fall into two areas: the integrity of the OGTR, and the effect on the future of research and development in the biotechnology area in Australia. In relation to the first point, there is widespread concern amongst environmental, consumer and industry groups that a body charged with protecting human health and environmental safety would be seriously compromised if it were funded entirely by the groups it is supposed to be monitoring. The general feeling is that spending priorities within such a body would be skewed towards supporting the needs of the payer and not towards the needs of the community. Currently, the only such body with true 100 per cent cost recovery is the Therapeutic Goods Administration, and this has recently occurred only following a phase-in of several years. It is interesting to note that a recent Auditor-General’s follow-up report into a 1997 inquiry into the TGA found that, of the 12 areas identified as being of concern, 11 had been resolved to the satisfaction of the auditor and only one was still of some concern. The area of continued concern related to problems with the recording and monitoring of adverse drug events. Perhaps not surprisingly, this was the only area that related directly to consumer safety; the others were, in the main, efficiency improvements that would benefit the payer—a long bow perhaps but even so the issue of human safety is such that issues like this require close and continued scrutiny.

It is also worth noting that there is much that the OGTR will do that will be of direct benefit to the Australian public. This also needs to be taken into account when considering how the OGTR will be funded. Australia is well known for the world-class calibre of its researchers and scientists and for the standard of its research. Unfortunately, it is also well known for not being able to keep these people or much of the intellectual property that arises from their research in Australia. We are a training ground for the rest of the world and as a nation we are all the poorer for that. Labor has at the centre of its new policy platform a commitment to ensuring that Australia becomes a leading knowledge nation. A major plank of this policy is to grow industries such as gene technology in this country and to ensure that our researchers and their ideas stay here and that we attract the rest of the world to our shores to commercialise our ideas. Over the past week the Senate inquiry has heard much evidence to suggest that 100 per cent cost recovery will be a major barrier to R&D in
At the sharp end, PhD researchers, who usually work in the rather obscure and complex discovery research area, are already struggling for funds to continue this crucial groundwork. It is a fact that this is the sort of research that informs and directs more traditional research, which in turn leads to commercial discoveries and finally to some level of payback. Forcing these researchers and their institutions to pay for the services of a regulator that they will now have to use could have an enormous effect on the amount and quality of discovery research that can be continued in this country. This is the start of a domino effect that could see a decline in commercial research and in the royalties, employment and industries flowing from that.

At the big end of town, there is a concern that, in order to protect smaller researchers and companies from the cost of using the regulator, they will have to bear most of the new costs. Their response to that will be to look to other countries where it is cheaper to research and develop their products, and they will come to Australia only to sell these products. Both ways, Australia will lose. This is certainly an area requiring close consideration—which, by the way, will be rather challenging, considering that there is currently no information available as to what it will cost to run the OGTR and how the fee schedule might work. According to the Interim Office of the Gene Technology Regulator, this information will not be available until some time in September, which makes any sensible discussion and debate about this issue difficult, to say the least. Apparently, these calculations and structures are being developed by KPMG, which was awarded the contract as part of a competitive tender. Needless to say, this has not helped the situation.

The first test of the IOGTR—and, as such, the first major case study into how new regulations might be tested—was brought to the public’s attention on 25 March this year in the form of a newspaper article published in the *Age*. The article reported the dumping of GM canola plants in a manner contrary to GMAC recommendations and what seemed to be a problem with the size of buffer zones. An unconnected but even more worrying allegation was also made in the article about the existence of a black market in GM seeds. It has been subsequently shown that the IOGTR was made aware of the allegations in relation to the GM canola crops 11 days be-
fore the *Age* report and yet it did not contact the company involved, Aventis Cropscience, for further information until the day after the news broke publicly.

There are also unresolved questions about how the investigation was conducted. While Aventis Cropscience was told to supply a statutory declaration to support its evidence, no such request was made of the journalist who broke the story nor of the private individual who initially raised the issue with the IOGTR. In addition, the journalist involved has not been asked to provide the physical evidence—samples of the GM crops found in the open tip and some of the black market seeds—to the regulator. In fact, no real attempts were made to seek further evidence from the journalist after the initial conversation with the IOGTR that occurred the day before the article was published. I find that unbelievable.

The final report of the investigation into this specific incident was released only a week ago and only after Labor’s continued pressure on the government. The report found that there had been five breaches of the GMAC recommendations by Aventis Cropscience, involving 81 per cent of the field trials that were under investigation. In its submission to the Senate inquiry and in its public evidence, Aventis continues to dispute the legitimacy of the IOGTR findings, claiming that while it ignored GMAC’s recommendations it did so on the basis of its own scientific evidence. That is like saying that, on past evidence of never having had a car accident, a person can break the recommended speed limit with impunity. The point is that recommendations were made by GMAC to minimise the potential risk to the environment of these canola field trials and the company chose to ignore them. There are no excuses.

Aventis has also made some allegations of its own as part of its submission to the Senate inquiry, claiming that GMAC was aware of breaches the company had made in the past and that it had not acted on them. The company further alleges that the only reason GMAC and the IOGTR chose to act this time was because the issue had been made public. These are serious allegations, and while the IOGTR denied them during the Senate grilling last Friday it is unfortunate, to say the least, that the integrity of GMAC and the IOGTR has been called into question. The flagrant disregard for GMAC’s recommendations by Aventis Cropscience, together with questions about the integrity of the watchdog, further supports Labor’s calls for a full audit of all GM field trials currently being undertaken in Australia. This is the only way in which the Australian public can be sure that any other breaches are identified and dealt with appropriately. It is the only way that the Howard government can regain some level of public confidence in this technology and the bodies responsible for regulating and monitoring it.

Since Labor made this request last week, there has been a deafening silence from Dr Wooldridge, the minister who is—at least in writing—responsible for overseeing gene technology regulation and safety issues in Australia. I know that may come as a surprise to many in the House, given that much of the government’s rhetoric on gene technology related issues can be attributed to the Prime Minister, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Senator Hill, Senator Minchin and an assortment of other front- and backbenchers, but it does indeed come within Dr Wooldridge’s sphere of responsibility.

There needs to be a full audit of GM trials, and this must occur as a matter of urgency. Before I move on to the most recent publicised GMO breach, I would like to refer back to the second allegation made in the *Age* article on 25 March relating to the existence of a black market in GM seeds. It is interesting to note that at no stage since the publication of this article has the government or indeed the IOGTR made any public reference to whether or not these claims have been investigated. I would not have been surprised if no further reference to it was ever made, had it not been for the issue being raised during the questioning of the IOGTR by the Senate inquiry last Friday. When asked about what had been done in relation to these serious claims, the IOGTR tried to dodge the issue by saying that the incident, while linked to the canola issue through the media, had
nothing to do with the current inquiry and therefore should not be the subject of further scrutiny by the Senate committee. Unfortunately for the IOGTR, the committee chair stated that the way in which the interim regulator conducted itself and its inquiries was crucial in informing the committee on how the new legislation may or may not deal with future investigations.

According to evidence supplied, rather unwillingly, by the regulator, there has been an investigation into the allegations and the IOGTR has been asked on notice to provide the relevant report to the committee. We wait with interest to see what this report contains and to find out why there has been a lack of public information and transparency about the investigation process.

Friday’s public hearing was also a useful way of finding out how yet another investigation into a GM breach was proceeding. This breach, which resulted in 69 tonnes of traditional cottonseed being mixed with GM cottonseed, first came to the public’s attention on 25 July. Again, it was the media, in this case the *Sydney Morning Herald*, not the regulator or the company responsible, that revealed the incident. According to the media report, Monsanto informed the regulator on 21 June that the incident had occurred. When asked by the inquiry why the public was again dependent on the media for this information, the IOGTR stated that it had in fact posted information about the breach on its public web site, although it could not remember exactly when that occurred. Having looked up the web site, I can let the House know that the information, which is contained in an IOGTR bulletin, was posted on 9 August—two weeks after the *Sydney Morning Herald* report.

What this bulletin does not tell the public, though, is that the contaminated seed may have already found its way into the Australian food chain. It took Friday’s Senate inquiry to uncover the fact that Monsanto does not know if the contaminated seed is currently in stockfeed used for Australian cattle but if it has made it directly into our food chain, says Monsanto, it would be in the form of cotton oil. According to the IOGTR’s bulletin, the findings of its investigation into the breach will be made available on the IOGTR web site by 15 September. Of course, if the public wants to get a preview of the findings, they should keep their eyes on the *Age* or the *Sydney Morning Herald* for the two weeks prior to that date.

I think you will agree that these two examples seriously call into question the fitness of the IOGTR to do the job it was established to do. The lack of speed with which these breaches have been investigated, together with the lack of transparency and the media driven action, does nothing whatsoever to inspire public confidence in the current system. It also raises serious concerns about the resourcing of the IOGTR to do the job. All I can say is that, instead of complaining about Labor’s ongoing criticism of the IOGTR, the government needs to make sure that all the weaknesses identified by these incidents will not and cannot be repeated under the proposed regulatory regime. I cannot emphasise enough that the future of gene technology in Australia, its potential benefits in terms of health, employment, science, technology, research and development, depend entirely on how much confidence Australians have in the OGTR. This is the message that has come out loudly and clearly during the Senate inquiry, and it is a message that industry as well as the government must heed. While Labor is aware of the additional financial and time burdens that strict regulation has on these industries, to try to water them down will bring only short-term financial benefits and will in the longer term lead to this technology carving out niche markets at best.

To understand why this will be the case, you need only to look at the fact that consumers both here and internationally have by and large accepted medical and pharmaceutical innovations produced through gene technology. On the other hand, there has been much less support for the agricultural applications. There are a number of reasons put forward for this. Firstly, the public has over the years developed confidence in the regulatory bodies responsible for overseeing the release of pharmaceuticals and medicines onto the Australian market. The Therapeutic Goods Administration has an enviable reputation for being a thorough and tough inves-
tigator and is considered to represent the gold standard for world drug regulation. Secondly, in order to access pharmaceuticals, consumers must get a prescription from a health professional. This gives the impression that in addition to the TGA there is a second gatekeeper for these products and therefore a further level of protection. In order for GM products to gain the same acceptance, the public needs time to develop the same level of confidence it has in the TGA. In the short term that means tough regulation, but in the long term, if the benefits of this technology are realised, it means a healthy and growing market for these products. In other words, the tougher the OGTR is, the more likely Australians will be to embrace this new technology and the greater the benefits to our nation.

It is for these reasons that Labor, while acknowledging the necessity for this bill and commending the IOGTR for its broad stakeholder consultation in the drafting of it, will be exercising its right to amend this legislation in the Senate once it has had time to consider the findings of the Senate inquiry. As we have said to the government and all stakeholders throughout the drafting and development process of this bill, Labor wants to ensure that legislation is in place as soon as possible, but we will not be pushed into rushing it through. The implications of this legislation are huge and long-lasting—it must not only meet the needs of industry and the scientific community in terms of providing certainty but also inspire trust and confidence amongst the Australian public.

This legislation is just the very tip of the iceberg when it comes to the regulation of gene technology. In the last month alone, we have seen public discussion, debate and concern about the insurance implications of genetic testing. Months after Labor supported a motion in the Senate to have an inquiry into the broader ethical, social, medical and legal ramifications of genetic testing, it took media and public pressure for the Howard government to act and call its own inquiry. The imminent negotiation of the GATT TRIPs agreement will reopen debate about the patentability of genetic material. Issues such as cloning, genetic data banks, and somatic cell therapy versus germ line therapy, issues of gene ownership, privacy and discrimination and the harvesting of stem cells—all of these issues—will confront and are confronting government. It was Labor who in 1992 held a House of Representatives inquiry into genetic manipulation. In his introduction, the chairman, Michael Lee, said:

The development of biotechnology, of which genetic manipulation techniques are a part, promises to generate a revolution in industrial techniques. Nations around the world are grappling with the legal and institutional changes which will be required to cope with this new technology.

Eight years on, the current government seems to take little interest in closing the gap between scientific advances and development of regulatory and ethical frameworks to deal with these advances. Labor continues to have these issues top of mind. At our national conference, Labor committed itself to a wide-ranging public consultation into the health, safety, ethical, environmental, legal and employment implications of new genetic technologies in the research, medical and agricultural sectors. Labor wants to ensure that the public’s concerns are addressed and in doing so enable Australia to progress its research and development work as a means of establishing its position as a knowledge nation. As I have already said, Labor welcomes this long-awaited bill as a useful basis for regulation of genetically modified organisms. We await the results of the current Senate inquiry with interest and look forward to working constructively with the government and others to improve the legislation and provide the Australian public with an act that inspires trust and confidence.

Mr Ian MacFarlane (Groom) (8.22 p.m.)—I welcome the closing comments of the member for Bruce that the Labor Party will work with the government to ensure that this legislation is put through in a form that is able both to ensure the safety of the public and to put in place as soon as possible the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator. We certainly have a concern that we get this office in place as quickly as possible. Some might say that it is long overdue. I would be inclined to agree with that. Like many other parts of science, gene technology often outstrips the ability of legislators to keep up
with developments. However, I do reject the assertion that the federal government have not been able to close the gap between scientific advance and the regulatory and ethical implications. The Gene Technology Bill 2000, the Gene Technology (Licence Charges) Bill 2000 and the Gene Technology (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2000 are certainly a step to ensure that science is allowed to progress but in a safe and healthy framework. The bills that we are considering tonight are, as the member for Bruce called for, tougher legislation. Having some respect for his opinion, I was curious as to which parts of this legislation he would zero in on as having shortcomings. That zeroing in did not occur. In fact, most of his address was spent addressing issues of the past, the usual words such as ‘at the tip of the iceberg’ being there.

Relying on a Senate inquiry to produce anything is, I think, wishful thinking in most cases. This legislation certainly has all the hallmarks of being able to protect the health and safety of people, as well as to protect the environment. It will do so by identifying the risk posed by or as a result of gene technology and by managing those risks through regulating certain dealings with GMOs. There is nothing in the legislation that leads me to think that any area is soft or in need of amendment.

The Gene Technology Bill 2000 creates the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator who is a statutory office holder with significant independence akin to the Commissioner of Taxation and the Commonwealth Ombudsman. This independence is critically important as it allows the officer to operate without political or commercial interference and is something I strongly support and am very pleased to see as a cornerstone of this legislation. The member for Bruce and I, and a number of other members from both sides of this House, spent some time on the Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services investigating gene technology. I am sure the member for Bruce would agree that the independence of the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator is very critical. The Gene Technology Regulator is appointed by the Governor-General with an agreement by the majority of Australian jurisdictions and has the responsibility to administer the legislation, thereby regulating GMOs. He or she will provide advice to the public, industry and government regarding the regulation of GMOs and provide risk assessment advice to other regulatory agencies whilst promoting harmonisation or risk assessment of GMOs and GM products. The office also has the task of developing guidelines and standards and undertaking much of the research on risk management and GMOs, while maintaining links with international organisations. The accusation that this legislation does not go far enough is simply refuted by those few paragraphs. The opportunity is there, through this legislation and through the establishment of the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator, to put in place all the mechanisms we need to ensure that both public and environmental safety is assured.

The Gene Technology Bill 2000 prohibits all dealings with GMOs unless the dealing is exempt, a notifiable low risk dealing, a licensed dealing or a registered dealing. The bill establishes a system for the Gene Technology Regulator to assess dealings with GMOs ranging from contained work to general releases of GMOs into the environment. Under the area of contained work—for example, dealing with low risk GMOs in a laboratory—the Gene Technology Regulator must undertake any consultation necessary, that is, with states and territories, expert committees, Commonwealth agencies, local governments, et cetera, and prepare a risk assessment and a risk management plan. I am not sure that I see any shortfall in all of that. The GTR must also notify the approval of the dealing—for example, on the database and in the annual report. Where the Gene Technology Regulator believes that a dealing may pose significant risk to health and safety of people or the environment, the Gene Technology Regulator must undertake any consultation necessary, that is, with states and territories, expert committees, Commonwealth agencies, local governments, et cetera, and prepare a risk assessment and a risk management plan. I am not sure that I see any shortfall in all of that. The GTR must also notify the approval of the dealing—for example, on the database and in the annual report. Where the Gene Technology Regulator believes that a dealing may pose significant risk to health and safety of people or the environment, the Gene Technology Regulator must publish a notice in the Gazette and relevant newspapers, enter a notice on the Gene Technology Regulator’s web site and generally make relevant people aware that the application has been received and is available on request, and invite submissions. The Gene Technology Regulator must also prepare a draft risk assessment and
a draft risk management plan, taking into account any submissions received, as well as advice from the Gene Technology Regulator’s expert technical committee. The GTR will release the draft risk assessment and risk management plan for a second round of public consideration, invite submissions and then make a final decision and notify the public.

What that tells me is that there is an extraordinarily extensive process involved in setting up the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator and that, in terms of the legislation, it is a living document. It is a process which we will need to ensure grows, as does the task in front of it. The confidence that I have is the confidence which the member for Bruce spoke of when he mentioned the esteemed performance of the TGA in managing issues relating to therapeutic goods. I have absolutely no doubt that the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator will be able to match those extremely high standards already set by the TGA.

The bill establishes three committees to assist the Gene Technology Regulator and to provide advice to the ministerial council. They are the Gene Technology Technical Advisory Committee, which is to provide scientific and technical advice, including on individual applications; the Gene Technology Ethics Committee to develop ethics guidelines and prohibitive directives; and the Gene Technology Community Consultation Group to provide advice on matters of general concern in relation to GMOs and the need for policy, technical or procedural guidelines and codes of practice in relation to GMOs and GM products.

The record of GMOs and GM product dealings provides for a centralised, publicly available database of all GMOs and GM products approved in Australia, including those approved by the other regulators. There is an interface with other regulators and relevant parties through the regulatory framework established by the Gene Technology Bill 2000. It will operate concurrently with other Commonwealth and state regulatory schemes relevant to GMOs and GM products as well as with relevant Commonwealth parties.

