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The House met at 12.30 p.m.

ABSENCE OF THE SPEAKER

The Clerk—I inform the House of the absence of the Speaker, who will be in attendance later this day. In accordance with standing order 14, the Deputy Speaker, as Acting Speaker, will take the chair.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Causley) then took the chair, and read prayers.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

Anzacs

Mr LLOYD (Robertson) (12.31 p.m.)—I move:

That this House:

(1) notes the passing of Australia’s last Anzac Gallipoli veteran, Mr Alec Campbell, and records its sympathy to his family;

(2) acknowledges the service and sacrifice of all Gallipoli veterans;

(3) notes the increasing number of young Australians who attend Anzac Day dawn services both in Australia and overseas; and

(4) encourages all Australians to ensure that the Anzac legend continues to be recognised and honoured.

It is a great honour that my private members’ business motion has been selected for debate in this chamber today. I was privileged to attend the funeral service of our last Anzac veteran, Mr Alec Campbell, in Hobart on Friday, 24 May 2002. I wish to pass on my condolences to Mr Campbell’s wife and family and to thank them most sincerely for allowing all of Australia to share that very personal moment with them. All of Australia stopped at that time, not only out of respect for Mr Campbell but out of respect for the Anzac legend and the sacrifices that a whole generation of young people made at that time.

Many hundreds of people attended that funeral. One of them most people would not know: a young Central Coast student by the name of Laura Grumley from Gosford High School. Laura was one of the eight Simpson Prize winners two years ago who attended the 85th Anzac Day services at Gallipoli and Lone Pine in Turkey. Prior to her departure as a 15-year-old student she had the opportunity to meet and speak with Mr Campbell. She was so moved by that meeting, her trip to Gallipoli and the spirit of the Anzac legend and what they represent that she paid her own way to Hobart to attend, with her father, Mr Campbell’s funeral. I can assure honourable members that Laura’s actions highlight so much of our young people’s respect for the Anzac legend.

On Anzac Day this year, I, along with a number of my colleagues—the member for Forde and the member for Bass, who are in the chamber at the moment, and also the Deputy Prime Minister—had the real privilege of attending the Anzac Day services at Gallipoli. I have to say that it was one of the most moving and emotional days of my life. People said to me before I went to Gallipoli that it really would change the way I thought about things, and it certainly did. It was an amazing experience. It is difficult to put into words the feeling, but what really impressed me so much was the 15,000 mainly young Australians who had made quite a considerable effort to be there as well. Attending the Anzac Day services at Gallipoli is turning into a pilgrimage for young Australians.

It is not easy to get to Gallipoli. Turkey is a long way away, it is expensive to travel there and to actually get to the Gallipoli Peninsula takes quite a deal of effort. To attend the dawn service most of those young people had to backpack six or seven hours in a bus and probably had to be at Gallipoli by about nine or 10 o’clock the night before. They had to sit overnight in subzero temperatures while waiting for the dawn service. It is really symbolic in some small way of the sacrifices that our young soldiers made on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

To watch the light grow during the dawn service, to look behind us to where the hills were and to imagine our young soldiers landing on that beach and trying to scale the cliffs with the Turkish forces there was very sobering for us. After the dawn service we then travelled to a number of services along the Gallipoli Peninsula, and they culminated, to my mind, in the Australian service at Lone Pine, which was held at 12 noon. I did not quite know what to expect when we were
going to Lone Pine, although we had had the opportunity of being there the day before. It was an amazing ceremony and I had the privilege of reading some of the service. I wish I could speak for many hours on it—but I have to say how proud I was of the 15,000 mainly young Australians who were there honouring our Anzac legends. I can assure all Australians that the principles that our young diggers fought for are in good hands with this generation. They were deeply respectful, and during the service at Lone Pine you could have heard a pin drop: there was not one sound from any of the people that were there. (Time expired)

The ACTING SPEAKER—Is the motion seconded?

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

Mr Edwards (Cowan) (12.36 p.m.)—I congratulate the Chief Opposition Whip on putting forward this motion on our Anzacs. It is fitting that the Parliament of Australia recognises and honours the passing of the last Anzac. It is my view that this should have been a condolence motion, put forward by the Leader of the House, to enable all members to speak to it. I find it somewhat ironic that the monarchist Leader of the House could allow a condolence motion for the Queen Mum and a motion celebrating the Jubilee of Her Majesty The Queen to enable all members to speak but only allow a limited motion to note the passing not just of the last Gallipoli veteran but of an era and of a generation of men who witnessed death, horror, destruction and the terrible carnage of war on a level and of a nature that we cannot even begin to comprehend. The same generation of men established a standard of courage, gallantry, mateship, humour, disdain for authority, larrikinism, individuality and love of freedom that grew to become the Anzac legend. It is indeed fitting that they should have been given the full respect of this parliament.

I extend my condolences to the family of Mr Alec Campbell. I extend my deep respect to all who served, suffered and died in that terrible military maelstrom of human catastrophe. In saying that, I recognise the terrible pain and suffering that was felt by those in Australia whose loved ones—fathers, brothers and sons—were so far from home.

Some years ago I visited Gallipoli and was shown around by a Turkish guide. It is a tribute to Turkey that this battlefield is so well kept and maintained. The bond between Turkey, Australia and New Zealand is strong, and all Australians should recognise and respect that fact. In his book, A Fortunate Life, Albert Facey described a number of his experiences. On the landing, he wrote:

Suddenly all hell broke loose; heavy shelling and shrapnel fire commenced. The ships that were protecting our troops returned fire. Bullets were thumping into us in the rowing-boat. Men were being hit and killed all around me. When we were cut loose to make our way to the shore was the worst period. I was terribly frightened. The boat touched bottom some thirty yards from shore so we had to jump out and wade into the beach. The water in some places was up to my shoulders. The Turks had machine-guns sweeping the strip of beach where we landed—there were many dead already when we got there. Bodies of men who had reached the beach ahead of us were lying all along the beach and wounded men were screaming for help. We couldn’t stop for them—the Turkish fire was terrible and mowing into us. The order to line up on the beach was forgotten. We all ran for our lives over the strip of beach and into the scrub and bush. Men were falling all around me. We were stumbling over bodies—running blind.

The sight of the bodies on the beach was shocking. It worried me for days that I couldn’t stop to help the men calling out. (This was one of the hardest things of the war for me and I’m sure for many of the others. There were to be other times under fire when we couldn’t help those that were hit. I would think for days, ‘I should have helped that poor beggar.’)

About the armistice he wrote:

I will never forget the armistice—it was a day of hard, smelly, nauseating work. Those of us assigned to pick up the bodies had to pair up and bring the bodies in on stretchers to where the graves were being dug. First we had to cut the cord of identification disks and record the details on a sheet of paper we were provided with. Some of the bodies were rotted so much that there were only bones and part of the uniform left. The bodies of men killed on the nineteenth (it had now been five days) were awful. Most of us had to work in short spells as we felt very ill. We found
a few of our men who had been killed in the first
days of the landing.

This whole operation was a strange experience—
here we were, mixing with our enemies, ex-
changing smiles and cigarettes, when the day
before we had been tearing each other to pieces.

He goes on to write about mateship:

I think that it would be true to say that all the men
who were at Gallipoli wanted to stay with their
comrades. It wasn’t that anyone wanted to be a
hero, it was just that we were very close after four
months together under such terrible conditions. A
sort of love and trust in one another developed in
the trenches. It made us all very loyal to each
other.

That is where the legend of Anzac was born,
and I think it is true to say that the legend of
Anzac is indeed the spirit of Australia.

I attended 17 Anzac services at schools
this year. Every one of them was a privilege
to be at, and it was a great honour for me to
watch those young Australian students con-
ducting their services. As we look back we
must look to the future. Young Australians
today have as much courage and as much
character as any other generation of Austra-
lans. Let us just pray and hope that their
challenges will never, ever again take them
to the shores of a place like Gallipoli. To all
of the Anzacs, I simply say: rest in peace.

Mrs ELSON (Forde) (12.41 p.m.)—It is a
special honour to support the motion before
the House on our Anzacs. Like all Austra-
lans, I was saddened by the recent passing
of our last Anzac Gallipoli veteran, Mr Alec
Campbell. Our sympathy goes to his family,
and our enduring gratitude as a nation goes
to Mr Campbell and his many brothers in
arms who fought so valiantly against in-
credible odds.

Alec Campbell was symbolic of a very
different time: an era when the essence of
our young nation was forged through the
bravery and deeds of our young men serving
abroad in conflicts the likes of which the world
had never known before. From the
heroic actions of our servicemen have sprung
the many values, ideals and characteristics
that make us Australian; and nowhere was
that brought into sharper focus than at Galli-
poli. The Gallipoli campaign cost 8,709
Australian lives—an incredible sacrifice for
a nation so young. That there is now no liv-
ing reminder of this brave battle does not
mean that the men who sacrificed so much
for us will be forgotten. Far from it. Long
before Mr Campbell’s passing, we were wit-
nessing a renewed commitment to honour
the Anzac legend. It is a commitment that
has been taken up by the younger generation
of Australians, as evidenced by their ever-
increasing numbers at Anzac Day marches
across the nation, and it is a commitment
reflected in the pilgrimage made by thou-
sands of young Australians to Gallipoli on
Anzac Day each year.

I was very honoured this year, along with
the member for Robertson, the member for
Bass and the Deputy Prime Minister, to be a
part of the services at Anzac Cove and Lone
Pine. It was an experience that defies de-
scription. To see the cliffs, the beach and the
rugged terrain, and to imagine the terrible
odds that our soldiers faced, gives you the
incredible realisation that the Anzac legend
is solidly based on courage and sacrifice. I
was heartened to see that so many young
Australians attended the Anzac Day services
at Gallipoli. I congratulate them on their im-
peccable behaviour and for the heartfelt re-
spect that they displayed during the many
services on the day. I took the opportunity to
talk to many of these young Australians, and
it was clear that they included a stop at Gal-
lipoli as part of their world travels, as they
saw it as an important mark of respect for all
of our Australian servicemen. These young
Australians have a very great appreciation
for the sacrifices made by the generations
before them. They have a very personal
commitment to ensuring that the memory of
those who served our nation continues to be
honoured. Certainly my experience in talking
with these young people at Gallipoli mir-
rored my experiences over many years in my
electorate, where I have seen increasing
numbers of young people and their families
attending Anzac Day services and paying
their respects. I think that right now, when
we have soldiers serving Australia overseas
as part of the international war on terrorism,
it brings home the fact that the price of lib-
erty is eternal vigilance. It reminds us all of
the sacrifices made by generations past so
that we may enjoy the freedoms that we cur-
currently have. It reminds us of the debt of gratitude we owe.

I am very pleased to strongly support this motion before the House. It is important that we continue to encourage all Australians to continue to recognise and honour the Anzac legend, remembering that the legend was forged through the brave actions and incredible spirit of those young men who landed at Gallipoli and built upon by the many deeds of our service men and women in all conflicts. I am incredibly heartened by—and this motion recognises this—the fact that there are increasing numbers of young Australians at Anzac Day services here and overseas. I think that for many young Australians it goes without saying that they feel very real pride in, and a debt of gratitude to, our veterans. I hope and certainly expect that we will see that deep personal commitment being passed on to their children, their grandchildren and so on for many more generations. So, while Alec Campbell and his brothers in arms have all passed on with the inevitable march of time, I have no doubt that their memories will live forever.

Mr BEAZLEY (Brand) (12.46 p.m.)—The passing of Alec Campbell means that the legend of Gallipoli passes into history and from the memory of any living person. Alec was a marvellously authentic representation of that generation. He was a marvellously authentic Australian, a man who accepted responsibility—he accepted responsibility before his time, in fact, to go to Gallipoli and fight, and he accepted responsibility for his society when he returned. He accepted responsibility for organising the work force as a strong trade unionist and trade union leader. He enjoyed life: he loved it and he lived it like an Australian with his love of sport which manifested itself in his taking part in several Sydney to Hobart yacht races. He was an authentic representative of his generation and, as such, it is fitting that he should be the last focus of the living part of the Anzac legend. With his passing the Anzacs pass into legend and history, and from living memory. I join with others who have spoken here today in expressing my condolences to his family. But they must be awfully proud.

We Australians, along with our New Zealand brothers and sisters, are really the only ones who incorporate that terrible campaign into our history and our national psychology. A fellow who is probably the best military historian in the English language, John Keegan, beautifully expressed this aspect of ourselves recently in the book First World War. He took a look at the campaign and had understandably critical comments to make of it, but then he talked of the contemporary battlefield. He wrote:

Few British make the journey; those who do, and find their way to ANZAC’s tiny and terrible backgrounds at Lone Pine, Russell’s Top and Steele’s Post, never fail to be moved by the appearance of young Australians, men and women, who have trekked across Europe to see where their grandparents and great grandparents fought and often died. Two-thirds of the Australians who went to the Great War became casualties and the first of the nation’s Great War heroes won their medals in the two square miles above ANZAC cove. Their grandchildren and great-grandchildren often bring those medals back with them to Gallipoli on their pilgrimage, as if to re-consecrate the symbols of the ANZAC spirit, a metaphor for that of the nation itself, on sacred soil.

Those beautifully expressed words capture exactly what the Anzac legend means to us here in Australia. It is the central, core element of our national psychology. That is attested to as thousands of Australians each year vote with their feet by visiting the battlefields such as the historian has there recorded. Probably the most moving experience of what is now on my part a fairly lengthy political career was when I witnessed the 75th anniversary of the landing at Gallipoli. There were enough Anzacs there to make up a company. We had 100 of them with us at that commemoration. It was extraordinary to see them sitting down with old Turkish diggers who had fought in the same conflict. Though neither could speak the other’s language, they understood each other perfectly. It was moving, too, to see thousands of young Australians participating in that ceremony at a battlefield that is visited, whether it is Anzac Day or not, because it is now so deeply impacted in our national psyche.
In conclusion might I say that our commemoration of that battlefield is not yet complete. I recommend that the government start the process of taking up the Australian submarine, AE2, which has been found by the Turks. I hope that by the time of the centenary of Gallipoli in 2015 there will be an appropriate interpretation centre there, too, for it. Fortunately or unfortunately, the submarine’s success in penetrating the Dardanelles is what caused the Australians to hang onto the beaches. I commend the government for undertaking that joint consideration and I hope it comes to a successful conclusion. (Time expired)

Mrs HULL (Riverina) (12.51 p.m.)—It is indeed a privilege and an honour to support the member for Robertson’s private member’s motion here today on our Anzacs. The fact that an entire nation mourned the passing of Mr Alec Campbell at 103 years of age is testament to all who have fought for this great country, and indeed to all of those who put themselves forward but through no fault of their own did not actually face enemy fire. It is of particular pride and significance to me that four members of the Australian Army Band Kapooka, from the home of the soldier in Wagga Wagga in the Riverina electorate, travelled to Hobart to combine with the Australian Army Band Hobart and the Australian Army Band Melbourne to perform a great tribute to farewell our last Anzac. Australian Army Band Kapooka members Rachel Westacott, Russel Paynter, Danny Beeton and Mick Beeton were honoured to be selected to pay tribute to a figurehead for those who gave their all.

As the mother of three sons and grandmother of three grandsons, I look at the baby face of a 16-year-old child and shudder at the thought of my boys ever having to witness the atrocities of war and I give thanks to Alec Campbell and 8,700-odd other young Australian men just like him who died during the eight months that saw another 19,000 of our brave hearts wounded. As I was preparing and looking at the speeches for today, I read Richard Reid’s *Gallipoli 1915* to take me back to some of the areas that were a part of us during that horrific time. One of the pages shows the words of Signaller Ellis Silas from the 16th Battalion of the AIF in Gallipoli, 11 May 1915. He said:

The roll is called. How heartbreaking it is. Name after name is called. The reply: a deep silence which can be felt despite the noise of the incessant cracking of rifles and screaming of shrapnel. There are few of us left to answer, answer our names. Just a thin line of weary, ashen-faced men behind a mass of silent forms once our comrades. There they have been for days. We have not had time to bury them.

Some of the words inside this book bring tears to one’s eyes and thoughts that can lead back to the experiences of our young Australians who have passed away. One could stand almost anywhere on Australian soil and slip away into a place in time where hell was a massacre on a beach with cries from the wounded, gunfire that sounded just like Guy Fawkes Day and the unimaginable screaming of shells.

The thoughts of one young man, Private Roy Denning from the 1st Field Company Engineers in the AIF, were as follows:

I thought I was justified in being proud of being Australian ... give me Australians as comrades and I will go anywhere duty calls, and I hope to be pardoned for saying so, being one myself.

You were pardoned and you were justified. Private Denning. Australians are very proud of the history that unfolds before them. No prouder day was held this year than Anzac Day, when I witnessed one of the largest Anzac marches ever to be held in the city of Wagga Wagga. Right across my electorate of Riverina, we saw our children marching with wonder in their eyes, a new understanding and a new recognition of the type of people that had lost their lives on other soils in other countries to save the way of life that they were experiencing now.

The addresses that were held across my electorate of Riverina and every electorate in Australia would have had the same passionate message of how fortunate we are as Australians that those who have gone before us and the likes of Alec Campbell delivered to Australians the quality, the safety and the future of a great nation. These Australian people can be well remembered. We can ask our country to always remember the sacrifice that went forward from all of the people who
fought in the Great War, a war that involved the loss of so many of our young people. All I can say is: lest we forget. **(Time expired)**

**Ms O'BYRNE (Bass)** (12.56 p.m.)—I support the motion moved by the member for Robertson with much pleasure and pride, not only because of the significance to this country of each of the elements of this motion but also because Alec Campbell was born and spent much of his working life in my electorate and because I was one of the proud and, might I say, well-behaved young Australians who attended the Anzac services in Gallipoli this year.

For each of his 103 years, Alec Campbell could always lay claim to being just a fraction older than our nation—our federated nation—but during the final years of his wonderful life he was more than that. He became the symbol of the very essence of our nation’s spirit. Of course, this was an Australian spirit that did not actually exist when he was born. It was yet to be forged at far off places like Anzac Cove and Lone Pine by young men like Alec Campbell. Much of that which we hold dear about being Australian, those things in which we pride ourselves, are part of the Alec Campbell story—the story of a fresh-faced boy who travelled to the other side of the world to fight for his country.

As history records, Gallipoli was not the theatre of war which claimed the most Australian lives, nor was it a great victory, but Gallipoli was the site and occasion at which Australia found something to be forever proud of. Alec Campbell became more than a 16-year-old boy lying about his age to go to war. He was more than a brave soldier who endured the horror of war. Alec Campbell became part of the definition of the spirit, courage and humour of Australia. Like so many of the brave Australians who survived the Gallipoli campaign, Alec Campbell returned home to play an active role in our young nation’s development. In particular, he was passionately involved in pursuing the rights of Tasmanian workers. He rose to become president of both the local branch of the Australian Railways Union and the Launceston Trades Hall.

I was both honoured and fortunate to attend the Anzac Day services at Gallipoli this year—the last Anzac Day when an original Anzac remained alive. I joined those people who made the pilgrimage to attend the dawn service at its new site at North Beach, where it has been moved to provide for the numbers that now attend. Ten or so years ago the crowd was in its hundreds; this year it is estimated that 15,000 people from many nations attended. How do we account for the huge growth in numbers not only at Gallipoli but also at Anzac Day services around Australia? How is it that Alec Campbell and his comrades in arms have become part of the evolution of what it is to be Australian?

This year, as dawn broke over the almost perpendicular cliffs against which so many young hopes and lives were dashed 87 years ago, I began in the very smallest way to understand the futility of the landing. But one cannot really comprehend what it would have been like in a storm of bullets, noise and death. For me, the amazing thing was not how many lost their lives but how many actually survived. It is incredible that they did not give up. We now know that throughout the campaign they and the Turks developed a grudging respect for each other. The Turks, who were defending their homes, could never understand what the Australians were doing there. Many did not even know where Australia was, just as our boys probably knew very little about Turkey when they left our shores.

These days, on Anzac Day each year, the main Australian service takes place at Lone Pine at noon. In 1915, at the Battle of Lone Pine, 2,000 Australians died in a furious attack launched on 6 August. Six days later, the worst of the fighting was over and the Australians had captured this strategic Turkish position—one of the few allied victories during the campaign. Many diggers who were not actually assigned to battle duties had begged for the opportunity to support their comrades. The Victoria Cross was awarded to seven Australian soldiers, two posthumously.

The 10,000 Australians who attended the service at Lone Pine in 2002 were up most of the night, catching what sleep they could on
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a very cold peninsula, before attending the dawn service and then trekking up to Lone Pine. They spent the morning as typical Australians would spend a morning: they were singing, they were chatting; they were enjoying the sun and they were enjoying the camaraderie of being there with people who were joined in their cause. When the official party arrived—members who have spoken today were part of that party—Lone Pine was awash with national pride. The crowd sang the national anthem. They cheered and spontaneously cleared a path for the dignitaries. They shed tears as wreaths were laid for the fallen and they reserved the loudest applause for a Turkish veteran—which I think was one of the most gratifying things about being there. The strange bond forged by their forebears with the enemy had certainly not been lost on this new generation. They were very proudly Australian, celebrating their Australianness at the site where Australian nationhood and nationalism was forged. The experience left no doubt in my mind why Alec Campbell and Gallipoli now mean so much to us. Having attended his funeral in Hobart recently, I can see why his family are so incredibly proud of him as well.

Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (1.00 p.m.)—I rise not only to support the motion by the member for Robertson but also to dedicate this speech to the memory of Lance Corporal John Gillespie, ‘dust-off’ medic of the 8th Field Ambulance, missing in action 17 April 1971, South Vietnam. It is important we remember that the spirit of Anzac does not end at Gallipoli but that it begins there. The last Anzac, Alec Campbell, was 103 when he left us on 16 May 2002—the last man to set foot on the beaches of Gallipoli with a rifle in his hand and the last man that could claim to be the custodian of the Anzac legend. Before him, Ted Matthews, the last Anzac to actually storm Anzac Cove on Gallipoli beach at dawn on 25 April in 1915, went to join his mates at the age of 101, on 10 December 1997. Now they have gone and there is no-one else left alive who saw those bloody beaches and smelled the stench of death wafting over the parapet walls into the trenches. Who really knows how they felt and what it was like to wake up in the morning and stare death in the face?

Anzac Day is a glorious ceremony and hundreds of thousands of Australians proudly join the veterans of many conflicts to celebrate the common spirit that touches us all. It is an experience that bonds us—even those newly arrived in the country from other countries who are moved by the passion we show in honouring our war dead; that is, until we woke one morning and found that Alec Campbell was the last Anzac. There were no more. And when he was gone, what would be left? Who would personify the legend? All of a sudden, Alec Campbell took on a new proportion. At 103, he was older than the Federation of Australia. For a time he was Australia and all the nobility that we felt about it. We feted our veterans, we paraded them—as if in a kind of ritual act of desperation to stop them going. Too late, we realised that it was only a matter of time before a cherished link with our past would be no more.

I remember the full-page photograph on the front page of the Sydney Morning Herald recently of a small, forlorn looking figure, in a uniform that was much too large for him, holding a rifle which, with bayonet fixed, was almost as long as he was tall, his face a serious pout—a seriousness that belied his 16 years on this earth when the photograph was taken those many years ago. The Edwardian uniform reflected a life that we can only begin to imagine from those grainy photographs, but now there is no-one to tell us what it was really like. What compelled Alec Campbell to volunteer for God, king and country? What sense of idealism drove him—or was it just a sense of adventure born of the naivety of youth? When interviewed two years ago, Alec Campbell said, ‘It’s so long ago I don’t remember.’ However, he did go back to those shores, along with a handful of comrades, and we as a nation started to realise that, like the grains of sand running through our fingers, disappearing into an indistinguishable void, these last heroes of our time were not going to be around much longer.

He was ultimately a humble man with simple views. He had seen the brutality of
war and he was not impressed. His reluctance to participate in Anzac Day parades, although he did, revealed that there was no glory in war, only sadness. The photograph of him at 103, framing the one of his youth, told a different story. It was that of a wizened old man—there was no shadow of the exuberance of the 16-year-old boy soldier—now with shoulders stooped and eyes glazed, the weariness of war cloaking him like a mantle, and only his medals to show the glory imagined by those that came later.

We have revered the legend of Anzac, and rightly so. Many an Australian soldier today, and his father before him, was inspired by the deeds of Anzac. They were inspired to go on and fight for their country, rightly or wrongly, just like the original Anzacs did. Such a sense of duty is not a commodity that can be bought. It is a spirit that grows in an individual, coming as it does from the likes of Alec Campbell and his mates, now long gone. It is their memory and their deeds that sustain us, for, without such examples to inspire us, from where will we gain the sense of nobility and the selflessness we need to put our country ahead of ourselves? No, this is not something that can be replaced. Alec Campbell’s passing is a milestone in this country’s history, and it also asks the question: have we learned anything from it? He has passed the torch to us, and we are obliged to carry it for him. Let us learn from this experience and hold dear those memories for future generations. They need a role model so that they too can aspire to nobler ideals than just those of the flesh. From the lyrics of Eric Bogle’s song:

But the band plays “Waltzing Matilda”,
And the old men still answer the call,
But as year follows year, more old men disappear,
Someday, no one will march there at all.
That dreaded day is here.

I am heartened on each Anzac Day to see more and more children of our veterans putting on their fathers’, uncles’ or grandfathers’ medals and marching side by side with the otherwise dwindling ranks. The dawn services are becoming more moving, and I believe that the ever growing band of young people now attending will indeed pick up the torch. It is this sense of involvement, this act of participation, that gives meaning to the moment. We the Australian people are custodians of memory. We have an obligation to honour their memory. (Time expired)

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (1.05 p.m.)—I rise to join with others in mourning the death of Alec Campbell. In the last week of sitting, about 20 Indonesians—public servants, journalists and judges—were on a six-week study tour in Australia. I happened to be with them, and we had a very good exchange. But I asked them the question: what is it that you enjoyed most about being in Australia? I was really taken aback by their response, which was that for them it was being in Australia at the time of the passing of a national hero—Alec Campbell. I think, like me, every Australian in the group was absolutely touched by that response, because indeed Alec Campbell’s passing was also the passing of an era.

But what is it that we celebrate about Anzac Day and Gallipoli, in particular? I do not think that anyone here can have a sense of what they went through. It was not the first heroic battle that Australians had fought in; that distinction probably rests with our engagement in the Boer War, which we do not tend to celebrate. But let us look at the statistics: 50,000 young Australians were at Gallipoli; 8,141 lost their lives and a further 17,970 were wounded, bringing the total casualty rate to 26,111. More than one out of every two people was a casualty in that engagement. It was no great victory. In fact, it was an appalling disaster. Perhaps the finest effort was the extraction with no loss of life at the end of the campaign. But the ground is soaked in blood. If anything, I think the thing we remember is the loss of innocence of those that participated and the bonding of those that stood shoulder to shoulder in such an awful, bloody campaign—a campaign no government would survive today.

I have always been struck by the words of Kemal Ataturk. When in 1934 he wrote a tribute to our Anzacs, he said:

Those heroes that shed their blood and lost their lives ... You are now lying in the soil of a friendly country. Therefore rest in peace. There is no difference between the Johnnies and the Mehmets to us where they lie side by side now here in this
country of ours ... You, the mothers, who sent their sons from faraway countries wipe away the tears. Your sons are now lying in our bosom and are in peace after having lost their lives on this land. They have become our sons as well.

I think they are tremendously generous words. I have a degree of satisfaction knowing that at the Rooty Hill RSL in Sydney we not only have a cenotaph to commemorate those that fell on the Australian side but also agreed to accept a memorial to the Turkish soldiers—other RSLs declined to do that.

As others have said, the Anzac spirit that permeates this country and the loss of blood that has so soaked those shores have given us a tradition, but we should not be frightened of making new traditions. We should not be frightened of standing up for our own traditions. We should not tug the forelock to mother countries; we should not be servile to those upon whom our security depends. This loss of innocence is the birth of a country: a free country, an independent country—a country that we are so very proud of. I hope that the Anzac tradition will live on, but I hope that as Australians we will, in this new century and in this new millennium, make new traditions, keeping holy that Holy Grail but being prepared to adapt and change with the times. Alec Campbell and his family must be so proud. (Time expired)

The ACTING SPEAKER—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.

Australian-Chilean Community

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand) (1.11 p.m.)—I move:

That this House:

(1) notes that members of the Australian-Chilean community who were victims of suffering, torture, expulsion and exile at the hands of the Pinochet regime in Chile now receive a “pension of mercy” from the Chilean Government as a reparation for their suffering;

(2) expresses concern that these members of the Australian-Chilean community have their entitlement to an Australian pension affected by the Chilean payments while other people receiving similar payments, such as victims of the Holocaust who receive compensation from Germany or Austria “as victims of National Socialist Persecution”, have these payments exempt for the purposes of income testing;

(3) recognises that these Australian-Chileans make a significant social and economic contribution to the Australian community and should be eligible for equal treatment and access to social security payments as other Australians; and

(4) calls on the Government to give those members of the Australian-Chilean community fair treatment by introducing legislation to exempt the Chilean “pensions of mercy” from the income test for Australian pensions similar to the exemption for other compensation payments in paragraphs (n) and (p) of subsection 8(8) of the Social Security Act 1991.

Having read the details of this motion into the Hansard, I have placed on the record what this House ought to do to rectify this injustice, because this issue, although it affects only a small number of people—we estimate 500 across Australia—involves a fundamental injustice which is occurring to those members of the Australian-Chilean community who were victims of torture under the Pinochet regime.

It was very important that I read out the details of this motion because, whilst it is something that affects a small number of people, it is very clear that these people find themselves in circumstances that mean they are deserving of more compassion than they currently receive. Many people, of course, would be aware of the terrible atrocities that occurred in Chile at the hands of the Pinochet regime and would be well aware that many of those people who were expelled, whose family members were imprisoned or who were themselves imprisoned for lengthy periods of time, whose family members disappeared, who were dismissed from their jobs and who had a whole range of very serious atrocities committed against them or their families settled in Australia under the refugee scheme and came to make Australia their home. Many have been working in, and contributing actively to, our community for many years.

It was not until the democratic regime was reinstated in Chile that the government there
made steps to compensate these people for the torture and suffering that had been inflicted upon them by their own government. People will be interested to know that these pensions of mercy when paid to sufferers who remain in Chile are not taxed—they are not regarded as ordinary income for the purposes of any other Chilean legislation. However, Chileans who find themselves in many ways in the happy circumstance of being in Australia also find themselves in the difficult circumstance where Australia does not recognise that these payments are compensation or reparation payments and should not be treated as income.

Let me give you a brief history of how it is that I come to move this motion today, because it does have quite a long life and we have been seeking alternative ways of trying to persuade the government to take up this issue. I was first contacted by some local constituents about two years ago. The western suburbs of Melbourne, where my electorate of Gellibrand is, have a significant local community of Chileans and people from many other Latin American communities. I would like to particularly acknowledge up front the work of Norma Valenzuela, the President of the Support Committee for the Politically Exonerated People and Relatives of Missing Persons. She was a driving force in getting me and many others, particularly on this side of the House—including my colleague Julia Gillard, the member for Lalor, and my colleague Mr. Byrne, who is going to second this motion—to try to persuade the government to take some action on this issue.

My electorate is also home to CELAS, the Spanish Latin American Welfare Centre. We also have the honour of having the first state member of Latin American background to represent the Labor Party in the Victorian state seat of Sunshine, Mr. Telmo Languiller, who has raised this matter in the state parliament as well. There are significant communities elsewhere, in Canberra and in Sydney. The Chilean Committee of Refugees and Relatives of Missing People is based in Campbelltown and it has been working tirelessly on this issue as well. I should also not forget the ambassador, who has been lobbying the government, assisting with translations and seeking fair treatment for these people.

There have been many letters back and forth: firstly to former Minister Newman and then, more recently, to Minister Vanstone. I wrote my first letters over 14 months ago, although the community had been actively pursuing the issue directly with the ministers and the other representatives of the government. We had a reply from Minister Vanstone on 31 May 2001—over a year ago—saying that she would look into this, but we have not had any action since that time. The question was raised again in Senate estimates in February this year and calls were made by the shadow minister for family and community services, Wayne Swan, in parliament in March following many phone calls to the minister. You will see that a concerted effort has been made by Labor to see justice done on behalf of these Australian-Chilean community members.

I must say that to its credit the government has always responded positively to looking at this issue, however we have never been able to bring that to any final action which is going to have appropriate results for the Chilean members of the community. It is concerning that the dates keep moving and we have no real confidence that we are getting closer to a resolution. It is also important to note that Australia has already set a precedent in that it is prepared to recognise the terrible suffering that many Holocaust survivors went through during the Second World War and it is prepared to recognise that payments by the Austrian and German governments to those people should not be treated as ordinary income. Perhaps this is a situation where people are not as readily aware of the events that occurred in Chile, although many would be. It is no difficult task to compare the Holocaust sufferers to those who suffered terrible torture at the hands of the Pinochet regime.

The new government of Chile is making steps towards a very important healing process for those people who were victims of the Chilean government’s procedures—or lack of procedures—and committal of atrocities at the time. It is really quite distressing that the
Australian government does not see that it
has a role to play in helping that healing pro-
cess or the relief that those sufferers would
feel in being able to finally be paid and given
some recognition from their own government
other than to have it taken with the other
hand by the Australian government.

We are fighting for recognition and under-
standing that the payments as a result of cir-
cumstances in Chile are not like any other
ordinary income earned or pensions paid,
they are very specific compensation pay-
ments made as part of an atonement by a
nation whose people suffered so terribly at
the hands of their own government. My mo-
tion calls specifically for there to be an
amendment to the Social Security Act which
would be consistent with the way the Aus-
trian and German payments are treated.
However, I understand that another option
has been discussed previously, and that is
that some sort of exemption could be in-
cluded in a comprehensive bilateral social
security agreement that would deal with
other issues between Australia and Chile. I
understand that, just as many of us were be-
ginning to despair—and I think at the very
time that this motion was being drafted—
there were meetings between the department
and some Chilean officials to move closer to
finalising that social security agreement. If it
is true that there will be a clause in that and
if that agreement is close to finalisation, we
will be extremely grateful and welcoming of
that news. It is not the particular tool that is
used to achieve this end but the righting of
the wrong that we are seeking to have cured.
That can be done either in the terms sug-
gested in my motion or through a social se-
curity agreement.

In the minutes remaining I will express
some words of caution. This agreement has
been negotiated for over five years. There
have been many answers to our questions in
estimates that these matters will be dealt
with, and then we find that we are no closer
to that agreement being finalised. I hope that
some government members who speak on
this motion will be able to enlighten us on
the timing of that agreement.

**The ACTING SPEAKER**—Order! The
honourable member’s time has expired. Is
the motion seconded?

**Mr Byrne**—I second the motion and re-
serve my right to speak.

**Mr LINDSAY** (Herbert) (1.21 p.m.)—I
am very pleased to be able to speak on the
motion before the House on the Australian-
Chilean community, moved by the member
for Gellibrand. This is a matter that does not
get a lot of attention in the big scheme of
things; nevertheless, matters such as this are
just as important as others that come before
the parliament. By way of background, para-
tograph (1) of the motion states:

That this House:

(1) notes that members of the Australian-Chilean
community who were victims of suffering,
torture, expulsion and exile at the hands of
the Pinochet regime in Chile now receive a
‘pension of mercy’ from the Chilean Gov-
ernment as a reparation for their suffering;

The question the Australian government has
to look at is whether these pensions of mercy
are an income support mechanism or
whether they are a compensatory payment. I
am of the view, personally, that they are a
compensatory payment and, if that is the
case, then I think we will be able to move to
achieve the outcome that everybody thinks is
sensible. Paragraph (3) of the motion states
that this House:

(3) recognises that these Australian-Chileans
make a significant social and economic con-
tribution to the Australian community and
should be eligible for equal treatment and
access to social security payments as other
Australians:

I do not think there can be any doubt about
that whatsoever on both points. The fact is
that Australian Chileans do make a signifi-
cant contribution and they should be treated
equally. That, after all, is the Australian way.
Australia is a socially and culturally diverse
country and it is wonderful that we are.

I think it is important to point out to the
House that from the early 1990s the Chilean
government has paid pensions of mercy—for
material damage, for suffering and for the
loss of a loved one—to people who were
victims of persecution under the Pinochet
regime. That clearly says to me that this is
not an income support mechanism, that it is in fact a compensatory payment. The regime was established under two separate laws in about February 1992. The legislation created the National Reconciliation and Reparation Corporation that grants free compensation pensions—again, I emphasise the word ‘compensation’—to the families of exonerated people who were persecuted during the period of military dictatorship from 1973 to 1990.

A second law of 12 August 1993 again establishes free compensation pensions for exonerated people dismissed from their employment for political reasons during the same period. Exonerated people, including ex-employees dismissed on politically motivated grounds—and this is the evidence that is needed to obtain these pensions of mercy—are required to provide evidence of their political persecution. And so it should be. This evidence can be through their name appearing in decrees or on lists made by civil or military authorities of political activists or members of banned political parties. Also acceptable is evidence that they were deprived of their freedom—for example, imprisoned in jail or in a place especially set up for political detainees, or detained in their own home.

There are two groups of people who can receive a pension of mercy. The first group are the surviving spouses, children and parents of the persons who have been imprisoned or who have disappeared and are presumed dead. The families of these victims of violations of human rights or political violence receive a monthly compensation pension without contribution, which is another key point. The second group compensated under one of these laws is workers, where it can be established that a worker was exiled or had their freedom taken away. To obtain an age or disability pension a period of 10 computable years is required. Politically exonerated persons who can accredit 15 or 20 years of service or computable affiliation with contributions at the time of exoneration, whether before or as of 9 February 1979, can also request, in addition to an age or disability pension, a pension of mercy. Where an exonerated person was dead at the time or has died after law No. 19.234 was enacted, their surviving beneficiary—that is, partner or dependent child—can obtain in addition to a survivor’s pension a pension of mercy if the exonerated person had at least 10 years of computable contributions for the pension or had reached the minimum period of service.

In relation to the request by the community to the Australian government, since December 2000 we have received a number of letters requesting that the Chilean pensions of mercy be exempted from the income test used for Australian income support payments. The government is sympathetic to the plight of members of the Australian-Chilean community who were victims of suffering, torture, expulsion and exile at the hands of the Pinochet regime. However, exempting any income from the means test in the Australian social security system, irrespective of its source or the reasons for its payment, requires very careful consideration. Each request for a payment to be exempt must be judged on its individual merit to preserve the integrity of the Australian social security system and the overall interests of the wider Australian community. I do not think anyone would disagree with that. There are very few exemptions in the Australian social security system.

But the world is not black and white, and it is up to the government to make decisions where it seems sensible to do so. Currently, the government must be satisfied that the Chilean payments are compensatory payments not income support payments. I think that in the argument I have put to the parliament today it is clear that in fact these payments are compensatory payments and not in any way income support payments. I am pleased to advise that the government is giving very serious consideration to the possibility of exempting pensions of mercy and I too ask the government, in view of the time that has elapsed—as the member for Gellibrand has indicated—to make a decision. I think that the way the process is running at the moment we will see a decision in the not too distant future. I certainly support the motion.
Mr BYRNE (Holt) (1.29 p.m.)—I am very happy to rise today to second the motion concerning the Australian-Chilean community from the honourable member for Gellibrand, who I note has been advocating on behalf of the Chilean community with respect to this issue for some period of time. While I have the opportunity I would also like to acknowledge the work that has been done by the state member for Sunshine, Telmo Languiller, by the federal member for Lalor, Julia Gillard, and by a man who is now a member of my staff, Fernando Moya, who is also a member of the Chilean community.

My electorate is very diverse: it has 142 different nationalities that reside within its borders. It has a large number from the Chilean community that have also taken up residence in this area. When they settled in Victoria these people were part of the Chilean diaspora. One million people left Chile after the events of 11 September 1973, when General Pinochet orchestrated a military coup d’état which led to the murder and disappearance of thousands of Chileans. I would like to quote an independent assessment of the events of that particular period, which lasted until 11 March 1990. I quote from a testimony submitted by Lord Browne-Wilkinson on this issue in the House of Lords, where he said:

On 11 September 1973 a right-wing coup evicted the left-wing regime of President Allende. The coup was led by a military junta, of whom Senator (then General) Pinochet was the leader. At some stage he became head of state. The Pinochet regime remained in power until 11 March 1990 when Senator Pinochet resigned.

There is no real dispute that during the period of the Senator Pinochet regime appalling acts of barbarism were committed in Chile and elsewhere in the world: torture, murder and the unexplained disappearance of individuals, all on a large scale.

The member for Herbert was indicating that in terms of assessment of income it is up to the department to assess whether or not it is a compensatory matter. I will give a couple of individual testimonies of people who my office has had some dealings with, and I will leave it to the parliament to decide whether or not these are people who should be compensated or people who have just received income. I will start with the example of Jacob Alvarez, from Canberra. He was taken by the Chilean police force to hidden police headquarters. They bashed him and threatened to kill him if he did not denounce other people. While he was in custody they killed three of his coworkers. As a result, any time that the security personnel came for him he thought that he was going to be the next to be shot. He was released because of pressure from relatives who had some political influence within the military arm. He applied for this particular compensatory mechanism and, as I understand it, has had his pension reduced as a consequence of this not being exempt from income assessment.

Another individual who the member for Gellibrand mentioned previously is Norma Valenzuela. She was a shop steward in the Hospital and Nurses Federation. During the army coup d’état she decided to continue her work with doctors and nurses at the Maipu Community Health Centre. The armed forces raided her premises under the excuse of searching for weapons. They took everyone there, about 25 people, and beat them continuously. The army personnel came back several times and did the same each time they came. Whilst they were doing this they were also bringing in for treatment people in the army who had been shot. This practice continued until they were all summarily exiled. She has also applied for compensation under the act that was introduced by the Chilean parliament.

We estimate there are about 50 members of the Chilean community who have had similar horrific experiences of family members being killed, of being tortured and of being abused. In similar instances where a humane government examines this set of circumstances, it understands that some compensation should be paid. It is interesting to look at some of the communications from the Chilean ambassador, Cristobal Valdes, where he discusses how the Chilean government came to resolve that this matter should be deemed one of compensation rather than income. I will quote from his view:

Having carried out the appropriate consultations in the Ministry of the Interior of our country and the Attorney-General of the Republic, the latter authorities advised us of the following: that
the pension is conceived to be a compensatory measure rather than just a measure of income. I would like to talk further on this, but I have suddenly discovered that my time is running short.

Crimes were committed during the period from 1973 to 1990: people disappeared, people were murdered and people were abused. People deserve compensation for their suffering, not punishment. They do not deserve to be penalised after contributing to the community and accepting an Australian pension. I urge that we take some measures to redress this imbalance, through the mechanisms described by the member for Gellibrand. (Time expired)

Mr Johnson (Ryan) (1.34 p.m.)—It gives me pleasure to say a few words to the motion on the Australian-Chilean community, and I compliment the member for Gellibrand on it. As my friend and colleague the member for Herbert noted, the government is giving serious consideration to the issues that have been raised. The issues raised are complex and the government is sympathetic to them. There are, of course, many Australians of South American and Chilean background in particular who were victims of tremendous suffering and torture, expulsion and, quite frankly, monstrous treatment at the hands of the Pinochet regime. All members of this parliament are, no doubt, absolutely united in that view. The people of Chile and the people of Australia have very good relations and will continue to do so, I am sure.

It is important to put the whole issue in some context in relation to these payments. First of all, the payments here are not single, common payments but involve a raft of payments or assistance made in respect of different contingencies that are the result of the persecution that we all know took place under the Pinochet regime. The payments are made to surviving spouses, children and parents of persons who have been imprisoned or have disappeared and are presumed dead.

The member for Holt eloquently described some of the circumstances of the horrors that took place, and they are something that no one in this country could imagine. Payments were also made to persons who suffered material damage. For example, payments were made to employees, politicians and the military who were dismissed from employment, were exiled and had their freedoms taken away. So it was not just the ordinary people who suffered; it was also some very brave politicians and people in the military. The payments to former employees, politicians and the military are paid as part of a person’s Chilean social security retirement, disability or survivors pension.

Australia’s social security system is based on residence and financial need, and payments are financed from the revenue that the government receives—that is, from consolidated revenue. As we all know, need is determined by the application of a means test—an income test or assets test. Generally, all income, no matter what the source or reason for it being received, is taken into account by the government when Australian pensions are being assessed. As my colleague and friend the member for Herbert said, there are very few exceptions. Our income test is structured to allow a fair assessment of a person’s need. We must not deny the suffering of residents in Australia from Chile who suffered under the Pinochet regime. However, it is critical that care is taken to ensure these people are not inappropriately placed in a better financial position than other members of the Australian community who rely exclusively on social security pensions and benefits, because of course the first role of government is to look after its citizens and its national security.

The member for Gellibrand did acknowledge that the government has been receptive to hearing the views of those affected. Officials from the Australian Department of Family and Community Services have met with representatives of Chile’s own Ministry for Labour and Social Security and the Embassy of Chile here in Canberra. They met in May to discuss a possible social security agreement. Officials also discussed the issue of Chilean pensions of mercy payments, and the Chilean officials have provided additional information about these payments. The minister has asked the authorities from Chile whether some more information could be provided, and the authorities from the embassy are more than pleased to give some
more information. I think that the government will be reaching a position very soon after this is done. As the member for Herbert said, the government should be coming to a decision in the very near future.

It is an important issue. My own electorate of Ryan has an important group of Chileans who contribute to our country, and we must acknowledge the contribution of Chileans throughout Australia. I think the government will be coming to a position soon. I do compliment the member for Gellibrand for bringing forward this motion and I hope that the government will give some information on this issue that will satisfy all those people and enhance their lives in this country. (Time expired)

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand) (1.39 p.m.)—by leave—I would like to pick up where the member for Holt finished off in talking about representations that have been made to the government by the ambassador. Whilst I am very pleased that the two speakers on the government side have been supportive of the general thrust of the motion, we are, as I said in my first comments, really at the point where we are tiring of assurances that people will look favourably at this, as they do not take any action. I understand the important distinction that both government members have made: we need to be confident that the people receiving these payments are receiving compensation for the suffering rather than some sort of income support.

I would like to read some details of a letter dated 11 July 2001—nearly 12 months ago—from the ambassador, who answered those very questions specifically in writing to the Minister for Family and Community Services to assure her about, and set out in quite a lot of detail, the circumstances in which these payments are made. It seems to me that we really are at the point where we now should act. We should not be continuing to say, ‘We need a little bit more information,’ when really we are just shuffling papers around for a little bit longer. In the meantime, these people who are receiving compensation payments because of their drastic suffering at the hands of the Pinochet regime are being penalised by the Australian government because they receive that payment. This should not continue. I would like to read some excerpts from the ambassador’s letter to the minister in which he is answering these very questions:

These Pensions of Mercy without Contribution, as its name implies, are not taxed in Chile, nor are they affected by any reductions of any kind since it deals with a compensation for damages and detriments received.

In this respect, I can inform you that having carried out the appropriate consultations in the Ministry of Interior of our country and the Attorney General of the Republic, this latter authority has advised us of the following: “The Pensions of Mercy without Contribution are based on a different assumption than those conceived in the regular systems of social security, for their nature is eminently compensatory.” The quoted judgment of the Attorney General that “...intention of the Legislator was to grant such exemptions independently from others that the beneficiaries may be entitled to.” In other words, the Compensatory Pensions or Pensions of Mercy without Contribution, do not result from the affiliation to any social security system; therefore, it does not constitute a profit for the beneficiaries and for the same reason it does not represent an increase in their resources, since this kind of pension is only aimed at repairing somehow, in part, the damage suffered by relatives of the victims.

In the same way, the Superintendence of Social Security has issued a statement immediately following our consultation: “...this Pension of Mercy without Contribution is absolutely compatible with the social security benefit of the minimum pension guaranteed by the State, therefore, it is inappropriate to consider the amount of the Pension of Mercy without Contribution within the concept of Income in order to grant the minimum pension from the State.”

Minister, it is clear that from the point of view of Chile, the true meaning and nature of the Pensions of Mercy without Contribution is that they are a compensatory benefit and its only objective is to compensate for the damage caused to the victims of human right violations and political violence.

Our main concern is to compensate those people of Chilean origin who are living in this country, particularly those who have been acknowledged as Politically Exonerated and who are receiving these Pensions of Mercy without Contribution.

It is very clear that these assurances—the clarification of the terms of the legislation and how these pensions of mercy apply—have been before the government for nearly a
ve been before the government for nearly a year. It would seem appropriate that the government now act. This motion is aimed at encouraging the government to act, and the House has moved with the support of the speakers from the government that that should be done. It seems to me that it is really very mean and actually quite niggly of the government to not be prepared to look at a claim that will probably affect, at most, 500 people. These people were victims in their own country of the most outrageous and abhorrent human rights violations. They are receiving compensation from that country as a result of those violations and really should be treated with much more compassion by this government. We urge that they do so now as a matter of some urgency.

The ACTING SPEAKER—Order! It being 1.45 p.m., the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 101. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS
Greenway Electorate: Commercial Nominees of Australia

Mr MOSSFIELD (Greenway) (1.45 p.m.)—It is with a great deal of satisfaction that I rise today to inform the House that my constituents Les and Heather Emerson will finally receive the compensation they so richly deserve. Senator Coonan announced last Friday, after an unnecessarily long and drawn out process, that the government had finally come to the decision that everybody had been calling for in the case of the collapse of Commercial Nominees, the superannuation trustee for around 480 small superannuation funds, including Les Emerson’s. I am, however, bewildered as to why the government has placed a cap on the compensation at only 90 per cent of the loss when the legislation does not require this cap at all. The government is being cheap with this payment. The Emersons should be compensated 100 per cent for the losses they have incurred.

This case has dragged on for over 18 months, and the Emersons have faced enormous hardship over that period as they have fought for their rightful entitlement. The government have now come up 10 per cent short. Nevertheless, the payment is welcome and will allow the Emersons to resume their normal lives and relax in retirement, knowing that they have the funds to support themselves. However, I urge the government to rethink their mean-spirited cap of 90 per cent and pay out the full 100 per cent as the legislation allows.

McPherson Electorate: Wintersun Festival

Mrs MAY (McPherson) (1.46 p.m.)—The long weekend signalled the end of yet another 10-day Wintersun Festival on the Gold Coast at Coolangatta. This is an annual event that just keeps growing year after year. The success of the event is certainly attributed to Barry McNamara and his very small but very professional team. Coolangatta and Tweed Heads are now being recognised as the rock-and-roll capitals of Australia. The event is a national event and it now has international recognition. The credit for that international and national recognition goes to Barry and his very small but enthusiastic team.

Wintersun is Australia’s leading fifties and sixties music festival. Many of us here in the parliament today would remember those days of rock-and-rolling, and we certainly saw it on the streets of Coolangatta. We had hot rods, custom cars, dance competitions, street parades, rockabilly, jive, rock-and-roll and bands from a long-gone era that most of us would remember. We had entertainers such as The Drifters, who are now living in Australia. These three gentlemen are now in their 70s but, I can tell you, they can still jive and kick up quite a storm, as they displayed at the ball we had at the opening of the Wintersun Festival. We also had Bobby Vee and Alan Dale—very well known old rockers from many years gone by. The festival itself is attracting people from all around the world. (Time expired)

Budget: Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

Ms HOARE (Charlton) (1.47 p.m.)—At the conclusion of this statement I will present a petition of 301 citizens of Australia drawing to the attention of the House increases to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme in the 2002 budget. These increases will hit those
who can least afford it: families and pensioners. The petition urges the government to remember the commitments it made before the 2001 election in regard to the cost of prescription drugs and asks that the House oppose the Howard-Costello plan to increase the cost of prescription drugs for Australians.

The government proposes that the sickest and poorest Australians and families under financial pressure be hit with an increase of almost 30 per cent in the cost of their essential medicines from 1 August 2002. The budget will mean families will pay $28.60 for each prescription—up $6.20 per script—up to a total of $190 extra each year for their essential medicines. Pensioners and other cardholders will pay $4.60 for each prescription—up $1 per script—up to a total of $52 per year more for their essential medicines.

I give a commitment to the 301 petitioners that I will be participating in the debate in the House and be opposing these measures to increase the cost of medication for the sickest and most vulnerable Australians.

The petition read as follows—

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

The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House:

That increases to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme in the 2002 budget will hit those that can least afford it, families and pensioners.

That this Government should remember the commitments made before the 2001 election in regard to the cost of prescription drugs.

We therefore pray that the House oppose the Howard-Costello plan to increase the cost of prescription drugs for Australians.

from 301 citizens.

(Time expired)

Hurley, Mrs Jessie

Mr Lloyd (Robertson) (1.48 p.m.)—Last Saturday, 15 June, I had the pleasure of attending the birthday party of Mrs Jessie Hurley, who is now Australia’s oldest citizen. Mrs Hurley was born at Riverstone in Sydney’s west on 15 June 1890, and resides at Tarragal House nursing home. I have had the pleasure of attending the last six of Jessie’s birthdays and almost feel part of the family. She was very sprightly on the day and was aware of what was happening, and I was very pleased that I could present a letter from the Prime Minister again—the sixth letter that I have presented to her from the Prime Minister on her birthday.

Mrs Hurley had eight children, six of whom survived into adulthood, and her family legacy includes 20 grandchildren, 47 great-grandchildren and 56 great-great-grandchildren. She is a marvellous lady and a great friend; in fact, when I was first elected, she baked a cake for me and she and her daughter brought it into my electorate office when she was the grand old age of 106. I do wish her many happy returns and look forward to attending her 113th birthday next year.

Oxley Electorate: Medical Services

Mr Ripoll (Oxley) (1.49 p.m.)—There is a medical crisis throughout Australia at the moment because of the lack of GPs, the lack of Medicare provider numbers and the lack of certainty for doctors and patients in terms of indemnity insurance. The government has admitted that a GP shortfall exists through the 2002 budget by providing for some new doctors in urban fringe areas. At this stage, though, we are unaware as to how this will work, if at all. I note that all metropolitan centres with a growing city fringe will share the 150 new doctors. This leaves very little to nothing at all for Ipswich if it is included in the calculation, which I believe it is not. The extra doctors are mainly trainees who will require supervision. This means that the initiative will not free up resources or actually give us more GPs.

The Costello budget measures are flawed. They provide no more than a bandaid solution to a very serious problem. This parliament needs to address the serious issue of public health in an integrated manner, taking into consideration the needs of all areas. The proposed measures under the budget will not help major growth areas such as Ipswich unless there is an increase in the number of registered general practitioners who are given therapeutic autonomy through the issue of provider numbers. In fact, the crisis can be easily summed up in terms of the reduction of Medicare services in Oxley from
83.1 per cent in September 2000 to 81.7 per cent in December 2001—and it is still falling. Next door in the electorate of Blair the situation is just as bad, falling from 73.5 per cent to 72.7 per cent in the same period. This represents a significant reduction in services to people on low incomes and pensions. The latest crisis of more doctors walking away from bulk-billing is frightening the elderly and frail and frightening families that cannot afford the high cost of private health cover and cannot afford the up-front fees of non-bulk-billed services. (Time expired)

Cook Electorate: Tourism

Mr BAIRD (Cook) (1.51 p.m.)—Recent figures made available by the Tourism Task Force show that there are over 8,000 jobs in the electorate of Cook that are reliant on the tourism industry. The Tourism Task Force estimates that there are approximately 8,000 people in the Sutherland shire whose jobs are reliant on tourism. Proportionally, this is almost eight per cent of all the jobs in my electorate and over half the number of people that are employed in manufacturing industries. These figures are an excellent illustration of how important the tourism industry has become for us at both national and local levels. The Tourism Forecasting Council expects around 10.4 million visitors per year to be coming to Australia in 10 years time—double the number we currently welcome.

Tourism employment in Cook is much higher than in other areas of Sydney. Undoubtedly, our proximity to Sydney airport and the range of tourism sector jobs that it offers contribute to our proportion being so high. There are a large number of flight attendants, pilots and people employed in the various businesses at the airport. The average level of employment in tourism across New South Wales is 6.2 per cent, and it is lower than this in much of the north and west of Sydney. The only areas in Sydney that have a higher proportion are the city centre and the eastern suburbs, where the proportion is boosted by the high number of backpackers that stay around Bondi Beach. In addition to the assistance provided by the airport, the Sutherland shire has a number of natural features that make it attractive to visitors: a range of beautiful beaches, Captain Cook’s landing site, the Royal National Park, bushwalks et cetera. (Time expired)

Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport: Noise

Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (1.53 p.m.)—Once again I would like to raise the issue of aircraft noise and the impact on the residents in my electorate of Lowe in the inner west of Sydney. As you know, I have made many speeches and asked many questions about this very important issue for the residents who are affected by aircraft noise in Sydney. The government promised that when the long-term operating plan was introduced we would only get 17 per cent movements to the north. We have been experiencing between 50 and 100 per cent since the introduction of the long-term operating plan. It has failed, and it is only going to get worse.

What is going to happen in the near future? Media reports are alive with the fact that Sydney airport is going to be sold with no commitment to provide the relief from aircraft noise that the government promised electors before the last election and before the election in 1998. We are faced with a future where there are going to be larger aircraft which are going to be noisier and Sydney airport is going to expand. This is an outrage. Even worse, to rub salt into the wounds of the residents of Sydney, the government have taken the decision now that residents will have to pay for the privilege of complaining about aircraft noise. There used to be a toll-free line; now there is a ‘toll fee’ line. That is outrageous, and it just shows how disingenuous the government are with regard to resolving this very important issue for the residents of Sydney. The residents in my electorate and indeed in Sydney are not fools. They expect the government to resolve aircraft noise problems in Sydney. (Time expired)

Makin Electorate: Clovercrest Swimming Club

Mrs DRAPER (Makin) (1.55 p.m.)—On Sunday, 16 June, I attended the annual trophy presentation day at the Clovercrest Swimming Club in my electorate. As always, it was a pleasure to meet with this enthusiastic group of parents and young people who truly do love their swimming. I have the
honour of serving as a vice-patron of the club. On Sunday I met with a young man who has a great future ahead of him. Members should keep his name in mind, because Travis Hore of Redwood Park may well be a future Olympic medallist. A member of the Clovercrest Swimming Club, 16-year-old Travis has already been selected for the South Australian Sports Institute identification squad. The secretary of the club explained that young people are selected for this squad if they show the potential to become champion swimmers. Travis is also a member of the national Tip Top squad and has recently been selected for the trans-Tasman team for the year 2002. As a member of this team of elite young swimmers, Travis will be competing in Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra in the coming months.

I want to place on record my congratulations to Travis Hore for his success and wish him well for the future. I am sure that he would be the first to say that he owes much to his parents, John and Lyn Hore, for their encouragement and support and to his coach, Jill Doyle. Jill is the head coach at the Clovercrest Swimming Club, and her dedication to her young swimmers is to be admired.

Australians are immensely proud of their sporting heroes, but without the encouragement and support of parents and family and the expertise and dedication of coaches—

(Ambassador to Mexico)

Mrs CROSIO (Prospect) (1.57 p.m.)—I would like to put on the record of this parliament the election of the new dean of the corps of the ambassadors within our region of Canberra, and that is His Excellency Mr Raphael Steger. He is the Ambassador to Mexico and has been with us for many years. He has used those years to bring knowledge to the Australian people on what Mexico is all about, to welcome many visitors and to provide us with the opportunity to understand and appreciate the political system of Mexico, and certainly he has worked hard to support trade between Australia and Mexico.

It is a very big honour when fellow ambassadors choose people to become their dean of the corps. I have had the opportunity of meeting a number of them. I know we have all farewelled Richard O’Brien, who has just left, and we wish him well. But we are now seeing our Ambassador to Mexico taking over that honour, and I am sure that everyone here in the parliament, including you, Mr Speaker, would join us in congratulating him and his wife, Gabriela, and in wishing him a most successful term as dean of the corps. We certainly look forward to bigger and better things happening between Australia and Mexico in the years to come.

Workplace Relations: Queensland

Ms GAMBARO (Petrie) (1.58 p.m.)—On 13 May this year, the Queensland government announced it was the first state government to develop a strategy to address bullying in the workplace. But exactly a month later the Queensland Premier, Peter Beattie, was defending his Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading and Racing, Merri Rose, who was accused of bullying not one but two workers. In today’s Courier-Mail, Mr Beattie’s wife, Heather, has been accused of bullying a state government chauffeur with a 17-year record endorsed by Beattie government cabinet minister Tony O’Grady and former Liberal leader Dr David Watson. The Queensland Public Sector Union has also accused some ministers of regularly bullying their staff.

Mr Beattie has subsequently defended both Ms Rose and Mrs Beattie. He even said the allegations against Ms Rose were part of a media beat-up—choice words from a man who is so in love with the media over any issue that he himself has been termed ‘Beat-Up Beattie’. It is funny how the tables turn.

Last weekend Premier Beattie defended the Queensland education minister’s decision not to attend an anti-bullying conference, despite an election commitment to make workplaces in Queensland safer and fairer. It appears that not all is well in the state of Queensland. The smart decision for Mr Beattie to make would be to investigate rather than to object.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 2 p.m., in accordance with standing order 101B, the time for members’ statements has concluded.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Immigration: Border Protection

Mr CREAN (2.00 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Is the Prime Minister
aware that one of the 3,000 islands excised from the Australian migration zone is Milin-gimbi Island, which at low tide is only one to two kilometres from the Australian mainland? Prime Minister, doesn’t this demonstrate that your flawed excision policy is just an invitation to people smugglers to go the extra 1,000 to 2,000 metres to reach the Australian mainland?

Mr HOWARD—As to the first part of the question, I will have a look at the map. The question allows me to point out something that we on this side of the House have always believed and that is that Labor is weak on border protection. That is the reality.

Mr Crean—The policy is flawed.

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

Mr HOWARD—It defies all logic that the Labor Party, having supported the act of parliament under which this regulation has been made, would now change its position, and the only thing that has intervened has been a federal election. If it was all right to excise Ashmore Reef and Christmas Island and if it was all right to see the enormous benefits in terms of the deterrent effect of that policy, why isn’t it, in the face of the evidence made available to the Leader of the Opposition, okay to excise these further islands? The only thing that has changed is that the Leader of the Opposition is under heat from his own party and he is going weak at the knees. He is going very, very weak at the knees. We in this parliament, with the support of the opposition, passed an act of parliament last year which not only excised Christmas Island and Ashmore Reef but also gave authority for the minister, by regulation, to excise further islands. The Leader of the Opposition supported it last year but he is opposing it this year. He is going weak on border protection. He has been rolled by the New South Wales—

Mr Crean—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order which goes to relevance. The question was: why isn’t this an invitation for the people smugglers to reach the mainland—

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

Mr HOWARD—Mr Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is going to water on border protection. The reason he is doing that is that the Labor Party have never really believed in a strong border protection policy. They went through the last election parading this fiction that there was only a tissue paper between our policy and theirs. The then Leader of the Opposition would stand up and say, ‘The government and the opposition are shoulder to shoulder on strong border protection policy.’ That strong border protection policy has meant that there have been no boat arrivals over the last six months. So that policy having worked, what has the Leader of the Opposition now set out to do? He has set out to undermine it, and he wants to undermine it because he does not believe in a strong border protection policy. The Australian people know which side of politics believes in protecting its borders and it is certainly not the Australian Labor Party.

Trade: United States

Mr CHARLES (2.04 p.m.)—My question without notice is to the Prime Minister. Would the Prime Minister inform the House of the current position regarding possible negotiation of a free trade agreement with the United States of America?

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I will recognise the Prime Minister when the House, including the member for Braddon, exercise the courtesies expected under the standing orders.

Mr HOWARD—I notice that the reaction of members of the opposition is to laugh at the suggestion that Australia might have a free trade agreement with the largest economy the world has ever seen. Yet that is an indication of just how seriously this government takes the national interests of this country. I can report to the parliament that the current position regarding the negotiation of a free trade agreement with the United States is that in order to negotiate any further trade agreements the administration requires trade promotion authority from the American Congress. The current indications are that that trade promotion authority, if it is to be granted, is likely to be granted over the next two to three months. It is then clear from the
discussions I had, both with President Bush and also with the US trade representative, Mr Zoellick, that once that trade promotion authority has been granted then I believe that negotiations with the United States will begin.

I want to make it very clear that the challenge of negotiating a free trade agreement with the United States is very formidable indeed, and it is important that everybody who would like to see this outcome achieved maintain realistic expectations. The benefits of a free trade agreement with the US would be immense and they would be of enduring economic benefit to this country. The United States is the largest economy in the world and if a properly based free trade agreement could be concluded that would be of very great benefit to the Australian economy. But, in the course of negotiating the free trade agreement, I want to make it clear that the interests of Australian farmers will not be betrayed in any way by this government.

It remains the view of this government, as I indicated in my address to Congress, that the United States farm bill has done great damage to Australian farmers. Not only has it done great damage to Australian farmers; but it ignores the reality that Australian farmers are extremely efficient producers. It also ignores the reality, as do the trading policies of the European Union, that the impact of those trading policies on the developing countries of the world is quite devastating. Indeed, if those trading barriers were removed, the benefits to developing countries would be at least three times the benefits of foreign aid delivered by the developed countries of the world to developing countries. If the opportunity arises, we will enter into negotiations with the United States government, but it will be on the basis of protecting the proper interests of Australian agriculture and it will be against the background of recognising that we should have realistic expectations.

I take the opportunity of also informing the House that during the time that I was in the United States I had an opportunity not only to talk to President Bush but also to talk to the Vice-President, Mr Cheney; the Secretary of State, Mr Powell; the Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage; the Commerce Secretary, Mr Evans; the National Security Adviser, Condoleezza Rice; the head of the CIA—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr HOWARD—I know the Labor Party finds all of this extremely uncomfortable. We had a barrage of noise from the Labor Party as soon as I rose to my feet. That indicates to me that it was not a bad visit. If it had been a bad visit, we would not have had that barrage of noise from the Labor Party. It was a good visit. You were right; your perception is correct. The Australian Prime Minister on this occasion was afforded a level of access that has never been exceeded by a former Prime Minister of Australia.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER—I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon His Excellency Mr Xanana Gusmao, the President of East Timor, and His Excellency Dr Jose Ramos Horta, the Foreign Minister of East Timor.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

The SPEAKER—That spontaneous applause from the House means no further comment from me is necessary as I welcome our guests.

Mr HOWARD (Bennelong—Prime Minister) (2.10 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I seek your indulgence.

The SPEAKER—Indulgence granted.

Mr HOWARD—On behalf of the government—and on this issue I think on behalf of the entire House—I extend to His Excellency, the President of East Timor, and his Foreign Minister, Jose Ramos Horta, the warm welcome of this parliament to you both in your new and very important roles and responsibilities. Both of you have sat on the floor of the House as guests in earlier capacities. This is your first visit to the parliament since your respective installations in your new positions. We—and this includes me, as well as the foreign minister, the Defence minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the Chief of the Australian Defence Force, the Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Coe-grove, and many others—attended your in-
dependence celebrations. It was a wonderful occasion and a source of enormous satisfaction, exhilaration and expectation for your future. You go into the future with the warm good wishes of the Australian people.

As I look back over the events of late 1999, I believe the action taken by Australia in relation to the events tragically unfolding in your nation rank as one of the most noble foreign affairs actions of this country over the last 20 years. I am very proud that I led a government that was able to take the action that led to the freedom of your nation. We wish you well. We admire your struggle for freedom. We particularly record our thanks at this time to the men and women of the Australian Defence Force, magnificently led by Lieutenant General Cosgrove, that gave such efficient execution to the decision taken by this government and led the INTERFET intervention. Good luck to both of you and to the people of your nation. It will always have our affection and friendship.

The SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition is extended similar indulgence.

Mr CREAN (Hotham—Leader of the Opposition) (2.12 p.m.)—Thank you, Mr Speaker. I join with the Prime Minister in welcoming two very good friends of Australia now heading the newly and most recently independent nation state on the globe. It was a great pleasure to have been there, as the Prime Minister indicated, and also to have been represented on our side by our foreign spokesman and the member for Lingiari. They were magnificent celebrations. It was a time of great rejoicing because you have been through a momentous struggle and you have succeeded. Our support goes to you and we look forward to ongoing cooperation. It was a great opportunity today on Australian soil to talk about the way in which that agenda could be advanced. I say that in the spirit of bipartisanship. In the same way as we represented Australia from both sides of the parliament at your independence celebrations, so too do we want to be part of your nation building, your capacity building, your development. I think that there are huge opportunities for that and we look forward to cooperating in that regard.

