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SITTING DAYS—2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 19</td>
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<td>March</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23, 24, 25, 29, 30, 31</td>
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<td>June</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24</td>
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<td>August</td>
<td>3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 30, 31</td>
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<td>September</td>
<td>1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 27, 28, 29, 30</td>
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<td>October</td>
<td>5, 6, 7</td>
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<td>November</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 22, 23, 24, 25, 29, 30</td>
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<td>December</td>
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- **BRISBANE**: 936 AM
- **GOLD COAST**: 95.7 FM
- **MELBOURNE**: 1026 AM
- **ADELAIDE**: 972 AM
- **PERTH**: 585 AM
- **HOBART**: 747 AM
- **NORTHERN TASMANIA**: 92.5 FM
- **DARWIN**: 102.5 FM
FORTIETH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—EIGHTH PERIOD

Governor-General
His Excellency Major-General Michael Jeffery, Companion in the Order of Australia, Commander of the Royal Victorian Order, Military Cross

House of Representatives Officeholders
Speaker—The Hon. John Neil Andrew MP
Deputy Speaker—The Hon. Ian Raymond Causley MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Mr Harry Alfred Jenkins MP
Members of the Speaker’s Panel—Mr David Peter Maxwell Hawker, Mr Philip Anthony Barresi, Ms Teresa Gambaro, Mr Peter John Lindsay, the Hon. Bruce Craig Scott, the Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry Adams, Mr Frank William Mossfield AM, the Hon. Leo Roger Spurway Price, Mr Kimberley William Wilkie, Ms Ann Kathleen Corcoran
Leader of the House—The Hon. Anthony John Abbott MP
Deputy Leader of the House—The Hon. Peter John McGauran MP
Manager of Opposition Business—Ms Julia Eileen Gillard MP
Deputy Manager of Opposition Business—The Hon. Simon Findlay Crean MP

Party Leaders and Whips
Liberal Party of Australia
Leader—The Hon. John Winston Howard MP
Deputy Leader—The Hon. Peter Howard Costello MP
Chief Government Whip—Mr James Eric Lloyd MP
Government Whips—Mrs Joanna Gash MP and Mr Fergus Stewart McArthur MP
The Nationals
Leader—The Hon. John Duncan Anderson MP
Deputy Leader—The Hon. Mark Anthony James Vaile MP
Whip—Mr John Alexander Forrest MP
Assistant Whip—Mr Paul Christopher Neville MP
Australian Labor Party
Leader—Mr Mark William Latham MP
Deputy Leader—Ms Jennifer Louise Macklin MP
Chief Opposition Whip—The Hon. Janice Ann Crosio MBE MP
Opposition Whips—Mr Michael Danby MP and Mr Harry Vernon Quick MP

Printed by authority of the House of Representatives
## Members of the House of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbott, Hon. Anthony John</td>
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<td>Adams, Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry</td>
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<td>Forrest, John Alexander</td>
<td>Mallee, Vic</td>
<td>Nats</td>
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</table>
### Members of the House of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gallus, Hon. Christine Ann</td>
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<td>North Sydney, NSW</td>
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<td>Bennelong, NSW</td>
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<td>Riverina, NSW</td>
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<td>Lindsay, NSW</td>
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<td>Goldstein, Vic</td>
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<td>ALP</td>
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# Members of the House of Representatives

<table>
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<th>Party</th>
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<td>Cunningham, NSW</td>
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<td>Chifley, NSW</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wilkie, Kimberley William</td>
<td>Swan, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Members of the House of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Williams, Hon. Daryl Robert, AM, QC</td>
<td>Tangney, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windsor, Antony Harold Curties</td>
<td>New England, NSW</td>
<td>Ind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worth, Hon. Patricia Mary</td>
<td>Adelaide, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zahra, Christian John</td>
<td>McMillan, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### PARTY ABBREVIATIONS
ALP—Australian Labor Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia; Nats—The Nationals; Ind—Independent; CLP—Country Liberal Party; AG—Australian Greens

### Heads of Parliamentary Departments
Clerk of the Senate—H. Evans
Clerk of the House of Representatives—I.C. Harris
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—H. R. Penfold QC
HOWARD MINISTRY

Prime Minister                                      The Hon. John Winston Howard MP
Minister for Transport and Regional Services and   The Hon. John Duncan Anderson MP
Deputy Prime Minister                              Treasurer
Minister for Trade                                  The Hon. Peter Howard Costello MP
Minister for Foreign Affairs                        The Hon. Mark Anthony James Vaile MP
Minister for Defence and Leader of the             The Hon. Alexander John Gosse Downer MP
Government in the Senate                            Senator the Hon. Robert Murray Hill
Minister for Finance and Administration and        Senator the Hon. Nicholas Hugh Minchin
Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate      Minister for Health and Ageing and Leader of the
Minister for Health and Ageing and Leader of the    House
House                                               The Hon. Anthony John Abbott MP
Attorney-General                                     The Hon. Philip Maxwell Ruddock MP
Minister for the Environment and Heritage and       The Hon. Dr David Alistair Kemp MP
Vice-President of the Executive Council             The Hon. Daryl Robert Williams AM, QC, MP
Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry    The Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP
Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and     Senator the Hon. Amanda Eloise Vanstone
Indigenous Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Reconciliation
Minister for Education, Science and Training        The Hon. Dr Brendan John Nelson MP
Minister for Family and Community Services and      Senator the Hon. Kay Christine Lesley Patterson
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the      Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources
Status of Women                                      The Hon. Ian Elgin Macfarlane MP
Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and  The Hon. Kevin James Andrews MP
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service

(The above ministers constitute the cabinet)
HOWARD MINISTRY—continued

Minister for Justice and Customs                       Senator the Hon. Christopher Martin Ellison
Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation     Senator the Hon. Ian Douglas Macdonald
Minister for the Arts and Sport                       Senator the Hon. Charles Roderick Kemp
Minister for Small Business and Tourism               The Hon. Joseph Benedict Hockey MP
Minister for Science and Deputy Leader of the House   The Hon. Peter John McGauran MP
Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads  Senator the Hon. Ian Campbell
and Manager of Government Business in the Senate
Minister for Children and Youth Affairs                The Hon. Lawrence James Anthony MP
Minister for Employment Services and Minister         The Hon. Malcolm Thomas Brough MP
Assisting the Minister for Defence
Special Minister of State                             Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz
Minister for Veterans’ Affairs                        The Hon. Danna Sue Vale MP
Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer          Senator the Hon. Helen Lloyd Coonan
Minister for Ageing                                   The Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP
Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs    The Hon. Gary Douglas Hardgrave MP
and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister
Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister         The Hon. Jacqueline Marie Kelly MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for           The Hon. De-Anne Margaret Kelly MP
Transport and Regional Services and
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for
Trade
Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer              The Hon. Ross Alexander Cameron MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for
Foreign Affairs                                        The Hon. Christine Ann Gallus MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for
Defence                                                The Hon. Frances Esther Bailey MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for           The Hon. Dr Sharman Nancy Stone MP
the Environment and Heritage                          The Hon. Peter Neil Slipper MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for           Senator the Hon. Judith Mary Troeth
Finance and Administration                            The Hon. Christopher Maurice Pyne MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for           The Hon. Patricia Mary Worth MP
Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Family     The Hon. Warren George Entsch MP
and Community Services
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health     The Hon. Warren George Entsch MP
and Ageing
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industry,  The Hon. Warren George Entsch MP
Tourism and Resources
SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition Mark William Latham MP
Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Minister for Employment, Education and Training Jennifer Louise Macklin MP
Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, Shadow Special Minister of State and Shadow Minister for Public Administration and Accountability Senator the Hon. John Philip Faulkner
Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for Trade, Corporate Governance and Financial Services Senator Stephen Michael Conroy
Shadow Minister for Employment Services and Training Anthony Norman Albanese MP
Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and Shadow Minister for Customs Senator Thomas Mark Bishop
Shadow Minister for Industry and Innovation and Shadow Minister for Science and Research Senator Kim John Carr
Shadow Minister for Children and Youth Senator Jacinta Mary Ann Collins
Shadow Minister for Revenue and Shadow Assistant Treasurer David Alexander Cox MP
Shadow Treasurer and Deputy Manager of Opposition Business The Hon. Simon Findlay Crean MP
Shadow Minister for Ageing and Seniors and Shadow Minister for Disabilities Annette Louise Ellis MP
Shadow Minister for Workplace Relations and Shadow Minister for the Public Service Craig Anthony Emerson MP
Shadow Minister for Defence Senator Christopher Vaughan Evans
Shadow Minister for Population, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs Laurence Donald Thomas Ferguson MP
Shadow Minister for Urban and Regional Development and Shadow Minister for Transport and Infrastructure Martin John Ferguson MP
Shadow Minister for Mining, Energy and Forestry Joel Andrew Fitzgibbon MP
Shadow Minister for Health and Manager of Opposition Business Julia Eileen Gillard MP
Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs and Assisting the Shadow Minister for Health Alan Peter Griffin MP
Shadow Minister for Information Technology, Shadow Minister for Sport and Recreation and Shadow Minister for the Arts Senator Kate Alexandra Lundy
Shadow Minister for Homeland Security Robert Bruce McClelland MP
SHADOW MINISTRY—continued

Shadow Minister for Finance and Shadow Minister for Small Business
Robert Francis McMullan MP

Shadow Minister for Housing, Urban Development and Local Government
Daryl Melham MP

Shadow Minister for Reconciliation and Indigenous Affairs and Shadow Minister for Tourism, Regional Services and Territories
Senator Kerry William Kelso O’Brien

Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries
Gavan Michael O’Connor MP

Shadow Attorney-General and Assisting the Leader on the Status of Women
Nicola Louise Roxon MP

Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Security
Kevin Michael Rudd MP

Shadow Minister for Retirement Incomes and Savings
Senator the Hon. Nicholas John Sherry

Shadow Minister for Immigration
Stephen Francis Smith MP

Shadow Minister for Family and Community Services
Wayne Maxwell Swan MP

Shadow Minister for Communications and Shadow Minister for Community Relationships
Lindsay James Tanner MP

Shadow Minister for Sustainability, the Environment and Heritage
Kelvin John Thomson MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Industry, Innovation, Science and Research
Senator George Campbell

Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition
Senator the Hon. Peter Francis Salmon Cook

Parliamentary Secretary for Defence
The Hon. Graham John Edwards MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Family and Community Services
Senator Michael George Forshaw

Parliamentary Secretary for Sustainability, the Environment and Heritage
Kirsten Fiona Livermore MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Attorney-General and for Homeland Security; Manager of Business in the Senate
Senator Joseph William Ludwig

Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition
John Paul Murphy MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Communications
Michelle Anne O’Byrne MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture and Resources
Peter Sid Sidebottom MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Northern Australia and Reconciliation
The Hon. Warren Edward Snowdon MP

Parliamentary Secretary for Urban and Regional Development, Transport, Infrastructure and Tourism
Christian John Zahra MP
CONTENTS

MONDAY, 31 MAY

House
Committees—
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee—Report ................................. 29471
Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee—Report ........................................ 29473

Private Members’ Business—
Parliamentary Education Program ....................................................................... 29476
Finance: First Home Buyers .................................................................................. 29484

Statements by Members—
Petrol Prices ........................................................................................................ 29489
Norris Road State School ...................................................................................... 29490
Trade: Iraq .............................................................................................................. 29490
Central Coast: National Rugby League ................................................................ 29491
Bellambi Lagoon ..................................................................................................... 29491
Cook Electorate: Sutherland Shire Stroke Recovery Club ................................... 29492
Roads: Safety ......................................................................................................... 29492
Education: TAFE Training .................................................................................... 29493
Finance: First Home Buyers .................................................................................. 29493
Telstra: Proposed Tower ....................................................................................... 29493

Questions Without Notice—
Health: Tobacco .................................................................................................. 29494
Saudi Arabia: Terrorist Attacks ............................................................................. 29494
Health: Tobacco .................................................................................................. 29495
Health: Child Obesity ............................................................................................ 29496
Health: Pneumococcal Vaccine ............................................................................. 29497
Economy: Growth .................................................................................................. 29497
Education: Literacy and Numeracy ...................................................................... 29498
Iraq ......................................................................................................................... 29499
National Security: Terrorism ................................................................................ 29500
Economy: Performance ......................................................................................... 29502
Iraq: Treatment of Prisoners ................................................................................ 29503
Aviation: Second Sydney Airport .......................................................................... 29504
Iraq: Treatment of Prisoners ................................................................................ 29506
Overseas Adoption ................................................................................................ 29507
Environment: Government Policy ......................................................................... 29507
Medicare ................................................................................................................ 29508
Immigration: Detention Centres ......................................................................... 29509
Trade: Free Trade Agreement .............................................................................. 29510
Budget 2004-05 ..................................................................................................... 29511
Environment: Greenhouse Gas Emissions ............................................................ 29512

Questions Without Notice: Additional Answers—
Health: Tobacco .................................................................................................. 29513

Personal Explanations ............................................................................................ 29514

Questions to the Speaker—
Questions on Notice ............................................................................................. 29514
Notice Paper .......................................................................................................... 29514

Personal Explanations ............................................................................................ 29514

Petitions—
Education: Funding ................................................................................................ 29515
Howard Government: Antiviolence Campaign ..................................................... 29515
CONTENTS—continued

Australian Defence Forces: Medals ................................................................. 29516
Health and Ageing: Aged Care ................................................................. 29516
Agriculture: Food Irradiation ................................................................. 29516
Defence: Properties ........................................................................ 29516
Health: Pneumococcal Vaccine ................................................................. 29517
Human Rights: Falun Dafa ........................................................................ 29518
Medicare: Bulk-Billing ............................................................................ 29518
Trade: Free Trade Agreement ................................................................. 29518
Budget: New South Wales Budget ................................................................. 29519
Australian Broadcasting Corporation: Funding ........................................ 29519
Immigration: Asylum Seekers ................................................................. 29519
Telstra: Privatisation ........................................................................ 29519
Social Welfare: Pensions and Benefits .................................................... 29519
Middle East: Israeli-Palestinian Conflict .................................................. 29520
Medicare: Bulk-Billing ............................................................................ 29520
Telecommunications: Mobile Phone Base Station .................................... 29520
Health: MRI Machines ............................................................................. 29521
Family Services: Child Care ................................................................. 29521
Immigration: Asylum Seekers ................................................................. 29521
Trade: Fur Imports ........................................................................ 29522
Responses ................................................................................................. 29522
Private Members’ Business—
Brain Tumours ....................................................................................... 29522
Private Members’ Business—
Carers ........................................................................................................ 29529
Grievance Debate—
  Immigration: Visa Approvals ................................................................. 29536
  Housing Affordability ........................................................................ 29538
  Centrelink: Pensioner Debts ................................................................. 29540
  Rural and Regional Australia: Doctor Shortages .................................... 29542
  Taxation: Mass Marketed Schemes ......................................................... 29544
  Iraq: Treatment of Prisoners ................................................................. 29546
  Hunter Electorate: Boer War Memorials ............................................... 29549
  Hunter Electorate: Branxton Lions Club ............................................... 29549
  Education: Literacy .............................................................................. 29551
Export Market Development Grants Amendment Bill 2004—
  Report from Main Committee ................................................................. 29553
  Third Reading ........................................................................................ 29553
Australian Federal Police and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2004—
  Report from Main Committee ................................................................. 29553
  Third Reading ........................................................................................ 29554
Bills Referred to Main Committee ................................................................. 29554
Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2004-2005
Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2004-2005
Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 1) 2004-2005
Appropriation Bill (No. 5) 2003-2004
Appropriation Bill (No. 6) 2003-2004—
  Second Reading ...................................................................................... 29554
CONTENTS—continued

Adjournment—
  Chronic Fatigue Syndrome ................................................................. 29596
  Sutherland Shire: Relay for Life .......................................................... 29597
  Djerrkura, Mr ............................................................. 29598
  Victoria: Law Enforcement ............................................................... 29600
  Employment: Workers Conditions ....................................................... 29601
  Roads: Queensland ................................................................. 29602

Questions on Notice
  Strategic Investment Coordination Program—(Question No. 565 amended) .............. 29604
  Australian Securities and Investments Commission—(Question No. 2515).............. 29604
  Veterans: Gold Card—(Question No. 2783) .............................................. 29605
  Taxation: Income Tax—(Question No. 2834) ............................................ 29606
  National Security: Terrorism—(Question No. 2947) ....................................... 29607
  National Security: Terrorism—(Question No. 2950) ....................................... 29607
  Health: Aged Care Assessment Team—(Question No. 2982) ............................... 29608
  Freedom of Information—(Question No. 3171) ........................................... 29609
  Medicare—(Question No. 3212) .......................................................... 29610
  Brisbane Electorate: Nursing Home Beds—(Question No. 3250) ........................... 29614
  Office of National Assessments—(Question No. 3318) ....................................... 29615
  Health: Haemophilia—(Question No. 3339) ............................................... 29621
  Employment: Job Network—(Question No. 3356) ........................................... 29622
  Australian Fisheries Management Authority—(Question No. 3395) ................. 29625
  Fisheries: Illegal Operators—(Question No. 3423) ....................................... 29626
  Education: Funding—(Question No. 3432) .................................................. 29626
  National Security: Terrorism—(Question No. 3447) ....................................... 29628
  Health and Ageing: Domestic and Overseas Air Travel—(Question No. 3455) ........ 29629
  Foreign Affairs: Indonesia—(Question No. 3524) ......................................... 29631
  Foreign Affairs: Philippines—(Question No. 3539) ....................................... 29632
The SPEAKER (Mr Neil Andrew) took the chair at 12.30 p.m. and read prayers.

COMMITTEES

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee

Report

Mr JULL (Fadden) (12.31 p.m.)—On behalf of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, I present the committee’s report entitled Near neighbours—good neighbours: an inquiry into Australia’s relationship with Indonesia, together with evidence received by the committee.

Ordered that the report be printed.

Mr JULL—in the 10 years since the committee last examined Australia’s relationship with Indonesia, much has happened in the international arena that has affected both countries and, at times, the relationship itself. Although there have been periods of strain, it has been for the most part a positive relationship of considerable value to both countries, with the potential to be significantly more so. It is in the interests of both nations for the relationship to be strong in all its dimensions—strategic, political, economic and cultural.

Within weeks of the commencement of this inquiry, the Bali bombings would bring home to us all how closely the interests of both countries lie. A number of submissions describe the high degree of cooperation that took place immediately after the bombings in dealing with the disaster and the ongoing cooperation since. The Bali bombings have had an impact on many aspects of our engagement. They have also affected the relationship at its deepest level. Of the 202 lives lost, 89 were Australians and 38 were Indonesians. This shared loss has brought together our two histories in a new and indelible way, and no account of measures taken by either government can adequately portray the nature of its impact.

While the Bali bombings have formed a backdrop to much of this inquiry, we have kept a broad focus that appropriately reflects our wide-ranging engagement. The breadth of this engagement was made very clear in the number of submissions from government departments and agencies. These submissions described in detail a wide range of activities in an extraordinarily diverse range of areas. Our recommendations in this area build on the excellent work that is already being done.

The committee was extremely impressed by Australia’s relationship with Indonesia at the bureaucratic level. We consider, however, that the relationship needs considerable strengthening at both the political and the people-to-people levels. At both levels there is a pressing need for much better communication and much deeper understanding. The committee considers that parliamentarians have a role to play in strengthening the relationship at the political level. Towards the end of this inquiry, we spent some days in Jakarta meeting with political leaders, senior officials and a wide range of other government and non-government organisations. Our discussions were substantial, informative and robust. There were many highlights in the visit—including, of course, our meeting with Her Excellency President Megawati Sukarnoputri.

We also valued the opportunity to establish a connection with our counterpart committee, Commission 1. We consider that regular meetings would provide the opportunity to develop this relationship and achieve, over time, communication that is characterised by open dialogue and mutual respect. The committee has recommended that the
Minister for Foreign Affairs establish a program of exchange visits between the foreign affairs, defence and trade committees of the Australian parliament and the equivalent committees of the Indonesian parliament.

At the heart of Australia’s relationship with Indonesia is the relationship between the people of Indonesia and the people of Australia. Australia and Indonesia have vastly different backgrounds and cultures. Such differences promise potential for rich exchanges. They can also lead to poor communication, misunderstanding and mistrust. Better mutual understanding is in the interests of both countries.

One of the principal means of enhancing understanding is through education. We consider that maintaining Australia’s expertise on Indonesia and expanding the level of understanding about Indonesia through research and education is crucial if we are to continue building this relationship over the long term. Australia’s commitment to this should be demonstrated by continuing support for Indonesian studies in universities and expanding research opportunities, restoring NALSAS or establishing a program with similar aims and increasing opportunities for Australian students to study in Indonesia. Education is not only a key strategy for building understanding; with approximately 18,000 Indonesian students coming to Australia each year, education is also significant in terms of trade. There is great potential for future growth in this area. My time is just about up, but I am sure that other members speaking in this debate will further expand on the recommendations that we have made so that we can build this positive, healthy and productive relationship between the two countries.

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (12.36 p.m.)—I would like to support the remarks of the honourable member for Fadden, the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee. It is disappointing that this report, which deals with one of the two most important relationships we have, will receive five minutes from him and five minutes from me. Some might say there is something wrong in the state of Denmark. Be that as it may, I stand by the report and its 28 recommendations. I think it is a very good report. The inquiry received 124 submissions, with representatives from over 60 organisations appearing in 40 hours of public hearings.

The government kindly agreed to allow the subcommittee to visit Indonesia as part of its inquiry. I particularly want to thank the Indonesian Embassy here and our Department of Foreign Affairs in Indonesia for what was a very useful visit. As the chairman has commented, President Megawati Sukarnoputri was most generous in the 45 minutes that she gave us, as was Vice-President Hamzah Haz. We met a whole range of different officials, including the Secretary-General of the Department of Foreign Affairs Mr Sudjadnan Parnohadiningrat, who was the previous ambassador, and General Sutarto.

There is no doubt that since East Timor our relationship has improved. We are getting very good cooperation in antiterrorist activities and in policing matters. It came as a bit of a surprise to me that General Cosgrove is yet to receive an invitation to travel to Indonesia and General Sutarto is not permitted to travel to Australia. We should not judge the whole relationship by the relationship between these two key defence officials, but it does say that we have a way to go to improve that relationship.

Of the people we met there—and they were many and varied—I was particularly interested to meet leading figures from three different Muslim organisations. There is no doubt that Indonesia, the largest Muslim
country in the world, is a country where Islam has come to terms with modernity. I think they have much to teach the rest of the Islamic world, but there is much for us to understand and appreciate from them.

I also want to say that education is a really important aspect of our relationship. It is one that we have focused on, particularly in two aspects. The first is what Australia can do in working with Indonesia, not only in the public schools but in the Islamic schools as well. I am pleased that that currently is, and will continue to be, an important aspect of our program. The other matter was touched on by the chairman, the honourable member for Fadden, and that is that we are at grave risk of shedding a lot of Indonesian expertise that we have built up over many years, particularly in the universities. That would be a real tragedy for us. The committee has made a number of recommendations, which were referred to by the chairman.