The Gene Technology (Licence Charges) Bill 2000 is a further bill being considered as part of this legislation. The purpose of this bill is to enable annual licence charges to be levied on licences authorising certain dealings with genetically modified organisms issued under the Gene Technology Bill 2000. The third bill being considered is the Gene Technology (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2000. The purpose of this bill is to amend a number of Commonwealth regulatory schemes to require other regulatory bodies to consider advice from the Gene Technology Regulator when making decisions to approve certain dealings with genetically modified products. This bill amends four existing schemes to regulate the approval of products derived from, or produced from, GM products. The bill thus provides an additional layer, or a second generation of regulation, and requires the relevant regulatory agency to request advice from the regulator and to consider that advice when making decisions in relation to products which are GM products or contain GM products. The agency must also notify the regulator of decisions made in relation to GM products.

All of that is quite a mouthful and to me merely underlines the detail and time that the government has taken in preparing this legislation. After the Interim Office of the Gene Technology Regulator had studied other models from right around the world, we have put in place a legislative base and framework which I believe not only will give consumers in this country a great deal of confidence but also will allow us to successfully develop GM products so that Australia remains at the forefront of scientific advance.

The area of GMOs has been subjected to a great deal of hysteria, misinformation and ignorance by parts of our community with regard to the whole issue of genetic modification. Genetic modification is nothing new; it has been going on since the beginning of creation and is part of evolution. From a scientific perspective, biotechnology is an umbrella term that covers various techniques for altering the properties or genes of living things and has been around for over 100 years. The term includes genetic alteration through methods such as selective breed-
ing—as a past cattleman I have certainly done that from time to time—plant cloning or grafting—many an orchardist has already become an expert at that—and the use of microbial products in fermenting.

What is new about BT, biotechnology, is not the principle of altering various organisms but the modern techniques for doing so. Of particular pertinence and importance is that these modern techniques are far more precise now and allow for the transfer of single genes. This gives a far more predictable result and produces greater gains in varietal and breeding development. In a nutshell, gene technology involves the modification of organisms by directly adding or deleting one or more genes to bring about certain specific characteristics. These may be characteristics related to growth patterns, chemical tolerance, disease and insect resistance, yield and maturity variations—and so the list goes on. Gene technology covers both animal and plant species.

Gene technology is also widely used in medicine. In fact, gene technology is used in research; agricultural applications; production of therapeutic goods and products such as insulin; medicine for the identification and treatment of disease; bioremediation, which is the use of micro-organisms to decompose toxic substances; and industry, such as the production of enzymes for use in paper pulp production. Benefits for agriculture include higher yields and productivity, higher efficiency, better and more sustainable land use, and reduced use of agricultural chemicals. Those few things for agriculture are things we very much need. Our farmers, as seems to be the case all too regularly of late, are in need of an extra competitive edge and great efficiency. It is never easy on the land, as many in this House well know—certainly those who sit on this side know. With current prices at levels we saw 20 or 30 years ago, many farmers are hanging their future viability on the development of new species of crops and animals which give them a larger margin in their farm productions.

Health benefits cannot be overlooked when talking about GMOs. These include the use of gene technology to conduct research into the cause of a disease, as a diagnostic tool, and for disease prevention and treatment. There is also the development of improved biopharmaceuticals such as vaccines. It is interesting—in fact, I find it incredibly curious—that the general public have accepted for decades the use of GM products which are injected into them yet we now have this sudden outcry over food products. Already well accepted are vaccines for whooping cough and hepatitis B. We are now using insulin and replacement hormone therapy derived directly from genetic modification techniques. These medicines are cheap to produce and present lower risks of allergies and, more importantly, lower risk of transmission of infectious agents. Where in the past we may have used animal products or animal derivatives, we are now using derivatives that have been produced synthetically.

The environmental benefits of GMOs include the reduced use of chemicals and pesticides, reduced ground water contamination, reclaiming of polluted or salt-affected land and increased agricultural productivity—which was the word I was looking for earlier—reducing the need for land clearing, thus protecting biodiversity. The production of biodegradable plastics and biodiesels are other potential derivatives from GM research, along with bioremediation—that is, the use of modified micro-organisms to clean up industrial wastes and environmental accidents.

As with all scientific advances there are some risks and, although they are not clearly identified, they relate to the possible unknown, long-term or intergenerational consequences of GM technology and allergies to GM foods, along with the impact on the traditional or organic cropping status of Australia. On that, we—we being Australian farmers—are quite rightly very proud of our clean, green reputation in international markets and we need to ensure that any advances we embrace through this technology do not endanger that.

Along with regulation, another area receiving a great deal of public attention is that of the labelling of GMOs. In the short time I have left I would like to touch upon that area. Much has been said about labelling and
the importance to the consumer of knowing exactly whether or not products contain GMOs. I certainly agree with that: the consumer has every right to know. The Australia New Zealand Food Standards Council agreed to a new labelling regime and, whilst they require the labelling of food and food ingredients where a novel DNA and/or novel protein is present, I do not believe they got it right. While I support labelling, I believe a far better approach would have been that we be able to use a system whereby those products that were not GMOs, that did not contain GMOs, were the ones labelled. I say that quite simply because what we are going to see in Australia’s litigious society is companies, manufacturers and retailers going for the easy option—that is, rather than getting caught with a product on the shelf that should have been labelled as containing GM foods, they will simply go through and label everything as containing GMos. In such a situation there is little or no information for the consumer, other than that the products in front of them either have GMOs or may have GMos in them.

What we really needed to do was offer the opportunity for manufacturers whose products do not contain GMOs, and who were prepared to defend perhaps even in court the fact that they do not contain GMos, to label those foods in that manner and use that as a marketing opportunity. Of course, politics and hysteria have prevented this and the consumer will be the loser through loss of information. This has masked the very real gains that are there to be made from gene technology and the regulation of gene technology and are very appropriate in the context of the start of the information age. If gene technology is about anything it is almost 100 per cent about information, because DNA is perhaps the most effective form of encoded information that we know of. It expresses so much information, in fact, that our modern technology is almost unable to cope with it. We have only just begun to decode the human DNA, and we have started on a number of plant and animal species to ensure that we also have the full record of their genetic make-up. But we have a long way to go yet. While we may have the basic roadmap of the human genome we do not have the answer as to what many of those genes do, and it will be many years yet before we have the full certainty of the genetic make-up of humans and the basis for each of those genes.

Indeed, the rate of change in this area has been so fast that I was born in the year when the basic structure of DNA was first elucidated by Watson and Crick, at the very start, if you like, of that technological revolution—
the genetic revolution that we are now seeking to regulate. That kind of rapid pace of technological change risks leaving people behind. The reality is that the changes have occurred so quickly and in so few generations that the human race is in danger of being left behind in that technological advance. People are concerned to ensure they are fully informed about those technical changes where they affect the intimate aspects of their lives and they want to know that they have the full amount of information necessary.

Unfortunately, the amount of information concerning genetic manipulation—genetic technology—is such that many members of the public have difficulty in fully comprehending and staying abreast of all of those changes when taken in the context of their already busy everyday lives and tending to their work and families. Trying to stay on top of areas of scientific change as complex as this is a difficult task, even for those professionals fully engaged in the field. It does not really matter whether you relate it to the invention of the motor vehicle earlier this century, as the previous speaker, the member for Groom, did, to the widespread use of vaccines, to the pasteurisation of milk or to the implementation of anaesthetics before surgery, those kinds of technological advances—particularly the examples I have chosen of health and medicine—were all very controversial at the time they were introduced. They provoked substantial public concern and public debate about their safety, their efficacy and their moral appropriateness. It was debated widely within the legal framework as to just why we should embark on that area of research, why the public should be subjected to those kinds of changes, whether they were safe and whether they were ethical. But public approval has usually followed in the long term as the benefits of that technology became apparent.

One of the issues that has concerned me about the gene technology debate is that many of those who promoted the early examples of genetic manipulation and the technology associated with it were not careful to ensure that the public were alerted to the benefits which would ultimately flow to them from this technology. Many of those early technological changes were directed at farmers and the producers of agricultural goods rather than at the ultimate consumers. PR effort was expended by the manufacturers of those products. I do not wish to single them out, but companies like Monsanto, Aventis, Novatis and many other corporations engaged in the quasi-pharmaceutical and genetic agricultural industry sought to promote their products to the agricultural community and did not expend the necessary effort to explain to the public why the changes they were proposing were in the long term beneficial, even at the first generation, and what was in store in subsequent generation products, where the consumer was likely to be even more directly benefited.

Because of that effect, substantial acreages of some of these early products were planted, such as Bt maize, Bt cotton and genetically modified canola. Those products have been planted substantially in the United States—some of them also in Australia and in many other countries. Consumers were not made aware that this technology was being implemented on a large scale, that it would show up in consumer products ultimately and that the health issues which might flow from that had been adequately addressed by the manufacturers. All of the effort went into convincing the primary customers—the agricultural producers—that these products were desirable, that they would make their lives easier, that they would add to their productivity and that they would ensure their farms would be able to use fewer pesticides or undertake less soil tilling, whatever the particular application was. Of course, the public were not aware of many of these changes and were naturally concerned when they did become aware about the impact that they might ultimately have. I think the industry is now largely aware of those early mistakes and is seeking to rectify them, but already public concern is out there and it is something which must be effectively addressed.

Good regulation in this context, therefore, is vital. It is absolutely fundamental that our primary concern in the area of agriculture and food should be food safety. It really does
not matter very much whether that food is derived from a product which has been directly subjected to genetic manipulation or whether that product is a conventional bread seed or a conventional bread product or whether it is one that has evolved naturally, although I will discuss some aspects of that later. It does not really matter how that food is derived or what processes are used in its production mechanisms; the important issue is whether that food is safe when it is sold at the farm gate, when it is sold in the supermarket and when it finally appears on the consumer’s table. That is the critical issue which we as legislators and regulators must address. It is the critical issue which consumers must address when they demand more information about products and when they look at the efficacy of regulations. We make a mistake when we focus too much on how that food came to be produced, rather than on the ultimate safety standards.

If we turn our attention to the organic food industry, we can see that an example of what is allegedly a natural product—produced by natural means—may not necessarily always be the safest product. While I have absolutely nothing against organic food per se, the reality is that often that food is fertilised in the farm context with the use of raw sewage and with the use of other organic material which may well not have been adequately decontaminated of bacteria. Many deaths have occurred from E. coli, which is carried in food, fruit or vegetables through to the consumers’ table and which is then the cause of food poisoning. Sometimes it can be quite serious and has the potential—although it is always difficult to trace these things back—to cause the deaths of consumers from food poisoning. Many thousands of deaths in the United States, and many in Australia, are caused by food poisoning every year from conventional food, yet we still permit the circumstances to exist. While we seek to minimise those circumstances, they are indeed out there. Being natural does not always mean that a food product is safe, and it does not guarantee that that food will not contain contaminants, be they organic or inorganic, which may ultimately be harmful.

We see that also in the field of drugs. In this era of rapid scientific change, there is potential for an almost anti-science attitude in the consumer marketplace, for a degree of concern about scientific advances and the efficacy of them, and for an ethical debate around them. Whether or not a scientific advance is appropriate, people may turn away from it and look towards what is sold in the commercial marketplace as natural—be it organic food or so-called natural drugs, which can often be far more harmful and dangerous than the real thing. For example, a drug containing St John’s wort is sold in health food stores as a cure or treatment for some forms of depression. These drugs often have adverse impacts because they contain a wide variety of active chemical constituents, they are not standardised in any way, and they are not subject to the normal regulatory processes or the double blind clinical trials which would precede the marketing of any pharmaceutical. They are not taken in a supervised context and there can be significant interactions with other drugs that are being taken.

So we have to be very careful, as consumers and as legislators, to ensure that we do not cater to an anti-science view which takes us away into this natural realm which may be as dangerous as the well-regulated but perhaps more artificial area of food and drug delivery. Certainly gene technology is one of the areas which many in the community cite for a lack of natural breeding processes, and they assert that there are risks involved. As in all human activity, there are risks, and we would be foolish not to acknowledge that. That is the reason for the kind of regulatory proposal that we have before us today.

We should not lose sight of the historical context in which plants have been bred by humans ever since we first domesticated animals and sought to produce domesticated agricultural plants. Indeed, we have always produced plants which involved forms of genetic manipulation. One of the earliest examples would be wheat, which is a hybrid product of other natural grasses and cereals and, as such, is far from natural, yet everyone would assert that bread is a very natural product. It is a product of the very earliest
genetic engineering which we are aware of. So is the tomato. Four hundred years ago, the tomato which grew wild in the hills surrounding the Andes in South America was small, green and relatively poisonous. Over 400 years of selective breeding—genetic engineering—we have bred a product which is larger, redder and far from poisonous; indeed, it is quite a healthy product to eat, although it does contain some natural toxins. Those who were performing that genetic engineering were doing it with their eyes closed and with no knowledge of the very substantial DNA changes which took place in those products.

For many years, some of the most common modern breeding techniques have involved exposing large numbers of seeds to chemical mutagens and radiation, which is designed to induce wholesale DNA restructuring within the seeds. Those seeds are then planted, the successful seedlings are selected for their desirable characteristics, and they are then bred back with the parent or other wild types to further propagate the desirable traits and suppress the less desirable traits which have resulted from the DNA changes induced by the chemical or radiation mutagens. That is far from a natural process, but it is the one we all endorse when we buy and eat new strains and new varieties of plant and agricultural products—which of course are what stock our supermarket shelves today.

Those changes to the DNA are wholesale; no-one knows what undesirable characteristics have been introduced in the breeding process or what significant changes have occurred to the DNA structure. They are aware only of the outward expression of that genotype, the outward expression of those desirable characteristics for which they have bred. They are completely unaware of any undesirable changes to the DNA, which are far more significant than those which occur when products are manipulated scientifically to modify the DNA and to insert perhaps one or two genes. In those cases, the changes which have been made to the structure of the DNA of the plant are very clear, well known and well documented, and the outcomes are well researched and tested. That is not always the case with traditional plant breeding. That is not an argument to say that we should be that concerned about traditional plant breeding—obviously we should not, because we have all been eating the products of it for many years now—or an argument to say that we should ignore the problems which potentially surround the manipulation of the DNA by genetic engineering technology. It is an argument to say that we must keep these relative risks in perspective, and we must judge one against the other, assess the relative concerns, and focus on food safety—not on the mechanisms by which these things were produced.

I suspect if consumers were fully aware of the way in which many of the traditional plant varieties had been produced, they would be less than enthusiastic about purchasing them, as many are less than enthusiastic about purchasing those items which are stated to have been recently changed and subject to DNA modification by artificial means. The potential for DNA manipulation is very great, as many members have said in this debate. It is important that this legislation allows that promise to be expressed in the way of new technologies, new foods, new pharmaceuticals, new industrial products and new environmental remediation tools which should become available as a result of this technology.

We should be able to see the introduction of vaccines into foods, which would be advantageous in those countries where there is not an adequate supply of cold storage or adequate medical facilities to distribute vaccines. We should see improved food nutrition, the removal of negative characteristics, and the enhancement of the positive characteristics of our existing foods. A prime example is the development of the so-called golden rice, which has had vitamin A added to its new genetic structure. This rice will assist children in many Third World countries who suffer partial or total blindness as a result of inadequate vitamin A in their diet. The company responsible, Monsanto, has recently placed the technology in the public domain and allows the licensing of that technology so that the countries which will benefit from it, but cannot afford to pay for it,
will be able to take advantage of it. We may well see some significant improvement in those children as a result.

There has always been the promise, particularly in animal trials, of the production of pharmaceuticals, especially the very complex and expensive pharmaceuticals, through the use of genetically engineered animal stocks. That is why cloning technology is so important. Having produced the initial animal with the modified DNA, which might well produce substantial pharmaceutical drugs of broad use and application in our society, that animal could then be cloned into a herd and economic production could occur as a result. We can potentially modify plants to be much more successful in high saline areas—a very relevant technology in Australia today—or to resist drought or heat or to cope better with higher CO₂ concentrations. All of those potential changes can be brought about by the introduction of additional genes into, or indeed the deletion of additional genes from, these plant and animal species—and that technology will grow apace.

It is important that this technology is properly regulated. It is important that we bring the public along with us and that consumers are properly informed about these changes. It is also important that we keep the risks in perspective, that we understand the kind of technology which is used today and the potential for that technology to be used tomorrow, and that we ensure that the benefits of this technology are not outweighed by concern as to the harmful aspects. We need to ensure that those aspects are properly addressed and that the public are made aware of the potential gains from this technology. Their support for it will be much more likely to follow when we indicate to them what the direct benefits to consumers are, that there is adequate regulation and adequate testing, and that those involved in this industry are seeking to do it not only for the profit motive—which, of course, will often be there in private sector research—but also for the ultimate good of society as a whole.

Dr WASHER (Moore) (9.01 p.m.)—I rise tonight to speak on the Gene Technology Bill 2000. Much has been said and written about gene technology in recent years, as the wealth of possibilities through science and research open up new doors for us—confirming this century as a revolutionary century of biotechnology. It is a very exciting field to be part of, as the benefits for the human race are limited only by our imagination. It gives us opportunities to feed our rapidly expanding global population, as well as treat and even cure diseases that are fatal or debilitating. Biotechnology offers many solutions to how we can go on living on this planet without destroying it. It lets us grow crops in places where it used to be impossible to grow anything, resisting even drought, frost and salt. It gives us the tools to make crops resistant to disease and able to stand up to outside forces like insects and pests, so we can use fewer pesticides and fertilisers. In short, it represents the key to meeting society’s challenges and will be the central growth factor in every economy on the globe.