I might say, just as a matter of interest, because we have been so heatedly debating the asylum seekers and people smugglers issue in this parliament today, that it was very interesting in discussions I had this morning with Xanana Gusmao and Jose Ramos Horta that there is a real desire on the part of East Timor for international cooperation to beat the people smugglers. They are concerned about it—they have expressed that concern—and they are seeking an international framework against which all of our borders can be better protected. I welcome that because I have been advocating that as part of a constructive solution from Australia’s point of view.

Government members interjecting—

Mr CREAN—Even if members of the government guffaw at it and believe that there are simplistic solutions which simply only invite the people smugglers to this country, it is pleasing that within the region there are other countries that recognise that the solution needs a far more comprehensive approach. I welcome East Timor’s recognition of that and I look forward to cooperating with them in achieving that objective.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Immigration: Border Protection

Mr CREAN (2.15 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Is he aware that, on 11 June, the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs refused to rule out excising parts of the mainland from the migration zone and that the Minister for Foreign Affairs also refused to rule out mainland excisions on 12 June? Given these statements, will the Prime Minister rule out legislating to excise parts of the mainland or is it the Prime Minister’s plan to excise Darwin, North Queensland and Western Australia or even to resurrect the World War II Brisbane Line?

Mr HOWARD—It is a measure of the desperation of the Labor Party on this issue that they are reaching back to invoke wartime references to the Brisbane Line. I want to make it clear that there is no intention—and there never has been—to excise any part of the Australian mainland. That is an absolutely ludicrous proposition. You cannot es-
cape the rub—you voted for something which you are now trying to destroy. It is as simple as that. Last year it was okay to excise Ashmore Reef and Christmas Island but this year, with the election behind you, with the hot breath of the state conferences of the Queensland and New South Wales ALP breathing down your neck, you are now buckling at the knees. You are going to water, as we always knew you would, on border protection.

The Australian people have a very clear situation in front of them: on the one hand, they have the Liberal and National parties who believe in strong border protection; on the other hand, they have an Australian Labor Party who, for political expediency, will pretend in an election campaign that they support us but who, with the election campaign behind us, are prepared to do everything they can to send a green light to the people smugglers. What the Labor Party are doing is sending a message to the people smugglers that they have cracked the bipartisan wall.

Mr Crean—You are!

Mr HOWARD—The bipartisan border protection wall is being undermined and cracked by the actions of the Leader of the Australian Labor Party. The action announced by the minister last week was taken under an act of parliament that the Australian Labor Party voted for. They voted for this. No matter how much they now protest, interject and obfuscate, nothing can alter the fact that, under the leadership of the member for Brand, the Australian Labor Party voted for this measure. The regulation was made by the minister under an act of parliament that was voted for by the Australian Labor Party. That can lead to only one conclusion, and that is: Labor are weak on border protection. Labor are weak on border protection. That sends a very clear signal to the Australian public and to the world that, if you want the interests of the Australian public but to the interests of international people smugglers. Labor are weak on border protection. That is the clear message coming out of this disgraceful backflip by the Australian Labor Party on an important piece of national policy.

Immigration: Border Protection

Mr CADMAN (2.19 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. Would the minister advise the House of the impact on people-smuggling operations of the decision to excise further islands from the migration zone? What role does the decision play in the government’s wide ranging strategy to protect Australia’s borders? Is the minister aware of other policies that could undermine the government’s important measures?

Mr Sidebottom—Don’t excise Tassie, Phil!

Mr RUDDOCK—I thank the member for Mitchell for his question. I might simply observe that, if you had read the legislation, you would be aware that excision only operates in relation to external territories and islands. As to the question of whether or not people want to get you into the game of saying, ‘Will you rule this one in or that one out?’, I was not going to go down that route and I make that very clear. It is only a matter of reading the legislation and understanding it.

Let me make the point that you need to have a comprehensive approach to dealing with people-smuggling issues. That is a point that we have always made, and we have been dealing with countries in our region to put in place a range of measures to enable us to work with them on dealing with these questions. Only as recently as last week, the Minister for Justice and Customs was in Indonesia signing further agreements dealing with cooperation on those matters. The fact is that it is nothing new to talk about getting cooperation from other governments. It is not some new, remarkable discovery; it is something that we have been working on consistently over a long period of time.
What I do remember is the piece of advice I got from a minister in Indonesia about the difficulties they have in dealing with some of these questions. It is not a first order issue for them. He said to me, ‘Minister, what are you going to do about the sugar?’ What he was saying was: ‘What are you prepared to do about those issues that are in your hands and that you are able to deal with?’ That is what he was saying, and it was a pretty compelling point.

Mr Crean—Oh, it was!

The SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition, the minister has the call!

Mr RUDDOCK—It was a pretty compelling point, and that is something that the Leader of the Opposition needs to understand, because what he was referring to was the relative advantage that you obtain if you are able to reach Australia, Australian territory or some of our islands, and you are within the migration zone, and you are able to lodge a valid application for protection in Australia. That gives you a very significant advantage in terms of the support that you are able to receive and the benefits that you might be able to access if you can get through an asylum system that gives you what I today call ‘convention plus’. It is a convention that is interpreted far more liberally and widely in Australia and which gives people benefits if they obtain a presence in Australia, our territories or any of our offshore islands which is an advantage over those who are waiting patiently to be reassessed anywhere else.

The fact is that the excision recommendations to the government in relation to the offshore islands between Exmouth and the Torres Strait and into the Coral Sea were made on recommendation by the People Smuggling Task Force. It was in the light of information that was given to us, some of which was published in the Indonesian press—and that has been made known—and some of which has been otherwise reported to us, that it is quite clear that people smugglers are still active in Indonesia. There are of the order of 2,500 people that might be able to traffic and ply representations that they can aid and assist them. There are people still active in trying to put together boats to travel to Australia and beyond. The advice was very clear: people were now looking at arranging for vessels to travel beyond Australia and into the Pacific.

Indonesia was the subject of a recent information campaign conducted by New Zealand warning against people trying to travel by sea to New Zealand. The fact is that people are very exercised about the way in which people might be intent on travelling beyond Australia. The route they would most likely travel is through the Torres Strait where there are many islands and reefs. The expectation is that vessels in very poor circumstances might well founder near some of those islands or might run aground on a reef. They may reach an island and, in doing so, enter the migration zone and obtain the advantages that that brings rather than the disadvantage that occurs if they land on Christmas Island, Ashmore Reef or the Cocos Islands. So there was very clear advice that this was the most appropriate way to deal with what was seen as a new risk arising from changed circumstances. It was something which was in our hands to deal with and something that would be useful and effective as a deterrent in ensuring that the range of measures that we have already put in place were able to operate effectively. That is the nature of the advice that the government received and I believe—

Mr Crean interjecting—

Mr RUDDOCK—I was not present at the briefing but I believe you would have been advised. We have now what I see as an emerging pattern from the opposition. This is not just disallowance of this measure, which would clearly be very important in dealing with people who are intending to try and travel beyond Australia, it is a pattern that is emerging because we had the member for Lalor out there arguing that those people, who have been found not to be refugees and who have no need for protection, ought to be brought to Australia and granted safe haven, unlike the Kosovars who were brought here lawfully as refugees. She is arguing that people who are not refugees ought to be brought to Australia to send a very clear signal that they had obtained an outcome in Australia to which they would not have otherwise been
entitled. Then we have the further statements that were made. She had this to say:

We will be making further policy statements on processing and on the future of mandatory detention.

Mr Swan—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order: the minister has been going for over six minutes. If he wants to make a ministerial statement, he should do it after question time.

Mr RUDDOCK—The only point I will make—and I will conclude on this point—is that there is a pattern of statements emerging clearly intended to undermine the suite of measures that we have put in place, which are working and which have obtained very important outcomes for the benefit of Australia. What the opposition are saying is: ‘We are about unwinding each of those measures as we get the chance and the opportunity.’

Ms GILLARD—My question is addressed to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs and goes to this government’s real performance on border security.

Mr RUDDOCK—The member for Lalor will come to her question. The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. The Manager of Opposition Business knows that there is no point of order.

Ms GILLARD—I refer the minister to the Auditor-General’s report released on Friday which deals with his department’s handling of unauthorised arrivals and which uncovers the following major problems with his department: one, that it lacks a strategic intelligence capability; and, two, that it does not have a database for storing intelligence. Minister, why don’t you fix the lack of intelligence about unauthorised boat and air arrivals and do something effective about the over 60,000 unlawful non-citizens who have breached visa conditions and who are still in Australia, instead of fantasising about a new Brisbane Line?

Mr Adams interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Lyons will withdraw that statement.

Mr Adams—Mr Speaker, I withdraw the statement.

Mr RUDDOCK—I thank the honourable member for her question because it gives me the opportunity to make a number of important points about what I consider to be a slur on my department. I have had the opportunity of reading the Auditor-General’s report. I found little original thought in it. What I did find—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—A fundamental understanding in this House is that everyone has the right to be heard and to be heard in silence.

Mr RUDDOCK—Let me make it very clear that, where it makes recommendations, it makes recommendations to the department that it should follow up on initiatives that it has already introduced. Let me say something about its performance. The fact is that the performance of my department in relation to boat arrivals is that we have been able to deal very effectively with what was a very major problem. As for the performance of my department in relation to air arrivals, we have seen the numbers of people arriving unlawfully declining. There may have been some justification for arguing that our performance was wanting if you had seen the numbers going up over time, but those numbers, over time, were coming down. That indicates to me a department that is effective in relation to dealing with those issues.

Let me make one final point: I do not mind people drawing attention to the fact that there are other people who from time to time overstay visas, or drawing to my attention that there are some people who breach visa conditions by working when they have no authority. But let me say that in relation to those numbers there has been no significant change in the number of people unlawfully in Australia in the time that I have been the minister or the time that those figures were collected under Labor. Let me make it very clear that there has been no significant change in those figures over all that time. But where there has been a significant
change—I will check the figures for preciseness, but indicatively they were of this order—each year we locate and detain about 14,000 people who breach visa conditions or overstay. When you were last in office fewer than half that number were located.

**Immigration: Nauru**

_Mrs HULL_ (2.32 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Will the minister inform the House of his discussions last Friday with President Harris of Nauru? Are the offshore detention facilities proving effective? Is the government aware of any alternative strategies?

_Mr DOWNER_—I thank the honourable member for Riverina and acknowledge the strong representation she has made on the issue of illegal migration. It particularly reflects the nature of her own electorate, to which many migrants have gone over many years—people who want a fair go for people through the legitimate system and not to see people come through the back door and cheat the system. I met with President Harris on Friday, and officials from AusAID met with him on Thursday. We had a very constructive meeting, as did the AusAID officials. We essentially discussed two things. First of all we discussed the aid program to Nauru, which is on track. We have been doing our best to help Nauru through a difficult time.

_Mr Crean_—It is a nightmare.

_Mr DOWNER_—The Leader of the Opposition, who wanted to set higher parliamentary standards, mocks the proposition of helping Nauru. He mocks assisting Nauru and providing fuel so that the people of Nauru can have fresh water. That is a joke for the Leader of the Opposition and it says something about the base standards that he sets for the Australian Labor Party. Not only is he weak but he is base in his approach.

The aid program is on track. What is more, President Harris is happy with, and understands the program put forward for, the processing and eventual departure from Nauru of asylum seekers and those who are found to be refugees. This government very much appreciates the cooperation with Nauru on this issue. Nauru is one of many countries that have worked closely with Australia in addressing the issue of people-smuggling. So too have the Indonesians and the East Timorese—two countries that participated at the Bali people-smuggling conference which was cochaired by Australia and Indonesia. Any suggestion that this government has not built strong cooperation in the region on this issue is manifestly false, as demonstrated by the success of the Bali people-smuggling conference and the many initiatives that have been taken since then in East Asia, in the Pacific and indeed in some of the source countries.

The honourable member for Riverina asked whether there were any alternatives. It is worth reflecting on the alternative put forward by the Labor Party. Six days before the last federal election the then Leader of the Opposition, the member for Brand, said, “The ALP will persist with the Pacific solution.” That was in the days when the Labor Party was trying to tell voters, “Vote for Labor and you will get the same policy on this issue as the coalition would deliver.” That is how a lot of people sitting on that side managed to be re-elected. A lot of people would not be on that side of the House if they had not made that commitment. In September the current Leader of the Opposition said: ... look you’re the government of the day—referring to us—

you’ve got to make the calls but ... importantly, we’re prepared to offer you support.

Of course he said that just before the election. The volte-face that the Labor Party has done since the election is a betrayal of the people who voted for Labor at the last election and it illustrates a great deception of the Australian people at the election. Deceived the people may feel but angry they will certainly feel over the bonus—the opportunities—that the Labor Party now offers to people smugglers. Labor has put up a sign for the people smugglers, saying, ‘Welcome back into business.’ Labor’s message is to give the people smugglers an opportunity to start their trade again after this government successfully closed it down for six solid months. Labor is weak on border protection, and that will not pass the attention of the people smugglers.
Immigration: Border Protection

Ms GILLARD (2.37 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs and relates to his last statements on unauthorised air arrivals. I refer the minister to paragraph 3.24 of the Auditor-General’s report, which states:

The level of intelligence support given to airline liaison officers and immigration officers at domestic airports had been limited due to resource constraints.

Also, the report alleges that despite his department’s claims that unauthorised arrivals by air are going down—a claim he has just repeated—they are in fact going up. That is an allegation his department refutes by stating the figure in its annual report is wrong.

The SPEAKER—The member for Lalor will come to her question.

Ms GILLARD—Minister, given the lack of intelligence support and the fact that your department cannot even get the number of unauthorised airport arrivals right, why is the government through its excision plan sending a message to people smugglers to try to get to the mainland, including through our airports?

Mr RUDDOCK—I simply make the point again: if the premise upon which you draw your conclusion is flawed—and it was—the fact is that the number of passengers refused entry at airports has dropped and is dropping, and that has been the case.

Ms Gillard interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Lalor has asked her question and the minister is responding.

Mr RUDDOCK—I simply make the point in relation to these matters that the facts speak for themselves. The numbers of people arriving without authority by air each year have been dropping at a time when we would have expected them to rise significantly. The expectation was that people would transfer from boats to air and it has not been realised. It is a flawed view if you are suggesting that the department has failed in relation to these matters when you look at the objective data.

The SPEAKER—I just remind the minister of his obligation to address his remarks through the chair.

Census 2001

Mr LINDSAY (2.40 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Treasurer. Could the Treasurer advise the House of the findings of the 2001 census released this morning by the Australian Bureau of Statistics? What does the census indicate about Australia and how it is changing?

Mr COSTELLO—I thank the honourable member for Herbert for his question. Today the Australian Bureau of Statistics has released the data from the 2001 census. On the basis of that census, the statistician has estimated that as of December last year Australia’s population had reached 19,603,000. Seventy-two per cent of Australians identified themselves as having been born in Australia and over 200 different ancestries were reported, with Australian being the greatest, followed by English, Irish, Italian, German, Chinese, Scottish and Greek.

The member for Herbert will be interested to know that 183,290 people are normally resident in Townsville, confirming that it is the largest town in North Queensland. The last election confirmed that it is the best represented town in North Queensland as well.

The results of the census confirm that the fertility rate continues to decline and life expectancy continues to increase. The median age of Australians in 2001 was 35 years, up from 34 years in the 1996 census. The proportion of Australians aged 65 years and over increased by half a percentage point, and the proportion of Australians aged 14 years and under fell by 0.8 per cent during the same period.

Mr Latham—What is the point of this?

Mr COSTELLO—The point, as the Intergenerational Report found, is that Australia’s population is ageing and that means that a government must put into place changes now to secure the future for future generations. And it is not the cheapjack opportunism of the Australian Labor Party which will do it. Here we are with a government which is prepared to put in place measures which will stabilise the Pharmaceutical
Benefits Scheme. Does the Australian Labor Party have an alternative policy? No. Cheapjack opportunism, led by the greatest political opportunist in modern Australian history—the Leader of the Opposition. This is a person whose previous ministers have said he used to boast before the election that there was not a cigarette paper between him and the government on border protection. He needs some defence. I would get up quickly.

Ms O’Byrne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order that goes to standing order 145 on relevance. The question was about the census, not any other view that the Treasurer might have.

The SPEAKER—The Treasurer was asked a wide ranging question about the census, but I was having difficulty relating his last two illustrations to the census. I invite him to come back to the question.

Mr COSTELLO—Mr Speaker, the census showed that Australia’s population is ageing. As the Intergenerational Report said, this is going to put particular pressure on such things as the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, the age pension and social welfare expenditures. In relation to stabilising those schemes, can I make this point: it is the side of politics that is interested in making those schemes sustainable which is going to ensure quality health care for Australians in the future. Cheapjack opportunism will not ensure that Australians in the future have the kinds of opportunities that they aspire to. That is why it is one side of politics that leads and the other side of politics that is cheapjack and opportunist in Australia.

The census also indicated that Australians are high users of technology, confirming that almost eight million Australians had used a personal computer in the week before the census was conducted and that around seven million, or 36.7 per cent, accessed the Internet over the same period. It is those sorts of changes, as we take them into all of the industries of Australia, that have given Australia the productivity boost in the latter part of the 1990s that strengthened our economy, along with macroeconomic changes. I want to thank the people of Australia who participated in this Bureau of Statistics census. Australia leads the world in relation to statistics and the collection of statistics. Our bureau is second to none in the area. This will give us the tools with which to devote policy attention and to lay down long-term planning for the future of the Australian public—planning that we want to see: better health and aged care opportunities and better productivity opportunities for the decades which are to come.

International Criminal Court

Mr RUDD (2.46 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Given the minister’s recent and remarkable silence on the ratification of the ICC, does the minister recall being asked by a journalist on 13 June whether he was still a strong supporter of the International Criminal Court? Does the minister recall replying with the following clarifying statement:

Well, as I said yesterday, I agree with what I say. That is, I’ve made a lot of statements in the past and I still agree with the statements I made. I agree with me.

The SPEAKER—The member for Griffith will come to his question.

Mr RUDD—He concluded by saying, ‘I agree with me.’ Minister, is it your frequent practice to disagree with yourself? Minister, in order to enlighten the House, what exactly did you say on 12 June about the ICC with which you still agreed on 13 June, when you were still apparently agreeing with yourself but not, it seems, with the Prime Minister?

Mr DOWNER—My answer to that childish question is that the policy of the government is well known.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Member for Cunningham! Member for Rankin! Member for Griffith!

Mr Tanner interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Does the member for Melbourne have trouble abiding by the standing orders?

BHP Pty Ltd: Industrial Action

Mr McArdHUR (2.48 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations. Would the minister inform the House about the illegal picketing action in Victoria? What threat
to job creation does this action pose, what is the government’s response to this action and are there any alternative policies that exist in relation to this matter?

Mr ABBOTT—I thank the member for Corangamite for his question. I regret to inform the House that last week the motor industry faced its third shutdown in just 12 months because of industrial action by ultramilitant unions led by the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union. The AMWU and its allies put on a blockade of BHP’s Western Port plant. They did this despite a Federal Court injunction and they did it despite graphic warnings by both Ford and Holden that they would be forced to shop overseas for components if this kind of industrial disputation continued.

When officials of Ford in Detroit began their weekly conference with officials of Ford Australia last week they started off with the question: ‘What’s new in strike country?’ This is the spectre now haunting the motor industry in Australia because at almost the same time the Assistant Secretary of the AMWU in Victoria was threatening to paralyse no fewer than 500 car component firms. Last week, while the jobs of 50,000 Australian workers were under threat, the Leader of the Opposition was working the phones to union officials in Victoria trying to get them to rat on Bill Shorten, but he would not pick up the phone once to try to stop them ratting on the jobs of 50,000 fellow workers. Last week the Leader of the Opposition gave five major interviews without mentioning the threat to 50,000 Australian workers’ jobs by a union which has given $3 million to the ALP in the last few years and which has the largest single bloc vote inside the Victorian ALP. Three million dollars may not always buy Labor’s support, but it always buys their silence. In fact, the only frontbencher who had the guts and decency—

Mr Swan—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order, which is relevance. Are you going to bring this minister back to the point that he was asked about, which was the dispute at BHP? He is clearly out of order. Please bring him into order.

The SPEAKER—I noted the question, as I always do. The minister was asked about the car industry and about alternative policies. I invite him to respond to those policies.

Mr ABBOTT—The workers in the car industry want to know when the Leader of the Opposition will drop his obsession with the 50-50 rule and change the 100 per cent rule, which says that every single member of the Labor Party has got to be a member of a trade union.

International Criminal Court

Mr RUDD (2.53 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. I refer to the minister’s answer to my last question, when he informed the House that the government’s policy was well known. Given the multiple occasions on which the foreign minister has publicly committed the government of Australia to ratifying the Rome statute establishing the International Criminal Court, will the minister rule out unequivocally the government introducing domestic legislation to ratify the statute that in any way qualifies or seeks to qualify the specific undertakings contained within the text of that statute as agreed by Australia and the international community in Rome in 1988?
Mr DOWNER—First let me say that, when this government came to office, it said it would not do what the Labor Party had done. We said that we would not go off and sign treaties and conventions without consultation, including with the parliament. That is a process that we put into place—

Mr Wilkie—You did that and you won’t act on it!

The SPEAKER—Member for Swan!

Mr DOWNER—and I was one of the two ministers who put that process into place. As far as the International Criminal Court is concerned, it is well known that not only have I been a longstanding supporter of it but I was one of the ministers who participated at the original Rome conference and I worked very hard on putting the statute together. The government will make a decision on how to take this issue forward, as a result of consultation. That is precisely the process we put in place back in 1996. It is an appropriate process and it stands in stark contrast to the arrogant disregard for the parliament and the public shown by the Labor Party in government when it came to treaties and conventions. It is as simple as that.

Mr Rudd—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order, on relevance. The question to the foreign minister was about the nature of the domestic—

The SPEAKER—The member for Griffith will resume his seat!

Mr DOWNER—Many countries—I think 25, 26 countries—in the process of ratifying this treaty have made—

Honourable member interjecting—

Mr DOWNER—Sixty-seven have ratified and about 25 or 26 of those countries have made statements at the time of ratification. It is a procedure that has been used by a number of countries. Whether this country would do such as thing or not is all part and parcel of the process of discussion and consultation—

Mr Wilkie interjecting—

Mr DOWNER—something that is anathema to the trade union party.

Mr Wilkie—You should resign if—
Mr Latham—How will they fare under free trade with the US?

The SPEAKER—The member for Werriwa!

Mr VAILE—What an outrageous notion for an industry that has achieved $5 billion worth of exports—to be held to ransom by the bloody-mindedness of the union movement in Australia, when what it is all about is an internal brawl for power, ultimately not just to control the Victorian union movement but to control the Australian Labor Party. That is what this fight is all about. We read headlines, like the minister mentioned a while ago, saying that in Detroit they are calling Australia ‘Strike Country’. The president of Ford Australia said:

... we don’t need to buy this steel in Australia any more. And if we move to buy it overseas it will never, ever, come back.

What a sad situation. I just want to draw to the House’s attention that, a couple of months ago, when the US announced that they were going to put tariffs on imported steel, including Australian steel, I had Sharan Burrow, Doug Cameron and Bill Shorten banging on my door saying, ‘Government, we want to participate in this steel summit. Government, we demand you do something about these steel workers’ jobs.’

We had a steel summit. We included, in good spirit and good nature, representatives from all those levels of the union movement. We had the member for Cunningham and the member for Rankin try to crash that meeting. They put on this amazing stunt with the television cameras outside on the steel dispute, but we have not yet seen any stunt down at the BHP factory with the unions that have been blockading that factory for the last month. There has been no stunt by the member for Cunningham and no stunt by the member for Rankin to assist the workers in that industry or the Australian auto workers.

The union movement came and demanded that this government do something, and we did. We freed up 85 per cent of our exports. We freed up 85 per cent because we believed we were representing the workers in these industries. At least there is someone representing the interests of Australian workers in this place, and it is not the Australian Labor Party. So, just like the union demanded of our government that we do something for Australian steelworkers, we are demanding that the union movement exercise some responsibility on behalf of Australia’s auto workers.

National Action Plan on Salinity and Water Quality: Property Rights

Mr WINDSOR (3.01 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, during the last election campaign you clearly supported the Deputy Prime Minister in his push for clearly defined property rights for the water reform agenda. You and your government clearly stated that the property rights definition of the New South Wales government was not acceptable to the Commonwealth. Why have you now signed the National Action Plan on Salinity and Water Quality bilateral agreement with the New South Wales government which contains the very same definition that only a matter of months ago was unacceptable and while the New South Wales government is considering amendments to legislation that will shift all decision making power from the regional level—

The SPEAKER—The member for New England will come to his question.

Mr WINDSOR—as required under the national action plan, to the New South Wales Minister for Land and Water Conservation?

Mr HOWARD—I can confirm that I supported the approach taken by the Deputy Prime Minister, and confirm I still do. I can also confirm that we have signed the national action plan on salinity. I take the opportunity of telling this parliament that this is the first serious attempt at a national level, since salinity became a major problem in Australia, to get a coordinated approach, and one by one, I am pleased to say, the states have come to realise the importance of joint action. I can assure the honourable member that there is nothing inconsistent between the signing of that agreement and pursuing the issues that I know are dear to the heart of the Deputy Prime Minister.

I might, for the benefit of the member for New England, inform the parliament that on
Saturday, after my return from the United States, I rang the Deputy Prime Minister and thanked him for acting as Prime Minister during my absence—and complimented him on the very good job he had done, might I say. We had a lengthy conversation about a number of issues and one of the issues he specifically raised with me was the very thing raised by the member for New England—that was the question of property rights for water. It is a difficult and important issue, and I can tell the House that there is no more persistent advocate on this issue than my friend and colleague the Deputy Prime Minister. What I have said on this matter I stand by, and we intend to deliver justice for the farmers of Australia on the subject.

Workplace Relations: Unfair Dismissals

Mr BARRESI (3.03 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Small Business and Tourism. Can the minister inform the House of any new developments in relation to the reform of unfair dismissal laws for Australia’s 1.2 million small businesses? Minister, are there any alternative views, and what is influencing these views?

Mr HOCKEY—I thank the member for Deakin for his interest in this matter. He, of course, has a rich history of experience in employment issues. It is a very important issue for the small businesses in his electorate.

The Labor Party has consistently blocked attempts by this government to reform unfair dismissal laws to help Australia’s 1.2 million small businesses. If the unfair dismissal laws are removed from their application to Australia’s small businesses, it is expected to create up to 50,000 new jobs. In fact, the Labor Party has opposed our legislative changes on five occasions now since 1997. Unfortunately, I have to inform the member for Deakin and the House that there seems to have changed in the Labor Party’s approach. It is continuing to oppose us on unfair dismissal law changes that are to the benefit of small business. If we needed any evidence of that, we need only look at Western Australia, where the Labor Party in government is in fact extending the application of unfair dismissal laws, making them more punitive for Australia’s small businesses.

The Leader of the Opposition is now making promises that he cannot deliver. In December last year he pledged on Sky News that he wanted to ‘build bridges with the business community’—a broken promise—yet so far on unfair dismissal he has let the business community down. I am asked by the member for Deakin for some of the reasons for the alternative view. I tend at this point to feel a little sorry for the Leader of the Opposition.

Government members—No!

Mr HOCKEY—I do feel a little sorry for the Leader of the Opposition. He has been having a hard time of it lately. He was belted up underneath the stage of the Sydney Town Hall when he tried to take a tough stand on a few issues. He was booed in Brisbane, so that now—

The SPEAKER—Minister!

Mr HOCKEY—It is relevant, Mr Speaker, because—

The SPEAKER—Minister, I will determine what is relevant and what is not relevant, and I am asking you to come back to the question.

Mr HOCKEY—Mr Speaker, I was asked why the Labor Party is opposing the government’s reform of unfair dismissal laws.

Mr McMullan—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order: the minister cannot read himself into relevance by having a question asked about things that are totally outside his responsibility. He cannot go on like that without clearly defying your ruling.

The SPEAKER—the member for Fraser will resume his seat. The member for Fraser is well aware that I had asked the minister to return to the question, and I am listening to his answer.

Mr HOCKEY—When it comes to the Labor Party formulating their policy on unfair dismissal laws and the bill that will go before the Senate in the next few weeks, we ask—and Australia’s 1.2 million small businesses are asking—‘Why won’t the Labor Party support the government on the reform of unfair dismissal laws?’ You ask whether that is linked to the fact that the union movement controls the Labor Party and the
fact that the Leader of the Opposition is trying to reform the Labor Party but was beaten up under the stage at the Town Hall in Sydney.

Mr HOCKEY—In his own state of Victoria there is a push by the left of the Labor Party to continue to take control of the party against the wishes of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Swan—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The minister is defying your ruling; he is not coming back to order.

Mr HOCKEY—Mr Speaker, there is an easy way for the Labor Party and the Leader of the Opposition to win the support of Australia's small businesses and that is to support the government's changes to the unfair dismissal laws. It is a simple proposal. Australia's small businesses want to be able to employ more people, but they are afraid of the implications of the unfair dismissal laws. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to be cheered at meetings instead of booed, he would be wise to take the advice of the government and support the government's changes to the unfair dismissal laws.

BHP Pty Ltd: Industrial Action

Mr McCLELLAND (3.09 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations. Is the minister aware of comments by Bob Herbert of the Australian Industry Group, who said in relation to resolution of the BHP Westport dispute:

It's always very easy to play the game from the grandstands. I don't think that there can be any criticism levelled at BHP in this dispute. Tony Abbott's obviously talking to his political interests which run differently to those of BHP.

Minister, are you the only person in Australia that wants to prolong the dispute? Minister, isn't it your job to promote the resolution of disputes, not to inflame them?

Mr ABBOTT—Let me respond to the shadow minister by saying that I at no stage criticised BHP. What I did was to criticise the AMWU for putting the jobs of 50,000 Australian workers at risk. What that question shows is that members opposite do not represent the workers of Australia; they represent no-one but the union bosses. The once proud Australian Labor Party is exposed, in its support for this particular strike, as nothing but the 'Australian trade union party'.

Science: Research

Mr NAIRN (3.10 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Science. Is the minister aware of any programs designed to assist Australian researchers working at the cutting edge of science? Is the minister aware of any recent breakthroughs by Australian based researchers?

Mr McGAURAN—I thank the member for Eden-Monaro for his continuing involvement and support for science and innovation, exemplified by his chairmanship of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Science and Innovation. As the honourable member well knows, this government has revolutionised funding and support for science and innovation, principally through the innovation statement of early last year—Backing Australia's Ability—which injected an additional $3 billion into science and innovation. This was followed up with $233 million extra in the last budget in May, taking the government's support for science and innovation to an all-time high of over $5 billion—all of it targeted and structured to develop a skills base, to create a research environment with the best of facilities and to commercialise our research.

All of this is in contrast to noodle nation, which was a grab-fest of ideas and loose concepts, none of which were practical, let alone able to be implemented. The government has worked with the science and research community to make sure that the funding hits those issues which are impediments to world-class research and the like. In addition, over the next six months we have undertaken to commence a process for determining national research priorities with the support and encouragement of the research community so that we can again ex-
tract better and long lasting benefit from the
taxpayer’s investment in science and inno-
vation—as researchers themselves would have us do.

I was privileged this morning to be in-
volved in the announcement of a technologi-
cal breakthrough by Australian based re-
searchers which takes us into a breathtaking
new era of science—teleportation. For the
uninitiated, which included me before today,
teleportation is the disembodiment of an ob-
ject in one location and the reconstruction of
it in another location in a split second. This
has phenomenal importance in the world of
science—

honourable member—It is an opposition
fantasy.

Mr McGauran—It is an opposition
fantasy that they can somehow be trans-
ported onto the government benches in a
split second. You have three years to work
out a case to convince the Australian public
that you are worthy of holding office. Eight
months have already gone and there is no
possibility of teleportation on the part of the
opposition. This breakthrough by a team at
the Australian National University, led by Dr
Lam, has been assisted by funding from the
Australian Research Council, which we are
doubling over the next five years by more
than $730 million. It is one of the cutting
gate areas of research and quantum me-
chanics that will revolutionise quantum
computing, communications and the like. On
behalf of the House I congratulate Dr Lam
and his team on their amazing work, which
establishes Australia as a world leader in this
frontier science and enhances Australia’s
reputation as a centre of world leading re-
search.

Workplace Relations: Trade Unions

Mr McClelland (3.14 p.m.)—My
question is addressed to the Minister for
Workplace Relations. Do you recall ad-
dressing the HR Nicholls Society on 23
March this year, where you called upon em-
ployers to join you as generals in a war
against trade unions. Specifically you said:
My hope is that chief executives will make [in-
dustrial relations] their principal interest rather
than leaving it in the hands of so-called industrial
specialists. But War is too important to be left to the
Colonels - the Generals need to be involved as
well.

Minister, why is your agenda to promote
conflict rather than cooperative and produc-
tive workplace relations?

Mr Abbott—On Sunday, the member
for Barton talked about left wing union lead-
ers as ‘lunatics’ and today he is asking their
questions. He is asking the lunatics’ ques-
tions today. The member for Barton might be
a third generation Labor lord, but they will
never forgive him on the other side for not
having been a trade union official. He is al-
most alone on the front bench in not having
been a trade union official, and these sorts of
questions are designed to make up for that
fundamental problem. This government is
fundamentally committed to the rule of law.
We are fundamentally committed to ensuring
that the law of the land is obeyed.

Mr Crean interjecting—

The Speaker—Order! The Leader of
the Opposition! The minister has the call.

Mr Abbott—we believe that the law
of the land should apply behind the factory
gates just as much as it applies on the street
outside. This government will not rest until
the law of the land is applied to workplace
relations, as it should in all other areas.

Dr Emerson interjecting—

The Speaker—Order! I warn the
member for Rankin!

Environment: World Summit on
Sustainable Development

Mr Tollner (3.17 p.m.)—My question
is addressed to the Minister for the Environ-
ment and Heritage. Can the minister advise
the House of Australia’s progress in better
managing our ocean resources? Can he ad-
vise of any progress at the recent preparatory
conference for the World Summit on Sus-
tainable Development, and is he aware of
any alternative approaches?

Dr Kemp—I thank the honourable
member for Solomon for his question. The
World Summit on Sustainable Development
will be held in Johannesburg in August and
September later this year. Australia has many
interests of course in the outcomes of this
world summit. We have been a principal driver in putting on the international agenda a strong focus on oceans and oceans management because the management of our oceans and our fisheries is a very important issue for our region. It is fundamental to food security, it is fundamental to economic development and it is fundamental to relieving poverty. At the recent meeting in Indonesia, held in preparation for the world summit, Australia achieved a good balance between development and conservation and a strong focus in the draft plan of action on oceans management which will be presented to leaders in Johannesburg.

The Pacific island states strongly welcomed Australia’s commitment to improved oceans management, which we are pioneering at home through the Australian oceans policy and the National Oceans Office. We were particularly pleased by the fact that the draft plan of action put firmly on the agenda the sustainability of the world’s fisheries and the need to eliminate subsidies, which encourage illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. The draft action plan has also taken up the need to take action to better conserve and manage biodiversity on the high seas. The deep oceans contain significant and unique ecosystems and species among the sea mounts, ridges and sea floor vents. They are truly this planet’s last frontier, and it is critical that these are not subject to unregulated exploitation before we know how best to conserve and manage these remarkable ecosystems on a sustainable basis. Australia is also working with our APEC colleagues to improve coral reef management, important breeding grounds for fisheries, to exchange information and develop capacity to better manage coral reefs in the Pacific.

There is a dramatic contrast, once again, between the government and the opposition in the development of oceans policy, because it is this government, the Howard government, which has put down Australia’s first oceans policy; it is this government which has announced that it is going to be working with the states to put into place a national coastal policy. While we are developing policies in a constructive way we see the total lack of policy direction on the part of the opposition. We see the Leader of the Opposition travelling from Labor conference to Labor conference being howled down by the Luddites in that party and unable to make any progress whatever on policy. It is now some 2,297 days since Labor lost the election in 1996. That is 2,297 days without policy, and there is no prospect whatever that we will see any constructive policy from the Labor Party in this crucial area of oceans management.

Defence: Equipment

Mr DANBY (3.20 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence. Can the minister confirm that in March 1997 the Howard government approved the purchase of the Seasprite helicopter in the full knowledge that the ship it was designed for would not be bought? Did the then Minister for Defence, Ian McLachlan, admit that the government had made a mistake when it went ahead with the $1 billion project? Further, hasn’t Mr McLachlan’s then adviser, Aldo Borgu, admitted that the government should ‘never have bought the Sea Sprites’, and haven’t senior Defence officials said that the government should have scrapped the $1 billion project when the reason for purchasing the helicopters no longer existed? Minister, why then did the Howard government sign the contract for this $1 billion project in 1997?

Mrs VALE—I thank the honourable member for his question. I have addressed this issue before but I will reiterate one or two things, especially the key points. The fact remains that the previous Labor government is closely identified with the Sea Sprite project. As I have stated earlier, the decision to procure—

Mr Bevis interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Brisbane! The minister has the right to be heard and to be heard in silence. The standing orders so provide.

Mrs VALE—Mr Speaker, I do not think it hurts to know a little of the history of this subject. The decision to procure the helicopters was announced by Labor in its 1995 budget, when Senator Ray was the Minister
for Defence. The request for tender documentation was issued in late 1995.

Mr Swan—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It is a point of relevance. This is about a $1 billion project signed in June 1997. It has nothing to do with the Labor Party—nothing at all.

The SPEAKER—The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. That was a frivolous point of order. The minister is addressing the history of the Seasprite project, and I invite her to continue.

Mrs Vale—Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am addressing the history of this particular process. The request for tender documentation was issued in late 1995, and binding tenders closed in March 1996. The lack of a liquidated damages clause reflects the original contract issued with the request for tender in 1995 by the Labor government. This proposal was permitted by and evaluated in accordance with the request for tender documentation issued by Labor. Addressing the question of the member, I am advised that the Commonwealth entered a contract with Kaman Aerospace International Corporation on 26 June 1997 for the supply of 11 Super Seasprite helicopters to operate from the Anzac class ships.

Mr Bevis interjecting

The SPEAKER—Order! I warn the member for Brisbane!

Mrs Vale—The Super Seasprite was selected principally because it could meet all the capability needs of the Anzac ship helicopter role. As an intermediate sized helicopter, the Super Seasprite was assessed as being cheaper to operate than the larger, medium sized Seahawk helicopter. The 11 helicopters were not to be supplied for operation from the then proposed offshore patrol combatant, which was ultimately not proceeded with by Australia in 1998. The benefits of possessing two different types of helicopters, particularly as the Super Seasprite helicopters would have improved technology, would outweigh the benefits of operating a single medium sized helicopter type, the Seahawk. I hope the member for Melbourne Ports is paying attention, because this is important.

The SPEAKER—The minister will come to her answer.

Mrs Vale—Mr Speaker, he did ask the question and I did assume he was interested in the response.

The SPEAKER—The minister will come to her answer.

Mrs Vale—in this regard, the Super Seasprite capability is predominantly anti-ship, which is a significantly different capability from the submarine role of the Seahawk helicopter.

Mr Danby—Mr Speaker, I seek leave to table comments that I referred to in my question.

Leave not granted.

BHP Pty Ltd: Industrial Action

Mr Pearce (3.26 p.m.)—My question is directed to the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources. Would the minister inform the House of the impact of industrial action at BHP Steel’s Westernport site on the prospects for continued growth of the automotive and other vital Australian industries? What is the government’s response to this? Is the minister aware of any alternative policies?

Mr Ian Macfarlane—I thank the member for Aston for his question. I know from my visits to his electorate that he has a keen interest in the industry, in job creation and in retaining the jobs of Australian workers in the industries that are important to the car industry. It is not just the car industry that is being affected by the reckless actions of the union, on which there is absolute silence from those who sit opposite. Whitegoods industries in Australia, such as Electrolux and the roofing companies, have also been harmed by this strike. Union representatives have threatened further strikes, which places in jeopardy the future of the car industry and, as the Minister for Trade said, Australia’s reputation overseas and the future of Australian jobs.

Those who sit silently opposite while the unions wreak havoc amongst Australian industries should ask the Premier of South Australia how embarrassing it was for him last week to go to the United States to try to
encourage Holden to run a third shift on their plant in Adelaide when there is a threat of that plant’s first and second shifts being shut down because of union action. What is industry as a whole saying about this? I note with interest that the member for Barton quoted the Australian Industry Group. In its submission on a future car industry plan, the Australian Industry Group said that there must be industrial relations reform in the car industry if it is to have a future. While those opposite sit silently, this government continues to take action to ensure that Australian workers, including those in the car industry, have jobs.

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

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

International Criminal Court

Mr Rudd (Griffith) (3.29 p.m.)—I seek leave to move a motion forthwith concerning the ratification of the statute of the International Criminal Court. I move that this House calls on the government to ratify the statute of the International Criminal Court forthwith and that this House resolves—

The SPEAKER—The member for Griffith, I interrupt you because I understood your first statement was that you were seeking leave. I was looking for an indication and now have an indication that leave was denied.

Leave not granted.

Mr Rudd—Therefore, I wish to move suspension of standing orders.

Mr Beazley—Mr Speaker—

The SPEAKER—The member for Brand will be aware that, although he had risen, I was not sure whether he was expecting me to give priority to the member for Griffith.

Mr Beazley—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Is it not the case under the standing orders that, in the normal course of events, a person who wishes to seek leave to move a particular motion should stand, seek leave and then read the terms of the motion before an inquiry is made of the other side of the House as to whether or not leave will be granted? In which case, would it not be normal under the standing orders for the honourable member on his feet to have a chance to read his motion before the question of whether or not he has leave is properly ascertained?

The SPEAKER—The member for Brand makes a valid point of order. The fact that it is private members’ business Monday is not the reason for the standing orders to be suspended, but it was the reason that I was anxious to indicate whether or not leave had been granted.

Mr Rudd—I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent the Member for Griffith from moving a motion relating to the ratification of the statute of the International Criminal Court. The ratification of the International Criminal Court is of fundamental importance to the parliament.

The SPEAKER—The member for Griffith will resume his seat.

Mr Rudd—The backsliding by this minister—

The SPEAKER—The member for Griffith will resume his seat or I will deal with him!

Mr Abbott (Warringah—Leader of the House) (3.31 p.m.)—He finally worked it out! I move:

That the member be not further heard.

Question put.

The House divided. [3.35 p.m.]

Ayes…………… 79
Noes…………… 63
Majority……… 16

AYES

Abbott, A.J. Anderson, J.D.
Andrews, K.J. Anthony, L.J.
Bailey, F.E. Baird, B.G.
Baldwin, R.C. Barresi, P.A.
Bartlett, K.J. Billson, B.F.
Bishop, B.K. Bishop, J.I.
Brough, M.T. Cadman, A.G.
Causley, I.R. Charles, R.E.
Ciobo, S.M. Cobb, J.K.
Costello, P.H. Downer, A.J.G.
Draper, P. Dutton, P.C.
Mr McCLELLAND (Barton) (3.43 p.m.)—I second the motion. This government is incapable of showing leadership—

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (3.43 p.m.)—I move:

That the member be not further heard.

Question put.

The House divided. [3.44 p.m.]

(AThe Speaker—Mr Neil Andrew)

AYES...

Abbott, A.J.   Anderson, J.D.
Andrews, K.J.   Anthony, L.J.
Bailey, F.E.   Baird, B.G.
Baldwin, R.C.   Barresi, P.A.
Bartlett, K.J.   Billson, B.F.
Bishop, B.K.   Bishop, J.I.
Brough, M.T.   Cadman, A.G.
Causley, I.R.   Charles, R.E.
Ciobo, S.M.   Cobb, J.K.
Costello, P.H.   Downer, A.J.G.
Draper, P.   Dutton, P.C.
Elson, K.S.   Etnsch, W.G.
Farmer, P.F.   Forrest, J.A. *
Gambaro, T.   Geogiu, P.
Georgiou, P.   Gash, J.
Gillard, J.E.   Georgiou, P.
Griffin, A.P.   Gillard, J.E.
Han, G.J.   Hoare, J.L.
Irwin, J.   Jackson, S.M.
Jenkins, H.A.   King, C.F.
Latham, M.W.   Lawrence, C.M.
Livermore, K.F.   Macklin, J.L.
Martin, S.P.   McClelland, R.B.
McFarlane, J.S.   McLeay, L.B.
McMullan, E.F.   Melham, D.
Mossfield, F.W.   Murphy, J.P.
O’Byrne, M.A.   O’Connor, G.H.
O’Connor, B.P.   O’Connor, G.H.
Price, L.R.S.   Quick, H.V. *
Ripoll, B.F.   Roxon, M.L.

79

Noes...

63

Majority..... 16

AYES

Abbott, A.J.   Anderson, J.D.
Andrews, K.J.   Anthony, L.J.
Bailey, F.E.   Baird, B.G.
Baldwin, R.C.   Barresi, P.A.
Bartlett, K.J.   Billson, B.F.
Bishop, B.K.   Bishop, J.I.
Brough, M.T.   Cadman, A.G.
Causley, I.R.   Charles, R.E.
Ciobo, S.M.   Cobb, J.K.
Costello, P.H.   Downer, A.J.G.
Draper, P.   Dutton, P.C.
Elson, K.S.   Etnsch, W.G.
Farmer, P.F.   Forrest, J.A. *
Gambaro, T.   Geogiu, P.
Gash, J.   Georgiou, P.
Haase, B.W.   Hardgrave, G.D.
Hartsuyker, L.   Hawker, D.P.M.
Hockey, J.B.   Howard, J.W.
Hull, K.E.   Hunt, G.A.
Johnson, M.A.   Jull, D.F.
Kelly, D.M.   Kemp, D.A.
King, P.E.   Ley, S.P.
Lindsay, P.J.   Lloyd, J.E.
Macfarlane, I.E.   May, M.A.
McArthur, S. *   McGauran, P.J.
Moylan, J. E.   Nairn, G. R.
Nelson, B.J.   Neville, P.C.
Panopoulos, S.   Pearce, C.J.
Prosser, G.D.   Pyne, C.
Rudd, K.M.   Sciacca, C.A.
Sercombe, R.C.G.   Sidebottom, P.S.
Smith, S.F.   Snowden, W.E.
Swan, W.M.   Tanner, L.
Thomson, K.J.   Vamvakious, M.
Wilkie, K.   Windsor, A.H.C.
Zahra, C.J.

* denotes teller

Question agreed to.
Monday, 17 June 2002

Randall, D.J.
Schultz, A.
Secker, P.D.
Smith, A.D.H.
Southcott, A.J.
Thompson, C.P.
Tollner, D.W.
Tuckey, C.W.
Vale, D.S.
Washer, M.J.
Worth, P.M.

Ruddock, P.M.
Scott, B.C.
Slipper, P.N.
Somlyay, A.M.
Stone, S.N.
Ticehurst, K.V.
Truss, W.E.
Vaile, M.A.J.
Wakelin, B.H.
Williams, D.R.

Majority………. 16

AYES

Adams, D.G.H.
Andren, P.J.
Bevis, A.R.
Byrne, A.M.
Cox, D.A.
Croci, J.A.
Edwards, G.J.
Emerson, C.A.
Ferguson, L.D.T.
Fitzgibbon, J.A.
Gibbons, S.W.
Grierson, S.J.
Hall, J.G.
Jenkins, H.A.
Latham, M.W.
Livermore, K.F.
McFarlane, J.S.
McMullan, R.F.
Mossfield, F.W.
O’Byrne, M.A.
O’Connor, B.P.
Price, L.R.S.
Ripoll, B.F.
Rudd, K.M.
Sercombe, R.C.G.
Smith, S.J.
Swan, W.M.
Thomson, K.J.
Wilkie, K.
Zahra, C.J.

NOES

Adams, D.G.H.
Andren, P.J.
Bevis, A.R.
Byrne, A.M.
Cox, D.A.
Croci, J.A.
Edwards, G.J.
Emerson, C.A.
Ferguson, L.D.T.
Fitzgibbon, J.A.
Gibbons, S.W.
Grierson, S.J.
Hall, J.G.
Jenkins, H.A.
Latham, M.W.
Livermore, K.F.
McFarlane, J.S.
McMullan, R.F.
Mossfield, F.W.
O’Byrne, M.A.
O’Connor, B.P.
Price, L.R.S.
Ripoll, B.F.
Rudd, K.M.
Sercombe, R.C.G.
Smith, S.J.
Swan, W.M.
Thomson, K.J.
Wilkie, K.
Zahra, C.J.

* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

Original question put:

That the motion (Mr Rudd’s) be agreed to.

The House divided. [3.46 p.m.]

(The Speaker—Mr Neil Andrew)

Ayes…………… 63

Noes…………… 79
PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr CREAN (Hotham—Leader of the Opposition) (3.54 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr CREAN—Yes, by the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr CREAN—In an answer to a question, the minister indicated that, whilst he was not at the briefing that I had on Friday, he understood that the briefing would have told me that the excision measure was necessary to deter the people smugglers landing in Australia. From the briefing that took place, that is not correct. I asked of the briefing specifically this question: ‘Will excising the islands off Australia prevent or deter boat arrivals on the mainland?’ The answer was, ‘No.’ I further asked how the specific measure would prevent further boat departures from Indonesia, and they said, ‘It wouldn’t.’

Ms HOARE (Charlton) (3.55 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

The SPEAKER—The honourable member claim to have been misrepresented?

Ms HOARE—Yes, I do.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Ms HOARE—I was misrepresented by the Minister for Transport and Regional Services in the *Newcastle Herald* on Saturday under the title ‘If you don’t ask, you don’t receive’, about Commonwealth funding coming to the Hunter. In the last 12 months, I have actively pursued grants under the Regional Assistance Program, the Regional Solutions Program, the IYV Small Equipment Grants Program—

The SPEAKER—I interrupt the member for Charlton only because she may not be aware of it, but she has not in fact indicated to the House where she was misrepresented. She has referred to a newspaper, and maybe even an article, but nothing more specific.

Ms HOARE—I was misrepresented by the minister saying that I have not asked for funding, and if I do not ask, I will not receive. I am just pointing out that I have asked for funding under the Regional Assistance Program, the Regional Solutions Program, the IYV Small Equipment Grants Program, the Regional Tourism Program and the Natural Heritage Trust. Some of these projects have been granted funds—

Ms HOARE—I was misrepresented by the minister saying that I have not asked for funding, and if I do not ask, I will not receive. I am just pointing out that I have asked for funding under the Regional Assistance Program, the Regional Solutions Program, the IYV Small Equipment Grants Program, the Regional Tourism Program and the Natural Heritage Trust. Some of these projects have been granted funds—

The SPEAKER—The member for Charlton has indicated where she was misrepresented and must resume her seat.

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

Questions on Notice

Mr DANBY (3.56 p.m.)—Under standing order 150, would you please write to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs and ask him if my question 139 on the Notice Paper of 14 February 2002 will be answered?

The SPEAKER—I will follow it up as the standing orders provide.

PETITIONS

The Clerk—Petitions have been lodged for presentation as follows and copies will be referred to the appropriate ministers:
Asylum Seekers: Work
To the Honourable the Speaker and the Members of the House of Representatives in Parliament assembled:

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

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

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

We, therefore, the individual, undersigned Attendees and Members of the Highway Christian Fellowship, Belgrave Heights, Victoria 3160, petition the House of Representatives in support of the above mentioned Motion.

And we, as in duty bound will ever pray.
by Ms Burke (from 11 citizens).

Lake Eildon: Water Levels
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives in Parliament assembled:

The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House the problem of sustained diminished water levels at Lake Eildon in Victoria. Residents of Lake Eildon and the surrounding local area are dependant on the lake for many reasons. For several years now these residents have had their lives and income adversely affected by consistently low water levels controlled by Goulburn Murray Water. Whilst it is understood that prevailing weather conditions do have an impact on the water level at the lake, we believe that in these times greater consideration needs to be given to the lake’s water level for tourism uses as opposed to the needs of the irrigation systems regularly in receipt of water from Lake Eildon.

Your petitioners therefore request that legislation be put in place to ensure that Goulburn Murray Water does not allow the water level of Lake Eildon to drop below 40 per cent of maximum capacity excepting in times of severe drought.

by Mr Charles (from 4,336 citizens).

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

The petition of certain citizens of Queensland draws to the attention of the House the decision of Australia Post to close the Strathpine Post Office at 481 Gympie Road, Strathpine, Queensland.

The decision to close will severely inconvenience the local residents and businesses in terms of the service to the community the Post Office provides. The elderly, disabled, and local businesses will be particularly affected. Post Offices are also taking on many of the banking services and this may be particularly important as many of the banking branches in the region are closing.

Your petitioners therefore request the House to:

Reverse the Australia Post decision and ensure that the Strathpine Post Office remains open for at least the next ten years.

by Mr Dutton (from 1,835 citizens).
Australian War Graves: France

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

This petition of certain residents of the State of Queensland draws to the attention of the House the proposal of the Government of France to build an international airport at Chaulnes-Vermandovillers in the Somme. The French Government has earmarked a 10,000 hectare block of land for consideration, of which 300 hectares will become the final airport site. The larger development zone takes in eight Commonwealth war cemeteries, including three that contain the graves of 61 Australians killed in action during both World Wars.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the House calls upon the French government:

• to immediately abandon any plans which may disturb the war graves of Australian service personnel who died defending France during WWI and WWII;
• to guarantee that no Australian war grave—marked or unmarked—will ever be disturbed or exhumed; and
• to consult fully and openly with the Australian Government and the Australian community on any future proposal(s) which may impact upon Commonwealth war cemeteries in France.

by Mr Entsch (from 666 citizens).

Taxation: Goods and Services

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 unfairness and inadequacy of the GST compensation for elderly Australians, in particular:

• the unfair rules of the Aged Persons Savings Bonus scheme which has failed to deliver on the Government’s election promise of $1000 for each aged person over 60;
• the misleading claim of a 4 per cent pension increase when in fact it is only a 2 per cent increase after taking into account Mr Howard’s 2 per cent clawback;
• the complete inadequacy of both the bonuses and pension increase to compensate for the double taxation of Australia’s retirees.

Your petitioners condemn the Government’s contempt for older Australians and request the Parliament explore ways in which the GST can be made fairer and simpler and compensation improved to protect the living standards of elderly Australians.

by Ms Macklin (from 83 citizens).

Telstra: Privatisation

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

The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws the attention of the House to our concern that:

(1) The Howard-Anderson Government plans to fully privatise the Australian people’s 50.1 per cent share of Telstra as stated in the Government’s own 2001 Budget papers;
(2) A fully privatised Telstra will focus on profits not people; and
(3) Services will suffer under a fully privatised Telstra, particularly in outer metropolitan, rural and regional Australia.

Your petitioners therefore ask the House to oppose the Howard-Anderson Government’s plans to fully privatise Telstra.

by Ms Macklin (from 35 citizens).

Health

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

We the undersigned call on the Federal Government to extend its plan to encourage doctors to outer metropolitan areas including the Central Coast.

There is a chronic shortage of doctors in the area and people are waiting between seven and 14 days to get an appointment with their doctor.

Doctors are overworked and people’s lives are being put at risk by the chronic shortage of doctors in the area.

The average doctor patient ratio throughout Australia is 1 doctor to 1000 people. In the northern part of Wyong Shire the ratio is 1 doctor to 2500 people.

Your petitioners therefore respectfully request that the House encourage doctors to outer metropolitan areas including the Central Coast.

by Ms Hall (from 23 citizens).

Banks: Social Charter

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 since 1996, over 1,500 bank branches have closed throughout Australia, reducing communities' access to financial services;
- that since 1996, the fee for a transaction conducted in a banking branch has increased by as much as 400 per cent and that since 1997 banks' fee income from households has increased by 53 per cent;
- in the last year the number of complaints made against banks increased by 22 per cent.

Your petitioners believe that by closing bank branches and continuing to increase bank fees, banks are not meeting their social obligations to the community.

We therefore pray that the House will immediately implement a 'social charter' to ensure that banks properly recognise the needs of the community.

by Ms Macklin (from 157 citizens).

Health: Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

A petition of Australian pensioners and superannuants residing in the Manning region who bring to the attention of the House that hardship and deprivation will be created to pensioners and superannuants by the proposed increase to pharmaceutical prescription charges.

We, the undersigned petition the House of Representatives to reconsider the intended increase of the cost of prescriptions to pensioners and superannuants by the proposed increase to pharmaceutical prescription charges.

We, the undersigned petition the House of Representatives to reconsider the intended increase of the cost of prescriptions to pensioners as this severe impost will cause extreme hardship to most of Australia’s senior citizens who are already experiencing difficulty due to the large monetary gaps in health care.

by Mr Vail (from 191 citizens).

Golden Jubilee Medal

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

The petition of certain citizens of Australia as signed hereunder draws to the attention of the House that the fiftyfifth Anniversary, or Golden Jubilee, of the reign of Her Majesty The Queen will be celebrated in 2002.

The Government of the United Kingdom will be minting a special Jubilee Medal but this Medal will only be made available for presentation to Citizens of the United Kingdom. It is understood that the UK Government expects Dominion Governments to mint their own medals if they wish.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the House request the Parliament to mint an Australian Golden Jubilee Medal for presentation to Australian Defence personnel and other appropriate persons.

by Mr Andren (from 26 citizens).

Immigration: Asylum Seekers

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

The petition of the undersigned draws the attention of the House to our concerns about Australia’s treatment of refugees and asylum seekers.

We are concerned about human rights violations in Australian detention centres, as identified by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), the US Department of State and the International Secretariat of Amnesty International. The HREOC report found that human rights are being violated due to the conditions of detention; restricted access to services; the practice and effects of long-term detention and restricted access to judicial review.

Your petitioners therefore request the House to:

Comply with international human rights agreements and cease the practice of detaining refugee children;

Offer an independent review of the decision to detain an asylum seeker, in accordance with international law;

Implement an alternative detention model that offers open detention and community release for those asylum claimants whose identity and circumstances have been established;

Ensure that the assessment of asylum seekers’ identity and circumstances is completed within 90 days of their detention.

by Mr Andren (from 17 citizens).

Food Irradiation

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:

Their opposition to food irradiation and the building of the nuclear irradiation facility proposed for Narangba, in Queensland, as well as the Electron beam irradiation facility proposed for North Queensland.
Your petitioners therefore request the House to:

- Prohibit the establishment of a nuclear irradiation facility or X-Ray or Electron beam irradiation facility at any location in Australia.
- Ban the import, export and sale of irradiated food in Australia.
- Call on the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Council (ANZFSC) and the Australia New Zealand Food Authority (ANZFA) to amend Standards A-17 and 1.5.3 – Irradiation of Foods in the Food Standards Code to ban food irradiation outright in Australia and New Zealand.

by **Mr Brough** (from 57 citizens).

**Health: MRI Machines**

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

This petition calls upon the Commonwealth Government to grant an MRI Medicare Licence to Western Australia’s only specialist children’s hospital, Princess Margaret.

An MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) machine is an essential diagnostic tool for a range of paediatric medical conditions.

Your petitioners therefore ask the House to ensure that the Commonwealth provide children in Western Australia with access to Medicare MRI scans at Princess Margaret Hospital.

by **Mr Edwards** (from 279 citizens).

**Medicare: Offices**

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

The petition of certain electors in the State of Queensland draws to the attention of the House that a Medicare Office is not located in the western suburbs of Logan City.

In the main, these signatories are from residents of the suburbs of Logan, the northern suburbs of Beaudesert Shire and the southern suburbs of Brisbane.

This area has been consistently recognised in consecutive censuses as being amongst the highest population growth areas in the country.

This area contains a large percentage of young families who have indicated that a Medicare Office in the area is important to them. In addition, the residents of this region have indicated that the office should be located in the Grand Plaza Shopping Centre which is a major regional centre and is the hub of retail, community and social interaction for the western suburbs of Logan City Council, together with the residents and signatories to the petition, believes it to be an ideal location for the establishment of this desperately required service.

Your petitioners therefore, request the House and, in particular, the Federal Minister for Health and Ageing, Senator the Honourable Kay Patterson, to carefully consider establishing a Medicare Office in the western suburbs of Logan, preferably in the shopping centre precinct known as Grand Plaza.

by **Dr Emerson** (from four citizens).

**Insurance: Public Liability**

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

This petition of certain citizens of Australia wishes to draw to the attention of the House the situation in which sporting bodies, businesses and community groups in general, find themselves in regard to the current state of the public liability insurance market. Increases of over 400 per cent have been encountered by many organisations.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the House can enact legislation to cap payouts on insurance claims in the near future, to ensure the viability of the many groups affected.

by **Mr Hawker** (from 90 citizens).

**Victoria Cross: John Simpson Kirkpatrick**

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

We the undersigned request that the Prime Minister make formal representations to the British Government seeking the awarding of the Victoria Cross to John Simpson Kirkpatrick of Simpson and the donkey fame:

- This award was denied as the result of an error in the original application.
- A second application, in 1967, was also denied as the British Government claimed a dangerous precedent would be set.
- In fact, it is believed that such a precedent already existed due to the awarding of the Victoria Cross in 1907 to two British officers who had died twenty-eight years previously.

Your petitioners request that the House of Representatives do everything in their power to ensure the appropriate recognition of John Simpson Kirkpatrick.
Monday, 17 June 2002

REPRESENTATIVES

by Ms Macklin (from 106 citizens).

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

We the undersigned would like to bring to the attention of the House their recognition of Australia’s rich and diverse historic, natural and indigenous heritage and the imperative to conserve and protect this heritage.

We further note that the Howard Government has introduced legislation into Parliament to dramatically cut back the powers and independence of the Australian Heritage Commission and to abolish the Register of the National Estate, which has been developed over the past 25 years and consists of some 13,000 places.

In its consideration of the Government’s proposed heritage legislation, we therefore call on Parliament to support legislation to:

• Maintain the independence and listing role of the Australian Heritage Commission.
• Maintain and develop the Register of National Estate.
• Increase heritage protection of heritage places of national importance.

Furthermore, we call on the House to continue to recognise the heritage values of St Johns Anglican Church, the Old Police Station, Christopher’s House, Serendip, Banyule Homestead, the old Courthouse, Pholiota, Lippincott House in Heidelberg, Ravenswood, Charterisville, and the Heidelberg Town Hall and Municipal Offices in Ivanhoe, Rosehill Homestead in Lower Plenty, Mont Park Psychiatric Hospital Precinct in Macleod and 32-34, 36-38 The Eyrie in Eaglemont, which have been recognised by the Australian Heritage Commission and is currently listed on the Register of National Estate.

by Ms Macklin (from 59 citizens).

Australian Broadcasting Corporation: Funding
To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.

The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws the attention of the House to:

(1) Our strong support for our independent national public broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Commission;
(2) The sustained political and financial pressure that the Howard Government has placed on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), including:
   (a) the 1996 and 1997 Budget cuts which reduced funding to the ABC by $66 million per year, and
   (b) its failure to fund the ABC’s transition to digital broadcasting.
(3) Our concern about recent decisions made by the ABC Board and senior management, including the Managing Director, Jonathan Shier, which we believe may undermine the independence and high standards of the ABC including:
   (a) The cut to funding for News and Current Affairs;
   (b) The reduction of the ABC’s in-house production capacity;
   (c) The closure of the ABC TV Science Unit;
   (d) The circumstances in which the decision was made not to renew the contract of Media Watch presenter Mr Paul Barry; and
   (e) Consideration of the Bales Report, which recommended the extension of the ABC’s commercial activities in ways that may be inconsistent with the ABC Act and the Charter.

Your petitioners therefore ask the House to:

(1) Protect the independence of the ABC;
(2) Ensure that the ABC receives adequate funding;
(3) Call upon the Government to rule out its support for the privatisation of any part of the ABC, particularly JJJ, ABC On-line and the ABC Shops; and
(4) Call upon the ABC Board and senior management to:
   (a) Fully consult with the people of Australia about the future of our ABC;
   (b) Address the crisis in confidence felt by both staff and the general community; and
   (c) Not approve any commercial activities inconsistent with the ABC Act and Charter.

by Ms Macklin (from 59 citizens).

Media: Cross Media Ownership Rules
To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House the threat to the public interest and Australia’s democracy by the Broadcasting Services Amendment (Media Ownership) Bill 2002. This bill will permit media
proprietors to own and control newspapers, television stations and radio stations in the one licence area.

We believe the Government should protect Australia’s current cross-media ownership laws and encourage diversity of media ownership, not change them to secure the economic imperatives of media proprietors.

Your petitioners therefore respectfully request that the House protect the public interest and Australia’s democracy by rejecting the Broadcasting Services Amendment (Media Ownership) Bill 2002 and oppose any bill that will permit media proprietors to own and control newspapers, television stations and radio stations in the one licence area.

by Mr Murphy (from 2,757 citizens).

Commonwealth-State Disability Agreement

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

The petition of certain electors of the Division of Blair and Oxley draws to the attention of the House that:

Preliminary Budget estimates recently released by the Federal Treasurer indicate that the Federal Government intends to cut the funding it provides to the States/Territories for disability support under a third Commonwealth State Disability Agreement (to be signed in June 2002).

The Commonwealth funding that has been cut from forward estimates is the additional $100 million for ‘unmet needs’ for disability support announced by the Honourable Larry Anthony MP, the then Minister for Community Services, on 25 July 2000. This additional funding was announced with an assurance: ‘Affirmation of the commitment of the Commonwealth, States and Territories to maintain the current base of funding for disability services under a third CSDA, including the significant increased Commonwealth/State/Territories contributions to address unmet need in the last two years of the current agreement.’

This action will mean that over one thousand Queenslanders with a disability and Queensland families living with a disability, including those living in this electorate will lose their support. This will be an unacceptable and potentially life-threatening turn of events.

Your petitioners therefore:

Request the House to ensure that the Federal Government honours the funding commitments its Minister for Community Services made in July 2000 – that the additional $100 million provided by the Commonwealth to address ‘unmet need’ is included in the 2002 Budget’s Forward Estimates and in the ‘base funding’ for a third Commonwealth State Disability Agreement.

by Mr Cameron Thompson (from 35 citizens).

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This action will mean that over one thousand Queenslanders with a disability and Queensland families living with a disability, including those living in this electorate will lose their support. This will be an unacceptable and potentially life-threatening turn of events.

Your petitioners therefore:

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by Mr Ripoll (from 35 citizens).

Petitions received.
PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS
Western Sydney
Mr MOSSFIELD (Greenway) (4.00 p.m.)—I move:
That this House:
(1) notes that:
(a) Western Sydney is one of the fastest growing regions in Australia with a high proportion of young people;
(b) currently there is a negative perception of young people in Western Sydney, which is a mistaken view since Western Sydney is no different to any other region with regard to youth problems and youth achievements;
(c) there needs to be public recognition of the achievements of young people which is linked to high self esteem and minimises anti-social behaviour;
(d) lack of access to educational facilities, especially information technology, has resulted in an imbalance of academic achievements; and
(e) there is insufficient provision of community and recreational facilities for young people in Western Sydney;
(2) urges the Government to:
(a) research methods of providing adequate access to computer facilities for the disadvantaged in Western Sydney in order to close the digital divide; and
(b) provide urgently needed youth community facilities in the Western Sydney area to address the social needs of young people; and
(3) acknowledges the work of the Blacktown Youth Orientation in drafting this motion and bringing these issues to light.
It is with a great deal of satisfaction that I rise to speak on this motion before the parliament. It arose out of a seminar held in my office last year, involving students from a number of local high schools in Greenway. The points in the motion were arrived at during a brainstorming exercise conducted by members of my electoral staff and the participating students. As the last paragraph of the motion indicates, it was the young people themselves who wrote the words of this motion. They should be congratulated on their efforts. The motion concerns the perception of youth in the area and the availability of resources and funding allocated to improve educational and recreational facilities for young people in Western Sydney.

As a federal member, I am always pleased to be involved in assisting the various organisations who are providing character building support for young people—organisations such as schools, sporting clubs, scouts, guides, air leagues, CMF units and church groups, to name a few. I am always delighted to see in the streets of my electorate schoolchildren from many cultural backgrounds—African, Middle Eastern, Asian, European, Pacific Islander and our Indigenous people—communicating in a non-discriminating fashion. I see a tall, gangling African schoolgirl with sparkling eyes and glittering white teeth, looking down and speaking with a fellow school student from an Asian background—or was it Anglo-Saxon? It does not matter; the companionship is there.