Last but not least, I really concur with the chairman about building up people-to-people links, but the parliament itself has a special responsibility. Having been one who travelled in the mid-nineties to meet commissions in Indonesia, with a view to trying to create some closer links, I am very passionate about the recommendation that says that the joint committee has a special role in developing relationships with our reciprocal commissions over in Indonesia. A bilateral visit program, I think, would stand both countries in good stead. I am looking forward, as I know the committee is, to welcoming them and having a good dialogue with them. A relationship with Indonesia is always going to be robust, but we should at all times work hard to minimise the differences that exist between two good neighbours. *(Time expired)*

The SPEAKER—The time allotted for statements on the report has expired. Does the member for Fadden wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated at a later hour?

Mr JULL (Fadden) (12.41 p.m.)—I move:

That the House take note of the report.

I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted.

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

Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee Report

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (12.42 p.m.)—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, I present the committee’s report, incorporating a dissenting report, entitled *Modern-day usage of averments in customs prosecutions*, together with the minutes of proceedings.

Ordered that the report be printed.

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP—On 27 March 2003 the committee resolved to conduct an inquiry into averment provisions in the Australian Customs legislation. This followed the committee’s review of the Australian Customs Service annual report 2001-02. The inquiry focused specifically on the averment provisions in the Customs Act and considered a particular case involving the use of these provisions. Under the act, averments function as an evidentiary aid for the Australian Customs Service in Customs prosecutions and, as such, they relate to fundamental issues of procedural fairness and
equity in court proceedings. The use of averments has attracted considerable debate, not only in relation to Customs but also more generally.

A key question for the committee was the appropriateness of the averment provisions in the act—a question that encompasses complex issues such as the difficulties in obtaining evidence and the potential for averments to be misused. Evidence received by the committee revealed both the value of averments and the undesirable consequences that can result from their use. There are a number of circumstances where the employment of averments will be reasonable and appropriate. At the same time, however, the use of averments can have adverse effects, leaving defendants with a diminished capacity to rebut matters averred by the prosecution.

In order to reduce the potential for such situations to arise, the committee has proposed some comprehensive amendments to the Customs Act, including: (1) a mechanism conferring discretion on courts to disallow averments at the pre-trial stage on the basis of injustice to the defendant; and (2) the insertion of guidelines on the appropriate use of averments into the act regulations. The committee has also recommended that the act be amended to prevent the use of averments as a substitute for evidence gained for a Customs prosecution, and that the Customs Service continue to send briefs of evidence compiled for possible prosecutions to the Australian Government Solicitor.

The committee has taken note of the recent High Court decision in the Chief Executive Officer of Customs v. Labrador Liquor Wholesale Pty Ltd & Ors case. Prior to this case, there was some uncertainty about the standard of proof to be used in higher courts. This case has now settled that it is the criminal standard of ‘beyond reasonable doubt’, and the committee recommends that this be codified and placed into the Customs Act.

Along with the issue of the appropriateness of the use of averments, we looked at a particular case, the Comptroller-General of Customs v. Tomson and Keomalavong. The committee received a great deal of evidence on this case, which was brought by the Customs Service in 1992 in relation to a number of importations of clothing goods made by the defendants in the late 1980s which were subject to seizure. The case was lost by the Customs Service, but the matter was not finalised until 1998—11 years in total, from 1987 to 1998. Of ongoing concern was the evidence provided to the committee which showed that, even though the evidence gathered for the case had been considered in 1990 by the then Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions as not being sufficient to support a prosecution under the Crimes Act, the Customs Service still proceeded to initiate a Customs prosecution in the Magistrate’s Court, requiring the same standard of proof as that required under the Crimes Act—namely, the criminal standard of proof, being ‘beyond reasonable doubt’. This meant that it hoped to rely on the averments to gain a conviction. Facts which were averred in the Magistrate’s Court stood as prima facie evidence, yet the Customs Service could not prove its case to the criminal standard with the evidence it brought, as it would have known prior to commencing the prosecution.

A Customs Service minute relating to this matter dated 8 May 1990 advised that the evidence was insufficient to proceed under the Crimes Act and suggested that the prosecution brief be referred to the AGS for prosecution under the Customs Act 1901, whereby the averment provisions can be advantaged. As the agency responsible, Customs must have known that it could not meet that standard of proof required.
We have found it necessary to strongly criticise the amount of time that elapsed and the conduct of the case and have recommended that compensation be paid to Mr Tomson. We recognise that the Customs Service has remedied its operations in the last 10 years and is now a very different organisation from the one it was. We note that the Tomson case was conducted at the same time as the Midford Paramount case and is, indeed, unfinished business. *(Time expired)*

**Mr Kerr (Denison) (12.47 p.m.)—**This report is substantially in line with the recommendations of previous reviews of averment provisions, which have been part of the Customs Act since 1901. It is in line with the Australian Law Reform Commission’s 1992 conclusion which stated:

... there is a need for averments in customs prosecutions in certain circumstances, principally where the evidence is located overseas, where the averment deals with formal or non-controversial matters, and where matters are such that they could easily be disposed of by the defendant without unfairness.

The report also recommends a number of measures, most in line with the ALRC’s 1992 and 2002 recommendations, to ensure that averments are not abused. On these matters, the committee was unanimous.

Where I have the misfortune of dissenting from my colleagues on the committee is with regard to recommendation 6, which attacks what it describes as ‘the reprehensible handling’ of the investigation and ‘failed prosecution’ of Mr Tomson by the Australian Customs Service and recommends the payment of compensation to him. In my view, our terms of reference, the evidence we received and the processes we followed do not justify that firm conclusion. Nor in my opinion do they justify the attacks made on the Australian Customs Service; the Director of Public Prosecutions in paragraph 3.74; the Australian Government Solicitor, who had carriage of the prosecution; and the Acting Commonwealth Solicitor-General in paragraph 3.70 in the report.

The fact that a prosecution fails does not itself justify criticism of it being brought. This is highlighted in this week’s *Sunday Age* ‘Agenda’ headline story, which states:

Most rapes come down to his word against hers. No wonder only 15 per cent are ever reported.

In barrister James Montgomery’s response to criticism that verdicts of ‘not guilty’ leave a stain on women complainants, he said:

... a verdict of ‘not guilty’ just means you can’t prove the case ‘beyond reasonable doubt’, not, ‘I don’t believe you’. We start with the presumption of innocence and if you don’t know which person to believe … you have to acquit—

even if you think the complainant is probably telling the truth. So the real question we should have looked at dispassionately was whether the ACS had proper cause to get this case up to the barrier and to use averments in doing so.

The committee has drawn attention to certain factors, but there are also some compelling facts that the majority seems to have overlooked in coming to their conclusion that it did not. These include: (a) Mr Tomson, then known as Vilaysack, had a prior conviction for importing undeclared commercial quantities of clothing [exhibit 6]; (b) he was importing clothing which trade opinion suggested was significantly undervalued and which was worth less than the cloth content alone [exhibit 6 and evidence given in court]; (c) the importations were under a wide variety of different names to avoid Customs attention [exhibit 6, page 6]; (d) different values appeared on different overseas documents for the same goods; (e) the matters averred were principally in respect of formal matters or matters relating to facts overseas in three countries where the cost and difficulties of compelling the attendance.
of witnesses would have been substantial; (f) the way in which the matter proceeded followed advice from the independent Director of Public Prosecutions [exhibit 6, page 3 and appendix E]; (g) the decision to prosecute and to use averments was made not by the Australian Customs Service but by the Australian Government Solicitor [exhibit 6, page 3], in accordance with the advice of the Director of Public Prosecutions; (h) delay was occasioned not only by those responsible for the prosecution but also by actions taken by the defendant and his legal advisers and by listing delays in the court; and (i) the Acting Solicitor-General provided an opinion that the averments were not the significant factor in the establishment of the prosecution’s case [report paragraph 3.74].

In lieu of the committee’s final conclusion, which I believe has overreached, I have recommended that there be an independent assessment of the case for payment of compensation to Mr Tomson, to be conducted against the criteria applied generally to determine eligibility for Commonwealth ex gratia payments.

The SPEAKER—The time allotted for statements on the report has expired. Does the member for Mackellar wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a future occasion?

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (12.51 p.m.)—I move:

That the House take note of the report.

I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted.

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

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

Parliamentary Education Program

Mr WILKIE (Swan) (12.52 p.m.)—I move:

That this House:

(1) recognises the importance of the parliamentary education program for Australian school students which encourages young people to come to Canberra and participate in and learn about our federal democracy and culture;

(2) supports and encourages utilisation of the educational resources available that complement parliamentary and democracy education;

(3) provides for the provision of realistic and flexible financial assistance to schools and students planning parliamentary educational programs; and

(4) calls on the Parliament to make rebate schemes more reflective and considerate of travel distances to the National Capital in order to allow equality of access to the parliamentary education program for all students and that such rebates reflect market pricing for those reliant on air travel.

One of the most important roles of parliament is to encourage all Australians, especially young Australians, to learn more about how parliament works and their role as citizens of Australia. Greater awareness of the federal parliament and its processes can only be of significant benefit as young Australians prepare to become voters and participate in our democracy.

The purpose of this motion before the House today is to draw attention to the fact that the rates of rebate currently stipulated in the parliamentary education program—which is based here at the Serjeant-at-Arms’ office and is titled the Citizenship Visits Program—need to be changed to enable Australian students who live the longest distances from Canberra equality of access to their parliament and the nation’s capital. It is often
not feasible for these students to be able to travel to Canberra by bus or train—it simply takes too long to make such a trip a viable part of a school’s curriculum. Air travel is therefore the only sensible option, but unfortunately the current rebate does not cover enough of the air ticket to enable many students to participate in the program.

Participating in the program offers significant benefits in two important ways: firstly, a greater understanding of federal parliament; and, secondly, a greater awareness of other national institutions. In fact, in my electorate only one school comes to Canberra on a regular basis and that is Penrhos College, and I compliment them on that yearly commitment. The challenges for young Australians are greater today than they have ever been. Politics and policy making are more complex and the issues which this parliament debates are more diverse. Increasing the awareness among young Australians of parliament, its processes and the issues we debate in this House is a vital part of equipping them for their responsibilities as citizens.

As a federal member of parliament I am frequently surprised at the poor information many people have on the respective roles of federal, state and local governments. Often there is confusion about the differences between jurisdictions and the issues they manage. This lack of awareness demonstrates the need to ensure that as many Australians as possible have the opportunity to visit Parliament House and enhance their knowledge of the role of federal parliament.

This underlines the importance of the parliamentary education program for young Australians. When students visit Canberra they also have the opportunity to explore and learn about other national institutions, such as the Australian War Memorial, the National Gallery of Australia, the National Museum of Australia and the High Court. These institutions are integral to our national heritage and our culture. We are all proud of these icons. They emphasise our history and the ties that bind us together as Australians. These two key components of an education visit to Canberra make such a visit a worthwhile complement to the curriculum based studies in civics, citizenship, culture and history.

As a Western Australian MP I am concerned that many Western Australian students are denied the opportunity to improve their education in these important subject areas because for them the cost of coming to Canberra is simply prohibitive. In 2003 almost 130,000 students travelled to Canberra and participated in parliamentary education programs, but only 2,000 came from Western Australia. Unfortunately many students in WA are missing out on these important educational programs because travel costs are clearly related to distance, and the 3,773 kilometres from Perth to Canberra is a costly proposition.

My colleague from WA, the honourable Member for Kalgoorlie, will speak on behalf of those who live in more remote areas of the state, such as the Pilbara and the Kimberley, from where the costs are even higher than from Perth. For students from WA the current rebate available is $230 per student. That falls well short of even the cheapest possible return airfare from Perth to Canberra. I welcome the efforts of Qantas to keep student fares as low as possible and appreciate their recent introduction of a new direct flight between Canberra and Perth. This will obviously assist schools by providing comparable travelling times to their eastern state counterparts, but the fact remains that to ensure that students from more distant areas of Australia have equitable access to our federal parliament and our national institutions we need to adjust the rebate.
I am pleased that my motion is supported by my colleagues, in the form of the indefatigable members for Lingiari and Capricornia, as well as the members for Kalgoorlie, Canning and Casey. Surely such bipartisan support confirms the validity of our case. It has been said that if we increase the rebate we may have to increase the resources made available to the Parliamentary Education Office. I say: let it be so. The future of our country lies with our youth and any additional cost would be miniscule compared to the advantages gained. The motion set before the House is essentially that all young Australians have the opportunity to access the parliamentary education program and that it be made affordable. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr HAASE (Kalgoorlie) (12.57 p.m.)—I second the motion. It is with a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction that I rise today to support this motion. The member for Swan raises a vital issue. I have the opportunity to represent 91 per cent of Western Australia. There are far-flung reaches in the Kalgoorlie electorate. For instance, Kununurra is some 2,000 kilometres from the capital city of Perth. When I look at the bureaucratic arrangements for the Citizenship Visits Program and I see that there is a scale that allows for the subsidy of students to visit Canberra, as long as they participate in a Parliamentary Education Office program—for distances from 1,000 to 2,000 kilometres $40 is allowed, from 2,000 to 3,000 kilometres $110 is allowed and for more than 3,000 kilometres $230 is allowed—I realise how ill-informed about the vastness of the nation people in high places are.

It is some 3,700-odd kilometres from Canberra to Perth and it is another 2,000 kilometres from Perth to Kununurra. Why on earth do we have a scale that cuts out at 3,000 kilometres? It is a nonsense. Sadly, I have so few visits from my schools to Canberra. You do not have to be a rocket scientist to work out why. It is simply because the costs are prohibitive. We do not have the luxury of many in Victoria and New South Wales, and certainly those in Canberra, of simply making a day trip to Canberra and the seat of federal parliament. Generally speaking, the opportunity for my students to visit Canberra is as a result of a mammoth undertaking—almost a military exercise of logistics—to get them here. It takes, on average, about six months of fundraising to get an individual from regional Western Australia to Canberra.

A case in point is the experience of Tom Price Senior High School. They decided that they had to avail themselves of the opportunities given by the Parliamentary Education Office here in Canberra and visit the nation’s capital to see how democracy worked and understand something of the varying levels of government and their responsibilities. Their trip cost them $27,000 for 14 students and three supervising staff. They were subsidised about $3,000 from this system. That means that they had to raise $24,000—in a small town like Tom Price. It becomes an incredible task. You may say, ‘This is just a wonderful opportunity for Australians who live wherever they might choose to,’ but we would like all Australians, especially young Australians, to understand democracy and to have a crack at leadership of this country. If they cannot afford to come to see what happens in the nation’s capital, they are going to be a lot less inclined to take up the cudgel to represent the people, because they realise just how damned hard it is.

So my urging today is that we have a serious and long look at these rates of reimbursement or subsidy available to Australian school students. We should be serious enough to look at how they might be improved so as to make the basics and the understanding of democracy available to all
school students, wherever they might be in Australia, and we should do something with this bureaucratically ignorant scale that simply says: ‘Anything over 3,000 kilometres from Canberra is unimaginable, for goodness sake. We don’t need to do anything particularly unique about those distances.’

We need to overhaul the CVP—the Citizenship Visits Program—rates in a major way. We have to look, therefore, at the funding for the Parliamentary Education Office and make sure that they are realistically funded to address the number of students who want to visit this nation’s capital. Until such time as we have done that, we are not administering something that can be purely accepted as democratic. If we stand for anything in this place, we pride ourselves on representing democracy. But in reality, until it reaches out to all of the far-flung points of Australia and gives equal opportunity to those citizens living in those far-flung areas, it is not true democracy. (Time expired)

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (1.02 p.m.)—I am very happy to have this opportunity to participate in this important debate and to support the member for Swan and other colleagues here in our call for increased financial assistance for school students making the trip to Canberra to experience first-hand Australia’s system of government and the principles and institutions that underpin our democracy.

I am sure that, like me, all members take every opportunity they can to speak to school groups in their electorate about the workings of the parliament and our system of government and to encourage young people to become active citizens. For each of us participating in this debate, those sessions invariably do happen back in the electorate because it is so rare to host a school group from the outlying states like Queensland and Western Australia here in Parliament House. The cost of travelling to Canberra to take part in the educational opportunities around the national capital is simply out of the question for most schools and parents in my electorate, however much they might want their children to have that experience. For example, in the last three years’ figures that I had a look at, an average of four schools per year came from my electorate down to Parliament House.

Trips to Canberra to complement the students’ SOSE curriculum are in there competing with sporting equipment, airconditioned classrooms, more computers and additional teaching resources as the No. 1 priority for the precious dollars raised by the dedicated members of the P and C of each school. When faced with such tough choices, schools are also aware of the subsidies and assistance available for various types of projects, and no doubt that helps to make the decision for them. Schools in my electorate of Capricornia receive a subsidy through the Citizenship Visits Program of $40 per student. That is not much for a trip of between 1,500 and 2,000 kilometres and lasting usually over a week.

If we believe, as is evidenced by this debate today, that civic engagement and a better understanding of our national institutions are important priorities for improving our society then we need to send that message to schools and parents, not through cliched propaganda but through meaningful support for students to come to Canberra to see democracy and government in action and—even more importantly—to feel connected to it through their own hands-on experience.

As parliamentarians, we regularly lament the lack of interest in the work of the parliament and the poor level of understanding about key aspects of our system of government that we detect in the community. We understand the warning issued by the Civics Expert Group in its 1994 report:
Our system of government relies for its efficacy and legitimacy on an informed citizenry; without active, knowledgeable citizens the forms of democratic representation remain empty; without vigilant, informed citizens there is no check on potential tyranny.

It goes on to say:

... our democratic values require that every citizen has equal opportunity to participate in the exercise of rights and responsibilities. Without civic education that democratic ideal is not maintained.

As MPs, we have also seen for ourselves the opportunity that exists to turn around that lack of interest before it turns into cynicism and even alienation in our country’s young people.

On any given day of the week I could bump into one of my colleagues taking a group of his or her local students on a tour of Parliament House. When that happens, I do not see too many signs of lack of interest. The students are generally looking around in admiration at this magnificent building, absorbing all of its history and drama and either listening to the stories about life in parliament or taking their turn to ask a question about what they have seen. The message that those students receive all day—whether it is from the wonderful activities undertaken with the Parliamentary Education Office staff, sitting in question time or talking to their local member of parliament—is that this is their house, their parliament and their democracy.

We know how powerful the experience is for those young students and we need to get behind the call in this private member’s motion to increase the subsidies available to students so that it is possible for many more schools to embark on the journey to Canberra and to make their students aware that our national government is just as much for them, whether they are from Muttaburra, Longreach or Rockhampton, as it is for people in the large capital cities, which seem so often to be the centre of our nation’s life. For those reasons, I commend the motion to the House and I urge the government to take seriously assistance for students from places like my electorate in coming to Canberra to learn about these important institutions of our democracy.

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (1.07 p.m.)—I too am pleased to speak on this private member’s motion on the parliamentary education program, and I commend the member for Swan on bringing this matter to the House. It is no accident that three of the speakers on the list are from Western Australia, a far-flung state. It is pretty obvious that the members for Capricornia and for Lingiari experience the same problems with students in their electorates as we do. The member for Casey will be speaking shortly, and I am sure he will also have a good case to put about students from his electorate facing challenges in participating in the national education program of this parliament. The parliamentary education program is a very important part of the national civics program. Far too often, people have very little understanding of what actually happens in this great parliament of Australia. I find it amazing—when I am doorknocking, for example—that half the time so many people do not know which parliament I belong to.

People can go down to their local city, sit in the chamber there get and get an impression of the size of the city of Mandurah or, in the case of the member for Swan, the city of Belmont, or whatever. Then they can go to the state parliament, and they think that is awesome. But if they think that is awesome, when they come to Canberra they are absolutely blown out of the water. The dimensions of the parliament in Canberra totally outstrip anything that any other chamber in this country has, and it puts the parliament in perspective in terms of relevance on a national scale.
When this building was finished in 1988, it cost a billion dollars—imagine what it would cost if it were being built today. This is probably the greatest building in Australia—not just because of its outlook and its ambience but also because it is the home of democracy in Australia. For students to come and actually see what happens here is far better than any textbook or lecture that they could receive from the teacher in their classroom. They say that a picture is worth a thousand words. For students from my electorate of Canning in Western Australia, actual hands-on experience in Canberra—seeing this building and seeing it operating—is something they can only dream about.

It is true that only a handful of schools from my electorate come to this House. One of the schools that comes quite regularly is the Armadale Christian College. Of course, it is far more efficient to fly to Canberra, but airfares from Western Australia—even on a school and student basis—are still very dear. The member for Kalgoorlie did not have time to mention this, but for a direct flight—walking in off the street from his electorate, for example—it costs over $2,000 to get here. That is dearer than flying to London return. That is the challenge we have. It is dearer to fly to Canberra than it is to fly economy to London. This is why this subsidy of $230 is inadequate. Jetstar, an economy air service, has just started in Australia; but even with economy airlines such as Virgin, unless you book well in advance or get a cheap Internet fare, it is still a great amount of money. As has been said before, a lot of fundraising goes into these trips, and the parents—particularly parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds—have a great challenge in contributing to their students’ travel to Canberra. It is all about priorities.

Mr Albert Cooper, the Principal of Armadale Christian College, has made coming here a part of the annual school program. He comes by bus with the Ellenbrook and Mundaring Christian colleges. They come with 35 students per bus. They make the $230 work for them as much as possible, because they then go on to Sydney to look at convict heritage in parts of Sydney and then they go via Sovereign Hill and Ballarat and look at the display on the Eureka Stockade in that region. It is a great education program for students from my state. Maybe the cost should be looked at as a percentage of the cost from our states rather than one ambit figure of $230. A percentage of the whole fare would be more desirable than one set figure.

I commend this motion to the House. It does need further review for the students from outlying states such as ours. We are not getting equality on this matter, and I urge the House to act seriously on this matter.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (1.12 p.m.)—I would like to commend the private member’s motion which is before the House today, and I thank the member for Swan for his initiative in putting it forward. I would also like to recognise the contributions and arguments that have been put by the member for Swan, the member for Capricornia and the member for Kalgoorlie—someone with whom I am not often in agreement, but with whom I do agree on this occasion.

At the beginning of this month, my office here in Canberra was visited by a group of year 11 legal studies students from Kalkaringi. For those of you who do not know—and I am sure most of you do know—Kalkaringi is in the Victoria River district on the Western Australia-Northern Territory border. It was the home of Vincent Lingiari who was, in many senses, the father of land rights. He was acknowledged on Friday at Reconciliation Place. As others have said, these students made their way to Canberra because of the importance of the visit to their
education, to understand how a parliament works, how a democracy works, how the other institutions of government work, and how the High Court works. When they came here, we were able to show them around the parliament, as we have done with other students. Last year we had three school groups come here from the Northern Territory; this year there will be seven.