Biotechnology is simply the manipulation of a biological process to derive some kind of benefit. We have been doing this for centuries through techniques like selective breeding and crossbreeding, and so has mother nature through genetic mutations. In fact, a natural mutation occurred recently in a canola crop that has now made it resistant to herbicide. Ever since we started baking bread, brewing beer and making cheese, we have been utilising biotechnology. GM foods represent a more exact science than what we have been used to, as we can now map and identify an organism down to a single gene and move it from one organism to another to enhance its characteristics to suit us. A good example was extensively covered in a recent issue of Time magazine, as was mentioned by a previous speaker. The article was about a Swiss scientist who had developed a rice crop that was created from snippets of DNA from a daffodil. His desire to do this stemmed from his concern that people in Third World countries were suffering major vitamin A deficiencies, leading to infectious diseases and blindness. More than one million children die each year because they are weakened by a vitamin A deficiency and an additional 350,000 go blind. This is due to poorer nations relying almost entirely on rice for their diet. By transferring genes from the
daffodil, the rice then has the code to make beta carotene. That is what makes it yellow. This is a precursor of vitamin A. I was pleased to hear in recent weeks that Monsanto, the company that owns the rights to this technology—as mentioned also by the previous speaker—has offered use of the rice to Third World countries totally free of charge. This crop will bring immeasurable benefits to the nutritional standards of poorer nations and cannot be overlooked when the hysteria surrounding GM foods reaches such a crescendo that we cannot see past the headlines. As a former United States president, Jimmy Carter, so aptly put it: ‘Responsible biotechnology is not the enemy; starvation is.’

In June this year an American scientist decoded, for the first time, the human genome. In other words, we have an extremely large database containing every letter of our human genetic structure—all 3.1 billion of them. Even more exciting, Australia was the first country to buy the rights to this knowledge. We now have the means to be part of a new medical revolution where genetic medicine will help cure and vaccinate against cancer, HIV/AIDS, epilepsy, Alzheimer’s disease and Parkinson’s disease, to name a few. For Australia to remain part of this revolution, we must continue on the path that the Howard government has begun to build—continuing funding for scientific research, supporting our scientists so that we do not lose them to the US and by structuring our tax system to encourage venture capital.

Fears surrounding GM foods were initiated, particularly in Europe, by the mad cow scare—a disease caused by proteins called prions that change shape. This has its equivalent in Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease and curu. Cows develop mad cow disease after being fed animal products containing neurological tissue, such as brain and spinal cord. Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease was spread by injecting people with human growth hormone extracted from cadaver brain tissue. This disease is now largely eradicated, rather ironically, with the aid of genetic engineering. We are now able to genetically engineer a safer growth hormone using bacterial cells. Despite the mad cow incident having nothing whatsoever to do with GM foods and despite its human equivalent, Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, being eradicated with the help of genetic engineering, this episode has inspired a wealth of paranoia on the subject.

It is worth noting that the medical world has been quite comfortable with GM products for some time. It is exasperating to see some groups like the British Medical Association speak out against GM products, even though their members use these products as vaccines on a daily basis. The same paranoia accompanied the introduction of treatments such as genetically engineered insulin some years ago. But they were permitted on the market because our medical regulatory systems based their decisions on good science and not on ill-informed sensationalism. Without this insulin, we would not have enough human pancreas in the world to obtain the human insulin that is required to treat our diabetic population. Vaccines also exist today because of genetic engineering. The new GM whooping cough vaccine is actually much safer than the old one as there was always a possible risk, albeit a small one, of brain damage. The new genetically engineered vaccine does not contain any foreign proteins and therefore removes this risk. Hepatitis B vaccine, which is now recommended for all Australians, has been guaranteed safe because it is produced by genetic modification. Confidence in its safety was not always assured when the product was extracted from high risk hepatitis B sufferers.

Critics of GM food often cite a handful of reported scientific studies that would result in a D grade for any high school science student using the same methodologies. Perhaps the most widely reported one comes from a biochemist in Scotland who said he had proven that GM potatoes were harmful to rats because of the genetic modification. Without going into too much detail, the changes observed in the rats and their organs are attributable to the fact that rats are not particularly fond of potatoes and were consequently malnourished. Most significantly, the known toxins in raw potato often cause problems in rats—a conclusion that could have been drawn from the start of the experiment. A GM potato causes no more
Monday, 28 August 2000  REPRESENTATIVES  19465

damage to rats than a non-GM potato. Of course, we should test GM foods to see if they are in any way harmful. However, it is worth pointing out that the food we are eating now that has been subtly altered will have gone through far more rigorous testing than conventional foods ever will.

This brings me to the decisions made by ANZFA on the issue of labelling products based on their method of manufacture. Even if products have been proven to be safe and substantially equivalent to their conventional counterparts, in making this decision ANZFA has allowed itself to be coerced and ultimately politicised away from good science. I am now extremely concerned about Australia’s global standing because of this decision. The United States Food and Drug Administration, which is one of the world’s oldest consumer protection agencies and an employer of some 2,100 scientists, has stated that labelling of all GM food represents ‘consumer fraud’. It is costly, unworkable and leaves us wide open to a trade war through the World Trade Organisation, threatening thousands of jobs of ordinary Australians. There is a danger that Australia will be used as an easy target to send a message to traders like the EU which have already been threatened with a formal complaint to the WTO on the grounds of product discrimination.

GM products would not have been allowed onto the market if they were not safe. As long as the product is not substantially different or contains allergens, then not only is mandatory labelling unnecessary, it is quite perilous. Advocates of GM labelling often quote surveys that report high public support for GM food labelling. But like all surveys, you get the answer you want by the way you frame the question. In Australia, for instance, we were asked: ‘Would you like to see GM food labelled so that consumers have a choice?’ Not surprisingly, 93 per cent said yes. Another survey in United States framed the labelling question in another context by saying:

The FDA currently requires that all food, GM and non-GM, that is substantially different or may contain allergens must be labelled. There is a move to label all GM food, irrespective of whether it is substantially different or not. Do you support this change?

Two-thirds said no. In more general surveys regarding gene technologies, such as one conducted by the Australian Food and Grocery Council, consumers were found to be confident in the safety of the food supply and comfortable with the application of gene technology. Another factor that makes a mockery of the idea of labelling GM products is that some products like sugar, starches and oils have been genetically modified, but there is no way of proving this as they have no DNA. In the process of making these products, the DNA gets stripped. It is impossible to tell the difference between these GM and non-GM products.

The legislation I am addressing tonight creates the mechanism for managing the gene technology industry to ensure the safety of the consumer and of our environment. This bill contains the legislative framework for the creation of the Gene Technology Regulator which will work with bodies such as the TGA, which already regulates therapeutic goods, and ANZFA which is the existing agency overseeing the safety of food products. Importantly, the GTR will be a statutory office holder with a large degree of independence, similar to the Commissioner of Taxation or the Attorney-General. I cannot stress enough the significance of this. I have said in this House before that these issues need to be managed on a scientific level, away from the populist mood of the day. The labelling issue represents a classical case of ANZFA letting politics get in the way of logical scientific decision making. The GTR will, nonetheless, be answerable to a ministerial council that will be made up of ministers from state and federal governments. Their role, I am told, is to provide a broad oversight of the regulatory framework and to provide guidance in matters of policy that underpin the legislation. The regulator will also take counsel from three separate advisory committees. Scientific advice will come from the former Genetic Manipulation Advisory Committee, now to be called the Gene Technology Technical Advisory Committee.
A community consultative group will provide input on issues and concerns from the community at large, and an ethics committee will advise the regulator on the questions of ethics that will inevitably arise from time to time. The public will have an opportunity to make comment on every single application to the regulator, but this is nothing new. The public can do so now through the Genetic Manipulation Advisory Committee. In fact, a new application for comment came across my desk just last week. It was from Murdoch University in my state of Western Australia, to conduct a trial to genetically modify a bacterium that will provide livestock with a tolerance to a particular poison occurring naturally in several native plants. Losses of cattle, sheep and goats from this poisoning cause significant economic damage to these industries. I wish this project well.

There is no denying that the issues surrounding gene technology are complex, particularly when it comes to legislating for its use. During the debates that arise about gene technology I often hear reference to what is known as the precautionary principle. This is a strategy of policy making developed in the 1930s and has been used as a political concept ever since. It basically says that, if there is a level of scientific uncertainty in a decision making process, anticipatory action should be taken to prevent any harm that may happen, as it has not been proven beyond any reasonable doubt that it will not. Although on face value it seems simple, this method of risk management should be treated with a great deal of caution. In fact, as one commentator points out, if you applied the precautionary principle to itself—if you ask what are the possible dangers of using this principle—we would be forced to abandon it very quickly. If we applied this theory every time a scientific breakthrough was made, who knows what limits we would have placed on our most significant scientific discoveries, including the life-saving medical advances we have achieved? The precautionary principle seeks to legitimise unfounded and irrational decision making processes. This has never been more obvious than in the debate over the use of gene technology.

Australia has the potential to lead the world in advancing biotechnology. If we do not pick up the baton and run with it, we will suffer economically from non-competitive agriculture. We will suffer from lost opportunities to innovate in medicine and research. Any technology we wish to use we will pay dearly for, as it will belong to someone else. In the words of Harvard University researcher Juan Enriquez:

The countries that succeed will pull ahead and those that fail will fall behind faster than we have ever seen. Australia is on a knife edge.

We have a tremendous opportunity to address the global problems that threaten to engulf us—problems of severe land degradation, environmental pollution, and the most pressing problem of feeding a global population that is set to double within 25 years.

I welcome the establishment of the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator, as this authority should show leadership in issues surrounding GM products. It is important that all the stakeholders share responsibility in ensuring that GM products are managed properly, safely and with the confidence of the consumer. I look forward to a future where the quality of life on this planet will be improved with the use of biotechnology. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (9.18 p.m.)—The Gene Technology Bill 2000 has been brought in because of the amount of work currently being done on genetically modified organisms in the world. There needs to be some method by which the risks associated with gene technology and our health and the health of our environment can be tested. The object of the bill is to develop a regulatory framework that will provide an efficient and effective system for the application of gene technology and operate in conjunction with other Commonwealth and state regulatory schemes relevant to GMOs and genetically modified products such as the existing schemes for regulation of food, therapeutic goods, agricultural and veterinary chemicals and industrial chemicals.

What we are looking at is risk assessment—who will be doing it, how transparent
it will be and how we can really be sure that what we are being told is true. By the same token, this technology can be very important to Australia. It does mean a whole redirection of agriculture, health and many other innovative developments. We cannot afford as a nation to stifle our most important asset, those people working on the edge of new technology. I am considering the bill in this context.

I do not think we should stint on cost in making it really safe, not just pandering to safety perceptions. But I cannot agree with my Tasmanian government colleagues that opting out, even for a short period of time, can be done without causing a setback to the research that is going on now. The risk of delaying GM research in New Zealand was discussed in an article in the *New Zealand Commercial Grower* in April of this year:

> Once you are a year behind—you are history. Not only would we lose our experienced scientists, but we would find that many of the genetic applications we needed would have been developed and patented by researchers in other countries. They would be unavailable to Australia or available only at a prohibitively high cost.

This may be no problem if, as the Greens believe, the public will increasingly avoid genetically modified products, but the risk is high. The first generation of GM products has benefits for the grower and not the consumer. Consequently, it was not difficult to persuade the public to avoid them. Subsequent genetic modifications however will carry characteristics which the consumer will want—enhanced flavour, a better shelf life, or freedom from allergens for example. These combined with the credible testing scheme, may regain many customers for GM foods.

I would add to this cheaper products because it will be the cost of production and therefore consumer price that will be the key to consumer interest. Part of the problem is that we have two polarised sides of the argument, and both are taking a view that prevents the other scoring. I see this as a much bigger argument than a bit of point scoring. This is the future of our technological development. This is bigger than television, the Internet and mobile phones put together.

Change is also worrying and many are fearful of it, but mostly for the wrong reasons. Stories abound. There was an alarming one floating around in Britain last year, mentioned by the last speaker. The *New Scientist* revealed that a biochemist who used to work at a research institution in Scotland said that he had shown that GM potatoes were harmful to rats because of their genetic modification. Were they toxic? On the basis of the evidence given it was impossible to say. The results supported only one conclusion: rats hate potatoes. In the tests, the researcher fed separate groups of rats normal or GM potatoes, to see if the GM food had different effects. According to Debora Mackenzie, who put together this story for *New Scientist*, it was good basic toxicology. Unfortunately, the researcher could not make the animals eat enough potato so they were malfourished, no matter what kind of potato they were eating. A number of tests were done on the rats and their immune activity. The only thing that could really be found was that starvation or known toxins in raw potatoes were the most likely culprits for any changes seen in the rats.

The reason I have raised this story is that we in Australia as well as those in Britain, from where the story originated, cannot really test the toxicity of GM foods by normal methods. There is insufficient research going on to provide better indicators. Even if one manages to get animals to eat enough test food, one risks changing their diet so profoundly that even those eating unmodified foods will be abnormal. Other tests also give ambiguous results, so it is currently very hard to achieve toxicity results in the testing of foods. This makes it hard to argue that GM foods are dangerous to health. I am not saying that they are not but I am concerned that what we are hearing is based on some pretty strange research results. Another story on the 25th anniversary *Science Show* last weekend rather took the mickey. Robyn Williams started the segment with a skit on the news item that reported a group of people had eaten some genetic material in their sandwiches. And—gosh!—one of the women turned green. Then they went on about canola genes crossing into computers and having canola jumping out of the keyboards. Opposition does sound a little silly when you get this sort of thing being said.
In a background paper from the Institute of Food Technologists in Chicago, written in December 1999, we read that since life began genes have crossed the boundaries of related and unrelated species in nature. Biotechnology applications by humans date back to 1800 BC, when people were using yeast to leaven bread and ferment wine. By the 1860s, people had started breeding plants through deliberate crosspollinisation. They moved and selected genes to enhance the beneficial qualities of plants through crossbreeding and knowing the strengths for which the genes were coded. Most foods, including rice, oats, potatoes, corn, wheat and tomatoes, are the products of traditional crossbreeding and are very different from what they were centuries ago. Traditional crossbreeding has its limitations. It can only occur in the same or related plant species, it takes time and is a rather random process. The idea of using a new technology to speed up the procedure has come about because scientists are now able to identify and select a single gene responsible for a particular trait. These genes do not have to come from related species in order to be functional. Hence, genes can potentially be transferred among all living organisms.

Here lies the rub: because there are no real independent checks and the legislation before parliament does not really deal with the crux of people’s concerns, there is understandable nervousness. This is certainly not helped by some quite wild claims by those opposed to GM technology, which have led to terms such as ‘Frankenfoods’ and ‘unnatural practices’. Personally, I think biotechnology is here to stay. It is going to be one of the biggest steps mankind has taken this century and it will not be going away. Whatever we think of the practice of genetic modification, it certainly will go on. If we ban it, that will mean it will go on without supervision and without scrutiny and may well become the evil that many believe it is now. However, taking a cautious approach, putting some good legislation in place with some completely independent and professional assessment of the risks, will provide an opportunity for Australia not only to have control of this technology but also to move forward on the edge of the technology and be a world leader. I read this morning that the CSIRO has moved to put a new inquiry in place into the long-term impact of genetically modified organisms—one of the first large-scale investigations into the long-term ecological risks of GMOs in agricultural biodiversity as well as the potential benefits. This will be a much more meaningful basis for legislation than hypotheses. This way we can continue the research programs.

I was recently reading in the Mercury of 6 August 2000 about an extremely tiny natural asset: micro-organisms that produce PUFAs—polyunsaturated essential fatty acids. According to this fascinating article by Elaine Reeves, pure PUFAs are worth as much as $5,000 a gram. That is even more than truffles. Apparently they are found in certain fish and cultured micro-algae. They are good for general health, including sharpening the thinking of adults, and have benefits in fighting against heart disease, arthritis, strokes and some forms of cancer. One can find PUFAs naturally and one can produce them, but this is very expensive through the normal ways. However, our scientists have found a way of getting the PUFA producing enzyme working in isolation away from the surrounding cell. And there is much going on—already some other research institutions are ordering kilograms of it, and they have not been produced in this sort of quantity yet. The point I am trying to make here is that this is an industry that is just starting out. It is very new. The article goes on to say that the last phase of the work will involve gene jockeying, or genetic engineering, and that these scientists are now sitting in a very delicate situation—can they continue this valuable work? If the Tasmanian experiment of banning GM crops goes ahead and the legislation is not handled properly, it could restrict all sorts of opportunities. The ones I mentioned are not the only ones.

Another two critical projects are being undertaken by a big company in Tasmania, within the poppy industry. It is already involved in a trial to genetically transform poppies to be resistant to herbicide and the other is transforming poppies with new constructs of genes involved in the alkaloid biosynthetic pathways. This has enormous po-
potential for Tasmania. The poppies will be unique to Tasmania. Although the company fully supports having a gene technology regulator, it is very concerned about a moratorium and possible ban on GM crops.

Recently I have had an intern, Vikki Fraser, in my office looking at the ethics of GM regulation. Between them, she and her supervisor have identified a number of problems with the current argument, not just with the bill but with the general ethical argument on these sorts of issues. They are not simple. I have attempted to translate this discussion into some of the problems with the bill that I and others have. Part 3 of the bill, at proposed section 26, refers to a gene technology regulator. Firstly, the person appointed should be completely independent of any related work and also from either side of the interests. The person should be an active scientist with broad interests and at the peak of their career, and they should have a specific and set term of office.

Proposed section 27 speaks of the functions of the regulator. We have to watch out that information which is disseminated as part of ‘providing information to the public’ has not been adulterated in its passage by commercial or political interests. Any research, testing and consequential information dissemination needs to be at arms-length from government and its research wing if it is to be credible. It is very important that we get right part 8, which covers the advisory committees. I believe you need more than just scientists on the committees if they are to be independent and credible. These positions are very influential, and I believe there should again be a set and specific term of tenure.