I welcome in this debate the member for Fowler as well as the members for Macquarie and for Mitchell. I also acknowledge in the public gallery Councillor Barbara Gapps, the ex-officio member of the Blacktown Council youth committee. Collectively we represent the fastest growing residential area in Australia. We, along with all the other elected representatives in our area, have an enormous responsibility to work towards making our part of the world, Western Sydney, a place for young people to grow up and prosper in. I recognise in this speech the many thousands of young people in our region who are striving for self-improvement. I speak of Mark Grima, who has been involved in scouting for around 13 years. Most of that time he has been with the 1st Quakers Hill-Doonside Scout Group. On Christmas Day this year Mark will be leaving to attend the 20th World Jamboree in Thailand. This is the second opportunity that Mark has had to represent his country. Four years ago Mark, as he described in a letter to me, had the honour ‘of being the only representative from the Greater Western Sydney region at the World Jamboree in Chile.’ Mark is a good example of a young person striving to achieve his ambitions. He also wrote:
As an 18 year old who only completed the HSC last year I am finding the financial burden of this event a bit much. I am working two casual jobs (K-Mart in Blacktown and Snowgum in Parramatta) to help pay for the event.

I would like to think that the Australian government is willing to make a financial contribution to the Australian contingent attending the jamboree. I also speak of Pilot Officers Michael Leonard and Ross Lavies, both of whom attended local high schools and progressed through the Blacktown Air League squadron where they obtained their restricted glider’s licence at the age of 15 and then progressed to their restricted powered licence. I speak of Toni Collette, the Oscar-nominated actress who started her acting career on the stage of Blacktown Girls High School. She also spent time as a peer leader helping young students, including one of my electorate staffer, Nicole.

I speak of Ehsan Fallahi, a representative of Western Sydney on the Prime Minister’s Youth Roundtable, who attended Wyndham College at Quakers Hill and who today is one of only two Australian representatives attending the global youth summit at the University of Sunderland in the United Kingdom. This summit, which is entitled ‘Citizen You’, will be the culmination of a special exchange program linking every Commonwealth country with partner communities spread throughout the United Kingdom. Ehsan believes that this is a great opportunity to express his concerns and share his views and experiences with a wide range of young people from around the world. Ehsan expects this summit will provide him with valuable feedback which he says he ‘can then put into practice not only locally but also to promote awareness at a federal level’.

Those young people I have mentioned by name, as well as the unnamed, untold others who are improving their lives and the lives of those around them, are our future. We need to listen to them, we need to listen to their concerns and ambitions and we need to act. A short while ago three young students from the University of Western Sydney came to me with a proposal as part of a project they were working on at the university. They would run a small campaign on any issue I wanted as part of their communications and public relations course. I chose youth issues. The students—Kirsty Magee, Laura Petherbridge and Nyanna Lawton-Kirtsanis—conducted a survey of young people in the area regarding their attitude to politics, politicians and the issues they felt were important. The issues raised in their survey do not differ much from the issues we are discussing in this motion which, as I have said, was drafted by young people at a youth forum held in my office. Those issues are the perception of young people, the need for better education and the need for basic facilities such as recreational facilities.

While it is not expressly listed in the motion, one of the hot topics for discussion at the BYO was the need for a skateboard park in Blacktown. That issue came out again in the survey. The survey has reinforced the Blacktown Youth Orientation, two very different sources telling me—and, through this motion, the parliament—that there is a great deal of work to be done building the future for our young people in Western Sydney. There were also a few other points raised by the youth of Greenway in this survey: the need for better and more affordable child care, the need for better public transport and the need for more programs to limit drug and alcohol abuse.

I think the most important thing to come out of the Blacktown Youth Orientation, the seminar in my office and this report by Kirsty, Laura and Nyanna is the issue of perception. Providing services and facilities is one thing. It is fairly simple to do once the money has been allocated. You go out and build the facilities that are needed—the skateboard park, the extra basketball courts and the youth service centres. More computers in schools is a simple product of more money and I am pleased to see the IT rollout to schools announced by the New South Wales government in the recent budget. Changing perceptions—changing attitudes—is far harder to do. Stereotypes are so hard to break down, particularly when they are entrenched in the minds of many. When that stereotype is wrong, as I believe it is for the youth of Western Sydney, it is all the harder.
I have hope and faith in the people like Ehsan Fallahi, Mark Grima, Pilot Officers Len
nard and Lavies, Toni Collette and young people just like them, all from Western Syd
ney and all helping to change the perception of young people from our area.

I believe that the programs run by local schools whereby young people visit nursing
homes and spend time with the residents there help break down the perception barri
ers. They give young people a chance to talk to the older residents of the area, to share
their life experience and to learn. They also help the older residents learn about the hopes
and concerns of young people. These programs are very valuable in helping change
attitudes and build our communities.

This motion goes part of the way to telling the young people of Western Sydney that
their efforts are not wasted, that they are being heard and that attitudes and perceptions
are changing, however slowly. The future is up for grabs and it is the young people of
today who will be marking their names in the books of history that are yet to be written.
The pigeonholing of people based on their geographical location I believe will become
a thing of the past. And if it does not, then I believe it is the people of Western Sydney
who will win out in the end.

I am indebted to the young people who attended the Blacktown Youth Orientation in
my office who drafted this motion for debate today. I look forward with great interest and
enthusiasm to this year’s Youth Orientation, which I hope to be hosting in August. I think
it will be bigger and better than last year. I look forward to the future and the world that
these young people from my own area can and will create. The foundations are already
there and the buildings will look magnificent once they are finished.

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

Mrs Irwin—I second the motion and re
serve my right to speak.

Mr BARTLETT (Macquarie) (4.10
p.m.)—I would like to thank the member for
Greenway for the opportunity that his motion
provides to focus on the benefits of Western Sydney, the resources of Western Sydney
and the contribution of its residents. I ac
knowledge the love that the member for
Greenway has for the residents in his elec
torate. I also acknowledge and commend the
Blacktown Youth Orientation for drafting
this particular motion and taking the initia
tive of bringing it to the House. I think the
very fact that they have done this—that they
have had the motivation to do this—is an
encouraging sign. It runs contrary to the me
dia stereotypes that we so often see. I am
greatly encouraged that these young people
are showing that they are motivated, en
gaged, positive and interested in what goes
on in their community.

As the member for Greenway would
know, I too am very committed to Western
Sydney, for two reasons. One is because the
area that I currently serve as the member for
Macquarie includes the Blue Mountains and
the Hawkesbury area, both parts of Western
Sydney. I will return to that in a moment. But
as the member for Greenway knows as well I
grew up in an area that is now the area that
he represents. I grew up in Blacktown and
attended Blacktown North Public School—

Mrs Irwin—A great school.

Mr BARTLETT—and Blacktown Boys
High School—both great schools. I have
much to be thankful for in terms of the edu
cation that I received at the start of my life in
those schools. I have many fond memories of
my 25 years in Blacktown.

Since then, I have spent close to 20 years
teaching young people in high schools
throughout various parts of Western Sydney.
In that teaching I have learnt a lot about what
motivates and inspires young people and,
sadly as well, what discourages young peo
ple and causes too many of them to despair
of hope and of opportunities. I have been
greatly encouraged by many of the young
people who I have taught during that time in
both government and non-government
schools throughout a number of suburbs in
Western Sydney.

There is no doubt that Western Sydney is
a key region in terms of the social and eco
nomic contribution that it makes to this
country. The Western Sydney area includes
the local government areas of Auburn, Bank-
stow, Baulkham Hills, Blacktown, Blue Mountains, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Holroyd, Liverpool, Parramatta and Penrith. Already, the geographic centre of Sydney in terms of population is west of Parramatta and this region that we now define loosely as Western Sydney has as a region the third largest regional economy within Australia in terms of GDP, contributing some $35 billion a year to the national GDP. This economy—the economy of Western Sydney—is underpinned by about 60,000 businesses and a population of over 1½ million people.

It is estimated that by the year 2001—in just 15 years time—when Sydney’s population will have reached 4½ million to five million people, over two million of these people will live in the Western Sydney region in the local government areas that I have just mentioned. What makes Western Sydney tick is very much part of what makes Sydney and Australia tick. The future of Western Sydney is very much the future of Sydney, the problems of Western Sydney are very much the problems of Sydney and the views of Western Sydney have a very large influence on the views of Sydney as a whole.

I agree with many of the points that the member for Greenway has included in his motion. I agree, for instance, with his emphasis on the need for education for young people. If there is anything that provides the hope for transition from youth to adulthood with responsibility, independence and self-sufficiency, it is quality education that leads to quality employment. I notice in part (1)(d) of the motion that the member mentions a ‘lack of access to educational facilities, especially information technology’. There are a few points that I would like to make about the lack of education that the member for Greenway mentions.

Firstly, with regard to schools, it is worth pointing out that the coalition government have done an enormous amount in terms of their capacity to influence school education. In this year’s budget we have increased funding for schools by another 6½ per cent, to $6.6 billion. We have increased funding again by almost six per cent for public schools and that will bring a total increase of 52 per cent in federal direct funding for public schools since we have been in office. In fact, we have been doing more in regard to the increase in funding for public schools than the New South Wales government has been doing. This last year we increased funding to state schools by 5.7 per cent; the New South Wales government only increased funding by 2.5 per cent. If the New South Wales government had simply matched our increase in funding, we would have another $146 million in public schools in New South Wales, much of which would be in public schools in Western Sydney.

I notice the member mentioned computers in schools. As well as this direct funding, I would just like to point out the commitment of the Commonwealth government through the computers for schools initiative. This initiative provides surplus Commonwealth government computers and IT equipment to schools across Australia to enable students and teachers to access IT technology and to have the ability to engage in that. The member for Greenway would probably be aware that just two weeks ago a number of computers and items of IT equipment were sent by the Commonwealth government to the Blacktown District office of the Department of Education and Training for distribution. That involved 61 computers and 13 boxes of peripherals—$30,000 worth—sent just two weeks ago on 6 June to the Blacktown District office for distribution to local schools. They will be distributed according to the formula: 70 per cent to public schools, 20 per cent to Catholic schools and 10 per cent to independent schools, roughly to match the proportion of students enrolled in those various types of schools. So this government are committed to assisting access to IT technology in whatever way we can.

I would add that we are very strongly committed to enhancing opportunities for vocational education. The number of vocational education places in schools has increased exponentially in the last six years since this government have been in office. We have seen a record number of apprenticeships—330,000 apprenticeships—compared to a 30-year low that had been reached under the former government. That is a commitment to providing access to training that will
link into the workplace for young people in places such as Western Sydney. Just last month in the budget we committed extra incentives to help employers take on young people as apprentices, including $750 extra in incentives to employers who would provide an apprenticeship while a young person is still at school and an extra $750 incentive if they would then employ that young person when they left school. In addition to that, there is $1,000 extra incentive for employers who would provide apprenticeships in emerging high-tech and IT industries—and these are the sorts of areas that the member for Greenway mentioned. So these are extra incentives by this government for employers to take on young people to assist them to get a foot in the door, to assist them to get training, to assist them to move into employment in those emerging high-tech industries.

While we are talking about employment, just look at the record over the last few years. When this government came into office we still had a legacy of 8.6 per cent unemployment that was left by the former government. In the last six years, over 900,000 jobs have been generated—many of those in Western Sydney, many of those in my electorate. The unemployment rate across the country has fallen in the last six years from 8.6 per cent to 6.3 per cent. I am pleased to say that my electorate—the Blue Mountains and the Hawkesbury—have benefited, with unemployment now down to around 4½ per cent in the Blue Mountains and around 3½ per cent in the Hawkesbury. My electorate of Macquarie—that part of Western Sydney that covers the Hawkesbury and Blue Mountains—is benefiting from the strong jobs growth that this government have managed to generate by strong emphasis on economic growth and low interest rates and on encouraging business so they can provide opportunities for our young people. I agree with the member for Greenway: our young people have enormous potential. (Time expired)

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (4.20 p.m.)—In supporting this motion I would congratulate the honourable member for Greenway for his initiative in sponsoring the Blacktown Youth Orientation Forum and for his concern for the young people of Western Sydney. The Fowler electorate has much in common with Greenway and I am sure that the concerns of youth in the Blacktown area would be shared by young people in areas such as Liverpool, Cabramatta and Bonnyrigg. I can say that I have had similar views expressed by young people in my electorate to those reported in the orientation forum.

Fowler does, however, have an added factor. Along with the negative perception of Western Sydney, we face a media bias caused by sensationalist reporting of drug and crime gangs associated with our schools. It seems that every time there is a drug or crime issue in any school in Sydney the media head straight for Cabramatta to get a background shot of Cabramatta High School. In one Sunday paper recently, four high schools in the Fowler area were featured as the centres of drug and gang activity, but my checks with schools and police revealed that the story was nothing but a beat-up. The hundreds of students who attend these schools had to suffer the slur of having their schools falsely accused of being crime and drug dens when the truth is that they are anything but that.

Many of the kids at those schools come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Their parents often speak little or no English. They have very few resources at home. But they work hard to overcome their lack of English skills and the overall shortage of resources at home and at their schools. The staff at their schools are some of the most dedicated and hardworking teachers in the state and those same schools produce students with academic achievements well above other schools. But all that can be undone by an ignorant journalist who only wants a cheap headline. After reading what you do about Cabramatta in the press, you can only wonder what a prospective employer thinks of someone with ‘Cabramatta High School’ on their CV. They should see that as a plus. They should see graduates of our schools as being resourceful, hardworking and able to overcome disadvantage—young people capable of making their way in a tough world and achieving success in spite of the odds. What more could an employer want?
I do not suggest for a moment that our community does not have its problems. In the meantime, we could use some positive bias towards our area if we are to do the best by our young people. We could also use help in funding facilities for young people to give them a fairer chance of success in life. The motion today identifies two important needs in Western Sydney. The first of these is access to computer facilities. For education and future employment, information technology skills are essential, but many homes within my electorate do not have even basic computer equipment. The reason is that they cannot afford it. While schools are increasing their capacity, their hours are limited and students need access out of hours. Community facilities which offer extended hours for computer and Internet access would be a great help.

The other need is for community facilities to meet the social needs of young people. Last year, I was pleased to participate in the opening of a basketball court in Cabramatta. It was not a very fancy facility—just an open court in Cabra-Vale Park—but, before it was available to the young people of Cabramatta, there was only a rough car park to play on, and even then it was only available when the cars had left. It was a much-needed facility and is now well used. But sporting facilities are not the only need. Many parts of Fowler have high levels of medium-density housing. Homes are small, so young people cannot bring friends home. There is a pressing need for social meeting places where young people can meet in a safe environment for leisure activities. I congratulate the member for Greenway for bringing this matter to the attention of the House.

Mr CADMAN (Mitchell) (4.25 p.m.)—I am delighted to participate in this debate and I want to thank the member for Greenway for bringing it on. Federal members in Western Sydney have an important leadership role in regard to our youth, and we ought to be taking up the challenge of encouraging federal, state and local authorities to pay attention to the needs of our youth as well as federal members can, if they wish to do so. To have a forum within our office or some other public place, often in cooperation with state and local governments, where we can start to draw out the issues of concern to young people, I think is a leadership role that we ought to willingly accept.

The problems in Western Sydney are significant but that does not mean to say that Western Sydney is a hopeless basket case. It is a most wonderful area and I really resent, with other members, the tag that is so often given to it. The people, both the older residents and the young people, have so much going for them that they have almost built a counterculture which says, ‘We are the West; we are proud of it; we can do it and we are better than the rest.’ I endorse and support that attitude which says, ‘Yes, we ignore those critical comments; we ignore those people that want to put us down; we ignore those that want to say that we are second best. We will rise above that and go on and create a reputation for commitment, for hard work, for willingness to be able to overcome adversity.’ I believe that that is the true heart of Western Sydney and that is the way the people feel about their opportunities. When people put down the west, it is something that I will always speak against. It is not a true representation of Western Sydney.

There are some areas that do need attention. Transport is a continuing worry for young people, because it is very hard for them to get around and they are mostly reliant on private bus services. Travelling can be a difficulty. That is something that is constantly raised with me. The problem of a lack of facilities is often raised in the region. I find amongst my colleagues in local government an unwillingness to look at these issues and see how we can enter into a partnership to provide facilities for the youth. I guess that part of the problem is that young people are only young for a short period of time and local governments have longer-term plans and therefore make commitments for longer-term projects. I do not agree that that is necessarily a good process.

There is great cultural diversity. Employment opportunities have changed, as my colleague has said. I have noticed that,
within the area of Fairfield, for instance, since 1995 unemployment amongst youth has dropped from 30.1 per cent to 22.6 per cent. It is still too high and we still need to work on it with lots of energy and lots of commitment. This government has initiated a number of programs in the family services area—for families and for relationships between fathers and their families. Right across the west, these programs are running and there are commitments of multimillion dollars. I think that we need to lift the awareness of some of the programs available to the west. In family relationships, in family education services, there was a commitment in 1998 of $6.1 million, and that is a continuing commitment. There will be more announcements this week. There are the contact orders pilot scheme and the Youth Activities Services—there are nine activities across Western Sydney under the YAS program. I have met recently with the people operating that program. They were in my electorate and it was a really wonderful occasion to spend time having a sandwich with them and working out what their priorities are. It was particularly helpful to me, and I have given that information to the minister. There is the Reconnect services program operating in Penrith, the Blue Mountains and the Hawkesbury.

These are all terrific programs, but we all need to take a continuing role of support for our young people. The way that that is best done is to draw them together as the member has, to find out what their needs are, to find out how we can assist them and to devise programs. Often their needs are hard to define and it takes the skill of an older person or somebody in a position of responsibility to work out precisely how we can assist them. I want to thank the member for raising these issues. I participated in a forum of this type last week, with great benefit.

That this House:

(1) condemns the Howard Government for its policies that have and continue to undermine the Australian shipping industry;

(2) recognises that this neglect puts at great risk our environment, our security and our ability to compete in the shipping industry and is therefore against Australia’s national interest; and

(3) calls upon the Minister to support the Australian shipping industry before our coastline is ravaged and our industry and merchant employment opportunities destroyed.

The motion before the House seeks to condemn this government for its active policies that have undermined and continue to undermine Australian shipping. It calls upon this House to recognise that this neglect puts at great risk our environment, our security and our ability to compete in the shipping industry and is therefore against Australia’s national interest. It calls upon the minister to at last act to support the Australian shipping industry before our coastline is ravaged and our industry and merchant opportunities destroyed.

Australia has always had and will continue to have a role in shipping. How can we not? In tonnage terms we have the fifth largest shipping task in the world. The Minister for Transport and Regional Services mentioned this in a speech entitled ‘Shipping in the new millennium’ he gave in Brisbane in 1999. He also referred to the fact that 99 per cent of imports and 96 per cent of exports by volume are transported by sea and that around 50 million tonnes of cargo are shipped annually. The minister went on to say:

In light of these issues it is obvious why the government has taken such a high profile role in addressing maritime transport issues.

In one sense the minister is correct: Australia has always taken a high-profile role in addressing maritime transport issues—but not under this government. The only maritime focus that this government has engaged in is its ideological pursuit of the Maritime Union of Australia. The government has in fact participated in the industry’s demise—a situation that is now at a critical level. If the government does not detour from its deliber-
ate course of neglect then we are not going to have an Australian shipping industry.

Since 1995-96, the average net annual disinvestment in Australian shipping was $4 million, compared with a net annual average investment of $292.8 million between 1989-90 and 1994-95. The Australian Shipowners Association firmly put the responsibility for the reduction in investment at the government’s feet due to the:

... inability of investors to be confident of a positive policy environment in Australia.

Since 1989, the number of Australian owned ships has almost halved, down to 49 in 2000. The minister for transport has over recent times taken to waxing lyrical over transport issues. We hear him mention words like ‘Auslink’, ‘intermodal transport’ and ‘inland rail investment’. Once again, the reality with this government is completely different. Whilst claiming to pursue an intermodal system, the minister continues to undermine the individual modes. The attack on shipping has been obvious to all. What has been less obvious is the calculated manner in which this minister and this government seek to undermine other transport modes.

The minister may have managed to keep quiet about his real agenda for rail, but he was unable to prevent the truth emerging. Senate estimates can make for very interesting reading. I encourage members opposite to take the time to cast their eyes over the Hansard, particularly those comments made recently by Senator Macdonald. Minister Anderson’s junior minister and representative in the other place took a moment to enlighten the estimates committee with a summary of why the government have undermined the provisions of the Australian cabotage policy. It was revealed that this will not just cost Australian shipping jobs but attack Australian rail jobs as well. He said:

I do seriously point out to the committee that coastal voyages from Melbourne to Perth ... can get goods from Melbourne to Perth 30 per cent cheaper than rail. That is why we have these exemptions to our normal cabotage policy.

‘That is why we have these exemptions to our normal cabotage policy’—to undermine rail. I confess: I have been misled by this government. They led me to believe that they only wanted to undermine the Australian shipping industry, but it appears that rail has also been their target. According to the Australian Shipowners Association, cargo carried in vessels issued with single voyage permits and continuing voyage permits increased by 0.7 million tonnes, or 10.1 per cent, to eight million tonnes in 1999-2000—a growth of 507.5 per cent since 1991-92. The increase in foreign vessels on our coast not only has many implications for the jobs of seafarers, as we have seen so clearly demonstrated with the recent events surrounding the CSL Yarra, but puts at risk our environment and seriously undermines our defence strategies and capabilities.

As I have said before, coming from Launceston on the Tamar River I am only too aware of the devastating impact on marine life and surrounds from ship pollution. The Iron Baron released 325 tonnes of oil into the Tamar River when it ran aground on Hebe Reef in 1995. Casting an eye over the ship detention list for the first four months of this year gives great cause for concern. There may be some members of this House who are familiar with the role of an oily water separator, but allow me to enlighten those who are not. An oily water separator reduces the oil content of bilge water to below 15 parts per million, which is the international legal requirement under MARPOL. This enables the ship to have safe discharge of bilge water into the ocean. It is an essential piece of machinery in the prevention of the pollution of our seas.

Mr Adams—Protecting our borders.

Ms O’BYRNE—Protecting our borders and our coasts. If we just focus on the deficiencies in that one piece of equipment in the detention lists of January to April 2002, we find the following: the Stolt Infra, oil discharge monitoring equipment non-operational; the Ioannis Zafirikas, oily water separator content meter defective, discharge in excess of 15 ppm oil content; the Brinkness, oily water separator oil content meter defective; the Multipurpose 5, oily water separator defective, 15 parts per million; the Bunga Orkid Dua, oily water separator oil content meter inoperable; the Ocean Elite,
oily water separator bypassed by illegal means. This means that by either accident or design these ships were pumping oil into our oceans at above the legal limit. AMSA does not inspect every ship—with its current resources it cannot possibly do so. Its target is to inspect at least half of those eligible for inspection. How many ships are still out there pumping oil onto our coastlines? In 2000, there were 4,655 ships eligible for inspection by AMSA on our coast. Of that potential 4,655, there were 2,926 inspections completed and 9,609 deficiencies were recorded.

But that is not the only risk to our safety. The Australian Merchant Navy have long been considered the fourth arm of our defence. In times of conflict, we rely on them to assist in the defence of our nation. Their role in East Timor was vital and recognised by the now chief of armed forces, General Cosgrove. During the last US election campaign, Mr Bush issued a statement declaring his support for the American Merchant Navy. The Bush-Cheney ticket stated that:

In time of war or emergency, the US military depends on shipping and seafarers drawn from the US flag commercial fleet.

The Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade of our own parliament is about to engage in an inquiry, the terms of reference of which refer to the importance of the shipping industry in the maritime defence strategy. The Royal Australian Navy’s maritime doctrine states:

The possession of a substantial national flag merchant fleet can be an important strategic advantage.

It appears to me that everyone—except the current Australian government and the current Minister for Transport and Regional Services—recognises the need for a strong merchant fleet to sustain the fourth arm of defence. It is interesting that, at a time when tightening up port security is the focus of the IMO and shipping nations around the world, we continue to offer unfettered access to our coasts and ports. When countries around the world are trying to find out who is on their coast and what they are up to, we do not seem to care.

Between March 1996 and 30 April 1999, 263 deserters from foreign ships were reported by the Australian Customs Service and 148 were located. These missing people are the ones we know about but, with the open slather visa arrangements granted to foreign ships, there could be tens, hundreds or thousands more. There could be almost 60,000—that is a figure that we have heard today. How do we know? We do not know because the minister makes no effort to find out who is on our coast. As I have raised before in this House and in the Main Committee, as the government continues to grant unlimited access to the coastal trade, the management of large numbers of foreign seafarers operating semipermanently on the Australian coast will become a nightmare. We have no idea who is there; we have no idea where they are going; and we have no idea how many actually stay. What we are now seeing is the real cost to the government, who choose to not only neglect our Australian shipping industry but also actively seek to undermine it. It jeopardises not only our border security, the pristine environment and coastal lines and the livelihoods of Australian seafarers, but also the economic viability of Australian shipping companies.

On 7 March this year, in one of his few speeches to the industry, the Deputy Prime Minister said:

The issue of safe shipping must remain a priority. I look forward to the day when this minister actually does treat this industry as a priority. I only hope it still exists when he finally wakes up and acts rather than continues to spill forth empty rhetoric.

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

Mr KING (Wentworth) (4.40 p.m.)—The Australian shipping industry has made a great contribution to Australian social and economic life since the earliest days of settlement. There is an interesting book entitled A Maritime History of Australia written by Professor John Bach of the University of Newcastle which, in my days at the bar, I
read with some interest, having practised rather extensively in that area.

Mr Adams—Which bar was that?

Mr KING—Yours, amongst others. It became apparent, and is obvious from the industry and scholarship of Professor Bach, that the Australian shipping industry from the earliest of times has been strong, robust and an important part of Australia’s social and economic structure. I make a general comment on the thrust of this motion: the error of thinking that the Aussie ethos is a peculiarly outback image and is one that ignores the contribution of those involved in the maritime industries is really quite egregious. The fact that the Leader of the National Party—the esteemed minister—is not from a maritime area does not mean that he does not show a tremendous interest in the significance of this important industry; indeed he does. Not only has the industry made a very important contribution socially and economically but also it is recognised in the Australian ethos, the Bondi Beach icon, and the contribution of our Navy over the years in the Gulf War, world wars and other conflicts.

My concerns with this motion are more specific. I suggest that it pays no regard to the contribution of the Australian shipping industry to date, or of its possible and projected contributions in the future. It shows no confidence in the future of the industry. Upon analysis, the motion itself makes little or no sense. The apparent thrust of the motion contains a criticism of government policy not borne out by the facts. The first part of the motion asserts that the government has actively undermined the industry and then it goes on to contend that the government has neglected the industry. What is the ALP saying about this proposal? Does the ALP know the difference between contending, on the one hand, that the government has done everything to destroy it and, on the other hand, that the government is completely neglecting it? It suggests that the proposal is a nonsense on its face. The third part of the motion implies that the government has done nothing to support the industry. But any careful or casual reading of the detailed reports of a number of government programs in this industry shows that the opposite is the case.

Let us take the contributions of the Australian Maritime College, which is in the electorate of the mover of the motion, the member for Bass. The recent report of that college, which was tabled not so long ago in this House, indicates that it is a very robust and successful college. In fact, it has recently been given university status. It has a very healthy student enrolment and an excellent research program. Any suggestion that the government does not support and has not continued to support the maritime industry, even in the seat of the mover of the motion, is obviously wrong. Another point is the contribution that the government makes through the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, amongst others, to the port state control mechanisms within this country. They have done an outstanding job in ensuring that the highest standard is observed for both coastal and international shipping in respect of visits to this country by the maritime trades.

But I wish to speak to the general thrust of the motion in some more detail. The first part of the motion condemns the government for its policies that have undermined the shipping industry and continue to do so. That assumes, as I have already indicated, that there has been some change in the legislative stance—some amendment or variation to a policy that has existed for the last few years. In fact, that is not the case at all. Coastal shipping is regulated by the provisions of part VI of the Navigation Act 1912. Although that act was not proclaimed until 1921, since that time cabotage has in effect applied to vessels on the Australian coast. There was some review in relation to the trade in 1924, when it was suggested that higher shipping costs would be imposed on the Australian coast by the cabotage arrangements, especially the Bass Strait trade and services to Western Australia, but these did not win out. It is critical to the understanding of the operation of part VI to observe that subsection (1) of the act deems a ship to be engaged in the coasting trade if it: ... takes on board passengers or cargo at any port in a State, or a Territory, to be carried to, and
landed or delivered at, any other port in the same State or Territory or in any other State or other such Territory.

The significance of that definition, amongst other things, is that it pays no regard to the voyage of the vessel between those ports other than it does traverse between those ports. When one looks, then, at the operation of part VI, the crucial section is section 288, which requires any ship operating in the coasting trade to be licensed, and although the legislation allows such licences to be issued for up to three years, in practice they are issued annually, although at a nominal rate. The licence is granted subject to two conditions: that seamen employed on the vessel are paid Australian wages, and that is defined in section 289, and provision made regarding libraries and books.

The act also makes provision for non-licensed vessels to operate in the coasting trade in special circumstances. Section 286 states that where the minister can be satisfied that in respect of trade between any Australian ports:

(a) that no licensed ship is available for the service; or

(b) that the service as carried out by a licensed ship or ships is inadequate to the needs of such port or ports;

and ... in the public interest that unlicensed ships be allowed to engage in that trade ...

then, and only then, may the minister grant a permit to those vessels to do so, conditionally or unconditionally, and a permit issued under these arrangements may be for a single voyage or for what is called a continuing permit. The interesting aspect of this debate is that it was the Hon. Ralph Willis who, on 1 July 1989, said that cabotage policy was carefully examined by the shipping reform task force. No member recommended its withdrawal, but it was suggested that changes be made to the application of the permit system to increase its flexibility. He said:

The Government agrees with the task force that the permit system should be made more flexible and has decided that new guidelines will be issued for the operation of the permit system. These will apply to single voyage permits and will also include the use of permits for continuous trading which, although allowed for under the Navigation Act, have not been issued for 20 years.

Since the Labor Party was in power—that is, in 1989—under the ministry of the Hon. Ralph Willis in this case, single voyage permits have begun to increase. In that year there were 48; in 1989-90 there were 88; in 1991 there were 142; in 1991-92 there were 203; and in the financial year 1994-95 there were 434. So they have increased continuously since the change in policy brought about by the previous Labor administration. The important point to make is that, quite contrary to the thrust of the first paragraph of the motion, there has been no change in policy. There has been no change in the legislation. It is an utterly absurd proposal and it makes no sense. It is not borne out by the facts whatsoever. (Time expired)

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (4.50 p.m.)—We have been warned. The member for Bass has warned us for some time about the implications of losing our national shipping industry. Developments in Australian shipping are confirming her warnings. Safe shipping is obviously no longer a priority for this government. So much has been made of the defence of this country; there are proposals to spend millions on border protection. Yet in times of war the Merchant Navy has played a vital part in the overall defence plan. Even as recently as the troubles in East Timor, the merchant fleet provided valuable assistance and were applauded by the defence forces for their efforts.

This government has gone soft on its own border protection legislation by completely ignoring the role played by the maritime industry. There is no consistency in the government’s approach to dealing with illegal immigrants. Our own merchant fleet, along with our fishing fleet, provide us with the eyes and ears of the open water. They are there when the Defence Force is busy elsewhere. They provide vital intelligence of ship movements in territorial waters but, by allowing open slather to foreign flags and foreign crews which often sail under flags of convenience, the information collected can be hostile to Australia.

What about maritime accidents? These more often occur under foreign flags. People
who feel no responsibility for Australia and its people do not care if ballast water contains opportunistic animal species that will colonise native populations of sea creatures. They do not care who let go the oil slick that will damage our wildlife, and it is hard for us to know unless the ship breaks up. Few controls can be applied when the country of origin denies all knowledge of the event.

What better way to come into Australia illegally than through a crew on a foreign ship? Immigration issues seem to have gone out the window with these ships. Crews can visit and work. If the crews disappear before the ship sails out of Australia, who is to know? The next port of call will not care. The member for Bass has warned about all these things in her many speeches on this issue in the House. What is the minister doing about these warnings? Nothing. I wonder why the Prime Minister does not criticise the minister for his position on border protection in the same way he does the opposition. Where is this so-called environmentally friendly government? Gone missing, presumed absconded like some of the foreign crew members. This particular horse has bolted, and the stable door is still wide open.

This nation was built on the maritime industry. Our first white settlers came halfway around the world by ship. Many millions of people have come by ship to Australia. Our goods are exported by ship. Our tourist industry relies on shipping visits to Australia. We are an island. Much of our trade is transported by ship, and we need trained and reliable crews. Australia should not be the harbourers of ships of shame. We should not let our standards drop so low that other countries use us as a flag of convenience. I worked with Peter Morris on the last part of the report on the ships of shame and was angry about other countries allowing a decline in human rights and the safety of crews on these ships. Do we really want to go down that line?

In the past, Maritime Union members found and assisted many overseas crews and colleagues but now, with the open slather practices of overseas crews, it is impossible to assist at all. This government seems to endorse slavery as a means of getting work done. With the undermining of Australia’s transport system by cheap overseas crews working on coastal runs, and with permits on cabotage being given out willy-nilly by this government and this minister, the next thing we will see is the closing of some of the rail systems around Australia because they cannot compete with the foreign crews working the coast of Australia. Single voyage permits should be looked at and should not be given out willy-nilly as they are at present. (Time expired)

Mr WAKELIN (Grey) (4.55 p.m.)—It is the time of the day when we have private members’ motions. This private member’s motion is on shipping. I welcome the opportunity to speak to this motion in the House. I was quite taken by the member for Wentworth’s contribution. He reminded us that Ralph Willis said that no member of the committee recommended any withdrawal on the cabotage issue. It is very important that we remember that.

The coastal licence permit provisions contained in part IV of the Navigation Act 1912 provide an appropriate balance in the interest of ship operators and shippers. Those provisions have remained unchanged for at least the past 25 years and were in place during Labor’s terms of government. It is important to have safe and internationally competitive shipping. It is crucial to our export markets and removes an obstacle to increasing value-adding commodity processing in Australia.

Foreign ships are permitted to carry coastal cargoes only in circumstances where Australian licensed vessels are not available. It is very important to remember that. The member for Bass mentioned that around 60,000 to 100,000 people who have come off these foreign ships have gone missing. We will have to tighten up those numbers a little to give them some credibility. As for the risk to the environment, since 1996 an extremely vigorous port state control program has been in place. The ship detention rate has fallen from 8.5 per cent, or 248 ships, of the 2,900 foreign ships inspected in 1996 compared with 4.4 per cent, or 127 ships, being detained of the 2,900 ships inspected in 2001. So much for the allegation about safety.
It is very important to observe what the government has done for the environment: declaration by the International Maritime Organisation of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park as a particularly sensitive sea area; compulsory pilotage for large vessels and all tankers in the navigation hazard areas of the northern inner shipping route through the reef; specific protection from operational discharge from ships within the Great Barrier Reef under the IMO’s International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships; and a mandatory ship reporting system for ships transiting the reef. These are some of the measures that the government has put into place.

I note that the member for Lyons mentioned Peter Morris and the inquiry into the ships of shame. Peter Morris was a distinguished member and former minister in this place. I served with him on the occasional parliamentary committee and came to respect him very much. I have never known a member to so actively campaign, in this chamber and in our parliamentary committee work, against the very fundamental problems with the ships of shame. Of those figures that I have mentioned, I think it is very important to remember—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—Order! It being 5.00 p.m., the time allotted for private members’ business has expired. The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 104A. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting. The member for Grey will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

GRIEVANCE DEBATE
Question proposed:
That grievances be noted.

Health: Dental Services
Ms O’BYRNE (Bass) (5.00 p.m.)—The state of Tasmania—and my electorate of Bass is no exception—is facing a critical shortage of dentists. Sadly, it is just another example of the myriad of problems which regional areas face. We, like so many other locations outside the mainland capital cities, have shortages of doctors, nurses, veterinary surgeons and a whole range of specialist medical positions. The Tasmanian government has called for a joint Commonwealth-state working party to consider the establishment of a dental school in Tasmania. I join with the state government in this call and urge the Minister for Education, Science and Training to immediately proceed with an initial investigation. The school would be located within the medical faculty at the University of Tasmania in Hobart. I do not make this call simply to see a new university course located within my electorate, although I am always pleased to see those. It is a far more wide-ranging issue than that.

Tasmania is the only state without a degree course in dentistry. The ramifications are significant. In my electorate there are dentists in the largest population centre, Launceston, but with the exception of a recently opened practice in Scottsdale there are no other private practitioners. For example, the George Town area, with a population of in excess of 4,500 people, is without a permanent dental service. Whilst all states are experiencing a shortage of dentists, it is Tasmania where the shortage is most noticeable. The national average ratio of dentists to population is 43 per 100,000 people; in Tasmania it is just 26.5. It is a matter of great concern for all Tasmanians, and one which has not gone unattended by their state government.

The dental action plan announced by the Tasmanian government in the state budget will, amongst other initiatives, enable the state to offer flexible incentive packages to boost the government’s own efforts to recruit more dentists in conjunction with the private sector. The plan will also enable the retraining of 30 dental therapists over the next four years to work with adult clients under supervision. But, whilst admirable and essential and going some way towards alleviating the problems we in Tasmania face, these measures will not solve the problem.

The problem is that there is no culture of tertiary education in dentistry in Tasmania. Without a dental school in the state, there is not the same interest shown in dentistry as there is in other degrees, such as degrees in medicine—and we have our own fine medi-
cal school. Those considering a tertiary education in the medical sciences but who wish to stay in Tasmania cannot currently pursue a study of dentistry. Those who are committed to studying in the area must go elsewhere and then we are left with the problem of trying to get them to come back. And that is not easy.

Only the smallest numbers of Tasmanians studying dentistry are indicating their intention to return home after graduation. The state government has looked at the reasons why potential candidates to practice dentistry are reluctant to come to Tasmania and in particular to practice in country centres. Whilst many have been happy to acknowledge the significant lifestyle benefits which Tasmania has to offer, it is not enough. We are currently, it would appear, not able to offer the financial incentives provided in other states. The state’s new initiatives will address this issue, and in part the overall problem. But the only long-term solution is the establishment of a dental school in Hobart. We need to provide opportunities for would-be Tasmanian dentists to study at home and for those from elsewhere who would join them to be so exposed to our wonderful lifestyle that they would want to stay as well. There is no question that our chances of recruiting dentists will increase if they study within the environment in which they will work. Familiarity, we believe, is likely to breed commitment.

The shortage is impacting on both the public and private sectors. It means that a start on implementing this long-term solution must begin immediately. In the report to health ministers of November 2000, the average waiting time in Tasmania for public dental health care had risen from 30 months in 1997 to 48 months in 2000. In just three years the average waiting time had risen by 18 months. Whilst a good proportion of this can be attributed to the Howard government’s decisions in 1996 to withdraw funding for dental services and abolish the Commonwealth Dental Health Program, it is exacerbated by the basic shortage of dentists.

Since the election of the current state government in 1998, the neglect of the capital needs of the state’s dental services has been addressed. The mobile based children’s dental service, whilst having served the state extremely well, possessed ageing infrastructure. The state government responded by investing $1.2 million in community based family dental clinics throughout the state. These provide permanent all-year access to dental services and extended hours of operation and encourage the greater involvement of parents in their children’s dental care. The clinics also provide individual care programs for children with high dental needs.

The commitment of the state government has not ended there. In this year’s state budget there is an allocation of $1.32 million not only to provide for the initiatives I mentioned earlier to attract more dentists and retrain dental therapists but also to reduce the backlog of Tasmanians who are waiting for dentures and to extend the partnership with the private dental sector to provide emergency care. For example, 1,000 Tasmanians who are currently waiting for dentures will receive them.

Tasmania continues to do its best. Under its new dental action plan, as I have mentioned, dental therapists will be offered the opportunity to engage in further training and education to enable them to work with adults as well as children. In order to ensure that services to children continue whilst dental therapists retrain, the state government will provide funds to enable backfilling through additional recruitment.

Had the Australian Labor Party been elected to government last November, one of its major initiatives would have been its plan for dental health. Now, as in November 2000, low-income Tasmanians along with their fellow Australians pay more, wait longer and have less access to affordable dental care than to any other form of public health service. Under its plan, Labor would have developed a truly national approach to dental health to restore and upgrade services and in particular to ensure that low income earners would have access to the most basic of health care.

Labor would have signed a new national dental agreement in 2002 and, in partnership with the states and territories, the initial priorities would have been emergency treat-
ment, preventative work and work force development. Labor would also have taken some direct action to address the shortages in the dental professions through a national dental work force strategy. Part of its brief would have been to attract a more diverse group of people into dentistry as a career. Specifically, in conjunction with the Australian Dental Association and our universities, the national dental work force strategy would have examined work force innovations such as vocational training for new graduates to broaden their experience and to define pathways to postgraduate specialisation and incentive programs and bonded scholarships to boost the supply of dentists in rural and remote areas, clarifying the role of dental auxiliaries and agreeing on the best way in which they could be used to complement the work of dentists. But this government decides to leave it all to the states.

Some might argue that this is acceptable as a result of the division of powers between the Commonwealth and the states, but the problem is that the playing field is not level. Whilst each of the other states has a dental school at which its students can train and from which it can recruit its dentists, Tasmania does not have that luxury. Opportunities for further education and acquisition of new skills by practising dentists are also diminished without a dental school. Thus, even if Tasmania succeeds in initial recruitment, it may fail in retention. Without a dental school, Tasmania also suffers the disadvantage of not being able to offer the same extent of free or subsidised dental services to the less well-off, which can be provided by the mainland states in the process of training their undergraduates. My state is approaching an enormous problem with a significant disadvantage.

If the federal government chooses not to engage in a partnership with the states on dental health, it should at least acknowledge its obligations to provide all the states, particularly those which are prepared to take action to address a major problem, with an even playing field. A tertiary dental course for Tasmania is not an unreasonable ask; it is not an unreasonable request of a government which contributes to the provision of one in each of the other states. I urge the minister to take the first step—a step which might lead Tasmanians to believe that they have the same opportunity as their counterparts on the mainland to receive basic dental care when they need it.

In the time available to me, I would like to refer to a comment made by the member for Wentworth in his speech on my private members’ business motion. In it, he indicated that the Australian Maritime College had received university status. Whilst we would love to see the Australian Maritime College achieve university status—and that is something that we have all been working towards—that is not the case now. The Maritime College is currently facing some kind of threat that, instead of receiving university status themselves, they may be subsumed by another university and then not granted any independence at all. I would like to see them with university status. I believe the member has probably inadvertently misled the House. I urge him, if he is interested in the future of the Australian Maritime College, to make representations to the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, the Minister for Education, Science and Training, and the Prime Minister to ensure that not only does the Australian Maritime College become a university but that it becomes a university in such a manner as to retain its autonomy—that it is not simply subsumed by a larger organisation desperate to get some of the funding.

**Population and Development**

*Mrs MAY (McPherson)* (5.09 p.m.)—I was privileged to travel to Japan in April and attend the 20th Anniversary Asian Population and Development Association International Forum, followed by the 18th Asian Parliamentarians Meeting on Population and Development, with a focus on water and sanitation, regional development and population. I was accompanied on this trip by the member for Charlton, who I am happy to say is in the chamber tonight, and Ms Dianne Proctor from the Australian All Party Parliamentary Group on Population and Development.

The international forum focused on conditions for human survival and the future of
our society—our international society. Issues discussed focused on the environment, biology, food, public health, social structures, bioethics and water. There were also discussions on population increases. There was no evidence that population increases productivity; in fact, increasing population is damaging our world. There was general consensus that politicians needed to use some wisdom in solving the problems that the world is facing with regard to population increases, which in turn raises questions about our environment, fresh water and food production.

The parliamentarians meeting, over two days, focused very much on water, sanitation, regional development and population. In particular, I want to focus my comments today on water and population. It was very clear from the conference that water is the key to economic development, which in turn will overcome poverty. Water, in fact, may be the resource that defines the limits of sustainable development. The relationship between population and water is a crucial one. All life on earth depends on water. The 21st century could well be known as the ‘century of water’. Water will become more valuable than oil. The outlook for future water availability in many countries is dire and the problem of water scarcity will continue to grow as the world’s population increases. As population increases, the amount of fresh water available to each person decreases.

The supply of fresh water is essentially fixed and the balance between humanity’s demands and available quantity is already precarious. We heard from a number of countries, including Bangladesh, India, the Philippines and Indonesia, how the lack of fresh water means that communities have less time to spend on educating children and being productive. The lack of fresh water has a direct impact on the economic and social growth of a country. It has a direct impact on the health of the population of those countries that do not have access to adequate or, indeed, clean water. Out of 48 least developed countries, more than 40 suffer from water scarcity.

Waterborne diseases are a real burden for developing countries. Tragically, it is children who are the most vulnerable to diseases which result from both a lack of water and dirty water. In developing countries, each child has an average of 10 attacks of diarrhoea before the age of five and one in 10 children die of diarrhoea and dehydration. Water is the key to social equity, to environmental stability and to cultural diversity. Evidence at the conference showed that improved access to water and sanitation reduces poverty, both directly and indirectly. This is due in part to the saving of time, allowing, for example, increased agricultural production; the saving of money due to reduced costs of water and a reduced need for medical treatment due to waterborne diseases; increased availability of water sources, leading to increased livestock and crop production.

Well over 70 per cent of the earth’s surface is covered by water. The total volume of water on the planet is estimated to be in the region of 1.4 billion cubic kilometres. However, approximately 97 per cent of this total is salt water and, thus, is of only limited use to humans. A large part of the remaining 2.6 per cent is permanently stored in glaciers, icebergs and deep rock strata. That leaves just one per cent for direct use. Desalination of sea waters has been pursued for decades but the cost of desalination, particularly to developing countries, is an enormous burden. The current cost of desalination is around 95c per cubic metre, and it is generally estimated that, if the cost of desalination came down to 55c per cubic metre, it would be financially feasible to apply it widely. It is expected that the cost will be down to around 55c in the next five to six years and that technology will become a high priority in water stressed countries very quickly.

Developing or poorer countries will be very interested; however, what of the cost to these developing countries? Will they be given the technology free of charge? Water is the lifeblood of a country. Will the technology be exploited or will it be available to these countries? As I have outlined, we heard at the conference that water stress and poverty have a close linkage. In the year 2000, 508 million people lived in water stressed or
water scarce countries. By 2050, 4.2 billion people will be living in countries that cannot meet the requirement of 50 litres of water per person each day to meet basic human needs.

The world population stood at 1.65 billion at the beginning of the 20th century and had grown to over six billion by its end. Under this unprecedented population pressure, the earth is plagued with serious environmental destruction, a shortage of food and water, runaway unemployment, poverty and a prevalence of infectious diseases, such as HIV/AIDS. There are some who say that the earth can only feed and support eight to 8½ billion people. The population that threatens the survival of our planet is an issue that cannot be left to any single country to resolve. Our coexistence with mother earth urgently requires an international effort to bring together the best wisdom available to solve this desperate problem.

Access to water and sanitation is a necessary precursor to other forms of development, but it will become a major limiting factor in socioeconomic development unless we take action now. As we work towards sustainable development—that is, development where people’s needs are met and their quality of life is improved in the present while safeguarding the ability of future generations to meet their own needs—we have to secure the political will and leadership to act innovatively and decisively. So what do we do? What is the role of our world leaders? What is the role of parliamentarians around the world? What can we do?

It was suggested at the conference that we have potentially very powerful roles as leading advocates, raising awareness of issues at the highest political level. We indeed have the opportunity of influencing and shaping the development agenda, both at a local level and at an international level, through discussions such as those we had in Japan. Through our own organisation here, the Australian All Party Parliamentary Group on Population and Development, we can raise these issues and raise awareness of these issues at roundtables and discussion forums in a bipartisan way. We can open the doors and, by speaking out on population and development issues, we can ensure that our society in Australia is aware—or, indeed, is made aware—of these serious concerns and challenges that we are facing in the 21st century. I cannot stress enough that our role as parliamentarians is crucial. We are talking about the future of mankind as we know it today. At the end of the conference, all delegates agreed on a millennium declaration, which states:

To create ‘an enabling environment’ for action to stop unsustainable water exploitation and to improve access to water supply and sanitation services at the accelerated rates by

- pursuing policy reforms as many policies need revision to reflect the current realities
- enhancing institutions—streamlining institutional frameworks, establishing mechanisms for coordination, promoting autonomy and accountability
- promoting capacity building for planning, management and development.

In closing, I would like to say thank you to Dianne Proctor for her guidance and assistance during the conference. She taught me a lot and did not seem to mind my endless questions on the history of the group in Australia who put together the conference and those involved in the conference. She was very patient. To the member for Charlton, who is sitting in the chamber tonight, I wish you every success in your new role with our group in Australia. It was a pleasure to travel with you, and I believe the two of us gained a far better understanding of our Asian neighbours and the challenges they are facing with regard to population and water issues in the 21st century.

Environment: World Summit on Sustainable Development

Commonwealth Bank

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (5.19 p.m.)—I note the remarks made by the member for McPherson on very substantial issues, many of which I agree with. I wish to grieve about two things this afternoon. The first is the Howard Liberal government’s performance in international fora on environmental issues. The government needs to lift its performance in international fora on environmental issues. It is absolutely astonishing that last Saturday week the Australian, under the headline ‘Kemp’s practically a greenie’,
could print a report of our government in Bali the week before at the final preparatory meeting for the upcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. In fact, what happened there was that Australia teamed up with the United States and Canada to block pro-environment initiatives on renewable energy from the European countries and the G77 developing nations.

The Bali conference, the last before the Johannesburg conference, was a dismal failure. By the close of the conference, the overarching political statement that was supposed to have been drafted by the attending ministers, including Minister Kemp, remained unwritten. Johannesburg is intended to be the most significant local environment and sustainability conference since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, which gave birth to the Kyoto protocol on greenhouse gas emissions and Agenda 21, a framework for sustainable development.

Green groups are dismayed at the failure of Bali to set environmental targets and have condemned Australia’s role at Bali. At a protest demonstration outside last week’s conference, an effigy of the United States, Canada and Australia was displayed, called the ‘axis of environmental evil’. A delegate in the corridor at Bali was overheard to say, ‘What’s up with the Australians? They’re so close to the United States that they’re almost sitting on their laps having sex.’ I understand that, at one of the workshops on sustainable development at Bali, the Australians asked the Bangladeshi delegation to move so that they could sit next to the Americans. Given that Bangladesh has tens of millions of people threatened by rising sea levels from climate change, the US might have benefited from sitting next to them rather than from the Australians wanting to find out what the US line was so that we could obsequiously follow it. The ‘Kemp’s practically a greenie’ headline says more about the Australian newspaper than it does about the minister.

In terms of our international role, this is far from the first time. There was our role at Kyoto itself, and the fact that Australia, the United States and Canada have systematically sought to undermine subsequent climate change negotiations. Former Liberal leader, John Hewson, hardly a radical greenie, lamented in the Financial Review on Friday:

... we now want to be one of the gang of two, along with the US, that will not ratify the Kyoto Protocol

... talk about lost opportunity. I quite frankly feel that we wouldn’t know if our backside was on fire when it comes to such important international relations ... we have a unique opportunity ... not only to earn carbon credits but also to develop a major new export industry in environmental technology in the Asia-Pacific region.

And then there was our role from 1998 through to 2001 at the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to draft a treaty to try to solve the problems of the worst organic pollutants, known as persistent organic pollutants or POPs. The United States, Canada and Australia consistently sought to water down the treaty, now known as the Stockholm Convention. They talked about minimising rather than eliminating these contaminants and the US proposed a general exemption for all POPs presently in existence. An international meeting in Geneva will start today to discuss persistent organic pollutants. Australia has not yet ratified that treaty. Labor announced prior to the last election that we would ratify this treaty. We are represented in Geneva and it is time that we did the right thing regarding persistent organic pollutants.

Under the Howard government, Australia has gone from being an international leader on environmental issues to an international pariah. I urge the government to ratify the Kyoto protocol and be part of the collective international effort on climate change. I also urge the Howard government to play a positive role in the forthcoming Johannesburg world summit on sustainable development. The world needs this summit to be a success—it really needs it. Unlike the Howard government, Labor considers the protection of the global environment a vital international policy objective and is committed to re-establishing Australia as a leader in international climate change negotiations.

The second matter I want to grieve about this afternoon is a local matter in my elector-
ate of Wills concerning a dispute between Mr Graeme Walsh, one of my constituents, and the Commonwealth Bank. A number of members of this House with legal backgrounds may well be aware of the legal term force majeure. For members without a legal background, my understanding is that its legal definition is ‘an event or effect that cannot be reasonably anticipated or controlled: “a fortuitous event”’. Commonly, this means a flood or a fire. These things can also be referred to as acts of God. Courtesy of the Commonwealth Bank of Australia and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, you can now add ‘bank branch closures’ to that list.

Mr Walsh was a customer of the Merlynston branch of the Commonwealth Bank of Australia. He was the holder of a safety envelope, or safety deposit box, and when the Commonwealth Bank moved to close the Merlynston Branch, he said: ‘I’ve got a contract with you and because of this contract, if you close this branch, you’ll be in breach of the contract with me.’ He had paid for this service on 10 May 2000, and had paid for the service for one year. The service was unilaterally changed by the bank because they moved the safety deposit box to the Fawkner branch when the Merlynston Branch closed on 23 February 2001. Mr Walsh believed that the Commonwealth Bank had broken its contractual agreement with him to provide the service. He believed, and the contract stated, that the service they were providing him with was a safety deposit box at the Merlynston Branch—not a contract for an account with the bank but an actual service at an actual location.

The bank mailed him a letter telling him he had three options: they could move the box to Fawkner, move it to another location of their choice or he could come and get it. They said he was not entitled to a refund. Granted, the amount in dispute here is probably about 10 bucks. Nevertheless, Mr Walsh was pretty unhappy about the bank’s handling of this matter, so he took it to court, seeking redress. He went to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, and sought damages, orders for return of goods, finding of deceptive conduct, false representation and unconscionable conduct. In their finding, VCAT stated:

... the Tribunal accepts the Respondent Bank’s evidence that closure of a branch, such as occurred at Merlynston, would and does constitute a sufficient reason for moving a Safety Deposit lodgegment. Circumstances such as bank mergers, branch closure, floods or fire cannot be foreseen.

This is laughable. Floods and fires are things that happen to banks; mergers and closures are things that are done by banks. It is simply outrageous for VCAT to consider these matters to be akin to fires, floods and things of that character. I noticed recently an interview in the Australian with the Chief Executive of the Commonwealth Bank saying that Mr Murray was ‘unapologetic about the need for hard decisions on closures and job losses to keep the industry competitive’. With words like ‘unapologetic’ and ‘hard decisions’ being used, it certainly sounds like premeditation to me. I simply do not accept the argument that closures amount to something akin to an act of God. It is also a bit rich that the Commonwealth Bank would go to such an extent to prove one of their customers wrong. Indeed, if the bank and VCAT’s view of this case was right, why is it that the bank has since changed its contracts to read:

I/We understand ... no arrangements/refunds will apply for broken periods.

That was not in the contract Mr Walsh signed but it is there now. From my reading, Mr Walsh caught the bank out and he should get an apology and a refund, and he should not be liable for costs.

I heard the Prime Minister say that banks were insensitive. I would expect his Treasurer to take up the cause of Mr Walsh, in keeping with my written request to that effect several weeks ago. It is the job of this parliament to ensure that ordinary people are not trampled on by large corporations such as the Commonwealth Bank and I hope that the Treasurer will seek to deal with this matter in a way which assists Mr Walsh to get justice in this case.

Howard Government: Policies

Mr LLOYD (Robertson) (5.29 p.m.)—I wish to use this opportunity to highlight much that is good about Australia and Aus-
ustralians. Listening to the Labor opposition, you would think that there was nothing good about Australia or Australians. I grieve the fact that the Labor opposition and elements of the Australian media fail to understand the views and aspirations of most Australians, particularly young Australians. As honourable members know, I have been a member in this place for more than six years and have successfully contested three elections. On each occasion the Labor Party failed to recognise why the Australian people have rejected them. On each occasion they deluded themselves that the Australian people simply made a mistake. I remember back in 1996 the Labor opposition were saying to themselves and their supporters, ‘Don’t worry, it’s only the Keating backlash; all we have to do is wait three years and we will be back in office.’ In 1998, after a difficult and hard-fought campaign on tax reform and the GST, again they could not comprehend why the Australian people put the long-term interests of Australia ahead of short-term, undeliverable promises. After the last federal election in 2001, after six years in opposition, the Labor Party still had no plans and no policies. They have been and still are a lazy opposition. The Australian public saw and continues to see them for what they are. They thought they could simply surf back into office on the back of unrest about the GST.

In 2002, the Labor Party are still all at sea, floundering around on their surfboard, waiting for the big wave to wash them into office. They even tried to claim that the MV Tampa washed them off course. Sadly, I have to tell them that they were not even in the same ocean. What Australia saw was a strong and cohesive government led by Prime Minister John Howard, who was and is prepared to take tough and strong decisions for the good of Australia, and a divided, weak opposition with no policies, no plans and no future vision for our great country. The Labor Party were not even in the race long before the MV Tampa sailed into Australian waters. The Labor Party and, again, elements of the Australian media persist with deluding themselves that the Australian people are the least bit interested in the costly taxpayer-funded Senate inquiry into a certain maritime incident. The Labor Party are hanging on every word as though the inquiry will magically reveal that they were robbed at the last election. I have to suggest to honourable members opposite that if that is their view they ought to spend more time in their electorates. A walk around my electorate—Gosford, Umina, Woy Woy or any other area in Robertson—would quickly reveal what the people of my electorate think of that wasteful inquiry.

But that is not why electorates such as mine, which was previously held by the Labor Party for 26 years and classified as a ‘safe Labor seat’, voted so strongly for the Howard government in the 2001 federal election. All age groups and all demographics in my electorate supported the Howard government simply because they compared the policies of the two major parties. They looked at our track record and our plans for the future and they liked what they saw, they looked at the Labor opposition who had no plans or visions for the future, and they compared the track records of the two parties. The Labor Party failed to understand the ambitions and aspirations of so many Australians, particularly, as I mentioned earlier, young Australians.

I spoke to many first-time voters in my electorate before and after the election. One who particularly comes to mind is a young chap who was working as a salesperson in an electrical store. He was about 20 years old and it was the first time he had voted. He quite simply said, ‘I looked at both parties and summed up what was in it for me and what was in it for this country. The other side was not offering anything of interest to me.’ He compared the track record of what the Howard government had done for Australia over the time that he remembers. Even at 20 years of age he can remember the effect that it had on his parents back in the 1980s when interest rates were 16 and 17 per cent and unemployment was 11 per cent, with over one million people out of work. Compare that with what we have now: 6.3 per cent unemployment. Look at issues such as the waterfront reform, for which the government was criticised heavily. We had crane lifts of 17 containers an hour. We now have up to 26.4 crane lifts an hour, which is world stan-
dard. As a government we made some tough decisions on industrial relations reforms so that we could employ more people. With the GST—the tax reform—we provided the largest ever tax cuts to Australians.

After the last election there was much talk about aspirational voters and what they wanted. The Labor Party cannot understand that young people in Australia now are highly motivated, well-educated and well-travelled and that they want incentives to achieve. One has only to look at the 60 Minutes program two Sundays ago which highlighted the number of successful Australians in London—the high-flyers. If you have an opportunity to travel to places like America or London, you find literally thousands of young Australians backpacking and working around the world. They are highly sought after employees. Those people are looking to governments and political parties for policies that will provide them with the incentives to work hard and to receive the rewards of their hard work and education.

Parents want freedom of choice in education. They do not want to be told that they must send their children to a public school. They want to choose whether to send their children to a government or a non-government school. They want a government that will support them in such choices. They see that in the Howard government—a government which is prepared to take the hard decisions which are right for this country. They look at the track record over six years and they see a country which can stand head and shoulders above most other countries in the world. By the end of this financial year the coalition government will have paid off $61 billion of the Labor Party’s $96 billion debt. Labor members become sick of hearing us say that, but it is important that we address the financial situation in this country so that we do not pay $4,000 million a year in interest and that we do not funnel money into a budget deficit black hole.

We have been able to generate many new jobs. The coalition has created over 900,000 new jobs since 1996. It will not be long before we can claim that we have generated more than one million new jobs. Unemployment is expected to fall to six per cent. I mentioned earlier in the speech that it was now down to 6.3 per cent and hopefully by mid-2003 we could have it down to six per cent. It is expected, as I said earlier, that over one million jobs will be created by Christmas 2002. Economic growth is set to remain strong in 2002 and 2003 and Australia is one of the fastest growing countries in the industrialised world.

These things have not come about by a government not taking the tough decisions. We have had a government that has been prepared to stay focused on what is important to Australians and to address the real needs of the Australian community. You have only to look at the opposition’s poor performance in disallowing the regulation in relation to the migration zone and you can see that there is no consistency.

Mr Slipper—They have jumped into bed with the people smugglers.

Mr Lloyd—Absolutely. There is no consistency there whatsoever from the Labor opposition. People in my electorate do not hang on every word that is said in parliament. They see the one or two minute grab on the national news, but they can see that the Labor opposition have no consistency; no policy. They do not know what they stand for. One minute they say they support our policies on protecting our borders and the next minute they disallow a regulation which sends the wrong message to the people smugglers of the world. It says that Australia is now open for business again for people smugglers. It is an act that I cannot comprehend and I am sure that the people in my electorate cannot comprehend where the Labor Party is going or in what direction they are going. I foresee that the direction the Labor Party are going will mean that they will be staying in opposition for a very long time. I am pleased about that because I can see that this is a country that now has a great future and will continue to have a great feature under the Howard coalition government. (Time expired)

Parliamentary Reform

Mr Price (Chifley) (5.39 p.m.)—Perhaps like you, Mr Deputy Speaker Mossfield, I wonder at an electorate which has
member from the government who declares that a deficit is a surplus. The Treasurer declares that a deficit in his sixth year is actually a surplus. Why would they believe the honourable member, let alone the government? But I do not want to be distracted. I want to talk about parliamentary reform. I would like to read a couple of quotes into the *Hansard* record:

I would like to see in a few years’ time a situation where there was a re-establishment of trust between the people of this country and their elected leaders. We do need to change the public’s attitude towards Parliament and that is why I am committed, if I become Prime Minister of this country, I am committed to ensuring that the Australian Parliament has a truly independent Speaker in every sense of the word. I intend to make the Auditor-General a completely independent office accountable to the Parliament, and I can assure you that if I become Prime Minister I will have no rostered days off and that I will be there every day that Parliament sits.

Those were the words of the current Prime Minister addressing the National Press Club when he was Leader of the Opposition. I would like to read another quote from the very same person:

No address on the role of government cannot ignore the role of parliament itself and the community’s view of the institution, particularly since the televising of parliament. No person who holds parliamentary sovereignty dear could be other than disturbed at the steady decline in both the actual power and the reputation of the parliamentary institution. Much of the responsibility for this can be fairly sheeted home to Australia’s Labor Governments of the past 12 years. Question Time has been debased, parliament relegated to second best through major statements often made outside parliament even when in session, and of course the speakership has been undermined by no less a person than the Prime Minister himself. Reversing this trend uniquely lies within the power of the government of the day. Our party system dictates that if the executive has a will to bypass parliament, only a major revolution from within the government party—which might imperil the government’s very existence—can prevent that occurring. For that reason I wish in advance of the election of a Coalition Government to commit the next government of this country to a series of reforms which will restore greater authority, dignity and meaning to our parliamentary institutions. The Coalition will seek to invest the Speaker of the next parliament with greater independence, similar to his or her counterpart at Westminster. This will require the positive response of the Labor Party. For our part the commitment is genuine and on-going.

Who said these words? The Prime Minister John Howard in one of his headland speeches—*The role of government: a modern Liberal approach*—to the Menzies Institute back when he was Leader of the Opposition.

Nothing could be further from the truth. What John Howard promised in terms of higher standards in this House and what he promised the people of Australia in terms of having an independent Speaker could not be further from the reality of what we have today. Who in this chamber believes that somehow question time has become more edifying and that it is a better representation to the Australian people of what we do today? Who in this chamber believes that somehow question time has become more edifying and that it is a better representation to the Australian people of what we do in this place? I think you would have to be certifiably mad to agree with that. And yet let me make the point that in *Hansard*, when the now Prime Minister was responding to the Blewett report, he said, ‘I want supplementary questions. The opposition wants supplementary questions.’ It is certainly in the standing orders but who was the Speaker who actually provided for supplementary questions? It was Speaker Halverson, whom the Prime Minister assassinated. So much for a more independent Speaker.

You have to understand that the Leader of the Opposition, before this parliament was assembled after the last election, put forward a series of propositions. One was for an Australian style independent Speaker: that is, either side would provide a Speaker from its side for six years and the Deputy Speaker would come from the opposition benches. That is what the proposal was. Simon Crean went one step further. He said that in fact we were prepared to support Speaker Andrew in that role for a further six years. How generous can you get? This is the Speaker that the Leader of the House says is the best Speaker, but he was not prepared to put him up as the first truly independent Speaker of this House. What humbug! In opposition they promised higher standards; in government they deliver the reverse. In opposition they promised an independent Speaker as far as the Westmin-...
ster system will go, but what have they done about the latest proposals?

It is more than just the issue of an independent Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition has proposed time limits on questions—one minute for the asking of questions and four minutes for the answering of questions. What has been the response of the government? Deafening silence. We have been through the farrago of the current standing orders, where there is one standing order for answering questions and I do not know how many standing orders for asking questions. I have a proposed standing order on the Notice Paper—it is a very simple one; it could be picked up by the government tomorrow if they wanted—which is that, insofar as the standing orders apply to the asking of questions, they should also apply to the answering of questions. Apart from time limits, what else has the Leader of the Opposition proposed? Not arty-farty, airy-fairy proposals, but concrete proposals. He suggested that there should be a take note procedure which would, on a given day, replace matters of public importance. I think this would open up question time and in fact make it a little bit more responsible. Again, it would be a meaningful reform of this parliament and this institution.

I have read of the Prime Minister’s fulsome commitment to the committee system. What was the reality once he became Prime Minister? He cut the budgets. In the House of Representatives the budget for the committee system was cut more than any other area in this parliament. Yet the committees are the universities of parliament—they are where you and I, Mr Deputy Speaker, can sit down as members of committees and try to sort out a national problem, our politics aside. We have example after example of this. There is an even greater farce in this parliament. Three new committees of the House of Representatives have been established and not one dollar extra has been committed to providing for and supporting those committees. It stands to reason that other committees will bleed to support these new committees. Democracy does not come cheap—if you really want to have an effective committee system you do actually have to invest in it. The reverse has been the case under this coalition government.

Last but not least, what about the farce of not having a staffing and appropriations committee? This was a radical proposal emanating from a Liberal senator in the 1970s in the Senate and still, in this new century and new millennium, this House of Representatives is the only body that is not scrutinised and has no accountability built into it. Increasingly, the Speaker despairs of the number of questions that are directed to him—quite properly—because there is an absence of an appropriations and staffing committee for this House of Representatives. In conclusion, only one group is serious about the reform of parliament and the reform of question time, and that is the opposition. The government has had its opportunity and it made its promises loud and clear before it was elected into government. It has failed to implement a single one of them.

Paterson Electorate: Tidy Towns Awards

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (5.49 p.m.)—My grievance today concerns the lack of recognition for the efforts of our volunteer community. Therefore, I extend my congratulations to the Soldiers Point-Salamander Bay Tidy Towns committee on its recent successes. It is the new winner of the National Tidy Towns Award, presented in Hobart at the Keep Australia Beautiful presentations. Soldiers Point-Salamander Bay won out over 1,700 other towns that entered the awards. The area features pristine waters, a clean environment, a koala habitat and the Mambo wetlands.

A clean local environment complements the tourism industry, which is worth millions to the local small operators every year. Tourism New South Wales estimates that there are 2.3 million visitors to the Hunter each year. Protecting the environment is a vital part of bringing more visitors to the area. Port Stephens is well known for dolphin watching, recreational fishing and diving. Without a clean environment that can attract native bush wildlife and plants, Port Stephens would be much worse off.

Not only did the Soldiers Point-Salamander Bay Tidy Towns committee win
the overall national award, which was recently announced; the Port Stephens local government area won the majority of awards in the categories announced in November. Lemon Tree Passage won the waterways and foreshore conservation award. West Tiligerry-Tanilba Bay won a highly commended award for waterways and foreshore conservation and also the waste minimisation award. Soldiers Point-Salamander Bay won the wildlife corridors and habitat conservation award and the litter prevention award. The Nelson Bay and West Tilligerry Tidy Towns committees won a highly commended award for cultural heritage conservation. These awards recognise not only the commitment to improving the environment by the many volunteers but also the work that improves the standard of living and quality of life for everybody in the surrounding communities.