I know Kalkaringi very well. I have been there over many years on many occasions, but I think it is worthwhile understanding that, for people who live in these very small and remote communities, a visit to Canberra and the parliament is a hands-on experience like no other. In my view, it is something which we need to be promoting far more than we currently do. An impediment to these schools coming from the Northern Territory and other remote parts of Australia is clearly the cost and the difficulty in getting here. I will use the Kalkaringi students as an example. So that these young Australians could take part in the parliamentary education program, they had to drive from Kalkaringi to Darwin, a distance of about 600 kilometres, about half of which is on the unsealed Buntine Highway and is often quite dangerous—that is if the weather is propitious and allows you to drive on those roads, because at some times of the year you cannot travel on them.

After arriving in Darwin they then had to fly to Adelaide, which is a flying time of about four hours, and then from Adelaide to Canberra, which takes another hour and a half or so. The rebate these students got for their travel expenses was $230 per student. The cost, of course, was far in excess of that. Whilst it may be convenient for students from parts of the eastern states closer to Canberra to travel by road, it is not a practical way for students from my electorate to get here. Some do, but the time and inconvenience involved is extreme. To travel from Kalkaringi to Canberra and return, for example, would be in most cases at least a six- or seven-day round trip. Travel by air is in reality the only practical way to get reasonably sized groups of students to Canberra.

If you live close to Canberra—for example, in Sydney or somewhere up or down the coast, like Bateman’s Bay or Melbourne—you could pool the rebates that you get, whether it is $15 or $40, hire a bus and be here overnight. That is simply not the case for people who live in remote parts of Australia. It highlights the inadequacy of this educational provision. In my view, you would at least need to double if not triple it to provide the incentives required and, along with the fundraising that needs to be done in school communities, provide the opportunity for many more students to come to Canberra. That, I think, ought to be our objective: to give students the opportunity, wherever they come from, whatever their socioeconomic background and however remote their homes might be, an opportunity to visit this place, see parliament in action, see Super Sid sitting at the table—

Mr Sidebottom interjecting—

Mr SNOWDON—and make a contribution to our parliament and our democracy. It is, after all, a fundamental piece of civics education. We should be proud to be here as parliamentarians and I am sure that we all are. We should be equally proud to show young Australians what this place means, how it works and how laws are made. We should show them what it means to them as citizens to be able to vote, why they vote, when they vote and what it means eventually in terms of a democratic outcome. (Time expired)

Mr ANTHONY SMITH (Casey) (1.17 p.m.)—I thank the members who have spoken before me and I associate myself with the motion of the member for Swan. I indi-
cate my support for not just the intent but also the substance of all of the parts of the motion. I would like to start by saying what a great job the Parliamentary Education Office does. Those of us who have school groups that come through—and, as someone from an outer suburban and partly rural electorate on the outskirts of Melbourne, I have a number of schools that are able to make the trip—they do a wonderful job. The staff are very hardworking and the programs they run really enrich the kids. I agree with all of the previous speakers on the importance of school kids, particularly kids of primary school age, seeing first-hand the operation of our parliament.

From my electorate I have had 14 school visits so far, with another four planned this year. It is a testament to the Parliamentary Education Office that most of those school visits are repeat visits. Once they make the trip to Canberra—and, no matter where they come from in any of our electorates, that involves a great deal of sacrifice on the part of the schools—they find it very worth while and it becomes the regular feature of their year. Obviously, from Melbourne there is the capacity to fly at a much cheaper rate. Also, there is the capacity to use buses and make that trip within a day or so. Not every school is able to do that. What I would like to see is increasing resources, if we can, for all schools. I agree that the visits program is a vital component of nourishing and enriching our democracy, as the earlier speakers said.

It is particularly critical, I think, for kids of primary school age, who find parliament reasonably remote and who are learning at that early age about our democracy and how it all works. It is the case that many people, particularly school students, feel remote from their parliament and from parliamentary democracy. There are many reasons for that. This motion goes to one of those reasons—that is, lack of familiarity, not having been to Canberra and seen Parliament House and how it operates. As one of the earlier speakers said, there is nothing like seeing first-hand the operation of parliament—coming to the national capital; seeing the House of Representatives operating as it is right now, not just in question time but in debate; seeing the operation of committees; seeing members of parliament from all political persuasions; seeing officers such as the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker and the Usher of the Black Rod; and gaining a real comprehension of how parliament works. That is absolutely vital.

Before school kids come to Canberra—and I know this from the number of visits I have had—most of them see parliament only very fleetingly, perhaps on a sitting day through the nightly news, where they might see a bit of argy-bargy in question time. I do not say that as a criticism of the media, which is duty-bound to cover what is interesting and lively. Nevertheless, the outtake of that is that the coverage is quite narrow for school students and, in fact, for everybody in the community. It is only when they actually come here and see the parliament operating that they see the full range of aspects of parliamentary life and the broader legislative work that goes on here. It is only by coming here that that is conveyed.

There would not be a school group or school student who comes here who does not go away enriched and with a greater understanding of our parliamentary system and parliamentary democracy. That is why we need to do all that we can to extend that to as many school students as we can, right across our electorates and right across the country, to make sure that as many students as possible have that opportunity. Last year more than 100,000 students came through and I think more than 2,000 schools were able to participate in one form or another. The Parliamentary Education Office do this on a
very small budget. The budget for their activities in this building is about half a million dollars. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. I.R. Causley)—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.

Finance: First Home Buyers

Mr BARTLETT (Macquarie) (1.22 p.m.)—by leave—On behalf of the member for Macarthur, I move:

That this House:
(1) notes that:
(a) recent statistics show that first home buyers in Australia now make up only 11.6 per cent of all homebuyers, down from 24 per cent two years ago;
(b) the drip-feed land release policies of the NSW Carr Labor Government have pushed land prices to unaffordable levels for first home buyers in Sydney;
(c) the NSW State Government took $3.5 billion in Stamp Duty from homebuyers in NSW in the 2002/03 financial year and that all State and Territory Governments took $8.4 billion from all Australian Homebuyers;
(d) the median Sydney house price is now $460,000 and the stamp duty payable on that purchase value is $16,190;
(e) stamp duty is the single biggest impediment to first home buyers; and
(f) the Federal Government is leading the way in home ownership policies by paying out $3.8 billion in assistance though the First Home Owners Grant and supporting homebuyers with record low interest rates; and
(2) calls on:
(a) the NSW Government to introduce a sensible land release policy that ensures there is enough available land to meet the needs of Sydney’s growing population; and
(b) all State and Territory Governments to give first home buyers the chance to own their own home by abolishing stamp duty on first home purchases; and
(3) calls on the Federal Government to:
(a) retain the First Home Owners Grant; and
(b) review the First Home Owners Grant to ensure it reflects the current costs associated with buying a first home.

There is no doubt that home ownership has always been the Australian dream. It provides the financial, social and emotional security in which to raise a family and live in retirement, and it is something of value to leave to our children. Australian rates of home ownership, from latest measurements, at around 70 per cent are amongst the highest in the world. This is something of which we can be very proud in Australia, and it is something which we need to work hard to maintain. However, as the costs of home ownership rise, this is becoming increasingly difficult, particularly in Sydney and its suburbs.

There are growing cost pressures confronting many home buyers and these cost pressures arise from a number of sources. Firstly and fundamentally are the issues of market forces—the supply and demand for real estate in Sydney. Sydney’s population, we are told, is growing by around a thousand people a week and, in the absence of effective policies of decentralisation, I dare say it will continue to do so. Yet the policies of the New South Wales government have failed to release adequate land to meet this demand. Higher rates of unit development and urban consolidation have helped to reduce the pressure, but these do not meet everyone’s requirements.

The second issue that has been adding to the pressure is state government policies and charges. In addition to the inadequacy of land release, there is the issue of the tens of
thousands of dollars in charges on land release, which has meant that land costs in Sydney have risen much faster than building costs. If you look at the composite of costs for buying a new home, by far the greatest proportion of that has been the cost of the land, particularly growth rates rather than the cost of building. Another area of government charges or impost that has affected home buyers has been the rapid rise in stamp duty charges applied on property purchases. On a median priced house in Sydney, a purchaser will be slugged with duty of $17,990—almost $18,000—on the cost of a new home. Last year alone, stamp duty revenue going into the pockets of the New South Wales government totalled some $3.6 billion, a direct cost impost on both young and older families—people wanting to buy a home, many of whom were in fact first home buyers.

The third area that obviously impacts on the cost of buying a home is the level of mortgage interest rates. These, over the life of a home loan, add tens of thousands, if not in fact hundreds of thousands, to the cost of buying a home. The very pertinent point here is that, under the Howard government, these interest rates have reached historic lows. They are in fact the lowest sustained levels for around 30 years, saving home buyers tens of thousands of dollars over the life of their home loan. When the Howard government came into office, home loan interest rates were 10.5 per cent and they are now down to 7.05 per cent. Someone with a mortgage of $200,000, for instance, will be saving $575 a month net of tax—a massive saving. That is more than $6,000 a year and, over the life of a loan, tens of thousands of dollars. In addition to the low interest rates presided over by this government has been the first home owner grant, totalling a large $3.8 billion since this initiative was introduced around four years ago.

Let me return briefly to the issue of land release, which is the responsibility of the state governments. My concern is with the New South Wales government. This does need to be addressed, but it needs to be addressed in a careful and strategically planned way. There are three important criteria that need to be considered. First, any land release must be environmentally sensitive and must adequately consider the issues of water quality and the removal of any natural vegetation. It must also be cognisant of air quality issues. For instance, I am particularly concerned with the impact on water quality of any land release on the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment system—a river that is badly degraded already. It needs a lot of help rather than extra developments adversely impacting on it.

Secondly, there are real concerns for the large proposed release near Bringelly of 70,000 to 90,000 lots. A study done in 1992 by Macquarie University and CSIRO indicated that that was not a suitable site because of very significant air-quality issues. It is a real sinkhole for pollution in Western Sydney. Yet somehow magically the state government seems to have ignored that and rejected that advice and now seems determined to build a large development of some 70,000 to 90,000 blocks in that area. It is important that these issues are rigorously analysed before any land release takes place. A second concern is that any release does not encroach on productive agricultural land. This is of particular concern in the Hawkesbury area, which has for decades—in fact, centuries—been the key provider of fresh produce to the city’s markets. We must be sure that it does not suffer from urban encroachment and that good agricultural land is not given up for urban development just the sake of it.

A third concern I have is that any release must include the provision of necessary infrastructure concurrent with or preceding any
development—not years or decades later. This requires adequate provision of sewerage. It is unacceptable, for instance, in the Hawkesbury that Glossodia, Wilberforce and Freemans Reach have, for some 20 years, been promised by the state government adequate sewerage services, and they still have not been provided. We have over 30 outlets in the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment pumping sewerage into the system. Many of those sewage treatment works are inadequate, with treatment works not up to the sort of standard that is needed.

We need to be guaranteed adequate roads infrastructure. For instance, Windsor Road should have been done two decades ago, but the state government is way behind time. We need duplication of the Richmond rail line from Blacktown to Richmond. So before any release of land takes place we need to be assured that adequate infrastructure is in place. We could talk about the water needs of Western Sydney and the culpable failure of the state government to adequately provide water for Sydney.

There are many issues regarding providing adequate housing in Sydney, but clearly the state government has its role to play. The federal government is doing what it can by maintaining low interest rates and providing the first home owner grant. The state government needs to shoulder its share of the burden and take the pressure off our home owners.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. I.R. Causley)**—Is the motion seconded?

**Mr Farmer**—Mr Deputy Speaker, I second the motion moved by the member for Macquarie and I reserve my right to speak.

**Mr MELHAM (Banks) (1.31 p.m.)**—The member for Macarthur could not make it into the chamber on time to move his own motion. He should also keep up to date with what is happening in his home state before proposing such a motion. Let me remind the member what the New South Wales government announced in April this year: the abolition of stamp duty for first home buyers buying a home worth up to $500,000. Just in case the member did not hear, I repeat: it announced the abolition of that stamp duty. In fact, the majority of state governments have recently made or announced changes to stamp duties for first home buyers. Let me also point out that the Productivity Commission’s draft report on first home ownership does not share the member’s extravagant claim that stamp duty is the biggest impediment to first home buyers. In fact, the commission’s report concluded:

... rising taxation has not been a significant contributor to the recent escalation in house prices. The Productivity Commission’s report clearly shows that a range of factors has influenced the supply for and demand of first home owners. So, rather than make extravagant, inaccurate claims, the member for Macarthur would do better to get his facts right and understand the housing market a bit better.

Let me improve the member’s understanding of the housing market for first home buyers by pointing out a few fundamental facts. Housing affordability for Australian families under this federal government has reached record low levels. For first home owners, increasing amounts of income are being paid for mortgages as prices for new and established dwellings increase. The member for Macarthur should take the time to look at the housing affordability index published by the Commonwealth Bank and the Housing Industry Association. If he did, he would see that housing affordability right across Australia has fallen to a record low. Housing affordability fell by a massive 40 per cent in the two years ending December 2003. Housing affordability has been declining across Australia during the last six years,
with the most significant decline in the last two years. Housing affordability continued to decline after the introduction of the first home owner grant in July 2000.

It is very interesting that the member for Macarthur is suddenly concerned about the grant for first home buyers. Why is he not concerned about those first home owners who earn less than $52,000 and will not get a tax cut from this mean-spirited government? The member feigns concern about first home owners. If he was really concerned he would call on the Treasurer to stop giving grants to people buying million dollar homes while battling families are locked out of home ownership by skyrocketing house prices. If he was really concerned he would call on the Treasurer to set a property value limit on the home purchase for which the grant could be used. He is happy for the first home owner grant to be used to purchase million dollar properties. He is happy that the grant is not targeted to those first home buyers who need it most. The member for Macarthur does not understand first home owners; he does not understand the Australian housing market. He refuses to acknowledge that this government has let housing affordability for first home owners fall to the lowest level in years. And he is happy for the first home owner grant to be used to buy million-dollar homes.

Mr FARMER (Macarthur) (1.34 p.m.)—Today I rise to speak on the outrageous problem of home ownership, particularly for young families in south-west Sydney. My first block of land at Eschol Park, a small suburb of Campbelltown south-west of Sydney, cost just $16,000 in 1985 when my wage was around $3,500 per annum. Today the same land sells for almost 20 times what we paid for it back then, but the average wage has only grown by 10 times to about $35,000. Today, for many Macarthur residents, the great Australian dream of owning your own home has become a nightmare, and it is a nightmare that I and many other members of this House recognise.

If one were to have read the figures from the Housing Industry Association in March, one would know that housing affordability for first home buyers is at an all-time low. More and more people cannot get to first base. They now make up less than 12 per cent of the market, when two years ago that figure was 24 per cent. Although house values have fallen by at least half in suburbs in Sydney during the first three months of the year, and are likely to further decline in the next quarter, a handful of suburbs in the Blue Mountains, south-western Sydney and the outer west are still recording significant rises. So it appears that residents of Macarthur, my electorate in the south-west of Sydney, are not likely to benefit and can gain no hope from the current slow down or drop in real estate prices, as it is one of those suburbs still experiencing a rise in home prices. In fact, house prices in Campbelltown rose by six per cent between 1 January and 31 March this year. For those of us who already own a property, it is comforting to know that our asset is increasing in value. However, for the many people who do not, particularly young people aspiring to break the poverty cycle and create an asset to build upon, the future looks grim.

The drip-feed land release policies of the New South Wales Carr Labor government are to blame. Under the Carr Labor government the benefits and opportunities presented by a strong national economy are being cancelled out and negated by bungled New South Wales land release policies. It is these policies that have forced prices through the roof to unaffordable levels for first home buyers. Last year Mr Carr released 4,000 new blocks of land to Sydney residents that were seeking a home. This drip-feed policy has created ridiculous and unacceptable lev-
els of demand. I am sure we are all aware of situations where people have become so desperate that they have camped out overnight to secure a block of land which probably ends up costing them $300,000 or more.

To compound this already unacceptable situation, we are advised by the Real Estate Institute of Australia that future demographics show the demand for housing is likely to increase through an expected decrease in household size, an increase in the number of international students coming to study in Australia and a general population increase. The HIA Executive Director, Elizabeth Crouch, says that the land crisis is having a dramatic effect on housing affordability and accommodation choice, with Sydney housing affordability dropping by almost 11 per cent to an all-time low. Ms Crouch says land now costs more than the house that is sitting on it.

To afford a loan for Sydney’s median first home, a family must now have a gross annual income of $120,000—up $23,000 in the past year alone. Bob Carr has created an undersupply of land which means it is sold and snapped up at grossly inflated prices, generating record stamp duty year after year. The median house price in Sydney has now risen to $460,000, and these prices are certainly not uncommon in my electorate. On checking over the weekend with local real estate agent Mike Connery of First National Campbelltown I was told that the average price for a house in the suburb is more than $350,000 and even an old home in Macarthur now sells for at least $300,000. Sydney grows at around 50,000 people a year, yet the Carr government’s best estimate is that over the next 20 years they will release land to accommodate just over 405,000 people: that is, only 20,000 people a year will be accommodated. The figures do not fit and neither will the population. (Time expired)

Mr COX (Kingston) (1.39 p.m.)—The member for Macarthur has tried to characterise this housing debate in very simple terms—as state government bad, federal government good. He has characterised the state government as bad and talked of stamp duties and the slow release of outer urban land, and he has characterised the federal government as good and talked of the first home owners grant. I might give the member for Macarthur a short lesson on the housing market in recent years. I will take as my text the Reserve Bank’s submission to the Productivity Commission inquiry on the affordability of first home ownership.

It is certainly the case that housing prices have doubled over the last 10 years. Why is that the case? The Reserve Bank says:

…

Because of the fall in interest rates, households have been able to afford to service much more debt, and this has greatly increased their purchasing power. This, in turn, has enabled them to compete with other households for more expensive houses. But this additional purchasing power is not confined to first-home buyers; indeed, existing home owners, with accumulated equity in their houses, have been in a much stronger position to compete than first-time buyers.

The Governor of the Reserve Bank has spent the last couple of years in a state of some agony about not only the effect of investors in the property market on house prices but also the implications of their activities for the wider economy. In its submission to the Productivity Commission, the Reserve Bank says:

…

at the macro level there is not much evidence to suggest that the growth in house prices has been due to a persistent shortage of supply of houses relative to underlying demand for new housing. The two main determinants of underly-
ing demand—population growth and the rate of household formation—have not been high by historic standards.

So the slow release of outer urban land is not actually the big issue that the member for Macarthur has been suggesting.

The submission goes on:

In our view—

the RBA’s—

stamp duty has not pushed up house prices—

but—

when stamp duty is applied to first-home buyers, it increases the “deposit gap” ...

That is certainly true. The Reserve Bank says:

It is our view that the main impetus to the continued increase in house prices at present is ... an unusually strong desire by existing property owners for further exposure to residential property, either in their own home, or in an investment property.

... ... ...

The stock of credit outstanding is rising at nearly 20 per cent per year for owner-occupiers—an exceptionally rapid pace—but for investors the growth rate is closer to 30 per cent per year.

When I interrogated the Reserve Bank Governor before Christmas about credit growth, he described an excess of 20 per cent growth in household credit as unsustainable. The submission goes on to say:

... investors have been contributing disproportionately to the increase in housing demand over recent years, with the effect that affordability, especially by first-home buyers, has been reduced.

The Reserve Bank lists the things that are driving investors as:

• the desire of investors to earn capital gains from investing in rental property;

... ... ...

... a common belief that house prices cannot fall

... ... ...

... the ease in obtaining finance—and the bank cites off-the-plan purchases as a particular risk—

• an active property investment seminar industry; and

• a tax system which is viewed by investors as assisting property investment.

So those are the real causes that are forcing first home buyers out of the market. It is not state governments.

Mr Farmer interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Macarthur!

Mr COX—It is not state governments at all. And it is time that the member for Macarthur stopped peddling the sorts of fallacious arguments that he has put together in this motion.

Mr Farmer interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Macarthur will be dealt with if he persists.

Mr COX—I remind him that the First Home Owners Scheme has not done a lot.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 1.45 p.m., the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 106A. The debate may be resumed at a later hour and the member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Petrol Prices

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (1.45 p.m.)—I inform the House that I have written to the ACCC asking them to help Australian families to get a fair deal at the petrol pump. I have asked the ACCC to investigate the abuse of market power by the big oil companies and major retailers that prevents independent petrol suppliers in this country from operating on a level playing field. Many smaller independent petrol suppliers are
forced to purchase petrol at higher prices than their counterparts—that is, the big oil companies and organisations such as Woolworths and Coles. As some of you present today may be aware, I spoke on this issue in the House just a few weeks ago and days before the announcement by Labor leader, Mark Latham, that Labor would enforce stricter competition in the industry to keep petrol prices down.

Since then, I am pleased to announce that Labor has sought to tackle this issue head on. Yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition outlined Labor’s six-point plan aimed at reducing the financial pressure that high petrol prices have on the average Australian family. Labor’s plan includes: (1) amending the Trade Practices Act; (2) allowing independent wholesalers and retailers to bargain collectively; (3) outlawing predatory pricing; (4) giving the ACCC the power to issue cease and desist orders; (5) granting courts a new power; and (6) establishing a yellow card system so the ACCC can keep a register of bona fide complaints of misuse of market power. I commend this move, and I call on the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to play its part in helping Australians get a fairer go and in driving down the cost of petrol.

**Norris Road State School**

**Ms GAMBARO (Petrie) (1.46 p.m.)**—Today I pay tribute to a truly remarkable individual. Recently, I had the pleasure of attending a farewell dinner held in honour of school principal, Torquil MacDonald, of Norris Road State School in Bracken Ridge in my electorate. The night was a magical and inspiring one, filled with many stories of Torquil’s personal and teaching achievements over the last 11 years. The photo history of Torquil’s time as principal showed us some insights into his great humour and passion. Torquil’s love of art and music was always going to be high on the Norris Road State School curriculum. There was not a dry eye in the room as we heard about a truly amazing man, who worked hard and was loved by all. The kids loved him so much that they spent half their lives outside his office, just to be with him or near him.

Torquil, while the night was really to pay tribute and to honour you, you honoured us by being part of our lives. Your nickname, ‘Talkwell’, says it all. You gave of your time and self unselfishly. I know that I will always fondly remember our chats about educational issues close to your heart, such as literacy and boys’ education. I wish you well in your new endeavours and study and in teaching English as a second language. I know that you will also be taking part in one of your favourite hobbies, which is travelling. In years to come many of your students will think back to the time they had at Norris Road and remember with fondness and gratitude a truly inspiring person who changed their lives in a very profound and special way.

**Trade: Iraq**

**Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (1.48 p.m.)**—Today the Australian government announced that Iraq’s debt of $600 million for Australian wheat will be written off. This is a public scandal. It is another rort by the government’s National Party component. The decision by the Australian Wheat Board to sell wheat to the Saddam Hussein regime over the last 15 years has effectively subsidised that regime. The Australian people fed the people of Iraq, while Saddam Hussein was able to spend his money on tanks, palaces and advanced weaponry: that is a public scandal. I think that those officials who were responsible for giving the Australian government the advice that we would ever get this money back should be held to account. That is the public policy aspect of this issue.
that has not been covered in reports of the write-off.