Part 9 at proposed section 138 covers confidential commercial information. There should be very little that needs to be confidential. The trouble with commercial-in-confidence information is that ‘commercial-in-confidence’ can be easily pulled on for political purposes—and has been used in the past—to preclude important information from being made available to a worried public. We need to be open and up-front if this technology is to be accepted for the good that it does, not just over the worry of change. The technology is in its infancy. There is much that can be achieved by Australia being involved in developing the guidelines, both ethically and commercially. We have the opportunity of improving our food, our environment and our lifestyles with the acceptance of the general public if it is done with the watchdogs being outside the commercial and political process.

I would like to see Australia be part of setting up an international panel to cut through the dogma and the wooliness that is clouding the debate over GM crops and food, a panel similar to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which has been working on the global warming debate. This is an idea put forward by John Krebs, who is the chairman of Britain’s Food Standards Agency, and I believe that it is a good one and that it would allow the debate to be more broadly based. While Australia can afford to pick and choose how our food is produced, millions of people are not so fortunate. A quote from John Krebs’s paper Seeds of Hope I believe is the way in which things should be considered, because developing countries do not have our luxuries:

We would like to be like you, with plenty of food for our people. We need every tool at our disposal to achieve this, including biotechnology, which will allow us to grow things without costly chemicals and irrigation schemes that we cannot afford. We do not want to be dependent on aid or redistribution, we want to be in control of our own destinies.

An independent world panel could help this to happen—not close the door on the technology but drive research and also separate facts from propaganda as those facts come to light. Getting this bill right is crucial to the future development of the technology not only here but overseas. I would ask that those comments be considered during the current discussions.

Getting back to the bill, I do not believe it goes far enough. I think we should be expanding our knowledge of this technology—we should be allowing our scientists to tackle this major ethical and economic direction without overbearing barriers. Caution by all means, but keep the discussion open and transparent, and Australians will benefit
from this approach. The area that must be looked at is that of the ownership of the technology—the owning of the patents and the costs of seeds, the genetic material that is patented and who has access to it. These are the aspects that are going to be most important in the ongoing discussion.

There are many problems that really need to be considered, and considered in the light of world trade arguments. When all is said and done, we might not have the choices to do what we want to do if the whole technology has moved on without us. I find that this argument has not been dealt with, that government is trying to sneak stuff through without really having the public understand what is indeed going on. How many people know which of the foods we are eating now have GMO material in them? The joke I repeated from the science show demonstrates that many people have still not got the faintest idea what has happened with our food over the years. Do people really think that some fast foods are better for us because they have been improved in some way, either genetically or through other methods? Australian foods such as Mars Bars, Maltesers, M&M’s and Heinz chicken dinners contain ingredients from genetically modified crops. Have they killed anyone yet? Also, I am told that Heinz banana custard, Homai cocktail spring rolls, Snickers, Dove caramel, Sani-tarium country spiced soy burgers, as well as their healthy spiced soy fillets, and some Nestle frozen products all contain genetically modified material. Other manufacturers are neither confirming nor denying that their products contain foods from genetically modified sources. (Time expired)

Mr ANDREW THOMSON (Wentworth)
(9.38 p.m.)—I have enjoyed the last 20 minutes. You would go a long way to hear speeches as carefully crafted as those delivered by the member for Lyons, and tonight’s was no exception to that. It is noteworthy that the honourable gentleman comes from Tasmania—indeed, the shadow minister at the table, Mr Kerr, likewise—but has expressed sentiments somewhat at odds with what the state government of Tasmania is attempting to do with genetically modified foods. But that is perhaps a debate for another time. Tonight we have to discuss the provisions of a number of bills, chiefly the Gene Technology Bill 2000. This is a complex subject—one on which the government ought to hasten slowly, but then again it has to be said that this legislation has been a long time coming. Genetically modified foods really boil down to a simple proposition—that of precision. When you are able to manipulate the gene sequence of a foodstuff, you are really acting as a scalpel, as opposed to the sledgehammer that selective breeding has been up until now. The potential that this technology provides for any developing country is astonishing when you think about what it can do to raise incomes and to increase the output of agricultural foodstuffs. It is quite astonishing when you go into it.

But there is a lot of anxiety about this technology and its products. It has to do not simply with the ethical and even the religious aspects of the manipulation of embryos but more particularly with what is in our food and what the growing of certain foodstuffs may mean for agricultural producers and the agricultural economy generally. For anybody with a child, especially a very young one, deep down there is always some element of doubt. You take special care when you feed a small child; you always wonder what is in the food and what it might do. In a larger sense, the anxiety around GM foods was fuelled in a great way by the beef scandal in Britain involving the so-called mad cow disease or BSE. This came as a great shock to people in Britain and Europe. Of course it spread very quickly, and so there is a heightened sensitivity about the quality of the food we are offered.

Even more than that, there is generally a reaction abroad to a perceived corporatisation of our economies, generally speaking. There is a deep feeling of loss of control, of the destruction of all the old verities. This manifests itself in various ways—some of them quite malignant, like vicious protests against gatherings of people who are attempting to discuss things in a sensible fashion, like the World Trade Organisation in Seattle or the meeting in Melbourne in a couple of weeks time. To be blunt, these days large corporations are sluicegates of
capital, both financial capital, raised through the equity or credit markets, and human capital. People want to work for large corporations where they see that there may be more security of employment than in smaller enterprises. Once you attach a brand name to the gate, that sense of control increases. Governments take more notice of large corporations that have a pervasive brand name and the ability to raise a lot of capital.

On the other side of the coin, you must also acknowledge that the aggregation of capital in the huge pension funds also tends to diminish the role of the individual in making decisions about where he or she might invest their savings. If more sovereignty is given to the individual—more choice, more individual control—there may be less anxiety. But these days, with supermarkets getting bigger and bigger and controlling more and more of the consumer franchise, there is a definite sense that control of the sources of food is gradually escaping the individual. So the cry goes out to government, ‘Do something to make sure we are safe,’ and hence this bill.

It establishes a framework of regulation. It is not something that I would naturally support, but by examining the individual provisions one by one you get the sense at first glance of an enormous framework, perhaps even unnecessarily large. But the more you look behind the provisions into what is going on in the laboratories and the kinds of alternatives on offer, the more you see that this bill is a reasonable attempt to deal with the feeling among citizens that some form of control and regulation is necessary.

If you go to proposed section 3, the object of the act, where we really ought to start any debate on a bill, you read the following:

The object of this Act is to protect the health and safety of people, and to protect the environment, by identifying risks posed by or as a result of gene technology, and by managing those risks through regulating certain dealings with GMOs.

So the emphasis is on managing the risks. What the act proceeds to do in proposed section 26 is establish a gene technology regulator. It says:

There is to be a Gene Technology Regulator.

It is a bit like the early chapters of the Bible. It then goes on to detail the functions of the regulator, but the pith of it is that if you want to deal—and I use that verb as they use it in the act—with a genetically modified organism you must have a licence to do so, unless that GMO falls within three categories. Those categories are those of what you might call minimal risk. The first is notifiable low-risk dealings, to be specified in regulations, although I am assured that this will be in effect no change from the existing regime of voluntary regulation; secondly, if the GMO comes within the category of an exempt dealing; and, thirdly, if the dealing is already notified to the GMO register. In these cases it will not require a licence.

What is of particular importance is what happens if the proposed GMO, the new technology, does not fall within those three categories of minimal risk and hence requires a licence. In that case, you have to go to proposed section 49. This is really the core of this attempted regulation. The provision says that if the regulator is satisfied that at least one of the dealings proposed to be authorised by the licence may pose significant risks to the health and safety of people or to the environment then certain duties fall upon the regulator: to publish a notice in respect of the application and so on and so forth. To pause just there, you have something that may be a reasonable attempt, and I think it is, to deal with the public anxiety about this new technology or may in future, if misused, cause some particular difficulties for those people who feel attracted to the idea of investing capital in some of this new technology. The test there is whether or not the regulator is satisfied that a proposed dealing in a GMO may pose significant risks to the health and safety of people. Is this a subjective test or is it an objective test? It appears to be a subjective one. So the person who holds that statutory office must satisfy himself or herself that the proposed dealing ‘may pose’ risk, so there is a question of likelihood. Is that test of likelihood to be on the balance of probabilities or the criminal standard of proof, beyond reasonable doubt? Informal advice is that it will be the civil standard of proof, on the balance of probabilities.
The next noteworthy word in that formula is ‘significant’—‘may pose significant risks to the health and safety of people or to the environment’. Again, this could be dealt with reasonably or it could be abused by a person who holds that office who has some ideological bent, perhaps. Is there a potential for some excessive zeal to perhaps frustrate the progress of science and to damage the investment potential of this kind of technology? Is this perhaps a charter for Luddites? It may be, but I am satisfied that for the time being it will not be used as such. When you go further into the bill and you examine some of the other aspects of the regulation, you see that sound science is introduced into the process and the precautionary principle, the stalking horse so often of those who are opposed to scientific progress, is kept happily distant from this.

The definition of the environment, which you find in proposed section 10, is very broad. If the wrong person were appointed to the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator, it may provide scope for a person to exercise what I would describe as excessive zeal. The definition reads:

‘environment’ includes:

(a) ecosystems and their constituent parts; and

(b) natural and physical resources;

There is nothing terribly worrying about those two. But thirdly:

(c) the qualities and characteristics of locations, places and areas.

What precisely that means—the qualities and characteristics of locations, places and areas—I think could do with some more definition. Whether by regulation or even over a considerably longer period of time by litigation and precedent, there may be some more precise definition of that which would be helpful.

After a person applies for a licence and the regulator satisfies himself or herself of that first test, the regulator has to publish a notice inviting public submissions. He or she must prepare a risk assessment and a risk management plan and must seek advice from the states, the minister for the environment and local councils. Puzzlingly, the regulator—and I point to proposed section 51—must take into account any such advice rendered from those sources.

It does not say that the regulator must make a decision within the parameters of any such advice, but apparently there is a duty conferred on that person to take that advice into account. I am not quite sure what that means. To me it smacks a bit of the right to negotiate, something that sounds rather good and sensible and perhaps not such a problem, but in effect it does not mean anything. If the regulator must take those things into account, the next question you would ask is: what are the time limits on that? A malevolent regulator may use the opportunity to delay approval of a new genetically modified organism, but thereafter proposed section 52 has it that the regulator will then publish the assessment and the plan and invite further public submissions. So this opportunity for public submissions, for which I think you can read ‘NGO-driven campaigns’ and so forth, is given twice.

Finally, the regulator must—in proposed section 55—make a decision to grant or refuse the licence. So you have these peculiar statutory attempts to direct what a regulator must do in terms of process, but it does seem to me to lack a little meaning. If I were the regulator and someone said to me, ‘You have to take these things into account,’ I could sit there until I was blue in the face taking them into account. I could take them into account from dawn to dusk. Then what is the outcome? Who would be able to judge whether or not I had taken them into account when there is no duty to make a decision according to the advice that you are given by these various sources. It seems to me to be put in there for the purpose of satisfying a rather strident lobby that something is being done, but as to what the outcome is that is a bit of a mystery. Provided there is enough sound science in the decision making process and that the precautionary principle is kept well away from this important technology, then I am satisfied with the bill and I shall vote for it.

Generally speaking, the question we have to ask ourselves is: is this excessive regulation? Given what is being said in the Senate
Community Affairs References Committee, which is inquiring into the bill, you would have to say that it could be worse. There are suggestions coming out of the Senate committee that new gene technology be the subject of a veto by a two-thirds majority of a community consultation committee. I was under the impression that this chamber is a community consultation committee, a parliament, and where we deliberate on bills and vote them into law then they should stand as such. If you confer or devolve onto some vaguely constructed body, a community consultation committee, powers to veto new technology, that is not the sort of thing that either side of this House could sensibly agree to.

Genetic modification and the technology that underpins it goes to lowering the cost of food, which involves increased output of plants and, if done well, can reduce the role or the need for herbicides, water and nutrients—the very sorts of things that many sensible people of an environmental bent are calling for. If you look back to the turn of the century when there was a great fear that the forests of the United States would be sacrificed, that there would be a great fear that the forests of the United States would be sacrificed, that there would be a great famine of wood, as they described it at the time, it was that increase in the productive capacity of the crops that were gradually introduced into the great agricultural areas of the United States that meant that farmers could use less land to produce more food. Gene technology is really much of the same. Yet much of the opposition to it is couched in terms of, ‘It’s not natural,’ or, ‘It’s Frankenstein food,’ and gives rise to an unjustified suspicion of scientific endeavour.

The precautionary principle, so often attempted to be introduced into regulation of this sort, often sounds a sensible idea on its own of safety first and the notions you seek to imbue in a small child—‘Don’t run across the road. You’ll get run over. Take it easy. Be careful.’ A balanced risk assessment is what this ought to be all about. Not only does it mean accounting for the potential cost of allowing such technologies to run free with no regulation but also it ought to account for the cost of regulation itself because deterring investment in GMOs has a cost of its own. It will reduce agricultural incomes and therefore, if you extrapolate that, it leads to lower incomes and lower standards of health in the parts of Australia that could do with just the opposite. Overregulation can cause damage by misdirecting resources that might be better spent elsewhere. I hope that this sort of research will soon find answers for weeds, salinity and depletion of forests, and even help carbon sequestration, which is something we have to face up to soon. We ought not to give in to the kind of blackmail that some of the strident campaigns seem to put upon us. I commend the bill to the House. (Time expired)

Mr JENKINS (Scullin) (9.58 p.m.)—Tonight we are discussing the Gene Technology Bill 2000 and two accompanying pieces of legislation. The object of the bill is to protect the health and safety of people and to protect the environment by identifying risks posed by or as a result of gene technology and by managing those risks through regulating certain dealings with GMOs—genetically modified organisms. As this debate has characterised, we are at a very important stage in assessing the proper use of gene technology.

Some eight or nine years ago it was my privilege to be involved in an inquiry conducted by the then Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology, which reported in February 1992. Its report was entitled Genetic manipulation: the threat or the glory? If we go back to that point in time—some eight years ago—it really is appropriate to set the stage and state the extent of the use of gene technology at that time. About a decade ago, there were no genetically modified crops commercially available. By 1995, throughout the world 1.6 million hectares had been planted. In 1999, it was estimated that the extent of those plantings had increased to 40 million hectares. In the United States of the order of half the soy bean crop and more than one-third of the corn are products of biotechnology. This is certainly a rapidly developing part of the way in which, in those examples, agriculture is being conducted.

This is an area where the proponents are equal in number with those that consider the risk of gene technology too great to contem-
plate. Let us put into context why people have a fear of the introduction of genetically modified organisms. This can be done simply by thinking about the introduction of exotic species and the effect that that has had on the Australian environment. A couple of examples of weeds and feral animals that were introduced are the prickly pear and the rabbit. Because of their introduction there was a catastrophic involvement with the environment and these things became environmental problems.

It is in that context that I think it is appropriate that we do not dismiss the concerns that people have about the introduction of genetically modified organisms as a result of biotechnology. Throughout this debate people have mentioned the fact that there has been genetic manipulation for quite some time, but in those cases it has been at a steady pace as a result of crossbreeding and the like. Through the techniques that are available we can have the intervention of biotechnology to introduce single genes into different species. I think that is causing people some concern because they want time to be able to absorb what the technology is about.

During the debate mention has been made of the agreement with the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Council about labelling rules for genetically modified foods. Some have said that, because the United States has decided not to go forward with labelling, that perhaps this is unnecessary. The labelling is very much saying to people that they have a right to understand the origin and the source, especially in this case, of food that they are consuming. It is also interesting to see the way in which the United States position has developed. Earlier this year the Clinton administration announced a series of changes to their regulatory framework for the way in which genetically modified foods were going to be introduced into the market. The basis for that change in regulatory requirement was the fact that it was understood that in the past, despite there being a justifiable case to say that those foods were only introduced after there had been the appropriate scientific review, there had not been the public debate required to give the confidence that that scientific review could lead to.

This is not about people merely dismissing the scientific basis for people believing that these foods or organisms are safe to introduce. It is about ensuring that the community can go forward with great confidence in the knowledge that what is actually happening has the proper safety element to it. People have to understand that it is not an extreme no progress view that has to be considered here. There are people in the middle ground with genuine concerns that should be being brought forward with the rest. The US position indicates that there needs to be an appropriate regulatory framework. In the case of the United States, it is a complex framework where there has to be cooperation, or it can be under the aegis of the Department of Agriculture, the Environment Protection Agency or the Food and Drug Administration, depending on what these genetically modified organisms are being used for.

The other interesting international precedent that we really should have regard to is what is happening in the European Union. The European Union is very concerned about food safety. When I say that I am not saying that in Australia we are not concerned, but the point is that the European experience with things such as mad cow disease has left them with a heightened awareness about the need to have confidence about the safety of foods. Therefore, when people such as David Byrne, the European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection, make statements about the safety of food, it has a great deal of resonance with the people of the European Union, on whose behalf he is talking. The European Union makes food safety a top priority. For some of its guidance the European Union uses agreements and measures such as the World Trade Organisation Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures. It wants to ensure it is complying with that and, through that, is also encouraging fellow members of the WTO to do the same to achieve the highest levels they can.

In fact, I do not think I am digressing too far to also emphasise that what we are talk-
ing about here are very pertinent concerns about the ongoing debate on international trade. Recently, and of great relevance to a trade debate, David Byrne made a speech entitled ‘GMOs, food for thought’ at the Seattle conference, where he as the European Commissioner with responsibility for health and consumer protection was able to join the European team at the ministerial meetings. He said:

There is a certain parallel with the EU endeavour: we started with the construction of a single market mainly focusing on economic affairs. This implied not only opening frontiers but also rules to ensure fair competition. However, we quickly had to balance our economic objective with other—as legitimate—social, environmental and consumer protection objectives.