The Tidy Towns Awards started in 1981. Since then, they have inspired towns right across New South Wales to get into action and clean up their environment. Towns across my electorate of Paterson have been involved in the event over the years. I congratulate all of the volunteers who have put the time and the effort into these programs. Today I want to acknowledge the hard work that has been put into winning the national award by the Soldiers Point-Salamander Bay Tidy Towns committee. It has been a gradual process over the last seven years and it began when the chairman, John Eckersley, started the initiative on his own. Over the years, more and more local people have got involved through organisations such as the Uniting Church, local schools and land care. Their efforts have resulted in Port Stephens being regarded as an example of environmental management to other towns.

The Tidy Towns judges made the following comments about the area:

Soldiers Point/Salamander Bay exemplify the Tidy Towns concept.

Entrances into the Soldiers Point/Salamander Bay are extremely neat and tidy. An overall commitment is clearly demonstrated to beautification projects in and around the whole community. Concern, care, commitment and pride are key components of Soldiers Point/Salamander Bay’s approach to the many tasks associated with Tidy Towns.

Numerous environment activities form the nucleus of the Tidy Towns work program. Notable projects include extensive erosion control works at Wanda Headlands and Cromarty Bay. These projects involve:

- The removal of bitou bush and lantana— not an easy feat, as you would know, Mr Deputy Speaker—
- Water quality monitoring
- Koala monitoring
- Bugwatch
- Revegetation

Soldiers Point Primary School has been heavily involved in these projects and has also developed its own education program. The school was presented with an award from Port Stephens Council recognising its commitment to various environmental action programs which were conducted in conjunction with parents, teachers and community service organisations. The judges also made special mention of the town’s Refused and Reused Community Recycling Centre. This centre takes materials ranging from scrap metals and white goods to building materials, electrical goods and batteries. The centre also hosted the Recycle Fest, which involved art displays made up of recycled material. The judges said of that:

David Sams’ commitment to the centre is to be commended. His coordinating role sees 2 people employed full time with 12 workers who volunteer their time in ensuring the centre’s success. Many thousands of tonnes of materials have been diverted away from landfill as a result of effective management.

One of the big environmental success stories is the hard work that has gone into the protection of native bush areas. Over 170 hectares of native bush in the Mambo wetlands is protected and is adjacent to Wanda wetlands and Taylor’s Beach Nature Reserve through to Stoney Ridge Reserve. It provides a natural wildlife corridor and habitat for fauna. A great deal of support was also gained from Port Stephens Council. This relationship between local government and the local Tidy Towns committee was commended, and judges went as far as to say that it was a leading example of working in part-
nership with the community for a common goal.

This achievement has not happened overnight, and it involved a team of people who have worked together for a number of years. Firstly, I want to mention John Eckersley, who is the chairman of the Tidy Towns and Landcare Committee. John says that he wants to use the award to protect and enhance our local environment. He stresses that one of the most important features of protecting the environment is maintaining wildlife corridors. This has been a very important part of the programs at Soldiers Bay and Salamander Bay and has helped the local wildlife. For example, koalas in the area have been known to move from Mambo wetlands to Taylor’s Beach to give birth, and then move back to Mambo taking young with them along the way. Without these wildlife corridors, this journey would be harder, if not impossible, for the local koala population. It is through the work of John and members of the Tidy Towns committee and the volunteers that the local wildlife and fauna have been able to survive. Some of these include endangered and rare species such as squirrel gliders and wallum frogs. Members of the committee have made an invaluable contribution to this cause. They have put a considerable amount of time and effort into making Tidy Towns work and many have been surprised at what they have found while working in the bush—from birdlife to native plants. They have created an area that has seen visitors, not only from local areas but also from overseas, look in wonder.

The members of this committee are John Eckersley, Sandra Bull, Simon Brooke, John Christians, Frank Cutting, Joan Eckersley, Neville Ross Gardner, Roma Gardner, Lindsay Harvey, Walter Lamond, Margaret Lamond, Beverley Lee, Wallace McLeod, Eileen McLeod, Mervyn McIntyre, Patrick O’Rourke, Connie O’Rourke, Marcia Pirie, Don Pirie and David Sams. The volunteers are Judy Ball, Eddie Ball, Sue Sams, Marlene Brooke, Roy Hughes, Ian Diemar, and Refused and Reused Community Recycling Centre volunteers. I would also like to name the members of the Mambo Wanda Committee: Carol Ridgeway Bissett, Larry Mulhearn, Carol Mulhearn and Gay McKay.

I would like to congratulate John and the committee on their hard work over the years which has resulted in this award. Not only is it recognition of the work that has been done; it also lays the foundations for future generations to be able to enjoy this beautiful part of Australia, with protection of native bush, wildlife and fauna. I would also like to recognise Councillor Brian Watson-Will for his efforts in this project.

The Tidy Towns project joins together other programs in trying to clean up our environment. Paterson is one of the most diverse electorates that is represented here, and there are varying needs for each environment. Again, I congratulate all that entered the Tidy Towns event. We are so proud of our volunteers for the effort that they have made in taking out this national award, but congratulations need to go to all of the other entrants that entered their local projects, throughout Australia, in these awards. Without the support of these volunteers on a national basis, Australia would be much the worse for wear.

### Bendigo Electorate: Printing Industry

**Bendigo Electorate: Roads**

**Mr GIBBONS (Bendigo) (5.57 p.m.)**—I want to use this grievance debate to speak about the treachery that this coalition government has inflicted on central Victoria as a result of broken commitments given prior to and after the last election campaign. In the recent budget, the Treasurer—without any consultation or warning—mugged Maryborough’s printing industry by removing the Printing Industry Competitiveness Scheme and the Enhanced Printing Industry Competitiveness Scheme, which should have continued for another two years. Of course there was no mention of this decision before the election.

PICS was originally introduced to offset the tariff on imported paper, a tariff that is still in place. EPICS was introduced as part of a written commitment given by the Liberal-National coalition to the Democrats to offset the GST on books, which were previously tax-free. Now we have this insidious
coalition tax on knowledge and learning. For Maryborough in central Victoria, which is a small community that relies heavily on the jobs provided by the book printing industry, this is a particularly savage mugging. Maryborough’s printing industry is among the most efficient in this hemisphere, and is responsible for producing, right here in Australia, quality products like the Bryce Courtney novel, *Four Fires*, and the very popular Harry Potter series. In fact, some 350,000 copies of books in the *Four Fires* series and 2.1 million copies of books in the Harry Potter series were printed in Maryborough. That is what is in jeopardy as a result of the Treasurer’s decision.

What has happened is that the Treasurer, with a few strokes of a pen, mugged Maryborough’s most vital industry and now we see that yet another GST compensation scheme has gone up in ’smirk’. Maryborough has an unemployment level of 12 per cent—almost twice the national average—with youth unemployment reported to be around 30 per cent. Nestle announced last year that in September this year they will pull the plug on their Maryborough operation, wiping out 130 full-time jobs. We can only guess the damage that is being inflicted on Maryborough’s economy by the Nestle closure, together with the coalition’s vicious attack on the book printing industry in abandoning PICS and EPICS and the future introduction of the Copyright Amendment (Parallel Importation) Bill.

Let me deal with those reasons one at a time. In relation to the first reason, about the community changing its banking habits, let me inform you, Mr Deputy Speaker, that there are no bank branches of any description in the township of Newstead. The last bank to close was the National Australia Bank branch in 1998. The Newstead post office offers a limited range of banking services but nowhere near as comprehensive a range of services as that proposed by the rural transaction centre’s Bendigo community bank proposal. The Bendigo Bank has now established some 66 community banks successfully trading right across Australia, and there is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that a Bendigo community bank branch in Newstead’s rural transaction centre would be any different. In relation to the second reason, I am advised that all documentation relating to the proposed child-care facility was in accordance with the department’s requirements. At no stage did departmental officials indicate any problems with this or any other section of the application. In fact, they acknowledged that the submission was of a very high standard.

As for the third reason, Centrelink apparently had not agreed to be part of the proposal. Recently, Centrelink Bendigo took a decision to withdraw its one day per week presence in Castlemaine, a town very close to Newstead. As a consequence, Centrelink clients from throughout the Mount Alexander Shire, which includes Newstead, now have to travel to Bendigo or gain access to Centrelink officers via a video conferencing facility established in Castlemaine’s community health centre, some 25 minutes travelling time from Newstead, which has virtually no public transport. Of course, now that the election is safely out of the way, the community has been informed that the project has not been approved. I have written to the Minister for Transport and Regional Services urging him to reconsider his decision and for not approving this proposal: one, the so-called viability of the community changing its banking habits; two, alleged unsubstantiated profit projections for the child-care facility; and, three, the fact that Centrelink chose not to be included in the project.
seeking a meeting with him or his department on behalf of the Newstead community task force.

But this Liberal-National coalition government does have money for its own marginal seats, and it spends it on a grand scale. Under another program, the government’s Regional Solutions Program, the electorates of two coalition ministers—the Nationals’ John Anderson and the Liberals’ Wilson Tuckey—have been big winners. The Deputy Prime Minister’s electorate scored $2.8 million of the initial $31 million handed out under the scheme. That is nearly 10 per cent of all the funds for just one electorate—a National Party electorate! Minister Tuckey’s electorate ran a close second. So there is plenty of taxpayers’ money for coalition areas but nothing for the Newstead district.

Another example of the coalition’s deceit in the election campaign was over funding for the duplication of the Calder Highway. The Bracks state government in its recent budget allocated $70 million for the next stage of construction, the section from Kyneton to Faraday. That is the Victorian government’s half of the full cost of $140 million for the project. As for the federal government, the cupboard is bare. There is nothing in the budget for the Calder. The Treasurer was in Bendigo during the federal election campaign. When questioned by the media over funding for the Calder, he refused point-blank to commit a sum of money and a completion date for the Calder Highway. By contrast, the federal Labor Party during the election committed itself to providing $200 million to complete the highway and to do it within the Bracks government’s time line of 2006.

I might say that the Calder Highway and the future of ADI in Bendigo were two major local election issues in Bendigo last year. The Treasurer failed Bendigo on the Calder and the then Minister for Defence, Mr Reith, failed Bendigo on ADI. Mr Costello would not fund the Calder but he had no problem pulling $445 million out of his hat during the election for the Scoresby Freeway in Melbourne’s outer east. The city always comes first with the coalition parties; the country does not count. The Prime Minister suddenly came up with $220 million for the Scoresby Freeway in the run-up to the Aston by-election last year. Then he conjured up another $225 million for the Scoresby Freeway in the November general election. I note the report in the Melbourne Age on 10 October 2001 of the Prime Minister’s comments on the Scoresby funding and contrast them with the Treasurer’s later refusal in Bendigo to commit himself in the same way to the Calder. Mr Howard said at the time: The Commonwealth Government is absolutely and unconditionally committed to finishing the $890 million road by 2008. There won’t be any tolls. This is an ironclad, unconditional, straightforward, black and white commitment.

A few weeks later in Bendigo the Treasurer refused to commit a sum of money for the Calder and a finishing date. What an incredible contrast! The Treasurer acknowledged in Bendigo during the election campaign that, one, the Calder Highway is a road of national importance; two, RONIs are funded by the federal government with the state government on a fifty-fifty basis; and, three, the federal government will put up the cash for the Calder when the state puts down its cash. So the Treasurer did make a commitment to funding the project at a campaign fundraising luncheon in Bendigo just nine days before the election. I am not sure what was on the menu at that Liberal Party fundraising lunch, but I do know what they were served: pork pies, and plenty of them. Let me quote the Treasurer’s very words:

The Commonwealth will continue to fund the Calder Highway duplication project in partnership with the State Government, so, as the State Government commits to construction, the Commonwealth will match the funding under the Roads of National Importance program.

Why won’t the Treasurer honour this promise? The Bracks government has put its money on the table—$70 million for the next stage of the Calder Highway duplication. Why won’t the Treasurer match it? There is one reason: this government says one thing before an election, then it does exactly the opposite after the election. In short, it lies. We have seen it on ADI. We have seen it on Telstra. We have seen it time and time again. Central Victorians have had enough of the
federal government’s doubletalk over the Calder Highway. We want funds to get on to the next stage of the duplication and we want them now.

This government, during that election campaign, said and did anything to steal people’s votes and then walked away after the election. As a result, they will not be able to hold their heads up high at all in central Victoria. I am delighted to invite the Treasurer to come to Bendigo and explain the situation on the Calder—why he did not allocate any funding in the budget. I would be delighted to welcome the Minister for Transport and Regional Services to come to Newstead in Bendigo and explain why he refused to allocate funding for their rural transaction centre after his predecessor gave them the thumbs up; he told them that the project would be funded during the election campaign. This government will do and say anything to steal votes before an election and then walk away after it.

Forestry: Regional Forest Agreements

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (6.07 p.m.)—I would like to bring to the attention of the members of the House in this grievance debate some developments with regard to the regional forest agreement process in relation to the New South Wales government. The New South Wales government must honour its commitments in the north-east New South Wales Regional Forest Agreement to check basic forest data sets. The New South Wales government must consult landholders who may be affected by the move to transfer crown land into reserves and national parks.

Some 154 graziers are likely to be affected by the latest round of land transfers, which will lead to a loss of valuable land currently used for forestry and grazing. Constituents within my electorate have raised concerns over the process New South Wales agencies are following to transfer land. They are especially concerned about the accuracy of the data used to target areas for transfer, and want the New South Wales agencies to ‘ground truth’, or validate, the existence of conservation values before taking any further action. Some of these graziers could be denied access to areas which they have held under permit or licences for decades. In some cases, the permits go back to the beginning of the last century. The process must ensure that the New South Wales government bases its decisions on sound scientific data, backed by field inspections, given the potential impact on these people and dependent rural communities.

Some are saying that the Commonwealth is driving the state to use this data to proceed quickly. The Commonwealth-New South Wales government bilateral agreement on the national action plan provides for the New South Wales government to complete the regional vegetation management plans as soon as possible. However, the Commonwealth has not imposed specific deadlines. The management plans must take into account the most accurate information available before decisions affecting the livelihood of people are made. I am concerned that the livelihoods of many of my constituents may be being adversely affected by decisions made on the basis of potentially flawed data provided by the New South Wales government. There are two main streams of assessment: one aimed at ensuring the environmental and heritage obligations of governments are met, and one aimed at ensuring that the social and economic objectives of forest use are achieved. This is an important balance—and not one that is currently being achieved in the case of New South Wales.

It is a widely held view that the authorities in New South Wales charged with the responsibility for assessing the areas in relation to RFAs have dropped the ball. It has been reported to me that there has been a brief audit of one layer—that being the GIS layer over four map sheets in New South Wales. This audit revealed four separate instances where those conducting the assessments had incorrectly interpreted areas of aerial maps. The number of errors is quite staggering. I have been informed that the errors range from approximately 200 errors in the interpretation of the aerial photograph in the case of the Tenterfield map sheet to approximately 330 errors detected in the interpretation of the Coaldale map sheet.

It is standard audit practice that, when a sample reveals inconsistencies, further work
is carried out. Given the quantum of errors discovered, many of my constituents are of the view that much more work is required. The cause of these errors would seem to come from where the data from the interpretation of aerial photographs is entered wrongly into a computer system for evaluation. The breakdown of the errors has been: missing line work from maps, missing codes, incorrect codes, conflicting codes, duplicated codes and incorrect labelling of codes.

I believe the New South Wales authorities should be taking a long, hard look at these errors. It has been suggested by some, and put to me, that staff assessing, reading and interpreting the maps are not sufficiently experienced. The interpretation of these maps is critical in the RFA process in New South Wales, given that the only method used is aerial interpretation. Unfortunately, the New South Wales government has not seen fit to go out and conduct on-the-ground work to establish the situation in these areas and the great bulk of the data remains unaudited. There has been talk of one property owner whose rock quarry was identified on the vegetation mapping as old-growth forest.

I would just like to draw to the attention of the House an extract from the Resource and Conservation Assessment Council report completed in September 2001. On page 15 of the report it states:

Other errors have been detected within the UNE structure layer. An example includes incorrect line work digitised by GIS contractors without consultation with aerial photographic interpretation experts in an effort to resolve code conflict issues. Polygons were split with a straight arbitrarily placed line. Which is meaningless in the field. A process to correct these errors should be initiated.

After scanning the line work, the GIS contract is manually typed CRAFTI codes into the digital layer. It was a major source of error, as the GIS operator often misread and/or entered the aerial photograph interpretation code incorrectly. The structural code (attribute) string is much longer and more detailed than the UNE floristic code string, so the error rating in the structural data set is likely to be much higher. Random “missing line work” errors have also been detected in the structure layer. This kind of error can only be identified and corrected during a complete and thorough checking process. It is recommended that the issue of errors within the UNE structure layer be addressed and that resources be provided to enable implementation of a systematic editing process.

It is of great concern to many of my constituents that decisions are being made on matters affecting people’s livelihood when the data forming the basis for these decisions is in serious doubt. From a federal perspective, the RFA process exists under the understanding that the Commonwealth has the responsibility for improving the economic and social welfare of all Australians. In this context, the Commonwealth has obligations relating to efficient resource use and management, industry policy, employment and regional growth and development. The Commonwealth has clear policy objectives for the development of the forest and forest product industries in Australia. These objectives acknowledge the important contribution that this industry sector makes to the economic and social welfare of the country, particularly in regional areas like the North Coast of New South Wales, where my electorate of Cowper is situated. In making decisions on forest use matters, governments must take into account all potential implications of the decision, including the broader implications of the community’s economic and social wellbeing. Economic and social assessments, therefore, form an integral part of the full range of assessments that should be undertaken as the basis for negotiating a regional forest agreement.

As a result of the Labor government in New South Wales assessing certain areas by interpretations off aerial maps, we are seeing areas becoming protected areas, where any groundwork clearly reveals that such an assessment is wrong. Perhaps if some Labor ministers in New South Wales got out from behind their desks and went out into the field they would see that decisions need to be based on accurate data in order to have the desired effect of environmental protection. These actions are damaging industry and commerce in fragile regional economies.

The need to take account of all economic uses of forests is firmly established in the National Forest Policy Statement, which establishes as a national goal the development
of internationally competitive and ecologically sustainable wood production and wood products industries. Efficient industries based on maximising value-adding opportunities and efficient use of wood resources will provide the basis for an expansion in wood products manufacturing which will in turn provide national and regional economic benefits.

The RFA approach recognises that Commonwealth and state governments have a range of obligations and interests in relation to the protection of forest values and the sustainable use and development of forest resources. Regional forest agreements are designed to streamline and coordinate the various decision-making processes necessary to meet governments’ obligations and interests in relation to forest use. A central objective is to reduce uncertainty and improve decision making. It is indeed a difficult problem. The problem is that if the data which forms the foundation stone for the RFA process is flawed then the resultant economic, social and environmental outcomes will be suboptimal.

I have discussed these matters with concerned farming people from outside my electorate. I recently met with Bronwyn Petrie who operates a family farm near Tenterfield with her husband Bill. Their property is a family owned enterprise which has been in the family for several generations, and over that time the family has been pursuing sustainable farming techniques. They have been involved in beef production and the harvesting of timber. This family has done an excellent job in managing their land and it is rich in biodiversity.

Their property has been mapped under the native vegetation plans as old-growth forest despite having been actively farmed by the family for, I am told, around 100 years. The management techniques this family have employed have been so successful, and their custodianship of this land so effective, that their land has been considered environmentally significant. Interestingly, this land, which has been classified as old-growth forest, includes grasslands. Such a classification shows how fundamentally flawed the data is. Now the Petries will have to suffer the dead hand of the bureaucracy and seek approval to cut down a tree or to gather firewood. I am told that without first applying to a state government bureaucrat they will no longer be able to control and thin regrowth timber, an activity which has been part of their farm management techniques for decades.

In his press release of 23 May 2002 the federal Minister for Forestry and Conservation stated that the NSW government should base its decisions on sound data backed up by field inspections, given the potential impact of their decisions on the community. I agree with the minister and, based on the information conveyed to me, the data appears far from sound. I call on the New South Wales state government and their bureaucrats to get out of their offices and into the forests to validate the data and ensure that the interests of the environment and the community are protected. 

(Banking: Credit Card Fees)

Mr Griffin (Bruce) (6.17 p.m.)—I rise to speak—very briefly, given the hour of the day—to the issue of credit card fees and the reforms currently under consideration by the Reserve Bank of Australia. Members may be aware that the Reserve Bank is currently reviewing the operation of the credit card system in this country with respect to a number of issues, particularly the interchange fee, which is the fee charged between the banks for the processing of transactions in relation to the system. I also wish to speak to issues such as the no surcharge rule, and also to the question of who actually can be involved in the systems in terms of smaller issuers coming onto the market. I will briefly focus on a couple of those issues and a couple of points which come from those.

The abolition of the no surcharge rule relates to allowing retailers to charge directly to customers the actual cost of the transaction, rather than the situation now where that cost is, if you like, incorporated in the overall operation of the system. It has been proposed that if you abolish this no surcharge rule you will have a situation where there is a more transparent system in relation to the actual cost of the operation of credit cards, rather than having it all hidden and lacking transparency.
It has been said recently, and I have noted some reports to this effect on the news today, that this will probably lead to widespread circumstances where retailers will charge people a surcharge on their credit card transactions. I put on the record that the experience overseas where the no surcharge rule has been abolished is that that has not been the case. Very few retailers have moved down the track of imposing a surcharge on transactions. In fact the circumstances are the reverse. The only area where that may be of concern with respect to this particular rule is in rural and regional areas where there is isolation and a lack of competition. It certainly has not been the experience overseas. Certainly, many of the players in the system that I have spoken to have said that they do not believe there is likely to be a major problem in that respect.

With respect to the interchange fee, the reason why it is being dropped, or the reason I suspect the RBA will find that it should be dropped, is that currently there are charges involved which should not be part of the fee. It is well within the scope of the system to cope with the dropping of that fee, and certainly I encourage the RBA to continue with its reform process.

Mr Abbott—You’ve got the message then!

Mr McCLELLAND—I can assure the minister that in my experience it is not the case and that it is a big decision to take industrial action, particularly with mortgage burdens as they exist in capital cities these days. For any worker to contemplate the loss of a day’s pay or several days pay or longer is a very big decision. Workers do not go out on strike lightly; in fact, it is my experience that—if not more often than not, certainly frequently—a decision to take industrial action or to continue with industrial action is taken despite the advice of the union leadership. There is a good case in point, although he has a reputation as a pretty tough trade union official: Doug Cameron, of the Manufacturing Workers Union, recommended to mass meetings of Qantas employees that they accept a resolution of issues in dispute between the workforce and Qantas, and he was rolled by the meetings of members. That is something that frequently occurs.

I also want to emphasise that trade unions are democratic organisations. Unlike corporations, all executive officers of trade unions must be elected; they cannot be appointed. Unions cannot engage professional chief executives; they must be elected. Unlike corporations elections, elections within industrial organisations must be supervised by the Australian Electoral Commission; indeed, more often than not, there is a presumption in the legislation that they will be conducted by the AEC, with the commission acting as a returning officer. So elections are very strictly conducted—indeed, controlled—by very far-reaching provisions that enable the Federal Court to conduct election inquiries. Those inquiries are not conducted as party-party litigation; they are literally inquiries where the Federal Court dispenses with the
rules of evidence to ascertain whether an illegality or irregularity has occurred in the electoral process.

A whole body of authority has developed which imposes very strict requirements of fairness and transparency in trade union elections. So, from the point of view of electoral democracy, unions are very democratic organisations. Certainly there is no comparison between the provisions that apply in respect of the election of officers of industrial organisations and those that exist in respect of the election of officers of corporations or the appointment of executive officers. In addition to that, the Workplace Relations Act—historically the Conciliation and Arbitration Act and then the Industrial Relations Act—has required the rules of industrial organisations to provide for the control of committees of management by the members of the organisation. This is the requirement of institutional democracy or participatory democracy. Under the rules members are able to challenge decisions of the executive, usually by way of a plebiscite—that is, a certain number of members can call for a decision made by the executive or committee of management to be reviewed.

The point I want to make is that there are already structures in place; indeed, the provisions of the legislation which deal with the internal governance of trade unions contains the objects. The objects are to encourage the democratic control of organisations and to encourage members of organisations to participate in the affairs of the organisations as well as the efficient management of organisations, but these provisions have not been put into that part of the act which is based on those objects but placed very much in the context of the resolution of dispute provisions contained earlier in the act.

In that context, we are looking at some pretty convoluted provisions. We have perhaps reached a new era in legislation in the country whereby no longer will Collins Street lawyers and Phillip Street lawyers be content with whimpy sections such as section 170VBK or even section 170WHD. If this legislation passes, they will be in great ecstasy presenting their submissions and referring to section 170NBCQ. They will even have the opportunity to refer to paragraphs of subclauses of parts of section 170NBGBC.

**Mr Abbott**—Sounds like the name of a trade union, doesn’t it!

**Mr McCLELLAND**—I suppose the acronym does. The minister is on the record as saying that he is fully post-Marxist, but this bill will introduce an extraordinary amount of bureaucracy. Indeed, it has been put to me that the extent of bureaucracy contained in these provisions would make Yuri Andropov blush with embarrassment.

I want to stress in my speech that if these provisions are approved, they will be imposed on top of existing very strict provisions on enterprise bargaining in relation to notice provisions, identifying the subject matter of the dispute and appropriate time limits. In 1993 the Keating government permitted industrial action either by an organisation or by employees in pursuit of enterprise negotiations, but it was on the basis of very strict requirements regarding these notice provisions. The former legislation had very sensible provisions that enabled the commission to control the process by directing the parties to negotiate in good faith.

**Sitting suspended from 6.30 p.m. to 8.00 p.m.**

**Mr McCLELLAND**—Earlier, before the dinner adjournment, I set out those provisions of the legislation which require the democratic control of trade unions and stated the fact that members must have the ability, under the rules of trade unions, to control committees of management by way of calling plebiscites and so forth. So there is already ingrained in the act this concept of participatory democracy rather than electoral democracy. In other words, rather than simply electing the officials, the rules must provide for a review of decisions of the committee of management.

In addition, there are very strict requirements in the act with regard to taking industrial action to initiate a bargaining period and taking industrial action to progress an industrial dispute. At this point one of our real regrets is that, because of a diminished role of the industrial commission as an independ-
dent umpire, increasingly we are seeing both parties taking to the law of the jungle in order to advance their interests. On the one hand, unions are resorting to direct industrial action, because they cannot get an arbitrated outcome; on the other hand, there are many more examples of employers engaging in lockouts often for several months at a time. So we say it is imperative that whatever government is in power the provisions of good faith bargaining should be restored in this legislation. But, be that as it may, the provisions are not there any longer. The government’s philosophy is that third-party intervention in the workplace is inappropriate. We, of course, have a different view.

In order to initiate this direct action there are very strict requirements, and I will outline those. Firstly, a bargaining period has to be validly initiated. Secondly, employers or employees are required to give at least three days written notice with the nature of the proposed action. Thirdly, the industrial action has to be preceded by an attempt to reach agreement. Fourthly, the industrial action by an organisation of employees has to be duly authorised by the organisation’s committee of management. Fifthly, the industrial action could not involve personal injury, wilful or reckless damage to property or the unlawful taking or use of property. Sixthly, if the Industrial Relations Commission sees the value in ordering a secret ballot of employees, such industrial action has to be approved by a majority in the coalition.

The coalition predicted that with the advent of legislation in 1993 there would be an outbreak of industrial disputation; there was not. In fact, from the period of the Fraser government when the yearly average was 590 days lost per 1,000 employees, industrial disputes steadily declined under the Labor government—so by January 1993 there were only 148 days lost per 1,000 employees and by January 1996, barely two years after the enterprise bargaining reforms, there were only 80 days lost per 1,000 employees. Indeed, that was during a period when the commission had a supervisory role through its ability to enforce good faith bargaining—a facilitative provision to try to achieve enterprise outcomes.

It follows from the 1980s and the 1990s when there was a genuine realisation by all concerned in industrial relations that if Australia was to prosper economically we had to focus on world’s best practice management and productivity techniques, and a tremendous amount was done. I can say from first-hand experience that on a number of occasions I represented trade unions, primarily during that period before the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. More times than I can count the commission sent the parties away—the employees and the employers—because the commission were not satisfied that the productivity improvements properly justified the wage increases. This philosophy went right through the eighties and the nineties, particularly in 1993 when enterprise bargaining was sanctioned by legislation.

With the facilitative provisions of the commission we saw a continuation of productivity improvements ingrained with this philosophy and wage increases based on those improvements. Quite frankly, I think the government are doing an injustice if they do not acknowledge that the infrastructure that was created during that period has been a significant factor in Australia’s current economic prosperity. But, be that as it may, the focus of both parties was on productivity outcomes—yes, growing the cake, not simply dividing the cake—but with the commission having a role as a facilitator.

The reality is that the coalition has been saying that what is needed in industrial relations is deregulation of the labour market, and in terms of deregulation I do not know where this bill fits in. If this bill is passed, it will add about 40 pages of very complex legislation to the Workplace Relations Act and will add an incredible degree of complexity. The bill will require, for instance, the following steps to be followed before an employee can take protected industrial action. Taking account of these procedures will be laborious and boring but, to understand the impracticality of them, it is necessary to set them out.

Firstly, an employee or union must apply to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission for an order that a secret ballot be
held. If no union is present, the employee cannot even make an application, unless doing so has the support of a prescribed number of employees. If there are fewer than 80 relevant employees, the prescribed number is four. If there are between 80 and 5,000 employees, the prescribed number is five per cent. If there are more than 5,000 employees, the prescribed number is 250. The bill does not make clear what constitutes support for an application for a secret ballot. Is it moral support, some words of encouragement, a pat on the back or perhaps a secret ballot itself about whether or not an application should be made for a secret ballot? Not to worry—there is always litigation in the common law courts. My mates in the legal profession are doing very well out of this government’s focus on common law—the pursuit of penalties and trying to resolve complexities—as a result of the strategies being pursued by the government, but it is not achieving productive outcomes. Instead of the focus being on improving productivity partnerships between employers and employees, the focus is on antagonism.

Returning to the ongoing assessment of the procedures, the application must also set out the question or questions to be put to the relevant employees in the ballot including, quite specifically, the nature of the proposed industrial action, details of the types of employees who are to be balloted and any details required by the rules, which have not as yet been made—that is, the rules which will be made if this legislation is passed. The application must be accompanied by a copy of the notice initiating the bargaining period, the particulars accompanying that notice and a declaration that the proposed industrial action does not relate to an objectionable provision, as set out in section 170NBBB. If you can get all that paperwork in order, you might have a valid application for a secret ballot, but a flaw in any of these complicated procedures can result in a ballot being challenged.

The commission must give the parties the opportunity to make submissions about whether a ballot should be held. We are now up to section 170NBCB, and we have some more ground to cover until we get to the end of these provisions, where 170NBDE results, if its provisions are satisfied, in a ballot being held. But I will press on. The commission must then satisfy itself that the applicant for a ballot has genuinely tried and is genuinely trying to reach an agreement with the employer. It also must consider whether the proposed ballot is not inconsistent with the object of establishing a transparent process, which allows employees directly concerned to choose, by means of a fair and democratic secret ballot, whether to authorise industrial action.

The commission must be satisfied that the applicant has not, at any time, contravened the secret ballot provisions of the act. If the commission is satisfied of all these things, it must frame an order for the ballot specifying the name of the applicant or agent, the types of employees who are to be balloted, the voting method, the timetable for the ballot, the name of the person authorised by the commission to conduct the ballot—and that is a significant issue in itself, as to whether that person will have the qualifications and skills necessarily to properly conduct a ballot—and the name of the person authorised by the commission to be the independent adviser for the ballot. These provisions, if they are passed, will create an industry—a very lucrative industry—in terms of independent advisers and those engaged by the respective parties challenging or defending these provisions.

I return again to the government’s repeated assertions that it desires to remove the third party from the employment relationship. Yet, with this bill, the government proposes not only a third party in the form of the commission but also a fourth and fifth party in the form of the person conducting the ballot and the person who is the independent adviser for the ballot. As I have said, these provisions will create, if they are passed, an industry in itself.

I return again to the actual order, because we have not yet reached the end of the matters which must be established before the application is dealt with—the commissioner cannot put his pen down yet. If the application is valid, the orders will set out, firstly, the questions to be put to the relevant em-
employees in the ballot, including the nature of the proposed industrial action; secondly, the voting method, which must be a postal ballot, unless a more efficient and expeditious method can be found, so that presumption necessarily involves mail delay; thirdly, the quorum that must apply to the ballot, if it is to be lower than 40 per cent; and, fourthly, the period of notice required before industrial action can be taken, if it is to be longer than three days.

We are now up to section 170NBCK, and this is where the fun really begins for the commission. The commission must now compile a roll of eligible voters—who is a current employee, who is casual, who has resigned and who is a new employee. The commission is given the power to require the employer and the union to provide a list of names and any other information it is reasonable to require to assist the completion of the roll. Again, employers will be really grateful for that additional burden! But what if that information provided to the commission is inaccurate? Will there be a challenge to the process? These are all complications that, no doubt, if the legislation were passed, would be tried in the courts. Things would get bogged down and we would not progress in dealing with the actual matters in dispute, which is where we say the focus of industrial relations should be.

Moving on to further complexities, an employee is an eligible voter only if they were employed on the day the ballot order was made—clearly that is a complexity in terms of determining the roll. If the applicant for the ballot is a union, then the employee must have been a member of that union on the day the ballot order was made. Do they need to have been a financial member or a part-paying member of the union? How do we determine these things? They are not an eligible voter if they were subject to an Australian workplace agreement on the day the ballot order was made. These are all tremendous administrative complexities that the parties will confront.

Once the roll has been drawn up, there is an opportunity for employees to apply to have their names either added to or removed from the roll. Clause 170NBDA of the bill heralds the arrival—not before time—of ballot day, when employees finally breathe the sweet air of this new democracy that the government has promised them. Exhausted after having spent many days compiling paperwork, appearing before the commission and finalising their rolls, their minds have long since turned from reaching an agreement with their employer. Their one goal is to cast their vote so that they can go on strike. This is where a paradox occurs, because going through all these complexities will actually lock the parties into a predetermined course of action despite the ongoing progress of negotiations, which tend to be fluid in these matters. Having gone through the effort and the expense, it is very unlikely they will depart from that. So, far from preventing industrial action occurring, it may well lock parties into taking the action.

The ballot paper must be prepared and copied, and it must be in the prescribed form. It must include the name of the applicant or their agent, the type of employee to be balloted, the name of the ballot agent authorised to conduct the ballot, the question or questions to be put to the employees, a statement that a voter’s vote is secret and that the voter is free to choose whether or not to support the proposed industrial action—which makes sense—and instructions to the voter on how to complete the ballot paper. Once the ballot has been held, the votes counted and any disputes about irregularities put to rest, the ballot agent declares the result and informs the parties. While that paperwork is finalised, including the ballot agent’s report and the publication of the ballot results by the Industrial Registrar, the employees turn their minds to clause 170NBDD to see if they can take industrial action.

One by one, they have to check off the requirements: firstly, that the action was the subject of a protected action; secondly, that the prescribed percentage of persons on the roll of voters for the ballot voted—that figure is 40 per cent by default—thirdly, that more than 50 per cent of the votes validly cast were votes approving the action; and, finally, that the action commences within 30 days of the declaration of the result of the ballot. This is, again, a paradox: you are actually
compelled to take the action within that 30 days, even if the negotiations in the workplace are progressing in a constructive fashion. Then, of course, employees must satisfy the existing requirements of the act regarding notice provisions. They must prepare their notices, serve them on the employer and wait three days. Exhausted, frustrated and having thought through these procedures again, how inclined are they going to be to sit down and resolve the dispute as opposed to continuing with what has been a predetermined outcome, effectively, from the time these procedures were commenced?

If we look at the time scale involved, we are going to lose at least one working day to prepare, file and serve the application and for the parties to prepare their submissions to the commission. We will be looking at at least two working days for the commission to determine the application—longer, of course, when the commission is busy and cannot list the matter. We will be looking at at least one working day for the commission, in consultation with the parties, to prepare the roll of voters—but I think a more realistic assessment is probably a week for that to occur in terms of crosschecking whether someone has resigned and so forth—and for the ballot papers to be drawn up, sent to the printers and returned from the printers. Again, I think a week realistically accounts for that period. We will be looking at at least six working days for the ballot to be held. In terms of the postal system, I think it would be three days out, three days in at the very least. We will be looking at at least one working day for the votes to be counted, a report prepared and the results published. We will be looking at at least three more working days being the required notice for the protected action.

We are looking at at least 15 working days or three calendar weeks for industrial action for this procedure to be followed. It, as I have said, will probably be counterproductive. It is three weeks away from the ongoing process of negotiations and, indeed, it is quite inconsistent when you look at these strictures. They do not impose anything of a similar nature on employers before they conduct a lockout, for instance. There is no requirement for a vote of shareholders. These procedures cannot be justified. It is the policy of the ACTU and, indeed, the practice of trade unions, because of the significance of industrial action, to seek the opinion of their members through a ballot held at the workplace through a show of hands. These procedures add unnecessary complications and will not further the resolution of industrial disputes.

Mr SCHULTZ (Hume) (8.21 p.m.)—I rise to talk on the Workplace Relations Amendment (Secret Ballots for Protected Action) Bill 2002. This bill aims to protect jobs by ensuring democracy so that workers who will be most affected by going on strike will have an unfettered say about whether they want to do so. Let me take the House back in history to the early mid-1960s when I was a young married man, working as a slaughterman in an abattoir in Melbourne, whose wife had just given birth to a child. I can vividly recall over a three-year period being out on strike for 15 months. That is, five months in every year. Imagine how difficult that was for a young married man, coming from a low income working-class background, to survive and trying to support a child in an environment where the basic wage in the meat processing industry for a slaughterman in those days was in the vicinity of £23—about $46. To compound that issue, in those days workers compensation was not as generous as it is today. I frequently had serious injuries because of my ambidextrous method of slaughtering using either my left or right hand. I suffered a number of very serious cuts and was out of work for a number of months and my wage was reduced to eight guineas—about $17—per week. That was done in an environment where I was paying eight guineas per week for my rent alone and trying to support a wife and child.

As a result of those strikes, abattoir closures became more and more frequent. There was a loss of jobs and export markets, and a reputation of unreliability in the supply of meat exports to overseas markets. The reason that I stand here tonight to talk on this particular bill is that the votes that occurred, which stimulated those strikes, were done by a show of hands. It was done in an environ-
ment where a number of union heavies used to stand around the room and look at the people who were voting. Needless to say, those people who wanted to work were intimidated into ensuring the status quo prevailed with a show of hands voting pattern. Because of that, in the time that I have been in parliament, I have been determined to be the ALP’s nemesis. I am here as a working-class individual, as a former trade unionist, to constantly remind them of the union’s actions in preventing a person like me exercising their right to work. The ALP puts unions before jobs of Australian workers. The ALP shuns democracy because unions tell it to. The ALP’s own internal processes deny fair say to ALP members and give unfair say to unions, just as the absence of a secret ballot before strike action denies fair say to workers and gives unfair say to unions. The ALP will not fetter this unfair say, just as the Leader of the Opposition’s mooted 50-50 rule will not do anything to fetter the unfair say that unions have in the affairs of the ALP.

I listened very intently to the contribution by the member for Barton. He reminded me of an article attributed to him in the Sydney Morning Herald on 30 November last year. He said this when talking on ‘Secret ballots—a hostage to unions’:

I made a lot of money appearing in trade union election inquiries. It’s easy to challenge a ballot … it would open up our industrial relations system to this sort of attack. It would neuter the ability of unions to engage in collective bargaining … because the unions can no longer seek an arbitration of their claims.

I am not a lawyer; I am not a person who holds a tertiary degree, but I think I know—a lot more about the issue of hard knocks and trying to work and support a family than many of the trade union officials on the other side of the House. The one thing that I vividly recall is that when we were out on strike, because of the voting system within that particular union of the day, the trade union officials were earning their weekly executive wage and driving their vehicles without any care or concern for people like me struggling to make a living.

Let us contrast the Australian Labor Party with the Leader of the Labour Party in the UK, because in Britain the Labour government has had the courage to implement secret ballots. Tony Blair had the courage to stand up to the unions, to introduce one vote one value within his party, and democratic principles in the workplace. As he told the trades union conference in 1997:

Better to let a ballot decide the issue rather than an industrial dispute which is the present law. We are not going back to the days of industrial warfare, strikes within ballots, mass flying pickets and secondary action. You do not want it, and I will not let it happen.

That was in a speech to the trades union conference on 9 September 1997. Let us compare Blair’s courage in standing up to the unions, who previously controlled his party, to that of the current Leader of the Opposition. On 25 November last year, the Leader of the Opposition, Simon Crean, confidently predicted that ‘the influence of trade unions necessarily has to wane.’ That was a comment in the Australian Financial Review on 26 November 2001. Two days later he attended the closed door meeting at the ACTU headquarters after which he emerged to declare:

I’m not Tony Blair and I won’t forget where I come from … I’m not interested in the Third Way.

That was a comment made at the ACTU headquarters on 1 December 2001. The Leader of the Opposition said that because influence in the Labor Party is bought and controlled by union money. Simon Crean should consider Tony Blair’s advice:

Modernise your political structures as we have done in the Labour Party. The country actually knows that influence with this Government and with me is not determined by anything other than the persuasiveness of your argument. That is the right way and it is the truth. The old ways of the Labour Party were the resolutionists, the committee rooms, the fixing and the small groups trying to run the show. That has no future …

That speech was to the TUC on 9 September 1997. What did the Leader of the Opposition come up with? He came up with a comment in a speech to the National Left Conference on 11 May this year. In part, he said:
... I believe we need to change from 60:40 to 50:50 because we have got to deal with the perception issue of that.

But as Neville Wran said:

It doesn’t give a tinker’s curse, whether it’s 60/40, 50/50, that’s a symbolic thing.

Neville Wran said that to the New South Wales State Labor Conference at the Sydney Town Hall on 26 May 2002, as reported on the ABC that evening. The comments of the member for Werriwa are pertinent to this debate, and I think he is right. On Sunday Sunrise on 25 November 2001 he said:

... we have to face the reality that union coverage in the workforce has fallen to just 25%. But unions still have 60% of the delegates at our conferences, so it’s pretty clear that 60 doesn’t go into 25. 60 doesn’t go into 25, and there will have to be some adjustment, so we’ll be making those adjustments.

Let us ask some questions about the bill that need to be answered. First, why aren’t the existing provisions that allow secret ballots sufficient? The answer is this: existing secret ballot provisions in the Workplace Relations Act give the commission discretion to order secret ballots. These provisions are rarely used. The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations has been able to identify only seven secret ballots ordered under the existing Workplace Relations Act in the last eight years. Only some of these ballots related to taking industrial action. Generally, those that do relate to taking industrial action are held while the industrial action is ongoing and do not seek approval prior to the industrial action commencing. As only a handful of instances of industrial action have been preceded by independently ordered secret ballots, most decisions to take industrial action are unregulated. There is no guarantee that all workers are consulted about or genuinely support taking industrial action. The existing provisions have not provided enough protection to workers who feel pressured into taking industrial action. The proposed changes to the Workplace Relations Act will ensure that a decision to take industrial action is both democratic and genuine.

Secondly, will the bill impede employees taking industrial action? The bill proposes a streamlined process for holding a secret ballot, providing for prompt consideration of applications by the commission and allowing ballots to be completed quickly with minimal procedural impediments thus minimising disruption to employers and employees. Appeals to the courts against the validity of ballots will be limited so that the conduct of ballots and any industrial action authorised by ballots is not delayed by legal challenges. That is of some concern to opposition members who have come out of the legal profession. The bill will allow for attendance ballots to be conducted and it sets a target of 10 working days to complete such a ballot. Preindustrial action ballots are routine in the UK, Ireland and Germany. Industrial action has continued to occur in these countries.

Thirdly, is the ballot process provided for in the bill consistent with International Labour Organisation standards? In general, the International Labour Office considers that the prerequisites for rendering industrial action lawful should be reasonable and not place a substantial limitation on the means of action open to unions. The approach taken for this secret ballot bill has been developed following consultation with the International Labour Office with a view to ensuring that the underlying elements of the model for secret ballots meet Australia’s international obligations. I commend the minister on ensuring that that process took place. The government believes that the proposed system of secret ballots is appropriate for Australian conditions and that it meets international standards.

Fourthly, why is there no ballot for returning to work or for the approval of a certified agreement? A secret ballot will not compel employees to take part in industrial action. Any employee will be free to choose not to participate or to stop participating in authorised action at any time. The industrial action can end without a ballot being conducted. I was never given that opportunity as a trade unionist. It is possible for the parties to reach agreement at any time in the course of the negotiations for an agreement. Agreement may be reached prior to any or all of the authorised industrial action occurring. In this case, the industrial action would cease without the need for any procedural steps.
The government’s focus in this bill is on the decision to commence industrial action. The decision to return to work or the decision to approve or not to approve a proposed agreement can be matters of disagreement between members or employees but they are not ones that the government considers as sensitive as a decision to commence industrial action.

Fifthly, why is there no requirement for an employer to have a ballot before a lockout? While an employee may be a company made up of shareholders, the employer remains a single legal entity. It is a single entity that enters into the agreement. As such, it is not appropriate for there to be a legislative requirement for a ballot to be held to determine the view of shareholders on taking industrial action or any other matter relating to agreement making. Such a requirement would take decisions about agreement making away from the level of the workplace and out of the hands of the people who are directly responsible for agreement negotiation.

Sixthly, why are secret ballots necessary? Often when unions organise industrial action they fail to seek membership approval for the action, and I have experienced that. Even when union officials do seek the approval of members, they mostly use hands up votes during union meetings—the intimidatory approach. This type of process requires members to make a decision about taking industrial action in an environment where they may be subjected to considerable pressure. The introduction of preindustrial action secret ballots will ensure that employees, not union officials, make decisions about whether or not industrial action is taken. This places decision making power where it belongs: at the workplace level in the hands of the employees directly involved. The Workplace Relations Act provides protection from civil liability for industrial action taken in the pursuit of certified agreements. This is an important protection and should not be used frivolously. It should only be used in accordance with the wishes of the employees.

Finally, what is the international experience of prestrike ballots? Preindustrial action secret ballots are an accepted part of the workplace relations landscape in a number of comparable countries, including Canada, Ireland, the United Kingdom and Germany. In most cases, the secret ballot requirement has been introduced through legislation, although interestingly in Germany unions have realised the benefits of democratic decision making processes even without such a legislative requirement and generally incorporate preindustrial action secret ballots as part of their organisational rules. In the UK, where secret ballots had been operating since 1987 and where they were retained by the Blair government, they have attracted support among trade union leaders. There is evidence to show that there has been a reduction in industrial disputation in the UK since the introduction of secret ballots.

However, the secret ballot arrangements proposed in the bill do not simply imitate those operating in Canada, Ireland or the United Kingdom. The government’s arrangements must necessarily be uniquely developed to suit Australian conditions and institutions. Despite the differences, the bill reflects the shared recognition that a secret ballot is the best mechanism for ensuring democratic decision making in relation to industrial action.

It is because of those particular points that I have a great deal of pride in standing here supporting the minister’s vision in introducing secret ballots for protected action through this Workplace Relations Amendment (Secret Ballots for Protected Action) Bill 2002. I am quite sure that those thinking men and women out there in the trade union movement working for and on behalf of companies as trade union members will thank him for trying to introduce this bill, although I do not give it much show of getting through because of the restrictive way in which the Senate—the upper house of this parliament—operates. Having made those comments, bear in mind that the Democrats, who are supposed to be an independent group set up by a former Liberal to keep—I will not say the word—the so-and-sos honest, have abrogated their responsibility to the Australian community by becoming no more than an industrial wing of the Australian Labor Party. They ought to be ashamed of that. They ought to hang their heads in shame.
every time they go out into the street and face the good, honest working men and women of this great nation of ours. I support the bill.

Mr LEO McLEAY (Watson) (8.41 p.m.) – Tonight, in the form of the Workplace Relations Amendment (Secret Ballots for Protected Action) Bill 2002, we are seeing another one of this government’s infamous workplace relations packages of bills. We all know what they are: they are the bills that the government has in reserve for those occasions when it needs a filler to cover a gap in its legislative program or when it wants to create division in the Australian community. The previous speaker gave the game away. He knows and the government knows that these bills are unlikely to pass the Senate. The government has tried to get these bills through the Senate year in, year out.

The government has an unhealthy obsession with trade unions—and lately, I must say, with the internal workings of the Labor Party. What you find with the previous speaker is that he and the government say, ‘You should have secret ballots in union industrial action. You should have democracy there.’ But he does not accept the democratic answer at the last elections in the Senate. He knows and the government knows that these bills are unlikely to pass the Senate. The government has tried to get these bills through the Senate year in, year out.

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It is also unfair for the previous speaker and those before him to compare the Australian industrial relations system to the British system. Some of the unions in the UK in the eighties and early nineties were out of control. They had no interest in their members’ best interests and all they were interested in was exercising power on their own behalf. But one of the problems that the government in the UK had was it did not have a mechanism to resolve some of this. The interesting difference between the system in the UK and the system here in Australia is that for 100 years in Australia we have had a mechanism called the Industrial Relations Commission which has been the vehicle for resolving industrial disputes. The industrial culture in Australia is dramatically different from the industrial culture in Britain, particularly from the industrial culture as it was in Britain in the eighties and early nineties. But what you see again with the government’s unhealthy obsession with the work of unions and of unionists is that the government also wants to destroy the role of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission in the Australian atmosphere.

In debate, the government is saying, ‘We want to have secret ballots in unions but we won’t accept that the Senate, who are elected by a secret ballot, can reject this legislation.’ They say they think what has happened in the UK is terrible. But here in Australia, where you have a mechanism—the Industrial Relations Commission—that has resolved many of the problems that the UK system could not resolve, they want to destroy that mechanism. What this government is really about is setting one Australian against another. There is nothing particularly urgent about this legislation. It is not urgent and it is not necessary but it is provocative and that is what the government wants. It has a lot to do with workers and unions and the government’s ideological campaign against workers and union members in particular.

Like the Workplace Relations Amendment (Prohibition of Compulsory Union Fees) Bill 2002 that was recently debated in this chamber, this legislation uses what have come to be recognised as emotive terms: secret ballots, lockouts, industrial action. These words conjure up visions of enforced union membership, strikes, standover bullying tactics and all that so-called nasty blue-collar stuff which we have heard the previous speaker talk about that the government and the previous speaker would like the general public to focus on whenever the issue of workplace relations is raised—not to focus on the fact that Australia has fewer strikes than most other OECD countries or the fact that the union movement here in Australia invariably works more with government and employers to help create employment than to create the devilment that you had in some parts of the UK economy late in the last century.

This legislation is another attempt by the government to chip away at Australia’s industrial relations traditions. It is not about
making improvements; it is about making the system more complicated and less able to work. It is provocative, unduly complicated legislation. Rather than simplify and improve the current system, it will make it more cumbersome and bureaucratic. That suits the minister and it suits the government. They know the system at present is not broke, so they want to legislate changes that will make it broke. In fact, it is not difficult to imagine that employees could become so frustrated with the bureaucratic demands that this legislation would make that they would be pushed into taking illegal action in an attempt to move things along. The more cynical amongst us could be excused for thinking that is probably what the government wants. The government certainly does not want to help workers—or ‘employees’, to use the government’s preferred politically correct term when it comes to describing workers in legislation.

The ACTU’s submission to the Senate inquiry into the five separate workplace relations bills that we currently have before us in the parliament makes some interesting points about this particular bill, which are worth having on the record during this debate. They will help illustrate the general comments that I have just made. In its submission the ACTU said to the Senate committee:

The process for obtaining and implementing an order for a secret ballot set out in the Bill adds additional time-consuming complexity to the taking of protected industrial action, reflected in the approximately 35 pages which would be added to the Act if the Bill was to be passed. And this is a government that talks about legislative simplicity! It wants to legislate to simplify the tax act but at the same time to complicate the industrial relations act. The submission continues:

The ACTU submits that the process would be of such complexity that it would nullify any practical right to take protected action.

The ACTU’s submission also contained some interesting quotes from a letter sent from the ILO to the relevant government department about where the legislation might stand in relation to the ILO’s principles and standards of freedom of association. One of the main concerns of the Freedom of Association Branch of the ILO was that the adoption of secret ballots as provided by this legislation should not make the exercise of the right to strike very difficult. To quote part of the correspondence:

... any legislation that is finally adopted on compulsory strike ballots will need to be considered in the context of the industrial relations legislation as a whole, in particular all the legislative requirements in order to call a lawful strike, to ensure that the cumulative effect of such legislation, by virtue of its complexity and extent, is not such as to make it very difficult from a practical point of view to declare a legal strike, or to declare a strike in a timely manner.

Of course, we know what the government really wants is to make it as difficult as possible.

In his second reading speech the minister stated:

The bill ... incorporates measures which ILO officials have indicated would be consistent with ILO standards.

That sounds like ILO endorsement, does it not? Well, I do not think so. I do not believe that the government has asked the ILO to look at the legislation in its full context as has been stated by the ILO. It has taken some ILO comments and concerns on board, but it has not been open with either the International Labour Organisation or the Australian people on this issue because it is not the government’s intention or in the government’s interests to be open. The government just wants to complicate the issue and that is what this package of workplace relations bills is all about: complicating the issue so that employees—workers—will suffer and any chance of a good system of industrial relations in Australia will be destroyed. That is all part of the government’s ideological confrontational approach.

We only have to remember the Patrick dispute. Remember the preferred approach of the previous Minister for Industrial Relations? What a low point that was in the activities of government and some employers. The government then spent months and years running away from Peter Reith’s arrange-
ments with the Patrick dispute. It seems that the current minister wants to emulate the model established by Peter Reith when he was minister, except I think the current minister wants to make it a badge of honour to go even further. We are all aware of the past boxing prowess of the current minister, Mr Abbott, and his generally punchy nature. He seems to want to be even more hairy chested and punchy than Peter Reith. The minister might well remember that, in the end, Peter Reith punched himself right out of the ring.

All this bill will do is strengthen the position of employers in industrial disputes. It will upset the level playing field. It will not help anyone who is a worker or an employee. It serves the needs of the privileged in society, the friends and supporters of the current government. It will make it more difficult for workers to take industrial action. Again, as we have seen in other workplace relations legislation, the description of the legislation and the words used in the legislation are misleading. Most people are happy to vote on industrial action. We have heard previous speakers outline the general approach that the union takes. Whether the ballot is secret or not is irrelevant. Sometimes there are secret ballots; sometimes there may be a show of hands. What is insidious about this legislation is that it is not really about secret ballots for protected action. It is yet another step in the government’s agenda to make the whole issue of unions and strike taking an incredibly complicated process.

To go back to the ACTU submission to the Senate committee, the ACTU make a very valid point. They say:

The ACTU supports the right of union members to vote on whether or not to take industrial action, and believes such votes are generally taken. It should be noted that a number of unions routinely use—

note the word ‘routinely’—

secret ballots prior to taking industrial action. No evidence has been adduced showing that unionists are being forced or required to take industrial action against their will, or without their consent. The fact that in many disputes not all union members participate, is evidence of the lack of coercion, which would, in any event, be unlawful.

You could bet your life, Mr Deputy Speaker, that if unions were indulging in unlawful activity this minister would be the first person to try and strike them down. He would be the first person to have them in court. The fact that the minister has not managed to mount a prosecution for coercion for people being involved in protected action highlights the fact that this legislation is not necessary. There you have it. The big bogeyman image of unions, which the government would like people to think is exemplified by the ACTU, does not look quite so terrible at all, does it? In fact it is the government that looks more like the bogeyman here. It is the government that continually conjures up—with these emotional terms—the image of industrial turmoil and unreasonable strikes. We heard today at question time a barrage from the government about the recent action at BHP in Victoria. But what ended up happening there in the end? In the end, the unions and management resolved the dispute. In the end, you had the employers coming out and saying that the minister seemed to be playing this for his own political gain, not to help them or to help the employees.

We have a government that has a very unhealthy obsession with trade unions in this country. We have a government that has a very unhealthy obsession with the internal workings of the Labor Party. We have a government that is willing to do anything to try and take the spotlight off its own failings and try and use all this emotive language to conjure up a problem that is not there.

There is no need for this legislation. There already exists provision for secret ballots to be held. It is an awful indictment of the government that it can cause resources to be devoted to unnecessary legislation such as this when there are so many other areas which need legislative change. The government wastes valuable, scarce legislative programming time on ideologically inspired legislation rather than face up to the real needs of Australians.

As I said earlier, the previous government speaker gave the game away. The government knows that this bill has little chance of passing the Senate. It has rolled up bills like this time and time again. They get defeated
in the Senate time and time again. The government knows this bill will not get through. The reason it will not get through is not because of the intransigence of the Senate or, as the previous speaker said, the Democrats acting as the industrial arm of the Labor Party. First off, the government says it is unions who are the industrial arm of the Labor Party and we should have an obsession with them. Now the government thinks the Democrats are the industrial arm of the Labor Party, so it has an obsession with them. The reason this legislation will not pass is that it is bad legislation. For that reason, it should not pass this House and I hope it will not pass the Senate.

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (8.57 p.m.)—It is my great pleasure this evening to speak on the Workplace Relations Amendment (Secret Ballots for Protected Action) Bill 2002. We are talking about this evening is a bill that aims to protect jobs by ensuring democracy. One of the fundamental rights that a democracy like Australia has is that you can have secrecy in the way that you conduct your own affairs, your private business. I am going to take us back into a little bit of history, which might waken the nerves of some of those in the Labor Party. They talk about being the party for the worker. That is the biggest furphy doing the rounds of this country. The Labor Party is not for the worker; it is for the elites of the Labor Party and the trade union movement.

This evening, I want to establish the links between the Australian Labor Party and the unions of this country—to make it quite clear how these two are linked and why this bill is important not only to the unions but to the Australian Labor Party. We know in this place—we have been told ad infinitum—that the Labor Party has, as a party rule, 60 per cent union control in its preselections and in much of its state executives. As a result, the people it puts in here come from very colourful Labor Party and union backgrounds. We know that most of the people on the other side of this House come from union backgrounds. There is nothing wrong with that, but you just have to understand who owns them. They are not their own people; they are put here by the 60 per cent rule currently existing for preselection to this House. We know that most of the people sitting on the front bench over there—60 per cent of them—have a union pedigree, one way or another. What is more, we know it is a rule of the Australian Labor Party that every member of the Labor Party must belong to a union. If they are not a member of a union before they come into this House, they must choose a union to belong to before they continue.

So we establish the links to the fact that the members of the Australian Labor Party are controlled largely by the union movement, their masters. As a result, they are opposing this fundamental move towards democracy that allows people to have privacy in the way that they vote. Just imagine if you were at school and you were running a class and they have the election for prefects and some kid is leaning over the desk and saying, ‘Hey, you’ve got to vote for my mate’—leaning on you. This is what happens in the Australian work force at the moment. When they go to have ballots on the work sites, they are not secret ballots; these people are intimidated. Why do they want a show of hands? Because they want to know who did not vote their way. Why do they want to eyeball the people that are not voting their way? Because they want to intimidate them. We know they have these big thugs walking around workplaces eyeing off people who do not vote the way they want them to.

We know, Mr Deputy Speaker Adams—and you would know in your lumber trade—that in the Australian work force if you do not toe the line as far as the union is concerned you are dealt with. I was talking to a plumber today, and on sites if the blokes do not put up their hands and vote they are considered as having not voted for them. So what do they do? They do retribution. They fill up their pipes with concrete and so on. They stop jobs. They threaten their ability to get on site if they are contractors.

I really want to take this back to the links that the Labor Party should be supporting, and I want to talk about the movement of people called the Chartists, a British working-class movement for parliamentary reform named after the People’s Charter, a bill
drafted by London radical William Lovett in May 1838—164 years ago democracy came into the work force through the Chartists. This is something that the Labor Party might want to take on board as a result of the fact that they claim—as we know, quite falsely—to represent the working people in this country. If they want to take a leaf out of the book of the People’s Charter, it contains six demands: votes for all men, equal electoral districts, the abolition of requirements that members of parliament be property owners, payment for MPs, annual general elections and secret ballots. They are the six points that the Chartists in 1838 brought before the working-class people of Britain.

Chartism was the first movement both working class in character and national in its scope that grew out of the protests against social injustices out of the new industrial order of Britain—very noble, and something that you would think the Labor Party in this country would be taking on board, with one of the demands being secret ballots. The movement was born amid the economic depression of 1837-38, when high unemployment and the effects of the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834 were felt in all parts of Britain. Lovett’s charter provided a program acceptable to heterogeneous working-class populations. The movement swelled to national importance under the vigorous leadership of an Irishman named Feargus Edward O’Connor, who stumped the nation in 1838 in support of these six points.

A Chartist convention met in London in February 1839 to prepare a petition to present to the parliament. ‘Ulterior measures’ were threatened should parliament ignore their demands—in other words, they got a bit threatening—but the delegates differed in their degrees of militancy over what form the ulterior measures should take. In May the convention moved to Birmingham, where riots led to the arrest of their moderate leaders Lovett and John Collins. I am putting this all in context, because you would think that the Australian Labor Party would have something in common with what the working man all of those years ago wanted for their party, and that was those six points of democracy. We know which of those is largely not supported by the Labor Party. The only other one that did not succeed, as we know, is annual general elections—we do not have an election every year, thank goodness.

The rump of the convention returned to London and presented its petition in July. The parliament rejected it summarily. There followed in November an armed rising of the ‘physical force’ Chartists at Newport, which was quickly suppressed. Its principal leaders were banished to Australia. How about this: the principal leaders of the Chartists movement, for all of their sins of trying to get democracy in the work force in Britain, were banished to Australia—they were transported. Some of the first convicts to this country were people trying to get democracy in the work force—the Chartists. Here we are, with a group of people—the old Labor Party, which had roots in the work force, not the elites of today—who you would think would identify with them. But, no, this current Labor Party, held prisoner of the union movement, will not do anything about it.

Just to extrapolate the Australian connection through transportation a little further, I want to connect with a book called The Chartists by Dorothy Thompson and actually put some names to these people that were transported to Australia and suffered the consequences of trying to get democratic reforms in the work force in Britain. These people were tailors, blacksmiths, silversmiths et cetera. One of the best known Chartist tailors was William Cuffay of London. He was in the movement from the beginning. His father had been a slave in the West Indies and his grandfather had been taken from native Africa. Cuffay himself was like many tailors: he was a bit physically deformed. ‘A good spirit in a little deformed case,’ he was described as. He was known in his trade as an excellent working man, but he did become involved in radical politics. Cuffay was already 36 years old when he became a late convert to trade unionism—do you hear this?—in the old country 138 years ago. The strike of 1834 had made him a supporter of his society and also seen him lose his job. We have seen that recently in the car industry in this country.
Anyway, what we do know is that, as a result of this conspiracy, he was given 21 years transportation. After his transportation to Australia as a convict, and later as a ticket-of-leave man, he continued to be a respected, sober and industrious man and—guess what? In Australia he again took up radical politics. Here was a man who decided that he would do something for the working class in this country. Mr Deputy Speaker, you might be interested to hear that his wife joined him in Tasmania in 1853. So that is where the Chartists fled to: parts of Australia, getting away from the oppression of people who would not let them have secret ballots way back then.

Mr Entsch interjecting—

Mr RANDALL—I do not think there is any relationship, Parliamentary Secretary. Another gentleman, Booley, was a blacksmith and a bleeding radical who, to get away from it, emigrated to Australia; he was not transported. Here he helped found—the member for Melbourne might appreciate this—the Geelong People’s Association to agitate for the six points of the People’s Charter. Here are the people that probably helped with the genesis of the Australian Labor Party in this country, and yet one of the main provisions in their six points was secret ballots. Do you think the Australian Labor Party will get in and support that? No, they will not, because they are prisoners of the unions. When Booley came to this country, he continued to press for parliamentary democracy and also for the legal eight-hour day—do you hear this?—things that the Labor Party have been on about. He was one of the many Chartist immigrants who helped set the tone of Australian democracy. You should be ashamed of yourself, members of the Labor Party in this chamber, because these people talked about freedoms, workplace reform and eight-hour days, and helped the union movement and Australian democracy, and you will not even support them by looking at secret ballots in this country.

I will go to other Chartists, from the Lancashire cotton operations. Two of the most prominent were William Ashton and Frank Mirfield, who had been transported to Australia for their parts in the bitter strike of 1829. They returned to the town at the beginning of the Chartism movement. As the result of a petition, the townspeople raised enough to pay for their return from Australia. They had already been transported on other matters but they went back to support the Chartist movement, the people of their towns having paid for them to get back to Britain. Again, I will not take you through all of the history of that, but there is ample evidence that many people were transported to Australia as convicts because they had tried to support democratic reforms in the workforce in Britain. The Australian Labor Party sits there smugly, just saying: ‘Look, that is good enough for those people all those years ago, but we are not the modern Labor Party. We are the party that wants to go back to the Dark Ages, that does not support the charter of rights, as the Chartists did, and provide the six points of reform.’ If the Labor Party cannot see the connection between the people who were imprisoned, ill-treated and sent to this country and reform to the workforce, they have sorely lost the plot.

I will move on a little further with the Chartist connection. Its principal leaders were transported to Australia, as I have said, and nearly every other Chartist leader was arrested and sentenced to a short prison term. The Chartists then started to emphasise efficient organisation and moderate tactics. Three years later, a second national petition was presented containing more than three million signatures. Way back then, 160-odd years ago, they could organise three million signatures for their reforms. But the parliament refused to consider it and the movement lost some of its mass support later in the 1840s when the economy revived. The movement to repeal the Corn Laws divided radical energies and several discouraged Chartist leaders turned to other projects.

The last great burst of Chartism occurred in 1848, a year of bad harvests at home and revolution on the continent. Another convention was summoned and another petition was prepared. Again, parliament did nothing. Thereafter Chartism lingered another decade
in the provinces but its appeal as a national movement was slowly waning. With the onset of the relative prosperity of mid-Victorian Britain, working-class militancy did tend to lose its edge. Many Chartist leaders, however, schooled in the ideological debates of the 1840s, continued serving the working classes and the Chartist spirit outlasted the organisation. All of the six points, with the exception of annual parliaments, have since been secured. They fought for it, they got transported to Australia for it—the lucky things, as it turned out—and what was their reward? They got all but one of the provisions accepted.

The secret ballot is very dear to Australia and is actually called the 'Australian ballot'. It is the system of voting in which voters mark their choices in privacy on uniform ballots printed and distributed by government or designate their choices by some other secret means. Victoria and South Australia—the member for Melbourne might appreciate this, too—were the first states to introduce secrecy of the ballot in 1856. For that reason, the secret ballot is referred to as the 'Australian ballot'. The system spread to Europe and America to meet the growing public and parliamentary demand for protection of voters. So we actually exported the secret ballot and led the world in this—but not the Australian Labor Party; they do not want the workers to have the same rights.

We are asking the Australian parliament to pass this legislation so that workers are given the same right as their parliamentary colleagues in this country to have secret ballots and democracy in the workplace. Australians have improved on the democratic push by the great English reform movement of the Chartists, many of whom, as I said, ended up here as convicts. All totalitarian and authoritarian regimes hate secret ballots, because they want to control the masses. They do not want them to have democracy. What we are saying here is that the union movement of this country, supported by the Australian Labor Party, is like a totalitarian and authoritarian regime. They do not want democracy. They want to manipulate the vote. Just as the Australian Labor Party will not support reform in the electoral system, they do not want to support reform to the secret ballot provisions that operate on work sites in Australia. It is a shame. The Labor Party should be embarrassed that they are standing up against this bill because it is undemocratic. (Time expired)

Mr TANNER (Melbourne) (9.17 p.m.)—The Workplace Relations Amendment (Secret Ballots for Protected Action) Bill 2002 is based on a longstanding conservative fan-
tasy, a fantasy that suggests that ordinary workers are mere robots—they have no brain, have no individual characteristics and are manipulated and ordered about by unions and by union officials. It is a longstanding view in conservative quarters that, when workers go on strike, the individual workers who collectively make up the group that has made the decision to go on strike do not really know what they are doing and do not have a genuine commitment to the action that is being taken but are being manipulated or deluded by nasty, evil trade unions. Built on this assumption is a longstanding commitment to impose a variety of kinds of secret ballot legislation upon the trade union movement in order to ensure that strikes that the conservatives believe would not have happened without a secret ballot do not occur. The premise upon which this legislation is built is fundamentally flawed: the assumption that workers have no independent choice, that they have no power to exercise that choice within their trade unions and that they are meekly and mildly led by the nose to take action which is against their interests.