The other issue that I am particularly concerned about is one that is too little known in Australia. It concerns the UN oil for bribery scandal and whether Australian Wheat Board officials, or other officials who were involved via consultants—however they did it—got special consideration from the Saddam Hussein regime to secure these contracts in Iraq. If they did, that too would be a public scandal. *Time expired*

**Central Coast: National Rugby League**

Mr TICEHURST (Dobell) (1.48 p.m.)—On behalf of the Central Coast community, I make a final plea to the NRL for a Central Coast based rugby league team. The NRL must realise that the Central Coast deserves a team of its own. We have the population, we have the support and we have the combined federal-state funded $30 million Central Coast stadium. The passion and support for the NRL on the coast is second to none.

Chris Newman, a 17-year-old student in my electorate of Dobell put forward the case for a Central Coast based team in a letter to the editor of our local paper. He stated:

... We already have a beautiful stadium, which is regarded as one of the best in Australia. We have our own teams in the New South Wales rugby league comps and we have a large number of juniors.

The NRL is always saying it needs to get out to country areas and encourage rugby league. Well remember, the coast is still regarded as a country area and has one of the largest number of juniors.

Please consider all of this—

he pleads.

The Central Coast boasts one of the largest and most valuable football fan bases in the country. One only had to visit the stadium during the Rugby World Cup to see the massive support that was shown. Around 57,000 people flocked to the stadium for the World Cup. Independent research shows the Central Coast has a population of fans who attend more matches and watch more games on television than fans in other areas. It also shows that the combined population of the Central Coast and the North Shore is larger than that of the rival bidder, the Gold Coast. The Central Coast plainly deserves its own NRL team. I hope the NRL takes into account the passion and steadfast dedication of Central Coast fans when making its final decision. *Time expired*

**Bellambi Lagoon**

Mr ORGAN (Cunningham) (1.51 p.m.)—Today’s *Illawarra Mercury* reports massive environmental damage to Bellambi Lagoon. Last week Wollongong City Council bulldozed natural waste traps and special filter mechanisms, replacing them with unfiltered concrete pipes. Years of hard work by Chris Illert, Danielle Reverberi and other locals have been destroyed. Council’s action was nothing less than stupid; it was sheer incompetence. They consulted no-one—certainly not the Bellambi Lagoon protection and regeneration society, who have been involved for years in more than $1 million worth of work to clean up the lagoon. This is by no means a local and isolated example. Recently, we saw a council hit squad with chainsaws cut down native vegetation at Sandon Point to give nearby residents uninterrupted views. We saw sand dunes at Fairy Meadow bulldozed, with no environmental impact study.

In Wollongong we have the crazy situation where council’s division of engineering services—headed by ALP member and one-time Cunningham candidate, Mr Joe Scimone—is responsible for management and protection of one of the most beautiful and environmentally sensitive coastal zones in all of Australia. These are engineers in charge—
not environmental scientists. Talk about putting Dracula in charge of the blood bank. And what is the result? Ongoing destruction and the local community being treated with arrogance and contempt. The council has no coastal management policy—that would limit development opportunities. General manager Rod Oxley heads a ‘pro-development council’. This is a rotten council and the community is sick of their continuing lack of commitment to protecting the environment from the ravages of inappropriate development. With Labor once again in control, it looks like a return to the bad old days where the local environment and our cultural heritage lose out.

Cook Electorate: Sutherland Shire Stroke Recovery Club

Mr BAIRD (Cook) (1.52 p.m.)—Last Friday I attended the 18th birthday of the Sutherland Shire Stroke Recovery Club. It was celebrated at the Cronulla RSL and was attended by about 40 people. The Stroke Recovery Club is an organisation that was formed to assist victims of stroke and their carers along the long and difficult road to recovery. The club has between 40 and 50 members and comprises victims and their carers, as well as a number of volunteers. It was founded on 28 May 1986 by Tonietta Watson and Celia Muirson, along with Ted Brooker, with the aim of helping those released from hospital after suffering strokes. Many people after being discharged from hospital do not have family support to help them along the way to recovery. Unlike a heart attack, those who suffer a stroke have to live with the difficulties of their illness for the rest of their lives. I would like to personally congratulate President Marjorie McCann, her secretary Gladys Wharton and her Treasurer Hilda van der Hout—and also the large number of dedicated volunteers and carers who together are assisting their fellow Australians in this very worthy and important cause. I would also like to commend the Cronulla RSL on its continuing financial support and for providing facilities for the Stroke Recovery Club. In the shire, we are lucky to have strong community-based clubs that provide facilities for community support groups such as this. The figures show that 3.67 million Australians are affected by heart, stroke and vascular disease and 1.1 million become permanently disabled after an attack of this kind. The prevalence of strokes has increased by 18.2 per cent over the last two years. (Time expired)

Roads: Safety

Ms O’BYRNE (Bass) (1.54 p.m.)—A growing number of roads of strategic importance in the north-east of Tasmania are becoming dilapidated and dangerous. The Nunamara section of the Tasman Highway and the Bridport Road between Bridport and Scottsdale require urgent upgrade and attention. That attention is now even more urgent, due to the severe safety risks that are being further perpetuated because these are two of the three major north-east access routes for such industries as forestry and agriculture, as well as for a growing number of tourists and the local community. In the worst sections of these roads, the safety risk is so severe that two heavy vehicles cannot pass one another and both remain on the bitumen. The situation is worse still in the sections where the drop off from the bitumen is up to 140 millimetres.

The RACT has warned there will be a doubling of the land freight task in Australia over the next 15 years. If something is not done to rectify how we manage our major road infrastructure, we will be faced with a situation where roads will not be adequate to support the growing needs of the communities and industries that rely on these corridors.
and of the number of tourists on these roads. It is not good enough for the government to administer patch-up policy. We have been waiting for the AusLink report. An appropriate Tasmanian response to AusLink will be to address these strategic roads—for the community’s ongoing safety and for regional economic success.

Education: TAFE Training

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (1.55 p.m.)—A chance comment by a Chisholm TAFE trainer to me during a recent visit to the Frankston campus has resulted in local students of automotive mechanics at the Frankston campus taking delivery of current technology cars to help with their training. I was delighted to join Chisholm TAFE management, trainers and staff during a visit from the federal Minister for Education, Science and Training, Brendan Nelson, and car industry representatives from Ford, Holden and Toyota, at the handover of the donated cars. The handover presentation by Minister Nelson was attended by Virginia Simmons, the Chisholm TAFE CEO; Pat Jones, the director of Chisholm’s School of Manufacturing and Engineering; Tony Hyde, Holden’s Executive Director of Engineering and Design; Katherine Sheehan, Holden’s public policy program coordinator; Russell Scoular, Ford’s Government Affairs Manager; and Andrew Willis, Toyota’s manager of government affairs and trade policy.

As industry representatives said, they invest hundreds of millions of dollars developing new vehicle technology but once they leave the showrooms they are in the hands of the mechanics. Hands-on experience with modern vehicles featuring high-tech engine management systems, automotive braking, electronic transmissions and all-wheel drive are part of that challenge. The event left me with another task—trying to find a heavy truck. The heavy engineering program at Frankston TAFE is the only one on that side of Melbourne. They are looking for some current vehicle technology to help with that training. I would encourage any trucking industry representatives who might have vehicles equipped with contemporary technology that will help with training to come forward and support our local effort in support of Chisholm TAFE.

Finance: First Home Buyers

Mr COX (Kingston) (1.57 p.m.)—I thought I might finish the lecture I was giving in the last debate to the member for Macarthur about the home loan market in Australia. There are two basic measures of affordability. The most commonly cited measure is the ratio of average household income to the income required to meet debt repayments on a typical house. In its submission to the Productivity Commission, the Reserve Bank made the following point:

Comparing the latest period with the early 1990s, the level of housing interest rates is now significantly lower, but the impact of this on affordability has been more than offset by the cumulative increase in house prices relative to incomes.

The other measure of affordability is the deposit gap. If you assume a fixed loan to valuation ratio, this measure is directly determined by the ratio of house prices to income. The Reserve Bank said:

As discussed above, this ratio has increased considerably over recent years and, as a result, households now need to save a larger amount relative to their income than was previously the case before they can purchase a home. For example, in 1990, a 10 per cent deposit on the median-priced house was equivalent to around 25 per cent of average annual household income. Today the figure is around 45 per cent.

(Time expired)

Telstra: Proposed Tower

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (1.58 p.m.)—On Saturday, I was pleased to be
with 200 of my local residents marching down Norton Street, Leichhardt, against a Telstra tower proposed to be built on the top of Norton Street Plaza. It is opposed by local community residents and also opposed, to their great credit, by Anthony Meddich and the Meddich Property Group, which owns Norton Street Plaza. The proposal is for the tower to be some 300 metres from Leichhardt Public School, and the Leichhardt P&C are concerned about the impact that radiation will have on the school’s students and also on those who attend the child-care centre at that school. Reverend Tim Foster from All Souls Church also expressed the opposition that he had.

Next week, I will be meeting with Fort Street High School to talk once again about the campaign to ensure they get insulation from aircraft noise, something that the government has failed to do. I look forward to having an ongoing campaign and dialogue with them to achieve justice for the students so their education will not be hindered by aircraft noise.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 2.00 p.m., in accordance with standing order 106A, the time for members’ statements has concluded. I point out to the member for Lowe that should he be present on the next sitting Monday I will recognise him for members’ statements.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Health: Tobacco

Mr LATHAM (2.00 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Is the Prime Minister aware of reports that the government is intending to reduce the size of the planned graphic warnings on cigarette packs from 50 per cent of the front of the pack to 30 per cent? Is the Prime Minister aware that 50 per cent graphic warnings on the front of cigarette packs have led to a three per cent reduction in smoking in Canada, which if replicated here would save lives and, according to an economic study commissioned by the government, would save the Commonwealth $2 billion? On this, World No Tobacco Day, will the Prime Minister now guarantee that 50 per cent graphic warnings on cigarette packs will be introduced as soon as possible?

Mr ABBOTT—My recollection of this is that there are two proposals which have gone out for public consultation. One is for 50 per cent of the front and 50 per cent of the back to be a graphic health warning. The other is for 90 per cent of the back and 30 per cent of the front to be a graphic health warning. So, one way or another, more than 50 per cent of the packet will be a graphic health warning. I make the point that this government has a very good record on discouraging smoking, which is of course the largest preventable cause of death in Australia. Since 1996, the percentage of the adult population smoking has dropped considerably to under 20 per cent, which is amongst the lowest smoking rates in the world.

Saudi Arabia: Terrorist Attacks

Mr HUNT (2.02 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Would the minister update the House on the outcome of the tragic terrorist incident in Saudi Arabia over the weekend? What do these events say about the determination and intention of terrorists? How is the government responding to this threat?

Mr DOWNER—Firstly, I thank the honourable member for Flinders for his question and for his interest. The government, not surprisingly, is deeply concerned by the terrorist attacks on the so-called Oasis compound in al-Khobar in Saudi Arabia. Although no Australian citizen has been killed, one of the foreign nationals killed is a permanent resident of Australia. The government is, and I think the Australian public generally would be, outraged by the deaths
of 22 civilians and the fact that another 25 people have been wounded. The casualties come from 10 different countries, including of course from Saudi Arabia. It is believed the perpetrators of this outrage are al-Qaeda or al-Qaeda linked operatives and they are part of a long-running attempt by al-Qaeda to destabilise the Saudi Arabian economy, and thereby destabilise the Saudi Arabian government, by targeting foreign workers on whom that economy, particularly the oil sector, depends.

What I think this attack does, though, is remind people of what the terrorists are trying to achieve. It is easy to forget, when we just look at the scenes on television, that these people have clear objectives. Their objective in the case of Saudi Arabia, and also in the case of the rest of the Islamic Middle East as well as Islamic South-East Asia, is to establish Taliban style theocratic regimes, even if that means that innocent Muslims have to die as a result. We have to appreciate that the terrorists remain strong and they remain determined. You can see them operating in Saudi Arabia and you can see them operating on a bigger scale now in Iraq. What these people want to do in Iraq is to stop Iraq establishing a moderate regime. They do not want to see democracy established in Iraq; they want to see a Taliban style regime established in Iraq.

It is very important that the international community understands the real objectives of these terrorists, and it is very important that the international community continues to work together in countering this terrorism. There is no doubt about the Australian government’s determination to do that, be it in Iraq, in other parts of the Middle East or, particularly for us, obviously, in South-East Asia, where we have signed a large number of memoranda of understanding and, as a result of those, contributed to the counter-terrorism efforts of those countries.

Let me say in conclusion that obviously our embassy in Riyadh is monitoring the situation in Saudi Arabia closely. Today the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has reissued travel advice. We continue to advise Australians to defer non-essential travel to Saudi Arabia, and Australians who are in Saudi Arabia—and there are quite a number of them—who are concerned for their safety should consider departing Saudi Arabia.

Health: Tobacco

Mr Latham (2.06 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. On World No Tobacco Day, I refer the Prime Minister to figures from the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons showing that smoking has resulted in a total health care bill of $21 billion and the death of 50 Australians every day. Given that there is no such thing as responsible smoking and that both sides of politics campaign at election time on the human and economic costs of smoking related illnesses, I ask the following: will the Prime Minister now join with Labor in rejecting political donations from tobacco companies?

Mr Howard—I offer the Leader of the Opposition a pack of 20 Centenary Houses! I mean, really—for the Leader of the Opposition to try to claim some high moral ground! We as a nation have been very successful. As a reformed smoker myself, I can say that the best health decision I ever took was on Easter Thursday, 1979. I remember the time very vividly. It was outside the old Mater Hospital in North Sydney that I stubbed out my last cigarette. On World No Tobacco Day, I have to say as Prime Minister that it is the best personal health decision that I ever took was on Easter Thursday, 1979. I remember the time very vividly. It was outside the old Mater Hospital in North Sydney that I stubbed out my last cigarette. On World No Tobacco Day, I have to say as Prime Minister that it is the best personal health decision that I ever took. After a lot of encouragement from my wife, I am very grateful that I finally did give up smoking. I take this opportunity to exhort smokers, the dwindling number of people on both sides of the House who are still smoking, to give up the filthy habit—because it is.
All of us would have been moved by the very evocative speech made by the former Premier of Tasmania, Jim Bacon, who I know is a friend of the Leader of the Opposition. I had the opportunity of speaking to Jim just after he made that speech. It was an eloquent and very sad message to so many people. I would like, given the opportunity that I have been given, to particularly address this plea to young girls. The incidence of smoking amongst teenage girls is still alarmingly high. It has become a very infrequent habit amongst many people now of middle age, but there is still far too high a rate of smoking amongst young girls. I hope everybody, by different demonstrations and exhortations, can make a contribution. But, please, in the interests of bipartisan impact, spare us the cant and humbug of somebody who takes $36 million from the Australian taxpayer, courtesy of the rort at Centenary House.

Health: Child Obesity

Mr SCHULTZ (2.09 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Prime Minister. Is the Prime Minister aware of any recent reports on medical research about childhood obesity? What is the government’s response to this serious issue?

Mr HOWARD—I thank the member for Hume for his question. I and, I am sure, all members of the House are aware of how serious a global problem is childhood obesity. The World Health Organisation has released the Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health, which includes a focus on healthy diets and regular physical activity. The OECD has also expressed concern about escalating childhood obesity levels. There are a number of causes of childhood obesity: lifestyle, a lack of physical activity in schools, and nutrition. There have been several important studies on obesity reported in the Medical Journal of Australia, and these reports show that more than one in four Australian children are overweight or obese. In the most recent studies, an alarming figure of 28 per cent of girls and 27 per cent of boys fell into the category of being overweight or obese. These children are at a substantial risk of developing chronic conditions such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and stroke.

The sad fact is that 40 per cent of children in Australia play no sport nor participate in any physical activity. Figures from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare show that just over half the population does 150 minutes or more physical activity a week, and that is the recommended minimum. In other words, just half do the recommended minimum—and I stress that it is a recommended minimum. This is a very critical issue. It has come upon us rather more rapidly than many people might have expected. That is the bad news. The good news, the experts say, is that, because it is a relatively recent phenomenon, if the right measures are now taken then something can be done in a relatively short period of time to reverse these adverse trends. The message is very clear: we need to eat better, we need to exercise more and we need to engage in more physical activity, in sport.

I have had the opportunity over recent weeks to have some lengthy discussions with a number of the major sporting bodies, including Cricket Australia, Netball Australia and the Australian Football League. They have all indicated their willingness to join the government on this matter. We have had lengthy discussions with the Australian Sports Commission. I hope within the next few weeks to be able to make a very detailed announcement, on behalf of the government, of a national action plan to tackle this issue. It is something, I know, that has been the subject of discussion from a number of angles. I welcome, incidentally, the moves that have been taken by a number of state gov-
ernments—I think most recently by the New South Wales government—to reintroduce a compulsory sporting element.

Years ago in state schools—and I speak as a product of a government school in New South Wales—it was part of the curriculum that you did sport on Wednesday afternoon. The regrettable fact is that that has been in retreat for far too long, and it has to come back. You will not do anything to really tackle childhood obesity in this country until all of the schools of Australia, not just a few, make sport and physical activity an integral and extensive part of their weekly curriculum. It will be our objective to do that.

I think there is also great opportunity to expand the activities to the after-school hours segment. This particularly applies to the utilisation of the assets of schools, particularly government schools, once again. Those assets tend to lie idle between three o’clock and five o’clock, when a growing number of children are reunited with their parents, whereas in the case of many of the independent schools there are sporting activities after school. There is a lot that can be done. There is a lot that is going to be done. I would hope that this is something that would draw united support and participation from many elements of Australian society.

Health: Pneumococcal Vaccine

Mr LATHAM (2.14 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Is the Prime Minister aware of comments made over the weekend by the President of the AMA, Dr Bill Glasson, that funding the pneumococcal vaccine is:

... good basic public health policy. It’s an investment in the future of our younger generation, and it’s preventing young people from becoming disabled...

When will the government stop reviewing the vaccine and actually fund it? Our babies cannot wait any longer.

Mr ABBOTT—The Leader of the Opposition is right to an extent. Certainly, funding the pneumococcal vaccine makes considerable sense. There is no doubt about that. Over the last three years, pneumococcal disease has killed five, nine and 10 Australians—not 50, as the Leader of the Opposition claims in accordance with his mendacious statement the other day. It is another figure made up by the Leader of the Opposition to try and score a political point.

Ms Gillard interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Lalor!

Mr ABBOTT—The fact is that this government does want to fund a pneumococcal vaccine—

Ms Gillard interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! I had already drawn the member for Lalor’s attention to her obligations and she immediately continued to interject. The minister has the call. He will be heard in silence as the standing orders provide.

Mr ABBOTT—The government do intend to supply a universal pneumococcal vaccine, but we are not going to write a blank cheque to any multinational drug company. Negotiations are continuing and the government are endeavouring to get the best possible price and the best possible access.

Economy: Growth

Mr HAWKER (2.17 p.m.)—My question is to the Treasurer. Would the Treasurer outline to the House recent data on international trade and company profits. What does this data indicate about the current strengths of the Australian economy and Australia’s economic outlook? Are there any risks to this outlook?

Mr COSTELLO—I thank the honourable member for Wannon for his question. I can inform the House that today the international trade in goods and services figure for
the month of April was released, showing an improvement for the month of April of $178 million on the outcome for March, leading to a deficit of $1.8 billion. The narrowing of the trade deficit was led by growth in exports, which were up six per cent in April and 10 per cent over the year. In particular, exports of rural goods were much stronger, increasing by 13 per cent in April. They are now 20 per cent higher than a year ago, which is welcome news for rural Australia. Although it is too early to say that the drought has totally broken across Australia, it is welcome news that rural exports are up again. Exports rose by six per cent, as I said, and imports rose by four per cent, with strong domestic demand leading to strong growth in goods in the consumption, intermediate and capital areas.

I am also asked about company profits. Today the ABS released their Business Indicators publication for the March quarter, providing profits and inventories. This reports that gross operating profits fell two per cent in March but are still a solid five per cent higher than they were a year ago. The March quarter fall was driven by a nine per cent fall in profits in the mining sector and could well be related to the appreciation of the exchange rate. This was offset by strong profit growth in the retail trade sector, where there was 12 per cent profit growth, and the manufacturing sector—and I think members will welcome this—where there was a three per cent increase in March.

Notwithstanding that, the risks to the Australian economy are considerable. We have seen in recent times the oil price as high as it has ever been in the past, rivalling that of the first Gulf War. Continuing instability in Saudi Arabia will not help the oil price. The drought has not yet finished, as I indicated before. So the challenges are very great and the government maintains a disciplined economic and fiscal outlook designed to cope with them. The government would be helped if the opposition would pass important legislation now blocked in the Senate, and I again call on the Labor Party to pass the measures which the government has put to the Senate on unfair dismissal, labour market reform and reforming the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and the disability support pension. All of these big, long-term changes for the Australian economy would help our economic prospects if Labor would give away its opportunism and concentrate on Australia’s medium- and long-term interests. There is still considerable work to be done in economic policy in this country, and I call on the Australian Labor Party to get out of the way and allow the government to get on with doing it.

Education: Literacy and Numeracy

Mr LATHAM (2.20 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer him to my question to him on 3 December asking if he would join with me in a bipartisan initiative to encourage all Australian parents to read books to their infant children, and to provide special literacy programs for parents. Does the Prime Minister recall promising that he would always extend the bipartisan hand on this policy? Prime Minister, six months later, why has the government failed to introduce a national reading program for our infant children? Aren’t the benefits of literacy, exciting their minds and imagination early in life, the greatest gift we can give our toddlers?

Mr HOWARD—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. Without in any way suggesting that reading to your children is unimportant, could I say that I disagree with him. I think the greatest gift you can give your children is love. Reading to children is immensely important, and it is a manifestation. As far as extending the hand of bipartisanship is concerned, what I meant by that, self-evidently, is that we will always
support sensible policies which are designed to encourage parents to read to their children. To the extent that the opposition proposes those sensible policies, we will not criticise them. I do not think you will find that the government is being critical of the generality of what the Leader of the Opposition said. Self-evidently, it is a good thing for parents to read to their children. Without engaging in the ultrapersonalisation of these things—and I know the Leader of the Opposition would never do that either—when my children were very young I was in the habit of reading to them. I am quite sure that many of the wonderful fathers and mothers on both sides of the House have done exactly the same thing. When I talk about bipartisanship, what I am really saying is that it is rather silly of either side of politics to try and score a political point on the issue of reading to your children.

Iraq

Mrs ELSON (2.23 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Would the minister inform the House whether the government is adhering to its policy of leaving Australian troops in Iraq until their task is finished? Are there any alternative policies?