So I have a concern when people think that the type of regulatory framework that we want to enter into on genetically modified organisms and gene technology in total is in fact out of step with the freeing up of markets. Therefore, I was interested in the ACCI review of June 2000, in which there is an article under the heading ‘Biosafety protocol, protecting the environment or protecting trade?’ This is my concern: in the current debate in the domestic circumstance—where we have been talking about free trade and fair trade—people have said that the term ‘fair trade’ has now been captured by those who want to put up barriers. So ACCI discusses the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, which is a global treaty that stresses the potential environmental impact of the movement of genetically modified organisms across national boundaries. So they are recognising that there has to be a regulatory framework to ensure that the movement across national boundaries of GMOs is under some control. In January 130 governments adopted the biosafety protocol but, as yet, only 50 have actually signed—Australia not being one of them.

My concern is that, in a genuine attempt to have a proper global framework about these issues of biosafety, it is too easy to be overwhelmed by the current discussion and debate on free and fair trade and for this to be labelled as an impediment and building a trade barrier. I am not so naive that I do not understand there are some countries that might use these types of devices not for the intention of the protection of the environment or for the safety of people but as a pseudo barrier against free trade. The point is that we cannot just dismiss protocols such as the biosafety protocol. We have to take them seriously.

The other aspect of concern is that, with the introduction of gene technology, there is much discussion about the use of the so-called precautionary principle. On some occasions, yet again, the discussion of the precautionary principle leads people to simply dismiss it because they see it as a grab-all type of phrase that can take in everything. What interests me is that the European Union understands that as an argument. The European Union is working hard to ensure that, when people use the term ‘precautionary principle’ in the global debate, they understand what it is about and that it is actually a legitimate system to be used. At Seattle David Byrne outlined what he believes needs to be done. Inter alia he said that the European Union is establishing guidelines about where the precautionary principle should be applied—for instance, and this is the general use of the precautionary principle, in situations where the scientific evidence is uncertain. The EU goes on to say that there need to be guidelines that look at:

- the implementation of a precautionary measure must start with a scientific evaluation and risk assessment;
- the measures developed should be non-discriminatory, and proportional;
- the measures should be provisional and kept under review until full scientific advice permits a definitive decision.

So all they are really saying is that we should be cautious, that we should hasten slowly with these things. I think it is appropriate that, in June of this year, when the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services looked at the primary producer access to gene technology—

Mr Sidebottom interjecting—

Mr JENKINS—I acknowledge the honourable member, who was on the committee, for trying to assist me in the manner that he has. The report was entitled Work in prog-
ress: proceed with caution. These pieces of legislation are part of proceeding with caution. We want a regulatory framework that ensures rigorous scientific analysis that is done in a transparent manner. We want people to be aware of what is actually happening, and that they therefore can use the end products and the outcomes with great confidence. The sad fact is that there are too many examples of companies working in this area that have done the wrong thing. A headline appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* last Saturday, ‘GM seeds may be in food chain—Monsanto’. The basis of this article was evidence given before the Senate committee that is looking at this bill, in which a spokesperson on behalf of Monsanto said that some tonnes of GM cottonseed had accidentally been mixed with non-GM seed on a farm in Queensland. The mixed seed went into one big pile, and they do not know where it went from there.

Unfortunately, it is not good enough. While I acknowledge that others in this debate have talked about Monsanto acting in an altruistic way to ensure that some discoveries they have made about gene technology to improve the vitamin A content of certain things is shared with the Third World, there have been too many instances where—and Monsanto is only one of the companies that have done it—they have acted without due regard. I am not only concerned that their acting without due regard could have had environmental consequences; it is just as disappointing that, by acting in that manner, they have caused people not to have great faith in gene technology per se. Where there is this lack of confidence, there will be those who can be described as luddites who do not want to see technological progress and who will continue to win the public debate. I have no problem with their having that position, but I am seeking that discussions occur with the best use of the science that is available.

In that regard, and not only in the context of the type of regulatory framework that has been put in place by these bills, Australia must increase its research effort in this area. I note on their web site that CSIRO have indicated they are embarking upon quite a considerable program to look at the wider use of gene technology. Under the heading ‘Researchers probe environmental impacts of GMOs’ they announced today on their web site a new $3 million three-year project to look at the effect on the environment of genetically modified plants, animals and other organisms on a large scale. I wonder whether $3 million is enough—whether we should not be taking it even more seriously. As has been said throughout this debate, there are potentially great benefits in the appropriate use of gene technology, and I have to support that as a notion. But if we are to go forward with great confidence about that use—that the benefits are not outweighed by the risks, and certainly the science is not precise about this—we have to understand what the secondary ecological effects of release of some of these organisms might be. But, in general, I support this progress in the use of gene technology. (Time expired)

**Mr BILLSON (Dunkley)** (10.18 p.m.)—I rise tonight to speak in support of the package of bills that set in place a regulatory framework for gene technology. The purpose of these bills, which comprise the *Gene Technology Bill 2000*, the *Gene Technology (Licence Charges) Bill 2000* and the *Gene Technology (Consequential Amendments) Bill 2000* is to establish the federal component of what is designed as a nationally consistent scheme for regulating dealings with genetically modified organisms. This national approach was first recommended in 1992 by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology in its report *Genetic manipulation: the threat or the glory?* and represents a unique approach to the issues raised by genetically modified organisms. This national approach was first recommended in 1992 by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology in its report *Genetic manipulation: the threat or the glory?* and represents a unique approach to the issues raised by genetically modified organisms. The object of the bill is stated in section 3:

... to protect the health and safety of people, and to protect the environment, by identifying risks posed by or as a result of gene technology, and by managing those risks through regulating certain dealings with Genetically Modified Organisms. The bills’ aims are to fulfil these objectives through a regulatory framework best described as embracing a containment ethos—where the responsibilities and the measures required to seek approval or consent for the release of a genetically modified organism
escalate as the risks that they present escalate. The system of regulation envisaged by the government would see gene technology covered by uniform laws with compulsory compliance arrangements, the establishment of the Gene Technology Office to administer the national system and ensure that comprehensive analysis and risk assessments are undertaken before genetically modified organisms are released and also to provide for interim measures to consider current issues until uniform complementary legislation is passed by state and territory parliaments. The regulatory framework will be supported by the gene technology agreement to be signed by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments.

A particularly important aspect of these bills is the establishment of the Office of Gene Technology Regulator as an independent statutory office holder. The regulator’s functions will include determining applications for genetically modified organisms; developing draft policy principles and guidelines; developing codes of practice and technical and procedural guidelines in relation to genetically modified organisms; providing information and advice to other regulatory agencies and to the public, recognising the interrelationship between GM issues and other areas of government responsibility; undertaking or commissioning research in relation to risk assessment and biosafety of genetically modified organisms; and, promoting the harmonisation of risk assessment processes relating to genetically modified organisms and GM products by regulatory agencies. As you can imagine, that office will be very busy, given that brief overview.

The bills will see the establishment of a ministerial council, by way of the gene technology agreement, which will consist of one or more ministers from the Commonwealth and each participating state and territory. This ministerial council will oversee the operation of the GTR and the issues, policies, principles and policy guidelines that guide the regulator. Currently the regulation of GMOs in Australia is covered by numerous Commonwealth and state acts and regulations, including the Australia New Zealand Food Authority Act 1991, the Therapeutic Goods Act 1989, the National Health and Medical Research Council and some of their guidelines and processes, the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals Code Act 1994, the Industrial Chemicals (Notification and Assessment) Act 1989, the Imported Food Control Act 1992, the Export Control Act 1982, and the Customs Act 1901.

From that description, it is easy to see how confusing and disjointed the regulatory framework is at present for the introduction and release of genetically modified organisms. This underlines why this package of bills is an important step in dealing with this evolving area of biotechnology. As recommended as far back as 1992, there is a vital need for a more uniform national approach to coordinating the diverse treatment we have at the moment. The bills we are discussing tonight—and, by the looks of things, tomorrow as well—provide for that approach.

Let me now turn to gene technology itself. ‘What is it?’ people often ask. What we are talking about here are the tools and the technology which allow genetic material—DNA as some describe it—in the cells of plants and animals to be altered in very specific ways. This is far more than mere cross-breeding between closely related species, which has been practised for thousands of years and will continue to be done in the future. As explained in the Bills Digest, ‘through gene technology, scientists can now choose from the entire gene pool—including taking specific genes from unrelated species—in order to add, subtract or alter genetic material in the target organism.’ These genetic changes may be designed to serve varying purposes, such as pharmaceutical production, herbicide resistance, flavour enhancement, growth stimulation, flavour addition, promoting infertility in pests which are affecting the rate at which fruit rots, et cetera. The possibilities are pretty much endless.

While the potential for good is also enormous—and that was discussed by some of the speakers earlier—it is not yet fully understood how to manage this evolving area of biotechnology, so there are concerns as well. These are genuine concerns about safety, of our communities and of our ecol-
ogy, stemming from the use of genetically modified organisms, and this package of bills is an appropriate response to those genuine concerns. This is why we need these gene technology bills, which provide for a national integrated system with the horsepower to oversee all aspects of the development of genetically modified organisms. Clearly, what happens in one state in the field of genetically modified organisms will not be contained by state borders, and one of the strengths of these bills is that the gene technology regulation that they prescribe is a national approach to what is a national and, as has been described earlier, an international issue. The current regime, with various portfolios and jurisdictions responsible for different aspects of gene technology, does not contain the safeguards and the integrated approach required in this enormous, important policy area.

The safety issues associated with genetically modified organisms are not the only concern, although they are probably the issues foremost in the minds of most Australians who have given any thought to the matter. There are others, and I will briefly discuss some of those later in my contribution. Notably, though, there are some broad issues of ethics and faith concerning the manipulation of DNA. Some would say that it is not desirable to play God by manipulating the fundamental structures of life, and these are particularly emotive issues when dealing with human DNA, but it is a concern for some people even when dealing with plant material. Thankfully, the processes envisaged by these bills provide for public input while emphasising scientific evidence as the primary guide to deliberations. As a nation, our natural environment is particularly important to all of us, and, as chair of the government’s environment and heritage policy committee, it is particularly important to me. It is also important in terms of the opportunities we can secure from biotechnology.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you would be aware that about 80 per cent of all the marine life in our cool, temperate waters is unique to this part of the world, and we do not know what mysteries they hold. We do not know what opportunities there are for biotechnology advancement and what assistance those sorts of organisms and marine life can provide for us. We do not know that yet, so it is important that, while we explore and understand that area of marine life, we do not expose it to ecological threats which could very much eat into our economic future as we eat into our ecological biodiversity in those southern temperate waters.

I say to you—and I will come back to this point in my contribution tomorrow—that there is a very close integration between what is in our environmental best interests and what is in our economic best interests, particularly as we pursue some of the opportunities presented by biotechnology. We must ensure that we protect our natural environment, our commercial crops and our animals from unintended and unwanted genetic changes. Our biodiversity is crucial and it is an important strategic advantage to our nation that we cannot afford to play with and treat shabbily.

We have already seen examples of why the highest possible standards are required in dealing with GMOs. There have been occasions in the past which could serve as reminders of what could happen if due care is not taken. While not a genetically modified organism, an example we can look to is the rabbit calicivirus from Wardang Island in South Australia, which is being tested by the CSIRO. We all know that the calicivirus escaped from the containment site and caused some impact right around the country—some would say not enough; others would say that the big concern was that it got away. It got out of our control and out of the containment framework that our leading science and investigative institution had set up. If that is an example of what is possible, we can understand why this package of bills is important at a broader level. The impact may not be on nuisance rabbits; it may be on issues more fundamental to our economic and ecological wellbeing in the longer term.

The dumping of a GM canola crop on a commercial rubbish tip in South Australia is another example of a breakdown in the process of dealing with GM crops. The bills before us tonight put in place an enforcement regime with considerable penalties for failure
to adhere to licence conditions. It is not unreasonable to require people who have those licences to be responsible in the way they administer them. And the regime of penalties that is provided in these bills is, in my view, just a first step as we try to envisage the consequences of failing to uphold some of these licence conditions. People who, like me, have a long-held interest in marine aquaculture, know what the Pacific oyster has done to many of the marine environments around the country. To the credit of that industry, you have got spat from oysters that is not able to produce further generations of oysters as a containment mechanism. So, in some respects, the ideas we are talking about tonight, of marrying the economic advantages of aquaculture while containing the potential spread of species so that our ecology is not damaged, are not unfamiliar to us. I look forward to talking more about it tomorrow.

Debate interrupted.

ADJOURNMENT

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

That the House do now adjourn.

Ecob, Mr Ernest Charles
Greenway Electorate: Blacktown City
Lions Club

Mr MOSSFIELD (Greenway) (10.30 p.m.)—I would like to advise the House of the death of Ernest Charles Ecob, who was Secretary of the New South Wales branch of the AWU from 1980 to 1993. Ernie was born in Dubbo in 1930. His father was a Baptist minister, and the family moved around quite a lot. He went to school in Leeton and Lawrence until he was 12 and then moved to Armidale. Ernie held various occupations in the rural industry, from rabbit trapping to shearing. His occupation took him to Coonamble, where he met and married his wife Joan. They had five children.

In 1964, Ernie became an organiser with the AWU and was involved in the DMR, the Grain Elevator Board, the pastoral, construction, mining, greenkeeping, cotton and forestry industries. Ernie was very proud of the awards negotiated by him for the building of the third Sydney airport runway, the Sydney Harbour tunnel and the Anzac Bridge. These three large projects all came in on time and under budget. Ernie held the position of Vice-President of the New South Wales Trades and Labour Council from 1983 to 1985 and was President of the Trades and Labour Council from 1986 to 1988. Ernie represented his union on a number of superannuation boards. He was a dedicated union official and his members were always his first priority. He was also an active member of the Australian Labor Party and served on the New South Wales ALP administrative committee. He was awarded an AM for his services to the community and the trade union movement in 1988. Ernie died in hospital last Monday, 21 August. I offer his wife Joan and his family my deepest sympathy.

I would now like to move to a different area of activity and refer to a number of community groups in my electorate. I believe the strength of any community can be measured by the involvement of local people and local organisations in improving the quality of life of its citizens. I would like in this adjournment speech to mention just one of the organisations in my electorate of Greenway, the Blacktown City Lions Club, and I will refer to the club’s annual report which was presented by club president Keith Henderson. Keith refers in his report to a range of projects involving direct community service, fundraising and social activities. The club has actively supported National Hire, Octoberfest, Britfest, car and bike shows, model train shows, trivia evenings, the CBA Christmas party, Australia Day, a Parramatta jersey raffle, the Blacktown Festival and the Rooty Hill family fun day. While these various fundraising activities have been very important, of equal importance have been the community service projects. These activities included the Salvation Army Red Shield Appeal and two International Year of Older Persons concerts. Direct fundraising projects undertaken this year have raised about $30,000 to cover previous liabilities and to support such worthy causes as the Rural Fire Service and disabled and disadvantaged people in the Blacktown community, including assistance with deaf camp projects and providing a Kaye Walker for a child with cerebral palsy. The club also raised a substantial
proportion of the cost to provide a Hart Walker for a disabled child in Blacktown.

All of these successful activities could only be achieved by the active support of all members of the club. In his report Keith Henderson mentioned in particular the immediate past president, Brian French; Secretary, Vikki Ward; Treasurer, Noel Forster; Vice-President, Heath Clifford; 2nd Vice-President, Delores Chilcott; 3rd Vice-President, Bruce Maxwell; Lion Tamer, Jim Chilcott; Tail Twister, Joan Robins; Membership Chairman, Gaylene Henderson; and Buntami Editor, Jenny Ware. I would like to congratulate President Keith Henderson and his board of directors for a sterling effort during 1999 and 2000 and wish the incoming President, Max Crowe, and the new board of directors good luck for the coming year.

Ballarat Electorate: Community Initiative

Mr RONALDSON (Ballarat) (10.34 p.m.)—This afternoon I was talking about Ballarat—Exporting to the World and I unfortunately ran out of time. Some of the members were in here, and I am pleased that they have come back to hear part two. I have just a couple of very quick comments. I did not have time this afternoon to pay credit to John Finch, the chairman of the organising committee. I congratulate John and his team. It was a huge week, and it was very well organised and highly successful. I will quote to the House some comments from the export award dinner that the Prime Minister kindly attended and at which he handed out the winners awards. John Finch, Austrade Ballarat Export Development Manager said:

As exporters in our region grow their businesses and new exporters come on stream, huge job opportunities are created for our children and our grandchildren.

Bruce Morgan is the general manager of the Ballarat Courier. I will again pay great credit to the Ballarat Courier. They have taken the lead in relation to Ballarat—Exporting to the World. It is a great regional newspaper that is into constructive journalism, not destructive journalism. They play a very constructive role. As Bruce Morgan said:

The Courier's role in events such as this is one of leadership in the promotion of regional growth and community aspirations.

This afternoon I paid great credit to Bendigo Bank. They have taken a real lead in this. As Managing Director Rob Hunt said:

What a showcase for Ballarat. What a fantastic message to send the world about our capacity at an exporting level but also the capacity of the community to come in behind an event like this.

Some of the comments made during the night by the exporters are also worth repeating. As I told the House this afternoon, Mars Confectionery won exporter of the year. General Manager William Duncan made a couple of comments, such as:

It's a great privilege to receive this award. Some of you may not know that, of all the confectionary exported from Australia, two-thirds of it comes from Ballarat.

Two-thirds of all the confectionery exported from Australia comes out of Ballarat.