I have been a union official, as you have, Mr Deputy Speaker Adams.

Mr Entsch—And me!

Mr Tanner—It is good to see that there are others here as well who can say the same. I can speak from my experience, and I am sure it is the same in your experience, Mr Deputy Speaker, that workers facing the prospect of going on strike do not treat that issue lightly. They certainly do not allow anybody to tell them what to do, instruct them to do something that goes against what they want to do and force them to take an action which is contrary to their interests.

The legislation before the parliament ignores the real dynamics of industrial relations. It ignores the realities of what drives workers and why disputes occur and why some workers in some circumstances go on strike. I have been involved in decisions by groups of workers to go on strike made by both show of hands and secret ballot. I and my union certainly had a very clear policy that, wherever there was the slightest hint that anybody who would be involved in that decision wanted a secret ballot, a secret ballot would be held as a matter of course, on the spot. It was sometimes, I will admit, in rather messy circumstances, but nonetheless a genuinely democratic secret ballot was held whenever anybody felt that that was appropriate. But that did not happen very often. In virtually all of the circumstances that I dealt with, workers were quite happy for a decision to be made by a show of hands, and in most of those circumstances there were people voting on either side of the proposition. Those who were voting against going on strike were quite happy for their view to be known and quite happy for the decision to be taken on a show of hands.

This bill is a slightly watered-down version of previous legislation that has been put forward by the Howard government, but it still imposes a ridiculously cumbersome and bureaucratic regime which is designed to hobble the capacity of unions and their members to take industrial action in pursuit of legitimate claims for better terms and conditions. The provisions of the bill require that any union or employees proposing to take industrial action have to apply to the Industrial Relations Commission for a secret ballot after a bargaining period has commenced. The application has to contain the questions to be put in the ballot, including the nature of the proposed action to be taken. The Industrial Relations Commission must, if practicable, determine the application within two working days, and the parties can make submissions to it about that. It must not allow the application unless it is satisfied that the applicant has been, and is, genuinely trying to reach agreement with the employer, and the Industrial Relations Commission has the discretion to refuse the ballot on certain other grounds.

In other words, the workers cannot even necessarily get to first base without satisfying the Industrial Relations Commission that there is even a legitimate possibility that they may be entitled to take industrial action and therefore have a secret ballot as to whether or not such action should be allowed to occur. For industrial action to be protected and to be legitimate under the act, 40 per cent of the eligible voters have to vote and a majority of the valid votes cast have to be in fa-
favour of the action. The action has to be taken within 30 days of the declaration of the ballot results. The applicants—the workers, the union—are liable to pay the cost of the ballot but, if they notify the Industrial Registrar of the cost, the registrar may determine that the cost was reasonably and genuinely incurred and the Commonwealth may, in all its generosity, pay up to 80 per cent of the cost. In other words, not only is a ballot being imposed upon the workers and a union where there may be no desire for it on the part of either; it is also going to be accompanied by, in some cases, very significant cost.

This legislation is really about radically altering the bargaining position between workers and the unions on one side and employers on the other. It is all about strengthening the bargaining position of employers. It is all about further neutering the power of industrial action as a last resort to be used by workers and their unions as a legitimate bargaining tool to achieve better wages and conditions. No alternatives are proposed for employers. No employers are to be required to hold ballots of their shareholders before a lockout or before they decide to sue their own workers, as occurred very recently in the dispute in Victoria. There is no countervailing obligation on the part of those employers to ballot their rank and file, their shareholders, but an obligation is being imposed on workers that they have to have a formal secret ballot to make a decision.

We may well ask why it is necessary for such legislation to be brought to the parliament at a time when, as the government often points out, industrial disputes in this country are at record low levels. The answer is pretty straightforward: this is an ideological attempt to further weaken the bargaining power of workers and trade unions and to further strengthen the dominance of employers in the workplace so that the ability of unions and workers to make use of industrial action as a legitimate bargaining weapon is further counteracted.

We have occasional high profile disputes. We have had some recently in the car industry and with BHP, and they of course reflect an industrial relations system that this government put in place. They reflect decentralised bargaining. They reflect a wage fixing system that is all about workplace or shopfloor bargaining. The pattern of establishing this system was laid by the former Labor government, but it has been very substantially furthered by the current government. The government does not want to face up to the logical consequence of this decentralised system, which is that there will be industrial disputes in particular companies that flow from having workplace based decision making—and that is precisely what has been occurring in the car industry in recent times.

Employers make the decision to pursue just-in-time approaches to manufacturing for entirely legitimate economic reasons but in doing so take upon themselves certain risks—in particular, risks that the supply chain will in some way be disrupted by a variety of possible factors, one of which is industrial action. Employers cannot have it both ways; the Howard government cannot have it both ways. If the government want a market driven system—if they want a system in which the individual parties determine outcomes and the government stay out, which is the rhetoric that we hear from the minister, the Prime Minister and the former minister, Mr Reith—then they have to live with the outcomes of that system. They cannot have it both ways.

This bill and the others that are associated with it are all about the government trying to cripple the strength of unions and trying to undermine the power of union members and workers to bargain on an equal level with their employers. No matter what rhetoric we get hit with about union bosses and holding Australia to ransom and bullies and all of the posturing bluster we get from the minister for workplace relations, it is very simple in reality: this legislation is an attempt to tilt the scales in favour of employers even further and more to the disadvantage of ordinary workers.

The sort of stuff that came from the member for Canning about the Chartists I find quite risible. As somebody who studied the Chartist movement for some time in the past when I was a student, I find it highly amusing that somebody of his political ilk would be citing them as some sort of base for his
position. His political forebears opposed the Chartist movement and they outlawed the trade movement in Britain. They sent the Tolpuddle Martyrs to Australia as well as many Chartists. The member for Canning now seeks to capture their legacy in some sort of entirely dubious attempt to give credibility to his position. Of course, what he fails to point out is that the Chartists were agitating for the secret ballot to elect parliamentarians in ordinary elections that occur from time to time on a predictable basis, not when there are 15 of them or 20 of them or 30 of them caught in a situation, potentially at short notice, where they feel the need to take industrial action—for example, because of a health and safety threat that has emerged where they feel the employer is not dealing adequately with the threat. The notion that you should idly sit by and accept an ongoing risk to your own health and safety while the Australian Electoral Commission or the Australian Industrial Relations Commission conducts a formal postal ballot is simply ludicrous.

This is all about bargaining power. Unions exist in our society to correct the severe imbalance in bargaining power between workers and employers and to ensure that workers, particularly those who have lower skills and less bargaining power in a pure open market, can collectively bargain to achieve a reasonable standard of living and a reasonable return for their efforts from the production process.

The Liberal philosophy is based on that of John Stuart Mill; in fact some of the more progressive ones belong to an outfit called the John Stuart Mill Society. That philosophy is essentially that all individuals are entitled to contract for employment as individuals and to enter into contracts with employers on that basis, and that any intervention in that is unjustified. They see the employment contract as essentially the same as all other contracts—it is no different from a contract to buy a bag of jellybeans or to buy a theatre ticket or whatever—whereas the Labor Party see the employment relationship as fundamental to our society and quite different from all other contracts. Our philosophy derives from R.H. Tawney, another great philosopher from the past—or historian in this case of our British tradition—who very pertinently pointed out in that great one-liner: freedom for the pike is death for the minnow. That is ultimately what trade unionism is about, and that is ultimately what labour market regulation is about. There is an inherent imbalance of power in most employment circumstances. There is an inherent imbalance in bargaining capacity, and that is what having a regulatory system and having trade unions is all about: to correct that imbalance to ensure that people do not get exploited and that they get a reasonable return for their labour in spite of the fact that in an open market, if they did not starve, they would live in destitution.

The labour input into the production process is not just that. The human input into the production process is also the means by which the rewards of the production process are distributed through the wages system. So as well as being the primary input into production, it is also the means by which the output—the benefit—is delivered. Finally, and in some respects most importantly, it is the means by which the vast majority of people get their identity, their sense of value and their sense of contribution to society.

From a Liberal perspective, the human input into the production process—the employment contract—is one-dimensional. It is an input into production, like a machine or a piece of land, and that is it. The Liberals do not acknowledge the broader social dimension that is involved in the phenomenon of labour, nor do they acknowledge the need to have special regulation in this relationship to ensure that there is fairness and equity so that people are able to have a reasonable standard of living.

The great irony of this bill is that it comes from a government that preaches deregulation in industrial relations. Yet what we have is a highly prescriptive, highly interventionist approach being imposed upon essentially unwilling people. What we have is the government micromanaging the relationship between trade unions and their members and intervening very prescriptively to say that, if there is a decision to be made with respect to prospective industrial action, that decision
has to be made in a highly bureaucratic, highly time consuming and, in some cases, highly expensive way—you are not allowed to make that decision in your own way by a decision at the workplace at a meeting, which historically has been the primary way that such decisions have been made.

Not only does the government say, through its legislation, ‘You are only allowed to take industrial action at certain times’; it also says, ‘We, the government, are going to prescribe how you can make that decision and we are going to impose an incredibly cumbersome and bureaucratic process of decision making upon you just to make it as hard as possible for you to come up with that kind of decision.’ In other words, from the government and from employers we have the free market when it suits them. When it suits their interests they are all in favour of the free market, but when the free market could lead to a bit of disruption or to unions and workers actually taking industrial action or exerting some sort of power in the overall negotiating position, then they are in favour of regulation—highly prescriptive, highly interventionist, highly cumbersome regulation at that.

They are not that far away from the position that prevailed shortly before the period that the member for Canning was talking about—namely, the Combination Acts in Britain from 1799 to 1824, which effectively outlawed trade unionism and made collective bargaining in Britain effectively illegal. That is where this government is heading. Bit by bit it is seeking to prevent workers from bargaining collectively through unions and pursuing their interests as workers to achieve better outcomes and better wages and conditions. That is ultimately where they are heading.

It is ironic that the broader context in which this approach is pursued has been about more jobs. We have heard for some years that deregulated labour markets deliver better employment outcomes. For quite some time the United States was cited as the perfect example of this and the European Union was the contrast. Australia was seen as an excessively regulated labour market and the United States was held up essentially as the model for how we should regulate industrial relations. Now that the United States is experiencing unemployment figures above five per cent and as those figures continue to increase, getting to a point where they will not be a great deal below Australia—and they are in fact significantly higher than a number of European Union countries—some of the propagandists who put this point of view have gone decidedly quiet in recent times.

They have managed to ignore the fact that something in the vicinity of one per cent of the American work force is in jail; therefore, there is an artificial reduction in what would otherwise be an augmentation of the unemployment figures. They ignore the impact of currency valuations and, particularly in the case of Europe, of overvalued currencies, which tend to create higher unemployment. They ignore the fact that overregulated product markets in Europe have also tended to exacerbate unemployment by restricting work opportunities and by diverting investment into unproductive and ultimately job-destroying kinds of activities, particularly through vehicles such as the common agricultural policy.

Jobs are created by demand. Employers employ people because they have work for them to do which they cannot have done by their existing work force. Supply issues are relevant. Questions of costs of employment and circumstances of employment are relevant to the employment relationship and to the creation of jobs, but the fundamental driver of employment in this country and in others with a market-driven society is demand. That is why large companies are downsizing. That is why big companies—even those companies doing very well, like the banks—are reducing the number of workers they have. Why? Because they can get by without them.

When the Commonwealth Bank makes a record profit it does not immediately go out and say, ‘Beauty, we can now employ a whole lot more workers.’ It is quite the reverse, because its employment decisions are based on the work it needs to do in order to deliver its services to its customers, not on the fact that it has enough money to employ a given number of people. Always,ulti-
mately, the employment decisions in this country will be based primarily on demand—on the work needing to be done on the employer’s product being purchased by consumers. Cost and supply factors are relevant to that but the dominant consideration will always be demand factors.

The Workplace Relations Amendment (Secret Ballots for Protected Action) Bill 2002 is part of a broader intellectual theory that the government adheres to, which is based on the notion that deregulated labour markets are free, fair and deliver best outcomes. In truth, they are none of those things because they deliver unfair outcomes that suit a minority of workers who do very well, as well as employers and the better off. They damage the interests of a very large number of workers, particularly the lower paid and people who have less bargaining power. They do not produce better employment outcomes.

This legislation is highly interventionist and prescriptive, contrary to the deregulatory rhetoric that broadly enshrouds the government’s typical position on industrial relations. Its propaganda about employment outcomes is now disintegrating because of changes in the United States. We are left with its simple agenda of bullying and mendacity in all its ugliness and starkness. As Peter Reith said when he was the minister, ‘Never forget that we are on the side of private capital. Never forget that we are against workers and that we are on the side of employers.’ That is the real agenda of this government and that is what you are seeing in this legislation. It is not designed to produce greater democracy or freedom; it is there to make life harder for workers and harder for unions. (Time expired)

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (9.37 p.m.—It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak on the Workplace Relations Amendment (Secret Ballots for Protected Action) Bill 2002. I want to start immediately with the philosophical arguments raised by the member for Melbourne. The member for Melbourne painted this as in some way an assault on the basic freedoms of workers, as a capitalist plot, yet it is about three fundamental principles. Firstly, it is about higher productivity, which has occurred over the last six years; secondly, it is about higher employment, again which has occurred under these changes over the last six years; and, thirdly—and this seems to be an idea which has eluded the member for Melbourne—it is about greater democracy, both in the workplace and more broadly within society in general. That is why in the United Kingdom—that great, heavy, capitalist society that he champions so strongly—they have secret ballots.

There are four principles which this bill introduces that I would like to address initially. First, it brings a fundamental principle of democracy to trade union activity. It is the notion that every worker, when deciding whether to withhold his or her labour, has the right to do so in secret, to do so free of coercion and to do so free of the oppression of those around them. The second principle is that this bill protects jobs by ensuring democracy, and it does so because on every occasion that there is industrial action—as we have seen in this very last week with the BHP plant at Westernport in my own seat of Flinders—it risks the long-term future of jobs for the majority. The heads of the car industry in Australia have raised the fact that they might no longer source component parts from within Australia as a result of this industrial action. Yet I know, from the families in the area and from the discussions that I have had, that there was a real concern amongst the workers in Westernport as to whether or not they would have the freedom to choose, because the families knew that the actions which were occurring were being done in public and without any choice but to vote in the full glare and amongst the full pressure of the union leadership.

The third principle that the bill provides for is industrial action under worker approval, including the idea that worker approval includes all affected employees, not just the union members who are affected. That is a critical distinction: people have a right to participate in the union but they also have a right not to participate in the union. That is one of the fundamental principles of freedom that we have. This bill strengthens and enshrines that right to opt in and, more
importantly, to opt out, because it means that workers can participate in any decision to withhold labour rather than having to rely on a union of which they are not part and over which they have no control. Fourthly, the key principle is that the bill helps to make unions accountable to workers and subject to the workers’ wishes without placing a premium on the decisions of the leadership from the top down, so it institutes a genuine democratisation to the processes within the workplace. Why would anybody be afraid of that? What is there to be afraid of in a process which dictates democracy in the workplace within a collective agreement?

I want in particular to look briefly at the dispute which has just occurred at the BHP Westernport plant in Hastings on the Mornington Peninsula in the electorate of Flinders. It is accepted in law and within this bill that any individual has the right to control his or her own labour. That is not in dispute but it is subject to two critical precepts. The first is that, in doing so, nobody has the right to compel or to prevent anyone else from working in their own right if they so choose. You simply cannot prevent others from working. Making your own decisions is a matter for you, but it is not a right to prevent others from making the choice for themselves. The second precept is that it has to be a genuinely free choice. In all other aspects of our society, we accept the notion that we have the freedom to choose, free from the glare of publicity and peer pressure, whenever there is a democratic right to be exercised. In particular, I note that when you look at like-minded countries—the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, Germany, Ireland—all have strong secret ballot provisions, yet this approach, this philosophy, is being opposed by the Labor Party, the opposition, in this very debate. Those two principles qualify the basic right to choose to give or to withhold labour, and that is that you cannot prevent others from doing so and you must be free to make your own choice without oppression and without coercion.

In looking at this bill, I want to examine it in three steps. The first is to look at the current situation; the second is to examine the operation of the bill; and the third is to put it in context—to examine the importance of this bill. What is the current situation? The current situation is that we have a context of unnecessary strikes which can be undemocratically approved. A union leadership can decide what is best for a worker without genuine consultation or reference to that worker. Yes, there is a set of existing secret ballot provisions in the Workplace Relations Act which give the Industrial Relations Commission discretion to order secret ballots, but the means of achieving this are so public and so onerous that these provisions are rarely used. It is interesting that the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations has been able to identify only seven secret ballots ordered under the existing Workplace Relations Act provisions in the last eight years. Only some of these ballots relate to the act of taking industrial action, of withdrawing labour, which means ‘one out, all out’. Generally, those that do relate to taking industrial action are held while the industrial action is ongoing and do not seek approval prior to the industrial action commencing.

The fact is that the vast majority of decisions to take industrial action are unregulated. There is no guarantee that all workers are consulted or that they genuinely support taking the industrial action. It is a fact of human nature that in a heavy, oppressive environment individuals will find it difficult. Whether they do or whether they do not, we have an obligation to ensure that they have the right to make that choice free from the threat, the possibility or even the spectre of oppression. What we have seen is that the existing provisions have not provided sufficient protection to workers who feel pressured into taking industrial action. In that situation, the proposed changes to the Workplace Relations Act will ensure that a decision to take industrial action is both democratic and genuine. The use of ‘hands up’ voting places unfair peer pressure on members to approve an action.

How does this bill operate? What will it actually do to redress the current situation? The government’s focus in this bill is on the point of the decision to commence industrial action. That is the key moment. The bill aims
to protect jobs by ensuring, enshrining and strengthening democracy at the key moment of control over one’s own labour so that workers who will be most affected by going on strike will have an unfettered say about whether or not they want to do so. When will it apply? Applications for a secret ballot can be made to the Industrial Relations Commission. The application for a ballot can be made only when a bargaining period is in place and not more than 30 days before the last occurring nominal expiry date of any relevant certified agreements. Who can apply for a ballot? If an organisation of employees initiated the bargaining period, then the organisation can apply or an employee or employees can also apply. Very importantly, the bill provides that, if an employee wishes to remain anonymous, they can appoint an agent to initiate the bargaining period, represent them during the application for a ballot and provide notice of the industrial action to the employer. There is protection for a worker seeking to be covered by this legislation.

Indeed, the bill goes on to make it an offence for a person to disclose information that will identify any other person as someone who has appointed an agent for the purposes of seeking a ballot. That is a critical protection. What it means is that action cannot be forced. Industrial action can disrupt not just the group of employees involved. As we saw in BHP Westernport, a small number of employees held over 1,000 other employees in that institution to ransom and, more than that, they held thousands of employees in the automotive industry throughout Australia to ransom. As a consequence, the long-term future—not even the short-term future but the long-term future—of that industry has been placed in jeopardy. That is why the leaders of that industry have expressly stated that they seek to look elsewhere to provide alternative sources of supply for key components—and all because a small number of employees took an action which affected a great number of employees. It was one small group who jeopardised the position of thousands of employees.

By making a secret ballot a compulsory precondition for industrial action, three things happen. First, you get a true picture of the worker support. Second, you add democratic legitimacy to that action. Third, you place power where it belongs—at the workplace level, in the hands of the employees directly involved—because, if the leadership does accurately represent their views, then they have nothing to fear from a secret ballot. If, however, they do not accurately represent the views of the rank and file, then a secret ballot will expose the true position. That is all that this legislation seeks to achieve, and that is all that anyone can ask.

That is the way the bill operates. Why, then, is the bill so important? At a philosophical level, we believe in a freedom to organise. We accept the notion in law that there is a freedom to give or to withhold one’s own labour, but neither of these can fully work without the freedom to choose and without the individual’s capacity to make the choice that ‘I will give my labour’ or ‘I will withhold it’ without the oppression of an organised environment which militates against it—and that was the word which came back in Hastings from the families of both those who were on strike and those who were affected by the strike. The second thing is that it protects jobs by ensuring democracy, and the third thing is that it overcomes an existing lacuna in the legislation. The fact that there have been just over a handful of secret ballots ordered in the last half a dozen years shows that the fear of going public in asking for a secret ballot is a significant inhibitor in itself.

These are the key points I wish to make. Ultimately, I believe that the Workplace Relations Amendment (Secret Ballots for Protected Action) Bill 2002 enshrines in law a fundamental principle of democracy. It enshrines in the workplace the choice of each individual over whether to give or to withhold their own employment. Significantly, it adopts a principle that exists in the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, Germany and Ireland. And for anyone who opposes that, surely the question must be: what are you afraid of? If it is operating successfully in those countries and if the Blair government’s Employment Relations Act 1999 retained the secrecy provision, what are we trying to
achieve here? Very simply, this bill enshrines the right for individuals to decide their own future in the workplace. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms GEORGE (Throsby) (9.52 p.m.)—I rise to make a contribution on this very important bill, the Workplace Relations Amendment (Secret Ballots for Protected Action) Bill 2002 which, as our shadow minister has indicated, the Labor Party and the members on this side of the chamber will be opposing. As I understand it, this is the third legislative attempt by the government to mandate secret ballots as a prerequisite for gaining authorisation from the commission to take subsequent protected action during negotiations for an enterprise agreement.

One of the issues that has not been clarified in the course of the debate on this bill is the point that there is already a highly regulated system in operation before industrial action can be granted the status of protected action, free from the possibilities of civil action being taken against the unions and workers. So there already exists in this country a high degree of regulation for action to be protected.

Why is this bill before the House? Is it really there to redress matters of concern to the Australian community? Are there shortcomings in the way the system operates? Is there a principle that operates internationally that we do not have in this country that we should pick up? Or is it really just another attack on the rights of organised labour? I want to try to establish that this bill is before the chamber not for any pragmatic considerations, but as part of an ongoing agenda by the minister to continue to try and tilt the industrial relations system even more consciously in favour of employers at the expense of working people, and, in this piece of legislation, to actually try and erode the fundamental principle that all democracies uphold, namely the right of workers to withdraw their labour—although, as a former union official, I have always taken the view that industrial action should always be action as a last resort. I think most sensible minded people in the union movement would believe that to be the case.

I have just listened very intently to the member for Flinders as he traversed other international examples. What he forgot to mention is that the principle of a right of access to secret ballots already exists in this country and, I think, has existed historically way back to the 1920s. So it is of little value for the minister and other members of the government to try and position people on this side of the chamber—and former union officials such as myself—as being somehow on the side of those who want to deny ordinary working people the right to make decisions about whether or not they engage in industrial action.

I support the right of all union members to vote on whether or not to take action. I think that is a fundamental right. It is a right that is expressed in many and various ways, including, in some unions, by secret ballots. But in my judgment, what we are seeing on the part of this minister is an attempt to say that the right can only have one form of legitimacy and that is by way of a secret ballot. That is a highly prescriptive and interventionist approach that the minister is trying to force onto the industrial parties who have shown over many decades that they are not particularly interested in using that right, even when the right exists, but rather in resolving matters in a sensible way at the workplace or industry level.

But just to make it very clear, in every union that I am aware of—and I think I understand the operations of most—it would be a very reckless and foolish union official who did not take into account the views of the workforce when determining certain forms of industrial action. Furthermore, like politicians, union officials are accountable to their electorate. I know from my own experience that union officials who get too far ahead or too far behind the prevailing views of the people they are elected to represent do not last very long. However, it is quite offensive for the minister to be suggesting that, somehow, workers are captured by leaders, that they do not think through the implications of proposed action and that they do not have a means to express whether or not they support industrial action.
As I say, I have been around long enough to see every form of democracy in operation in unions before industrial action is taken. In many unions, it is by a show of hands—the same kind of system that operates in caucus meetings of major political parties. I am sure the minister is not suggesting that true democracy can only pertain in the caucus room of the Liberal Party by a secret ballot. I am sure that it happens there as it happens in our caucus: discussion occurs and often votes are taken by a show of hands, but that does not in any way undermine the democratic principle once that decision is determined. In other unions they have major mass meetings. As I have indicated, though, there are some unions, including some teacher unions, that historically have had provisions written into their rules for secret ballots of the whole membership before action is taken.

A variety of forms of democracy exists. I find it rather surprising that the minister preaches the virtues of a deregulated labour market—something that we on this side of the House do not support—and goes around pontificating about the virtues of deregulation yet at the same time wants to introduce a highly regulated and prescribed system of mandated secret ballots prior to the taking of protected industrial action. It is somewhat inconsistent. For those who still want to perpetuate the myth that there is a lack of democracy within the union movement or that people have something to hide, let me make it clear that, beyond the union and the workplace, that very august body the Australian Industrial Relations Commission has the power today to order secret ballots. As I have indicated, that is not new in Australia; secret ballot provisions have existed in different legislative forms since the late 1920s, so perhaps Australia led the world in the introduction of the provision that enables secret ballots to be put in place.

Under section 135, of its own volition the commission can order a secret ballot and, under section 136, employees can request that the commission put in place the process of secret balloting. So the provisions are there and they are open to be used. In fact quite recently I read that one of our unions—the Rail, Tram and Bus Union—sought a ballot of employees of Great Southern Railways over their choice of being forced to continue with AWAs—that is, the individual contracts—or having a collective agreement. It comes as no surprise that their democratically expressed preference was for a collective agreement. I raise that example only to show that such provisions exist and they can be accessed, although they are not accessed very often. The member for Flinders was right to draw our attention to the fact that, although they are written into law, those provisions are not used very often. But he did not go on to say why that is the case. The case for the infrequent use of secret ballot provisions arises because industrial partners often believe that a secret ballot can polarise the positions of parties and remove the flexibilities that are necessary for the resolution of industrial disputes. In other words, you take a secret ballot; the workers express an opinion; that opinion, let us say, is carried overwhelmingly; you sit around and try to negotiate an outcome to the dispute; and you find that the mandated secret ballot often makes the resolution of industrial disputes far more difficult.

To those who want to argue that this bill provides an extension of democracy in the industrial relations system I pose this question: if the matter is all about democracy, why does this bill not require a secret ballot to call off industrial action? The bill proposes these forms of ballot before industrial action can be taken but there is no suggestion that a secret ballot should be held to call off industrial action. Nor is there an onus on companies for a form of democratic decision by shareholders before, under the law, a company can lock out its employees as part of their industrial strategy in enterprise bargaining negotiations. This bill, like many others that have been and will come before this chamber, is very one-sided. It does not deal with any gross omissions in the current system of industrial relations. It really is the extension of the pursuit of a very political and ideological agenda by the current minister and his predecessors. I contend that it is not about democracy; it is about restricting the right to take industrial action. Interestingly enough, the present minister learned a lot from the former minister for industrial
relations, Minister Reith, but he does not talk about the fact that back in 1998 the former minister commissioned a discussion paper on this very issue. The discussion paper commented on the secret ballot provisions and said:

The Commission seems to be using ballots strategically to progress dispute resolution, particularly where the parties have reached a standoff in negotiations.

But that discussion paper, which was commissioned by the minister, indicates quite clearly that there was no evidence of the commission ever refusing applications by employers or anybody else for ballots in relation to the question of taking industrial action. The provision exists but the minister will not recognise that it is rarely used because the industrial partners believe that it is not an efficient way of resolving industrial disputation. The minister has not made out a case for the changes he proposes, nor has he made out a case to show that the existing arrangements are inadequate. The provision exists but the minister will not recognise that it is rarely used because the industrial partners believe that it is not an efficient way of resolving industrial disputation. The minister has not made out a case for the changes he proposes, nor has he made out a case to show that the existing arrangements are inadequate. The Australian Industrial Relations Commission currently has the discretion and in my judgment that is where it should remain. The bill is a reflection of the minister’s misguided belief that on many occasions industrial stoppages do not have the support of rank and file workers. The words in his own second reading speech indicate his obsession. He said of the bill:

It will ensure that the right to protected industrial action is not abused by union officials pushing agendas unrelated to the workers at the workplace concerned.

That is a very one-eyed, very dogmatic, very unrepresentative and very distant view of how union officials operate in practice.

We need look no further than Western Australia to see what farce emerges when a highly regulated system of mandated secret ballots is forced on unwilling partners. As we know, the Liberal government in Western Australia made much about their industrial relations agenda—in fact a more extreme agenda in many respects than this current government’s agenda. There was a lot of fanfare about legislating for compulsory secret prestrike ballots. What has been the outcome? Applications were made possible by employers, employer organisations, unions and union members. Here we had a highly regulated system open to all to have compulsory prestrike ballots. I will tell you what the result was: not one application was made from the time that the Liberal government in Western Australia legislated for the introduction of these compulsory secret prestrike ballots. Again, it was a highly ideologically driven agenda that had no relationship to practicalities, nor to the wishes of those involved in resolving industrial disputes.

In fact, the reverse can be true. Instead of the motivation being, as we are led to believe, the extension of democracy, let me tell you what an eminent labour lawyer, Professor Ronald McCallum, has said about the Western Australian situation and the details of this bill. In commenting on this bill in the previous Senate inquiry, Professor McCallum said this:

... I suspect, from my long experience in labour law, that such a bureaucratic system will drop industrial action down from union executives and union secretaries to wildcat action. I think we will see an increase in short-term wildcat action, and there will be a series of legal decisions seeking to assert that wildcat action on the shop floor can be sheeted home to trade union officials. Similar case law occurred in England in the late 1960s and early 1970s, to little effect.

In other words, the eminent labour lawyer Professor Ronald McCallum was arguing that moves to introduce secret ballots would result in employees ignoring regulated processes for protected action that currently exist in the act. They would simply end up taking wildcat industrial action—possibly against the advice of their unions—which could well end up in endless litigation, as case law in other countries has shown.

In conclusion, I want to argue that the provisions in this bill are not necessary. They are impractical and based on the Western Australian experience. They are ideologically driven and bear little relationship to what it is that the industrial partners want as an efficient way of resolving industrial disputation. I would also argue that the bill should be rejected because the Australian Industrial Relations Commission, a very eminent body, has the authority to call secret ballots and that the discretion that rests with
the commission should remain there. I would argue that there is already a highly regulated system in operation for the taking of what we call protected industrial action.

In short, the bill really adds little to the notion of industrial democracy, being as one-sided as it is. As I pointed out, there are no secret ballots to call off industrial action and no secret ballots for employers before they are able to lock out workers. The bill effectively creates further impediments to unions being able to undertake legitimate industrial action and to withdraw labour as a last resort. As Professor McCallum so rightly points out, such forms of highly regulated interventionist approaches often lead to the prospect of longer disputation and needless and endless litigation. It is for those reasons, among others, that I contend that this bill should be rejected.

Mr WAKELIN (Grey) (10.12 p.m.)—Tonight we have before us the Workplace Relations Amendment (Prohibition of Compulsory Union Fees) Bill 2002, the Workplace Relations Amendment (Secret Ballots for Protected Action) Bill 2002, the Workplace Relations Amendment (Genuine Bargaining) Bill 2002 and the Workplace Relations Amendment (Fair Termination) Bill 2002 all brought together for debate. In an attempt to make a balanced contribution this evening I thought it might be worthwhile trying to come to grips with what industrial relations is meant to be about, or what I understand industrial relations is meant to be about, within the Western democracies and specifically within Australia. To my mind, it is about the willing relationship between an employer and an employee. It is about the creation of employment and the maintenance of employment. It is about working in a workplace that is safe and fair. And is about people being able to make reasonable progress—that is, the business and the individual employee—to the benefit of the total community and to the nation.

There is no doubt in my mind that in 100 years of Australia’s history we have seen very significant progress. The bitterness of previous times is not as severe today. It gets a little bit rough, as we saw in the BHP dispute last week where the automotive industry was on its knees and the steel industry was at its wits end to know how to maintain an efficient industry and maintain their supply to their customers. In all of this there is inevitably from time to time the two sides. There is an adversarial system and generally speaking sometimes it ends up in strike action. But most of the time it ends up in resolution.

To be specific, the bills address compulsory union fees. I must confess I was not aware of what that actually meant until I saw it in front of me here tonight. For the purposes of the House and any community member that may be listening, those who are non-union employees, as the description is, are expected to pay a service fee for union participation in agreement negotiations in the workplace. The demand is typically made above the annual due. Apparently it is accepted practice. The information before me even goes on to suggest that the ACTU formally supports unions pursuing this compulsory fee in collective agreements in an attempt to give these demands a legal aura. So the concept of freedom of association and freedom to join a union is but a nonsense. The previous speaker for the government talked very much about democracy and secret ballots. I thought that he put it in a most eloquent and forthright manner when he said that the importance of human rights and the importance of the principle that a secret ballot allows to be tested is vital and central to our democracy.

With regard to what genuine bargaining is, let me go back in history a little bit. We see quite remarkable differences within unions. The MUA is noted for some of its methodologies in achieving its ends. It seemed to be a very successfully union in its outcomes. But the people in my electorate say it is all very well for the MUA to demand those sorts of outcomes, but what about the forklift driver who brings the product to the wharf? He works equally as hard, if not harder, and he is on about half the wage of the MUA employees. It is very obvious to any casual observer of the Australian industrial scene that might be able to achieve much more than others can achieve in those sorts of circum-
stances. What is genuine bargaining—that elusive capturing of something which is the balance of commonsense and the need to have a job and the need to keep the company or the business going? There is no doubt that there is a very large imbalance in power between some of the unions and the way they go about it.

In terms of some of the tactics in recent years, I am sure we conduct our industrial relations in a much more moderate atmosphere than the way we used to do it 50, 70 and 80 years ago. Nevertheless, it is still an essence as important as it has ever been, even in a time when we have very significant support and welfare payments and a whole lot of sophisticated government mechanisms which give significant support to people who would have been much more vulnerable in earlier times. I think it is very important to respect the human rights of individuals who want that basic freedom, that basic right, to work. So I have to come out in support of the legislation, acknowledging the progress of the Australian system based on respect for human beings and their right to work, their right to have their say, their right to withdraw their labour. But let it be done without coercion, without threats and without the need, as I have seen in previous disputes, for heavy security for ministers of the Crown.

This bill offers us that opportunity to allow individuals at the workplace to have their say. I guess if I was an employee of 50 years ago, I would have appreciated many of the hard-won gains of those unions. But I believe in this current environment—and we see it in the recruitment by the unions themselves; we now have less than a quarter of our workforce unionised—we have massive change occurring in the workplace. I believe that both sides need to acknowledge that—and I even hesitate to use the word ‘sides’ because at the end of the day we have a common cause, a common purpose. We have the creation of employment, the creation of wealth and the creation of export income, but we all have a common purpose in getting it right.

So it is with significant pride that I support these bills. I think it is the third time around, in various forms, that this legislation has been presented to the House and it is very important that we recognise the enormous change that is occurring in the workplace. It is extremely important that we respect the fact that individuals are much more aware of their rights, much better educated and much more aware that coercion of any kind, from the boss or from the union movement, is unacceptable. In that climate, we need to have some of these mechanisms that are here tonight in this legislation. With that contribution, I wish the bills a speedy passage through this House and through the Senate.

Dr Emerson (Rankin) (10.22 p.m.)—The Workplace Relations Amendment (Secret Ballots for Protected Action) Bill 2002 has nothing to do with good policy and everything to do with partisan politics. The legislation is before the chamber for the same reason that other industrial relations bills are being brought to the House of Representatives, and that is to seek to divide this country, to divide workers from employers, to create hostility in the workplace—because that is the government’s agenda. It is important to understand that the history of the Liberal Party in Australia has been one of dividing Australia, of setting Australians against Australians. We can go back to the Fraser years. The verdict was finally delivered on the Fraser government, with the election of the Hawke government, that enough was enough—that the pitting of Australians against Australians through industrial relations laws was getting the country nowhere, that strike action was rampant and that the base political purposes of the Liberal Party then, as now, were doing nothing to advance harmony in the workplace or, indeed, changes in work practices and in workplaces themselves.

This legislation is brought forward ostensibly on the grounds that it will reduce the level of industrial disputation. But, if I can refer to the Fraser years, under the Fraser government, a yearly average of 590 days were lost to industrial disputes per 1,000 employees. That is a divided nation. By January 1996, there had been 13 years of Labor government, and throughout that period the coalition said that everything Labor
was doing would lead to greater industrial disputation. In fact it led to a reduction in industrial disputation to 80 days per 1,000 employees. I think it is also a fact that the level of industrial disputation overall has continued to fall under the coalition, and yet it says that the reason it is bringing this legislation into the parliament is to deal with high levels of industrial disputation. It is a complete furphy, and the true motivation in bringing this legislation into the parliament—just as the motivation has been in bringing in the Orwellian-titled ‘fair dismissals’ legislation for small business—is to achieve some basic partisan political purpose, not any genuine reforms in the industrial relations system, and certainly not with a view to creating harmony in the workplace.

We now have a Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations who is, through his own job application, prepared to sacrifice any prospect of industrial harmony in this country by declaring to the H.R. Nicholls Society that he is very disappointed with employers and employer groups because they have not gone to war against working families in this country. He wants them to go to war—for no purpose other than to promote his own agenda and lift his own profile in the Australian community. He is not genuinely interested in a harmonious relationship between workers and employers. His comments in relation to the recent difficulties in the car components industry have been inflammatory. He has wanted BHP to proceed with prosecutions and, when BHP said they were not going to do that, he expressed grave disappointment.

We need to understand, in this current environment, that the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations is using the fact that there is a Productivity Commission review of the automotive industry to hold over the heads of the component manufacturers and the car manufacturers in this country the spectre of withdrawing funding under the ACIS arrangements—which provide import credit relief to those industries to the value of $2 billion—if they do not do his bidding in the declaration of industrial war that he has made.

It is a completely irresponsible attitude on the part of the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, whose sole objective is to raise his profile as a prime-ministerial candidate. He is prepared to set Australians against Australians. He is prepared to provoke industrial disharmony in the very important car industry in this country and in the components industry. He is prepared to jeopardise Australian exports of automobiles and of components—a rapidly growing industry and one of which we all should be proud. Instead of looking for solutions to ongoing difficulties or possible difficulties in that industry, instead of bringing the parties together in some sort of roundtable, or encouraging them to come together in a roundtable to work out their approach to the enterprise bargaining that will be coming on in large numbers in the next 12 months, he is only interested in creating further strife. You would think that the minister would have an interest in settling the industrial relations system down. It is quite the opposite. His interest is in provoking a very poisonous relationship in that industry between employees and employers.

This legislation is poor policy. It is designed purely for base political purposes. It will not result in a reduction in industrial disputation, because, if a strike were called as a result of a secret ballot, a strike would have to be called off as a result of a secret ballot. That means more industrial disputation when it occurs, more protracted industrial disputation. The automotive industry in particular cannot afford the prospect of protracted industrial disputation, because of the just-in-time inventory systems the car manufacturers have in place, where they do not keep large stocks of components. That is for good, efficient productive reasons, but it would make them more vulnerable to protracted industrial disputation by requiring secret ballots to call and call off strikes. All that means is longer industrial disputation and greater difficulty for this industry.

Debate interrupted.

**ADJOURNMENT**

*The SPEAKER—Order! It being 10.30 p.m., I propose the question: That the House do now adjourn.*
Traveland: Workers’ Entitlements

Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (10.30 p.m.)—Tonight I wish to bring to the notice of the House the issue of the outstanding redundancy packages yet to be paid to approximately 540 former employees of the now insolvent Internova Travel Pty Ltd trading as Traveland. Some of these former employees live in my electorate of Lowe. I note that the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Mr Tony Abbott, finally tabled an answer to my question on notice No. 54, which was printed in Hansard on 14 May 2002. In my question I asked the minister, inter alia:

Has his attention been drawn to (a) the insolvency of Traveland Pty Limited on 26 November 2001 and now under administration, (b) the subsequent termination of 550 employees of Traveland on 4 December 2001 and (c) the fact that those 550 former employees had worked the whole of November 2001 without being paid their monthly wages and (d) the fact that, since 4 December 2001, those 550 former employees have received no further payments.

The minister replied, inter alia:

The administrator for Internova Travel has advised my Department that some employees have unpaid wages, however, the extent is unconfirmed.

I ask the minister tonight to confirm what steps, if any, he is taking to determine the extent of these unpaid wages and what administrative action he or his department is taking to ensure the proper settlement payments that are, in justice, owed to them. I further quote from my question on notice No. 54 to the minister:

Were the 550 former Traveland employees excluded from the Special Employee Entitlements Scheme for Ansett Group Employees as a result of Traveland Pty Limited’s primary assets, including its employee contracts, being sold by the Administrator of the Ansett Group, which included Traveland Pty Limited, on 23 September 2001 to Internova Travel Pty Limited, notwithstanding widespread speculation at the time that Internova Travel did not have sufficient capital to operate a national travel agency network.

The minister’s reply notes:

The former employees of Traveland were made redundant as a result of the insolvency of Internova Travel Pty Ltd. Internova Travel Pty Ltd is not an Ansett group company and consequently the former employees are not eligible for assistance under the Special Employee Entitlements Scheme for Ansett group employees...

I urge the minister to ensure that entitlements to the former Internova employees will be equivalent to those industrial entitlements that these employees were subject to under the provisions of the SEESA agreement. In hindsight, the handover from Ansett to Internova was an irresponsible commercial transaction in that it was reasonably foreseeable that Internova was not competent to manage a national travel agency the size of Ansett’s ongoing business operations. Further, whilst the parties to that commercial transaction may be responsible for this irresponsible act, the reality is of ongoing financial hardship for those former employees of Internova, including constituents who live in my electorate of Lowe.

The situation has created great financial hardship and creates a political obligation on the Howard government to act with justice and to support those former Internova employees. I urge the minister to ensure that as a matter of urgency he investigates the full extent of the financial harm caused by this irresponsible commercial transaction. Moreover, I urge the minister to answer as soon as possible my follow-up question No. 472, which I placed on the Notice Paper on 4 June 2002. That question asks:

... what steps, if any, is he taking to determine the extent of the unpaid wages ... What administrative action is he or his Department taking to ensure that proper settlement payments are made to the former employees of Internova ... in light of the fact that Internova is not a former Ansett group company and therefore was never subject to the provisions of the Special Employee Entitlements Scheme (SEES) for Ansett Group Employees, are steps being taken to ensure that those estimated 540—
or 550—former Internova employees are given industrial entitlements similar to those of former Ansett employees equivalent to the SEES provisions ...

With each day that elapses, the harm continues for the former employees of Internova and the financial burdens become worse. Therefore, this matter needs to be dealt with by the minister with the utmost urgency.
Robertson Electorate: Queen’s Birthday Honours

Mr LLOYD (Robertson) (10.35 p.m.)—Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am very pleased that you have seen fit to give me the call, because I know how competitive it is to get speaking time in the adjournment debate. Tonight I would like to pay tribute to three members of my electorate who have been awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia, the OAM, in the Queen’s Birthday honours. Those three people are: Superintendent Graeme Malone of Bensville from the New South Wales Ambulance Service; Mr Austen Hughes of Kariong, for his services to cricket; and Councillor Malcolm Brooks, for his service to the community, particularly through local government and also through the retail motor industry.

Councillor Brooks—who is known personally to me; I have known him for many years, and he is well known throughout Gosford City—is a former Gosford MP and a long-time Gosford City councillor. I am very pleased that he has been honoured for his service to the community. Councillor Brooks first served on Gosford City Council from 1971 to 1977 and since 1991. He was shire president from 1973 to 1977 and was elected as the Liberal member for Gosford from 1973 to 1976. He has also served on many council committees and charities including Gosford Rotary and Lifeline. He was the foundation commodore of the Gosford Aquatic Club from 1961 to 1970. He established Regal Motors in 1953. His lasting legacy will be Kibble Park, which is well known to Gosford City residents. It is now a green area in the centre of the city, a parkland area. He used his casting vote to stop it being turned into a multi-storey concrete car park.

According to the *Central Coast Express*:

For Mr Austen Hughes … of Kariong, cricket is more than a game—it’s a way of life. Mr Hughes has been involved in cricket all his life, first as a player, then as an administrator … He was captain of the Ballina district team, captain of the Armidale Teachers College team and captain of Casino district team. He played grade cricket with the Northern District Cricket Club and has been president of that club since 1971. He has been patron of the Narara-Wyoming Cricket Club since 1994 and remains a member of the judiciary of the Gosford-Wyong District Cricket Association.

In another quote from the *Central Coast Express*, he said:

Cricket has been my whole life. I love the game.

So it is a very fitting award for Mr Hughes.

The third award, as I said, was to Mr Graeme Malone of Bensville, who said that the award came to him ‘like a bolt out of the blue’. He certainly was not expecting it. Again in the *Central Coast Express*, he said:

I’m just one of a team of 2,500 officers throughout the state.

The newspaper continued:

For the past four years he has been manager of the Ambulance Education Centre at Rozelle which he said was similar to a police training academy. He is in his 23rd year as an ambulance officer and has served on the coast, and in the central west and in Sydney. He grew up at Avoca Beach and served for a time at the Toukley Ambulance Station before leaving to become a paramedic. Mr Malone likes to keep in touch with officers on the front line and now and then does a shift on the coast.

So, again, it is a very fitting award. I am very pleased that I have had an opportunity this evening to acknowledge the very prestigious OAM award to three outstanding Central Coast citizens from the electorate of Robertson. On behalf of all the residents of Robertson, I add my congratulations to these three people and their family and friends. I know that these awards are fitting and well-deserved.

Greenway Electorate: Nirimba Education Precinct

Mr MOSSFIELD (Greenway) (10.40 p.m.)—I wish to provide the House with an update on the unique Nirimba education precinct in my electorate of Greenway. This precinct is a joint education venture between the Western Sydney Institute of TAFE, the University of Western Sydney, the Terra Sancta Catholic College and the Wyndham State Senior High School, which is the feeder school for the Quakers Hill, Riverstone and Seven Hills high schools. The precinct is a cooperative unincorporated joint venture arrangement based on co-location of facilities and the sharing of some of these facilities. Each partner retains its individual iden-
tity, autonomy and accountability. The Nirimba site provides for co-location whilst maintaining discrete and identifiable campuses. Soft boundaries exist between each campus with the emphasis being placed on maximising the shared use of facilities and services.

I would like tonight to speak specifically about the TAFE college. I do so as a supplement to the private members’ debate in the House today when I spoke about the achievement of young people in Western Sydney. I will again be speaking about further achievements of young people in this speech. The current student enrolment figures for semester one in 2002 is 3,845 with annual student contact hours standing at 819,595. The college draws its student population substantially from the Blacktown local government area, but a considerable number of students are also drawn from high schools from a wide geographical area including Greystanes, Macquarie Boys High, Northmead, Nepean, Cranebrook, Pendle Hill, Dunheved, Granville, Mitchell High, Toongabbie and Seven Hills. The college has 73 full-time staff members and 376 part-time staff. It provides an excellent environment for learning and provides considerable opportunities for flexible learning, joint school programs and degree-linked courses. Current students from across Western Sydney are gaining new skills up to associate diploma level in building, computing, child studies, business services and welfare and music, with the college having extensive facilities for training in the building and construction industries. The Nirimba College has established partnerships with a number of local and state organisations, including the New South Wales Department of Housing, enabling the college building and construction section to build under contract five homes to the value of $690,000. These homes will be built in Penrith and will be completed by September 2002. Since 1996, the college has built six homes for needy families.

The college has also developed industry partnerships with TNT, P&O and Dairy Farmers, and over the past two years it has provided over 700 workers with training in certificates II and III of the transport and distribution training package. In November 2001, the college hosted the annual State Building and Construction Conference. This provided an ideal opportunity to promote the training facilities of the college. This year the National Building and Construction Conference will be held in Sydney and the delegates at the conference will visit Nirimba College to view its extensive roof tiling training facilities, Nirimba being the only college delivering roof tiling training in New South Wales. The community service section and Centrelink have also signed a contract for the provision of training for Aboriginal customer service officers. In all, Indigenous enrolments in the college have increased from 183 in 1998 to 242 in 2001.

With respect to personal achievements, the college has produced a number of outstanding students. Katrina Bradley, Diploma in Child Services student, won the New South Wales trainee of the year award in 2001 and represented New South Wales at the national awards in Canberra. John Laurence, a student in information technology from the Get Skilled course, won the Western Sydney TAFE Institute’s specific achievement award in 2001. Tony Jessop, an architectural technological diploma student, won the Building Designers Association award for New South Wales in 2001. Four of the 12 finalists were students from Nirimba. Sorpong Prunglage, a student of certificate 4 contemporary music, won the Western Sydney Institute of TAFE student excellence award for music in 2001. Anthony Fairbain won the state medal for bricklaying in TAFE in New South Wales in 2001.

The increased residential growth in Western Sydney in general, but more specifically in the Kellyville and Rouse Hill area, will over the next 10 years bring an increased demand for vocational training in the area. (Time expired)

**Cook Electorate: Sutherland Shire Suicide Safety Network**

Mr BAIRD (Cook) (10.45 p.m.)—In the lead-up to the 1998 election campaign I went to Woolooware railway station at 6.30 in the morning. Just before I arrived a 19-year-old youth threw himself in front of a train and was killed. As a result of that incident I
talked to a number of people in the electorate who expressed to me that this incident was by no means a unique one. Quite a number of other suicides had occurred amongst young people in my electorate. In fact it was mentioned to me on more than one occasion that the Sutherland Shire had one of the highest rates of youth suicide in Australia.

One of the commitments I made during that first election campaign was that upon becoming a member I would bring together a number of interested parties with a view to forming a community based organisation to look at various local approaches to combat the problem. The commitment resulted in the formation of the Sutherland Shire Suicide Safety Network, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to provide the federal parliament with an update on how this organisation has progressed in subsequent years. Perhaps other members could draw upon the experience we have had in the Sutherland Shire if they are attempting to address these same issues in their own communities. Since its inception, the organisation has been admirably chaired by Paul Malliate, who brings a wealth of experience from the corporate sector to the organisation. The energy and enthusiasm that he has brought to the role have played a large part in ensuring that the network developed from a series of meetings of concerned representatives to the effective, proactive organisation that it is today.

I am also pleased to note that the Sutherland Shire Council has provided significant funding support for the network to employ a part-time coordinator. This position has been filled by Tony Ellitt, who commenced in December 2000. It could be said that Tony acts as the network’s secretariat. He administers the scheduling of the monthly meetings and working parties, as well as handling any promotion or media activity being undertaken. Tony also handles the financial side of the organisation and prepares the bulk of its reports, funding submissions and briefing notes. His presence within the suicide safety network is invaluable, and I would like to record my gratitude to the Sutherland Shire Council for the continued funding they have provided for his position.

Last week I chaired a special review meeting of the SSSSN that looked at both its achievements to date and the way forward. The achievements since December 2000 are many. Firstly, the network has held two highly successful ‘Partnership Day’ conferences. Both of these conferences have been attended by around 100 representatives of health care groups, families that have been touched by suicide, mental health organisations, churches and other interested parties. The format of the conferences is under continual review to ensure their ongoing effectiveness. Secondly, the group launched the *What Can I Do?* suicide prevention booklet at the 2001 conference. Since its launch the booklet has been widely distributed to around 2,500 households and organisations.

Thirdly, in conjunction with Olsen’s Funerals, the network has developed an information package to support families who have lost a loved one to suicide. It is hoped that the package will be expanded to all local funeral companies in the near future. Fourthly, as well as the support package, the network has produced the *What Do I Do Now?* booklet for people dealing with suicide after the event. This document is currently being trialled within the Miranda police local area command. Fifthly, the network has secured a significant amount of funding for a local bereavement support group modelled on a successful group in Burwood in the electorate of Lowe. Without doubt this is an impressive list of achievements for this young group.

In contrast to the evidence that was presented to me back in 1996, the suicide rate in my area is now similar to, or lower than, that in many other areas of Sydney. This change is promising but, as always, there are other areas of concern. Males between the ages of 25 and 44 are a demographic causing considerable worry. Many suicides in this age group result from a family or relationship breakdown or battles for the custody of children. Suicide amongst people aged 65 and over is also becoming increasingly common, which could be the result of loneliness or isolation from the community. Figures such as these are an important focus for the network as they continue to map out the best
ways to approach one of the most distressing social problems. I congratulate the Sutherland Shire Suicide Safety Network. In their achievements to date they have moved a long way forward. I congratulate Mr Paul Malliate on his chairmanship of the group, and those who represent the committee. (Time expired)

Insurance: Medical Indemnity

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (10.50 p.m.)—The medical indemnity crisis which has hit this country is unique in one particular way: no government in the Western civilised world has mismanaged its duty of care responsibilities from a government perspective so badly and so acutely as that which has taken place in the UMP collapse. I will briefly outline the key issues in this debate. The medical indemnity insurance issue has been on the government’s plate for quite some time but they have not acted—in the same way that they did not act in the case of HIH. As a matter of fact, when the coalition came into office they had the Tito report, which drew attention to the issues surrounding medical indemnity insurance, particularly foreshadowing potential shortfalls in the system and stressing the need for substantial reform. Regrettably, the government ignored the report’s warnings and pretended that everything was hunky-dory.

About one year ago UMP made the federal government aware that urgent law reforms were required to arrest increasingly escalating compensation payouts. What did the government do? Again, members of the government buried their heads in the sand and hoped for the best. Their heads were in fact buried so deeply in the sand that they could not see the massive kick that was approaching. Unfortunately for the rest of us—the doctors, the patients and all Australians—that kick hit us all and the system as we know it is now in crisis.

The measures that were put in place by a panic-stricken government at a summit on 23 April, which resulted in a $35 million guarantee to ensure that UMP could trade at least until 30 June this year, created the impression that if UMP got into further difficulty the government would be there. A letter from the Prime Minister to UMP, which he wrote on the eve of the summit, indicated that the Commonwealth would not be there. That totally confused the profession and the industry. I can tell you that they are still confused, and they are really wondering about what the government is actually doing. On the afternoon of 29 April, UMP called for provisional liquidation, and on the same night the Assistant Treasurer, Senator Coonan, admitted on the 7.30 Report that the government did not have a plan—which again threw the profession and the industry into further confusion. She said that the government could not be bound or could not guarantee the conduct of future governments or future parliaments.

The front page of the Australian of Tuesday, 30 April, stated ‘Health system in chaos as medical insurer faces liquidation. Doctors will shut out patients’. To me that sounds like a strike. I do not know what you would call it, but that is what it sounds like to me. With similar headlines in all major newspapers, the first evidence of the government’s mismanagement of this crisis emerged. The medical profession has not been notified of any plans as to how the government will guarantee the continuity of medical services.

The following day the Prime Minister indicated that he would legislate by 30 June to effect a guarantee from 29 April to 30 June. The saga goes on: ‘A potential levy on doctors is proposed; the doctors indicated that if this is introduced, they will obviously pass it on to their patients’. Of course, there is no indication as to which types of doctors would pay, how much of the levy they would pay and what proportions that might be in. I can tell you that, from talking to doctors—I had a meeting in my electorate with doctors from Oxley and from Blair—they are very concerned. They are prepared to pay some form of levy perhaps, but it will be passed on to the patients.

The degree of confusion and the muddle that has caught this government has now caught patients, it has caught doctors and it has caught the whole industry. But it does not stop there. A crisis in medical service delivery has been looming for quite some time, and the only thing contained in the budget that might even come close to
dealing with this would be 150 trainee doctors and GP registrars having to work under full supervision, which will not increase medical service one little bit or take away any pressure on supervising practitioners.

What we have seen over the past 12 months is disregard from this government about those battlers out there doing it really tough, particularly those people in the electorate of Oxley. They do not have access to a whole range of medical services, particularly bulk-billing. But something is being done at the state level. I know that criticisms have been levelled at the states, but at least they are doing something. The Queensland state government in particular will pass legislation through cabinet tomorrow to deal with this issue.

Mr Speaker, you might think that this has all just flopped onto the government and it had no idea that it was coming. If you thought that, you would be wrong. As late as 31 July 2001, Labor launched a medical indemnity reform package in which we stated the problems that were already in the industry. If you read it, it could have been written yesterday because it is so accurate in terms of saying what could happen. There were reports, and the government knew but no-one acted. What we see today is a crisis that was created by the government through lack of action. Something could have been done; something should have been done; something would have been done if this government cared about doctors, if they cared about patients, if they cared about people at the lower end of the income scale who are now the ones left in the lurch. Patients are unclear about their future; doctors are unclear about their future; in fact, the whole industry is unclear about the future. *(Time expired)*

**Tourism: Frankston**

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (10.55 p.m.)—I encourage the member for Oxley to appraise himself of the practice nursing program and also the incentives for outer metropolitan general practitioners to set up in underserviced areas. I know that the Minister for Ageing is at the table and I ask him to pass on my congratulations to the Minister for Health and Ageing for these very worthwhile initiatives assisting my community.

In the last few days, in the week that we were away from this parliament, there was a great deal going on in the Mornington Peninsula and Greater Frankston area relating to the tourism industry. Two particular initiatives stand out in my mind. One was the workshop convened by Frankston City Council in conjunction with Frankston Tourism, held at the Frankston International, to see how best to invest the $63,800 provided by the federal government to work with Frankston City Council to identify strategies and activities that will expand the local visitor industry market and increase visitor spending in the Greater Frankston area. That was a very important local step that signified to the broader community and our own city that Frankston city and our community are serious about tourism and that the Commonwealth will partner Frankston City in making sure that the outer metropolitan area that I represent—that magnificent part of coastal Victoria on Port Phillip Bay—is open for visitor business, is open for tourism and is a very worthwhile place for people to spend their time.

I often talk about the community that I represent on the broader Mornington Peninsula, an area that is probably best known for its excellent wineries and more of the coastal related tourism further down the Mornington Peninsula. I often talk about the Frankston city and general region as being a renewal zone—a renewal destination where the 3½ million hard-working Melburnians want to come to recharge their batteries. We have many cultural and artistic, dining, leisure, environment and heritage attractions as well as the improved transport that will be available through the Scoresby transport corridor. Interestingly, Mr Speaker, I am sure you would be delighted to know that three-quarters of the visitors to the Mornington Peninsula come from the catchment that will be serviced by the Scoresby transport corridor. That area looks to our community for a bit of wind in the hair and a chance to recharge their batteries.
This grant from the Commonwealth government has enabled Frankston City and the local tourism and visitor industry operators to work in collaboration with the federal government to make sure that those employment and investment opportunities available from the visitor industry are a part of our local economy—an economy that needs to be sustainable year-round and that can provide growths for those local businesses and new employment opportunities.

The visitor industry does good things for the local community by expanding the services that are available. By making sure the leisure and recreational facilities are attractive to those from outside the area, and by ensuring a vitality and a freshness in the way we present ourselves to those from outside our region, we ensure that our community is a better place to live.

At a very local level I would like to congratulate Frankston City, the local tourism operators and South-East Development Chairman Charles Wilkins who, through the area consultative committee, supported this program to instigate and renew the tourism strategy for Frankston City. The following day we probably had the mother of all tourism plans: the 10-year plan for tourism launched by our parliamentary colleague the Minister for Tourism and Small Business, Joe Hockey.

The plan is delivering on an election commitment that we would put in place such a 10-year plan. Why is it important? There are few Western governments that spend more taxpayers' money on tourism and promoting their nation internationally than we do. It is an enormous area of expenditure, and there is a reason for that. Tourism contributes about 4.7 per cent, or $31.8 billion, of our gross domestic product. That is a larger contribution to our national economy than other industries like communication services, agriculture, forestry and fishing, electricity, gas and water. It directly employs more than half a million people. It is an important part of our economy. This plan is available for public consultation where the government is working in partnership with those in the industry. There is an opportunity for comments to be provided by 28 June. I would like to congratulate Mornington Peninsula Shire, Frankston City, David McCarthy from the tourism strategy group in Minister Hockey’s department and all those who attended the 10-year planning workshop held in Frankston on Thursday, June 13 to make sure we put a regional voice forward; that, in the Greater Frankston-Mornington Peninsula region, our tourism industry interests and the opportunities that industry presents for local residents are reflected in this tourism strategy. I would encourage others to make a contribution.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 11 p.m., the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 11.00 p.m.

REQUEST FOR DETAILED INFORMATION

Members’ Entitlements

Mr Martin Ferguson to ask the Speaker:

(1) For each of the last ten financial years, what has been the average sum spent by Members on personalised stationery and newsletters.

(2) Was he or his staff consulted by the Minister for Finance and Administration on the decision to create an upper limit of $125 000 per Member for personalised stationery and newsletters.

(3) For the (a) calendar year 2001 and (b) six months ended 31 December 2001, what was the average sum spent by Members on personalised stationery and newsletters and for each period, what was the average sum spent by (i) members of the Government and (ii) members of the Opposition.

NOTICES

The following notice was given:

Mr Brendan O’Connor to move:

That this House:

(1) notes that the demise of former national aviation carrier Ansett has resulted in some adverse consequences, including increased airfares and a loss of thousands of Australian jobs;

(2) recognises that the loss of Ansett jobs has had a significant impact upon employment levels particularly within some regions; and

(3) calls upon the Government to commit itself to assisting those regions most affected by loss of employment.
Monday, 17 June 2002

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. I.R. Causley) took the chair at 4.00 p.m.

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 1) 2002-03

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 6 June, on motion by Mr Costello:

That this bill be now read a second time.

upon which Ms Macklin moved by way of amendment:

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

“whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading, the House condemns the Government for:

(1) its failure to deliver a budget surplus in 2001-02 after a decade of growth;
(2) its failure to deliver a budget surplus in 2002-03 without breaking previous commitments on defence, roads and working credits;
(3) imposing the cost of a pre-election spending spree on families via higher interest rates and cuts in health and welfare spending;
(4) falsely claiming that cuts to health and welfare payments are needed to fund the war against terrorism and border protection;
(5) wasting $5 billion of taxpayers money by gambling in foreign currency markets through cross currency derivatives;
(6) wasting almost $3.5 billion by failing to manage currency risk on defence spending despite warnings from the Auditor-General;
(7) wasting $31 million on maintenance services for 40 year old helicopters that are years overdue despite a $800m downpayment;
(8) its failure to recognise the GST as a Commonwealth tax and this Government as the highest taxing of all time;
(9) its failure to consider the fairer options put forward by the Opposition to offset the harsh measures it intends to impose on families, the sick and disabled; and
(10) the failure of its Intergenerational Report to recognise that investment in education, research and development is critical to our future prosperity and our capacity to generate the revenue and wealth required to support an ageing population.

Ms JACKSON (Hasluck) (4.00 p.m.)—In rising today to speak to Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2002-03 and in support of the amendment moved by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, I would like to consider a particular concept that both the Prime Minister and the Treasurer refer to on a frequent basis, and that is good government. In numerous press releases and interviews over the past six years, we have seen this phrase bandied about by government ministers, expressing that in their opinion they are delivering good government to the Australian people. Just what is good government? Since the budget was handed down, many constituents in my electorate of Hasluck have been wondering the same thing. My electorate office has been inundated with people deeply concerned about the impact of this budget on their already difficult circumstances, and they want to know why they have been targeted. Is that what good governments do? Is it good government to hit those in the community who are the most...
disadvantaged while at the same time giving tax breaks to those who are better off? I think not. According to the Prime Minister in a speech he made at a Liberal Party function in 1999:

... the quality of good government is always to know what to reform, what to discard and what to preserve and what to refurbish.

I would like to consider this year’s federal budget in light of those criteria. Let us look at what to reform. The measures that this government calls reform in the budget start with ordinary families and health care. Remember that this government has already presided over a five per cent reduction in the number of GPs who bulk-bill, not to mention an average $12 increase in the cost of visiting a GP. Families have also seen a $150 average increase in the cost of their private health insurance cover. But to compound this problem even further, this government has decided that it is going to reform—and I use the word advisedly—the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and increase the cost of essential medication for many vulnerable Australians. It is interesting that the government has decided to bring in changes by imposing harsher measures on those at the bottom of the food chain, the patients or constituents, simply shifting the cost from government to patients. At the same time it is doing very little to reform the cost of pharmaceuticals at the top end through targeting the pharmaceutical companies, the terms of the subsidies paid under the PBS and the pharmacists themselves. Indeed, the budget proposes that pharmaceutical companies get funding assistance to market their product more effectively.

The additional cost of $1 per script may not seem a significant amount to the Prime Minister or to the Treasurer, but to people who are already struggling under the pressure of increased costs it is extremely significant. I want to place on record the situation for one couple from my electorate. Ken and Merle Longbottom of Gosnells wrote to me within days of the budget announcement. Mr Longbottom has suffered from severe heart attacks since 1985 and as such now has to endure taking six tablets a day, one of which is Ramipril, which attracts the $4 surcharge. Mrs Longbottom is also forced to take up to six tablets a day, as she is suffering from a severe gastric condition. The cost of the PBS budget measures in real terms for this couple in Gosnells will be an additional $6 a fortnight, a very significant amount for two people struggling on a pension. This comes on top of the recent 32 per cent increase in the cost of their private medical cover, which both have struggled to maintain, as they did not wish to be a burden on society. If I can use the words in their letter, Mr and Mrs Longbottom say:

We ... feel the added cost to prescriptions may not seem much, but as everything else goes up as well [this is] the straw that’s about to break the camel’s back.

The Longbottoms are just two of the many people who have contacted my office on this issue. The government has underestimated the strength of feeling in our community about the PBS changes and the desire of ordinary folk to protect the sick and the disadvantaged. Australians want a fair go and will not stand by and see people kicked when they are already down. I am confident that the majority of my constituents are opposed to these PBS changes and support Labor’s stand on this issue. Clearly, the government’s so-called reform of the PBS by targeting those most ill equipped to absorb the increase is not an act of good government.

What else has this government sought to reform in the name of good government? There is the disability services pension. Perhaps the real test as to the legitimacy of this budget meas-
ure was the fact that, within days of its release, we saw the Minister for Family and Community Services and the Prime Minister backtracking on some of its core details, due to the public outrage at such an ill-conceived policy. We are all aware that the minister was forced to admit that approximately 13,000 disability pensioners currently receiving the benefit and working a few hours a week would be adversely affected by the new measures. I have been told by disability pensioners in my electorate who are currently able to work a few hours a week that they are terrified at the prospect of either having to work a full week or losing their disability pension. They are clearly in no physical condition to cope with either scenario. But what of the other 187,000 pensioners that have been left to deal with the prospect of a $52.80 cut in their base benefit when they are pushed onto Newstart—not to mention the loss of other vital concessions such as the $5.80 pharmaceutical allowance, the $68 pension education supplement, the pensioner concession card and the telephone allowance?

Again, as one example of the many, I want to place on record the situation of one of my constituents who lives in a caravan park in Caversham and who wrote to me asking me to oppose the federal government’s change to the disability support pension. He has a permanent disability and lives each day with acute pain. He is obliged to take daily the maximum dose of pain-killers to enable him to function. He has had part-time employment for over 10 years, working 24 hours per week, and is well respected by his employer and his peers. It is painful for him to work, but he forces himself to do so for his own self-esteem, as a form of physiotherapy and to reduce the so-called burden on the welfare system. He receives very little pension but relies heavily on the medical and other benefits that the disability support pension entitles him to. He will not be able to reduce his working hours to 15. If the federal government changes are made law, he will have the rug pulled out from under his feet. He stands to lose his park home and will not be able to afford the medication that he requires to continue to work and function on a daily basis.

Whilst disability pensioners and disability services stay in the firing line of this government’s attempt to justify its so-called welfare reform process, the Labor Party will do all it can to protect these people by opposing these unfair measures in the Senate. The Minister for Family and Community Services’s crude response to this was to threaten to withhold the funding from the Commonwealth-State Disability Agreement. You only have to speak to the many individuals, families and community support groups in my electorate who have to deal with the frustration and suffering resulting from insufficient disability funding and support to realise what an effect such a course of action by the minister would have.

I have previously spoken in this place about two of my constituents, Carol and Norm Franklin of Huntingdale, and their adult disabled son, Stephen. In that context, I spoke about their inability to access funding for accommodation support for him. I had the opportunity to be in contact with Carol following the announcement of the federal budget. I left messages for her, and she emailed me back. I asked her if I could read some of her emails into the Hansard, as her son, Stephen, has recently been diagnosed with lymphoma—a form of cancer. She wrote:

Life is hectic. Stephen was diagnosed with a lymphoma, and I seem to spend most of my life at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital.