Mr DOWNER—I thank the member for Forde for her question. I know that she, as an excellent local member, is interested in the answer because her constituents are interested in the answer. The government has said on many occasions that it is committed to keeping Australian troops in Iraq until the job is done. It is very important that people know what those jobs are. They are training a new Iraqi army so that Iraqis themselves can take over responsibility for their own security. I would have thought that is a commonsense thing for our troops to do. We still have some air traffic controllers there helping with the administration of Baghdad International Airport and they will stay there until the Iraqis can fulfil that function, and we have 86 soldiers who are protecting the Australian representative office in Iraq.

As the House knows, a bomb went off recently near the Australian representative office. It was interesting to hear the Iraqi policeman say that the protection provided by the Australian troops makes it very difficult for any terrorists to attack the Australian mission itself. It is also noteworthy that HMAS Stuart was very effective in helping to protect Iraqi offshore oil assets recently. The Leader of the Opposition says that the troops there are just symbolic. He thinks they do not do anything important. I think Australians will resent that, because the troops are doing something very important. To leave now, as I explained the other day, or to leave in the middle of the year, would of course lead to the closure of our mission there, and I think that would be a bad idea.

The member for Forde asked whether there are any alternative views. There are always the views of the member for Griffith, who has a view on everything and many views on the same thing, and those views can change from interview to interview. It takes a great commitment of time and energy by my office to maintain track of the words of the member for Griffith. Last week I explained that he did an interview with a German newspaper called Die Tages Zeitung. In that interview he said that under Labor there would be an early withdrawal of our troops, but last week he said he would get advice from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on whether our troops should stay and guard the embassy or whether our troops should leave. I got the advice for him, and the advice was that we would have to close our embassy without the troops.

So what happened after that? The member for Griffith went on Lateline again—he gets
a good run there—on 27 May, last Thursday night. On *Lateline*—I think honourable members would be interested to hear this—the member for Griffith agreed that the government was right to have troops in Iraq protecting our embassy. He said:

If that is the advice Mr Downer has received—which you know it is, because I tabled it in the parliament last week—then that’s an appropriate judgment for Mr Downer to make now.

So the member for Griffith thinks it is right to have the troops there. He told *Die Tages Zeitung* that it was wrong to have troops there. A couple of weeks elapsed and it was right to have troops there.

Interestingly enough, he even contradicts his leader’s position on whether the troops should be out by Christmas. Let us be generous to the member for Griffith and say that he thinks the troops should be there now, but what about later on? On *Lateline* he said:

All I’m saying is it’s irresponsible for a politician—which I assume includes the Leader of the Opposition—to say six months in advance of a reality, this is precisely what the lay of the land will be then.

In other words, the member for Griffith is leaving open the possibility that under Labor’s policy they will not withdraw all the troops from Iraq; they will leave the 86 troops there to protect our mission—a reasonable proposition.

It is hardly surprising that in the *Australian Financial Review*’s colour magazine there was an article on the member for Griffith entitled ‘Destiny’s Child’, which is a very good title. By the way, I thought that some people on the other side have been saying some uncharitable things about the member for Griffith behind his back. I thought they were uncharitable. **Honourable member interjecting—**

Mr Downer—Someone said ‘Shame’—I agree. A lot of people in the Labor Party are following the Leader of the Opposition and his personal critique of the member for Griffith. The *Financial Review* said, ‘Rudd has to play follow-the-leader no matter how much damage is done to his credibility.’ I think those words say it all. Last week in the parliament I raised the question of what the Leader of the Opposition’s position was on the troops. I think we should be told. If the Leader of the Opposition were to become the Prime Minister of Australia, I think we are indeed all entitled to know whether the Leader of the Opposition agrees with the member for Griffith, or the Leader of the Opposition agrees with the member for Griffith before the recent statements by the member for Griffith, or whether the Leader of the Opposition even agrees with his own interview on 2GB, with Mike Carlton. The fact is that my own view of the Leader of the Opposition is that he actually believes in almost nothing except his own ego—almost nothing at all. The Leader of the Opposition, unlike Paul Keating or Gough Whitlam, is not one of politics’ true believers; he is one of politics’ true careerists. I think we are entitled to know from the Leader of the Opposition, if Labor were elected, what their position on the troops really is, because there is deep and dark confusion about that issue.

**National Security: Terrorism**

Mr McClelland (2.30 p.m.)—My question in this instance is to the Prime Minister. Given the Attorney-General’s admission today that the failure of ASIO and AFP to respond to approaches about the activities of Jemaah Islamiah was ‘a very significant failure on their part’, will the Prime Minister now acknowledge that the failure was a missed opportunity to find out more about the activities of JI, the organisation responsi-
ble for the Bali bombings, some two years before those bombings occurred? Given the gravity of these and other failings, will the Prime Minister now agree to hold a royal commission into our security agencies?

Mr RUDDOCK—I thank the—

Mr Crean interjecting—
The SPEAKER—The Attorney-General has the call. The member for Hotham!

Mr RUDDOCK—I thank the honourable member for the question, because it does give me the opportunity to point out, in relation to this very serious issue, that it has been a matter of note for some time. These reports occurred some four years ago, before the tragedy in New York and before the tragedy in Bali. It is the case—and it was reported publicly some two years ago—that ASIO was involved in a detailed internal investigation in response to those public claims in 2002 by Mr Roche, and they established then that they had not followed up on certain calls that were made. My predecessor was advised of that, and we were both given briefings by ASIO as to the steps that had been taken, following that outline.

ASIO now has in place a systematic system of fall-back checking so that public calls will not be entirely dependent on just one or two people who might receive the call. These arrangements were instituted last year. There was an independent inquiry. The inquiry was undertaken by the former Inspector-General of Security and Intelligence, Ron McLeod, and he found that the new system was sound and appropriate, although he did make some minor suggestions which were implemented by ASIO in relation to this matter.

As the Prime Minister said before, you cannot guarantee that there will never be human error, but I think ASIO is a particularly professional organisation. I think it does its job well. But the director-general recognises that this was a mistake on its part. The fact is that ASIO has had to deal with something in the order of 13,000 calls from members of the public since the National Security Hotline was instituted. Some of those have proved useful and are being followed up; others, of course, have not been entirely relevant. ASIO has to make some judgment calls in relation to those matters. But it is, I might say, drawing an extremely long bow to suggest that, if ASIO had been following that matter up at that time, it might have prevented the Bali bombings. There is no evidence, and there was no evidence adduced by Mr Roche in the trial, that suggested that he knew anything at that time about the Bali attacks.

The question also asked for information in relation to the Australian Federal Police. I have said today in response to a number of interviews that I was unable to confirm that a call was made to the Singapore office of the AFP. In fact, the advice that I had received from the AFP—because I had sought specific advice from the AFP before I spoke to the media on this matter—was that there was no record of any call to the AFP. But I have been advised this afternoon that, on further checking, a person posted to Singapore in the year 2000 has today identified a diary note which may relate to the issue. According to that note, he received a voice mail message on 7 September 2000 from a man who identified himself as Ibrahim. The message, I am told, was non-specific but suggested that the caller had information of relevance to the AFP, and he left a phone number, requesting that his call be returned. The officer noted in his diary records that he attempted to return that call at 12.40 on the same day, that that attempt and subsequent efforts to raise someone on the number provided were unsuccessful and therefore that he was unable to speak to Ibrahim. The caller did not make—according to the advice I have been
given—any further attempts to contact the AFP.

I think these matters have been dealt with properly, appropriately and fully. They were in the public arena two years ago, when these issues could have been raised. As is normally the case, we have indicated to the Leader of the Opposition that, if he wishes to be briefed on these matters relating to national security, he can have a briefing in relation to them, and if he wants to satisfy himself as to the changes in procedures that have been outlined he can do that as well.

Economy: Performance

Mr BARTLETT (2.36 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Treasurer. Would the Treasurer advise the House on the benefits to Australian families of disciplined, focused economic management? How would this be placed at risk by alternative proposals?

Mr COSTELLO—I thank the honourable member for Macquarie for his question. I can inform him that the government is forecasting continued economic growth in 2004-05. The government is forecasting that that will continue on low inflation and that unemployment will remain below six per cent—as low as it has been in the last 23 years. The government is also forecasting the seventh surplus since the government was elected in 1996. In fact, as at the end of the current financial year, we believe that in net terms we will have retired $70 billion of the $96 billion that had been accrued by the time Labor left office in 1996. That will reduce net debt to GDP from 19.1 per cent to 3.2 per cent. This is a very strong fiscal performance, and there are not many countries around the world that can boast, like Australia, continuing surpluses.

The member for Macquarie asked whether this could be placed at risk by alternative proposals. Unfortunately, it could. It is quite noticeable that the Labor Party now has a tactic of not asking questions about the economy and not allowing the member for Hotham on his feet at the dispatch box anymore. In the course of this budget session, the Labor Party’s criticism—to the extent that the Labor Party talked about the budget—has been that the tax cuts did not go far enough. That was the Australian Labor Party’s position. If there was any doubt about that, the Leader of the Opposition stood up in his reply to the budget, on the Thursday after the budget, and said, ‘We will implement a bigger program of tax relief.’ That could mean only one thing: the Labor Party believes that the tax cuts were not enough and that there should have been bigger tax cuts. Consequently, the Labor Party believes that the budget should have had more spending.

That is why I was so surprised, when federal Labor criticised the government for not spending enough on tax cuts, to read the newspapers today and find that state Labor was criticising the government because the tax cuts were too large and too extensive. Just in case federal Labor was wrong and we had not gone far enough, state Labor decided that we were wrong because we had gone too far. It must have been a slow news day for the Financial Review, because their lead story was from the New South Wales Treasurer, Mr Egan. I was rather amused to read that Mr Egan said:

… there is a danger that domestic rates could head higher, hurting activity in the property market …

Some mothers do have them, don’t they? There could be problems in the New South Wales property market. Of course, it has got nothing to do with the new 2¼ per cent tax that the New South Wales government has just whipped on all investment properties—a proposal where you pay tax not only when you buy a property but also when you sell it. There was no mention of this from the New South Wales government before the last state
election. I have always said: if you want to know what Labor would do if it were elected at a federal level, have a look at what Labor has done in the states. There was no talk about new taxes on property from Bob Carr before the last election. The thing that amazes me is that you can look in vain for a federal Labor MP who has criticised the new taxes of the Carr government.

What an extraordinary proposition we are now getting out of the New South Wales Carr government—that property could turn down in New South Wales not because they have whacked a new tax, an exit tax, on all investment properties but because the federal government was reckless, according to Treasurer Michael Egan. Sooner or later, the media of Australia are going to hold the Labor Party accountable for what they say. Sooner or later they are going to say to the Leader of the Opposition: running Australia is a little bit more difficult than being mayor of Liverpool Council. Sooner or later they are going to wonder how it is that the Labor Party can promise greater tax relief without announcing their rates. When that scrutiny is put on, maybe they will have a look at the words of Senator Stephen Conroy on Meet the Press on Sunday. He was asked how they could do all of this and the question was, ‘Will you end up disappointing your supporters?’ Stephen Conroy said this: I think our package will be fully funded. We will have broader and fairer tax cuts and we will have more in services and health and education than the Government are providing.

Isn’t that amazing? You can cut tax and spend more money at the same time; and, at the end of it, you have an intergenerational fund and have more left over at the end of it. Why didn’t we think of that? What have we been doing these last eight years? None of that adds up. You cannot do all of those things. The Labor policy is a fraud, and the Australian Labor Party’s tax policies and family policies would do enormous damage to Australia. You would get the same outcome, because it is the same promise that was made down at the Liverpool Council, and that is that you could spend more and have more left over. The Liverpool Council is now in the hands of receivership.

Iraq: Treatment of Prisoners

Mr Rudd (2.43 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to his statement to the House last Thursday that the October 2003 Red Cross report covered ‘general concerns about detainee conditions and treatment’. The Prime Minister contrasted that with the February 2004 Red Cross report, which ‘raised allegations of ill treatment of detainees.’ I also refer to the Prime Minister’s statement of last Friday when he maintained this distinction, saying that the October Red Cross report dealt with food, clothing and communications matters. Why did the Prime Minister suddenly change his position yesterday on the October Red Cross report by now admitting that there is a debate about what was in that report and that he was still trying to obtain a copy of that report? If the Prime Minister had not even read the report by last Thursday, how on earth was he in a position to assure the parliament of what was in the report and what was not in the report?

Mr Howard—As I have indicated all along, I reiterate that the comments I have made in relation to this matter have all been based on advice that I have had from the defence department. I have also reiterated—and I reiterate again—that the first I and to my knowledge ministers knew of the serious
abuse allegations was in April. Nothing that has come to my attention has altered that fact. I indicated to a television interviewer yesterday that, because of the different views that have been expressed by various people on this subject, I had sought a copy of the October report from the British and/or American governments. I have not seen the October report. To my knowledge—

Mr Rudd—So how could you know what was in it?

Mr Howard—I was relying on the advice, as I said, of the defence department. This is an extraordinary proposition. I was not in Baghdad. I was not there. I have not seen the report. Everything that I have said to date is based on what the defence department has told me. I was informed shortly before question time that the defence department now has in its possession some documents that have been described as working drafts or working papers. I have not had an opportunity to analyse them and I do not intend to say anything further about that until I have. But I repeat: everything I have said on this matter has been based on the advice of the defence department. It can be none other.

Can I also take the opportunity of saying yet again that it is perfectly legitimate for the opposition and, indeed, the media to ask questions about the time at which knowledge was acquired by people in the Australian Defence Force and when knowledge was acquired by ministers. That is a perfectly legitimate exercise. I am satisfied that, as soon as the ministers were aware of these serious abuse allegations, the appropriate statements of disgust and abhorrence were made on behalf of the government.

I have to take this opportunity again of saying this, because it may not seep through to everybody in the Australian community: none of these abuse allegations in any way involve the behaviour of members of the Australian Defence Force. At no stage have members of the Australian Defence Force been in any way involved. We totally repudiate any suggestion of that and the implication. Every time one of these allegations is made, the television cameras reproduce those appalling photographs. When allegations are made about the knowledge of the ADF and these appalling photographs are produced, it is my obligation as the head of the government to say this again and again on behalf of the men and women of the Australian Defence Force, who have behaved impeccably, and also, incidentally, on behalf of the 138,000 or 139,000 members of the American army serving in Iraq who have also behaved in a totally professional manner.

There has been appalling misbehaviour by a small number of people. To the great credit of the United States, something is being done to bring the perpetrators to justice. In my view, that reflects favourably upon the United States and I do not believe that the misdeeds of a few should besmirch the fine reputations of fighting men and women in both armies.

Aviation: Second Sydney Airport

Mrs Gash (2.48 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services. Would the Deputy Prime Minister update the House on the government’s policy regarding the future of Sydney airport? Is the minister aware of new evidence in regard to alternative policies?

Mr Anderson—I thank the honourable member for her question and note her particular interest in the speculation of the last few days. The government’s policy is settled and has not changed. In a nutshell, Sydney does not need a second airport in the foreseeable future and there is no point in looking for one. Indeed, it would be very bad
public policy in my view to go and try to find a site now and seek to build one—

Mr Murphy—Nonsense!

Mr ANDERSON—The member for Lowe just said in an aside that they are going to find a site and build it. The reason that it would be bad policy to do so at the moment—and he is nodding—is that we do not know if it will be needed or when it will be needed if it were to be needed. The real danger is, that in making a decision now in the absence of those critical factors as to whether you would need it and where you might build it, the chances are that you would build a complete and absolute white elephant at vast cost to the taxpayer, and one which would not be used by the travelling public.

Despite all of this and the commonsense position that the government has taken up, on the basis of information made public last week the Labor Party are quite intent on finding a site for the second airport that Sydney does not need. It is also the case, we now know, that they have almost certainly chosen the airport site and made up their minds that they want to build it.

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr ANDERSON—’Not true’, we hear, but the member for Lowe says it is true. We now know, thanks to the Leader of the Opposition in New South Wales lodging an FOI request, that quite a bit of detailed information has been sought, assembled and put together for the Labor Party. The Leader of the Opposition lodged the freedom of information application, attached the required fee and requested:

... all file notes, emails, reports or other documents relating to discussions regarding possible locations for a second Sydney airport or any planning or future land use issues relating to Wilton, Sutton Forest, Berrima or Wells Creek in Wingeecarribee or Wollondilly shires held between the honourable Craig Knowles or his staff and the federal opposition leader and his staff or designated agents.

They have made a lot of talk over there about how they would be consulting with their New South Wales colleagues. Shortly after that, back came the reply from the relevant FOI officer:

I have this day determined—it says in part—that full access be granted to the information you requested.

Full access!

Please find attached one document detailing the information pertinent to your application.

As to the one document, what is it? A very detailed exploration of the possibility of Sutton Park is what it is, setting out all of the reasons why it ought to be built at Sutton Park.

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr ANDERSON—It is Sutton Forest, I beg your pardon. In response to this, the New South Wales government initially said that it did the work because the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning wanted to know what sites were available—he was curious. But, this morning, there was a report that the work was done because the federal Labor opposition asked for an airport site outside the Sydney basin. Interestingly, of course, this work was done in January, just before that conference where they said they would identify a site and then at the conference said they were not going to. Then we see, at federal level, the opposition transport spokesman admitting that he has been talking to the New South Wales minister about alternative sites but saying that he has not seen the one document that is germane to the whole thing.

The Labor Party cannot possibly expect us to believe all of this nonsense. The people of the Southern Highlands deserve to know whether or not this really is their secret plan...
for an airport—whether this is what they are going to do. It is not only the people of the Southern Highlands; the taxpayers need to know as well. The estimated cost of an airport like this is around $3 billion—the Treasurer would like to know, I am sure. But not only that: it needs to be recognised that Sutton Forest is 130 kilometres from Sydney. The document makes the claim that New South Wales would need a bit of help with the additional infrastructure—there is a light rail at the cost of about $3 billion and a complete upgrade of the highways. The Treasurer might like to add this to the magic pudding—the lower taxes, the more spending, the better services, the bigger surplus and the intergenerational retirement plan. You can now add around $5 billion or $6 billion for this. And I note this morning mention of the Pacific Highway as well. But, in the end, the Leader of the Opposition has to demonstrate some public policy integrity on all of this. He has to rule out the Sutton site, rule it in and tell us how they will fund it or admit that Labor have no intention of building a second airport and that their policy is just a pretence to the anti-airport lobbies of inner Sydney.

As I looked at all of this this morning, it occurred to me that I am one of those Australian parents—I think it is about 96 per cent—who actually read to their children without having to have a government instruction from the nanny state to tell them to do it. One of my children had a favourite character: a dog whose name was What-a-Mess. He was one of those lovable characters that was always trying to do the right thing but, every time he tried to resolve a mess, he made the mess worse. I reckon that the member for Werriwa has been reading What-a-Mess to the member for Batman, and that is how they came up with this airport policy.

Iraq: Treatment of Prisoners

Mr Rudd (2.55 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Given evidence before Senate estimates, just before lunchtime today, that Major O’Kane visited Abu Ghraib prison on at least one occasion last year, why did the Prime Minister not disclose this fact to the House last Thursday in his extensive response to my question? Given the importance of hearing directly from Major O’Kane, why is the government refusing to let Major O’Kane appear at estimates and clarify who in the chain of command in Canberra any relevant information was passed to?

Mr Howard—The question of whether people in the defence forces or the defence department appear before estimates committees is a matter for the Minister for Defence. I am sure he will be guided in that matter by the practice of past defence ministers.

Overseas Adoption

Mr Hartsuyker (2.56 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Attorney-General. Would the Attorney-General advise the House of the government’s views on overseas adoption? Is the Attorney-General aware of any alternative views on this issue?

Mr Ruddock—I thank the honourable member for Cowper for his question, because it does give me the opportunity to provide some information to the House on the number of children adopted both from overseas and locally. In the year 2002-03 there were 78 adoptions within Australia. In that same year, there were 278 overseas adoptions that were arranged under the bilateral agreements between countries or under the Hague convention. The issue of adoption is obviously a very important one. It is important because the number of children available for adoption here and abroad is very limited. There are always many more families who seek to adopt children than can ever be ac-
commodated. The fact is that we are dealing with situations which, if you saw some of the comments from the Leader of the Opposition, one would believe ought to be automatically accommodated. I quote the Leader of the Opposition from a radio program on 2GB today on this matter:

In general, all other things being equal, adopted children are far better off with a mum and a dad. And, if the world was perfect, that would always be the outcome you would be seeking. But in the imperfect world, a lot of unique and difficult circumstances, we think, have always been handled case by case in the best interests of the child.

I simply make the point that this is not a matter for the states; this is a matter in which the Australian government determines who will be able to come and settle in Australia.

Ms Roxon interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Gellibrand does not have the call.

Ms King interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Ballarat!

Mr RUDDOCK—There are arrangements for recognised programs on a bilateral basis which are supervised by the states in determining whether or not parents are suitable for adoption.

Ms Roxon interjecting—

Ms King interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The members for Gellibrand and for Ballarat!

Mr RUDDOCK—It is in that context that we know the best interests of children are served by having both role models available to them, and the Leader of the Opposition has suggested that that is important. We know there is a shortage of children available for adoption, yet there are some people who would want to put that program at risk by prioritising, over and above couples who are wanting to adopt children, those in same-sex relationships. This would put at risk an international program. Governments abroad would say, if you were doing that—

Ms King interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I warn the member for Ballarat!

Mr RUDDOCK—‘We are not going to allow our children to enter into a program that is pursued by Australia.’ It would be clearly against Australia’s interests to have state governments determining that homosexual couples should have priority over married available parents seeking to adopt children. I go back to the words of the Leader of the Opposition, because they were very germane:

In general, all other things being equal, adopted children are better off with a mum and dad.

Ms Roxon interjecting—

Ms King interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I warn the member for Gellibrand!

Environment: Government Policy

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (3.00 p.m.)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to his announcement that after over eight years in office the government will be adopting 10-year plans as part of its re-election strategy. Given that recent media reports have stated that the government will soon announce a 10-year plan for the environment, will the government adopt Labor’s 10-year plan for the Murray-Darling river system by injecting 1,500 gigalitres of water into the river system over the next decade? Will the government adopt Labor’s policy to increase the—Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Sturt!

The member for Wills will repeat his question from whatever point he was interrupted.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON—The second part of the question was: will the government
adopt Labor’s policy to increase the mandatory renewable energy target from less than two per cent to five per cent and require this to be met by 2010?