This is a testament to the fact that you do not have to be in a big city to be a successful exporter.

Hear, hear! William Duncan also said:

I feel very humbled and grateful for this. There is nothing better than being recognised in your own community. Exporting is not an easy business, sometimes people think that it is opportunistic and it is risky—well, it is. But the prize is a great one and I believe it is important to encourage companies.

Andrew Oliver from Oliver Footwear, who won the small to medium section, said:

We are very pleased—pleased for the company and for our 80-odd staff and we share this award with them. The evening has been great—a showcase for Ballarat. I do not think Ballarat people know how many companies export and what products are exported.

Peter Hiscock from Sovereign Hill Museums Association, who won the service information section, said:

We are absolutely delighted. A lot of people do not realise that international visitors are a form of exports. We have always been very focused on the international market and realise that there is a difference in the way we present Sovereign Hill to international visitors compared to our local visitors.

In the emerging exporter section, Andrew Woskett from OZTRAK Group Pty Ltd said:

It is quite exciting. We are a bit surprised. All the contestants were fully entitled to win, and I am
glad we have. It is a demonstration of the capacity which exists in a city like Ballarat and the region surrounding us.

During this fantastic week for Ballarat, there were a couple of other important announcements as well. The Selkirk group of companies have invested some $15 million in a factory—which the Prime Minister opened last Thursday—the first of its kind in Australia, called Ultrapanel. It is going to go to the world. While I am on that, Berklee Mufflers have just landed a $2 million contract with car makers in Germany. Again, regional Australia is leading the way.

Social Welfare: Policy

Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (10.39 p.m.)—Over the last 18 months, I have experienced an increase in the number of concerns from constituents in my electorate of Lowe over the social welfare system, in particular about the effect of cutbacks in pensions in a variety of categories, including single mother benefits, disability allowances and age pensions. A large number of these grievances come from single and married pensioners who are unable to make ends meet, either because they are compelled to sell the only asset they wish to preserve for future beneficiaries, such as their children or grandchildren, or because they simply cannot live on the money they have.

As well as this attack on age pensions there are attacks on two other groups of social welfare recipients. These are single parents and people with disabilities. These are the very people who have been left behind in an environment of purported economic prosperity. Yes, there has been much economic prosperity within certain quarters. I note that the big end of town—the corporates—is making its money whilst the average punter is losing out. I am particularly reminded of the current implementation of the present government’s election promise of $1,000 for every person over the age of 60. This promise was modified after the last federal election, now requiring that to be eligible for the $1,000 bonus a person be subject to an income and assets test. The consequence of this was that certain people on pensions who had no savings received a nominal amount of $1. Further, constituents have complained that the information upon which the government have based their calculations has been incorrect. In other words, many pensioners have been denied the supplement, even though they were eligible to receive it.

It is now a matter of public record that in 1997 the Howard government presided over the largest cuts in social welfare spending in Australia’s history. The cuts have come at the expense of disability support pensions slashed by $98 million, and a host of other cuts which have totalled over $5 billion. In 1997-98 alone, these cuts included the capping of access to child-care assistance and rebate ceilings and freezing of those ceilings, as well as cutting home care services for people with disabilities. Quite contrary to this government’s brave announcements on supporting families, it has sought to penalise families having more children through the reduction of child-care assistance income for second and subsequent children. These are but a small number of the more than approximately 40 areas where this government have attacked the most frail, the most incapacitated and the most vulnerable economically. They have done this at a time of record corporate profits, making it yet harder for single or married parents, those with disabilities, the unemployed and age pensioners to make ends meet.

Added to this broad based decimation of social security—what I call social insecurity—is the goods and services tax. The effect of this tax, on which I have previously spoken in this House, has been an unequal distribution of the burden of the tax on those who cannot afford to redistribute their income. The higher percentage of their income is spent on necessary consumption, all of which may be subject to GST. I have had constituents show me that the pension they receive cannot pay the bills and buy food. They do not have the money to repair their homes or buy new clothes. The combined effects of the new tax regime, together with the absolute decline in pension levels and pension availability, are creating a new underclass of impoverishment. These people are becoming the great dispossessed, in line with this government’s continued utilitarian approach of pandering to certain sectors of
the community whilst denying social justice to those economically dispossessed.

It is noted that the number of people dependent on the government is rising. It is not for this government to solve the economic cost of an ageing population by simply denying a growing number of retirees access to a pension, which is what the government is doing by setting ridiculous assets and income test thresholds. The real solution is to be found by ensuring that those who have the capacity to pay, do so. There are a significant number of persons, and in particular corporations, which are not paying their fair share of tax in Australia. These are the ones who should be targeted for bringing the revenue home to the government in order for it to afford an equitable social welfare system. The bulk of social welfare recipients have seen their ability to gain access to the social welfare system disappear before their very eyes. They have practically no access to money and they are penalised every time they attempt to better their position. It is social welfare recipients who are being penalised and who are seen as undeserving in utilitarian terms. They are not useful to society and, hence, do not deserve to receive money sufficient for them to live with dignity. In light of the same reasoning, the corporate world avoids paying anything near their fair share of taxation, precisely because they are useful. They provide jobs and dividends. Those who have got more get more—

(Time expired)

Gilmore Electorate: Road Funding

Gilmore Electorate: Ulladulla Public School

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (10.44 p.m.)—On my way to Canberra this morning, I had to travel via the road over Cambewarra Mountain, through Kangaroo Valley and up over Barrengarry, all of which is very picturesque. However, less picturesque was yet another accident involving a truck that is really too big to be negotiating the kinds of bends that define this narrow road. Of course, the truck and I were on this narrow winding road, with half of its guardrails and fencing still missing from previous accidents and landslips, because we could not travel on main road 92. It had started raining during the night, and heavily enough to make main road 92 a quagmire. For the lack of a signature from the Carr Labor government, or any decent support from our state ALP member for South Coast, another truck had yet another accident on Barrengarry and we all got held up in the resulting traffic.

On my preselection to candidacy for the federal seat of Gilmore, the local people made it very clear that they wanted someone to represent their views in parliament. It seems that the state ALP member is more interested in giving his government’s message, telling the people of the South Coast what the New South Wales government wants, instead of the other way round. He tells us what his government is going to do, he tells us what the people in Kiama want, he tells us what people in Dapto and Wollongong want—all Labor seats. But what the member for South Coast does not do is tell the NSW government—in public so we can all hear or see it—just what the people of central Shoalhaven, his electorate, really want. How many times have you heard the member for South Coast berate his ministers for not doing something for his electorate? How often has he stepped out of line to make a point on behalf of the people who voted him in? No, he tells us what his government wants to do. And he tells us why it is a good idea for us to say thank you. So, thank you, Mr Country Labor, for yet another hold-up on the Kangaroo Valley Road, thank you from the truck driver for another accident that did not have to happen, and thank you from the central Shoalhaven businesses that cannot get truck drivers to bring down their supplies from the Southern Highlands or the ACT.

On another matter entirely, I take this opportunity to talk a little about the media around the opening of some new and refurbished facilities at Ulladulla Public School. If one had taken the time to read or listen to much of the local and regional media, it would have been clear that the New South Wales minister for education single-handedly developed, funded and opened the $2.8 million project in a benevolent gesture to Ulladulla. However, a second look, some research on the facts, would have produced
Monday, 28 August 2000 REPRESENTATIVES 19483

an entirely different picture. Some five years ago Ulladulla Public School had spent 18 months on developing the concept, drawing up the plans, working on the project management and administration, and creating the associated curricula. With that work complete, it was expected that the first stage would receive a funding allocation in the following year, just as these projects generally flowed in other areas. But Ulladulla Public School did not get a mention in that budget—or the next, or the one after that. Instead, other projects, planned and submitted after ours, were funded and built—but not Ulladulla. Finally, we reach the top of the list, Ulladulla Public School gets its funding and the project team swings into action—along with the rain! Now it is complete, and the children and teachers have had some time to get used to the technology, the new and refurbished buildings and the new demands on all of them. At the official opening I represented the Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Dr David Kemp, who was overseas. In my press releases and when interviewed, I made careful note to state that this was a joint project and to value cooperation between state and federal governments.

People listening to the NSW education minister or reading his press release would have no idea what really went on. He talked about what he and his NSW government had done and how wonderful this $2.8 million project was—and even took a swipe at the federal government for not funding public and private schools equally. Nowhere did he mention that, of the $2.8 million spent on Ulladulla Public School’s facilities, more than $2.2 million—over 76 per cent—was supplied by the federal government, contrasting with $600,000 from his government. Nowhere did he mention that he refused to attend large meetings of angry Ulladulla parents at the civic centre to say why the funding was not available. In fact, he left it to Russell Smith, a Liberal opposition state member, and me, an interested and involved federal representative, although at the time it was purely a state matter. Russell and I promised we would do what we could, and we have—in spades. The Carr Labor government would never give credit where it is due. Its only credibility is scaremongering and opposing our government’s good policies in public, while rushing behind doors to sign up for our funding contracts. The federal government and the people of Gilmore rely on action, not empty words.

International Metallic Silhouette Shooting Championships

Schools: Curriculum

Mr RUDD (Griffith) (10.49 p.m.)—I rise tonight to talk about a couple of events on the south side of Brisbane, one relating to recent developments in sport, the other more broadly on the question of education and schools. On Brisbane’s south side, on 21 August, it was a pleasure and my honour to officiate at the opening ceremony of the International Metallic Silhouette Shooting Championships. These are conducted periodically under the auspices of the international body responsible for that event, the IMSSU. The host facility for this year’s event has been the excellent facility at Belmont owned by the SSAA, which is located in my electorate of Griffith in Brisbane.

This year we have had some 190 competitors participating from 16 countries—Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, New Caledonia, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, USA and, of course, Australia. The event has been hosted by two bodies. One is Pistol Australia, and I pay tribute to its vice-president, Lyn Gilligan; the second is the SSAA, and I pay tribute to its local president, Don Ruwoldt, and its national secretary, Ray Smith. This event was hosted at the SSAA’s Belmont facility. Belmont has already been the subject of considerable investment by the Queensland state government for the purposes of upgrading the overall facility for pre-Olympics training. In terms of the SSAA’s individual facility, there has seen something like half a million dollars of total investment in upgrading the facilities to make them truly of international standard. I have to say that we see at Belmont also evidence of a huge amount of
effort from the local volunteers and local members of the SSAA in order to make the facility truly world class. I pay tribute to match director David Dewsbrey; deputy match directors Bill Ayers and Don Ruwoldt; and administrative staff Jan Linsley and Kaye Hutchinson.

In the competition so far, we have seen some outstanding performances—one in particular from a 15-year-old Queenslander by the name of Tim Cupitt, who has already won for himself three gold medals for his outstanding performance. Other outstanding performances have been registered by Chris Dale, Anthony Finn, Al Smith and Allan Murray. Unfortunately, this coming Wednesday, because of my presence in Canberra, I am unable to attend the official dinner closing this international sporting event, but I would certainly like to wish those organising the event and all its participants all the very best for its successful conclusion. I congratulate them for holding an internationally classed event at the Belmont facility in Brisbane.

I also said that I would be addressing a matter relating to schools and education, across Brisbane’s southern suburbs and also more broadly in terms of the state of Queensland and across the nation. There has been a substantial debate for some time in Queensland about the development of a new curriculum for schools. Part of that debate has been about a curriculum for ‘Studies of Society and the Environment’, one of the eight key learning areas to be developed not just in Queensland but in other states as part of a move towards a new, national curriculum.

The idea of a national curriculum is a very sound one. These days we have parents and students moving with far greater rapidity from one state to another, and the need to have a common curriculum to which students can have access is greater than it was before. While the development of this national curriculum, and of a SOSE curriculum in particular, is to be applauded, there has been some criticism about the draft version of that curriculum which has so far been developed in Queensland. Some of it has focused on purported ideological bias, some accusing those who have written the curriculum of producing ‘a leftwing document’. I do not particularly want to entertain that debate here because I do not think it is at all relevant to the real issues at stake in terms of a proper curriculum for our students.

What I am concerned about and have written about in the Queensland newspapers is the treatment of traditional subjects such as history and geography. There is a great debate across the country in terms of the proper balance between content and process; for example, between a chronological framework for the understanding of the history of this nation, as opposed to the process related skills in terms of critical and analytical skills—skills for using historical knowledge to advance an argument. Similarly with geography there is a need for basic geographical information in terms of the major countries and geographical features of our region. We need to get that balance right and that is what needs to occur with this particular document in Queensland. (Time expired)

Virotec International: Water Treatment

Mr ST CLAIR (New England) (10.53 p.m.)—Tonight I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate and make the House aware of an environmental technology company, Virotec International. Virotec is releasing treated water, from a 14½-hectare, 1½-billion-litre mine tailings dam, which the company’s new technology has cleaned of heavy metals and acid mine drainage. The tailings dam at the Mount Carrington mine in the north of my electorate near Drake was considered one of the state’s most urgent environmental problems, as it sits in the catchment of the Clarence River. Heavy metals removed in the Mount Carrington projects include aluminium, cadmium, copper, iron, lead, nickel and zinc, and pH levels have been lifted from 5.2 to 7.26 milligrams per litre. Concentrations of other environmentally important components such as silver, arsenic, chromium, nickel, selenium and mercury which were near or below target values before treatment were reduced further by Bauxsol treatment.

The new Virotec technology, trademarked as Bauxsol, is derived from bauxite refinery residues. The chemistry of Bauxsol treatment involves a number of complex chemical re-
actions. Bauxsol modifies the pH of the water and simultaneously creates a change in the speciation of metals that then promotes their removal to the solids. Once the metals start to move to the solids they are removed from the water by the precipitation of new minerals and once precipitated into these mineral phases they are no longer available to the environment.

Acid mine drainage occurs when, through mining or other development activities, sulfidic materials are exposed to oxygen and water. Water seeping through tailings dams, waste rock or acid sulfate soils carries acid into streams, making the waters highly acidic. It may also contaminate ground water. Acid mine drainage kills plants and animals and inhibits bacterial decay of organic matter in water, thus allowing large quantities of organic matter to build up in streams. The sulfuric acid also leaches toxic elements such as aluminium, copper, zinc, lead, arsenic, and cadmium. US mines produce about 2.7 million metric tonnes of acid a year and acid mine drainage pollutes over 26,000 kilometres of streams. A similar problem exists throughout the world. Polluted mine drainage and pit lakes continue to be the mining industry’s worst and most enduring legacies, as evidenced when 100,000 tonnes of cyanide tainted water burst through a breach in a tailings dam in Romania in January this year. This failure was blamed for the killing of fish and livestock in Romania, Hungary and Yugoslavia and spread 600 kilometres south into the River Danube.

Dr David McConchie, Professor of Geochemical Engineering in the School of Resource Science and Management at Southern Cross University and a finalist in the Eureka Prize for environmental research in 1995 and 1996, affirmed that the cleaned water meets the most stringent Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council water quality guidelines for the protection of aquatic ecosystems. The Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council recommends a wide range of water quality guidelines, covering aquatic ecosystems, drinking water, recreational water, and industrial and agricultural water. The cleaned water is being released at the rate of one million litres per day. There is no longer a risk of contaminated water from the tailings dam overflowing into the Clarence River catchment during heavy rain. Professor McConchie has seen and studied many of the world’s worst acid mine drainage problems. He states:

This is the first time in the world that such a large body of water contaminated with Acid Mine Drainage and heavy metals has been cleaned to such strict environmental standards using a commercially viable, cost effective technology. The Virotec technology has tackled one of New South Wales’s worst environmental problems, the 10-year-old Mount Carrington mine tailings dam, and the clean water can now be gradually released into the Clarence River catchment. Virotec’s scientists are monitoring the cleaned and released water and the aquatic ecosystems of nearby Sawpit and Plumbago Creeks, and early reports indicate a substantial improvement in water quality.

**AFL: Brownlow Medal**

Mr STEPHEN SMITH (Perth) (10.58 p.m.)—At one minute to 11 on Brownlow Medal night, I had hoped to be able to announce the winner. But I am told that, with a couple of rounds to go, Koutoufides, Woe wodin, West, McLeod and O’Loughlin are all bunched in a pack with a point or two between them. In the spirit of Brownlow Medal night, I take this opportunity to compliment Guy McKenna on a magnificent career as captain of the West Coast Eagles and, more importantly, to compliment him for being a fantastic role model for boys and young men and for being so publicly spirited. In the course of my time as member for Perth, more often than not he has made himself available to schools and also to training institutions which are engaged in assisting young men who have become unemployed or long-term unemployed. He has been a great, publicly spirited individual. I would like to wish the East Perth Football Club all the best for the grand final, having successfully won the second semifinal at the weekend, one of the premier WAFL league clubs in my electorate. In conclusion, I would like to compliment the Bayswater-Morley Bears under-nines for a successful season which
concluded with the carnival at Houghton Park on Saturday morning.

Mr SPEAKER—Order! It being 11.00 p.m., the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 11 p.m.

NOTICES
The following notices were given:

Mr Wilkie—to move:
That this House:
(1) congratulates Iran regarding the completion of acknowledged democratic elections and the work of the new Majlis;
(2) nevertheless regrets that Iran’s reputation continues to be marred by questions of human rights and denial of religious freedom, most particularly the persecution of Baha’is and the renewal of the death sentences of Mr Hedayat Kashefi Najafabadi and Mr Sirus Zabihii-Moghaddam, and the inception of another against Mr Manuchehr Khulusi;
(3) furthermore notes the persistent gaoling of numerous Baha’is for their religious beliefs and widespread discrimination in property, education, employment, civil and political rights;
(4) acknowledges grave concern for the fate of 13 members of the Jewish community presently in custody in Iranian prisons and facing charges of espionage; and
(5) urges Australia’s continued vigilance and activity regarding human rights issues in Iran.