Another family that also lives in Huntingdale have a 19 year old son with Angelman’s Syndrome. This family are one of the families in critical need, Rick only sleeps for 2-3hrs a night, they lock him in his bedroom, so they can try to get some sleep. Rick now bangs constantly on his door for the rest of the
night. So sleep for that family is rare, the other two children in the family are falling behind with school work because they are so tired.

Did you read about Peggy Pratt a mother who had cancer and her dying wish was to see her son (31) be accommodated before she died, but she never had her wish.

If Amanda Vanstone goes through with her threats the crises will only get worse, families will break down and a tragedy will happen. Someone will take their Child’s life as that is the only way that they can secure their future. Families are just surviving and being put in the middle while governments play their control game, only will lead to a Tragedy.

The Disability Pension in the Budget doesn’t really affect our Kids because none of them would be able to work 15hrs at award wages, but in saying that they will never get a job, because they would never be productive. The prescription will be another added burden to families, most of our kids are on multiple medications, and the rest of the family would have to pay the extra because they don’t have a pension card.

Regards Carol

That is just how one family is feeling in light of the threats by the minister to cut the funding under the Commonwealth-State Disability Agreement.

It led me to ask: why is it that the government are so insistent on targeting the disabled and the vulnerable in our society through shifting the cost burden of the federal budget onto them? Does this perhaps have something to do with another of the indicators that the Prime Minister used to measure good government—by what they discard or, should I say, by who they discard? In addition to discarding the concerns of those people, what else have they discarded in the preparation of this federal budget?

The first thing I think that you could identify is responsible spending. The one thing the government decided to discard—more particularly in the lead-up to the federal election—was the whole concept of responsible spending. A multimillion dollar advertising spree before the last election, the HIH royal commission, the family tax benefit debt waiver and the ‘Pacific solution’, not to mention the Treasurer’s money market gambling problem, were clear demonstrations of this government’s lack of vision. This federal budget reflects their decision to make Australians pay for their continued mistakes. With the recent announcement of an additional ¼ per cent increase in interest rates the squeeze on already struggling families has continued. Disregarding responsible spending measures has produced a $1.2 billion deficit which the Australian people now have to pick up the tab for.

But that is not the only thing that the government has sought to discard. Let us take the environment. Over the last three years, $484 million that had been pledged to help the environment has simply not been spent. That means that the funds the Treasurer claimed were needed for green issues were simply never delivered. World Environment Day was a stark reminder to catchment groups, such as the Canning Catchment Group and the Blackadder Catchment Group in my electorate, that the Commonwealth government has let them down. Their projects have been driven by grassroots community organisations which have invested a huge amount of their own time and resources in trying to save Perth’s rivers and the surrounding environment. The fact that the Commonwealth government’s second stage of the promised Natural Heritage Trust funding is still up in the air is putting at risk the good work of these catchment groups.
I want to look at another group of people affected by the budget, and that is women, generally, in the community. There is an old proverb that states: ‘Women hold up half the sky’. This proverb originated in China in recognition of the global contribution of women, a point that seems to have been discarded by the government in this budget. When commenting on the outcomes for women in the budget, Eva Cox of the Women’s Electoral Lobby, stated:

When the government starts its women’s budget statement by announcing women’s suffrage a century ago, it is obvious that our present concerns are not high on their agenda.

It appears that this government has no comprehension about the challenges that face women in our society today, many of whom are struggling to juggle the financial need to work as well as trying to raise a family. The juggling act is a very real issue for women in Hasluck, most of whom can literally not afford to take five years out of the work force, due to the growing financial pressures that record household debt and rising interest rates are placing on their families.

The only new real measure for women in the budget, the much touted baby bonus, actually provides nothing for women who must return to work after their first child is born or indeed for women having their second child. To add insult to injury, the government has again ensured that it will be looking after the better off in society by ensuring that only families with incomes over $50,000 will receive the maximum benefits for stay-at-home mothers. For those women who do return to work, the level of assistance provided for child care remains a patchwork that especially does not meet the needs of mothers working irregular hours or shiftwork.

What else has it discarded? As the implementation of the baby bonus scheme demonstrates, along with the government’s constant attacks on the sick and disabled, this is a government that is happy to discard the concepts of equity and fairness in Australian society. Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than if we look at what the government has sought to preserve in the federal budget. One thing it has preserved, it seems to me, is the coalition parties’ ethos of looking after the better off in this society at the expense of the average Australian. You have to look no further than the proposal to give the richest three per cent of the population a tax break by giving them a 30 per cent reduction in the superannuation surcharge rate whilst at the same time giving no such reduction to low-income and middle-income earners. During the last parliamentary sitting, Labor’s proposal for a fairer system which would see all Australians receiving a cut in their superannuation surcharge rate was deemed financially sound by the Liberal Party’s superannuation expert Senator John Watson. One wonders: will the government now move to grant this tax reduction to all Australians and not just the rich? The answer is no.

Also, why has the government decided to make it easier for employers to get away with not paying superannuation contributions to casual employees? By extending the minimum income level calculations from a monthly basis to a three-monthly basis, it will now be much easier for employers to manipulate the hours of casual workers so that they do not reach the minimum pay level required for a superannuation contribution to be made. It is just another way that it has opened the door to exploit those who are in the most vulnerable positions in our community.

Again much touted in the budget was how the government was going to address the pay parity issue for registered nurses in the aged care industry. As we all know, nationally the
wage gap between aged care nurses and their public sector counterparts is at least $84.48 per week. The additional $51.2 million in the 2002-03 budget translates into less than an extra dollar per resident per day, a one per cent increase. For an average 48-bed nursing home or hostel, this means an extra $48 per day to increase wages across all shifts. You do not need to be Einstein to know that this additional funding will not be enough to address the wage disparities and stem the flow of experienced nurses out of the aged care industry.

I now move to the fourth criterion of the Prime Minister’s policy of reform, discard, preserve and refurbish. What have they chosen to refurbish? Nothing at all. They have touted their Intergenerational Report as the blueprint for our future. Their flawed report concludes that we must cut expenditure now to pay for a future ageing population. One wonders where members of the government have been if they were not aware of this increasing problem of an ageing community. You have to examine the report itself and look at some of the ridiculous assumptions that underpin it—the accuracy of fiscal projections made 40 years in advance and the assumption that health issues for 70-year-olds in 2002 are going to be the same health issues for 70-year-olds in 2042. You only have to look back over the last 40 years to see the changes that have occurred. There is little, if any, clear detail about the effectiveness of cost-cutting now in areas such as health and education and training in reducing expenditure in the long term.

I also want to talk about the lack of refurbishment in my own electorate. There will be no refurbishment on the number of GPs who bulk-bill in the Hasluck electorate, no initiatives to better combine federal and state health funding more efficiently, no funding for tertiary places for potential students in Perth’s outer eastern suburbs and no funding for the Midland historic railway workshop precinct. Given the Prime Minister’s own criteria for judging good government, what has this budget delivered? It will reform the PBS and disability support at the expense of the most vulnerable in our community, discard those who are sick and disadvantaged, preserve the standing of the well-off at the cost of the average Australian, and refurbish absolutely nothing. On their own criteria this has been a miserable failure for good government and certainly for the electors of Hasluck.
from the electorate of Fisher my return to this parliament, I announced the Fisher 10-point plan: a number of key priorities which I have committed myself to work for during this term of government to ensure even better outcomes for people of the Sunshine Coast and, in particular, people of the electorate of Fisher, which comprises the central and Sunshine coast regions.

It is important when we are elected to represent local communities that we seek to cooperate with those people elected at all levels of government. I enjoy a very fruitful relationship with the members for Maroochydore and Caloundra but, regrettably, the state member for Kawana seems all too often intent on playing politics, even when the result means our mutual constituents are substantially disadvantaged. I also enjoy a very sound working relationship with the councillors of both the Caloundra City Council and the Shire of Maroochy.

The 10-point plan that I mentioned prior to the poll has a number of elements, some of which are matters of federal responsibility and others are matters of local and state responsibility. I am not going to apologise for the fact that I was prepared to stand up before the electorate of Fisher and say that I was prepared to fight for improved outcomes even if some of these matters were not, under our Constitution, matters of federal political responsibility.

One of the complaints I regularly get in my electorate office is from ordinary, decent people resident in communities from Maroochydore south to Caloundra and west to Montville who are concerned about the state ALP government’s serial inability to deal with the ongoing problem of car hoons.

Mr Laurie Ferguson interjecting—

Mr SLIPPER—I am pleased to see the member for Reid in the chamber. The New South Wales Labor government has a policy which has seen car hoons have their vehicles confiscated in certain circumstances. The Queensland state government is looking at introducing some new laws which may prove useful, but the police service would have a much greater opportunity to clamp down on car hoons if the Sunshine Coast received its adequate quota of police service members right through our rapidly growing area. Regrettably, because of the ineffectiveness of the state Labor members in the area, the Premier of Queensland seems reluctant to give us police numbers which we desperately need if we are to ensure that the safety and security of coast residents is maintained and safeguarded.

I get lots of complaints from residents who have their peaceful enjoyment of life interrupted by car hoons who have no respect for the civil rights of others. I hear about motor vehicles tearing up lawns and people being unable to sleep. I have called on the state government to bring in very strong legislation to deprive car hoons of their motor vehicles as the price of these people being uncivic-minded. In July, I am calling a public meeting for residents of the electorate of Fisher who want to express their concerns and share their experiences about the ongoing problems caused by car hoons.

This is probably the No. 1 issue of people ringing my electorate office. They are concerned over the failure of the state government to act decisively in the way that Premier Carr has in New South Wales in relation to this ongoing endemic problem of car hoons. I am not going to apologise for standing up today in the federal parliament to highlight the plight of ordinary, decent residents of the Sunshine Coast who are having their lifestyle destroyed by car hoons, who are simply thugs. They are people who break the law and they should have the full force of the law thrown at them. The price of that force of the law ought to be that, when a car hoon...
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commit such an offence, the vehicle is subject to confiscation. It is simply not adequate for
the state government to attack this problem with a wet lettuce; it is important that the state
government listens to the community. I am calling on Premier Beattie, the state Labor gov-
ernment and state members to listen to the results of the community meeting which will be
convened to talk about, and demand action from the state government in relation to, the
problem of car hoons.

Another issue which has concerned me is the fact that sewage is pumped into the ocean by
coast based councils. The Howard government is the greenest government in Australia’s his-
tory—it has set up the Natural Heritage Trust and it is the first government which has been
prepared to address the impact of 200 years of European settlement in Australia—but we find
that local councils are still pumping sewage into the ocean. I am particularly keen to work
with the councils to ensure that this no longer happens. It is unacceptable that people who
travel right around the country to enjoy our wonderful Sunshine Coast beaches should have to
share the waters off the Sunshine Coast with sewage pumped into the ocean by councils on
the Sunshine Coast. There has been some activity by councils with respect to this matter but,
as we have now entered the 21st century, it is simply not adequate for this to continue.

Another issue I highlighted, as I have done over the years, is the problem of unexploded
ordnance, particularly in the Kawana Waters-Currimundi area, and I was fortunate to be able
to attract the outgoing Minister for Defence, Peter Reith, to the Sunshine Coast prior to the
election over this. It is a tragedy that unexploded ordnance, ordnance that has been around for
the last 50 years since the Second World War, is regularly found, often by children. The state
government has permitted the land to be cut up for residential development, Caloundra City
Council has permitted subdivision to occur and the developer has made substantial profits
from the sale of the blocks but we do have unexploded ordnance still present. It would be a
tragedy if a child had to lose their life or a limb before this endemic problem was attended to.

I am particularly keen to work with Caloundra City Council, the state government and the
developer to make sure that this problem, which has been around for half a century, is re-
solved once and for all. It is not primarily a federal problem but we do have a circumstance
where our community’s children are endangered by the fact that unexploded ordnance could
be lurking in bushland or on beaches. We have had very large numbers of near escapes where
young people have discovered these things, and then, of course, the ordnance has had to be
removed or exploded. This morning I was very pleased to talk to the Minister for Defence,
Senator Hill, about this matter.

One of the difficulties we have as a fast-growing area is that our infrastructure never seems
to catch up with the growth in our population. People are moving from what I like to refer to
as the rust belt areas of southern Australia to the sun belt, and it is important that the state
government continues to pump additional funds into providing much needed infrastructure on
the Sunshine Coast. The city of Caloundra is a rapidly growing area and regrettably the road
from the highway is simply two lanes in places. I am calling on the state Labor government to
improve access to the city of Caloundra from the Bruce Highway and to widen Caloundra
Road to four lanes. I have had discussions with my state colleague Mrs Joan Sheldon, the
member for Caloundra, and Caloundra City Council concerning this matter, and we are all
determined to push the state government into this much needed action.
It is tragic when a state government plays politics. What happened was that the state government—the Beattie government—were elected and immediately upon election to office they dropped down the list of priorities the upgrading of Caloundra Road to four lanes. So in effect they said to the people of Caloundra, "Look, we’re going to penalise you because you had the temerity to return Mrs Joan Sheldon as the state member for Caloundra." Joan is an excellent member, and I just think it is appalling that Premier Beattie and the state Labor government show this level of vindictiveness in that they are prepared to penalise people because they have exercised their democratic right to choose to return a Liberal representative.

The federal government has made funds available to upgrade the access road to the Sunshine Coast from Brisbane, and I am certainly working to seek additional Commonwealth and state government funds to widen the Bruce Highway to six lanes along its entire length from Brisbane to the Sunshine Coast. A very large proportion of tourists visiting what is undoubtedly the premier tourist destination in Australia travel to the Sunshine Coast by road. If you look at how clogged the roads are, you will see that those circumstances could well be a disincentive to people travelling to the Sunshine Coast. If people are not able to gain access to the Sunshine Coast easily, that, of course, has a negative impact on our local economy. I am lobbying the Deputy Prime Minister and the state government to start work on this very necessary continued expansion of the Bruce Highway, to build on the outstanding contribution that the government has already made to date. In Maroochydore, which is a growth centre, I am pushing for financial assistance to construct the southern access link road, and I want to support the efforts by the Shire of Maroochy to make this a reality and to improve traffic flow into the central business district of Maroochydore.

On the Sunshine Coast there is particularly strong support for the proposal to build a Sunshine Coast arts and exhibition centre. The Sunshine Coast is, as I mentioned earlier, one of the fastest growing areas in Australia. We have a large retired population, a large population of young families and a very interested and active arts community. It is important that the Sunshine Coast receives such a centre, which will enable a very large number of shows, conferences and conventions to travel to the Sunshine Coast and take place in our local community, boosting the economy and consequently increasing jobs. I am working with the Maroochy Shire Council and the local community to do what can be done to bring this wonderful dream of a Sunshine Coast arts and exhibition centre to reality.

Another matter we are looking at very strongly is a feasibility study into the development of a multimodal transport and communications corridor on the Sunshine Coast. As we continue to grow rapidly, it really is important that we have better methods of access to the Sunshine Coast, including rail. It is something which the entire community needs and it is something which we are working for. It is a particularly important element in the growth of the Sunshine Coast and the infrastructure and facilities needed to support our rapidly growing population.

The present government is the greenest government in Australia’s history, and I want to support very strongly more Work for the Dole projects, more Green Corps projects and more Jobs Pathway programs allocated to the electorate of Fisher to help young people into work and to benefit our local environment. We have done pretty well in preceding years, but we have to build on that success and make sure that we get more Work for the Dole and Green Corps projects and more Jobs Pathway programs.
The wonderful thing about these programs is that we have projects of enduring environmental and general benefit to the Sunshine Coast community. Just for a moment I will refer to Green Corps projects: the young people who participate in Green Corps learn something about the environment, become work ready and also know that they have the satisfaction of repairing the impact of a couple of hundred years of European settlement in Australia. I am pleased that we have delivered Work for the Dole, Green Corps and Jobs Pathway, but more still needs to be done.

As a rapidly growing area, the Sunshine Coast central business district town of Maroochydore deserves a Medicare office, and I am lobbying the federal government for a Medicare office in Maroochydore. We have offices at the moment at Caloundra and Kawana Waters, and I fought very hard to make sure that those offices remained. I am pleased that we have been able to deliver to the people of Kawana Waters and Caloundra the continued services of those local Medicare offices. But it is also appropriate that Maroochydore, in the central part of the Sunshine Coast, also receives a Medicare office.

The HMAS Brisbane has to be sunk, and the federal government has allocated the ship to the Sunshine Coast on the basis that it be sunk off Kawana-Mooloolaba. The federal government has also allocated up to $3 million both for the preparation of the ship for sinking and for its actual sinking; but, regrettably, at the present time we are being met with a total lack of cooperation from the state Labor government, and the Premier of Queensland has refused to sign the deed of gift to accept this ship, which will cost the state government very little.

The local community will be placing very great pressure on the Premier of Queensland, and I would like to call on the state member for Kawana, Mr Cummins, to show that he is not as ineffective as everyone believes he is. He ought to get in there and back this very important job creation project, which will provide growth not only for our tourist industry in general and the accommodation industry in particular but also for other, additional jobs, which I think is a very important aim.

I have been disgusted by the way that Mr Cummins has to date shown a complete lack of interest in this very important project. Premier Beattie will look very silly if the federal government moves the ship to another location off the Australian coast and if he, as a result, loses this moneymaking venture to another state or to overseas. I am calling on the Premier to look at the needs of the Sunshine Coast and to support the very important stand taken by the federal government, which says that the HMAS Brisbane should be sunk off the Sunshine Coast as a dive wreck.

The budget currently before the chamber aims to keep Australia safe, our borders secure and our economy strong. The budget has been well accepted by people of the Sunshine Coast who value the fundamental objectives of sound economic management. The government will contribute $1.2 million over four years to a productive ageing centre to be established at the University of the Sunshine Coast. This was proposed by the government during the last election campaign and fulfils yet another government commitment to the Sunshine Coast and older Australians. The centre will provide services to the seniors community, and it will operate as a corporate entity in its own right and have a formal and financial relationship with the National Seniors Association. This is an outstanding budget, and I am proud to support it.
Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Reid) (4.40 p.m.)—During hearings before a committee on 3 June, the Secretary of the Department of Defence, Allan Hawke, put another hole in the government’s defence of its budget that it was based essentially on the needs of national security. He indicated that before the election, despite government claims, his department told this government that there was no way that costs could be held with regard to these areas, despite the funding of its election promises at a later stage.

Quite clearly, this budget deficit has very little to do with defence requirements. It has far more to do with the $5 billion that the country has lost in currency swaps. It is far more relevant to note that $1 billion has been devoted by this government to advertising and consultancies. It is far more relevant to look at the outsourcing of banking from the Reserve Bank of Australia by various government departments, which also lost millions. A larger part of this budget problem is to do with the government’s total failure with regard to IT outsourcing. The taxpayer is up for a huge cost because of the incompetence of the previous, now retired, minister. It has a lot more to do with the home loan scheme, which saw 220 people buying homes worth $1 million receive assistance. They are the reasons why this budget is in deficit. It has very little to do with defence.

I noted today in question time the desperate attempts by the Prime Minister to sound important with regard to his visit to the United States. Trying to make his visit relevant, every person that said hello to him in the corridor and every person that he met in the street was quoted. Despite how obsequious he is and despite his attempt to race with Guam, Puerto Rico or wherever to be the most obsequious, obedient supporter of the United States, the reality is, as a colleague pointed out to me, that he did not rate too highly in last week’s Washington Post. He was competing against sex scandals in the US Catholic Church, the burial of a Viet- nam veteran, Karzai’s vote in Afghanistan, EPA plans with regard to coal burning, whether a few Democrats were using their association with Bush for re-election and a Chinese seizure of one asylum seeker. The competition was not really that outstanding, but he still did not merit a mention. Quite frankly, it really starts to show a few people where Australia does stand with regard to US perceptions.

I am reminded of his performance at the time of September 11. There he was on national television, on the spot, seeming to be important. Then one of the three national broadcasters of US television said, ‘We are now going to take you to the only world leader in the United States at the moment.’ They certainly did not turn to John Howard; they turned to the President of Lithuania, which has a population of 3.6 million. That is the kind of payback that he has received, and it has been the same thing in regard to trade policy.

Quite frankly, the attempt by this government to say that people have to suffer with regard to the disability pension and that they have to cop increases in pharmaceutical costs because of defence, terrorism, security et cetera is extremely shallow. Many of the reported defence expenditures that the government tries to use as a facade for these antisocial changes are actually to be met through funding changes in the portfolio and subsequent savings.

I want to say that in my electorate, in contrast to that of the previous speaker, the government’s budget has not been warmly received. I did promise to read the words of one constituent into the record. The constituent says:

I would like to let you know how the proposed budget measures will affect me! Please; Sir! pass this on to Mr Costello!!!!!
I work as a security guard, & earn just under $30,000 a year ... This is in addition to periodical, medication price increases!!!
I work hard, & long hours, I don’t ask for “FREE” medications!
I pay my taxes, & understand we all must contribute to the running of this beautiful country.
I am not a “bludger”, I have a mortgage!
But; I have to say! These proposals are very much UNAUSTRALIAN, and, NOT a FAIR-GO!!!!!!!
That typifies the reaction in my electorate.

The budget has not been warmly greeted by people in the field of disability as the government seeks to deprive people of their current entitlement to the disability pension. ACROD, a group interested in this field, has asked me:
... to ensure that disability employment organisations in your constituency are able to continue to provide services for people with disability.
The Down Syndrome Association of New South Wales says:
... the proposal to move people with disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities, currently receiving DSP, who are assessed as able to work more than 15 hours a week at award wages, to the Newstart Allowance—
is an attack that is to be resisted. It goes on to say:
People with Down syndrome need and require support in all aspects of their lives. Today, people with Down syndrome are developing their independence. An important component of which is seeking employment opportunities.
Similarly, there were statements by the Physical Disability Council of New South Wales asking me:
... to do everything in your power to oppose and stop the Government’s proposed reduction in eligibility for Disability Support Pension.
So we have the main players in this field—the people representing people who find it very difficult to articulate their thoughts, people who are suppressed, people who have disabilities—saying that the government’s changes are totally wrong.

No less a person than Kerryn Phelps of the AMA commented that the government’s medication changes ‘will hit the sickest and the poorest—people with chronic illness will be particularly affected, as will people with young children who are often at the doctor’s’. This of course comes at the same time as the government’s broad threat to basically get rid of Medicare in this country. It wants to take us down the road of the US system where, unless you are in the most desperate, dire circumstances—in the bottom 10 per cent of the economy—you will have to pay for it. If we are to have that system, the vast majority of people who feel some identity with the Medicare system in this country will no longer feel an identity because they will not have self-interest. Essentially, the government is trying to bring in a system in this country which plays to private corporate interests. This is the same government which now says that we should be alarmed at the cost of pharmaceuticals in this country; that we have to increase prices because they are getting too expensive. This is the same government which last year for the first time tried to appoint representatives of the pharmaceutical industry to the bodies that basically decide which—and for what price—pharmaceuticals will come into play in our system. Last year the government was trying to give the corporations more
power in the system. Obviously the only interest the pharmaceuticals would have is to get more bucks in return for their research. But the government is now saying we should be worried about the cost. This is a significant attempt by this government, now that it is in power, to increase these costs. This is not the first time: it is just a continuation of what it has been doing over the years.

With regard to the disability pension, the government is saying that all new applicants and those being reviewed after 1 July 2003 will be subject to this change. The reality is that for once this government has not been totally doctrinally driven; it has looked at a few realities in the workplace. These days, people over 40 offering themselves to employers are basically regarded as pests. Half the time they are not going to get jobs. Perhaps some people went onto the disability pension because of this reality. Quite frankly, a policy which is designed to deprive them of $52 a fortnight, to force them to tramp around to employers who are not really interested in them, really makes you doubt the practical outcome of it all. Up to 200,000 people receiving disability support pensions will be forced onto Newstart if the government proposals are implemented. This will mean very real suffering for very real Australians.

Quite frankly, I am unimpressed with the retinue of government speakers who have come into the House and into the Main Committee saying that the government have made the hard decisions. They are not making the hard decisions for themselves, for federal members of parliament; they are making hard decisions for people in our electorates. They are making hard decisions for people for whom $52 a fortnight is big dollars. They are making hard decisions because of their own mismanagement in a variety of portfolios that have virtually nothing to do with defence requirements.

In one of the portfolios that I have been interested in, we have seen $1 million provided for Australian citizenship campaigns. These were undertaken to regain some momentum after last year’s promotional campaign which was conducted for only a few months and which has foundered. The government have also guaranteed in this budget that the Living in Harmony initiative will continue for a further three years. There has been no increase in funding and I note that more than half the allocation for this aspect of multiculturalism goes to departmental overheads rather than to grants to the community organisations that are really doing something practical out in the electorate. A variety of interest groups have approached me with their criticisms of the government’s accent in this policy area: that the government’s only concern is to slap themselves on the back and say how great the country is, that we are multicultural and have very few problems.

I know the new Northern Territory government, amongst others, has said that we should show a bit of interest in the problems we still face. That government reflects a broad number of people in Australia who say that on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination we still have racial vilification, racial discrimination et cetera in this country. We should not spend this money on allowing the minister of the day to run around the place getting a few television shots and assuring everyone that everything is well. That is not to say that there are not a significant number of groups funded by this money who do good work.

The government has reached a stage where there has been an initial evaluation of the first stage of the Living in Harmony initiative but still today the outcomes of that have not been publicly released. The full evaluation of that program has not been given to the public and perhaps having that out in the marketplace for discussion is overdue. The budget also an-
nounced that from July 2003 there will be funding for the AMEP, the migrant English Special Preparatory Program and the Home Tutor Scheme Enhancement Program. Once again it is a continuation of current funding levels. There are no initiatives, no changes and no improvements.

The future delivery of migrant English services remains rather uncertain due to the fact that the tender process has not been completed and could be another six to 12 months away. I noted, in discussing this issue with various groups around Australia, concern that we have situations—in Perth, for instance—where husbands and wives are doing courses at two different colleges across town. Obviously the management of that in the family situation is not easy. In some of these tenders there has to be a search to see how, in delivering these services, we can help people with their real family problems.

There is no ongoing increase in funding under the two main settlement programs: the migrant resource centres and the Community Settlement Services Scheme. That is despite the fact that there have been increased award costs for the staff after 10 years, there are problems in securing adequate premises for these organisations and there are arising in this country new communities which have needs. With regard to the award rise, the New South Wales government—these wages are, in a sense, proportionately funded by state and federal governments—has come to the party to make sure that when people get the increase, after 10 years without an increase, they do not have to work extra hours and reduce services: that the increase is funded. The response of the ministers in this government has been, ‘Go and do harder work or make sure your services are reduced so that we don’t have to pay any more money.’

There is a one-off increase of $1 million from savings elsewhere which, for some unknown reason, is devoted to rural and regional areas. One of the lamentable realities in this country is the continued concentration of new arrivals in Sydney and Melbourne. We know those figures. We know the trend is worsening. We know that not only is there a continued movement of new arrivals to Sydney but they are specifically going to a smaller and smaller part of Sydney. When this government does find some money through savings for some pork-barrelling exercise to help some National Party or Liberal Party rural member, it proposes that these resources go into an unspecified, undescribed rural or regional area. The real need in Sydney, where people are unemployed because they lack English and where the numbers are increasing all the time, is being ignored.

When asked last week in Senate estimates, the department said that the minister had not yet decided how the funding was to be allocated. He has decided to do a bit of pork-barrelling, but he has not decided yet to find an excuse or a facade to defend the prospect. There is no shift by DIMIA on the issue of services for temporary protection visa holders, but it is worth noting that the Minister for Education, Science and Training, in a slight distinction of policy in the government, announced extra funding to the states for intensive language tuition for the school-age children of TPV families.

The final area of expenditure in multicultural and citizenship affairs by the department is $3.7 million over three years to former child migrants from the UK and Malta. That is to help them travel overseas to be reunited with their natural families. Whilst the opposition welcomes those measures, they are essentially a response to a Senate committee of inquiry
chairied by Senator Crowley. The coalition response to that was that there was no need for that inquiry. The coalition was somewhat uninterested in the process. Now that that inquiry has come down and shown the level of suffering, despite the fact that the government refuses to apologise for its failure to properly exercise its clear duty of care to these children, it is providing some dollars. The details of the travel fund have not yet been determined. It is about time that these guidelines are looked at to ensure that people can travel and can have an overdue reunion with their families.

The expenditure in this area of multiculturalism and citizenship pales into insignificance when we see the heavy expenditure devoted to the so-called ‘Pacific solution’, which we have been told in the past few days is no longer a solution. The nightmare the electorate faced late last year was going to be rectified by excising a few islands, but that is no longer a solution. We have to go further. The amount of money the government is devoting to settling people, helping them gain employment and helping them live in this country, work for it and assist it is nothing like the $430 million over four years for offshore processing in Nauru. The other amount of $455 million is for the Christmas and Cocos islands. There is $195 million for construction costs and associated roadworks. We all know that these so-called solutions, paying off the Nauruan regime, letting people have their health care et cetera, are going to do nothing to solve the fundamental problem of the large number of rejectees that the government is now faced with having to detain, in all probability for a number of years, and the cost to the Australian taxpayer. We were told back then that these people were never going to step on Australian shores, but you can bet your bottom dollar that they will. They will have to be detained for a number of years because we do not have diplomatic relations with Iraq. Syria and Iran now refuse to take back failed applicants. The overall solution is no longer good enough. The government now wants to basically excise other parts of Australia.

In conclusion, this government has made a lamentable attempt to justify a tax on people’s disability entitlements and in areas such as pharmaceuticals, which will make it very difficult for people who live in electorates like those in Western Sydney, on the basis that the government is beefing up defence and is in the forefront of the fight against international terrorism. The real cost is from the government’s bungling with regard to transactions on the exchanges and making commitments at the last election that it knew did not have the funding for. It was told by Defence that there would be some requirements with regard to increased defence expenditure. At the time, the Treasurer and the Prime Minister said that it was all covered and that there were no problems. That has been refuted by the Secretary to the Department of Defence. It is not good enough to expect that the opposition and the minor parties should support these changes, which are going to hurt the people in our electorates, from a government which is a very minor player internationally, despite the pretensions of the Prime Minister in question time. It is taken for granted because he is such an obsequious supporter; whether it is on climate change, trade policy or defence, he is always reliable. Quite frankly, when you are fully taken for granted, you do not get much say.

Mr CAUSLEY (Page) (5.00 p.m.)—It is always interesting to follow the member for Reid. I followed him through the door in 1984 into the state parliament. It is also interesting to see the metamorphosis from his ebullient support of the Wran-Ferguson government to his present negative state. Obviously, the opposition are squirming over this budget. It has been a magnificent performance by the Treasurer, the member for Higgins, and there is no doubt in my mind that historians will treat him kindly because of what he has done for Australia. I am
very proud to stand here and support this budget. There is no doubt that Australia is in a very
strong financial position, not because this government is sitting back and letting things happen
but because it is making some very hard decisions to ensure that the country has a long-term
economic base. This budget, like previous budgets, addresses those particular problems.

There is no doubt that there were problems associated with September 11, and that those
problems associated with that event shocked the world. I was stunned. I could not believe that
anything like that could happen. We are now dealing with a different situation—the world will
never be the same—where we are all suspicious. We do not quite know what is likely to hap-
pen. We are cautious about different groups in our community, which is very sad. But the fact
is that we have to put extra precautions in place to make sure that our free society cannot be
attacked. That of course means quite a lot of expenditure. There is no doubt that money is
expended in this budget, as it was before this budget was brought down, that the govern-
ment—and, I dare say, Australia—would have preferred not to expend. Nevertheless, if we
are to protect the rights of the citizens of this country, we cannot run away from our responsi-
abilities. We have to spend that money to ensure that this country remains a free country and
that the citizens of this country are protected.

The money that is expended on Defence is, I believe, expended wisely. I do not apologise
for the fact that we have been, and are, strong friends of America. My father and uncles were
very proud to fight with the Americans in the Pacific war. Only for the Americans, this coun-
try would have been conquered in the Second World War. It was undoubtedly the Americans
who saved this country—not that I would blindly support everything they do. I think the
Prime Minister has made that very clear. But, on the other hand, if we believe that we need
strong friends, then we could have no stronger friends than the Americans at the present time.
I am sure that that was highlighted again when the Prime Minister was in America last week.

Let it be said that I know the Prime Minister put very plainly to them what Australia thinks
about trade. I have no illusions about what the Americans think. The fact is that, unless we
keep putting forward those views, we will not be heard. We have to continue talking, not just
to the President but also to congressional leaders, and putting the view very strongly about
where we stand. I believe that, if we do that, we will get that message through to the Ameri-
cans. They have told our leaders when they have been in America that they appreciate the
support of Australia in the fight that they have at the present time. I am sure that eventually—
I do not believe it will be in the short term—we will get some recognition for that.

I note that the Labor Party have given up. Today in question time there was almost glee on
the other side when trade was even mentioned. They have given up: they are not prepared to
go over there and put a strong voice forward; they are prepared to just roll over and accept the
fact that America might agree to some of the trade provisions that we think are very impor-
tant. I have listened quite closely to some of the speeches of members opposite. I have had the
opportunity, sitting in the chair, to do that quite often. I dare say that it is the problem of all
oppositions that there is very short memory about some of the issues that were of importance
just a few years ago, that have now changed.

I was an agricultural leader in Australia when penalty interest rates to farmers hit 23 per
cent. That hurt enormously. Now, when there is a quarter of a per cent increase, people get
delighted. They say, 'The government has failed. Interest rates have gone up from 3¼ per cent
to maybe six per cent.’ All of a sudden, the government has failed! We still have the lowest interest rates in 30 years. It is not a fluke. The reason we have the current interest rates is that our economy has been managed in such a way that they have been kept down. I have been amazed in the last few years that Australia was not affected by the Asian downturn and then the problems in America, which obviously went though a recession. That is the first time in my memory that we have not been affected by those types of global downturns, particularly in America. There was a common saying when I was younger: if America has a cold, we have pneumonia. This time it did not happen, and it was quite remarkable. I was rather stunned that it did not happen and that the Australian economy continued to grow.

I will not claim all the credit for this government, because I think some of the decisions were taken by previous governments. We are now managing our economy in such a way that it is able to withstand outside forces. Our economy is quite small—I do not run away from that fact—compared to those of other large countries of the world. We as Australians should be proud of the fact that this country has managed to withstand these outside influences and has continued to grow.

I note that as usual the opposition are trying to zero in on some areas of the budget that they think might be detrimental to the community and on fertile areas in which they might be able to get some support. If you look at the provisions in the budget, as usual we do not get the full story. I listened to the member for Hasluck earlier, as well as a number of other opposition members, speak about the PBS. There seems to be a total lack of understanding that this scheme is growing at an exponential rate. You just have to look at the Intergenerational Report which the Treasurer has put in this budget, which people are trying to pooh-pooh. We must look ahead. We all talk about the impending baby boom, the bulge. I am part of that or the start of it. There will be a huge problem for this country if we do not address some of these issues. Fewer and fewer people will be paying more and more to support the elderly in this community who are living longer and longer.

I saw figures the other day which showed that the average male in Australia now lives 76 years and the average female lives 82 years. That forecast is much higher now than it was when I was a young person. In those days, I think males lived to about 65 and women a bit over 70. We are living longer and longer. We are now consuming medicine a lot more in our older years than we did in the past, so there is a real challenge as to how to manage and fund it. The PBS is a marvellous scheme. There are very few countries in the world—in fact, I do not think there is another country in the world—with a scheme as good as this. We are very lucky that we can afford it, but we cannot allow it to run out of control.

The speakers opposite zero in on the fact that there has been a dollar increase in prescriptions. But there is still a ceiling there. The opposition speakers seem to be saying it is the chronically ill who are going to be affected by this. That is not true. Maybe those who do not use the pharmaceutical system as much, who do not get to the ceiling, will be the ones who will pay. The ceiling is still there for those who are chronically ill and they will be protected by that. There has to be some sort of protection in the system. In the budget we say that doctors should be more aware of what they are prescribing. We talk about pharmaceutical companies as well. I think there is quite a lot to answer for there. We talk about trying to address some of these issues. We must look at this on the broader scale.
I have not heard from the opposition in this debate what they would do. How would they contain the PBS? Obviously containing the PBS is going to be a challenge for all governments in the future. We have to do some thinking. We cannot just sit back and be critical. It is about time we sat down and did some thinking. I do not say that all knowledge exists on the government side—I do not accept that at all—but I do think we have to be positive about this and not just run off and say to people, ‘It’s terrible. The government has put up our prescriptions by a dollar.’ How do we address this problem? That is a challenge that the opposition has not addressed at this time.

The disability pension is another issue that has been zeroed in on. If you look at how this pension has grown over the last few years, you have to ask: why has this pension grown at such a rate? Maybe it is doubtful whether some of the people who are on this pension should be on the pension. I won’t name names but I am sure you could look at a number of people in my electorate and say to yourself, ‘I don’t know quite why these people are on the disability pension.’ It is not about the people who are totally disabled or people who are desperately disabled. However, I have to say that when this furore about the disability pension erupted in the media one of the most disabled persons in my electorate, a young fellow who had a bad accident in the surf similar to one in the claims we heard of recently in Sydney—he just dived into the surf and finished up a paraplegic—came out and said, ‘I don’t want to work 15 hours a week. I don’t want to work 30 hours a week. I want to work full time.’ And he does. He is a very good contributor to the work force.

Instead of being negative about this, we should be looking at these people because most of them want to work. Most of them want to have a skill. Most of them can be trained. In the budget there are 73,000 new training and work opportunities for disabled people. The government is saying it is not just a matter of looking at the disability pension; it is a matter of getting people into some training. We need to look positively at that.

If you look closely at the budget papers, the Commonwealth is contributing $2.7 billion to a new Commonwealth and state disability agreement, $743 million more than in the previous agreement. This is an agreement with the state governments that helps disabled people. We look at areas where we can try to help some of these people. If you start projecting into the future and think about what we said earlier about the baby boomers coming through the population, you will see that we need these people as employees in the future because the unemployment rate is already coming down. In my electorate it is already down to 9.6 per cent, which is three per cent above the average. Do you know what it used to be? It used to be 16 per cent. It is down to 9.6 per cent.

These people may be disabled, but there is no good reason why they cannot get a good job and good training. We will be needing these people. It is not a matter of kicking them off a pension; it is a matter of training them and getting them some skills so that they can work in the community, and there is no doubt that they can do that these days. With the technology that we have today, there is no good reason why a lot of people cannot work. I keep thinking about that scientist.

Mr Quick—Steve Hawking.

Mr CAUSLEY—Yes, just have a look at him. He cannot speak. I think he has motor neurone disease. He is disabled but is the greatest brain in the world. He is a professor at Oxford.
I am saying that that is what we should be looking at. We should be a little more positive about this. This is not about saying: ‘This terrible government.’ This is about asking: ‘How do we help these people? How do we get them trained? How do we get them into the work force?’

Similarly, one should look at the traineeships and the apprenticeships that this government has introduced. I find the Jobs Pathway Program is working extremely well. Some of these problems go back a long way. They go back to the days when we brought in Austudy and where students, instead of going to a college and getting training, stayed back at school. There were problems with Austudy. For example, there were students there who did not want to learn and they caused problems for the ones who did want to learn. The Jobs Pathway Program is a great program. It gives students in the later stages of their education an opportunity to glimpse what a certain job might be like, and then, if it does not suit them, it is not too late for them to change paths and do something else. Often people make up their minds and say, ‘I want to be a neurosurgeon,’ or something like that, and when they get there they say, ‘I really didn’t want to do this.’ Maybe that is an extreme example. But the fact is that, with the Jobs Pathway Program, people can get a glimpse of what the job is likely to be, and then they can say, ‘Yes, I am interested in that,’ or, ‘No, I’m not interested in that.’ But we have gone a step further by saying that those employers who are prepared to take on an apprentice or a trainee will get a payment of $750 and, in fact, if they continue on and employ that person they will get another $750. So there is an incentive for employers to try to do something for these people and to give them a chance to get employment.

I will now turn to the veterans area. I think governments of all persuasions in Australia have always been very generous to veterans. In fact, there are very few countries in the world that look after their veterans like we do. It probably goes back to the fact that we have a pretty sad war history. I think the member for Herbert may have mentioned this in debate in the lower house. When you look back to the First World War in particular, you see that we lost 80,000 men. To put that in perspective you have to remember that Australia had four million people in those days, so that was a huge number of people for us to lose. Governments have always been focused on the needs of veterans, and I think this particular budget supports that. It gives extra benefits to veterans so that they can live with security in their old age.

Another area that I am very keen about is the area of health care. I will not go into the total funding of health care, because that could probably take up a full debate. I see as very important the fact that we have offered to provide six radiation oncology services across Australia. I am putting up my hand for one of those, and I am sure a lot of other members will be putting up their hands for them. On the North Coast of New South Wales in Lismore, which is the centre of that coastal strip from Port Macquarie through to the Gold Coast, there are two major hospitals—the base hospital and St Vincents—which probably have some of the best specialists available, particularly in those regional areas. That is an area where I believe that an oncology unit would be very helpful. We missed out in the last round of MRI allocations.

Mr Billson—It went to Dandenong.

Mr CAUSLEY—You will not get the next one, because we have our hands up.

Mr Lindsay—Townsville has two.
Mr CAUSLEY—Oh, my gosh—that is a marginal seat, is it! We desperately need that MRI facility. St Vincent’s Hospital in Lismore has an MRI; it is just that it has to get accreditation under Medicare, and there is no doubt in my mind we will get that.

As I said to start with, I am excited about this budget. Obviously, there are special circumstances surrounding its formulation, and it addresses those particular challenges immediately in front of us. This budget keeps Australia on a very sound financial basis: it will ensure that our interest rates remain low compared to historical levels; it will ensure that inflation is kept under control; it will ensure that our small businesses and our farmers are not ripped off by having to pay high interest rates as they were in the years under the previous Labor government; and it will ensure that young people, in particular, paying off mortgages, will be able to own their own homes because of the low interest rates. I believe that Peter Costello will go down in history as one of the best treasurers in the history of Australia.

Mr JENKINS (Scullin) (5.20 p.m.)—Today in question time the House welcomed Xanana Gusmao and Jose Ramos Horta as President and Foreign Minister of the newly independent nation of East Timor. They were received with great warmth by all members, and it was a moment of genuine joy on the floor of the House. All of us who have observed what has happened in East Timor over several years would not wish to dwell upon what should or should not have happened, what may or may not have happened, but would wish to rejoice that now the East Timorese have become, through self-determination, an independent nation. We should now dwell on the way in which Australia can continue to be a very friendly neighbour. That is the positive outcome that is most important to remember on a day like today, because those two gentlemen, along with a number of their colleagues, struggled for a long time to get to this point.

It is also a time to reflect upon Australia’s capacity to operate within the region with our new neighbours—an area where, as a larger nation, we should be able to play a very big role—and to reflect that, perhaps, in the past, we have not played a very big role. Perhaps in the past we have not concentrated and focused on the issues of our new neighbours and the region. Some of those nations of the region confront some very grave problems. Australia should be turning again to look at the region and to decide on the ways in which we can help solve the region’s problems, such as the ongoing problem of Bougainville and the way which PNG has developed since its independence so many years ago now. We can reflect upon the ways in which we can be a better neighbour: we can look at the current happenings in the Solomon Islands and in Vanuatu. When we think of a neighbour like Nauru, we remember the headlines like “Illegals in bogus passport racket” from last year—negative connotations of the way in which Nauru is allowing itself to be used by global organised crime. Perhaps we can think about how we can help those countries in our region.

This leads to one of the environmental problems that will well and truly impact on island nations—if we believe the theorists—which, of course, is the greenhouse effect. The global community is trying to come to grips with the way in which it can come together to address this. At the moment we have the discussions about what Australia is actually going to do in the context of the Kyoto protocol.

We have a vast difference developing between two international camps. On the one hand we have the US, especially since the election of George W. Bush as President, moving away
from the Kyoto protocol and putting in place its own version. What we see developing now in the Australian context is perhaps a line of thought that places us in that camp rather than in the wider international camp. We really should look at what is happening with Kyoto to see how distinct this difference is and how we are putting ourselves on one side if we go down the United States track. All 15 European Union countries have signed the Kyoto protocol. They were followed earlier this month by Japan. Russia and New Zealand are to sign by the end of the year. That would leave the US and Australia to act. A total of 71 countries have now agreed to ratify the Kyoto protocol.

Along the way Australia has been able to get a fairly good deal from the processes that arose out of the protocol. Having gained those concessions makes the government’s position even more bewildering and puzzling. I admit that at the time those concessions were gained I was not totally satisfied. But the point is that in the present debate this government has to acknowledge it gained those concessions. It is now, it would appear, intending to move away from the whole process. The process is important; the protocol will put in place three economic instruments that would be open to countries that have ratified and are moving towards meeting their emission reduction targets. Those economic instruments are: (1) international emissions trading—the exchange of credits between industrialised countries to meet emission targets; (2) joint implementation—the creation of credits from projects in industrialised countries; and (3) the so-called clean development mechanism—the creation of credits from projects in developing countries to meet the industrialised countries’ targets.

There has been great discussion about these instruments. First of all one has to go through a learning curve to get one’s head around the notion of using economic instruments for environmental gains. But that is where we are situated in the early years of the 21st century: there is a developing awareness of the potential for such instruments. But if Australia places itself outside a mechanism that would allow it to participate in that system, we would be well and truly out of step. We would find it very difficult, once being shunned by the international community, to meet the targets that are set under the protocol and, more importantly, to take an active role in what is an international effort.

At the moment we have state governments acting on reducing carbon emissions—they are showing leadership when at present that leadership is lacking at the federal level. There are specific initiatives. For example, the Victorian government has set a target to reduce Victoria’s greenhouse gas emissions by more than five per cent within a decade. Some of those targets are set within the context of many competing parties saying that those targets are not achievable and the interests of those parties are not being looked after. A number of regions of Australia have a great dependence upon the coal industry, and there are a number of jobs in that industry. Slowly but surely the debate is turning around the feelings of those regions, as they understand that the new technologies that would lead to the clean use of coal have great employment potential as well. These are important developments. This is an ongoing debate; it is not as if everybody understands the phenomenon and the mechanisms that are required to address it. It is my concern that, if the government continues on the course of action it has put in place—as it appears it will; on the basis that yet again it is something we want to be shoulder to shoulder on with the United States of America—we will be outside what is happening internationally.
The real point—and this is important—is that it is yet another example of where the environmental outcome that we are trying to achieve marries with potential economic benefits and outcomes. In this case, it is significant that business opportunities are created by the Kyoto protocol and that we would lose that opportunity if we failed to ratify. Companies are thinking about whether they would be better placed to go offshore to countries that are inside rather than outside the Kyoto tent. There are many examples in Australia of companies that are developing alternative energy technologies and, if we continue to move away from the protocol, the further development of those potential technologies might be placed in jeopardy.

On another subject, at present there is a debate going on about the regulations that were put in place on the Friday before last, excising 3,000 islands in the northern waters above Australia from the migration zone. In the debate about this, the Labor Party’s position, which would see us opposing that excision, is being portrayed as being in some way soft or weak on border control—I think ‘weak’ was the word used today in question time. I am saddened that that is the way our position is being portrayed, because such a portrayal really reflects what the gesture of the Friday before last—of a further excision of more islands from Australia’s migration zone—is really about.

Is the debate really about the appropriate and proper processing of people that are making their way to Australian shores with the intention of seeking asylum? If that is what the debate is about, then the types of proposals that are being put forward are well and truly at the margins. It is a nonsense to use them as a wedge between political forces within Australia. In fact, as has been put forward in the debate on behalf of the opposition, if people are headed for these islands and the islands are in some way put outside the migration zone, it would not require great imagination to see that shifting the goalposts would simply mean that people would make the additional journey to the mainland. And then what happens when any potential boats land on the mainland? Do we see excision of areas on the mainland? I think that people would understand that that is a logical progression from the thinking that is in place in this policy area.

But if we are going to talk about border control and weakness or softness we ought to look at the whole picture. Why is it that the government uses people who, in their desperation, would come here by a method which is outside the preferred legal regime, in order to talk about border control and put fear into the minds of Australians that this is about border control full stop? It is not. If we were fair dinkum, we would be talking about the 60,000 people—based on the department’s own figures, at least 60,000—that come here illegally by other methods. These are the people who either have legitimate visas and overstay or rort the system to get a visa to get here with the intention of staying permanently. If we want to put fear into people’s minds, let us start talking about those people. But it is not convenient when, of those 60,000 people, 12,000 are from the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Please, let us get fair dinkum.

I, for one, am not in any way dissuaded because a high percentage of those processed off the *Tampa* by the UN have had their claims dismissed. That means that the procedure for looking at claims is appropriate. That is all it tells me. It tells me that people have legitimate rights when they take the actions that they have taken—being on a leaky vessel, the leaky vessel sinks under whatever circumstances and a courageous captain of a Norwegian merchant vessel rescues them. Then everything goes completely askew because we have a gov...
ernment that wants to project and change the way in which it is perceived as acting on ‘border control’. So we have, conveniently, a large vessel within camera shot of Christmas Island so that we can have our SAS troops go aboard the vessel in the full glare of the media. Is it just so that we can have the slogan ‘Who is the most hairy-chested? Who is the harshest or the strongest on border control? We are.’

Mr Billson interjecting—

Mr JENKINS—Where is the debate about source countries? If the honourable member for Dunkley wants to interject about the closest port, let us go to the detail about that and ask why the vessel did not go to the closest port, because this is the crux of the matter. We have the source countries and we have the countries that are in the pipeline. Can the honourable member for Dunkley tell me what Minister Ruddock and Minister Downer, to prove that they are hard on border control, are doing about that? The member for Dunkley cannot tell me because he will not get up and ask the question that will get a ministerial statement that is different.

Mr Billson—You have misled the voters, haven't you?

Mr JENKINS—I did not mislead the voters. If the honourable member for Dunkley again wants to get into this debate that it is about which party is the strongest—

Mr Billson—There is only a cigarette paper’s width—

Mr JENKINS—and not about which party is actually looking at the policy, progressing the policy, he might want to note that it is not about the minister being in the House on the Wednesday and saying that the great success of the present policy is that no boats are on their way, while on the Friday using the excuse that a boat is on the way to increase the excision of the migration zone. Now the boat has disappeared—I do not know whether it is the Bermuda Triangle, but it has disappeared. But that is not the point: boat or no boat, there should be a proper discussion of policy. And on the cigarette paper’s width, the Labor Party 18 months before this was talking about the treatment of people in the detention centres and had called for an inquiry, and that inquiry would have gone forward. That was lost in the artificial way that this was created as an issue.

Mr Billson—That was misleading the voters.

Mr JENKINS—that was always there. It is not about misleading the voters. Were the voters told that the migration zone will be excised and excised? Were they? No, they were not. They were not told that it would be cut away and cut away. There has been no answer to the question about how far this measure goes. We can ask those that have got the good voice now: what are we going to do with those who have been denied, whose claims have been dismissed, and how are we going to deal with their return?

Was that discussed in the days and weeks up to the election? The people that were there at the time of the election remain; the same people are still there. Isn't it simply that we should discuss this to see the way in which these people should be properly processed now that their claims have been denied? That is in fact the crux of the matter. No matter what we as legislators believe, the individuals that are involved, except for a few that are perhaps out-and-out parts of some criminal element, are driven to these types of measures, and the outcome must be based on the way that the international community deals with these things.

The present government can get excited about the way in which Australia is deciding these matters and people can say that the result of the election decides it for evermore, but that is a
nonsense. This is a piece of public policy that is a work in progress. The problem has not gone away simply by the measures that were put in place three days after the government announced that it was going to build more detention centres—policy on the run. The point is that I am quite happy for the Labor Party to be in a position where it is developing its policy on this matter. It has gone out to the public and said that that debate is continuing. *(Time expired)*

Mr LINDSAY (Herbert) (5.40 p.m.)—I am a bit puzzled. When we first announced excluding certain territories from Australia’s migration zone, that was supported by all sides of the parliament, as I understand it. It was public policy. It went to the last election and in the legislation was provision for regulation so that at a time in the future we would excise further territory if that were seen to be useful. That was very public: that was on the public record. The government is, for very prudent reasons, moving to excise islands above latitude 12 degrees south and the Labor Party are now doing a complete backflip and saying they are not going to support it, but I do not know the downside of excising further islands. I have not heard that argument: I have not heard anybody tell me why they should not be.

Mr Jenkins—What if Magnetic Island were excised?

Mr LINDSAY—It would not make a damn piece of difference, because all Australians can move freely and openly in any of those territories, as they do now. It does not make one iota of difference to anybody except those people who want to come here unauthorised: they are the only people it affects. The Labor Party are saying, ‘Well, we’re going to signal that we want to go soft on border control.’ That is what they want to do. Until I hear a logical reason coming from the Labor Party as to why we should not excise I will remain puzzled. I did not get up here to speak about that.

Mr Billson—You were provoked.

Mr LINDSAY—I was provoked. I thank the member for Dunkley. I move widely in Australia, as most of us do in discharging our responsibilities as members of parliament, and for more than a third of the year, as all of us are, I am out of my electorate in other parts of Australia, principally in Canberra but with committee duties you do move around the country. Then, as always happens—it happens to you and it happens to me—people ask, ‘Where are you from?’ I say, ‘Australia’s largest tropical city,’ and they ask, ‘Where’s that?’ That is a very interesting response. What do I then get? The first thing that a person will say is: ‘You’re from Cairns.’ ‘Well, no, actually; it is not Australia’s largest tropical city.’ ‘Well, then you must be from Darwin.’ ‘No, that’s even smaller.’ Then on comes the bright light: ‘It’s Brisbane.’ ‘Well, Brisbane is not even in the tropics.’ If they are really, really pushed they can name Rockhampton and then Mackay. But do you know what: they cannot name Townsville, Australia’s largest tropical city.

That worries me. Townsville is a very important and significant city in this country. We have in Townsville Australia’s largest defence base. Virtually all of Australia’s overseas operations in the last 10 years have been launched from Townsville. In Townsville we have the Australian Institute of Marine Science, which leads the world in marine science. We have the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, which controls one of the wonders of the world and manages it. Yet no-one can name Townsville. If you say to the television stations, ‘Why don’t you have Townsville on the weather map? It’s Australia’s largest tropical city,’ do you
know what their answer is? ‘It’s easier to put Cairns on because it’s a shorter name and it fits
on the weather map.’ What an excuse! I do not understand that. We are a tropical city that has,
straight out its back door, the reef, the rainforest and the outback, but nobody knows
Townsville.

Townsville is the undiscovered gem of Northern Australia. We in Townsville think that
North Queensland is the best place in Australia—blue skies, golden sands, deep green rain-
forest, fascinating outback, charming cities and islands for indulgence. We have it all. It is the
ultimate tropical lifestyle. Those of us in Townsville know that the lifestyle is as good as you
would get anywhere in the country. We love our life in the tropics and we invite those of you
listening to this debate to share a slice with us. Come for a weekend of excitement or relaxa-
tion. Come on a package tour. Fly in and rent a car or drive the Bruce or Flinders highway and
enjoy life with us.

Townsville has a progressive and innovative community that enjoys its restaurants, night-
life, casino, museums and galleries. We love our water sports, golf, fishing, abseiling, white-
water rafting and bushwalking. We know of pristine beaches, rainforest habitat and outback
oases that will astound. I say to the member for Franklin, ‘Forget the crowds, the stress, the
pressure and the tourist traps; relax with a drink in hand, gazing out to the islands in the Coral
Sea.’ We enjoy our life in the tropics and our enthusiasm is contagious. Once you experience
it all, you will love the feeling of euphoria and you will be determined to return again.

But what happens? People think of Cairns. People think of the Whitsundays. People do not
think of Townsville. And what is the reason for that? It is hard to change people’s perceptions
of Townsville if they visited the city years ago. People know it as an industrial port—dry,
dusty, not a lot to do. We had the problem of losing our international air carriers at the inter-
national airport; they have come and gone. It is very hard for us to compete with the hot spots
and gateways in Queensland that already have well-established product in international mar-
kets and that tend to get the support from the various tourism promotion bodies as being the
hot spots in Queensland.

What do our potential customers miss out on? They miss out on what Townsville is to-
day—a dynamic, progressive city with a new tourism product and major developments and
infrastructure. The redevelopment of the Strand, for example, has been branded as one of the
best beachfront promenades in Australia. I do not think there is any doubt about that. Domes-
tic airfares are now more affordable with the introduction of Virgin Blue, which chose
Townsville as their first Queensland regional destination, for very good reasons. That has
brought prices down. But I just lament that we do not yet have enough airline capacity into
Townsville.

Only last week, when I had to return to Townsville, I could not get a seat on a plane from
Brisbane to Townsville. I had to fly to Cairns to get home. I had to fly to Cairns, get in a car
and drive 400 kilometres to get back that day.

M r Billson interjecting—

M r LINDSAY—I observe to the member for Dunkley that, if I drove 400 kilometres in his
state, I would be out of the state, but we Queenslanders have a much more significant area to
look after. I know that last Saturday one of the Qantas flights out of Townsville was 15 seats
overbooked. They could not fit 15 people on the aircraft. I think that is a clear case where
schedulers at Qantas really need to take note and, by increasing the capacity available in and out of Townsville, look after the market that is most clearly there.

I firmly believe that Townsville Enterprises is working very hard on trying to get the name recognition up. I was very pleased to be able to give Townsville Enterprises $25,000 last week as a matching contribution to cash contributions from their members to develop a definitive publication on the attractions available in the north for visiting cruise ships and, particularly, visiting warships, so that we can market the city in a very meaningful and positive way and talk up all of the really great facilities and attractions that are available. I think it behoves everybody in Townsville to play their part to increase the awareness of the attractions that we have in our city.

In the time available to me I would like to move on to another couple of matters in relation to the north. I would particularly like to talk about the proposed ocean terminal. Every time a warship comes into Townsville—and, incidentally, the US Navy rate Townsville as the best port to visit in Australia, which is a pretty good feather in our city’s cap—it stays three days or so and it leaves behind $3 million to $5 million in the city. We as a community need to concentrate on—I believe this is probably the next major project that we should all be working on—the gateway project; namely, an ocean terminal development of the potential of the Western Breakwater in Townsville and the area in front of Jupiters casino. I think that it should happen as a partnership between private enterprise and government. While the state government has a lead role in this, the federal government should also be involved, because this has the potential to give our city and our region a major boost by capturing a segment of the tourism market which we are not currently adequately capturing.

Recently, in Townsville, the state government announced a new gas-fired power station—base load power station—for the city. This was a very important announcement because it signalled the arrival of gas into Townsville. That power station will become a reality as part of an upgrade of an existing peak load power station at the Queensland nickel site at Yabulu. This is very important in relation to Yabulu because it will turn into a cogeneration scheme. I note that we have the chairman of the environment and heritage committee with us today, and he will be very pleased to know that this cogeneration scheme will see gas, which is a clean fuel, generating electricity. It will also see the waste heat being used to generate steam, which will be fed into the nickel plant. So it will reduce everybody’s costs and give the benefits of gas.

It will also further enhance the likelihood that we will be able to get the Yabulu extension project up, which is a $300 million development in hand with the Ravensthorpe project in Western Australia, where nickel will be mined, part processed and then shipped to Townsville for final processing at Yabulu. I am very pleased to see state development in Townsville working to look at all of the value added industries that can be tacked onto the three mineral processing plants in Townsville and Thuringowa—something that would be a marvellous addition to our city.

Fundamentally, in the long term we need to think long and hard about true base load power. True base load power actually means delivering power to industry at a world competitive price. I am told that it is not possible to do that with gas. I am told that the only way you can get a world competitive unit price of electricity delivered to your doorstep is to use a coal fired power station. That has some downsides, and there are some concerns. With Australia
determined to meet its responsibilities in relation to the Kyoto protocol, whether we ratify it or not, we need to think about how we might balance any additional emissions that would come from such a power station with ways of ameliorating the problem of the additional CO₂ in the earth’s atmosphere.

One way or another, we have to be world competitive. Providing world competitive power on Townsville’s doorstep with a power station on the Bowen Basin coalfields is certainly a way of making Townsville another Gladstone. It can bring enormous opportunities in relation to the industrial lands adjacent to the Sun Metals zinc refinery, and it can bring very significant developments associated with the Queensland nickel plant at Yabulu. I ask the community and the decision makers, particularly the state government, to think long and hard about that. I know that the Premier will have some difficulties with that concept, but I think there is a solution somewhere. It is important for our region’s progress with jobs and for the economic wellbeing of our city to see true base load power being developed.

In the time left to me, I might spend a moment on higher education, particularly James Cook University. The member for Riverina may disagree, but I think next to the sandstone universities James Cook University comes right up there. The government has to recognise that the costs of running a regional university, particularly James Cook University, are certainly higher than those of running a sandstone university. There needs to be a will within the government to recognise that there are extra costs and to fund universities in the regions accordingly.

There is no doubt that a university like James Cook is very much at the centre of our community. It is not like the metropolitan universities. You find that there are much greater demands on regional universities in relation to the services that they provide to their local communities. There is a community expectation that we all do work as a team and that universities should contribute. You do not see that as much in the larger metropolitan cities. You also find that the regional universities do not have access to the benevolent funds that the larger universities have access to, and that holds their development back. When they have very strong, important, innovative ideas and they are determined to do something that is absolutely new in the country, they do not always have the resources to do it.

I think it is time that the government looked at the way universities manage themselves, at the way university councils sometimes try to usurp the role of management of universities and at the way that university councils, for political reasons perhaps, try to get in there and tell vice-chancellors around the country how they should operate. Equally, I think it is time that universities looked at allowing managers—meaning vice-chancellors—the opportunity to manage down into the faculties should they need to. At the moment there are some very out-of-date management structures which should be looked at. Universities need to operate in the real world in the way private business operates, and currently I believe that that is not the case.

I come back to where I started: the fact that people cannot name Townsville as Australia’s largest tropical city. I invite anyone listening to or reading this speech to give Townsville a go. You will not be disappointed. As you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, it is a fabulous place—an undiscovered gem.

Dr Lawrence (Fremantle) (6.00 p.m.)—I will begin my comments on the budget tonight in a perhaps slightly unusual way. I want to take the opportunity to pay tribute to Ruth
Cracknell. In many ways Ruth represented the best that Australia has to offer. Given that I am responsible in opposition for the status of women, the arts and Indigenous affairs, she was indeed a fine representative of all of those areas. I would like to take this opportunity as a member of the House of Representatives to acknowledge her passing. The Senate has in fact moved a motion of appreciation. I simply say that Ruth was a much loved and superbly talented actor with a deep commitment to social justice, Indigenous affairs and women’s issues. She should be held up as a fine example of someone who used her status for a good purpose: to better the lives of others.

The death of Ruth Cracknell is a great loss to Australia’s cultural life. Her stage and screen career, spanning almost 60 years, made her one of Australia’s most respected, best-known and honoured actors. In her 57-year career she acted in a wide range of classical and modern plays and Australian film and television. She raised three children and won Sammy, Penguin and Logie awards, to name but a few. Ruth Cracknell, of course, was a member of the Order of Australia and was named one of Australia’s living national treasures, as indeed she was. She was generous in her support for many young actors and others in the arts community and she was a tireless campaigner to improve the status of women. Ruth Cracknell was also a committed advocate of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, joining forces with many others to form Women for Wik during the native title amendment debate in 1997 in an attempt to influence public opinion. Ruth Cracknell’s passing is a great loss not only for her family and friends but also for the nation. I would like once again to convey my sincere condolences to her family and friends.

Before going any further, I particularly want to talk about Indigenous affairs, which I know were dear to Ruth’s heart—and dear to mine, too—and I am very sad to say that the current budget does very little to assist Indigenous people in this country to improve their lot in life. I wish I did not have to say that. I do not say it as a political statement. Frankly, just look at the record.

The minister announced when he released the federal budget that spending on Indigenous specific programs and services will increase to a record level of $2.5 billion in 2002-03, up from $2.5 billion the previous year. That sounds like good news on the face of it, and news that I would have been happy to welcome. But I think it is important that we look at that definition of ‘Indigenous specific’ and pull it apart a little because it is absurdly broad. It actually relates to funds that in any way might be seen to be spent on Indigenous people, or on the areas in which they live. To give you an example, that statement includes $2.2 million going to Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry for pest and disease monitoring in Northern Queensland. That benefits everybody; it is not Indigenous specific. Also, it covers the $7 million that the Australian Bureau of Statistics requires to collect statistics on Indigenous people. Again that is not done separately; it is done for all Australians.

These are worthy programs, but they are not Indigenous specific and they should not be lumped in with spending of that kind if we are to actually look at the government’s performance here. The government is still including a lot of these areas in the total expenditure allocated to overcoming Indigenous disadvantage, and it is time we actually had a much clearer book. Many of these programs are provided to all Australians. I am not just talking about those extreme cases of quarantine and statistics collection but about the things we take for granted: clean water supply, access to reliable electricity at a reasonable price, and education.
and schooling. They are not Indigenous specific; they are the rights of citizens. In my view they should not be included as separate unless they have special elements, additional funds or new programs designed to address the disadvantage we know Indigenous people face. In fact, many of those are just basic citizen services which require funding.

Given that the programs are listed for this purpose and the government describes them as Indigenous specific, it is reasonable to ask the minister, particularly as he puts them under the heading of ‘practical reconciliation’, exactly what is going on in those areas of education, employment, health and so on that are available to other citizens. What effect are these programs having on Indigenous people? Are they improving their circumstances?

We put a number of questions in the Senate estimates to the department asking about a lot of these programs that are listed as Indigenous specific and as part of so-called practical reconciliation. The sad fact is that the department were unable to answer most of the questions; they simply had no idea, although they were happy to claim them as part of a program to support Indigenous people. We think they should be keeping a close eye on these programs if they are going to claim them as being of benefit and put them under a ‘practical reconciliation’ heading. In response to how they monitor these broader programs—and I mention employment, education and health; they are critical areas—the secretary of the department said:

... I am not able—and frankly I do not think I should be able—to say that the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs is monitoring expenditure of that sort down to that level. That is clearly a program matter administered by another portfolio.

You cannot have that. The minister has to know. The precise reason for having a separate minister for Indigenous affairs is that we recognise that there are special needs and special difficulties associated with many Indigenous communities in Australia. It is not good enough to say, ‘Someone else is looking after that,’ if at the same time you are claiming it as part of a major program. In other words, they are not linked as part of a program; they are just what happens to be available to Aboriginal people, as they are to other citizens in our country.

When I asked the minister a question last week about what was happening to Aboriginal medical services, he said, ‘That is not my responsibility; I am not the minister for health.’ No, he is the minister for Aboriginal affairs and reconciliation, and he should know. In estimates, evidence emerged that the federal government continues to underspend—and that worries me a lot—on areas that really are designed specifically to reduce disadvantage and to improve the life circumstances of Indigenous people. The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, for instance, told a Senate estimates committee that in 1999-2000 the government had not been able to spend $20 million of funding allocated for Indigenous employment. What group in the community has the highest level of unemployment? Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. How can you possibly underspend in an area where there is so much unmet need? That was about 35 per cent of their total budget. They were very pleased with themselves this year when they said that they had only underspent it by 13 per cent of the budget, some $6 million to $7 million. It is not something to celebrate, I would have to say.

Further figures from this year’s budget show that the government has not been able to spend an allocated $4.3 million on domestic violence. What have we been hearing about Indigenous communities? That they want to work together with the government to stamp out domestic family violence, alcohol abuse and substance abuse. This is an area where there is great need, and everyone recognises it. The government underspent $4.3 million under the
status of women program. They said they could not find suitable program managers to spend this domestic violence money. This money was generic, but the need is greatest in Indigenous communities and could have been directed to those communities.

It is another example of the government’s apathy, in this case both toward women and Indigenous communities, for a problem that has, frankly, become a national disgrace. Everyone recognises that it needs urgent attention. It has been stated as a high priority for government. Indeed, they say that family violence is a particularly urgent issue for Indigenous women, who comprise 46 per cent of people who require hospitalisation from intentional injuries, and for Indigenous people, who die from interpersonal violence at 10.8 times the rate of non-Indigenous Australians.

Only a day later ATSIC told Senate estimates that they had been advocating constantly for increased effort in this area. There is $4.3 million sitting there unspent and ATSIC are saying, ‘We’re in dire need of these funds.’ Although they had already spent $4.9 million annually on programs related to family violence, they said the demand was much greater than that. When the question was put, they said that they could easily have spent that extra $4.3 million to improve community safety and the safety, particularly, of women and children in Indigenous communities.