Mr HOWARD—I thank the member for Wills for his question. I am glad he is following the papers. I am glad he has noted that the government will be having a number of things to say about longer-term policy in relation to the environment. It gives me an opportunity of saying something about the wonderful environmental record of the government over the last 8½ years. It enables me to remind the member for Wills that he talks about the Murray-Darling, but the most significant thing that has been done in relation to that issue in recent times is the national water initiative, which was brought before the Council of Australian Governments by the Commonwealth government. I have to acknowledge the tremendous work of the Deputy Prime Minister and the leader of The Nationals, because he has been the driving force behind that. I can tell the member for Wills this: you will be hearing something about future environmental policy from the government over the last 8½ years. It enables me to remind the member for Wills that he talks about the Murray-Darling, but the most significant thing that has been done in relation to that issue in recent times is the national water initiative, which was brought before the Council of Australian Governments by the Commonwealth government. I have to acknowledge the tremendous work of the Deputy Prime Minister and the leader of The Nationals, because he has been the driving force behind that. I can tell the member for Wills this: you will be hearing something about future environmental policy from the government. I can assure him that, to the extent that our policy and the policies of the opposition are the same, it will not be a bad thing, because in all of these areas there is no harm in coincidence—there is no harm in great minds thinking alike.

But I can promise him one thing: there is a big difference between us on this side of the House in the government and those who sit opposite in the Australian Labor Party. We believe it is possible to preserve the Australian environment without crippling our resource industries. We believe it is possible to reach the Kyoto target of 108 on the benchmark date in relation to Australia, without at the same time betraying Australian resource industries, by signing a protocol that would disadvantage Australia as compared to countries such as China, Indonesia and Brazil that could very readily be our competitors in relation to investment and markets. In other words, we can pursue a bright environmental future for Australia without the high economic costs that would be imposed by many of the policies that have been advocated by the Australian Labor Party. There is only one side of politics in Australia that can be trusted simultaneously with the environmental and economic future of Australia, and that is the Liberal Party and The Nationals.

Medicare

Dr WASHER (3.04 p.m.)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Health and Ageing. Would the minister provide examples to the House of how Australian families are now benefiting from the government’s new Medicare safety net? Is the minister aware of any alternative policies?

Mr ABBOTT—I thank the member for Moore for his question and I congratulate him on spending an adult lifetime trying to promote better health outcomes for the people of Perth—both as a doctor in Perth and as a member of this House. As the member for Moore well knows, the Howard government’s brand new Medicare safety net is the biggest structural improvement to our Medicare system since it commenced in 1984. Already, more than 200,000 Australians are enjoying higher Medicare rebates thanks to the new system. They have benefited to the tune of $7½ million already—$7½ million to the sickest and most vulnerable people in this country as a result of the Howard government’s brand new safety net.

I have been asked about alternative policies. The policy of the Labor Party—the great health heist of 2004—is to rip the guts out of the Howard government’s brand new safety net. I have here a quote from the member for Lalor, who said on Meet the Press:
We won’t be operating this sham safety net arrangement.

Then, of course, we have none other than the Leader of the Opposition, who wants to take money off people in the safety net and fund the pneumococcal vaccination. The only political party in this parliament that wants to actually take money away from any health program is not the Liberal Party, The Nationals, the Democrats or the Greens—it is the Australian Labor Party, which thinks that you can rip benefits off one group of people to give them to another. This government is about putting more money into the Medicare system; it is not about taking money out.

The Labor Party’s policy to abolish the Medicare safety net means real hardship to real people. For instance, there is a retiree with a brain tumour. She has received $720 under the safety net already, and that would be gone under Labor. There is a pensioner with suspected prostate cancer. He has received $230 already under the safety net—that would be gone under Labor. There is a couple expecting their first child. They have received $445 already under the safety net—that would be gone under Labor. There is a pretty odd Labor Party that wants to rip off the pensioners, the retirees and the expectant mums of this country. The message is going out: look at the fine print; and the fine print says, ‘You will pay more for your health if there is ever a Labor government elected.’

**Immigration: Detention Centres**

Mr STEPHEN SMITH (3.08 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. Can the minister confirm that the cost of keeping open the now empty immigration detention facility on Manus Island is $250,000 a month? Can the minister also confirm the government will keep the centre open at least until the end of October at a cost to the Australian taxpayer of $1.25 million? Minister, is it not the case that the cost of keeping the empty Manus Island facility open is equivalent to 9,700 bulk-billed GP consultations a month?

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Perth is now advancing an argument.

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! Member for Mackellar, the member for Perth has the call.

Mr STEPHEN SMITH—When will the government adopt Labor’s policy to end the Pacific solution and end this extraordinary waste of taxpayers’ money?

Mr HARDGRAVE—This government takes very seriously the responsibility of sending a very strong signal to those who have engaged in the past practice of people-smuggling—of attempting to bring people to Australia by means which challenge our orderly migration process. This government has used a range of mechanisms that send strong signals to those people-smugglers that that range of activities no longer guarantees an outcome.

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I warn the member for Grayndler, since no other language is understood by him, and remind him of the consequences of being named.

Mr HARDGRAVE—As a result, this government has been able to see a real decrease in the number of people coming to this country by unlawful means. The Australian Labor Party, on the other side of the equation, stands for a soft approach on people-smuggling. The Australian Labor Party wants to send a green light to this industry that, if it should happen to be elected, after the next election they can be back in business—and we can start seeing children loaded onto boats to take their chances on the high seas; we can start to see people trying to force their way into the Australian
community and at the same time bringing into disrepute all people who come in an orderly way through the migration system. It is important that the Australian people understand very clearly that the Australian Labor Party and its competing agenda on this particular issue are a threat to the integrity of our migration system and a threat to the integrity of the good standing of all people who pass lawfully through it.

**Trade: Free Trade Agreement**

**Mr SECKER (3.11 p.m.)—**My question is addressed to the Minister for Trade. Would the minister inform the House of support for the free trade agreement with the United States? Is the minister aware of any alternative policies?

**Mr VAILE—**I thank the honourable member for Barker for his question. Coming from South Australia, he is particularly keen to see the passage of this agreement through the US Congress and of the enabling legislation through this parliament so that his constituents can benefit from some of the programs that will fall out of the agreement and, of course, from the jobs that will be created in his electorate in South Australia.

The report is out from CIE, the Centre for International Economics, that indicates that this agreement could deliver a $6 billion boost to the bottom line of Australia. It also indicates that it could generate another 30,000 jobs in the Australian economy. It indicates that it would give us a historic opportunity to access a market of 300 million consumers. This has been well recognised by many groups across Australia since the detail of the agreement became public after the negotiations in January and February this year. Of course, industry and business support this deal; the farmers support it; the seafood industry supports it; business groups support it; manufacturers support it; Medicines Australia and the Pharmacy Guild support it; and even state Labor governments have indicated their support for this agreement—all the state Labor governments have indicated their support.

I found reported in media recently on the mid-North Coast of New South Wales that the Labor trade spokesman actually supports it. It is reported in the *Great Lakes Advocate* that Senator Conroy—Senator Conroy again; I know he was mentioned earlier in question time—when he was in my electorate was attending a meeting that had been organised by, I think, people from One Nation, maybe, because the report in the paper comes from those people. He was asked if Labor supported the free trade agreement, and Senator Conroy said, ‘Yes, we do.’ That was reported in a piece in the *Great Lakes Advocate*, and the piece went on to say that about 60 concerned citizens from throughout the New South Wales North Coast heard the senator and the Labor candidate for Lyne confirm that they will continue to support the Australia-United States free trade agreement if Labor should win government in the forthcoming elections.

We still have not heard from the Leader of the Opposition, though. We have heard from everybody else. We have heard from industry. We have heard from all the interested stakeholders. We have heard from the state Labor governments. We have heard from the trade spokesman for the Labor Party. We have not heard from the Leader of the Opposition on this, as the voice of the Labor Party. We have not heard from him whether they will support an agreement that will deliver a significant boost to the Australian economy and will create an opportunity of generating an extra 30,000 jobs in the Australian economy. We need to ask ourselves why. We need to ask ourselves whether, as some commentators very unkindly say, it is his natural anti-American attitude.
Mr Swan (3.15 p.m.)—My question without notice is directed to the Prime Minister. Is the Prime Minister aware that officials from the Department of Family and Community Services have told Senate estimates today that families who lodge tax returns early will not be advised of any family benefit debts they may have until after September? Is the Prime Minister aware that, in a departure from the government’s usual practice, they will not have their tax returns stripped to recover any overpayment? Prime Minister, doesn’t this systems problem mean many families will not be advised or asked to repay debts until after the election, should it be held in August or September?

Mr Howard—I will resist the urge to tell the member for Lilley when the election is going to be held.

Mr Anderson—We would like to know first.

Mr Howard—You would like to know first, yes. I am not aware of what has been said in Senate estimates, but I am aware that as a result of the budget every eligible family will be $1,200 a child better off this year.

Mr Swan—Untrue.

Mr Howard—Nothing alters that fact, not even the fervent and tortured efforts of the member for Lilley to suggest otherwise can alter that simple fact. I will just repeat it very slowly so the member for Lilley can take it in. You get $600 before 30 June in relation to the eligible child. My advice is that those payments are going to be made some time between about the middle and the end of June, because the legislation has gone through. My further understanding is that, in relation to the next $600, you have to put it in your tax return and then you have a reconciliation. It has never been suggested that there would not first be a reconciliation and then the extra amount. Obviously, if there is a liability, that liability will be offset.

Mr Crean—And then the clawback.

Mr Costello—He is complaining there is no clawback.

Mr Howard—He is complaining there is no clawback. Can I also take the opportunity of reminding the Leader of the Opposition—

Mr Swan interjecting—

Mr Howard—I am glad the member for Lilley interjects; I think he actually helps me. He does not intend to, but he does. Per misadventure, he reminds me of something I have in my file. What I have in this file says—and these are very interesting figures, and I think everybody in the House will want to hear them—that, as at March 2004, just under 1.7 FTB families have had their 2002-03 FTB reconciled. Of these families, 478,366 or 28 per cent have received a top up.

Mr Swan—A catch up.

Mr Howard—No, a top up—something that did not exist under the Australian Labor Party.

The Speaker—The member for Lilley!

Mr Howard—No, Mr Speaker, I warm to the member for Lilley; he encourages me on these things. There are 469,904 who have incurred an overpayment and there are 748,364 who have not been changed. Even with my feeble maths, if you add the 44 per cent and the 28 per cent together, I think you have 72 per cent who either have no change or who receive a top up. That indicates that the reconciliation results for 2002-03 are an improvement on the outcomes for the previous year. I am told that 10.2 per cent more families have reconciled and...
overpayment for 2002 than for 2001-02. What this shows is that, quite apart from the additional $1,200 to which each eligible child will become entitled—

Mr Swan interjecting—

Mr HOWARD—The member for Lilley shakes his head and thinks that somehow or other you can shake away $1,200.

Mr Swan—You have just admitted they are not entitled to it.

The SPEAKER—The member for Lilley is warned!

Mr HOWARD—I do not think many families are going to shake $1,200 away. They might, when they work it out and when it comes, shake you away, but they are not going to shake away the value of this budget for Australian families. In relation to their entitlements, there will be an additional eligibility of $1,200 for every child. Nothing the member for Lilley can say alters that fact.

It has been a very good budget for Australian families. Can I point out to the member for Lilley that the benefits are going to flow. They are going to start flowing in the middle of next month, and what I think the people who receive those will want to know is whether they have an absolute guarantee that, if there were a change of government—whenever the election is held—they would continue to get that extra $1,200. That is what they are going to be interested in. They are not going to be so worried about top ups and reconciliations; they are going to be worried about snatch aways. They are going to be worried as to whether any of that $1,200 is going to be taken away—and the inability, day after day, of the Leader of the Opposition to spell out what he intends to do on taxation and family benefits will only feed the anxiety of average Australian families.

Environment: Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Mr BILLSON (3.21 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for Environment and Heritage. Is the minister aware of any recent claims that a greenhouse emissions trading system would benefit Australia? Is there merit to these claims and would the minister provide details of possible outcomes of such a scheme?

Dr KEMP—I thank the honourable member for Dunkley for his question. I am aware of the fact that there are those promoting emissions trading schemes for Australia to address the issue of climate change—among them the Leader of the Opposition and the Premier of New South Wales. Last week in a speech, the Leader of the Opposition attempted to argue that an emissions trading scheme would be good for business. An emissions trading scheme—and this is for the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition—operates like a carbon tax. The Leader of the Opposition appears to be working under the delusion that a scheme to increase the cost of production for our major industries is actually great for the Australian economy. He seems to ignore the fact that increased costs mean higher prices, fewer jobs, hardship for families and fewer rungs on the ladder of opportunity.

Why would the Leader of the Opposition want to impose this extra cost on Australian industry? It certainly is not in order to reach our internationally agreed target for greenhouse abatement, because we are going to reach that target anyway. So why does the Leader of the Opposition want to impose this extra cost? At least, instead of pretending that it is a benefit, he ought to admit that it is actually a cost—because the Victorian government recently received a report from Allen Consulting which made this point very clearly. As the Australian reported on 19 May:
A carbon trading scheme designed to reduce greenhouse gases would knock out 15,000 jobs, slash the national economy and lead to an explosion in power prices, secret modelling for the Victorian Government has found.

So here we have the extraordinary situation where the Leader of the Opposition believes that a new tax burden on Australian business is going to be good for the economy, when an expert report to the Victorian government shows that it will actually cut economic growth and cause the loss of perhaps some 15,000 jobs. As well as that, the report indicated that it could put up electricity prices by some 27 per cent. If electricity prices were to go up by 27 per cent, that would be a $203 per annum increase in electricity bills for every household in Victoria; $209 extra in New South Wales; $224 extra in Queensland; $193 extra in Western Australia; $289 extra in Tasmania; and $303 extra in South Australia.

This is the cost of the Leader of the Opposition’s commitment to an emissions trading scheme. It will only disadvantage Australian families. It will destroy jobs. It will be an extra burden on Australian industry. It will knock a further series of rungs out of the ladder of opportunity. Maybe the Leader of the Opposition thinks the way you make the magic pudding deliver is to put up taxes and then that speeds up economic growth and you have more to spend. The reality is, as every piece of expert evidence shows, that this will destroy jobs and undermine economic growth. Why does he want to do it? For shabby political reasons: to buy Green preferences. If the Leader of the Opposition thinks we need to go further than our already agreed international target, he should tell us so or abandon this crazy policy.

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

Mr CHARLES (La Trobe) (3.28 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr CHARLES—I do.

The SPEAKER—The member for La Trobe may proceed.

Mr CHARLES—In a long article in the Weekend Australian on 29 May this year, Patricia Karvelas and Samantha Maiden said, amongst other things:

In the lower house, outgoing Liberal member for La Trobe in Melbourne’s northern suburbs Bob Charles made just one contribution to democracy, giving only one speech this parliamentary term. For his one-off contribution, he cost taxpayers close to $1 million dollars to maintain...

We checked the record today. In this parliamentary term I have made 35 speeches in the House and 174 speeches in the electorate. I have chaired 38 public hearings of the JCPAA, chaired 64 private meetings of that committee, asked 21 questions without notice and tabled eight petitions. I suggest that perhaps the journalists need extensive re-training.

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

Questions on Notice

Mr PRICE (3.29 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, under standing order 150: on 4 December 2003 I asked question No. 2848 addressed to the Minister representing the Minister for Justice and Customs. Could you write to him and seek an answer to the question about street posting boxes?

The SPEAKER—I will follow up the matter raised by the member for Chifley as the standing orders provide.

Notice Paper

Mr PRICE (3.30 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I may be grossly mistaken, but has there been a change to the policy for the production of the Notice Paper? It was my understanding that a complete Notice Paper was printed every sitting Monday but it now appears to be printed only every first sitting Monday—that is, fortnightly. If this is the case, could you advise members when it was introduced and for what reason? I miss the old system; I must say.

The SPEAKER—I am sure the member for Chifley will understand that it would be best if I sought advice on this and came back to him and the House. But I have to say that I do encourage those things that would generally reduce the use of paper in the House. I am happy to present some statistics to indicate the changes in paper use in the House. I note assent from the member for Bonython.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (3.31 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation. Yes, I have been savaged by the Deputy Prime Minister during question time.

The SPEAKER—I am sure the member for Chifley will understand that it would be best if I sought advice on this and came back to him and the House. But I have to say that I do encourage those things that would generally reduce the use of paper in the House. I am happy to present some statistics to indicate the changes in paper use in the House. I note assent from the member for Bonython.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (3.31 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr MURPHY—Yes, I have been savaged by the Deputy Prime Minister during question time.

The SPEAKER—The member for Lowe claims to have been misrepresented and may proceed—but I was here for question time.

CHAMBER
Mr MURPHY—During question time in response to a Dorothy Dix question, the Deputy Prime Minister in relation to the ALP’s policy regarding a second airport for the people of Sydney totally misrepresented the position. My position is the ALP’s policy, which flows from the motion moved by the member for Grayndler, seconded by me and adopted by—

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

Dr LAWRENCE (Fremantle) (3.32 p.m.)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

The SPEAKER—Does the member for Fremantle claim to have been misrepresented?

Dr LAWRENCE—I do—

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Dr LAWRENCE—by the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources in a press release of 28 May, in two respects. Firstly, in his press release there was the implication that, in launching a policy document from the Sustainable Transport Coalition earlier this month, I endorsed all its recommendations, including those relating to the pricing of oil. I did not at the time, and I do not. Secondly, in the same document, the minister claimed that the document in question was an ALP petrol plan. As he knows, it is not, nor did anyone—me included—claim that it was anything other than a series of suggestions from a community organisation seeking to highlight what the Deputy Prime Minister said about oil supplies in the Sunday Age. It is a finite resource; it is not going to be there forever.

PETITIONS

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

Education: Funding

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

The Petition of certain citizens of Australia undersigned draws to the attention of the House:

A well funded Public Education system is vital to the maintenance of a fair and democratic Australian society.

We need our public schools to be well resourced.

This requires the Federal Government to provide a fairer model for funding Australian schools.

Your petitioners therefore ask the House to:

Ensure that the funding policies of the Commonwealth Government are reformed to provide increased and fairer funding for public schools.

by Mrs Gallus (from 349 citizens)
by Mr Sawford (from 308 citizens)
by Mr Secker (from 38 citizens)
by Dr Southcott (from 158 citizens)
by Mr Wakelin (from 8 citizens)

Howard Government: Antiviolence Campaign

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

This petition of certain citizens of Australia, condemns the Howard Government for refusing to run the anti-violence campaign, “No Respect, No Relationship” that was designed to educate young people that violence in relationships is wrong and must be stopped.

Your petitioners ask the House to ensure that the Government releases the campaign material that was developed over the last 2 years, at a cost of millions of dollars to taxpayers so that it can be used by others in the community to send a strong message to young people.

Public money paid for the development and production of this campaign and we urge the House to demand its release for public use.

by Ms Hall (from 14 citizens)
by Ms Roxon (from 383 citizens)
**Australian Defence Forces: Medals**

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

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

That a citizen who serves to defend the country does so with the highest patriotic motives in mind. They know they could be called to serve in war and lay down their life. After that commitment they may leave the service without any tangible recognition being given to them. Unless a member receives a medal for overseas service their first chance of gaining a medal is for long service after 15 years service, if the member serves that long.

The medal sought is not for service in the sense of long service but more for the individual who makes a commitment to serve the Nation.

Your Petitioners pray that the House will institute a medal for two years full-time or part-time service in the Australian Defence Force from 1 January 1946 to the present and future servicemen and women who serve and protect our Nation.

by Dr Stone (from 20 citizens)
by Mr Wakelin (from 83 citizens)

**Health and Ageing: Aged Care**

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

The petition of the undersigned shows:

• concerned Australian citizens point out to the House of Representatives:
  
  Due the increasing shortfall between the income available to deliver aged and community services and the rising costs of delivering those services, Australia is facing the imminent collapse of the aged and community care system as we know it.

Your Petitioners therefore ask the House to:

• Replace the current system of indexing pricing in the aged and community care sector with a system which reflects the true increases in the costs of running aged and community care services.

• Immediately inject $10 per day, per bed to restore the existing viability of residential care services.

• Provide a 10 per cent increase in the prices paid for community care to ensure viability of these important services, which help keep our elderly and disabled in their own homes.

by Ms Vanvakinou (from 480 citizens)
by Mr Windsor (from 84 citizens)

**Agriculture: 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 Australian 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 Anthony (from 60 citizens)

**Defence: Properties**

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:

1. The Central Queensland Military and Artefacts Museum Association Inc. (CQMAM Assoc Inc.) was formed in the year 2000 with the aim of preserving and promoting the unique military heritage of Australia.
2. The CQMAM Assoc Inc. has developed a substantial collection of artefacts, documentation and knowledge concerning military history and specifically, regarding the military history of Central Queensland.

3. The CQMAM Assoc Inc. is housed in temporary premises and has been since its inception.

4. The temporary premises do not meet the needs of the Association, and indeed prevent the CQMAM Assoc Inc. from fully achieving its constitutional objectives.

5. The Archer Street Training Depot, situated in Archer Street, Rockhampton, Queensland, has been used since federation as a training centre by the Army Reserve and its forbearers.

6. The Archer Street Training Depot contains a number of heritage-listed buildings of historical and sentimental significance to the Central Queensland community, and represents a local history of voluntary participation in the defence services dating back to 1859, including such units as 42nd Battalion AMF/RQR, 11th Field Ambulance and 9th Field Ambulance;

7. Following its closure as a training depot in October 2000, the Archer Street Training Depot was listed for disposal by the Department of Defence and remains available for acquisition.

Your petitioners therefore request the House to transfer the ownership of the Archer Street Training Depot from the Commonwealth Department of Defence to the Central Queensland Military and Artefacts Museum Association Inc, as your petitioners believe a move to the Archer Street Training Depot would:

• provide an excellent and purpose-built alternative to the current temporary premises occupied by the CQMAM Assoc Inc.

• provide a venue for the research and education of interested parties in Central Queensland’s and Australia’s military history;

• preserve the heritage-listed facilities in a manner congruent to their original purpose; and

• rightfully return the facility to the community that has supported it for over 100 years via their enlisting in the Army Reserve.

by Fran Bailey (from 10,070 citizens)

Health: Pneumococcal Vaccine

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

The petition of certain citizens of Australia points out to the House that the Federal Government recently rejected the recommendation of the National Health and Medical Research Council that the pneumococcal vaccine should be made available at no cost to all Australian children as a 3-dose series at 2, 4 and 6 months.

This recommendation was made to prevent young Australian children dying or developing brain damage from pneumococcal disease.

We therefore pray that the House call on the Federal Government to urgently act upon the recommendations of the National Health and Medical Research Council to provide pneumococcal vaccine free to all Australian children.

by Ms Burke (from 26 citizens)

Health: Pneumococcal Vaccine

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

The undersigned petitioners wish to draw to the attention of the House that the innocent babies of Australia need the vaccine for Pneumococcal Bacteria to protect them from the devastating effects of this virus. These include disablement, vision impairment, hearing impairment, developmental delays and loss of fingers and toes through Septicaemia and or death. The vaccine costs $144.45 per shot and babies need 3 shots to immunise them against this virus.