Ms O’Byrne—to move:
That this House:
(1) recognises the valuable role played by the Australian civilian ships in supporting the Interfet Force deployment in East Timor without which, as Commander Peter Cosgrove stated in his letter to the Maritime Union of Australia of 15 October 1999, the deployed Forces’ logistics build up would have been severely hampered;
(2) recognises that the role played by Australian civilian ships in East Timor continues the enormous role the Australian Merchant Navy has played historically in our ever expanding peacetime carriage of trade both domestically and internationally and through its service in two World Wars at cruel cost, with one seafarer in every eight dying and many more disappearing unrecorded in the ships of many nations;
(3) supports the International Maritime Organisation’s recognition of maritime workers and the importance of merchant shipping, including Australian coastal shipping through the celebrations of Maritime Day on September 24; and
(4) believes that World Maritime Day should be regarded as a day of maritime pride and history and that the Australian Government should promote the flying of the Australian Flag rather than Flags of Convenience.
QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The following answers to questions were circulated:

**Capital Gains Tax: Averaging Provisions**

(Question No. 1560)

Mr Kelvin Thomson asked the Treasurer, upon notice, on 29 May 2000:

1. Has the Government considered the submission from the Investment and Financial Services Association (IFSA) concerning the transitional capital gains tax averaging provisions contained in the New Business Tax System (Income Tax Rates) Bill (No. 2) 1999.

2. If so, what would be the revenue implications of IFSA's proposals that the transitional capital gains tax averaging calculations be repealed so that taxpayers are entitled to averaging in respect of capital gains derived prior to 21 September 1999, whether directly or as a unit holder.

3. Does the Government have anything else to say about the proposal.

Mr Costello—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

1. IFSA made a submission to the Treasury Department and the Australian Taxation Office (ATO). The ATO provided a detailed reply to IFSA addressing issues related to the interpretation and administration of the law in this area.

2. and (3) The Government has put in place transitional arrangements that balance the objectives of fairness and simplicity across a wide variety of circumstances. Revenue estimates are not prepared on proposals which are not Government policy.

**Centrelink: Outsourcing Contracts**

(Question No. 1564)

Mr Tanner asked the Minister for Finance and Administration, upon notice, on 29 May 2000:

1. Under what circumstances is Centrelink required to seek Office of Asset Sales and IT Outsourcing (OASITO) approval to proceed to selecting a contractor for the supply of products and services that are within the scope of outsourcing.

2. Since the tender for Centrelink outsourcing was issued, what Centrelink contracts have been approved by OASITO prior to Centrelink entering into these contracts.

3. What is the value, and terms, of those contracts.

4. What were the products and services approved.

5. Were any of the approved vendors potential candidates for outsourcing or actual respondents to the outsourcing tender request; if so, what are the details of the individuals and companies concerned.

Mr Fahey—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

1. The Department of Finance and Administration outlined the general principles on any IT expenditure decisions prior to the completion of competitive tendering processes under the Government’s IT Infrastructure Initiative in a number of Finance Estimates Memoranda in 1996 and 1997. In general, the transitional arrangements for IT expenditure is to: require agencies to minimise upgrades or replacement of Information Technology facilities; be confined to essential changes to sustain approved service levels; and that significant IT acquisitions be cleared through the Department of Finance and Administration and OASITO.

2. The Request for Tender for Centrelink’s IT infrastructure was issued on 15 December 1999. OASITO does not approve Centrelink contracts. However, since that time, Centrelink has consulted OASITO on three proposed IT acquisitions. One was for the purchase or lease of 500 desktop computers, another for renewal of mainframe and midrange computer software licences and the last for mainframe software and hardware leasing.

3. OASITO is not aware of the final value of the contracts.

4. The products and services were desktop computers, mainframe and midrange software licences and mainframe software and hardware leasing.

5. No.
Telstra: Share Allocations and Refunds
(Question No. 1565)

Mr Tanner asked the Minister for Finance and Administration, upon notice, on 29 May 2000:

(1) Further to the answer to question No. 1161 (Hansard, 9 May 2000, page 15321), how many applicants for Telstra 2 shares who did not receive their full requested allotment had not received a refund of their payment for those shares not made available, as at (a) 7 February, (b) 21 February, (c) 6 March, (d) 20 March, (e) 3 April, (f) 17 April, (g) 1 May and (h) 15 May 2000.

(2) Of those who had not received their refund, for each date referred to in part (1) how many were owed more than (a) $5000 and (b) $20,000.

(3) What timeframes have been established for refunds to be paid to unsuccessful applicants.

Mr Fahey—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) For each date identified by the honourable member, the approximate number of refund cheques issued is as set out below;
   (a) 303
   (b) 134
   (c) 64
   (d) 50
   (e) 44
   (f) 37
   (g) 33
   (h) 26

(2) For each date referred to in part (1), the answers for (a) and (b) are respectively
   (a) 50 and 7
   (b) 26 and 1
   (c) 11 and nil
   (d) 7 and nil
   (e) 3 and nil
   (f) 2 and nil
   (g) 2 and nil
   (h) 1 and nil

(3) The share registry has advised the Commonwealth there are no refunds owing to applicants because they did not receive their full requested allotment. Any further payments that may need to be made relate to queries raised in relation to holding statements and refunds already issued. Some continued adjustment of allotments and refund of application moneys over a period of months has been experienced in all share offers conducted by the Commonwealth.

International Year of Older Persons: Funding
(Question No. 1582)

Mr Martin Ferguson asked the Minister for Health and Aged Care, upon notice, on 30 May 2000:

(1) Was $10.9 million allocated for the International Year of Older Persons.
(2) How was the sum dispersed.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

In accordance with advice provided to me:

(1) Yes.

(2) These funds were used for major initiatives that met the priorities identified by older Australians during consultations in the lead up to the International Year. Benefits for older Australians
were achieved through more than 40 projects and activities operating at a national level including the inaugural Commonwealth Seniors Awards and inaugural Senior Australian of the Year Award, both of which are to be ongoing. Funding was also provided to Australian Coalition ‘99, a network of non-government organisations, to promote and coordinate activity through the business and community sectors.

**Goods and Services Tax: Boarding School Accommodation**

(Question No. 1609)

**Mr Andren** asked the Treasurer, upon notice, on 6 June 2000:

(1) Has his attention been drawn to the concerns of parents from isolated areas about the application of the GST to boarding school accommodation.

(2) Is it a fact that while boarding school accommodation is to be GST-free under the New Tax System, components of the boarding fee such as food and the cleaning of students’ clothes will attract the GST; if so, why will these components attract the tax.

(3) What assurances can the Government give that the cost of educational boarding accommodation will not rise as a result of the GST.

**Mr Costello**—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) A supply of accommodation at boarding schools is GST-free if it is supplied to students undertaking a primary course, a secondary course or a special education course and the supplier of the accommodation also supplies the course. Accommodation provided in a hostel whose primary purpose is to provide accommodation for students from rural or remote locations who are undertaking such courses is also GST-free.

(2) The GST is a broad-based indirect tax applying to most goods and services. This treatment of food and cleaning components of boarding fees ensures that supplies of these goods and services are treated in the same manner as when supplied commercially elsewhere.

(3) The GST-free treatment of accommodation at boarding schools enables providers of such services to claim input tax credits for GST paid on inputs. Therefore, there will no longer be any embedded taxes in prices charged to boarding schools, as had been the case under the old wholesale sales tax regime. Boarding schools will be able to pass these cost savings on to students.

**Regional Australia Summit: Attendance by Senators and Members**

(Question No. 1612)

**Mr Martin Ferguson** asked the Minister for Finance and Administration, upon notice, on 6 June 2000:

(1) Further to the answer to question No 1234 (Hansard, 1 June 2000, page 16943) concerning the 1999 Regional Australia Summit, was he, his staff or his department consulted by the Regional Australia Summit Reference Group, the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, the Minister’s staff or the Minister’s Department on the Reference Group’s decision to invite coalition members and senators to the Summit dinner.

(2) What sum was paid to coalition members and senators who attended the Summit dinner for travel allowances, airfares, cars and taxi costs, and under which travel entitlement was the sum paid.

**Mr Fahey**—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) No.

(2) It is not possible from the information submitted on the travel claim forms to provide an accurate estimate of the costs which may have been incurred. Senators and Members may carry out a variety of parliamentary business when in Canberra on any particular occasion and are not required to provide advice of functions attended to draw on the travel or car with driver entitlements. Senators and Members who attended the Summit dinner may have drawn on the following entitlements:

- **Travel**
  - Scheduled services—Clause 2.1 of Determination 26 of 1998
  - Car with driver—Clause 3.1(b) of Determination 26 of 1998
- **Travelling Allowance**

  Ministers—official business—Clause 6(b) of Determination 8 of 1998

  Senators and Members—attendance at an official government function—Clause 10(g) of Determination 8 of 1998

- **Travelling Expenses**

  - Parliamentary Secretaries—official business—Clause 7 of Determination 9 of 1998

  **Job Network: Successful Contractors**

  *(Question No. 1618)*

  Dr Lawrence asked the Minister for Employment Services, upon notice, on 7 June 2000:

  1. How many, and what are the names, of the organisations who were successful in obtaining Job Network contracts in round 1 and round 2 have sub-contracted all or part of their contracts to other providers.

  2. How many, and what are the names, of the organisations who were successful in obtaining Community Support Programme contracts in round 1 have sub-contracted all or part of their contracts to other providers.

  3. How many, and what are the names, of the organisations who were successful in obtaining New Enterprise Incentive Scheme contracts have sub-contracted all or part of their contracts to other providers.

  4. How many, and what are the names, of the organisations who were successful in obtaining contracts to run New Apprenticeships Centres have sub-contracted all or part of their contracts to other providers.

  5. In each case referred to in parts (1) to (4), what sum or percentage of the contract price has been retained by the successful contractor and what sum or percentage has been paid to the sub-contractor or sub-contractors.

  6. What form of monitoring does his Department undertake of contracted organisations and their sub-contractors.

  7. For each of the organisations successful in obtaining round 1 Job Network contracts, and for each of the Job Matching, Job Search Training and Intensive Assistance categories, what percentage of the contract payments went to (a) administration costs; (b) advertising and marketing and (c) profit or retained earnings.

  8. In the Job Network Evaluation Stage One dated February 2000 and released on 23 May 2000, how many of the 800 interview and focus group participants were job seekers.

  Mr Abbott—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

  1. Sub-contracting arrangements under the Employment Services Contract 1998-1999 for the whole or a substantial part of the contract, were approved for 54 Job Network members. Under the Employment Services Contract 2000-2003, sub-contracting arrangements for a portion of the contract have been approved for 23 Job Network members. In view of the commercially sensitive nature of the information, the department does not release details of those Job Network members who have sub-contracted portions of their contracts to other providers.

  2. None of the providers that were awarded Community Support Programme contracts in round one, have sub-contracted all or part of their contracts to other providers.

  3. Under the Employment Services Contract 2000-2003, sub-contracting arrangements have been approved for 10 Job Network members who provide NEIS services. This is a subset of Job Network members in (1) above.

  4. The matters referred to in this question fall under the portfolio responsibilities of the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

  5. All payments under the Employment Services Contract 2000-2003 are made by the department to the Job Network member, not the sub-contractor. The share of the contract price retained by the Job Network member and that paid to the sub-contractor(s) is a commercial arrangement between the Job Network member and the sub-contractor(s).
(6) Under the Employment Services Contract 2000-2003, the Job Network member remains responsible for provision of the services under contract, even where sub-contracting has been approved. The monitoring activities of the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB) include:

- periodic monitoring, reviewing, and evaluating Job Network members’ performance and contractual compliance (which includes verifying claims of job placements with job seekers, employers and Centrelink);
- site visits;
- investigating complaints;
- investigating allegations/evidence of fraud by Job Network members; and
- monitoring payments to ensure compliance with requirements.

(7) The Commonwealth is not privy to the distribution of payments within the accounts of contracted organisations, received under the Employment Services Contract 1998-1999.

(8) The study referred to by the honourable member is qualitative research used for the Job Network Stage One Evaluation. This study was conducted in two parts: Wave 1 (August 1998) and Wave 2 (April-May 1999).

Ninety-four of the 304 interview and focus group participants in Wave 1, were job seekers. A total of 458 of the 816 interview and focus group participants in Wave 2 were job seekers.

**Airports: Taxi Rank Feeder Fees**

*(Question No. 1631)*

Mr Latham asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, upon notice, on 19 June 2000:

1. Has his attention been drawn to the practice at privatised airports, including Canberra, of charging a feeder fee on taxi ranks.
2. What is the size of the fee at each privatised airport.
3. Is the fee permissible under the legislation covering privatised airports.
4. Does he regard this as an instance of coercive pricing or unconscionable conduct; if so, will he refer the matter for investigation by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC).

Mr Anderson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

1. Yes.
2. As at 14 July 2000, Perth and Brisbane airports had imposed fees for the use of taxi ranks. At each airport the fee is $1 for each trip in which passengers are picked up. There is no fee for delivering passengers.

Canberra and Hobart airports also levy taxis $2 and $1, respectively, on taxis that utilise a parking area prior to accessing the taxi rank. For both of these airports, when the taxi rank is not full, taxis may enter the rank directly without attracting a fee.

None of the other leased Federal airports currently impose fees relating to the use of taxi ranks.

3. Yes.

The fees are intended to recoup the cost of providing facilities and services for commercial operators. These include dedicated taxi holding areas, feeder ranks, rest areas and comfort rooms and services such as dedicated flight information displays and taxi rank supervision. This assists in ensuring that improved customer services result. The fees must also be reported to the ACCC as part of the prices oversight arrangements for leased Federal airports.

**Colston, Former Senator: Movement Records**

*(Question No. 1654)*

Mr Murphy asked the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, upon notice, on 21 June 2000:

1. Further to the answer to question No. 1153 *(Hansard, 8 June 2000, page 16339)*, is the information concerning former Senator Colston a matter relating to law enforcement pursuant to
subsection 488(1)(e) of the Migration Act in respect to charges alleging misappropriation of Commonwealth revenue, namely travel rorts.

(2) May he authorise a member of the Australian Federal Police (AFP) to perform, for the purposes of law enforcement, the disclosure of former Senator Colston’s movement records under his powers prescribed under subsection 488(2)(e) of the Migration Act.

(3) Has he disclosed former Senator Colston’s movement records under subsection 488(2)(e) of the Migration Act to the AFP for the purpose of law enforcement.

Mr Ruddock—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) The relevance of information concerning former Senator Colston to charges alleging misappropriation of Commonwealth revenue is a matter for my colleague, the Attorney General.

(2) Yes.

(3) There is no record in Departmental systems that any information related to any movement records of former Senator Colston has been disclosed to the Australian Federal Police.

Imports: Motor Vehicles
(Question No. 1665)

Mr Murphy asked the Minister representing the Minister for Industry, Science and Resources, upon notice, on 22 June 2000:

(1) How many units of motor vehicles were imported under the Low Volume Import Scheme (LVIS) in 1999.

(2) Was the purpose of the LVIS, introduced in 1989, to permit importation of motor vehicles that the Full Volume Importers (FVI) do not import.

(3) What is the estimated number of LVIS business closures throughout Australia resulting from the introduction of the Specialist and Enthusiast Vehicle Scheme (SEVS), effective from 9 May 2000.

(4) What will be the impact on FVI businesses resulting from the introduction of the SEVS.

(5) How many FV new motor vehicle importers are there in Australia and how many motor vehicles do they import annually.

(6) How many low vehicle importers are there under the LVIS and how many motor vehicles do they import annually.

(7) How many new and used motor vehicle transactions have there been since 1997.

(8) Under the Automotive Competitiveness and Investment Scheme, has the Government subsidised over $2 billion to the automotive industry, consisting of four major manufacturers and approximately fifty importers.

(9) Will the elimination of LVIS businesses through the SEVS result in the loss of many thousands of employees.

(10) Will the SEVS result in an oversupply of a smaller number of models of motor vehicles.

(11) Does the LVIS vehicle market cater for vehicles that the full volume market importers failed to appreciate as import lines.

(12) Prior to the enactment of the SEVS, is it mandatory for the amendments to the regulation to be subject to a regulatory impact statement.

(13) Has a regulatory impact statement satisfactory to the Productivity Commission been provided to the Government?

(14) Is the LVIS a threat to new car industry market share, or Australian motor vehicle manufacturing jobs in the past, present or future; if so, will he provide figures to support that contention.

Mr Moore—The Minister for Industry, Science and Resources has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:
(1) The number of vehicles allowed to enter under the Low Volume Compliance Plate Approval (LV-CPA) Scheme were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vehicles</td>
<td>1,037</td>
<td>1,318</td>
<td>1,705</td>
<td>2,873</td>
<td>5,049</td>
<td>7,708</td>
<td>14,437</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) In 1970, concessions were introduced for low-volume manufacturers to facilitate the supply of low-volume production vehicles by Australian based specialist manufacturers. Certain concessions were granted from the safety requirements of the Australian Design Rules (ADRs). These concessions were made on the premise that such vehicles in limited numbers have minimal impact on national safety and environmental objectives and the local automotive market. Over time, the concessions were extended to imported vehicles of a specialised nature.

In 1989 the Motor Vehicle Standards Act (MVSA) was enacted, incorporating the LV-CPA Scheme, to establish and apply national uniform standards for motor vehicle safety, gaseous and noise emissions and anti theft devices. Eligibility for PMV imports under this scheme was pared back in 1995 to more closely align with specialist and enthusiast interests.

(3) There are generous transitional provisions to help affected businesses. For instance, all approvals issued under the previous LV-CPA Scheme will remain valid for two years. Applications lodged before the SEVS decision which can be supported by evidence of prior substantial financial commitment, will be assessed under the criteria of the previous scheme. The new registered workshop regime will be implemented next year in consultation with interested parties. In addition, the annual cap for passenger motor vehicles has been increased from 25 to 100 to enhance the viability of small operators. The Government believes that affected businesses will have ample opportunity to adjust to the new SEVS arrangements.