Funding for the minister’s office and the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs is also included in the Indigenous-specific funding. This is for the benefit of Aboriginal people but it includes $4.3 million for fighting Aboriginal people in the courts—litigation such as the Cubillo-Gunner stolen generations case. This is not spending which helps Indigenous people yet it is listed there as if it were for their benefit. Indeed at one stage that litigation funding made up 47 per cent of the department’s budget. Half of the spending was going on court cases that were clearly against the interests of Indigenous people generally and several Indigenous people in particular.

The interesting thing about this budget is that it actually contained no new funding initiatives in these Indigenous-specific areas. Most of those funds are administered by ATSIC and there has been no new funding for ATSIC. The chairman of ATSIC said that there were no new funding initiatives this year despite the ever increasing demand. He described the extra funding last year as a down payment on funds that never seem to come. The $470 million that was taken out of ATSIC has not been filled and the government apparently has no intention of doing anything about it.

There were a couple of announcements of new expenditure. The government announced a new budget measure of enhanced training of Indigenous directors but there was no new money. There were new programs that ATSIC had to find funding for but no additional funding. Better training in governance is critical to Indigenous communities and ATSIC in particular is working hard to develop new programs, as is Reconciliation Australia. But it is pretty hard to do it with no money.

Another ‘new’ measure was $8.3 million announced for meeting the telecommunication needs of remote Indigenous communities—again, worthy. But the funds were taken from a different Indigenous-specific bucket of money from previous years which had not been spent. What does it deliver to these communities? It provides exactly the same service that every other Australian should be able to expect. When questioned in the Senate estimates commit-
the government was forced to acknowledge that remote Indigenous communities had very poor levels of service generally. I have listened to members in this place complain about poor telecommunication services in places like North Queensland, outback New South Wales and outback Western Australia. I understand that and I am sympathetic to it, but if you think they have a problem you should look at the Indigenous communities. Whereas 97 per cent of Australians are connected to fixed telephone services under the USO, the best estimates that we can get—from the government itself—for Indigenous communities are that five to 10 per cent of remote Indigenous people are connected. That is a huge gap in service provision. And the government provided no new money; it just moved a little bit around to give some people slightly better access to telecommunication services.

We have also indicated that we are keen to support the ATSIC review that has been mooted. We were less enthusiastic about hiring former ministers Wooldridge and Reith to do the job; we did not think they would be particularly independent. But part of the problem with this review is that it will have to be paid for out of existing ATSIC funds, which were cut by $470 million. ATSIC do not even know at this stage what the review will involve—what its terms of reference will be, who will be involved, who will be consulted and how long it will take—and of course they do not know how much it will cost.

They had $470 million taken out of their budget, there was no new expenditure on the part of the government for ATSIC and no genuine new expenditure on Indigenous affairs. And that is in the context of the government requiring ATSIC to quarantine big portions of its expenditure. Approximately 80 per cent is quarantined—the CDEP and the community housing program. So they have very little left to do some of these other things that are sorely needed, including tackling substance abuse and other issues which the government claims to care about and which are vitally important for the health of these communities.

Finally, in the area of Indigenous affairs, I want to refer briefly to the problem with Aboriginal medical services. The government have been warned several times that several of the medical services, which are vital to the health needs of Indigenous communities, are in real trouble as a result of the public indemnity insurance problems that we have heard so much publicity about recently. Many services—particularly in remote areas such as Bourke and Walgett, and including Redfern, in inner city Sydney, and Western Sydney—are under threat of closure. They cannot get their doctors suitable insurance. They are directly the responsibility of the federal government—no-one else is responsible for these services—and when I asked the minister a question he did not know the first thing about it. It is not just the doctors who cannot get indemnity coverage but also dentists, midwives and others who are providing services in these communities. We still have not had an answer from the government on this. As far as we know, they are just going to let the due dates roll along and these people will have to find very substantial additional funds from within quite tight budgets or they will lose their doctors. I think there is no doubt about that.

If I have time, I want to turn briefly to two other areas: the arts and the status of women, for which I am responsible. The notable thing about the government’s approach in the budget to the arts is that there is no approach. You never hear ministers in this government talk about Australia’s artistic and cultural life. You can beg and plead for something—anything; a sign of life—but you will not find it. It is really very worrying. The more I talk to people in this area, the more it is clear to me that the government is prepared to let the cultural life of this nation hang—not die exactly, because there is enough funding just to keep people hanging on the
edge. Take, for instance, the small to medium sized performing arts sector. Many theatres in Australia are dark. If you go around the cities you will find this. In my own home town of Perth, there are theatres that are dark. Ten years ago that was not true; you would very rarely find a theatre company that did not have a full program for the year. Now you find that they do it project by project.

The government has just put out a little report on the small to medium sized performing arts company—and the government offered no hope. Indeed, as one of the commentators put it: ‘It’s like going to the doctor asking for treatment for lung cancer and being given treatment for bad breath.’ That is how much attention they got from the government. That is a pretty damning indictment. The person who said it said it amusingly, obviously, but they are really concerned about the status of those particular organisations. We have seen very little attention given to any of the art forms. We are told that the Myer review into the visual arts sector is going to come out soon. The minister has it but does not expect to release it until the middle of July. But he has made it clear to everybody in the arts community, ‘Don’t expect any money to come with this. We are basically going to tell you to do better with the resources you have got.’

Anyone who spends any time in the arts community will tell you that the Nugent review, which did some excellent work for the major organisations, has been a very useful contribution and additional funds were provided—overdue but welcomed. But even that is causing problems, as the life of those funds is winding down. Then we get below that to the innovative side of Australian arts. I am not saying that Australian opera and the major performing theatres are not innovative, but a lot of the really original work comes from the smaller end of the market and they are really struggling to survive. The government seems to have no concern with that at all.

When you look at some of the areas of the budget where the government did provide additional funding last time—$37.2 million additional funding for the museum—you see that it was not additional funding for the arts, because the government had actually taken it out of another area; in particular, the National Archives. So the government was giving with one hand as it was taking with another. When the museum director was asked what the extra funding was needed for she said that it was due to unforeseen circumstances. That suggests to me that there is some fairly untoward planning going on—visitor numbers were not as good as expected, special exhibitions had not done as well as expected and they had not been able to get sponsorship. I can understand that with a new organisation, and I am not being critical of the museum’s director. These are propositions that the government should take on and fund appropriately. But instead what does the government do? It takes it out of the archives. The government is effectively asking the National Archives to absorb the hit because of its failure to plan properly for the new museum. At risk at the National Archives is a vital part of Australia’s records and objects. So we have, in a sense, a misunderstanding of the nature of those two organisations.

I could say a lot more about the arts—and I will at another time—but the real disappointment is that there is no focus, there is no energy, there is no commitment. As far as the government is concerned the arts is a dead area; it is one of those ‘special interest’ areas; it is an area where you can poke at people and say, ‘These are all pinko lefties; you do not take them seriously.’ But their vital creative input into the nation’s life is not to be underestimated.
I want to speak about the status of women very briefly—not because it is unimportant to me but rather because I will have other opportunities to do so. One of the things that really continues to disturb me is the fact that the government has paid so little attention to the financial needs of women. For instance, in this budget and in legislation coming out of it, we are told that women who are sole parents will now enter the mutual obligation system and will be breached if they fail to meet certain conditions the government sets down.

This will be my last point: the women most likely to be breached are precisely the ones who need the support and assistance of government. If you fail to turn up for an appointment or you fail to meet certain commitments to the government, what sort of person are you likely to be? You are likely to be under a great deal of pressure, probably not particularly well-educated and frightened of administrations. In my time in parliament I have found that the people who throw their letters in the bin are typically those people who have a psychiatric illness or an inability to deal with bureaucracies. They are people, in other words, who have a great deal of difficulty in managing from day to day.

And what are we saying to these people? We are saying, ‘We’re going to take the money from you.’ The penalty level is really hefty; it is more than you get for a serious breach of the law. We will be putting women who are already in poverty and under stress into an impossible position. We will be saying to them, ‘Either you do what we require, and you know that you have to do it,’—it is the latter that worries me more—‘or you go and find yourself a partner.’ There is some very recent evidence to show that that kind of continual repartnering is very damaging indeed. It is not something that government policy should be seen to be encouraging, inadvertently or otherwise, but that is one of the possible consequences of this legislation.

In superannuation too, a brief look at the government’s proposals here shows that they do nothing for women, the ones with least coverage in superannuation. There is a bit of splitting at the top end, which is very beneficial for those whose spouses have incomes over $100,000 but is of no benefit at all for women—many of whom have had interrupted working lives—who will end up at the end of their working lives with very little in the way of superannuation coverage. They are just a couple of issues I want to signal. I am particularly concerned about the government’s proposals to do with single parents and I intend to say a lot more about it, because it is a destructive, careless, thoughtless and child unfriendly policy, and the government deserves to be hit around the head very hard.
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metropolitan areas. This will be supplemented by a further $73 million which will be spent over four years in establishing up to six new radiation oncology units in regional Australia.

In looking at the question of doctors for outer metropolitan areas I note that already, in the period since the budget, we have been able to secure not only the approval for but an actual doctor for the town of Koo Wee Rup. This is a town which is going ahead but has had difficulty attracting medical staff; it already has an existing, first-class doctor, but he finds himself overwhelmed by the work. So this is a real, practical and tangible benefit which flows from the budget for the people within the area of Koo Wee Rup. It also has an impact on those within Lang Lang, Clyde, Devon Meadows and Five Ways, all of which are benefiting already.

The second local issue which I would like to raise is that of the baby bonus, which is available to parents of a child born on or after 1 July 2001. Mothers who are no longer working can receive up to a maximum of $2,500 each year until the child turns five. This is a tangible benefit to people within the towns of Somerville, Baxter and San Remo—growing communities with young families, working families, who need this support if they are to be able to maintain the balance of family life whilst at the same time maintaining the balance of their incomes. It is a critical initiative about which I have already received many inquiries.

The third local issue that I want to raise is that of aged care. Through this budget, the coalition is establishing an additional half a billion dollars to be spent on older Australians. That includes $311 million for aged care homes, $47½ million for nurses and personal care workers and an additional $80 million for carers. On the Mornington Peninsula, in Cranbourne and on Phillip Island, all of which are areas that have significant numbers of elderly people, that means that their needs and the resources that they require are being met. In particular, I am delighted that on Friday only a week ago the Minister for Ageing, Kevin Andrews, visited the Mornington Peninsula and was able to announce that the Mornington Peninsula and Cranbourne are areas of priority for aged care. This follows from the fact that very recently, at the last aged care assessment round, specific places were made available on Phillip Island: 40 additional beds on an ongoing funding basis in perpetuity were made available for Warley Hospital, Phillip Island. That has a profound effect on all the areas of need within our area.

On the question of superannuation, from 1 July 2002 qualifying low income earners who make personal superannuation contributions and have annual incomes under $32,500 will benefit from the government’s co-contribution of up to $1,000 each year. In Rosebud and Rye, working families that are working to save for their long-term future are being not only encouraged but also supported to do so.

In looking at those issues, I want to turn from Flinders to the broader national picture. As I said, I want to address three particular issues in the time remaining to me. The first is the question of what the budget means more broadly for families. I have already outlined the benefits attached to the baby bonus. In addition, in an area which is often neglected, men’s health, there is over $5 million in funding for establishing national focus groups on the problems of men in rural and remote areas—the problems of suicide and depression, things which are not frequently acknowledged in a public sense.

Furthermore, at the family level, over $6½ billion has been allocated in the budget for Australian schools for the coming financial year. Government schools are going to receive
$2.4 billion. Since 1995-96, Commonwealth funding for schools has grown by over 80 per cent. That has a very important impact on families. Similarly, in disability support services, new places will be provided for rehabilitation, training, education and employment.

I would now like to look at rural and regional benefits and what the budget means for these communities. On the communications front, within Flinders we have an important issue relating to telecommunications black spots. An original program of $35 million to fix over 250 black spots has already been completed, but this budget allocates an additional $13.3 million over three years to find alternative technical solutions in a further 34 black spots. In Mount Martha, Safety Beach, Dromana and Rosebud we have benefits.

Finally, I want to address the issue of aged care and the elderly generally. There is over $100 million for rural aged care homes to upgrade their facilities. This has a long-term impact on the quality of life for people within Flinders—for the elderly, the veterans, the more than 20,000 people in my electorate who come from that population over the age of 70.

In conclusion, this budget sets down the long-term prescription for economic health—jobs and economic growth. But it also takes care of the conditions for the young, the families and the elderly within the electorate of Flinders.

Sitting suspended from 6.30 p.m. to 8.00 p.m.

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR (Burke) (8.00 p.m.)—I rise to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2002-03 and to make some comments on what I view as a very woeful budget handed down by the Treasurer a while ago. In doing so, I will make clear my opposition to this budget in broad terms—that is, with respect to the consequences for the country—but I will also touch on those constituents of the Burke electorate that have been harshly hit by this cruel and unfair budget.

The first thing to remind people of is that this budget will put upward pressure on interest rates and increase costs for Australian families. This budget must be placed in the proper context. Three years ago the Treasury forecast that the surplus for this financial year would amount to $14.6 billion. The latest estimate for the same year is a surplus of only $0.5 billion. Any economic observer would conclude that this means pressure on interest rates. It may well be argued that this is a result of the vagaries of the market and of external factors, but the government must take responsibility for this problem because more than 80 per cent of the loss of the estimated surplus is a direct result of some deliberate decisions it has made—decisions that in my view were made not in the national interest but to save the government’s hide prior to the election last year. What plan does the Treasurer have to make the books look like they balance? He is talking again about selling the rest of Telstra, and the government is now hinting that there may be a sale of Medibank Private.

But how does one explain the state of Commonwealth finances, given the strength of the economy? I am afraid that much of this problem arises from the government’s recent reckless, selfish and irresponsible financial behaviour. We see this failed budget as a result of currency losses. The Treasurer has presided over a $5 billion loss over the past four years by gambling on foreign currency markets. He rolled the dice and they came up snake eyes. Despite numerous warnings from his own department, the Treasurer failed until September last year to do anything to address this matter. He just kept rolling the dice instead of leaving the table. It should also be remembered that the Howard government has misused an incredible $1 billion over the past five years on advertising and consultancies. In my view, this was a veiled re-
source to buy votes. In fact, it was hardly veiled—it was clear to people before the election and certainly after the election that this was a government willing to spend taxpayers’ money to basically look after its own interests before the interests of the Australian public.

Of course, then there was the Pacific solution, the Clayton solution, the solution you have when you do not have a solution. It costs twice as much to process asylum seekers on Christmas Island and the Cocos Islands as on the mainland and more again in countries such as Papua New Guinea and Nauru. We are still looking to fathom the extent of the wasteful spending, which by no means could honestly be termed a solution. Another failure of the budget was to properly look after the majority of Australians with respect to superannuation.

We all know that the Treasurer’s rationale for a budget deficit was always going to include the excuse that it was a war budget, a khaki budget—you could almost smell the gunpowder. Indeed, it is true to say that there are matters of national importance which the government must attend to in the national interest. It is now very apparent that if it were not for the Treasurer’s wasteful and mismanaged ways the budget would now be in surplus. Even if no new funding requirements for defence and border protection had been required, the 2001-02 budget would still have been in deficit by more than half a billion dollars.

The government cannot escape the horrible consequences of this budget for those least able to afford it. The budget will increase the cost of essential medicines for more than one million pensioners, and cardholders will be $52 a year worse off. This budget will also ensure that 300,000 Australians who are in families will pay an extra $190 a year for essential medicines. The budget, if successfully passed, will mean families will now have to fork out $28.60 for each prescription, up by more than $6 per script. There are many more millions of Australians who will pay 30 per cent more for essential medicines every time they go to the chemist.

This budget will cut the pensions of 200,000 disability support pensioners by $52 per fortnight, and it does not ensure any guaranteed training or rehabilitation for these pensioners. This is a disgrace, even for this government. The sickest and poorest of Australians are being asked to carry the overwhelming burden. Even I was able to accept the contention that cuts may need to be made or tax increases imposed, but why on earth would a decent and caring government slug those least able to afford it? A decent and caring government would do no such thing. It seems as if this government could not care less for the less fortunate in this society.

We have had the Howard-Costello gamble on the foreign exchange market amounting to a whopping $4.5 billion, the hundreds of millions of dollars wasted on the so-called Pacific solution and the buying of helicopters that are museum pieces. It is a wonder the government would consider devoting any further money at all to be expended by the Minister for Defence after that decision. On top of these gambling debts and financial failings we see little effort to assist the elderly, the infirm and the sick. Despite this government’s rhetoric and its hollow assurances before the election to fix the aged care problem, only $72 million was left to address the growing pressures on nursing homes and community organisations that provide support and succour to the infirm and the frail.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop interjecting—

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—In my electorate of Burke many thousands of people are concerned about their future and that of their parents and other elderly relatives. It does not
take a genius to know that there is a growing crisis, notwithstanding the remarks made by the member opposite. There is no doubt that she is aware, as all members would know, that there is a growing crisis in aged care. If they wanted to be honest with themselves, they would acknowledge that fact. Not only are there insufficient funds devoted to residential care and to home and community care programs for those in care, but the shortfall impact upon the growing disparity of income between aged care nurses and their public sector counterparts is now, on a national basis, over $80 million and climbing. Not only is this disparity inequitable; it increases the difficulty for nursing home operators to attract and retain quality staff. These problems are just a few of the concerns ordinary Australians are expecting their government to address.

In my electorate constituents want to see something done to assist them in their everyday lives. They would not have expected to see such a cruel and unfair budget handed down by this coalition government, especially in light of undertakings given by the Prime Minister prior to last year’s election that no disability pensioner would be worse off. That is why Labor will oppose changes in the budget that hurt the poor, the sick and the elderly. I am sure like all members and senators across Australia, I have received much correspondence since the budget with respect to those matters that are affecting ordinary Australians. I would like, if I could, to refer to a number of those. Mr Phill McQuade wrote to me on 21 May this year in relation to matters of concern to him. He said:

Dear Mr O’Connor

I am writing to you to let you know of my disgust at the planned budget changes to prescription costs and the changes to Disability Support Pension.

My name is Phill McQuade. I’m a 40 year old married father of 3 children aged 7, 5, and the third baby who is 2 days old. I’m currently on the Disability Support Pension. I’m no dole bludger. I’ve worked for the last 20 years. This includes 4 years in Australian Army transport corps. Four years ago I was diagnosed with Congenital Tarsal Coalition, which in English means I was born with bones in my feet joined together that should have separated. It didn’t show up till 1998 when in a lot of pain my doctor sent me for a CT scan. My ankles and feet are worn out with arthritis. I’ve had 3 operations and had my ankles fused with bolts. I’ve been through 4 years of hell. I was working previously as a storeman driver for 5 years but I had to leave fulltime work in 1998. My WorkCover claim was knocked back because I was born with this condition. I’m in constant pain 24 hours a day and on a lot of medication. My medical certificate says I can work 16 hours a week. I miss out on the pension by 1 hour. The problem is I’m a truck driver with a B double licence, but my medication makes me drowsy. To work 2 days I have to stop taking my medication. If I lose this pensioner concession card we are totally stuffed. We will lose our own house we currently live from week to week. My wife works 2 days a week as a kindergarten teacher but is taking 12 months unpaid leave for our new baby. If we are without the concession card and have to pay $28 for a script we couldn’t afford all the medication we need. My son has asthma, he’s 7. My 5 year old daughter has a condition called Renal Reflux. And my wife has Marfan Syndrome. I have been doing some work doing casual driving for a labour hire company but it’s not regular. I can’t believe they want to raise money by hitting the people who can least afford it. This is the lowest act I’ve ever heard of. It seems politicians don’t know what it’s like to struggle for money each week and care nothing for people who do. They’ll pay come next election with their jobs.

This is signed by Phill McQuade, and he is one of many constituents who have written to my office outlining the harsh effects of many parts of the budget handed down by the Treasurer. It would be a good thing if the Treasurer and other senior members of the government were to meet people like Mr McQuade or indeed read the letters that have, no doubt, been sent to their
own offices to know what effects these budgetary decisions will have on people like Mr McQuade and his family. I will refer to one other. It is from Bet and Jack Luke, who reside in Gisborne. They have indicated:

Dear Mr O’Connor,

In regard to the changes to the Disability Pension in the new Budget.

We wish to complain of the unfairness of lumping all disabilities together.

We agree that there are people who use the system, but we feel very concerned about those with mental disabilities who work 30 hrs weekly in a Sheltered Workshop, with no ability to work in any other employment.

These people who perhaps can’t read or write need some respect in the community.

We have been involved with a particular workshop, and know that some people have been there for 25 yrs and would be lost without the continuity and companionship of “their job”.

They do very repetitious work which you or I would never tolerate.

Some weeks if there is a shortage of work, they are unable to be employed, and so they rely more heavily on the pension.

We feel it is very unfair for these people to be getting a reduction of their pension.

It is those letters that bring home in the most human sense the tragic consequences of some of the budgetary decisions made by this government. In Burke there are almost 4,000 people on a disability pension, and they are relieved to know that the Labor Party will vote against the changes proposed by the government. Families in Burke are pleased that the Labor Party is standing up for them by voting to prevent the regressive changes to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. These changes will hurt people who can least afford it.

Another area of concern has been the failure of this government to provide necessary upgrades to the important transport road links in my electorate. An election promise to improve the Calder has been reneged upon—or, at the very least, deferred—and no commitments have been undertaken to address the critical problems of the Western Highway. The communities in Deer Park and the new estates of Burnside and Caroline Springs are sick to death of the ever-growing congestion that is developing along the highway. The residents of Rockbank, ably represented by their spokesperson Ian Cowie, have for years lamented the dangers associated with the patch of the highway adjacent to their community. The incidence of death and serious injury cannot be tolerated any longer. The residents of Melton and Bacchus Marsh, which is also connected to the Western Highway, share these concerns and have brought the dangers of the area—notably, Anthony’s Cutting—to the government’s attention, but without relief. As I have said on other occasions, this highway is a premier link between Melbourne and Adelaide and must be given greater priority.

As for the changes proposed to the superannuation surcharge, in many ways this decision sums up the unabashed elitism of this government. Let us remember that, before Labor extended superannuation to the vast majority of Australians, only the well-off enjoyed the luxury of a guaranteed, comfortable retirement. The coalition have either opposed broadening the superannuation net or have been dragged kicking and screaming into supporting changes which benefit those who now receive compulsory superannuation. It is laughable for any member opposite to boast that this budget assists and helps those people’s superannuation benefits.
Contrary to the rhetoric of the Treasurer’s Intergenerational Report, this government shows scant regard for the bulk of the nation. If this is the Treasurer’s CV for the position of Prime Minister, then he failed the job interview. No wonder the minister for workplace relations is puffing his chest even more than normal! The budget contained what the Treasurer boasted was a plan to boost incentives to investments in superannuation. In truth, it is a plan to benefit the well-off, ignoring the concerns of middle- and low-income earners in Australia. The budget proposal involves giving a tax cut to only the top three per cent of working Australians. Instead, Labor proposes a fairer alternative. We would consider cutting the superannuation tax for all Australians from 15 per cent to 13 per cent or we would consider cutting the tax to 11.5 per cent for people aged 40 and over. It is important to note that the packages proposed by Labor are, responsibly, revenue neutral.

In my first speech to parliament this year I said, ‘Australians are seeking political leaders who will look after the interests of the many rather than the few.’ I believe this is still the case, but the budget does nothing to assist them in this pursuit. Instead, the budget highlights the disregard and contempt this government has shown for people who it should be doing its utmost to assist and protect. It is a shameful budget and it provides the electorate with an insight into what the next leader of the Liberal Party really thinks about the aged, those in need of essential medicines and those with disabilities most in need of care.

Mr WAKELIN (Grey) (8.20 p.m.)—Speaking in the Main Committee on the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2002-03 gives me the opportunity to go through some of the successes of the Howard government. If you had asked me back in 1996, when the government came to office, whether the success which has been achieved was possible, I would not have agreed at all that it was possible to achieve what has been achieved. This is another chapter in the proper management of Australia. You can talk about border control and the war against terrorism but, while those extraordinary international events are occurring, there is still an economy to be managed and a country to be run. The sure hands of this government and its executive are something that the Australian people have come to respect.

Some of the comments from our political opponents are always predictable; naturally enough, they have to find something to probe us on, and that is the way it should be. I will run through a few of the general points in the budget—some significant, some quite large and some quite modest, but they are just finetuning the overall macro-effect which has been so effective in making this country currently probably the most successful economy in the world.

The National Food Industry Strategy is important to the regional sector and to the value adding sector of the economy, and significant resources have been placed there to give it a greater emphasis and to point up our trade opportunities. Some of the incentives provided to individuals in terms of the rural environment are also important. Greater incentives have been created to address a problem that is emerging about the availability of rural vets, and that move is very welcome. A small measure, but one which is particularly important to my electorate, is to do with scientific research in cooperation with a number of other countries into the southern bluefin tuna. That research measure will be much appreciated. In Northern Australia we have the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy, and the foot-and-mouth scare through Europe, the UK, Northern Ireland and small parts of the Republic of Ireland has made us more aware than ever that it is very important to stay ever alert with regard to this issue.
One measure that I particularly welcome in my part of the world is with regard to the Commonwealth legal services. We have a great lack of general legal advice in regional areas, particularly in the area that I come from, and the service that has been offered, particularly over the past couple of years, has been very much appreciated. The focus in the budget on illicit drugs is also important and, in answer to a question in the House a fortnight or so ago, the Prime Minister gave considerable hope as to the sort of success that is possible when you give support to the states—although I worry sometimes about whether the states do enough and whether they wait too long for the Commonwealth to become involved. Nevertheless, with the sort of the support the Commonwealth has been given—and I give credit to those states who have endeavoured to get on top of the issue of substance abuse, particularly illegal drugs—the statistics that are coming forward are quite encouraging.

Crime Stoppers is a small program but, nevertheless, it is important and very successful. The citizenship program will receive greater support. At a time when international events are perhaps making us respect our citizenship and the quality of life that we enjoy in Australia, it is highly appropriate that we remind ourselves and the population in general that it is important to Australia to be citizens of this country, especially as much of that privilege is taken for granted by so many.

In the regional sector we have a great little program called the Television Black Spots Program. For most Australians it would seem almost incongruous and most unlikely that people would not enjoy three or four television channels. But, believe it or not, some communities have only one channel. With great respect to the ABC, it is nice to have a little bit of diversity aside from that one source of television and to have Imparja and SBS. The Television Black Spots Program is a great program for small communities. As I say, most Australians would not even credit that you might have only one channel—and, of course, some do not have any television at all. That program is greatly appreciated by a significant minority of our population.

There is $14.3 billion for defence in this budget—a significant contribution from taxpayers to a pretty important part of our national infrastructure. There is a similar amount of money for education—around $14 billion, I believe. The sorts of percentage increases that the Commonwealth has been putting into this area, which is now combined in the new portfolio with science, are very significant and important. The Job Network receives some modification, some changes and some improvements, and I very much welcome that. The Job Network initiative is a world leader. Whilst everybody would agree that finetuning will always give some improvement, the principle, the structure and the comparison with the previous system show us that Australia can be well proud of the effects and results of the Job Network. Apprenticeships, once again, receive generous support. It is important that we remember that, in 1996 and prior to that, our apprenticeship and traineeship systems had dropped away. It is very welcome to see the sorts of numbers of trainees and apprentices that are coming through our nation. Of course, this is the foundation of so much of the skill base for future industry.

For the Natural Heritage Trust there is $1 billion-plus in this budget. It is an important program—unprecedented in Australia’s history in terms of the support given particularly, but not exclusively, to regional environmental projects, on which it is important to work with the states. The National Action Plan on Salinity and Water Quality, combined with the Natural Heritage Trust, is seeing unprecedented work going into our natural environment.
It is very important that support continue in the family area. With the very significant focus on women’s issues over the last decade or so, I have been particularly pleased to see some focus on men. I think a very significant case can be made for the support of men in some of the issues that they face, particularly after such a significant focus on women’s issues over the years—important as those issues are.

I will just touch on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the respect that I have gained for that department. We had some pretty significant issues in front of us with the US farm bill and the ever-present European Community with its subsidisation of agriculture. Right across the world we have a very excellent resource in our diplomats and our trade people. From my limited knowledge, I will talk about the people who are recruited. For example, in a place like France, they are people who understand the local situation; quite often they are nationals of the country, and there are even some Australian people who have perhaps undergone their secondary education in Paris or somewhere else in that land. I think the way these people blend into and understand those countries and represent Australia is nothing short of astounding.

To conclude, it is another very good budget, building on, as I said right at the beginning, what is getting to be a long period of successful economic outcomes and reminding us all that we have one of the most successful economies in the world. Not to put too fine a point on it, there is no doubt in my mind that the government’s focus on interest rates, debt and government expenditure, its bringing down a balanced budget and its focus on the real skills of this country are things that the executive and the parliament can well be proud of.

Ms ELLIS (Canberra) (8.31 p.m.)—Federal budgets always attract a great deal of attention and, in doing so, they usually attract a great range of labels. I think the worst label that you could give to a budget would be to say that it is an opportunity lost or that it is a budget that offers not terribly much at all. Basically, that is how I see this current budget. There are a number of victims of this budget. Families will certainly be paying the price. The Treasurer and the Prime Minister spent enormous levels of money in the lead-up to last year’s election, and they should be blaming no-one but themselves for the current state of the books. We are seeing the evidence of pressure on interest rates already, with the government also wanting to charge higher costs for pharmaceuticals and wanting to attack those on disability pensions in the cloak of welfare reform. Families will be paying enormously high levels for pharmaceuticals—something that we on this side are not at all impressed with, even though we do agree with some of the administrative changes that are proposed in the PBS.

I have mentioned already that some sectors of the community look to a forthcoming budget with dread. I think that is a fair thing to say on behalf of many sectors of our community. The community of the ACT, the people in my electorate, have had cause over recent years—since 1996—to dread this government’s budgets. We in this town still remember very clearly what happened to us in 1996 and 1997 in particular. The attitude to this community was one of slashing Public Service numbers. In fact, I remember that terrible term ‘cut them off at the knees’—I think that was the phrase being used by a minister at the time.

This community is recovering from that period in spite of those attitudes. The private sector and the businesspeople in Canberra who have invested their money, their families and their future in this town and its economy have hung on, determined to see that faith paid back in profit in every sense in the long run. I have to commend them on that. While this year’s
Representatives

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Main Committee

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Budget, thankfully, did not threaten kneecapping, it offered little in the grand scheme of things. I do, however, want to acknowledge that the funding for the upgrading of the Australian Institute of Sport is very welcome. That funding helps to lessen the fears held by some as to the long-term future of the AIS in Canberra, and I am pleased to see that decision has been made. I note, however, that the overwhelming amount of that money will not be seen until 2005-06, and so the announcement in this budget is really a prediction of spending in future years rather than some very large project that is about to occur.

We see the same sort of situation surrounding the construction of the new Defence headquarters, which was announced prior to the last election. Two to three days before the election the then defence minister announced that the government planned to construct the Defence Headquarters Australian Theatre at a site outside Queanbeyan. The budget papers are extremely disappointing, in reality, and people cannot be blamed for thinking that the government are still not sure what will be built or where it will be built.

Something that is not, but should have been, in the budget is the government’s decision to announce the sale of very large tracts of land in the ACT, with no consultation with the ACT government on economic or planning grounds. The ACT government has responsibility for administering an orderly program of land release and use, and has gone to a great deal of trouble in doing so, with a great deal of work being put into that area of its policy. The Commonwealth, on the other hand, just decides that it has very large blocks of land that it does not believe it needs any more, plops them onto the market and then is a little surprised when the local authorities say that this is not quite how planning ought to occur. That is perhaps something that should have been announced in the budget in a fairer and more open way.

The other two areas that I want to very briefly touch on here tonight, given the limited time I have, surround education and ageing. I am again disappointed to see the lack of good, strong investment in our future, through investment in education, particularly in the higher levels of education and in public education. I understand that there is only about $12 million for new measures for the entire science, education and training portfolios, which is about 0.1 per cent of the total education and training budget of $12 billion. It is pretty disappointing. When the government also says that we could ‘expect a fall in estimated demand for residential aged care services’, that is so unbelievable as to be laughable. It raises the question of where the government has been and where the minister or his advisers have been, if that is how they see the aged care sector. I think the front page of the Adelaide paper today had an article with the terrible prediction of possible closures of aged care services there, owing to lack of resources—or some such story. With the government going to remove subsidies by something like $152 million this year and a further $174 million in the next year in the aged care area, if it is going to have that sort of attitude towards aged care now, that raises the question of why we would go down the avenue of an Intergenerational Report which tells us that we have to worry about a growth in aged care needs in the future.

I believe that the government’s program of welfare reform is one of the most contentious parts of this whole budget. There are serious concerns about the minister’s plans for people receiving disability support pensions and for those in our communities who require that type of support now and into the future. While much noise is being made about the growing numbers of people receiving DSP, it is a fact that those numbers have been trending down in recent times; but we need to look very carefully at what the government is actually planning...
here. Firstly, the third Commonwealth-state-territory disability agreement, which is a five-year agreement, is currently under negotiation and due by the end of June. However, I noticed in recent days that the Prime Minister and Minister Vanstone have announced a four-month extension to that current agreement. I would like to come back to that a little later. Within these negotiations is the debate surrounding the money needed for unmet needs, as demonstrated during the current five-year arrangement. An additional $100 million per year was agreed to and announced by then Minister Anthony back in July 2000 and was already factored in and, in many cases, already spent by the states and the territories in their program deliveries. The government is attempting to falsely claim this as new money or as some generous windfall. Clearly, it is not. I despair at the lack of growth funds in reality in the budget arrangement for that agreement.

Secondly, proposed changes to the administration and eligibility for the DSP were announced in the budget. Currently, a person needs to demonstrate that they are unable to work a minimum of 30 hours a week at award wages to receive DSP. In the future that work test will be reduced to 15 hours a week at award wages—in other words, a tightening up of that work test rule. It is not going to affect people who are within five years of retirement age. It is going to affect existing recipients and new recipients from July of next year. There are also other changes which, unfortunately, I do not have the time to attend to here but which have been talked about in great detail in the other chamber. In the recent Senate estimates hearings, we learned that people currently working in business services, which were previously referred to as sheltered workshops, may also be facing the possibility of this new work test.

Thirdly, there are serious problems emerging, with the government refusing to accept its responsibilities for increases to salaries for those working in the community sector in New South Wales. The Social and Community Services Award, or SACS Award, was passed last November. This meant that people working in the community sector, and in this case the disability sector in particular, would receive a very justified wage increase. These people were among the state’s lowest paid non-government community workers. On 26 April the New South Wales Premier, along with seven prominent community leaders, wrote to the Prime Minister, pointing out that the New South Wales government had fulfilled its responsibility to meet its share of the SACS Award increases, at a cost of $116 million over three years. In that letter it was estimated that the Commonwealth’s share was $68.8 million, or approximately 37 per cent, of the total funding required. Still the Commonwealth is refusing to face up to this responsibility. While the government remains intransigent, the services involved are paying wages to their employees and are very quickly running out of money. The services include residential disability services, day programs, respite services, youth refuge and hostels, amongst many others.

If the time permitted I could quote scores of representations that I and other colleagues have received from this sector, from families and from organisations facing closure of the programs—all because we cannot see this government saying that it will pay its share of the costs. It is fair to say that Minister Vanstone uses a lot language and a lot of words to deny these claims but, in reality, I cannot find any way of justifying the Commonwealth’s actions. In actual fact, a serious crisis is looming. The government is holding the sector to ransom. The minister says that, if this parliament does not pass her changes to the DSP, funding for the disability sector through the CSTDA will be withheld. This is cold-hearted blackmail. In the words of the MS Society of Victoria, ‘This is Senator Vanstone’s own human shield strategy.’
People with disabilities, their families, their carers and the organisations providing services are not pawns on some game board. They are not to be used as scoring points, and they are not to be seen as people refusing to do their bit to contribute when and where they can. They are able to do those things knowing that they have the DSP to support them and to catch them if needed. Compulsorily remove that support and force them into competition in the open labour market, and you risk their chances of succeeding.

I want to very briefly refer to a couple of cases where people have contacted me and given me examples of how these changes will affect them. Danielle is a 45-year-old woman who works 37 hours a week in a business service in New South Wales. She requires support to perform her duties. Open employment is not an option for Danielle, because of her support needs as a result of her intellectual, neurological and physical disabilities. Young Stephen is a 32-year-old who works 36.7 hours per week in the same business service. I had the pleasure of meeting this young man when I visited there two or three months ago. He requires assistance to perform tasks. He is legally blind and he has an intellectual disability. He receives DSP. He lives at home with his parents, and he relies on that DSP to supplement his wages. Stephen is also working one day per month at the University of New South Wales in the mail room to gain experience. He earns a full wage for this work and he pays tax. He is gaining valuable skills in this work and now uses those skills at the business service in question. But he is not able to earn full award wages on a full-time basis, because of his work capacity.

The government has to understand that business services and other similar areas actually offer for these people an employment base that is different from the open labour market. Those business services can actually alter their day requirements when necessary. I know of a young woman here in Canberra who works a 35-hour week, but that may take a different configuration each week, depending upon her wellness and her ability. An open labour market would very likely not be able to do that for people like those I am referring to. There is another stunning article that I recommend that everybody read if they have not. It was in the *Melbourne Herald Sun* on 27 May. It was written by a young man called Lachlan McLeod, who is a journalism studies graduate and is disabled and confined to a wheelchair. It is a very good article. Towards the end of it he says:

To most able-bodied people, going out and doing everyday things may not seem like an achievement.

But to a disabled person, I can assure them that it is indeed an accomplishment to be like everybody else.

Then I suppose at the end of the day, losing $53 isn’t as insulting as the Government assuming that the disability pension is a waste of money.

These are real people. I am not making any of this up. I know that Minister Vanstone has made noises about rethinking certain bits of this, but I personally think that she has to rethink almost the whole lot.

The Eastern Regions Mental Health Association in Melbourne sent me a very detailed letter of its views about these changes. The president said towards the end of the letter:

I see the changes proposed by the Treasurer as not only short-sighted but potentially damaging to the mental health of many Australians disabled by mental illness.
We have to imagine what it is like to have a mental illness and to try to adapt to the new requirements, which will be stringent and harsh, given that what the government has said has not been refuted. The Melbourne City Mission had this to say:

The framework for the report—
that is, the Intergenerational Report—
accepts that it is desirable for Australia to aim to maintain its position as a ‘lower taxing and spending country’. This is clearly a point that can be contested. While fiscal sustainability and accountability are necessary, consideration of current and future citizens extends beyond their role and expectations as taxpayers. Questions of common good, community cohesion and individual well being must also be considered.

They had a lot more to say, but time does not allow me to go into those details. All I can say is that we have people working in the business services area who are facing massive change through the quality assurance bill, which we supported but about which we have some concerns, given the current budget situation. We have people on DSP with chronic illness or disability who need a seamless, smooth transition from support to work as they are well and able to carry out their duties. The government is totally wrong in believing that the only way it will achieve renewed policy in the disability area is by coercion. It needs to think carefully about the gains already being made by the massive number of people on DSP with no coercion. If we could increase the support and financial resources for those people and the employers employing them, I believe we would reach stages that we could be proud of as a community with no need for coercion or compulsion at all.

Mr JULL (Fadden) (8.47 p.m.)—It is not my intention to delay this chamber for long tonight, but I would like to make some comments on Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2002-03. In many respects, this is a most remarkable document. It is a remarkable document inasmuch as it has managed to provide some good, sound economic guidance for Australia at a time of very great concern; concern at our security and concern at the state of our defence forces. The government has made a commitment to ensure that they are brought up to date, that they are properly funded and that Australia can play a role not only in international affairs but in ensuring the security of the people at home.

If you look back over the last five or six years, the story of our defence forces is a remarkable one indeed. I think it is good that we pay tribute to the tremendous work that has been done in places like East Timor. When the newly appointed President of East Timor arrived at question time today, the emotion in the reception he got in the House was obvious. There was a realisation by all the members in the House, as there is in the community at large, that Australia did play a most constructive and leading role as part of the UN forces that brought some peace and security and ultimately democracy to that troubled island. There is no doubt that in providing that particular support in East Timor our defence services were indeed stretched, as our equipment was stretched. The load on those forces in recent years has been considerable indeed. It has not only been East Timor. If you look at what Australia has achieved in a number of peacekeeping forces around the world—if you look at the tremendous job that is being done and what is being achieved on the troubled island of Bougainville—I think you can see the standard of the service that we provide. We really need to congratulate and support all our forces, not only as a token of thanks but as a means of making sure that Australia does play its role in the international community.
Bougainville is not quite there yet, but it is indeed heading towards a situation where at last—after 12 or 13 years—that troubled island may have the prospect of some peace. Mr Deputy Speaker Price, as you and I both know, what has been achieved by the Australian forces in Bougainville is really incredible. It was an invaluable experience to visit that place, to see the state that it was in just two or three years ago and to realise that a form of peace had been kept and that the peace process was working through with the support of the Australian defence forces. The thing that came back to me time and time again after that visit was the fact that the ADF people on the ground carried no arms whatsoever. It was part of the arrangements that there were not to be arms used in that particular process. Our people were indeed brave, and the people of Bougainville paid tribute to the attitude of the Australian forces in the work that they undertook. The one thing that should be pointed out in terms of the Bougainville effort is the fact that the women who were members of the Australian defence forces played an enormous role. Once again, in public meetings with the personnel of Bougainville, it was pointed out to us that it was really appreciated that the women were there, and the relationships that they built up with the local communities were such that they were regarded as being trustworthy and as having a real contribution to make.

So I was delighted to learn that this commitment was made to re-equipping our defence forces, to providing that extra support and indeed to building on their numbers. Virtually daily in the papers now we read of their efforts in the war on terrorism and the role, in particular, that they are playing in Afghanistan. That in itself is going to be a major commitment for not only this particular budget but also a great number of budgets to come.

The other point I would like to allude to very briefly is the increase in allocation to our own security services. One of the things that has tended to be forgotten in recent months is that we are still very much on alert for any terrorist activity that might happen not only within this country but also in our region. I am afraid I have no time for some commentators. It would seem particularly prevalent on radio for commentators to say that there is no threat to Australia. I do not think anybody in authority in Australia, whether from the security agencies, the government or indeed the parliament itself, has ever said that there is no threat to Australia. It has been said that there has been a low threat, but never that there has been no threat. The government has recognised that our first obligation is obviously for the security of the country. Consequently, the commitment has been made for extra equipment, extra funding and, I understand, for some extra personnel.

In many respects Australia has been very lucky, and we have been lucky because of the quality of our services. But I think one of the things that probably assisted us more than anything was the three years or so in the lead-up to the Olympic Games, when a massive security operation and security check were undertaken not only in terms of what may be happening in the country but also in terms of assessing people who would be visiting. The fact that the Olympic Games went by without a hitch and without an emergency spoke volumes for the standard of the work that was done by our security services in conjunction with overseas bureaus. The reality is that Australia has a very real role to play in providing that security for our region and indeed as part of the worldwide effort to stop terrorism. The quality of our work is acknowledged overseas, and I think that the work that has been done within Australia has been acknowledged not only by the public at large but also by a number of the ethnic communities scattered around Australia who have been working in conjunction with our security
services. So, in that respect, it was a major commitment of the government to undertake to look after the defence forces and our security services. Despite that, we still had the opportunity to provide some good support for community organisations and for our education system.

There are a couple of areas that do not normally seem to come to light in these general debates on the appropriation bills. Australia’s record on the trade front in recent years really has been quite outstanding. We know that many of our trade figures in recent quarters have been in the black. While obviously the level of the Australian dollar has contributed to our success in going into overseas markets, I believe that the government should be congratulated on the real efforts that they have made in trade promotion. I was pleased to see that the export market development grants have once again been a focus of this budget and are to be extended. I do not think that people fully realise just what effect that can have. Maybe it is not a big deal in terms of our larger companies, but in our small and medium enterprises the fact that that assistance is there often makes the difference between having a go at exports and just leaving them alone and concentrating on a domestic market.

In my electorate in Queensland the vast majority of businesses are small and medium enterprises. I was going through a list of export market development grants that have been paid in the last 12 months within that electorate, and there are some amazing stories. There is the story of a swimming pool lining manufacturer who now produces his entire output for export to Germany. He makes liners for swimming pools. There is an optical company that makes contact lenses that have been quite revolutionary. They are the only one of their type in the world. They are now exporting worldwide. Jewellery manufacturers export from Sanctuary Cove to places like Hawaii— it seems almost incongruous, but they are there.

One of the classics came through just last week with some funding from the Minister for Trade. This was in the area of soft serve ice-creams. A company that was part of one of the major Australian groups decided that they would off-load their soft serve ice-cream division. Two young gentlemen took this over and decided that they could make a go of it. I tell you, Mr Deputy Speaker, next time you are in Dubai or Beijing and you have a Dairy Queen ice-cream of the soft serve variety, it came from my electorate. That company is exporting to more than 20 countries around the world selling soft serve ice-cream. The list goes on and on.

The manufacture of portable buildings is another area. A company that was involved, I understand, with the making of the sails for Expo have now got to a situation where they are exporting worldwide. They built the sails and the covers for the Commonwealth Games complex in Kuala Lumpur. Now they are building collapsible and portable silos for wheat, which they are exporting to the United States. They are making portable libraries for sale in France, car parks and major entertainment centres which can be erected in a matter of hours. This was a process which was developed in Queensland and exported to the world. Now the company are manufacturing in such diverse places as India and South Africa. I understand they will soon be going into the United States.

The other area that is a concern in my electorate—and it is one with which I have been associated for many years—is tourism. I would like to congratulate the government on the initiatives that they have undertaken in recent years in making sure not only that Australia is promoted properly but indeed that major studies have been undertaken to make sure that we maximise the benefits of tourism. I do not know how many times I have stood up in this place and talked about the flow-on effect of tourism on employment. Every time we have an in-
crease of something like 25,000 international visitors, there are another 1,200 jobs up for grabs. The success story of Australia over the last 15 or 20 years in the tourism industry has been quite remarkable.

It is true—and we had to do it—that we looked towards volume, and we prided ourselves when we first reached the million tourists a year mark. We made great noises about the fact that during the year of the Olympics we had more than three million visitors. Now we are looking at the quality end of the industry—not to ignore the others but to ensure that those tourists who come to Australia are of a type that spend more than most and have the opportunity of providing yield for our tourist operators and for our accommodation houses. It has been true that in past years we have been through a huge construction phase, particularly in hotels. Nobody has made any money out of them. Now is the time to settle down and consolidate and to make sure we do have that capacity to bring some yield in and to provide some real returns for the investment that has been made in that industry.

There is a maturity in the tourism product but, more importantly, there is a maturity in the nature of the people who work in that industry; and I think we should pay tribute to the work that is being done by TAFE and specialist colleges around Australia in producing young people who manage, run and operate various tourist facilities. I suppose my first interest in tourism arose 25 or so years ago. The thing that really used to annoy me was that the few hotels in Australia all seemed to be managed by somebody called Fritz or Helmut. If you go overseas now, more often than not you will find Australians working in or managing hotels. A number of them are working in Asia, but the reality is that a number of them are now working throughout Europe in some of the great hotels of the world.

When I was recently in London I was quite delighted when a young lady came up to me at the hotel in which I was staying to tell me that she was from my electorate and that she had graduated only recently from a course at one of the Queensland institutions and immediately got a managerial job in that particular hotel in London. A lot of effort, money and concentration has been put into the training of our young people. That money and that purpose is still there, and now of course the hospitality and tourist industries can provide our young people not only with satisfying jobs but with lucrative jobs as well. We are not just providing housemaids; we are providing the real brainpower and effort found behind the tourist industry and we are exporting that to the world.

The other issue that I would like to raise very briefly concerns one particular aspect of some of the controversy that is going on at the moment over pharmaceutical benefits. There have been increases in the rates to be paid, by both ordinary Australians and, indeed, those in receipt of pensions, for drugs under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. I think there has generally been an acceptance that this had to happen, much as some people may not like it. The reality is that science is making tremendous progress in the development of medicine, but that progress is often expensive: new drugs are hitting the market all the time and some of them are very expensive indeed.

In fact, lists of the real prices of some of those drugs that are available have circulated around this place, and I do not think a lot of people realise the cost that is involved. One of the things that the government should be congratulated on is the decision to make sure that the real price of the drugs actually appears on the label of a prescription when it comes out of the
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chemist shop. Not one but two of my local chemists who agree with this particular move have raised another issue that is of concern to them. Admittedly, it would appear from what they tell me that quite often the elderly are the offenders. Apparently a number of service clubs quite often have drives for drugs that are out of date and they ask people to take those drugs back into chemist shops where they are collected and checked. If they are still all right, they can be sent overseas to some needy countries.

The situation that they point out is that there would seem to be almost a tendency by some sections of our community to hoard their prescription drugs, and that in actual fact quite often mountains of drugs come into chemist shops for distribution overseas after their official expiry date. As one of my pharmacists said the other day, it would be an interesting exercise for the government to sit down sometime and try to estimate the cost of this hoarding of drugs. Maybe that exercise could be looked at. I thought it was an interesting aspect of this whole debate on the PBS. I certainly know people in my community who do have a tendency to hoard drugs, and obviously that is also putting some pressure on our system. Mr Deputy Speaker, I said I would not delay the House too long and my time is just about up. I would just say once again a special word of congratulation to the government for a budget that I think has achieved a great deal in very difficult times.

Mr Edwards (Cowan) (9.05 p.m.)—I welcome the opportunity to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2002-03. I do so not to congratulate the government but to condemn them for the very harsh attitude they have taken to some of the most vulnerable in our community—those with disabilities who are caught up in a very mean and tricky move by this government to change their disability support pension. I have had many calls, as I suspect have most members of parliament, not only from people with disabilities but from employers of people with disabilities.

Any prospective employer who is looking for an employee would be well served to look at employing someone with a disability. People with disabilities generally make far better employees. The facts show not only that they take less time off due to sickness and other matters but that they appreciate being given the opportunity of employment and will generally work much harder than their able-bodied counterparts. You can understand why people with disabilities feel that they have had a real kick in the guts from the government when they heard the news about their pension in the budget.

In the time that I have available tonight, I want to refer to the case of a young girl aged 29. Her disability was as a result of suffering from a serious stroke at the age of 22. The ongoing effects of the stroke are, firstly, reduced mobility and capacity in the right arm and leg; secondly, a speech disability; and, thirdly, anti-phosphate syndrome: a blood disorder, which requires regular medication, monitoring and analysis.

Her employment position prior to 14 May was this: she is a client of BizLink, a disability employment organisation which operates in the northern suburbs of Perth and does a tremendous job. This young lady was employed by RIC Publications Pty Ltd, an educational publisher, as a production assistant. She has worked there for the past three years for 25 hours per week, a time that has been altered regularly to allow her the opportunity to comfortably manage her disability while at the same time develop an ongoing career. The employer in this circumstance is to be congratulated for the opportunity afforded this young woman.

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As to her financial position prior to this government’s budget, she received the disability support allowance of $112.20 per week and had a salary of $305.75 per week, giving her a total income of some $417.95 per week. Her position post this budget of 14 May is that she is currently very uncertain of her future and is exploring the following options: first, she is looking at full-time employment, which will have negative effects on her health and well-being and will result in the loss of eligibility for health care cards which are essential to her; second, she is looking at reducing her working hours to 15 hours per week, which will see her financially disadvantaged and intellectually unchallenged, will increase her pension and increase the burden on government—an increase in the government’s contribution from $112 to $162 per week; lastly, she is looking at not working at all and receiving a full-time pension.

Her financial position post 14 May is this. Her disability support allowance could be replaced by Newstart allowance. This would represent a potential reduction of some $52 per fortnight. She could cop a reduction in salary if hours worked are reduced. Then again, there could be a loss of job. The reporting regime required by the Newstart program would create a level of physical and emotional distress that would be detrimental to this young lady’s health if employment were terminated for any reason.

This employer tells me that the current level of uncertainty is placing a significant level of emotional stress not only on this employee but also on a couple of other people that he employs. It has had some effect on this young lady’s work with this particular firm, but, combined with the support provided by BizLink, they have created an environment where this young lady can manage her disability well, at the same time developing her skills and making a considerable contribution to her employer and to her community.

The experience of this young lady over the years since the stroke has shown that increased stress levels place health and wellbeing at some risk. What young people in this circumstance need, particularly young women, is not the sort of initiative that this government has written into the most recent budget. What young people like this need is support in the workplace. They need programs to help them maintain themselves at work. And people without employment need programs and support in areas that will help them find that employment.

I really appreciate the job that BizLink does. It is not in my electorate, but it does service a fair area of the northern suburbs. Its staff are very committed and it does a tremendous job. It is one of those organisations which in the last three budgets has had to accept about a six per cent cut, called an efficiency dividend. On top of that, it has had to absorb the GST. That has meant that it has had to take one person away from the support position that it has had in the field and has had to put more administrative time into managing its budget, which is much tighter, and dealing with the GST. Here is an organisation that has done a tremendous job and that has not been helped in the last three budgets. It now finds that it has a much more difficult client workload to contend with simply because of the uncertainty and the concern that has resulted from this budget—concern not just to employers but to employees.

Another point that needs to be made is this, and I hope the government will consider it. People with disabilities, depending upon what the particular disability is, can have really good days and really good weeks. They might go for months being fit, healthy and well, and then they can have a run of outs. They can have bad days. They can have days when the disability just gets on top of them and when they find it very difficult to cope. It is very difficult when...
you are faced with an assessment at a time when you might be feeling pretty good or at a time when you are feeling very bad.

I think the government has made a real blue here. It has made a blue in picking on some of the most vulnerable people in our community. I am very pleased indeed that we on this side of the parliament have indicated that we will oppose this legislation in the upper house. A number of people from the ranks of government have indicated to me that they hope that the opposition parties in the Senate will knock this off. They are not comfortable with it, they are not happy with it, they feel embarrassed by it and they feel that these moves in the budget do not reflect some of the good things that they believe the Liberal Party stands for. I think it will be a relief to many people in government to have this piece of legislation knocked off in the Senate.

I want to say this to those government members who see there being some sort of a safety net in the Senate and who know that ALP members of the Senate will not let unfair measures like this through: if those government members are really dinkum about being concerned about the unfairness of these initiatives in the recent budget, they will do what people in the Liberal Party have done previously—that is, they will have the courage to stand up in their party room and say to the Treasurer that these sorts of moves are simply not acceptable and that he should go away and find other ways of raising the funds that he claims he needs.

There are a number of issues that I would have liked to have had the time to raise tonight, but I understand that there is an agreement to cut things short so that everyone gets the opportunity to have a say. I am very pleased to be able to join with other members from this side in giving voice to our opposition to these moves on the disability support pension and in saying to the government that it is not an appropriate way to raise money and that, if they want revenue that badly, instead of picking on some of the most vulnerable, most deserving and most needy people in our community, they should look elsewhere. There are plenty of places that they can look, and they should.

The issue that I will conclude on is that this whole budget has been sold to the community as a khaki budget—a budget which brings in increased funds because of our need to deal with the terrorist situation, because of our need to fight the war on terror, because of our need to better protect our borders and because of our need for greater security. The truth is that, when you look closely at this budget, you see that it is all camouflage; it is trickery. It is the old mean and tricky bit which this government is well known for and well identified by its own hierarchy. This is not a budget which brings in a lot more money to Defence, because much of what is being spent on defence is being achieved through cost cutting and through the delaying of longer term capital acquisition programs. The government has sought to simply con the people of Australia by talking up a khaki budget at the same time that it is hitting some of the most vulnerable people in our community. I am very pleased that the ALP is taking stock of those measures and will knock them off in the Senate, which is what it ought to do.

Mr KING (Wentworth) (9.18 p.m.)—I am delighted to support the budget tonight because the residents of my electorate, the federal seat of Wentworth, have benefited for seven years from low interest rates, low unemployment and economic growth as a direct result of the budgetary policies of the coalition government. The coalition’s seventh budget—and, if I may say so, my first as a member of this august parliament—continues the government’s excellent record of management of our economy, which has seen Australia perform better than most
other developed economies. In 2001, it is perhaps worth noting, our growth was higher than
that of each of the world’s largest seven economies and was twice as fast as the OECD aver-
age.

Following the budget speech, I thought that I would do a little survey of my own in my
electorate to determine what the feel on the streets was about this budget. I did some door-
knocking in Randwick, in the southern part of my electorate, and in Paddington, in the eastern
part of my electorate. Those are somewhat diverse communities, and I thought I would get a
reasonable response in relation to the budget. I found to my interest that, in general terms,
people were supportive of the direction of the budget. There were concerns in one or two
places that changes to the disability support pension might impact not so much upon them
personally but upon their acquaintances, but when I further examined the persons involved
they said that overall they were pleased with the direction of the budget.

Interestingly enough, in relation to issues of economic significance and financial implica-
tions, the greatest concern to the people of my electorate in the middle of May when I made
these casual inquiries—if I can put it that way—was regarding the direction of insurance and
the problems faced by the broader community, especially not-for-profit organisations, con-
cerning premiums for public liability insurance. I wish to say something about that possibly
later in this speech, although it probably deserves a separate address.

I want to point out several features of the budget which, I believe, are very important. They
include some general economic features, some sector by sector features, some of which have
been dealt with in detail by my distinguished colleague the member for Fadden, and also
some local initiatives in my seat of Wentworth which have been very welcomed by the people
of that part of Australia. Let me deal firstly with some general features of the budget. The
Treasurer concluded his remarks on 14 May by saying:

This is a Budget to keep Australia safe, to keep our borders secure, and to keep our economy strong.
I am sure that I was not the only one in the chamber that night who felt a tremendous sense of
relief that these objectives had been made the priorities for the coming budget. I believe that,
if we do get the support of the parliament—and I urge the Senate to reflect very carefully
upon any opposition to any measure in this budget—our country will continue to enjoy those
economic benefits that it has enjoyed over the last three terms of the Howard-Anderson gov-
ernment.

The budget surplus, which is provided for, is $2.1 billion in 2002-03, with every cent being
used to pay back Labor’s debt. Labor’s debt by mid-2003 will have reduced substantially
from the $61 billion that it is at present. The debt interest repayments are really quite signifi-
cant. The interest bill today is $4.75 billion per year less than it was under Labor. That is a
very significant saving. It means that those moneys can now be put into other things such as
health and education. Australian home buyers are now paying $350 less per month for a
$100,000 home mortgage than they were paying when the opposition was last in office. These
are not insignificant benefits of good economic management. More importantly, the coalition
has created more than 980,000 new jobs since 1996 and unemployment is expected to fall to
six per cent by mid-2003. It is expected that over one million jobs will have been created by
Christmas this year. What a wonderful occasion it will be when somewhere around this coun-
try some lucky person becomes the one-millionth beneficiary of the economic policies of this government—that might be an interesting photo opportunity.

Let me turn to some of the sector by sector features that I mentioned earlier. The first is strengthening Australia’s defence. In my electorate I have three defence facilities: one Navy and two Army. They are very significant defence facilities. The war against terrorism, which is currently being continued by our government in coalition with 35 other countries around the world, will cost an extra half a billion dollars, but I warmly commend the government for that effort. We must do all we can to ensure that innocent people, not just in our country but in all other countries around the world, can enjoy their peace and not be terrorised by people who have no regard for their rights. Therefore, the increase in defence spending of $1.3 billion in 2002-03, bringing the total defence spending to $14.1 billion, is welcome. The establishment of a permanent incident response regiment with capacity to respond to chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive incidents is an important step.

Major projects, too, have not been neglected. The government will continue funding for major projects such as acquiring armed reconnaissance helicopters and upgrading weapons on the Anzac frigates. I have had the pleasure as an officer in the Defence Reserves of actually being deployed on one of those frigates. I warmly commend those measures in the budget. The establishment of a permanent special forces tactical assault group on Australia’s east coast to support the existing one on the west coast is highly commendable. As earlier speakers have said today, the government’s commitment to strengthening Australia’s defence forces and fighting in the war against terrorism, including bringing important legislation before this parliament, must be given the support not just of the Australian people but of every responsible member of this parliament.

Protecting Australia’s borders is another aspect of the budget which I wish to briefly mention. Over the next five years, $1.3 billion will be spent to improve aviation security, to assist in identifying possible security threats and to increase Australia’s capacity to respond to security incidents. The offshore processing of illegal arrivals is an important measure in that regard, and it is obviously working. Border protection is also significant, and the Coastwatch patrolling activities of our northern borders must continue to be addressed. All of these are in the provision for protecting Australia’s borders. Over the next four years, $75 million will be spent for a regional cooperation agreement to fight people-smuggling and unauthorised migration in transit countries. It was pleasing to hear today that the leadership of East Timor is committed to supporting our government in this program. A strong border protection policy, maintaining the integrity of our immigration programs, is in the interests of the Australian people as a whole, of the region and of responsible migration policies around the world.

Health is another sector which is of real significance. Fighting drug abuse is of particular interest and concern in my electorate. In an area bordering Kings Cross, residents often experience problems associated with the drug trade. I am therefore pleased that the budget is funding a program for the introduction of retractable needle and syringe technology in Australia and that overall $65 million will be spent on fighting drug abuse. In the area of arthritis, which is important for a number of people in my area, $11.5 million over four years to improve diagnosis, treatment and care will be appropriated. In the area of palliative care, $55 million over four years to target education and training for GPs, more efficient backup and coordination between service providers, support for family and friends and increased aware-
ness for the wider community is another important health provision which I would seek to emphasise.

In the area of aged care and veterans, there is a tremendous interest in my electorate in the provisions in the budget. The $654 million over four years to provide quality care for older Australians is an important measure. In particular, I would mention the 6,000 community aged care packages that will assist older Australians to continue living in their own homes. This is a measure which is proving most popular. As for aged care nurses, our aged care homes will receive increased subsidies to help them attract and retain more nurses, and facilities will be upgraded in some small aged care homes. These measures in the area of aged care are of particular importance. As the Treasurer pointed out in the Intergenerational Report, we have to ensure that we responsibly address the challenges we face into the future in dealing with an ageing population. Today 2.4 million Australians are over 65; in 20 years time, it is estimated that there will be 4.2 million. We cannot ignore those demographic changes.

Another area which I would seek to address is the area of job seekers and training. In July 2003, the government will renew contracts for the most effective providers and put others out to tender. An important measure which resonates in my electorate is the announcement of 8,500 additional places each year to give job seekers greater opportunities to participate in the Work for the Dole program. For mature age workers, 11,500 places for computer skills training at a cost of $23 million over four years is a highly commendable measure. We ought not to consider that, simply because someone has reached the age of 55—or even younger these days—they are no longer able to adapt, no longer able to be trained and no longer able to be of significance in the work force. I take the opposite view; I take the view that, with measures such as these, we can exploit the tremendous experience and greater skills of our older people.

In the area of education, I am particularly proud of the measures in relation to numeracy and literacy. An increase of $35.7 million over three years for programs in our schools has been announced. Just the other day it was my pleasure to attend Bronte Public School with the Minister for Education, Science and Training, Dr Nelson, for the launch of that national program. It was an exciting day. The kids at that school and the teachers—who have not always found reason to agree with every aspect of federal policy—were very excited about the direction of the education program. Expenditure of $82.4 million over three years to expand quality teacher programs has also been announced. A massive 52 per cent increase in general funding for government schools since 1996 is part of the package. Finally, in the education area, let me mention $60 million for research into the critical new economy areas of information technology and biotechnology.

Finally in the sector-by-sector analysis of measures which are of relevance to my electorate, can I mention the environment. Increased environmental funding of over $1.8 billion will be spent to protect Australia’s environment—$198 million more than in 2001-02. Another $100.7 million will be allocated to tackle salinity and improve water quality measures as part of the national plan. In addition, $103.57 million will be allocated to improve the condition of Australia’s coasts and waterways.

Let me now turn to some of the measures that directly affect my electorate. I was particularly pleased that the government has, through the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, allocated more than $10 million to the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust. As the former chair
of the Australian Heritage Commission, I played a role in the establishment of that trust, which will establish lands for the permanent and public benefit of the people of Sydney and Australia. The trust has a vital role in managing Commonwealth-owned heritage assets around our harbour, including two in my seat: the Macquarie light station and the former marine biological research station at Watsons Bay. Funding will assist the trust to maintain these properties and continue to develop a management plan for the sites.

I am also pleased that the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts has confirmed that the coalition’s election commitment to provide capital assistance to the Sydney Jewish Museum will be honoured during the coming financial year: $250,000 will be provided to help upgrade access to the museum for people with disabilities. This will be a major boost to its fundraising drive to complete what are vital works for an institution which is, in many respects, the heart of Sydney’s Jewish community. The museum’s educational programs, particularly those associated with the Holocaust, rely on the wonderful support of the magnificent Holocaust survivors who every day toil in that museum to ensure that their story is so poignantly told. As the years go by, the absence of lifts and ramps in the museum is having a serious impact on their ability to get about the museum. This project will particularly help those volunteers, but also ensure that the museum is more accessible for members of the general public. I am proud to support this budget. I am pleased to have the opportunity to support it and, along with my colleagues tonight, I commend it to the House.

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (9.35 p.m.)—In speaking to the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2002-03, I want to concentrate on a couple of broad areas, the first being the budget and its implications on government direction and the other being where the government is heading in terms of its own policy direction and the relationship it has to the budget.

If there is one clear thing that we can all gather from the budget, it is that it was a complete failure. The Costello-Howard budget—proclaimed by the Treasurer himself in his own handouts and materials to be the sixth consecutive budget surplus—was actually a deficit. The Treasurer got it wrong right from the start. He sneakily tried to correct this on his own website when the fact became common knowledge, but he was caught out.

This budget is about taking from the poor and giving to the rich. That sounds like a cliche except that this time the rich are actually the government. This budget is about cutting spending to those least able to afford it. It is about cutting spending to people on disability support pensions and about cutting spending in pharmaceutical benefits. At the end of the day, this budget is about paying for the war on terror—paying for defence—by taking money away from those in the community that are least able to afford it. These cuts are targeted at the most vulnerable in our community, and these are the people whom the government should be looking after, rather than cutting back on what they get in the budget and giving it to another area.

One area which I have just mentioned that did get a significant budget increase is defence. Everybody on the Labor side supports the idea that we should have extra spending on defence, but when you have extra spending in a particular area, it needs to be balanced in terms of where you get that money from. There is no objection to spending extra money on defence, but it should not be taken from people on pensions, low incomes or disability support pensions. Do not take it from those who can least afford to pay for the increases.
On the one hand it is good to see the government provide extra spending for defence and to promote what I would call ‘the government’s war on terrorism’. That is what the government is trying to do: promote its own private war on terrorism, rather than bringing all the people together with it. What we know and see in the community is that people are not ignorant or stupid. They understand what is going on.

I heard one of the government members saying that he did a bit of a straw poll in his electorate and spoke to his constituents. I think we all did something similar. I went out and asked people what their concerns were about the budget. A fairly resounding response came back in my electorate that they were concerned about budget cuts. They were concerned about what would happen with the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, they were concerned about people on pensions and low incomes and they were concerned about people on disability pensions that would have their funding cut. Of course, those on disability pensions that are receiving cuts are sometimes the most in need, particularly people with intellectual disabilities. They are now out in the cold, left to fend for themselves. It is the old catchcry, the ‘catch and kill your own’ approach from government.

The government has wavered a bit. It got a bit shaky in the knees. It suddenly realised this might be a really bad idea and that it had not quite anticipated that the community would see what it was trying to do. There was a bit of outrage and a bit of feigned indignation from the minister, who thought the government might need to get a different approach on this and started looking at ways to make it less harsh. That is what it is: harsh. Less harsh is what the government thought it might make it. The changes the government may put forward are insignificant. They are not going to make any difference to those that need to have some positive outcomes from the budget.

This is where the good news stops, believe it or not, and where the bad news really begins. Labor has said that in the Senate we will steadfastly oppose changes to DSP. We will get support from the minor parties to do this. So what does the government do? What is the government’s response to a democratically elected Senate that in the end has the majority over the government if it chooses to exercise it? The government blackmails the Senate. Call it budget blackmail or whatever you like; at the end of the day that is what it is. The government has made it clear that, if we do not pass the harsh measures and the cutting back of disability support pensions to those most in need, the government will start defunding disability to the tune of $100 million per annum. That is the choice we get. That is the alternative. It is a case of ‘damned if you do and damned if you don’t’. But there is one thing for sure: this government will take away from those least able to afford it. It will attack the weak and it will give to the wealthy and the rich—in this case, the government. It just gives it back to itself so it can pass it on to other areas.