We therefore pray that the House takes steps to ensure that the Government will change it's mind and fund this immunisation.

by Dr Emerson (from 201 citizens)
Human Rights: Falun Dafa
To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:
The petition of certain citizens and residents of Australia draws to the attention of the House that:
(a) Falun Gong (also known as Falun Dafa), is a practice of meditation and exercises with teachings based on the universal principle of “Truthfulness-Compassion-Tol erance”, practiced in over 50 countries world-wide and has roots in traditional Chinese culture - has been subject to a systematic campaign of eradication in China since July 1999;
(b) The Falun Dafa Information Center has verified details of 890 deaths (as at 25/2/2004) since the persecution of Falun Gong in China began in 1999. In October 2001, however, Government officials inside China reported that the actual death toll was well over 1,600. Expert sources now estimate that figure to be much higher. Hundreds of thousands have been detained, with more than 100,000 being sentenced to forced labour camps, typically without trial;
(c) The implementation of this policy of eradication violates the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which China has signed, the Convention Against Torture and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, both of which China has signed and ratified;
(d) Australia is the elected Chair of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights for 2004 and the Commission will convene on 15 March 2004.
Your petitioners therefore request the House to initiate a resolution to condemn China’s persecution of Falun Gong at the United Nations Commission on Human rights and request China to:
I. Unconditionally release all Falun Gong practitioners imprisoned for their spiritual beliefs, including those family members of Australian citizens and residents currently detained;
II. Allow unrestricted access into China to the United Nations rapporteur on torture, to carry out independent, third-party investigations on the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners.
by Mr Entsch (from 199 citizens)

Medicare: Bulk-Billing
To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:
The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House:
• That the rate of bulk billing by GPs has fallen by over 15% in Shortland Electorate since 2000 and is now in serious decline;
• That this year, 7.7 million fewer GP visits were bulk billed than in 1996;
• That the average out-of-pocket cost to see a GP who does not bulk bill has gone up by 51% since 1996.
• That public hospitals are now under greater pressure because people are finding it harder to see bulk billing doctors.
We therefore pray that the House takes urgent steps to restore bulk billing by general practitioners so that all Australians have access to the health care they need.
by Ms Hall (from 79 citizens)

Trade: Free Trade Agreement
To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.
We, citizens of Newcastle and the Hunter Valley, call on the Federal Government:
• Not to conduct any free trade negotiations with the USA behind closed doors, and to ensure that all trade agreements are openly debated and approved by Parliament and not only by Cabinet
• To facilitate comprehensive independent research into the social and economic impacts of all trade agreements, and to publish the results before beginning negotiations.
• To ensure that essential public services like education and water and health and social
policies like food labelling, quarantine regulations, and equitable access to medicines, are excluded from trade negotiations.

- Also, to exclude cultural services and activities which are essential to maintain Australia’s distinctive cultural independence.

We therefore pray that the House takes steps to address this matter.

by Ms Hall (from 45 citizens)

Budget: New South Wales Budget

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

The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House. We the undersigned object to the Federal Government’s plan to slash $376 million a year from the NSW Budget. This is equal to the wages of 5,600 nurses.

NSW is getting a small slice of the Commonwealth’s funding pie despite the fact that it costs more to run hospitals, schools and transport in NSW.

We therefore pray that the House opposes the decision of the Commonwealth Grants Commission and urges the Federal Government to reverse its decision.

by Ms Hoare (from 508 citizens)

Australian Broadcasting Corporation: Funding

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

The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House the budget cuts to the ABC and the subsequent cutting of children’s programs in particular Behind the News (BTN). Behind The News is a brilliant, much loved and used program that introduces children to current affairs. It is vitally important that children are correctly informed, and develop an opinion on things that may later affect them.

Your petitioners therefore ask the House to provide funds to ensure the continuation of the Behind the News children’s program.

by Ms Hoare (from 312 citizens)

Immigration: Asylum Seekers

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

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws the attention of the House to the current situation of the East Timorese asylum seekers currently in Australia. We request that a special visa class be introduced to enable this group of long-term asylum seekers to be granted permanent residence.

Your petitioners therefore request that the House turns its urgent attention to addressing this injustice and create a new humanitarian visa class for the East Timorese people living in Australia.

by Ms Hoare (from 20 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 following issues to the attention of the House:

- The Howard Government is determined to sell Telstra even though service remains inadequate in regional areas and widespread concern that services will decline further if the rest of Telstra is sold.

- The Greens, Democrats and Independents may make deals with the Liberal government to allow the sale to go ahead, despite increasing community opposition to the sale.

- A fully privatised Telstra will focus on profits not people; shareholders will be more important than customers.

- Services will suffer under a fully privatised Telstra, particularly in outer metropolitan, rural and regional Australia.

We therefore pray that the House oppose the Government’s plan to sell Telstra and that all Greens, Democrats and Independents join Labor in opposing the sale of Telstra.

by Ms Hoare (from 132 citizens)

Social Welfare: Pensions and Benefits

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.
The petition of certain pensioners of Victoria draws to the attention of the House:

(1) Higher property values are followed by higher council rates making us asset rich and income poor. The average rise of rates to this newly valued property can be much more that the average pension rise. We have not contributed to this and is beyond our control.

(2) Higher property value is making us real asset rich and puts us outside the guidelines, as to the asset limits, given to us by the Government when we became pensioners and made life decisions based on that information. Decisions that needed to be implemented at a precise date—and our pensions get cut. We feel misled and cheated—used as commodities to raise revenue. We do not cost more to the Government whether our house was worth $200,000 or is made to be worth $400,000. We believe this is not a good Government with respect to invalid and old age pensioners.

We ask the House:

- to make the necessary legislative changes so that the value of the house of the pensioner freezes, as is, at the time he becomes pensioner until he sells or dies, which ever comes first, and

- for the reinstatement of his pension.

by Mr Hunt (from 840 citizens)

Middle East: Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

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

The petition of certain citizens of Australia points out to the House the Israeli government’s construction of the so-called security wall inside the West Bank. Your petitioners state that:

1. the wall separates tens of thousands of Palestinians from their families, neighbours, employment, schools, hospital, water resources and land;

2. the wall continues Israel’s illegal annexation of Palestinian land;

3. the real purpose of the wall is to force Palestinians from their homes and land by making their lives unbearable and to prevent the establishment of a viable and independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Your petitioners therefore ask the House to call upon the government of Israel to immediately cease construction of the wall and to negotiate a just peace with the Palestinians.

by Mrs Irwin (from 577 citizens)

Medicare: Bulk-Billing

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

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

The need to keep bulk billing for the families and communities of Inner West Sydney.

We therefore pray that the House opposes the introduction of an upfront fee for GP visits.

by Mr Murphy (from 65 citizens)

Telecommunications: Mobile Phone Base Station

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 health from the failure of the Telecommunications Code of Practice 1997 to include a requirement for all telecommunications carriers to properly notify nearby residents and small businesses of the installation of the proposed mobile phone base station at 97 Majors Bay Road, Concord NSW.

We believe the Government should protect residential and commercial areas across Australia from exposure to electromagnetic radiation (EMR) generated by mobile phone towers installed without adequate community consultation.

We believe the description of the proposed base station at 97 Majors Bay Road, Concord NSW as described by Connell Wagner Pty Limited (A.B.N. 54 005 139 873) on behalf of their client Optus, is insufficient to describe whether the sta-
tion falls within the definition of ‘low impact facility’ within the meaning of the Telecommunications (Low Impact Facilities) Determination 1997.

We believe Optus can place no reliance on the said Determination in seeking to construct the base station. We say that there is no evidence that the proposed base station complies with the Determination.

Your petitioners therefore respectfully request that the House protect public interest and health and that activity to construct the said base station be halted until it is established the base station poses no risk of harm to the public or otherwise breaches the Determination.

by **Mr Murphy** (from 70 citizens)

**Health: MRI Machines**

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

The petition of certain residents of the State of New South Wales draws to the attention of the House the refusal by the Federal Government to license a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) facility at the Concord Repatriation and General Hospital denies equitable access to vital health services for cancer, heart, orthopaedic, burns and MS patients.

Despite a commitment by the NSW Government to purchase a MRI machine, Concord Hospital remains the only teaching hospital in Sydney not approved to provide MRI diagnostic services via the Medicare system.

This means Concord’s frailest patients are unable to locally access vital diagnostic services.

Your petitioners request the House to protect the public’s interest and provide equitable access to the Medicare system for inner western Sydney residents by licensing MRI diagnostic services at the Concord Repatriation and General Hospital.

by **Mr Murphy** (from 369 citizens)

**Family Services: Child Care**

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

This petition of citizens of Australia draws the attention of the House to our serious concerns about the current child care system, particularly the lack of available places for children of all ages. Children of both pre-school age, and school age, particularly in the western suburbs of Melbourne.

Many parents are forced to leave work, or delay re-entering the workforce, simply because there in not adequate care available. This situation is devastating for many families.

Your petitioners therefore request that the House turns its urgent attention to addressing the chronic shortage of child care places and ensuring that adequate recognition and funding is given to build a child care system that can adequately cater for our children.

by **Ms Roxon** (from 223 citizens)

**Immigration: Asylum Seekers**

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 at St Luke’s Anglican Church Sydenham, Vic 3037, petition the House of Representatives in support of the above mentioned Motion.

AND we, as in duty bound will ever pray.

by **Mr Sercombe** (from 11 citizens)
Trade: Fur Imports

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

This petition, of citizens and residents of Australia, is to call the attention of the House to the international trade of dog and cat fur products and accessories, being sold in Australia.

Humane Society International has investigated and unearthed evidence of the appalling international fur trade, where dogs and cats are cruelly slaughtered by inhumane methods, with animals dying by slow suffocation, hanging, clubbing or beating to death. All these methods involved severe panic, trauma and needless prolonged suffering. More than two million dogs and cats are killed each year for use in the international fur trade.

Your petitioners request the House to send a strong message to this terrible industry, by banning the importation of dog and cat fur products into Australia.

by Mr Wakelin (from 18 citizens)

Petitions received.

RESPONSES

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (3.37 p.m.)—Mr Deputy Speaker Jenkins, can you advise whether there have been any ministerial responses to the tabling of petitions?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—It would be my understanding, in answering the member for Chifley, that if there had been and they were pertinent to him then he would have been advised.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

Brain Tumours

Ms HALL (Shortland) (3.37 p.m.)—I move:

That this House:

(1) acknowledges that brain tumours can cause immense distress to those who are diagnosed with them, their carers, family and loved ones;

(2) notes that:

(a) 1400 Australians annually are diagnosed with a primary brain tumour;

(b) United States’ data suggests that statistically there will be almost as many Australians diagnosed with benign brain tumours, many of which can be life threatening; and

(c) an even greater number are diagnosed with a metastatic brain tumour;

(3) notes that brain tumours, unlike some other malignant neoplasms, affect both males and females in all age groups from birth to old age and are now responsible for the cancer deaths of more children under 14 years of age than all types of leukaemia;

(4) notes that while the incidence of brain tumours is ranked 13th in a list of all cancers in Australia, they rank 4th in a table of the total number of person years of life lost (PYLL) as a result of deaths attributed to cancer;

(5) notes that, as yet, there does not appear to be any identifiable single cause of primary brain tumours, nor is there an efficient, safe, and cost effective method of screening for them, nor are they necessarily preventable by changes in diet or lifestyle, although these may be useful in alleviating distress and symptoms; and

(6) calls on the Federal Government to recognise:

(a) the need for a specialised response to the challenge caused by brain tumours, particularly in the areas of patient and carer support; and

(b) the need for increased support for research, including the collection of more detailed clinical and statistical data, particularly by way of data sets and a brain tumour registry, with a view to developing better treatment protocols leading to longer survival and a better quality of life.

Tumours of any kind are serious and in many cases life threatening, but brain tumours have different dimensions from other tumours. The brain has a very different function from
other parts of the body. We are barely aware that it controls bodily functions such as breathing, blood circulation, maintaining body temperature, motion, the production of hormones and the digestion of food. It also interprets information from our senses and controls our thoughts. Brain tumours can take two forms, either benign or malignant. There are 40 major types of brain tumour. Fourteen thousand people a year are diagnosed with brain tumours in Australia. They can be children or adults. The symptoms are very wide and varied. They can include speech and memory problems, headaches, and hearing, visual and taste problems. Many other symptoms can indicate that a person has some form of brain tumour.

The treatments undergone by people who suffer from brain tumours have a number of side effects. Not only do brain tumours affect the physical functioning of a person but they also affect their cognitive function, their memory—both short and long term—and their emotional behaviour. Also, people who have had brain tumours can become very different people. Some of them become quite violent, some suffer from depression and some experience side effects such as epilepsy.

I am the patron of the Hunter branch of the Australian Brain Tumour Network. As such, I have come into contact with a number of people, and their families, who have suffered from brain tumours. Only this morning I was speaking to Jacqui, who lost her husband, Michael. One of the things that she identified as being very important was support for carers. People who suffer from brain tumours look okay. Their symptoms are masked. She says that when she went to network meetings she sometimes felt like it was a single mothers’ club. Two weeks before her husband died she went to the doctor and the doctor said he was okay. So the symptoms of brain tumours are masked and it is understandable that people do not recognise them. People do not realise just how seriously ill a person with a brain tumour is. Lorraine’s partner, Chris, died about 12 months ago. They had problems dealing with bureaucracy because, once again, he looked fine. He had been working as a coalminer. He had problems dealing with the Child Support Agency and he had problems being deemed eligible by Centrelink for the disability support pension.

A very close friend of mine had a neuroma. The only symptom he had was a total loss of hearing. Subsequently, he had an operation and he now operates fairly normally. Another friend of mine suffers from von Hippel-Lindau syndrome, which is a genetic disorder that leads to tumours of the brain, and he is fighting an ongoing battle with brain tumours. A young person within my electorate, Matthew Heaney, was diagnosed with a brain tumour when he was quite young. He had operations and treatment but after a period of time he died and his family has since worked to raise funds and awareness to fight the disease. These losses affect not only the people with the tumours but their families. Brain tumours change the lives of every person involved—not only the person who has the tumour but anyone who has contact or is associated with that person.

Today I call on all levels of government to recognise the enormous cost of brain tumours to our society, the enormous cost to the individuals who suffer from them and to their families. I call on governments to invest in the future of Australia by committing to more research into, and more education on, the cause and treatment of brain tumours. Brain tumours attack the centre, the core of a person. They are pervasive and invasive and they leave a lasting impact on that person. We need action right now to attack this serious, debilitating illness. I commend this mo-
tion to the House and ask all members to join with me in supporting it.

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

Mr NAIRN (Eden-Monaro) (3.43 p.m.)—I second the motion. I strongly support the terms of the motion. Brain tumours are not the most common types of cancer, but nonetheless they are very debilitating and serious. They affect young people and old people; they affect males and females. There is a real difference between brain tumours and other cancers. Other cancers are usually more easily removed than a brain tumour. The protective structures of the brain make it very difficult to tackle brain tumours medically.

Greater community understanding of the special challenges faced by brain tumour patients and their carers is needed so that we can avoid misdiagnosis or delayed diagnosis. Also, recognition is needed that sometimes it is necessary to use expensive image-scanning facilities and expensive chemotherapy regimes to monitor and fight the disease. There needs to be strong, supportive care and access to current information on treatment options, not only for the patient but for family members who are also struggling to come to terms with the enormity of the situation they suddenly find themselves in. The impact of diagnosis is felt not only physically but emotionally, psychologically and financially by all involved.

Brain tumours can affect many of the normal functions of the brain, such as speech, movement, balance or memory. Patients often require help from allied health professionals, such as speech, physio and occupational therapists. However, such health professionals are often not readily available or accessible for rural patients. Many patients, while able to be cared for at home, lose their independence in the process, which has a significant impact on their life and the lives of their family members. They require strong support from carers, be they family, friends or formal home-care services.

Research is being done in Australia and overseas but, obviously, more is needed to gain a greater understanding of this type of cancer and to assist in developing new treatment protocols. I was pleased to see that, in last year’s budget for 2003-04, there was an allocation of $2 million for the Brain Research Institute for a computer upgrade to enhance research and diagnostic ability, but more in that area needs to be done.

Whilst the disease affects people indiscriminately, regardless of where they live, rural patients face some additional difficulties in coping. Travel and accommodation costs when accessing medical services in the city areas for lengthy periods is certainly a challenge. Some states require patients to live more than 200 kilometres from their treatment centre in order to claim travel and accommodation costs, which are then paid retrospectively. I have been talking with the state member for Bega in my electorate, Andrew Constance, about what he might do to get that distance reduced in New South Wales. In Victoria, for instance, the distance is only 80 kilometres before people become eligible.

The disruption to family life and the need for care arrangements for children when accessing treatment services is also an issue. Often there is no access to adequate in-home care services. Many juggle care responsibilities while trying to maintain a business and a family life, so more needs to be done, particularly in those rural areas. It can really be a great challenge to those patients when they are away from home for periods of time and then back again.

Whilst the number of those in the Eden-Monaro region suffering from a primary brain tumour is not numerically large, the
disease can have an overwhelming effect on the patient, their family and carers. I was contacted by Paul, aged 33, and his wife, Natasha, aged 31, from Merimbula. They have two girls aged two and four and they own and run an electrical business in Merimbula. Paul was suffering from frequent migraines midway through last year. They initially thought the cause was mainly stress from work but decided to have a check-up with his local GP. He was diagnosed, after an MRI scan, with an inoperable brain tumour. They have had to spend many weeks in Sydney, which has been very difficult as they are still trying to keep their business going. They are getting their travel expenses back but often many months later. It is certainly a big challenge and they have large out-of-pocket expenses. They found approaching Centrelink and going through the volume of paperwork quite challenging. People like that need additional support, and that is what this motion is about. Brain Tumour Australia Inc. do an excellent job, and I thank them and the chair, Denis Strangman, for the information that they have provided to me.

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Burke) (3.48 p.m.)—I rise to support the motion. I thank the member for Shortland for bringing such an important matter to the attention of this House. Clearly, there are many Australians that suffer from brain tumours and the consequential effects of such an illness. I think it is very important that there are motions such as these—that is, motions that go to particular illnesses, including those that do not always receive a lot of public attention. The great role that I hope we as members of parliament can play is to not only inform ourselves about some of these things that we may not have come across directly or personally but also, using the information we receive, hopefully impart knowledge through the parliament and public forums to educate many of the public who are not aware of some of the devastating effects that brain tumours have upon certain individuals, their families and the community at large.

I also thank Dr Strangman, the Chair of Brain Tumour Australia, for providing me—and I am sure other contributors to this debate—with a whole range of information on brain tumours, which I have had the opportunity to read. I know that some of the material comes from Brain Tumour Australia and some of the material that was enclosed was developed by the New South Wales Cancer Council, and I thank them also. I am also in receipt of some emails from a number of people who it would appear have been very much affected by brain tumours one way or the other. I thank Jane Cruickshank, Marg Henley and Clare Vivian, whose husband passed away as a result of a brain tumour, for their kind words and support. They have thanked us for our role in supporting brain tumour sufferers.

Being given an opportunity to speak on this matter has compelled me to read more on the topic. I have managed to become acquainted with Brain Tumour Australia’s publication, Brainstorm News. I found it very interesting reading. There is no better way to touch another person than by personalising a matter—in this case, personalising the effects of brain tumours. In this publication, I read a personal story by Malcolm Sandstrom, who talked about his illness. He was diagnosed with a brain tumour and it took him some time to realise that the symptoms he experienced were, indeed, a result of a brain tumour. He managed to get help and successfully have an operation. However, he does emphasise the lack of support, especially from specialists, after the operation and talks about the need for greater care of, and advice and support to, sufferers post operation. I think that those reflections by a sufferer
really do get to the nub of the problem in relation to this issue. I think it is important.

I therefore join the member for Shortland and say that we could do more. We should be focusing upon the sufferers and their families and realising that this is not just a mental disease but a physical and emotional problem and that the sufferers and their families should therefore be cared for in a holistic manner. By bringing this motion to the attention of this place, I hope that we can ensure that there will be proper regard for the breadth of the concerns that affect sufferers of this disease.

Dr WASHER (Moore) (3.53 p.m.)—I certainly support this motion and thank the member for Shortland for bringing this to the attention of the House. Neoplasms of the brain and spinal cord are divided into two groups: primary nervous system tumours and metastatic or secondary nervous system tumours. Today we have spoken about primary tumours, and that is what I intend to discuss further. Primary tumours develop from glial cell precursors, meninges and associated structures, such as pituitary and pineal glands. Annually, 1,400 Australians are diagnosed with primary brain tumours, and a greater number with metastatic tumours. Although the incidence of brain tumours increases with age and is more common in the elderly, brain tumours are the most common solid tumour of childhood.

Tumours are classified by their cellular origin. The majority of brain and spinal cord tumours are of neuroepithelial origin—that is, glial cells or their precursors. They are classified as either high- or low-grade, according to poor or good prognosis. We do not describe them as benign or malignant as we would with other tumours, because benign tumours infiltrate normal tissue and therefore prevent total surgical resection. Rarely do these tumours truly act as malignant and metastasise. The environmental risk factors include ionising radiation, so there is an increase in meningiomas and glial tumours with radiation for intra- or extracranial tumours and prophylactic irradiation for leukaemia.

HIV infection and other immunosuppressive disorders constitute risk factors for primary CNS lymphomas. Exposure to electromagnetic radiation, like mobile phones, has never been proven to cause brain tumours. Inherited factors are a minor cause of brain tumours. However, acquired genetic abnormalities are associated with CNS tumours. These include the loss or mutation of a tumour suppressor gene—for example, p53 or the retinoblastoma gene—and the amplification or rearrangement of oncogenes, or cancer genes, many of which code for growth factors or growth factor receptors that can self-stimulate tumour cells. CNS tumours, even when relatively small, often cause symptoms. First, they may damage vital pathways of the brain and spinal cord, causing severe dysfunction; second, they are encased in unyielding dura and bone, and compression of normal tissue occurs easily; third, the new tumour vessels leak proteins and potentially noxious substances, causing surrounding tissue oedema and aggregating compression of normal structures—oedema removal is slow, as the brain lacks lymphatics; and, fourth, tumours in the third and fourth ventricle obstruct cerebrospinal fluid pathways, causing hydrocephalus.

We would suspect brain tumours in adults with new onset seizures, papilledema or new focal, motor or sensory symptoms. These people warrant an MRI, with an injection of contrast material. Although MRI may suggest the histological diagnosis, only biopsy is definitive. Positron emission tomography, PET, with positron emitting radionuclides, or single photon emission computed tomography, SPECT, and magnetic resonance spec-
MRS, may be useful for non-invasive methods of determining histological type and grade of tumour.

Treatments include: (1) corticosteroids, which reduce intracranial pressure and reduce oedema; (2) surgery followed by corticosteroids for intracranial tumours that arise outside the brain, such as meningiomas, schwannomas and pituitary adenomas—surgery for tumours arising within the brain establishes the diagnosis, relieves intracranial pressure, and improves symptoms and seizure control; (3) radiation therapy, particularly post-operative, improves survival and quality of life, particularly in high-grade tumours; (4) chemotherapy, with the exception of oligodendrogliomas, germ cell tumours and medulloblastomas, generally has a very limited response. I certainly support the carers of people with brain tumours—they have a terribly difficult job—and I strongly advocate, along with my colleagues in this House, the need for greater research. That is where the breakthrough is going to be in the future.