(4) The introduction of the SEVS (for new and used vehicles) will ensure that there is fair competition between SEVS participants and full-volume vehicle suppliers who must meet more stringent regulatory requirements at higher costs. It will also provide the confidence for the local automotive manufacturing industry to proceed with the necessary investment to improve its competitiveness.

Unlike the previous scheme, full-volume vehicle suppliers may participate in the SEVS. However, a vehicle model cannot be introduced under the SEVS and full-volume arrangements simultaneously.

(5) The Department of Transport and Regional Services advises that there were 78 full volume motor vehicle importers in Australia in 1999. According to industry (VFACTS) sales statistics, there were around 500,000 new imported motor vehicles sold in Australia in 1999.

(6) Currently, there are 1,210 LV-CPA holders with 2,100 compliance plate approvals in aggregate. In 1999, there were 14,437 vehicles allowed to enter under the LV-CPA Scheme.

(7) Statistics on the number of used vehicle transactions in Australia are not readily available. According to VFACTS data, new motor vehicle sales were as follows between 1993 and 1999.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vehicles</td>
<td>555,300</td>
<td>616,300</td>
<td>642,600</td>
<td>650,000</td>
<td>722,600</td>
<td>807,700</td>
<td>786,900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(8) The Automotive Competitiveness and Investment Scheme (ACIS), will commence operating on 1 January 2001 and conclude on 31 December 2005. ACIS is directed towards encouraging new investment and innovation in the Australian automotive manufacturing industry to increase its global competitiveness in the context of trade liberalisation.

Eligible participants will include Australian based motor vehicle producers and original equipment suppliers of automotive components, automotive machine tools and tooling and services used in automotive manufacture such as design and engineering. There are over 200 firms in Australia involved in motor vehicle related manufacture. The number of firms participating in ACIS will become known once it has commenced operating on 1 January 2001.

(9) Under the new SEVS arrangements, concessions will enable the trade in used vehicles to continue. The new scheme has a clear focus on facilitating the supply of genuine specialist and enthusiast vehicles. On the basis of a preliminary assessment of applications under the previous scheme against the new SEVS criteria, some 140 vehicle models, including several diesel-powered 4WDs, will
be eligible under the SEVS. With the generous transitional provisions, the Government believes that if affected companies choose to take advantage of opportunities available under the new scheme there will be no job losses resulting directly from the introduction of the SEVS.

(10) The number of vehicles supplied will be determined by market forces.

(11) The low volume arrangements have provided some opportunities for access to vehicles that, for whatever reasons, have not been supplied in full volume. Vehicle models that are not supplied in full volume, and that meet specialist and enthusiast criteria, will be eligible for concessional entry under the SEVS.

(12) Legislative amendments are normally accompanied by a regulation impact statement.

(13) The impacts on business were considered in a public review of the MVSA. The review was advertised nationally, and some 3,000 identified stakeholders were invited to provide input. Fifty five formal submissions were received by the review taskforce. Meetings were held around the country with stakeholders, including those who did not lodge a submission, to ensure that the widest possible spread of stakeholder views were obtained. Prior to the Government’s response to the review there was also extensive consultation with the key stakeholders. The Office of Regulation Review was consulted during the preparation of a regulation impact statement. This statement formed part of the Government’s deliberation process.

(14) Large numbers of concessional used vehicle imports can have an impact on the mainstream motor trade, and erode the national safety and environmental objectives of the MVSA.

The recent high growth in concessional entries of used vehicles has created a competitive imbalance between firms importing vehicles under the LV-CPA Scheme and those supplying vehicles (whether locally produced or imported) under normal arrangements, reducing investor confidence in the Australian automotive industry. Imports allowed under the LV-CPA Scheme grew by 86.4 per cent, from 7,858 to 14,437 vehicles between 1998 and 1999. Over the same period, sales of new motor vehicles fell by 2.6 per cent, from 807,700 to 786,900 vehicles.

Refugees: Applications

Question No. 1695

Mr Sciacca asked the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, upon notice, on 27 June 2000:


(2) In each post referred to in part (1), how many refugee applicants have been allocated and advised of a queue date and what is their expectation of a date of arrival.

(3) How many on-shore applications are currently lodged with his Department under Australia’s refugee and humanitarian program.

(4) Where are the major UNHCR refugee camps used by his Department for the purpose of attracting refugee applications.

Mr Ruddock—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) Not all of the posts listed have applications lodged under the refugee and humanitarian program. Following is the list of posts where refugee and humanitarian applications are processed offshore, and their corresponding number of applications, including the number of persons, awaiting a decision as of 30 June 2000:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Cases</th>
<th>Persons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ankara</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>1869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auckland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athens</td>
<td>865</td>
<td>2656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok</td>
<td>702</td>
<td>1827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beirut</td>
<td>874</td>
<td>2906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgrade</td>
<td>3713</td>
<td>11818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cairo</td>
<td>1123</td>
<td>3116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombo</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>1040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guangzhou</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ho Chi Minh City/Hanoi</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islamabad/Teheran</td>
<td>1245</td>
<td>5214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jakarta</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuala Lumpur</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madrid</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manila</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nairobi</td>
<td>939</td>
<td>3101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ottawa</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phnom Penh</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretoria</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santiago/Mexico City</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vienna</td>
<td>4856</td>
<td>15534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warsaw</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>16542</td>
<td>53086</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) Refugee and humanitarian applications are normally processed according to date of lodgement. Priority in processing is given to Woman at Risk, Emergency Rescue and UNHCR referred cases. Applicants are not allocated or advised of a queue date, nor provided with an expected date of arrival.

(3) As of 30 June 2000, a total of 14,328 persons had applications lodged on-shore under the refugee and humanitarian program. This figure includes temporary protection applications and review cases.

(4) Cases referred to the Department by UNHCR as being in need of resettlement may be from refugee camps, collective centres, or located in the community, depending on the circumstances of the refugees in the country of first asylum. Refugee camps, operated by various governments with the assistance of non-government organisations, from which UNHCR has referred cases to the Department include:

- Kakuma, Kenya
Mr Sciacca asked the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, upon notice, on 27 June 2000:

(1) How many (a) off-shore and (b) on-shore applications for Aged Parent Visas (subclass AX103) are currently (i) at the processing stage and (ii) queued.

(2) What sum is his Department or the Consolidated Revenue Fund holding for application fees, Assurances of Support and Health levies in relation to the AX103 (aged parent and aged dependent relatives) class.

(3) When were queued and not queued AX103 applicants advised of their status within the queue and the expected outcome of their application.

Mr Ruddock—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) As at 2 July 2000, my Department had the following number of parent visa applications (cases and persons) in the pipeline:

(a) off-shore, Class AX (Subclass 103) -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>persons</th>
<th>cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>total in the pipeline</td>
<td>15,639</td>
<td>8,977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number queued</td>
<td>3,864</td>
<td>2,307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number being assessed</td>
<td>11,775</td>
<td>6,670</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) on-shore, Classes AG, AO, AS and BP (Subclass 804)* -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>persons</th>
<th>cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>total in the pipeline</td>
<td>4,000</td>
<td>2,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number queued</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* estimate only due to system reporting capacity

(2) The Consolidated Revenue Fund has received application fees of $12.8 million on behalf of all on-shore and off-shore parent visa applicants (Subclasses 804 and 103 respectively) who were in the pipeline as at 2 July 2000. Application fees are for the recovery of the costs of processing. Parent applications continue to be processed in accord with legislative criteria. No health levies or Assurance of Support Bonds are held for people in the pipeline. These are only paid immediately prior to visa grant.

(3) Parent applicants are advised of placement in the queue when they meet all of the following legislative criteria:

- sponsorship by a settled Australian citizen/resident or eligible New Zealand citizen;
- the Balance of Family requirements;
- the health and character requirements; and
- the Assurance of Support requirements without payment of the health services charge or the associated bond.
Parents are advised of their individual queue date as well as the current queue date that is being considered for visa grant.

Parents being assessed for placement in the queue as well as parents who have lodged an application are advised of the program management mechanisms that the parent visa category is subject to including: priority processing; visa cap limit; and queuing and visa place allocation order.

This advice comes from fact sheets and the application booklets prior to lodgement of their application; in the acknowledgment letter following lodgement of the application; at the time of queuing; and on request at other stages during the processing of the application.

It is not possible to advise parents being processed towards placement in the queue or who have reached the queue stage precisely how long it will take before they can be granted a visa.

**Sydney Airport Noise Levy Scheme: Alleged Rorting**

(Question No. 1698)

Mr Martin Ferguson asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, upon notice, on 27 June 2000:

(1) Have there been allegations of rorting of the Sydney Airport Noise Levy Scheme, including allegations of landlords of properties that have been insulated and air conditioned under the scheme, removing the air conditioning systems for use in their own homes.

(2) Have there been allegations of the failure to deliver wool-based insulation material to contract specifications.

(3) Has the Sydney Airport Community Forum called for a report on (a) how many builders taking part in the program are on probation, (b) what happens if insulation is removed or downgraded through either age or change of ownership and (c) the scope for covenants on titles to protect the noise insulation qualities of houses.

(4) What steps will be taken to ensure that problems with the Sydney Airport Noise Levy Scheme will not be transplanted to the proposed Adelaide noise insulation scheme.

(5) What is the basis for calculating the noise levy for Adelaide Airport.

Mr Anderson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) My Department is aware of one case where a new owner has complained that an air conditioner installed as part of the Program, was removed before they purchased the property. The Department is examining the issues involved. To date 3,100 houses have been insulated under the Program.

(2) In late 1997 investigations undertaken by the Commonwealth demonstrated that the wool based insulation material installed in the ceilings of a significant number of properties was not in accord with representations made by the manufacturers at the time the wool based ceiling insulation material was approved for use in the Program.

In the light of specific concerns about the resistance of wool based insulation to insect attack, an offer was made in November 1998 to replace wool based insulation material in all houses in which it had been installed. Some 940 (out of 1100) eligible homeowners have taken up the Government’s offer so far.

Homeowners continue to have the choice of polyester, fibreglass and rockwool ceiling insulation products.

(3) (a), (b) & (c) Yes.

(4) Project management arrangements for the Adelaide Program will include provision for appropriate testing of insulation products, as is now the case with the Sydney Program, before they are admitted for use.

(5) The Aircraft Noise Levy Act 1995 sets out the basis for calculating the noise levy which will apply at Adelaide Airport.

**Immigration: Spouse Visas**

(Question No. 1703)

Mr Sciacca asked the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, upon notice, on 28 June 2000:

(2) What is the average waiting time for spouse visa applications lodged at each post listed in part (1).

(3) How many staff are employed at each post listed in part (1) and how many of those employees are locally engaged personnel.

Mr Ruddock—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) The number of permanent spouse visa applications (visa subclass 100) and the number of provisional spouse visa applications (visa subclass 309) lodged at each post as at 28 June 2000 are presented in columns one and two in the table below. As is shown in the table, not all of the posts listed in the question process spouse visas.

(2) The average processing time, in weeks, for a provisional spouse visa (309) at each post is presented in column three of the table immediately below. The figure given is based on the time it took to decide 50% of the 309 applications which were granted in the period 1 October 1999 – 31 March 2000 and reported in: A Manager’s Guide to Visa Grant Times. Processing times for subclass 100 visas are unreliable due to data coding errors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Current Applications</th>
<th>309 Processing Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Buenos Aires</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Vienna</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Dhaka</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Brussels</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Brasilia</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) Bandar Seri Begawan</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(g) Rangoon</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(h) Phnom Penh</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) Ottawa</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(j) Santiago</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(k) Beijing</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(l) Guangzhou</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(m) Shanghai</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n) Hong Kong</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(o) Nicosia</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(p) Cairo</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(q) Suva</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(r) Paris</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(s) Berlin/Bonn</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(t) Athens</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(u) The Hague</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(v) Budapest</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post</td>
<td>Current Applications</td>
<td>309 Processing Time (weeks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(w) New Delhi</td>
<td>2 486 37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(x) Mumbai</td>
<td>- - -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(y) Jakarta</td>
<td>28 368 41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(z) Bali</td>
<td>- - -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(aa) Tehran</td>
<td>1 48 25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ab) Dublin</td>
<td>6 66 17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ac) Tel Aviv</td>
<td>3 20 12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ad) Rome</td>
<td>5 13 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ae) Tokyo</td>
<td>10 30 9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(af) Amman</td>
<td>- - -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ag) Nairobi</td>
<td>32 214 51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ah) Tarawa</td>
<td>- - -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ai) Seoul</td>
<td>3 13 16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(aj) Vientiane</td>
<td>- - -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ak) Beirut</td>
<td>44 407 19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(al) Kuala Lumpur</td>
<td>6 25 15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(am) Port Louis</td>
<td>- - -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(an) Mexico City</td>
<td>0 1 -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ao) Pohnpei</td>
<td>- - -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ap) Auckland</td>
<td>12 62 20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(aq) Noumea</td>
<td>- - -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ar) Lagos</td>
<td>- - -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(as) Islamabad</td>
<td>12 216 46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(at) Port Moresby</td>
<td>15 43 30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(au) Manila</td>
<td>25 403 21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(av) Warsaw</td>
<td>1 33 14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(aw) Moscow</td>
<td>2 136 27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ax) Apia</td>
<td>9 2 -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ay) Singapore</td>
<td>33 94 42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(az) Honiara</td>
<td>- - -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ba) Pretoria</td>
<td>51 95 38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bb) Madrid</td>
<td>5 16 12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bc) Colombo</td>
<td>13 148 40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bd) Damascus</td>
<td>- - -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(be) Taipei</td>
<td>2 11 20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bf) Bangkok</td>
<td>20 478 36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bg) Nuku’alofa</td>
<td>- - -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bh) Ankara</td>
<td>19 119 10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bi) Istanbul</td>
<td>- - -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bj) Dubai</td>
<td>- - -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bk) Washington</td>
<td>34 90 17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bl) Los Angeles</td>
<td>31 54 14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post</td>
<td>Current Applications</td>
<td>309 Processing Time (weeks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bm) London</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bn) Manchester</td>
<td>Closed 2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bo) Port Vila</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bp) Ho Chi Minh City</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bq) Hanoi</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(br) Belgrade</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bs) Harare</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>968</td>
<td>7,909</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(3) The table below represents the total number of positions, and the number of Locally Engaged Employees (LEE), funded by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) at each post in 1999 - 2000. For example, in Vientiane DIMA provides funds for 50% of one position. This may indicate that there is one part-time employee at Vientiane, or that the person works for both DIMA and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and that DIMA funds 50% of the position.

Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs Funded Positions at Overseas Australian Missions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Total Number of Positions</th>
<th>Number of LEE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Buenos Aires</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Vienna</td>
<td>19.00</td>
<td>16.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Dhaka</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Brussels</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Brasilia</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) Bandar Seri Begawan</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(g) Rangoon</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(h) Phnom Penh</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i) Ottawa</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(j) Santiago</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(k) Beijing</td>
<td>42.00</td>
<td>35.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(l) Guangzhou</td>
<td>33.00</td>
<td>27.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(m) Shanghai</td>
<td>35.00</td>
<td>30.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n) Hong Kong</td>
<td>29.00</td>
<td>24.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(o) Nicosia</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(p) Cairo</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(q) Suva</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>13.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(r) Paris</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(s) Berlin</td>
<td>22.00</td>
<td>19.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(t) Athens</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>8.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(u) The Hague</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(v) Budapest</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(w) New Delhi</td>
<td>38.00</td>
<td>30.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(x) Mumbai</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(y) Jakarta</td>
<td>35.00</td>
<td>29.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(z) Bali</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post</td>
<td>Total Number of Positions</td>
<td>Number of LEE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(aa) Tehran</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ab) Dublin</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ac) Tel Aviv</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ad) Rome</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ae) Tokyo</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(af) Amman</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ag) Nairobi</td>
<td>12.30</td>
<td>8.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ah) Tarawa</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ai) Seoul</td>
<td>9.50</td>
<td>7.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(aj) Vientiane</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ak) Beirut</td>
<td>19.00</td>
<td>14.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(al) Kuala Lumpur</td>
<td>14.50</td>
<td>12.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(am) Port Louis</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(an) Mexico City</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ao) Pohnpei</td>
<td>Funded by DFAT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ap) Auckland</td>
<td>8.50</td>
<td>7.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(aq) Noumea</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ar) Lagos</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(as) Islamabad</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>11.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(at) Port Moresby</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(au) Manila</td>
<td>28.00</td>
<td>22.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(av) Warsaw</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(aw) Moscow</td>
<td>13.30</td>
<td>9.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ax) Apia</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ay) Singapore</td>
<td>11.50</td>
<td>9.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(az) Honiara</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ba) Pretoria</td>
<td>22.00</td>
<td>18.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bb) Madrid</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bc) Colombo</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>11.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bd) Damascus</td>
<td>Closed 1999</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(be) Taipei</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bf) Bangkok</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>17.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bg) Nuku’alofa</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bh) Ankara</td>
<td>10.50</td>
<td>7.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bi) Istanbul</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bj) Dubai</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bk) Washington</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>13.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bl) Los Angeles</td>
<td>12.70</td>
<td>11.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bm) London</td>
<td>51.00</td>
<td>45.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bn) Manchester</td>
<td>Closed 2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bo) Port Vila</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bp) Ho Chi Minh City</td>
<td>33.00</td>
<td>28.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bq) Hanoi</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post</td>
<td>Total Number of Positions</td>
<td>Number of LEE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(br) Belgrade</td>
<td>24.00</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(bs) Harare</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>764.28</td>
<td>629.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>