Before I talk about a range of other measures in the budget, I want to remind people of the link between the way the government operates—the way it treats people in the budget, the way it is treating disabilities and the way it deals with the business of government—and the way it ran the last election campaign. The last election campaign, without any doubt, was a single issue campaign. It was about war, terrorism, border control, border protection—wrap it up any way you like; that is what it was about. We all genuinely have some fears about some things that might take place, but when a government deliberately exploits the fears in the community—the deepest, lowest common denominator—this is when it has lost its way. The
government set out in the last election to deal with one issue only—to scare a whole country into concentrating on the one issue of border protection.

The media had its own hand in this; the media did play a huge role. After the election it was said that something like 80 per cent of front pages during the whole 33 days of the election campaign were in relation to September 11, boats, boat people or something of that nature. There was very little to do with the election campaign. This highlights the length the government will go to win an election. You might think that everything is fair in love, war and elections, and in a sense it is. But the government has taken that election win, transposed it to the budget and said, ‘This gives us carte blanche, open slather, in terms of big spending in certain areas.’

There is some need, but let us get the need in perspective and let us get the need from the right areas. Let us not take money from people with disabilities. Why attack people on disability support pensions? Why change the work test? Why attack those in the community least able to afford it? Why make them pay the extra dollar? Why make families pay that extra bit of money? It is quite simple: this government simply does not care. The easiest people to hit are often the people with the least ability to lobby, the people with the least ability to come back to the government. This government thinks it has got away with it.

The government have taken some unbelievable opportunism at the time of September 11 and transposed it not only to their campaign but now into what they do in government and what they do in the budget. It is all just flowing through. If you look really closely, there is evidence everywhere you look, every day. I turn my mind quickly to a couple of weeks ago when Minister Brendan ‘Chopper Read’ Nelson was so caught up in trying to embarrass the Queensland state Labor government that he did not realise how much promotion, how much free media, he was giving to the very subject that he was denouncing. Smart move by Minister Brendan ‘Chopper Read’ Nelson! He was waving photocopies—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Barresi)—Order! I ask you to refer to the minister by his correct title.

Mr RIPOLL—Thank you Mr Deputy Speaker. He was waving for everybody to see, in front of the media cameras, the front cover of the book he was denouncing. So upset was he about the impact this would have on our young kids that he was prepared to flaunt it around in front of all the media cameras, he was prepared to put it on his web site and he was prepared to keep promoting that book with that offensive front cover! At the end of the day, I think he actually likes it. It is as simple as that. What else could it be? We have a pretty smart minister! In fact, he was a little embarrassed, because he got up there attacking the Queensland state Labor government about some sort of approval of this for high schools, and he forgot that it was the federal government and federal funds that actually paid for the movie Chopper to be put together in the first place. It was funded by the federal government. How embarrassing it was to see the minister squirm all red-faced, with the front of the book cover in his hand. What a genius! He just kept coming back for more, because that is the genius he is! He is a great genius and we should all applaud him for his efforts!

Then you have your fully true, tried and tested one, the ‘Big A’, one of my favourites: Minister Abbott. He is like a robot with a short circuit. He is unable to feel; he cannot see; he cannot integrate with the human race. This is a man on a mission. His mission, if he accepts it,
is to destroy the union movement, kill off the Labor Party and in his spare time convince every employer that what they really want, more than anything else, is more unfair dismissal laws. Forget about making money! What business really wants is more unfair dismissal laws! If the minister just keeps telling them that, perhaps one day some of them will actually be convinced. As I said, his mission, if he accepts it, is to completely destroy the union movement, kill off the Labor Party and in his spare time convince employers that they do not really want to make money. This is how the minister comes into the House every day.

People refer to him as the attack dog. He is like an attack dog. It is a bit like those banned breeds across Australia—those dangerous breeds. He is one that needs to be muzzled. Through careful breeding over many generations, the minister’s brain—through that generational thing—was completely shrunk down to the size of a pea so that all he needs to do is control his breathing and his attack functions in the House.

Mrs Gash—Mr Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: I do believe the member is slitting the minister in tones that should not be allowed for parliamentary colleagues.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I ask you to get back to the debate.

Mr RIPOLL—As I said, it is just like dangerous breeds—I do think there is a great comparison to be made here. It is an analogy, a way of projecting. You have got to place yourself in this and think of the best way you could describe the minister. You could have a look at dangerous breeds, and this guy is just like one of those dangerous breeds. He should be kept away from all decent pet owners. Those people are decent people and they would not have a bar of it. We have the only minister, I would say, in history—apart, probably, from Minister Reith when he was a minister—that works very hard day in, day out to prolong industrial disputes. He actually attempts to convince employers and workers that they should not negotiate, that they should not resolve their disputes, that they should continue to be in dispute because that would be good—for whom, I am not sure, but probably for the minister, no-one else.

So even after the dispute is resolved, as we saw today in question time, what does the minister do? He still tries to create a dispute out of one that has been resolved. This is a minister that has lost his mind. How can you bring up in the parliament today an issue that has been resolved? The workers are happy; BHP is happy; everyone has gone back to work. They have resolved their own issues through negotiation, and that is what it is about. But, no, the minister is not happy. The minister insists on continuing to try to cause disputation, because that is what the minister wants to do. It is all about the politics; it has nothing to do with the end result. It is all to do with the way this government behaves. Luckily for the majority of workers and for the majority of decent employers out there, they know there is a better way to get on with business. They actually want to get on with business to make money.

But today I have to hand the prize to Minister Downer, today’s living proof that old habits die hard. I am sure a lot of us remember those famous words he uttered when he said ‘the things that batter’ in relation to domestic violence. Today he did it again. I might bring up a question that was raised by the shadow minister for foreign affairs when he asked the minister a very simple question about where he stood on something. His answer, of course, was the famous John Moore defence—that is, ‘Everybody knows very well what my view on that is, which is not much at all.’
This budget and this government—and the last election—are about not helping people, not coming to the assistance of people, not trying to give people a decent go so that they can provide for themselves better. They are really just about one thing: the government winning an election and having a budget that provides a smokescreen for the next election, because the next election is already being played out now. It is all about border protection—and we already know where it is at. Let us fight those issues. Let us get them on the table and let us be fair dinkum about the next election.

Ms JULIE BISHOP (Curtin) (9.48 p.m.)—The Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2002-03 before this chamber presents the parliament with a unique opportunity to safeguard the future of this country and our society by preserving our prosperity and our freedoms into the future. Edmund Burke observed over two centuries ago in the classic critique of the French Revolution that society is a partnership not only between those who are living but also between those who are living, those who are dead and those who are yet to be born. So we have an obligation to craft our economic and governmental arrangements today with an eye to tomorrow and the memory of yesterday. These bills and this budget do just that.

The budget brought before this parliament by the Treasurer is a sturdy fiscal platform for Australia’s future development. By commissioning the Intergenerational Report, the government has set in train reforms that will safeguard our nation’s future. One of the keys to those reforms is Australia’s superannuation system, and I will give credit where credit is due: there is no doubt that it is to the credit of the Australian Labor Party that it did seek to make self-provision through superannuation a part of Australian life. This has helped to insulate Australia from the future calamities that face nationalised pension systems in Western Europe, for example, and to turn around the wishful idea that taxation is a form of savings. Nonetheless, it is also true that Labor could never shake the union monkey from its back: it could not see superannuation except from the perspective of increased union power, influence and financial clout, and our nation’s retirement income strategy is the poorer for that failing.

By contrast this government, through this budget, recognises that superannuation offers the best way for Australians to secure both their own personal retirement income and the financial health of the nation. This budget will ensure that from 1 July 2002 the rebate for personal contributions will be replaced by a co-contribution. The government will contribute up to $1,000 a year towards the superannuation savings of eligible low income earners where they make personal undeducted contributions to those savings. Contributions can continue to be made by working people aged between 70 and 75. The superannuation guarantee contributions will be fairer for small business employers. The tax rate on excessive eligible termination payments will be reduced. The fully deductible amount for superannuation contributions by the self-employed will be increased from $3,000 to $5,000 from 1 July next year. Members of accumulation funds will be able to split future contributions with their spouse. Families will be allowed to make superannuation contributions on behalf of a child, and the superannuation surcharge rate has been reduced. The budget also reaffirms the government’s commitment to choice and portability in superannuation, and it makes provision for an education campaign in that regard by the Australian Taxation Office.

I think the introduction of the children’s superannuation accounts is of particular interest, given the importance of fostering a lifetime savings culture in our society. This particular measure was a very popular election commitment on the part of the coalition and will ensure that from 1 July family members, including parents and grandparents and other relations, and
friends can make contributions on behalf of a child. Not only will that child be better able to achieve financial self-reliance in the future; they will, from the very outset, be encouraged to make their own contributions once they enter the work force. There will be a contribution limit of $3,000 per child per three-year period, and this limit is flexible enough to accommodate the needs of a contributing family without compromising the integrity of the measure.

Of equal importance is the reduction in the rate of the superannuation surcharge. It is no secret that many Liberal members of parliament have had reservations about the surcharge. On a personal level, I entered this parliament some years after the surcharge’s introduction and was not a fan of it either inside or outside this place. But like many others, I recognise the valid intentions of the surcharge in addressing some tax and budget issues. Nevertheless, I welcome wholeheartedly this particular budget initiative not simply because it is an effective tax cut, an initiative that ought to be welcomed by all members of this chamber, but because it addresses the concerns of many of my constituents about this particular surcharge. Over the past 3½ years I have had numerous representations from professionals, the self-employed and many others calling for the amelioration of the effects of the surcharge, so those Australians are most pleased that from 1 July this year the surcharge rate will be reduced by one-tenth and that similar reductions will be made over the following two income years. As such, the maximum surcharge rate will be 13.5 per cent in 2002-03, 12 per cent in 2003-04 and 10.5 per cent in 2004-05 and succeeding years. The total tax relief generated by these reductions will be $50 million in 2003-04, $120 million in 2004-05 and $200 million in 2005-06. So, combined with other budgetary initiatives, this reduction in the surcharge will encourage savings and self-provision in retirement to the benefit of Australian taxpayers and the ultimate benefit of Australia as a whole. The federal government has also made it clear that it will review the surcharge arrangements after three years so as to ascertain whether any further changes will be required. Given the evidence available to date and the present circumstances of our economy, I would urge the Commonwealth to utilise that future opportunity to abolish the surcharge in its entirety.

Retirement incomes policy, including superannuation, pension reform and fiscal policy more generally, is of particular interest to the people in my electorate of Curtin. The western suburbs of Perth are home to more older people than anywhere else in the state of Western Australia. In fact, the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics census figures show that over 18,000 residents of Curtin—that is, about 15 per cent of the total population—are aged over 65, making my electorate one of the oldest in terms of the proportion of people aged over 65 years in Australia. Incidentally, in my electorate over one in four people are aged 55 or older. That is around 25 per cent. Not surprisingly, the findings of the Intergenerational Report released with the budget papers have been of particular interest in Curtin.

That report has found that, without a change in policy direction, the social and demographic forces shaping our nation will be likely to produce a structural deficit of around five per cent of GDP within 40 years, equivalent in today’s prices to about $87 billion annually. Australia’s population will age such that the number of people aged over 65 years will double and the number aged over 85 will quadruple. Almost 25 per cent of all Australians will be 65 or older in the year 2042. It will accelerate government spending on health services and aged care. By 2042, 15c in every single dollar earned in Australia could be spent on welfare and
health—an additional $90 billion annual burden on taxpayers. It will also increase the cost of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme to Australia fivefold and double aged care costs.

The report is by no means a tale of doom and gloom. The report does find that Australia is very well placed to take care of its retired citizens by virtue of our means tested age pension system and our maturing superannuation system. While 6.3 million more Australians will be of age pension age in the year 2042, spending on age pensions is likely to grow much more slowly here than in other developed societies. Further, the report’s findings take the form of challenges not problems. Armed with this comprehensive analysis, we have the opportunity to re-fashion the future. We have the opportunity to take the steps in 2002 that will bear fruit in 2042 or before—steps like the reform of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and the disability support pension. For example, taxpayer support of the disability support pension has increased dramatically in recent years and is likely to increase in the future. Twenty years ago, only 229,000 Australians received a disability benefit. Today more than 624,000 receive the disability support pension. In the last 12 years, the number of recipients has doubled. Today over one in nine Australians aged between 50 and 64 is, according to our welfare system, disabled. By taking measured and reasonable steps to address these issues today, we are safeguarding the benefits to Australians of the disability support pension system and other entitlements such as the PBS. Were such entitlement systems to collapse under the weight of their extraordinary costs, either in 40 years time or before, the ultimate losers would be those who rely on those systems. Those who would threaten such necessary reforms today will most certainly be called to account in the future.

The Intergenerational Report also affords us as parliamentarians the opportunity to discuss the social and demographic forces acting upon our national future. An issue often spoken about by Peter McDonald of the ANU is the fertility rate for Australian women. The decline in the number of children being born in Australia is very real, and the rate will drop to less than 1.6 births per woman. Other important social phenomena include the increasing casualisation of employment—a shift driven by the needs of employees first and foremost—and the growing instance of people under the age of 55 living without a partner. Further, young adults are staying at home longer. Amongst the 20-somethings, the proportion is over 30 per cent. Likewise, a lone parent now heads over 15 per cent of those households with young children. This government will continue to develop public policy to meet these changing social needs precisely because it is a Liberal government, and liberalism has served, does serve and will continue to serve the needs of people rather than ideology. Liberalism is about the sovereignty of the individual person, not about class or race. It is about making every man and woman the pilot of their own lives. It is for that reason that I would counsel parliamentarians to do more to reduce the burden of taxation on Australian families, businesses and employees. This government has made great strides in lessening that burden. It would have done even more had the opposition allowed for the implementation of the complete economic program endorsed by the Australian people at the 1998 federal election. But there is always more to do.

Our economic future is bright, unemployment is low and we continue to lead the way in growth globally. To safeguard the extraordinary development and success of the past six years, we should turn once again to the engine of income tax reduction, particularly to the reduction in the top marginal tax rate. We can be pleased that our nation faces a lower tax burden than the OECD average: about 30 per cent compared to 37 per cent of GDP. In Western Europe, it is almost 50 per cent. But our regional partners face even lower levels of taxa-
tion, averaging around 25 per cent of GDP, and that is where our competition lies. The increasing incongruity of the top marginal tax rate on income will drive away our nation’s best and brightest achievers. Labour may not be yet as mobile as capital but, in a globalised marketplace, it is increasingly picky.

Before I embark on one of my pet topics—further tax reform—we should do a growth accounting exercise to consider the sources of growth over the next 40 years. The sources of growth will be productivity and labour force growth, which can mean population growth, the labour force participation rate, the unemployment rate and hours worked. All of these will be affected by our level of taxation. But, before we focus on this, we also need to appreciate that future economic growth rates can be improved not only by making our tax rates more competitive but by curbing spending, particularly on what is being termed as ‘middle class welfare’. While the key to good growth performance is lower tax rates or a much flatter tax scale, we must also be conscious of increasing government expenditure, particularly on health and medical care for those who can otherwise afford it. The price of growth enhancing tax cuts will be curbing government spending. We should re-examine our public expenditures in the light of the Intergenerational Report and hopefully will find our way clear to continue to ease the burden of taxation that falls upon those who generate the income that supports those expenditures. I commend Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2002-03 to the chamber.

Mr QUICK (Franklin) (10.02 p.m.)—What a wonderful idyllic world it is—the view from Peppermint Grove!

Ms Julie Bishop—I don’t live in Peppermint Grove.

Mr QUICK—I mean Peppermint Grove in the sort of Alice in Wonderland view of those on the other side. Today, statistics from the latest Australian census were revealed to all and sundry, and we saw the warts and all figures of Australian society. Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2002-03 gives us an opportunity to wax lyrical about where we stand and to give our views on what is happening to our country and what is happening in our electorates. Most people have given a view on society. I am about to have my 61st birthday. My eldest daughter is 25 and my youngest is 23. They are both currently in Prague. The eldest works in London and the other, when not on holidays, works at Target in Melbourne to pay for her Dip. Ed. at Melbourne Uni. Today’s census, as I said, highlighted the warts and all figures of Australian society. We heard about the median age of Australians, the percentage in each age group, the average weekly earnings, the states which had the greatest increases in population and the birthrates. Someone mentioned to me over the phone tonight that there are 30,000 fewer Tasmanians than in the last census. There are a whole lot of things in this census that we can compare with similar things in the last census. We can compare things in my childhood with things in my children’s childhood.

In these speeches on the budget measures we keep hearing phrases about security, threats to Australia, what is happening overseas, the Intergenerational Report, retirement income policy, superannuation surcharges and what sort of Australia we are going to have in 30, 40 or 50 years time. Tonight, in the moments that are left to me I would like to give a thumbnail sketch of my electorate. My electorate is basically the same as those of most people, although what the previous speaker says is happening in her electorate bears no relationship to what is happening in any other part of Australia that I know of.
I have an electorate that is made up of three regions: huge tracts of broadacre public housing, middle-class Australia, and rural and remote regional parts of Tasmania. Each of those has specific needs. In the census statistics that are out there for everybody to see today, each of those regions can compare and contrast what they have and have not got, see where the deficiencies and needs are and see where resources need to be placed. When we come to these appropriation bills, it is incumbent upon all of us to have a realistic look at what this budget means for each and every one of us. I am a hopeless budgeter—always have been. I have always spent more than I have earned. I have been lucky enough in my few years on this earth to realise that life presents you with a hell of a lot of opportunities and, if you do not grab them with both hands and hang on to them as tightly as you can, you are never going to get another chance to enjoy what is coming along.

But a lot of Australians are not in the situation where they can grab these opportunities. Constantly in my electorate office I come across families that are really doing it hard. If you listen to some people in this place, you hear about how wonderful Australia is—a booming economy, wanting for nothing, with average weekly earnings of $X, with things being great. I can tell you that there are lots and lots of families in my electorate that are doing it really tough. You see them on Friday night at the supermarkets just before closing time carefully going through their budgetary strategies to see which bits of the chicken packages, which bits of the roast and which bits of bread are going to be marked down. In this day and age I find it hard to believe that in our Australian society we have families doing it so hard.

As I said, my electorate is probably no different from most electorates, apart from some in Sydney or Melbourne where there is money aplenty and you do not really worry about where it is coming from. When you are framing a budget, you need to be mindful of the good times and the bad, and of Australian society in general. Access to excellence in education, medical services, aged care facilities, adequate housing options, relevant child-care facilities, crisis accommodation for families really doing it tough, assistance for veterans and war widows—all these things are in the budget. When you look at the numbers and you listen to ministers espousing the virtues of their departmental strategies, you would think that everything is fine, but once you scratch the surface it is not.

You hear of the First Home Owners Scheme, the $7,000. There are young families in my electorate who love this First Home Owners Scheme. This was their one opportunity to grab a house. They went along to the bank and said, ‘Yes, we’ve got the $7,000; we have managed to scrimp and save a few thousand dollars to pay the various bills that you need to pay, for the stamp duty and for the lawyers to do all the bits and pieces.’ Then they find that they cannot really buy the $60,000 house in the broadacre public housing areas that are now being sold by the housing department: they need a 10 per cent deposit because the mortgage insurers will not accept five per cent. If you go up the road to the town of Brighton, where the houses cost $120,000, you need only a five per cent deposit, so why not double your debt? People say, ‘We can get you into the house.’ Things should be different. You should be able to buy the house that you can afford to repay, rather than doubling your debt and putting yourself under further strain. One of the statistics today is the increase in the divorce rate, and I am firmly convinced that the stress of money is one of the key contributors to the rise of the divorce rate since I was a child.

We hear lots in this place, as I said, about security threats to Australia. We hear of the wonderful role of the Americans. I have quite a few American cousins. My late Aunt May was an
American war bride. My brother married an Irish-American girl from the east coast, and they have four American-Australian kids. I take the mickey out of them and tease them dreadfully about how the Yanks were not in the First World War until it was all over, how it was two years into the Second World War before they came and how they were hopeless in Vietnam. It really worries me that we are focusing on this supposed threat. We put our hand over our heart and, unfortunately, follow George W., and it really worries me. I grew up in the 1940s and early 1950s. As a child I remember being propagandised with stuff that was trotted out every Saturday afternoon in the movie theatres.

As some speakers have said in this place, I think we need to focus on the basics. Our communities are not communities. We all have our security doors. We do not know who our neighbours are. We tend to be isolated and fragmented. Yet, when it comes to an outside threat, we are all together, all on side and all supportive. I would like to think that we can become reflective and introverted in the nicest sense, back into the communities that I remember as a child. People say that they are probably the dreams of a baby boomer, but in fact I was born before the baby boomers. Governments do have a responsibility. We as legislators have a responsibility. It is an awesome responsibility. It is incumbent upon us, as people have said in this place, to share the responsibility rather than to nitpick, blame each other and say, for example, ‘Back when interest rates were X-plus ...’ I well remember, when I was putting an addition on my house, how hard it was.

Let us stop blaming and start creating. Let us start supporting our communities, supporting the families that shop on Friday nights because that is the only way they can survive, supporting the families that are making their first commitment to a home, supporting kids when they are underachieving at school, supporting sole parent families and supporting widows who are left in large houses, with large front and back yards, who are not coping and who do not want to go into nursing homes. Let us think creatively. We do have that capacity, but we—the Commonwealth government, state governments and local governments—need to work together. I support lots of the measures in this budget. I do not want nitpick and particularise, but we need to really have a vision. I have a vision for my children. I hope that when I leave this place I can spend the next 25 years contributing to that vision. I know my children do. I welcome this opportunity to speak on the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2002-03.

Mr CIOBO (Moncrieff) (10.15 p.m.)—It gives me great pleasure to rise this evening in the Main Committee to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2002-03 and to outline the significant benefits that flow as a result of this government’s strong fiscal policy and strong management of the economy. This budget is another in the long line of Howard government budgets that have focused on getting the fundamentals right. It is a budget that is built upon the platform of keeping our economy strong, our borders secure and our nation safe. It is a budget that, thanks to the Howard government, has seen Australia continue to move forward, safe from the economic turmoil that has been experienced around the world. This budget, Peter Costello and the Howard government’s seventh budget, is one that will ensure Australia weathered the economic storm. As a result of this government getting the economic fundamentals right, we have succeeded in ensuring the Australian people have not suffered the turmoil that arose as a result of the Asian economic downturn. Australia has also withstood the storm resulting from the attacks on the mainland of the United States on September 11 last year. The Howard gov-
ernment is committed to ensuring the fundamentals are right, and it has done this by repaying approximately $62 billion of the Labor Party’s $90 billion black hole.

Previous opposition speakers have made comment that we need to be mindful of the good times and the bad. This is a budget that does exactly that: it is not a budget built on short-term economic sunshine, nor is it a budget that offers a knee-jerk reaction to short-term economic decline; it is a budget that is in Australia’s best interests in the long term and it is a budget that, as I have said, has seen Australia weather economic turmoil throughout the world.

This week’s Economist magazine noted as part of its economic and financial indicators table that ‘Australia’s GDP rose by 4.2 per cent in the year to the first quarter, by far the biggest increase of any country in our table’. We have seen Australia surge forward with economic growth of 4.2 per cent. Let us compare and contrast that growth with that of other developed countries around the world. Opposition members like to compare Australia with Third World and developing nations, but I will compare apples with apples—I will compare us to those other developed countries around the world. Canada has had economic growth of 2.1 per cent; France, 0.3 per cent; Japan, minus 1.9 per cent; Switzerland, 0.2 per cent; the United States—the economic powerhouse of the world—has had economic growth of only 1.5 per cent; and the entire European area has had economic growth over the past year of only 0.1 per cent. We see that Australia is surging ahead. We are surging ahead because this budget, like all previous Howard government budgets, is solidly built on a platform of getting the economic fundamentals right. It is not a budget that seeks to take advantage of political opportunism. It is not a budget that seeks to ensure that we creep our way back into office by only looking after certain sectoral interests; it is a budget for all Australians. It is a budget, as I said, that keeps our economy strong, our borders safe and our nation secure.

When you look forward, however, you also see that Australia does not suddenly fall away. This budget will, according to the Economist magazine, continue to hold Australia in very good stead. The Economist poll predict four per cent growth for Australia in 2002. Again, let us compare that with other developed countries: Canada, only 2.9 per cent growth; France, 1.4 per cent growth; Germany, 0.9 per cent growth; Italy, 1.3 per cent; Japan, still languishing at minus 0.8 per cent; and the United States, 2.9 per cent. The same applies in the following year in the Economist forecast for 2003, where Australia is again ranked No. 1 at 3.9 per cent growth. It is very safe for the Australian people to place their faith in the Howard government. We have delivered time and time again, and this budget has once again scored a goal.

One of the key government initiatives that was handed down under this budget was the additional $194 million for the war against terrorism. I find it interesting that opposition members refer to a ‘supposed threat’. The member for Franklin, who spoke immediately prior to me, mentioned a so-called supposed threat, about how he had been ‘propagandised’ throughout the sixties. He spoke of how the United States appeared, in his words, ‘to be an abject failure when it came to previous wartime experience’. I am intrigued by this notion of a ‘supposed threat’. Apparently it is only a ‘supposed threat’ that terrorists would seek to murder nearly 50,000 people in the World Trade Centre. They were only successful in murdering 3,000. I find it incredible that it is only a ‘supposed threat’ when now on almost a weekly basis we see attempts by terrorist groups throughout the world—for example, an attempt to place a shoe bomb on board a flight from Europe to the United States. These ‘supposed threats’ seem to me to be anything but ‘supposed’. They seem to me to be very real threats and threats that go to the very heart of democracy and what it means to live in a free country.
If we relent, if we move away from maintaining the defence that we have against these people who would seek to make us live in fear, who would seek to make us question the very lives and freedoms that we have, then we most certainly have lost. I am very proud to be part of a government that is playing its role in protecting the democratic ideals that Australia has embodied for over a century.

In addition to the $194 million for the war against terrorism, the Howard government has also provided $1.3 billion to upgrade domestic security over the next five years. This has involved additional spending in terms of aviation security. We have seen the introduction of the air marshal system at a cost of $40.2 million for the financial year 2002-03, rising to $169 million over the next five years. The air marshal program is a very tangible way in which the Australian government is helping Australians to feel safe when they take to the skies. It is also helping the Australian tourism industry to weather the terrorism storm—and I will speak on this further. With regard to domestic security, we also have provided additional funding of $110.9 million for the financial year 2002-03 to assist agencies such as ASIO, the Australian Federal Police and the National Crime Authority to access additional investigative technology—the kind of technology that will ensure we have success, as we have had in the past, in defeating those who would seek to threaten our democratic way of life.

We also have, as a result of an additional $113.7 million of funding, an increased response capacity. This will directly assist Health and Ageing to build and develop a stockpile of biological weapons vaccines and antidotes. It will also mean that we have an incident response regiment and a second counter-terrorism tactical assault group. Again, these are very tangible measures that the Howard government is taking to ensure the Australian people feel safe and secure in our way of life and know that our country will not fall victim—or will certainly have an extremely low chance of falling victim—to the kinds of base terrorist attacks that we have seen in other countries. I can honestly say from my discussions with constituents and from my own perspective, I would never want Australia to become a country that lives in fear like countries such as Israel, the United Kingdom and now the United States. Many Australians would like to believe this will never happen in this country. But it can. The way for us to prevent these attacks is to be vigilant.

This budget also provides funding of $1.6 billion for border security. As a result of this funding, we will succeed in maintaining Australia’s borders. This budget provides an increase of $22.3 million for coastal surveillance. It also provides for the construction of a $21 million facility on Christmas Island to ensure that those who would seek to queue-jump, those who would seek to undermine the very equitable nature of our refugee program, will not succeed. These direct measures will ensure the Australian people can continue to offer all people around the world safety and harbour on an ongoing basis in an equitable way. We will not allow those who seek to bypass the integrity of our system to go through other countries such as Indonesia and then jump on board a boat and come to Australia.

I will turn now to some very direct ways this budget will benefit the people of the Gold Coast and in the electorate of Moncrieff. This budget goes to the core of assisting a region like the Gold Coast, principally through increased spending being provided to the tourism industry. It is fair to say the Howard government and the Minister for Small Business and Tourism, the Hon. Joe Hockey, are providing a direct impetus for the tourism industry and safeguarding the future of the industry in trying times. Tourism benefits to a significant extent
as a result of some $50 million additional spending. Key initiatives such as $24 million of additional funding for the Australian Tourist Commission, an additional $8 million for the See Australia program and an additional $8 million for the regional tourism program are of direct benefit.

Fundamentally, however, tourism benefits because Australia will once again be regarded as a safe destination. One of the key results of the attacks on the mainland United States was a loss of confidence among tourists. The Australian tourism industry, an industry that accounts for some 30 per cent of my local economy on the Gold Coast, suffered as a result of this downturn in the willingness of people to travel abroad. Now, because we have secured our country and secured our borders, people feel safe travelling to the Gold Coast. And safety is one of the principal drivers of a healthy and vibrant tourism industry.

In addition to assisting the tourism industry, the Howard government’s budget extended the PELS to Bond University students. Bond University, Australia’s most successful private university, is based on the Gold Coast. Those opposite—not all those opposite, but certainly some—are opposed to the very notion of private tertiary funding. Little wonder, then, that Bond University would never stand a chance of succeeding as a private tertiary education model if those opposite were in government. In contrast, this government has looked after and directly assisted institutions such as Bond University through the extension of the PELS to postgraduate students.

Likewise, additional funding has been provided for the Gold Coast film industry and for the film industry broadly. The Gold Coast film industry is a fledgling industry that really benefits as a result of this government’s film industry package. Although not announced as part of this budget, it is one of several measures the Howard government introduced. Since its introduction, the Gold Coast has attracted big budget feature productions. The direct benefit of these movies is a significant increase in employment for those who work directly on the film set and indirectly in areas such as special effects production and post production.

In the time remaining, I urge all members to consider the benefits of this budget. I would also make some brief comments on those opposition members who seek to reject this government’s initiatives in the Senate. I cannot help but think that the opposition to changes to eligibility for the disability support pension and the increase in the copayment under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme reek of political opportunism. It is absurd that those opposite say this government is being mean and tricky because we seek to decrease the number of hours for those on disability support pensions from 30 hours to 15 hours. How can the opposition rationally argue that 30 hours is the acceptable level to set the threshold? At present if you are capable of working 31 hours, that is bad luck. If you are capable of working 29 hours, good on you, you are eligible for the disability support pension. We have now lowered the threshold to 15 hours, and all of a sudden the arbitrariness of the threshold does not mean anything anymore. The opposition attempts to portray this government as being mean and tricky. I urge support for this budget.

Debate adjourned.
QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The following answers to questions were circulated:

Media: Cross-media Ownership Rules

(Question No. 3)

Mr Murphy asked the Prime Minister, upon notice, on 13 February 2002:

(1) Has his attention been drawn to a presentation by the Chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA), Professor David Flint, launching the ABA research report Sources of News and Current Affairs, 3 May 2001 and titled “How news is made in Australia” in which Prof Flint called for the relaxation of Australia’s cross media ownership laws.

(2) Has his attention also been drawn to Prof Flint’s conclusion that the greatest influence on the media is not the media owners but the journalists, themselves, who are the most influential factor in the making of news; if so, does he concur with this view.

(3) Do Australia’s cross media ownership laws need to be changed along the lines Prof Flint has suggested; if so, why.

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

(1) and (2) I understand Professor Flint indicated that he was providing a personal viewpoint and was not speaking in his capacity as Chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Authority.

(3) On 21 March 2002, the government introduced the Broadcasting Services Amendment (Media Ownership) Bill 2002. The Bill amends the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 (the Act) to empower the Australian Broadcasting Authority to grant ‘exemption certificates’ to applicants seeking to acquire media organisations that would otherwise represent a breach of the cross-media rules. Exemptions will be subject to applicants meeting requirements to maintain separate editorial decision-making responsibilities. Regional broadcasters subject to an exemption certificate will be required to meet prescribed minimum levels of locally relevant news and information services, or maintain existing levels where those are higher.

The Bill repeals the media-specific foreign ownership provisions in the Act which apply to both free-to-air and pay television. The government has also committed to discontinuing newspaper specific foreign ownership limits within its foreign investment policy.

The government’s objectives are to maximise competition while protecting diversity of opinion in the marketplace.

Media: Cross-media Ownership Rules

(Question No. 11)

Mr Murphy asked the Prime Minister, upon notice, on 13 February 2002:

(1) Is he aware that (a) News Limited is an Australian subsidiary of News Corporation owned and controlled by Mr Rupert Murdoch, (b) News Limited has interests in more than 100 national, regional and suburban newspapers throughout Australia, (c) in terms of its share of circulation within Australia, News Limited has approximately two thirds of the capital city and national newspaper market; three quarters of the Sunday newspaper market, almost fifty percent of the suburban newspaper market and almost one quarter of the regional newspaper market, (d) News Limited has a quarter stake in Foxtel’s pay television and News Interactive online and (e) News Limited has additional media interests in AAP Information Services.

(2) Is he also aware that (a) Publishing and Broadcasting Limited (PBL) is an Australian media company which is chaired by Mr James Packer and which owns and controls the Nine Television Network and the magazine publisher Australian Consolidated Press, (b) the largest shareholder in PBL is Mr Kerry Packer, (c) PBL owns and controls three metropolitan and one regional television licences giving it a reach of more than half of the potential audience, (d) in terms of pay television, PBL has a quarter interest in Foxtel and a third interest in Sky News, (e) PBL publishes more than 65 magazines and its share of the circulation of the top thirty Australian magazines is approximately 40% and (f) PBL has a joint on-line operation known as ninemsn.
(3) Do Australia’s cross-media laws prohibit a person from owning and controlling newspapers, television stations and radio stations in the one licence area.

(4) In light of numerous media reports since the last federal election, will the Government proceed with changes to Australia’s cross-media ownership laws to permit a person to own and control newspapers and television stations or radio stations, or both, in the one licence area; if so, why.

(5) Can he guarantee that such changes will not lead to a further concentration of media-ownership in Australia; if so, how; if not, why not.

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

(1) & (2) I am aware that both News Limited and Publishing and Broadcasting Limited have interests in a range of Australian media outlets.

(3) Yes.

(4) & (5) The government supports reform of Australia’s media ownership laws.

Without reform, the government believes that the current media ownership laws will consign the Australian media sector to an outdated structure, little or no capacity for new players, an absence of further competition, and an inability to respond to a rapidly evolving and converging international media environment.

The government introduced legislation on 21 March 2002 to amend the Broadcasting Services Act 1992 (the Act) to allow exemptions to be granted to the cross-media rules if undertakings are given that companies will maintain existing levels of locally produced news and current affairs in respect of radio and television and that separate and distinct editorial processes are put in place. The government’s objectives are to maximise competition while protecting diversity of opinion in the market place.

Suicide

(Question No. 69)

Mr Murphy asked the Minister representing the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 13 February 2002:

(1) Has the Minister’s attention been drawn to an advertorial titled “Self-Deliverance and Plastic Bags: Proven effective! Introducing the customised ‘EXIT BAG’”.

(2) Is the product being marketed in Australia; if so, for how long has the Minister been aware of the marketing of this product.

(3) Is the product being marketed by direct mail, through franchises or some other means; if so, what are the details of this medium.

(4) Does the product facilitate suicide or euthanasia; if not, why not.

(5) Does the Government have a policy on the sale of this product in Australia; if so, what are the details.

(6) Will the Minister ensure that, if the product is found to facilitate suicide or euthanasia, it be removed from sale in Australia; if not, why not.

Mr Andrews—The Minister for Health and Ageing has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

(1) Yes.

(2) I have no knowledge of the product being marketed in Australia. However, if Mr Murphy has such evidence, he should forward it to the Minister as soon as possible.

(3) I have no knowledge of this occurring.

(4) The product describes a method of taking one’s own life. Such information has previously been published by other organisations associated with euthanasia.

(5) The question as to whether the Commonwealth should take action to prohibit the importation or sale of this product in Australia has been referred to the National Advisory Council of Suicide Prevention (NACSP) for expert advice.
The issue as to what action, if any, should be taken in regard to this product will be considered following advice from the NACSP.

**Aviation: Air Safety and Cabin Air Quality**

*(Question No. 79)*

Mr McClelland asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, upon notice, on 13 March 2002:

Has the Civil Aviation Safety Authority reassessed its requirement for monitoring the operations and cabin and cockpit air quality of the BAE 146 aircraft operating in Australia since October 2000; if so, what reassessment has been made and have any practices changed as a result of that reassessment; if so what practice or practices have changed.

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

The Civil Aviation Safety Authority issued an Airworthiness Directive, effective 3 April 2001, which requires all operators to undertake inspections of oil contamination at intervals not to exceed 500 flights.

In October 2000 the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee tabled its report on Air Safety and Cabin Air Quality in the BAE 146 Aircraft in Parliament with eight recommendations.

The issues raised have been addressed in the Government response to the Committee’s report.

Action to table the Government’s final response will be progressed as quickly as possible. A final consolidated response has recently been sent to the Prime Minister seeking agreement to tabling at the earliest possible opportunity.

Final clearance and tabling of the Government’s response was delayed as a result of the Federal election and to allow for the consideration of recently completed international studies. Accordingly, the response has been updated to ensure it represents a satisfactory consideration of the Senate Committee’s recommendations.

**Rail: Alice Springs to Darwin Railway**

*(Question No. 104)*

Mr Martin Ferguson asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, upon notice, on 13 February 2002:

(1) In answers given during Senate Estimates (Senate Committee Hansard, 19 February 2001, page RR&T 71) concerning his Department’s assessment of the viability of a proposed Parkes international freight airport, was it stated that his Department had been lobbied over a number of years and could not see any economic viability in the proposal and that a due diligence process had been followed.

(2) If so, how can he justify the total lack of any economic assessment of the viability of the Alice Springs to Darwin rail project before committing expenditure by his Department, as confirmed in the answer to question No. 2036 (Hansard, 7 December 2000, page 23867), yet conduct a due diligence process and an assessment of the economic viability of a far smaller project, the Parkes international freight airport.

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

(1) & (2) As I have indicated previously there have been a number of economic assessments conducted into the Alice Springs to Darwin railway project.

Completion of the line will provide the final link between mainland capital cities on the interstate rail network, an objective that has been targeted for over 100 years. The line is also expected to enhance the importance of the port of Darwin which is well placed for access to Asian markets. Importantly, the construction and operation phases of the railway will also create significant employment, particularly in regional Australia.
Parliamentarians’ Entitlements
(Question No. 122)

Mr Martin Ferguson asked the Minister representing the Minister for Finance and Administration, upon notice, on 13 February 2002:

(1) What method was used to calculate the limit of $125,000 for Members of the House of Representatives for personalised stationery and newsletters.

(2) For each of the last 10 financial years, what has been the average sum spent by Members on personalised stationery and newsletters.

Mr Costello—The Minister for Finance and Administration has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

(1) The decision was taken having regard to past usage patterns and a desire to apply an appropriate constraint without unreasonably limiting the ability of Members to adequately communicate with constituents.

(2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Average Expenditure</th>
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<td>2000-01</td>
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Notes:
- Data for the year 1991-92 are not available.
- Figures do not include the stationery/printing costs met by the Department of the House of Representatives.
- The averages have been calculated using total expenditures and dividing them in each year by the number of Members on a full year basis.

Kirribilli House: Official Functions
(Question No. 129)

Mrs Crosio asked the Prime Minister, upon notice, on 13 February 2002:

(1) Is it a fact that guests, including Ros Packer, Ray Martin, Kerry Chikarovski, David Leckie, Dick Smith, Donald McDonald, Nick Greiner and Malcolm Turnbull, attended a function at Kirribilli House on Friday, 21 December 2001.

(2) Was this event catered; if so, (a) what food and beverages were served, (b) did the guests pay for the catering of this event and (c) what was the cost per head of catering for this function.

(3) What sum of Commonwealth money was used to cater the function.

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

(1) An official function was held at Kirribilli House on Friday 21 December 2001 involving a wide cross section of the Sydney community. However, it has been the long established practice of my department not to release the names of guests attending functions at the official residences.

(2) & (3) Appropriate catering was provided at the function.

I have continued the established practice of previous Prime Ministers by hosting such functions at Commonwealth expense. I am advised by my department that the cost of catering for this and other functions I have hosted is in line with historical patterns.

Health and Ageing: Accommodation Places
(Question No. 191)

Mr Murphy asked the Minister for Ageing, upon notice, on 11 March 2002:
(1) How many aged care beds formally allocated to operators by his Department remain non-operational.

(2) What steps is he taking to ensure aged care operators bring these beds on-line.

(3) When will these beds be brought on-line.

(4) What action will he take if formally allocated aged care beds remain non-operational on 1 January 2004.

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

(1) The Aged Care Act 1997 (the Act) provides that aged care providers have a period of two years to bring a bed on-line. As at 31 December 2001, there were 2,816 beds outstanding beyond two years.

(2) Provisional Allocations are subject to conditions under the Act. These conditions have recently been strengthened and now require providers to report quarterly on progress towards meeting milestones and bringing places into operation.

I have asked the Department to review all provisional allocations made prior to the 2000 Aged Care Approvals Round. The review will determine what action is appropriate for each provisional allocation under the legislation and guidelines. This could involve continuing to closely monitor the provisional allocation, seeking surrender of the provisional allocation by the approved provider, varying the provisional allocation or revoking the allocation.

(3) Under the Act, all aged care providers have two years to bring the beds on-line. All holders of provisional allocations have to meet this limit unless the Department agrees there are extenuating circumstances as defined in the Act.

(4) The legislation states at Section 15-4 that the Secretary may vary or revoke a provisional allocation if the Secretary is satisfied that a condition to which the provisional allocation is subject has not been met.

Press Gallery: Pecuniary Interests
(Question No. 229)

Mr Murphy asked the Prime Minister, upon notice, on 14 March 2002:
Further to the answer of the Minister representing the Minister for Communications, Information and the Arts to question No. 52, will he introduce legislation to require members of the Canberra Media Gallery to complete a register of pecuniary interests to be held by the Clerk of the House of Representatives; if not, why not.

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

This issue was considered by the Committee of Inquiry Concerning Public Duty and Private Interest (the Bowen Committee) in 1979. The Committee rejected any proposal to impose a requirement for disclosure of interests or any other form of regulation upon political journalists, noting that such a requirement “would be seen as an attempt to blunt the teeth of criticism.” The Committee recommended that no form of government control be introduced to regulate conflicts of interest involving the media, and concurred with the view that “self regulation was to be preferred to government intervention”.

I am advised that this approach was endorsed by the Hawke government in 1983 and, consistent with the Committee’s view, the then government indicated that the issue would be best considered by the members of the media gallery themselves and relevant organisations. The Statement of Principles issued by the Australian Press Council in October 1996 includes guidance for members on the disclosure of any commercial or other interest by publications which might be construed as influencing the publication’s presentation of news or opinion.

The government has no plans to introduce legislation to replace current arrangements.

Transport: Shipping
(Question No. 250)

Mr Danby asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, upon notice, on 19 March 2002:

(1) Is he aware of any reports that Canadian Steamships Line Incorporated Australia (CSL), is planning to sell CSL Yarra to its partner company CSL Asia.
Is he aware of reports that the plan to sell CSL Yarra to CSL Australia will result in the sacking of the Australian crew of CSL Yarra.

Can he give an undertaking that the crew will not be replaced with cheaper offshore sailors.

Are foreign sailors who work on cargo ships permitted in Australian waters subject to the same award, rates of pay, and conditions as Australian sailors; if not, why not.

How many Australians sailors are currently employed in the Australian shipping industry.

How many Australian sailors were employed in the Australian shipping industry in (a) 1996, (b) 1997, (c) 1998, (d) 1999, (e) 2000 and (f) 2001.

Has there been a decline in sailors for this industry during these years; if so, does this coincide with the ending of the cabotage system whereby foreign ships can only carry a cargo when Australian ships are not available.

Will the Government seek to reintroduce cabotage in Australia.

How many continuing voyage permits has the Australian Government issued to foreign vessels each year since 1996.

Is he aware of any incidents since 1996 where either single or continuing voyage permits have been issued to foreign ships where an Australian ship has been available to carry cargo.

How many Australian ships are currently registered to carry cargo.

How many Australian ships were registered to carry cargo in each year since 1996.

Has there been an increase in the amount of permits issued to foreign ships wishing to carry cargo, if so, has this led to a decline in the number of Australian ships in recent years.

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

Yes. The vessel has been sold to another CSL subsidiary located overseas.

The maritime unions and CSL have agreed on how the CSL Yarra will operate in the future and the employment of its current crew.

Licences to engage in the Australian coasting trade are not restricted to Australian flagged and crewed vessels, and are issued, pursuant to subsection 288 of the Navigation Act 1912. This is subject to conditions that:

1. seafarers employed on the ship are paid wages at the current rates ruling in Australia for seamen employed in that part of the coasting trade; and
2. if applicable, the crew has access to the passengers’ library.

These conditions do not apply to ships with permits that may be issued to carry some coastal cargoes where licensed ships are not available.

Foreign ships that are not engaging in Australia’s coasting trades are not part of Australia’s domestic economy and should not have to pay Australian levels of wages. A foreign ship holding a coasting trade permit is deemed not to be engaging in the coasting trade when carrying cargo or passengers to, from or between the ports specified in the permit. These arrangements, as set out in the Navigation Act 1912, are of very long standing.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics show there were 14 000 people employed in the “Water Transport” industry (defined as international sea transport, coastal water transport and inland water transport) at 31 August 2001. The Australian Bureau of Statistics does not publish a further break-up of Water Transport industry employees, to show specifically the number of sailors employed in the Australian shipping industry.

Australian Bureau of Statistics’ employment data for the Water Transport industry, which is a category that includes more than just the sailors in the Australian shipping industry, for each year is as follows:
Calendar Year | Number Australian water (sea) employed in the Australian shipping Industry
--- | ---
1996 | 13,000
1997 | 10,000
1998 | 10,000
1999 | 11,000
2000 | 12,000
2001 | 14,000


1. Australian Bureau of Statistic’s published data does not detail numbers of sailors employed specifically in the Australian shipping industry.
2. The Government has not changed the cabotage legislation, namely Part VI of the Navigation Act 1912. These provisions are long standing and have not been changed for the last 25 years.
3. The number of single voyage permits (SVPs) each year since 1996 is shown in the table below:

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<tr>
<th>Calendar Year</th>
<th>Number of Cargo SVPs Issued</th>
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<tr>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>675</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. The number of continuing voyage permits (CVPs) each year since 1996 is shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calendar Year</th>
<th>Number of CVPs Issued</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. No. A permit is only issued where there are no licensed vessels available for the intended voyage or that the services of the ship do not meet the reasonable requirements of the port or the shipper.

6. and (13) There is no separate category of registration under the Shipping Registration Act 1981 for “ships to carry cargo”. The consolidated statistics maintained by the Shipping Registrar distinguish commercial and trading ships, of which some will have the capacity to carry cargo.

However, considering the context of the question, it is appropriate to provide also the numbers of ships that are licensed to carry cargo under the coasting trade provisions of the Navigation Act 1912. This is a much smaller number than the number of registered ships noted above, and could include some foreign-flag ships, as these may obtain a licence. Australian Licences can be issued to any vessel regardless of Flag State provided it meets the requirements of Part VI of the Navigation Act 1912.

The numbers of commercial and trading ships on the Australian Register of Ships and the numbers of licensed vessels each year since 1996 are shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year ended 30 June</th>
<th>Number of commercial and trading ships</th>
<th>Number of coasting trade licences issued</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>944</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>947</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>945</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>970</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1,023</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The total numbers of permits are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calendar Year</th>
<th>Number of Cargo SVPs Issued</th>
<th>Number of CVPs Issued</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>695</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>741</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>648</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>623</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>790</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No. Permits may be only issued where there is no licensed vessel available, or where the service provided by licensed vessels is inadequate.

**Immigration: Asylum Seekers**

*(Question No. 252)*

**Mr Bevis** asked the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, upon notice, on 20 March 2002:

1. How many asylum seekers have been detained under the Government’s “Pacific Solution”.
2. Where have asylum seekers been detained and how many have been detained at each location.
3. What is the status of individual applications for asylum, including how many (a) have been accepted, (b) have been denied and (c) are still waiting a determination.
4. Of those who have been accepted, to what localities have they been transported and what ongoing assistance has been provided.
5. How many asylum seekers currently awaiting a determination of their status come from Afghanistan, and of these, how many are identified as being members of the Hazara community.
6. Are there any Hazara translating services available to these asylum seekers; if so, what services are available and in what detention facilities are they offered.

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

1. 1515 asylum seekers have been accommodated in the offshore processing centres in Nauru and Papua New Guinea.
2. 1159 asylum seekers have been accommodated on Nauru and 356 on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea. As at 28 May 2002, asylum seeker numbers on Nauru and Manus are 1102 and 340 respectively.
3. (a)-(c) The announcement of refugee status determinations in both centres commenced on 8 April 2002. Processing of asylum claims in Nauru is being undertaken by both the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA). DIMIA is processing all claims on Manus. As at 28 May 2002, 628 decisions have been made so far. Of these, 433 are approvals and 195 are refusals. The processing of the remaining claims of the asylum seekers is continuing.
4. A family of five, who have been found to be refugees, have been resettled in Australia from Nauru following advice that the mother was in need of medical treatment not available in Nauru. On 9 May 2002, 59 persons from Nauru travelled to New Zealand. These were from the UNHCR caseload and comprised 5 Afghans and 40 Iraqis who had been found to be refugees and 14 Afghans with links to the Tampa group whose claims for protection have not yet been finalised.
5. Seven Afghans on Nauru have been found to require protection and five of these travelled to New Zealand on 9 May 2002. The remaining 753 Afghan asylum seekers on Nauru have protection claims outstanding. There are no Afghans on Manus. The number of Afghans on Nauru who identify themselves as being Hazara is not available at this stage.
   As at 1 May 2002 there were 137 asylum seekers from Afghanistan in Australia who have protection claims outstanding. Of the 137 in Australia 22 identify themselves as being members of the Hazara community.
6. Every effort is made by DIMIA to provide access to language specific interpreters/translators. All mainland immigration detention facilities have access to translating and interpreting services through the National Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) via phone conferencing.
On-site interpreters are provided at Curtin and Woomera Immigration and Reception Processing Centres (IRPCs). Woomera IRPC has also had on-site access to Hazara interpreters as required. Where asylum seekers have requested access to a Hazara interpreter/translator the Department has sought to comply with this request by utilising TIS via phone conferencing if there is no on-site Hazara interpreter/translator available or readily accessible. On-site interpreters can be arranged in advance through TIS but logistical constraints including transport can delay the immediate availability of an interpreter on-site. On occasions where Hazara interpreters are not available through TIS then, with agreement from the asylum seeker, a Dari interpreter may be used given the linguistic similarity between the two languages.

In Nauru there are 2 Dari interpreters and 5 Afghan Community Liaison Officers who also assist with interpreting and translating.

When DIMIA undertakes refugee status determination interviews in either Manus or Nauru qualified interpreters also accompany the interviewing officers to interpret during interviews.

**Recording Industry: Code of Practice**

*(Question No. 284)*

**Mr Murphy** asked the Attorney-General, upon notice, on 21 March 2002:

(1) Further to the answer to question No 2694 *Hansard*, 6 August 2001, page 29260), is he aware of the Guidelines For Retailers Handling Compact Discs And Tapes With Explicit Lyrics.

(2) What is the procedure for complaint and review of audio classification where (a) an audio recording is found for sale in a retailer’s premises which has apparently no identifiable classification, (b) an audio recording is found to have a classification of the kind listed in his answer but, in the opinion of the listener, deserves a more restrictive classification and (c) despite a classification which, according to the guidelines are prohibited from being played in the store or being sold, are nonetheless being played or sold.

(3) Does clause 3 of the Guidelines state that retailers must not sell recordings which contain material stronger than 18+; if so, can he define how a retailer or other person is to define material stronger than 18+.

(4) Which audio classification codes correspond to the term in clause 3 as stronger than 18+.

(5) What punitive provisions exist under Commonwealth law for a person breaching the guidelines.

(6) Is he aware of punitive provisions in the Australian States and Territories laws for a person breaching the guidelines; if so, what are those statutory provisions.

(7) Further to his answer to part (2) of question No 2694, will he list the names of the 44 audio-visual videotape and CD-ROM recordings of 13 of the 23 artists listed in Light magazine article of May 2001.

(8) Further to his answer in part (2) of question No 2694 concerning titles of recordings, has his attention been drawn to recordings by the artists Niggaz With Attitude titled (a) Just don’t bite me, (b) She swallowed it, (c) I’d rather .... you and (d) One less bitch; if so, have these recordings been classified; if so, what are those classifications as defined under the audio code administered by ARIA; if not, will these recordings be classified; if so, when; if not, why not.

(9) What provisions exist for the monitoring of recordings in retail outlets in Australia.

(10) How is policing and surveillance of audio recordings carried out to the satisfaction of the spirit of legislation regulating audio recording classification.

(11) What law, in addition to the Record Industry Code of Practice for Labelling of Product with Explicit and Potentially Offensive Lyrics, regulates the display, playing and regulation of the sale and distribution of audio recordings.

(12) Who is responsible for the classification of audio recordings.

(13) How is the Classification Board constituted.

(14) What is the current composition of the Classification Board and profile of each member.
(15) Irrespective of labelling provisions, are there provisions under the general censorship laws of the Commonwealth that prohibit a recording being displayed notwithstanding its compliance or otherwise with labelling guidelines.

(16) Can he clarify whether the guidelines are a law or by-law; if not, what are they in terms of a legal instrumentality and will he ratify their regulatory force by making them a law or a by-law.

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

(1) I am advised that the Guidelines For Retailers Handling Compact Discs And Tapes With Explicit Lyrics exist as part of the Australian Record Industry Association (ARIA) Code of Practice for Labelling Product with Explicit or Potentially Offensive Lyrics (the ARIA Code), which is an industry-regulated Code of Practice for the sale and labelling of audio recordings containing explicit lyrics. ARIA has estimated that 98% of record distributors are ARIA members.

(2) I am advised that procedures for dealing with complaints about audio recordings are included in the ARIA Code.

(3) I am advised that dot point 3 in the Guidelines for Retailers in the ARIA Code states that:

“Retailers must not sell recordings which contain material stronger than 18+.”

I am advised that material stronger than 18+ is defined in the ARIA Code as:

“Albums containing lyrics which explicitly and gratuitously deal with and promote, incite or instruct in matters of hard drug abuse, criminal violence, sexual violence, bestiality, incest, child abuse, and being abhorrent activity or activity that specifically instructs to commit suicide [shall be refused classification as 18+ and are not permitted to be sold].”

(4) As stated in (3), material stronger than 18+ is defined in the ARIA Code.

(5) None. The Guidelines for Retailers exist as part of an industry self-regulatory scheme. The ARIA Code is not legislated.

(6) See the response to question (5).

(7) The Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995 (the Classification Act) does not provide for the classification of audio recordings unless they also contain visual material. Under the Classification Act, the Classification Board classifies recordings on videotape or visually enhanced CD (eg CD-Rom) as ‘films’.

The list of names of the audio-visual videotape and CD-Rom recordings classified as films by the Classification Board, as requested by the honourable member, is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pantera</td>
<td>Pantera – Cowboys from Hell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pantera 3 – Watch it go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pantera Vulgar Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metallica</td>
<td>Fuel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$19.98 Home Vid Cliff ‘Em All!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 of One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cunning Stunts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hero of the Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Live Shit – Binge and Porge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nothing Else Matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S &amp; M (No Leaf Clover)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S &amp; M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Metallica Garage Inc. Electronic Press Kit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Year and a Half in the Life of Metallica (Part 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Year and a Half in the Life of Metallica (Part 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 PAC</td>
<td>Until the End of Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Untitled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus Hill</td>
<td>Still Smokin’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Untitled Cypress Hill Video Compilation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korn</td>
<td>Family Values Tour August – October 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unauthorised Korn: R U Ready</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Who, Then &amp; Now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Falling Away From Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Eminem: Unauthorised: Eminem – Hitz &amp; Disses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Eminem: Stan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Eminem: Stan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Eminem: The Marshall Mathers LP (The Real Slim Shady)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Dr Dre/Snoop Dogg/Ice Cube/Eminem/Warren G - The Up In Smoke Tour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Nirvana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>The Offspring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Americana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Huck it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Maximum Carnage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Conspiracy of One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Video Clip Compilation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Electronic Punks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Untitled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>SBS TV Special – CD Extra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>The Best of Volume 1 the Complete Videology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Ana’s Song (Open Fire)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>The Best of Volume 1 the Complete Videology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Suicidal Tendencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lights – Camera - Suicidal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(8) I am advised that recordings by the artist Niggaz With Attitude do not appear either in the list on ARIA’s website of audio recordings that are required to carry ARIA labels, or in the Office of Film and Literature Classification’s database of films classified by the Classification Board. No application has been made to the OFLC for classification of these recordings. Whether audio recordings by this artist will be labelled by ARIA members is a matter for ARIA.

(9) The monitoring of audio recordings in retail outlets in Australia is a matter for ARIA and the Australian Music Retailers Association.

(10) See response to question (5).

(11) The ARIA Code sets out provisions relating to the playing, sale or distribution of audio recordings.

State and Territory classification enforcement legislation sets out the provisions for the demonstration, sale and distribution of videotapes and visually enhanced CDs classified as films by the Classification Board.

Under the Broadcasting Services Act 1992, the television and radio broadcasting sectors have developed codes of practice governing content for broadcast, including musical content. These codes of practice are registered by the Australian Broadcasting Authority (the ABA). Codes of practice for the national broadcasters, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the Special Broadcasting Service, are notified to the ABA.

(12) ARIA members and music retailers are responsible for labelling audio recordings as necessary.

(13) Members of the Classification Board are appointed by the Governor-General under section 48 of the Commonwealth Classification Act. The Classification Act provides that, in appointing members, regard is to be had to the desirability of ensuring membership is broadly representative of the Australian community. Members are usually appointed for an initial period of 3 years and may be eligible for reappointment. No member may be appointed in their first term for more than 5 years, and there is a statutory limit of 7 years on membership.
The members of the Classification Board are the Director, Des Clark; Senior Classifiers, Paul Hunt and Paulyne Williams; full-time members, Wendy Banfield; Yiah Chan, David Griffiths, Robert Sanderson, Lynn Townsend and Rachel Williams; and part-time members, Margaret Clancy, Bronwyn Healy and Graham Shirley. Profiles of the current Classification Board members can be found on pages 12-21 of the Classification Board and Classification Review Board Annual Report 2000-2001. No new full-time or part-time appointments to the Board have been made since 30 June 2001.

If the cover-art or printed lyrics of an audio recording are likely to warrant restriction to adults, they can be submitted to the Classification Board for classification as ‘submittable publications’. Provisions for the display of classified publications are set out in State and Territory classification enforcement legislation which complements the Commonwealth Classification Act. The responsibility for enforcing Classification Board decisions lies with the States and Territories.

The guidelines are neither a law nor a by-law. As stated in (5) above, they exist as part of the industry-regulated ARIA scheme for labelling audio recordings with explicit lyrics. The effectiveness of the ARIA scheme is monitored by Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers with classification responsibilities. Ministers have recently required ARIA to amend the ARIA Code to prohibit the sale to minors of audio recordings carrying the strongest ARIA warning label. As stated in (7) above, the Classification Act does not provide for the classification of audio recordings unless they also contain visual material.

Environment Australia: Wildlife Conservation Plan

Mr Kelvin Thomson asked the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, upon notice, on 14 May 2002:


(2) When is the plan due to be (a) completed and (b) released.

Dr Kemp—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) Yes, Environment Australia is preparing a Wildlife Conservation Plan for Dugongs under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

(2) Following stakeholder consultation Environment Australia expects to (a) complete the Plan within the next 12 months and (b) release the Plan shortly after.

Environment Australia: Mobil Oil Company, Altona Refinery

Mr Kelvin Thomson asked the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, upon notice, on 14 May 2002:

Did he grant an 18 month exemption to Mobil Oil Company’s Altona refinery, allowing it to produce diesel with sulphur levels of up to 1300 parts per million (ppm), even though the legal standard is 500ppm; if so (a) why and (b) why was the decision initially not made public.

Dr Kemp—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

On 26 February 2002, I approved a variation to the 500ppm diesel sulphur fuel standard to be introduced on 31 December 2002 to allow Mobil to supply up to 1300ppm sulphur diesel with the fuel additive Cleanerburn™ from 31 December 2002 until 30 June 2004.

(a) Mobil proposed that Cleanerburn™ would provide an equivalent environmental outcome to 500ppm sulphur diesel and that its use would allow Mobil to upgrade its Altona refinery to produce 50ppm sulphur diesel by mid 2004, eighteen months earlier than when the 50ppm standard comes into force in 2006.

An independent technical assessment of the alternative fuel was undertaken and, in the opinion of the technical experts, any potential impact on the environment would be relatively minor.

My decision to grant the approval was based on the findings of the technical assessment and Mobil’s advice that Cleanerburn™ diesel would facilitate an early upgrade of the Altona refinery to produce 50ppm sulphur diesel. The Government does not wish to block any investment strategies that will assist
industry in moving to the ultimate goal of lowering sulphur levels to 50ppm by 2006 or earlier if possible.

The approval applies for a limited period and as an interim measure until the Altona refinery commences production of 50ppm sulphur diesel in mid 2004. A number of strict conditions apply including clear labelling of bowsers to advise consumers of the potentially higher sulphur content of the fuel. Mobil will also be required to report regularly on progress with the refinery upgrade and independent audits will be carried out in this regard.

(b) The approval was publicised in the Government Notices Gazette of 13 March 2002 and by placement on the Environment Australia website.

Environment: Natural Heritage Trust

(Question No. 309)

Mr Kelvin Thomson asked the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, upon notice, on 14 May 2002:

What funding from the Natural Heritage Trust has been directed to projects within the electoral divisions of (a) Wills, (b) Deakin and (c) McEwen since the Trust’s establishment and how does this compare with the total funding distributed by the Trust in that period.

Dr Kemp—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

Natural Heritage Trust funding that has been directed to projects within the electoral divisions of (a) Wills, (b) Deakin and (c) McEwen since the Trust’s establishment is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Electorate</th>
<th>Total Trust Funding Provided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>McEwen</td>
<td>$1,225,177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deakin</td>
<td>$13,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wills</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is also likely that other funding from the Trust may have been spent in these electorates. For example the Integrated Urban Bushcare Project, with Trust funding of $656,000 over two years, may have directed funding into the electorates of Wills and Deakin. The Commonwealth cannot easily track the electorate-based distribution of devolved funds in such projects.

As at 9 May 2002, $1,417.8 million has been approved for 11,992 Natural Heritage Trust and related projects.

Education: Job Guide

(Question No. 324)

Mr McClelland asked the Minister for Education, Science and Training, upon notice, on 14 May 2002:

Is the Government no longer distributing a hard copy version of the Job Guide for Year 10 students and instead distributing the information solely by CD-ROM; if so, and given that many students have limited access to computers, will he consider reinstating the hard copy version to give all students fair access to this important information.

Dr Nelson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

Job Guide distribution to schools for 2002 will be:

- sufficient books for each year 10 student; and
- 10 CD ROMS for each school as resource sets.

Job Guide is also available on the Internet.

Job Guide will also be distributed to, amongst others, Centrelink, public, university and TAFE libraries, correctional institutions and DEST programme providers.

Trade Practices Act: Country of Origin Labelling

(Question No. 326)

Mr McClelland asked the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources, upon notice, on 14 May 2002:
Monday, 17 June 2002

Does the Government intend to take any steps to amend paragraph 53(a) of the Trade Practices Act
to take into account the 1998 Country of Origin defences particularly in relation to a claim that a
product is “made in Australia”.

Does the Government intend to confer with State Governments with a view to requesting that State
laws be amended to take these defences into account.

Pending appropriate amendment of the law, will he direct the Australian Competition and Con-
sumer Commission to withdraw its current guidelines and to amend its website so that is made
clear that the 1998 Country of Origin defences are of no benefit and, in particular, have no applica-
tion to claims that a product is “made in Australia”.

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

The Government is drafting a consequential amendment to the Trade Practices Act 1974 to extend
the scope of the Division IAA defences for country of origin claims to cover actions under s. 53(a).
The amendment will be included in the Industry Tourism and Resources Legislation Amendment
Bill.

Once the Amendment Bill is passed I intend to write to the relevant State and Territory Ministers
asking them, in the interests of harmonising State, Territory and Federal legislation, to consider
amending their Fair Trading Acts to mirror the country of origin defences in the Trade Practices
Act 1974.

In July 2000 the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission released amended guidelines
which are explicit in recognising that where an action is brought under s. 53(a) of the Trade Prac-
tices Act, the defences provided in Division IAA of the Act for breaches of ss. 52 and 53(eb) are
not available as a defence to s. 53(a) proceedings. These guidelines are available on the Commis-
sion’s website.

Environment: All-Terrain Wagons

Mr Martin Ferguson asked the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, upon notice,
on 14 May 2002:

Further to the answer to question No. 251 concerning the significant growth in the numbers of All
Terrain Wagons purchased as a proportion of all new light vehicle sales, what is the estimated fuel
consumption for each class of new light vehicle, including All Terrain Wagons, sold in Australia.

What is the level of, or what is the sum of, federal tax paid on the purchase of each class of new
light vehicle, including All Terrain Wagons, sold in Australia.

What is the registration fee payable in each State and Territory on each class of new light vehicle,
including All Terrain Wagons, sold in Australia.

Dr Kemp—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

The Australian Greenhouse Office annually compiles fuel consumption information on passenger
vehicles and some types of All Terrain Wagons and light commercial vehicles. However, the Fuel
Consumption Guide provides model specific information, not information by class, as there is no
universal class classification system for Australian passenger vehicles.

Imported passenger motor vehicles currently attract a 15 per cent tariff rate, which is scheduled to
decrease to 10 per cent from 2005 onward. All Terrain Vehicles, all of which are imported, are
classified as light commercial trucks and attract a 5 per cent tariff rate.

The Goods and Service Tax is levied on all vehicles. Input tax credits are available for the pur-
chase of vehicles for business purposes.

A 25% luxury vehicle tax applies to passenger motor vehicles with a GST inclusive value greater
than $55,134.

Details of registration fees payable are available from the responsible authority in each State and
Territory.
Mr Bevis asked the Minister representing the Minister for Defence, upon notice, on 15 May 2002:

(1) What process is used to select private companies to undertake transmission repair work for army vehicles in Brisbane.

(2) How many providers of this work are currently engaged.

(3) What are the names of these providers.

(4) How many vehicles have been repaired by each of these firms.

(5) What is the process of quality control.

(6) Have any firms been removed from the approved repairers’ list, if so, why.

(7) What procedures exist for additional firms to be added to the approved repairers’ list.

Mrs Vale—The Minister for Defence has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

(1) Selection of contractors occurs through the assessment of capacity, capability, quality, insurance coverage, financial viability, cost schedule and contractual compliance.

(2) Nine.

(3) For Landrover transmissions:
   - A1 Four Wheel Drive Services.
   - Four Wheel Drive Centre.
   - FWD Motors Pty Ltd.
   - Paul Beauchamp Performance & Automotive.
   For Unimog transmissions:
   - Daimler Chrysler.
   - Mack Trucks Australia.
   - Brisbane Diff & Gearbox Pty Ltd.
   For Mack transmissions:
   - Mack Trucks Australia.
   - Brisbane Diff & Gearbox Pty Ltd.

(4) Of the firms engaged in transmission repairs, Four Wheel Drive Centre, FWD Motors Pty Ltd, Daimler Chrysler, and Mack Trucks Australia are involved in vehicle repairs. The number of vehicles repaired cannot be readily quantified due to difficulties in discriminating between repairs conducted by each contractor to vehicles, sub-assemblies and component parts and the fact that the vehicle fleet has been in service for approximately 18 years.

(5) Quality control processes are internal to the contractors quality management system and are reviewed as part of the assessment process when selecting a supplier. Generally quality control occurs through inspection and testing during stages of repair and upon completion. All work is certified as being complete in accordance with the terms and conditions of the purchase order. Quality assurance is conducted by Commonwealth representatives through both product and process audits.

(6) No.

(7) Additional firms are identified as potential contractors through advertisement, unsolicited approach to Northern Logistic Group, referral from related industry sources and known suppliers to Defence or other Government Departments. Once identified a supplier assessment is conducted.