Mr HATTON (Blaxland) (3.58 p.m.)—My Uncle Lenny was 38 years of age. He was running 20 kilometres a day, preparing to run a marathon. At the end of a run he would go off to the pub in Surfers Paradise, where he was well known. He had been there for 20 years or so and had had a series of jobs. He would have a beer, and after his beer he would get a funny sort of feeling, because his foot would start to flop and flap around a bit, so he went to see a GP. The general practitioner told him it was just stupid; there was nothing to it at all. Six months later he went back to the GP because, every time he went for a run and had a beer afterwards, the same thing was happening but a bit more. That was when he was 38. When he was 47 he died in St Joseph’s Hospital in Auburn as a result of a brain tumour that was extremely slow growing. They could not cut out Lenny’s brain tumour—it was in the very central part of his brain. They could not even do a biopsy on it, until one very smart surgeon realised that if you encased the needle in a bit of plastic then the danger of causing significant damage to the person was cut to about five to 10 per cent.

When they did the biopsy, they were simply able to tell Lenny that, yes, it was a brain tumour, it would be years, probably, until it grew enough to kill him, but there was nothing that they could do to ameliorate it. They could not cut it out, they could not use chemotherapy, they could not use radiotherapy—he would just have to live with the fact that, inexorably, this is what would take him out. After a great deal of suffering, having fought it for nine years and having had the rest of my family, by and large, encourage him to keep fighting what was utterly inevitable, he had got to the point where, if you sat on the edge of his bed in the hospice or even touched the bed, the pain was so intense that it was like pins and needles throughout his whole body. I had to be the one to tell him just to give it up, to leave it alone, to accept the fact that he was dying and that he could not keep going and trying to push forward to beat this thing, because it was harder than he was. It was a very long, slow, difficult death.

My wife’s son died from a glioblastoma more than 10 years ago. It was a very quick death. He had an original operation which took out the blastoma. He then expected that it was successful and that he would be able to live. He and his wife had a child, who is now a teenager. But just after the birth of their child the blastoma returned and, because it was so aggressive, Robert was dead about nine months from when they first diagnosed its return.

These are two of the counterbalances in the experience of people: either the rapidity
of a glioblastoma or the slow, long, inexorable death from a slow-growing cancer. In either case, it is the carers, the family members, who are impacted upon, because the very first thing that people do is rush to try and find out as much as they can and see if there is a ready cure off the shelf. And part of the great trauma when it comes to brain tumours is that there is no ready cure that can be brought in off the shelf. Glioblastomas are so rapid, so high-grade, that the probability of getting over them is very small.

Things are getting better; the chances of recovery are increasing. Ten years ago, work was being done in Japan utilising new techniques—nuclear medicine, I think, and so on—to try to get a better result for people who suffer this insidiously quick and ravaging death. But it is not easy and it is not simple. The hardest problem I think people face is the lack of simple knowledge, simply given to people. There is a great deal that is arcane in this area. The latter part of this motion is extremely important—not just the support for carers and extra research but the fact that, if people can have a relationship with their doctors and health professionals where the nature of what is facing them is better explained, they can then deal with those realities on a surer footing. It is the great unknowns, the great dangers, that actually increase the suffering. I support this absolutely.

Mr Johnson (Ryan) (4.03 p.m.)—I am pleased to speak in the parliament today on this motion moved by the member for Shortland. I compliment her on it and also thank my colleagues on both sides of the House for their support of the motion. In particular, I am pleased to follow the distinguished member for Moore, who is himself a medical practitioner. I acknowledge his dedication in the field of medicine before coming to this place.

The brain is of course a unique part of our body. I think it is probably reasonable to say that it separates us, as human beings, from other forms of life. It provides us with our personality and our intelligence, and there is still very little that we understand about the brain. It is such a complicated and fragile organ that I am not sure if humanity will ever fully understand it.

I am particularly pleased to speak on this motion about brain tumours being something that this parliament—this country—needs to turn its attention to. One reason is that my brother is a neurosurgeon and has a very strong professional interest in this. He is a very dedicated young Australian who has turned his professional life to work in the field of neurosurgery. In fact, he has also inspired our sister Catherine, who is studying at the University of Sydney, to take an interest in this and to play a part in addressing brain tumours when she graduates from university as a doctor. I might also say that I know that the wife of the member for Flinders—who I have the privilege of sitting next to in the parliament—is a neurosurgical nurse herself and just another example of the Australians throughout this country who dedicate their professional lives to good work for our fellow Australians.

Brain tumours, of course, are something that very few of us would wish upon our worst enemy. They are crippling to families and relatives. The previous speaker, the member for Blaxland, put a story to statistics. I want to talk about some of the statistics and to raise, in the parliament, greater awareness amongst not only members of the parliament but also the community. I do not have the opportunity of recounting, as the member for Blaxland did, a very personal story—and I pass on my sympathies to him and his wife—but I want to talk about the 1,400 new cases of Australians every year who are diagnosed with malignant brain tu-
mours and the hundreds more who are diagnosed with benign brain tumours. These are deadly if the tumour is in a vital area. More than 1,200 people die each year from malignant and benign brain tumours. The number of cases of malignant brain tumours in Australia has increased by more than 20 per cent over the last 10 years. I think that is a very striking figure that we in this country must turn the very best of our medical researchers and specialists to addressing.

As I said, my brother is a neurosurgeon, and I conveyed to him that I would be speaking on this motion in the parliament today. I asked him if he would give me, as a layman, a sentence that I could use. The statement he gave me really struck me, and I want to quote him. Dr David Johnson, from the Gold Coast Hospital, said that brain tumours:

… are a very small percentage of the overall tumour burden in humans (approx 2%) but by the nature of location they strike the very soul of the person and incapacitate not only physically but emotionally and cognitively.

I think that is one of the things about a brain tumour: it actually strikes not only at the very heart and soul of the person who is suffering from it, it also strikes the wider family. I want to say to the parliament and to members of the community that we must turn our focus to this. We must dedicate resources, research and the very best of Australia’s minds to treating neurosurgical issues. I want to thank Denis Strangman, the Chair of Brain Tumour Australia, for being in the parliament and helping speakers today.

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

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

Carers

Mr HUNT (Flinders)  (4.08 p.m.)—I move:

That this House:

(1) recognises the invaluable contribution that carers make to our community;

(2) acknowledges that carers need and deserve practical support from the community to meet the significant challenges that they face on a daily basis, whether those challenges be financial, emotional or physical;

(3) realises that it is not always desirable, possible or practical for carers and the people they care for to live in the same house and therefore they should be entitled to choose the living arrangements that best suit their individual circumstances;

(4) praises the Howard Government for providing carers and the people they care for with a choice as to the living arrangements that best suit their circumstances as part of the 2004 Budget;

(5) commends the Howard Government for providing carers receiving the Carers Payment with a one-off payment of $1000 and $600 for Carer Allowance recipients for each eligible care receiver they provide care for as part of the 2004 Budget in recognition of their contribution to the community;

(6) supports the Howard Government’s provision of an in-home respite service of up to 5 hours per school week for young carers at risk of leaving secondary school or equivalent vocational education as part of the 2004 Budget;

(7) commends the Howard Government for providing young at-risk carers one fortnight of respite care each year to undertake activities such as study for exams, training or recreation as part of the 2004 Budget;

(8) strongly supports the Howard Government for guaranteeing, when matched by States and Territories, up to four weeks a year respite for parents over 70 years of age who are caring for a son or daughter with a
disability and, for parents aged 65 to 69 years of age who need to spend time in hospital, two weeks respite as part of the 2004 Budget, and calls on the States and Territories to demonstrate their support for carers by matching this commitment; and

(9) commends the Howard Government for initiating a strategy to work with the States and Territories and the carer and disability sectors to develop options to help ageing carers plan for the future when they can no longer provide care for their disabled children.

In every electorate, in every town in every corner of Australia, there are people who are carers. During the course of my time in this House representing people from the Mornington Peninsula, from Westernport and throughout that area of Victoria, I have come into contact with people such as Bill Skinner. Bill Skinner lives in Nyora and, with other members of his family, he takes care of somebody. It is an arduous, difficult task to be a full-time carer—to take care of somebody who is reliant upon you for many of their physical, emotional and social needs. It is an extraordinary burden.

Only two weeks ago, I met with Milton and Margaret Omond. Milton Omond was a fine, hardworking man who suffered a terrible accident over a decade ago. In the time since then, his wife, Margaret, has had the responsibility of caring for him. They come from Hastings and they live under difficult circumstances. Things are not easy for them. They have a close relationship and she has sacrificed much in order to care and provide for Milton and, above all else, to provide a loving home base for him. This couple represent the very essence of what carers are. In moving this motion, I sought to say ‘thank you’—as I believe all members of this House would like to say—to those people who are carers. They may be people such as the Gippsland Carers Association or people in any of our towns—whether it be Hastings, Nyora, Somerville, Rosebud or any one of the towns throughout Australia where there are carers.

There are more than 81,000 people nationwide who are effectively full-time carers and are recipients of carer payments. There are another 290,000 people—with some overlap—who receive carers allowance. That means that they give significant care and attention to those in need of it. In addition to those, there are many who may not be recognised through formal government payments but who contribute and assist. Their role is a deeply important one at a human level. In each situation their role is critical. That is why I believe that the recent announcements during the federal budget were critical. They were an extremely important step forward. First and most importantly, there is a total budget payment of $461 million for assistance to carers. In practice, that means a recognition that there are significant hardships and significant social benefits associated with caring.

Immediately, before 1 July 2004, there will be a total payout of $255 million to carers. Under the carer payment, recipients will receive a one-off payment of $1,000; and, under the carer allowance, recipients will receive a one-off payment of $600. In some cases, carers who work hard and work full-time will receive $1,600 in immediate benefits. I know, from having talked to one family recently, that this payment may well make the difference to their ability to keep their head above water. You cannot legislate for financial success in every case, but what you can do is to help and assist, and these payments make a real and profound difference to families in need. In addition to that, the eligibility criteria for the carer allowance will be expanded. That is an important step forward which means that people who are not necessarily living with the patient will be able to receive assistance. Furthermore, there
will be support in terms of two weeks respite and five hours per week of assistance for young carers, and there will be up to four weeks respite for people who are older carers.

There is more to be done; make no mistake about it. In discussions I have had with the member for McPherson, she has talked about the very great need to ensure that young people with disabilities and disadvantages have a safe and secure environment when they leave school and when their parents are also facing death. The great questions for the parents are: ‘What will happen to my son or daughter after I die? Who will take care of them?’ That is the next great step forward in the treatment of those who need care. Above all else, I say thank you to those who are carers, and I put my respect on the record. (Time expired)

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

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

Ms HALL (Shortland) (4.13 p.m.)—I join with the member for Flinders in thanking those who are carers and acknowledging the role that they play in our community. Carers make an invaluable contribution to our community—one that cannot be measured in terms of their financial contribution. Their contribution is much greater than that. Carers are part of the backbone of our nation. Through their care, love and understanding, they make life worth living for the person they care for. Through their contribution they save government millions and millions of dollars. But, unfortunately, their contributions are not always recognised by government, nor are the hardships and difficulties that they experience.

This motion does acknowledge the role of carers, but, unfortunately, it has a rather self-congratulatory tone to it. It is congratulating the government on giving a one-off payment of $1,000 or $600 or a combination of those to carers, depending on whatever payment they receive. I would argue very strongly that carers deserve more than this. Carers deserve ongoing support and commitment from government of all types and not only at a time when there is an election. They deserve that support from their parliament, their government and their representatives in this House every single day. It leaves a very bad taste in my mouth that we are debating a motion that, on the one hand, acknowledges the fine role and great work that carers do in our community but, on the other hand, congratulates the government.

The motion also mentions respite and the increase in respite care. The availability of respite care, I find, is the greatest problem for people living in my area. I represent the 10th oldest electorate in Australia. I know just how hard it is to find a respite bed. You can increase the amount of respite that a person is entitled to but that respite has to be available in the first place. That needs to be looked at very seriously by government.

I have talked to one of the largest dementia specific services within the Hunter. It is funded by both the federal and state governments. In talking to this organisation I was told that the average age of carers is 80 years. These are frail aged people themselves and they are caring for demented spouses or members of their family. It seems to me that these people need a lot more support than they are being given at the moment. They need more than $600 or $1,000; they need ongoing support from their government, support on a daily basis and the ability to access the services that the government talks about but that they are unable to access in the local area. There is an increasing need for dementia specific community aged care packages in my area. These packages will make the lives of carers much better.
In the previous motion that was before this House, I spoke about brain tumours. When speaking on that motion I mentioned a constituent within my electorate. The one thing that she emphasised to me was that, when her husband was sick, there was a lack of support. There is a lack of support for carers who are caring for their loved ones with critical illnesses or spouses or family members suffering from dementia. We have ageing carers. We have a deterioration in Medicare within Australia, which is putting more pressure on our carers. I call on the government not just to give one-off payments of $600 or $1,000 but to make a real commitment to carers in our society. (Time expired)

Mrs May (McPherson) (4.19 p.m.)—I am delighted to support this private member’s motion today. I commend the member for Flinders for bringing to the House’s attention the very valuable contribution that carers make within our communities and the strong commitment that the Howard government has towards these very special people.

Since its election in 1996, the government has recognised the significant contribution that individual carers make to the lives of older Australians in particular, including many who would not otherwise be able to remain at home. There have been many studies that indicate that older Australians benefit significantly in the areas of health and mental wellbeing if they are able to stay at home and be cared for by a loved one—a carer who is prepared to meet the challenges faced on a daily basis in caring for someone within their own home. This caring role is a selfless one. There are many people in my own electorate who give up careers to care for someone they love. They face many challenges to undertake this role. The challenges they face on a daily basis can be financial, emotional or physical.

In fact, these people—the carers—also need support for the role they undertake. The government recognises the need for this support, primarily in the area of respite. In fact, the carers budget package provides $461 million for this assistance to carers. I think the House would agree that this package certainly demonstrates the very strong commitment of the Howard government. Within the package the government recognises the wide diversity of carers, their various care situations, the range of care needs and the long-term commitment of carers. In many cases, it is not always desirable or practical for carers and the people they care for to live in the same house. The government recognises this and is happy to support living arrangements that best suit individual circumstances.

Through the provision of support to carers and the recognition of individual living arrangements, the elderly in our communities who need this type of at-home care have more certainty. It gives them the choice of staying in their own homes and being cared for by a loved one. That loved one who is providing the care does not have to live in the same home. I commend the government for providing this flexibility in this year’s budget. This means that, from 1 April 2005, carers who do not live with the care receiver but provide substantial levels of personal care will be able to access the carer allowance. This expansion of carer allowance eligibility is for those carers who provide substantial support on a daily basis to someone with a disability or a severe medical condition, or to someone who is frail aged.

This year’s budget will also provide a one-off carer bonus to eligible carers who receive the carer payment and/or carer allowance on 11 May 2004. That will cost $255 million. Carer payment recipients will receive a one-off payment of $1,000. A carer payment provides income support to people who, because
of the demands of their caring role, are unable to support themselves through substantial work force participation. Carers must provide constant care and care receivers must be assessed as needing that level of care to qualify for a carer payment.

Carer allowance recipients will receive a one-off payment of up to $600 for each eligible care receiver they provide care for. In some cases, this may be a single payment of $600, if they care for one care receiver, or multiple payments of $600, where the carer cares for more than one eligible care receiver. Most important in this year’s budget is the provision of $26.6 million over four years from 1 January 2005 to provide young carers at risk of leaving school or the vocational equivalent with additional respite to ensure that they are able to both fulfil their caring responsibilities and complete their education. This measure provides additional in-home respite of up to five hours per week during school terms and up to one fortnight each year that can be taken as a block or as separate days. This is particularly important during exam periods when the young carer may need to study without the added concerns of caring.

Of real concern to many of my constituents is the future of children with disabilities. I am approached regularly by parents who have older children with disabilities who are concerned about when they are no longer able to care for these children. Where will these children go and who will look after them? I commend the government for initiating a strategy to work with the states and territories and the disability sectors to develop options and choices for ageing parents with disabled children to give them some certainty and peace of mind about their children’s future. This will be done, in the first instance, through a proposed community and disability services ministerial council. Caring for a disabled child is never easy, but without certainty for the future these selfless parents live with a cloud hanging over their heads. In my view, this proposed council must move swiftly to develop those options as soon as possible. In the short time today, there is not enough opportunity to canvass all the programs, but I indeed commend the carers in our community. (Time expired)

Ms HOARE (Charlton) (4.24 p.m.)—Speaking on this motion of the member for Flinders, I join with my colleagues in thanking all carers who provide invaluable support to our communities. The personal sacrifices of carers are immense. Many carers care for their loved one at the expense of their own needs, health and living. The task of caring for another person who is dependent on the care provided takes its toll. This is especially true for younger carers. Personal relationships are often strained, if not lost, and social activities are rare because of the needs of the person being cared for. This may be alleviated, or at least reduced, if greater recognition of the personal costs of caring for others was recognised in Centrelink payments and respite services.

Caring is, for many, an around-the-clock activity. Some carers are forced to leave their employment to focus on the needs of loved ones. In the case of caring for a parent, some carers have experienced a break-up with their partner. The physical and emotional stress of caring cannot be understated. There are reports of carers murdering their loved ones and committing suicide because they can no longer cope. The strength and determination of carers must be admired but not taken for granted. Carers need support from the community. However, these needs are often left wanting. Whenever I have spoken with carers, the issue of respite services is always raised. Respite services need to be made available on a ready basis. Ideally, there should be a reasonably short period of time between when a booking for a respite
bed is made and when the respite is provided. This is to provide the carer an important psychological boost to know that, in so many days or weeks, they will have time away from their caring responsibilities. Secondly, it allows carers much needed time to look after themselves.

Some respite services for specific conditions, such as dementia, are in high demand. Highly regarded respite providers can have waiting lists of up to two years, which is absolutely ridiculous. An unfortunate reality is that some people die before they can access these respite services, and the time frame provides the carer with nothing to look forward to. Whilst respite services are welcomed by carers, the service is not without cost. For those carers dependent on Centrelink benefits, the costs of respite are usually paid for out of their allowance. When respite is available, many carers are restricted in what they are able to access because of the severe financial constraints placed on them. The member for Flinders commended the government for providing carers receiving the carers payment with a one-off payment of $1,000 and $600 for carer allowance recipients. I welcome the much needed assistance to carers in our community who remain unsung heroes. Carers, however, deserve more long-term recognition of their invaluable contributions and not one-off election payments. They are carers for life, not for just one election.

People with challenging behaviours also require specific respite services. Many respite services are inappropriate for people with challenging behaviours. Such arrangements can be to the detriment of others requiring care, staff and to the person with the difficult behaviour. In the situation where the cared for is violent, there is a real need for emergency respite services for the safety of both the carer and the cared for. When difficult behaviours are not obvious at all times, it can be difficult to persuade medical professionals that the need exists. The absence of adequate or appropriate respite services contributes to higher admissions of people into residential aged care facilities. At a forum I hosted to hear the views of local carers, it was clear that many more people would continue caring for their loved ones in their own homes if adequate respite services were available in a timely manner. It is important to recognise that flexibility is required in the support of carers. While many carers have universal concerns, no two situations are completely alike. Greater support in the form of financial assistance for carers and in-home services is essential.

Government must appreciate the great personal sacrifices carers make for their loved one. A great generosity of spirit on the part of policy makers is required. Carers essentially save the Commonwealth a large amount of money by reducing the need for residential aged care. In-home supported accommodation packages that can be transferred easily to residential aged care packages or the like when appropriate should be considered by government. As a community, we all have a responsibility to assist where possible in the care of those with a range of disabilities. The extraordinary people who make enormous personal sacrifice in the provision of care for a loved one who is dependent must not be treated as second-class citizens but with respect. The community’s appreciation should be reflected in greater assistance for carers. (Time expired)

Mrs HULL (Riverina) (4.29 p.m.) — Today it is a great pleasure to stand here and pay tribute to carers. This tribute should be paid every day, because carers deserve that much at least. We ask ourselves this question at times: what is a carer’s lot in life? Many people do not understand that. When you are emotionally and physically exhausted and you just cannot get five minutes to shower,
go to the toilet, eat or sleep, how do you feel as a carer? You may feel happy or contented, strange as that may seem, but the fact that your charge is alive and clean and having a better day is all that matters. You may feel despair, agony, pain and bewilderment because nothing that you do makes any difference to the reality for the person for whom you care. You may feel guilty and damn yourself because you wish that this was not happening in your life, that it was somebody else’s problem or that it was all over, knowing that you have to suffer these feelings in silence because you could not possibly tell anyone how you feel—they might think you abhorrent or think of you as not caring for that person. So you suffer that in silence knowing that you can never release those feelings.

There is no peace of mind for a carer. From the day that they take on that role of caring it is the end of peace of mind forever, because each day is filled with questions. Have you done your best? Who is going to care for your loved one if something happens to you? How do you financially future-proof your disabled child so that there are assets to care for them when you are too old or have departed from this world, when the rules state that maybe you cannot do that because you lose what little financial assistance you might get now? For those people who care for a terminally ill person, even when the inevitable happens, peace of mind is never there. Peace of mind is muddied with thoughts of, ‘Did I do it well enough? Did I care well enough?’ It seems so strange that we as carers only remember the things that we did not do rather than all of the things that we did do. Why is it that carers accept guilt that does not belong with them? I guess that is the lot of a carer.

What of our young carers? Can anyone possibly imagine their lives? How hopeless things must seem at times when the burdens of everyday life fall entirely on their shoulders, with the inability to gain a proper education or employment, to meet with friends or to enjoy just a day of carefree existence. Many of our young carers have done this for the majority of their lives, and they see nothing else in their lives but a future caring for somebody that they love so much, although they certainly know that they would like to have a life for themselves as well. Again, guilt creeps into their lives.

Can anyone honestly know what it is like to be a carer if they have not walked in those shoes? No, I think not, because even if you have volunteered during Carers Week or you help out a friend or a family member occasionally you really do not know, because you are able to leave the responsibility behind when you walk out that door. Carers do not have a health plan for themselves, as their health takes second place. They do not have a leisure plan, they do not have a family plan, they do not have a work plan—in fact, they do not have a plan other than to care to the best of their ability, regardless of their feelings for themselves, because that is their only plan in life.

A carer can never leave behind the responsibility; it is theirs for life. Carers should get rewards here on earth; they should not have to wait till they meet their maker. I urge everyone to try and walk in the shoes of a carer, because they deserve every possible assistance on earth. Carers are the backbone of our community. They continue to provide to Australian people what no Australian government or community can provide. Governments can assist greatly. However, communities must also embrace their carers by giving them easier access to services and perhaps by providing a little well-earned relief at times so that a carer can go and do something for themselves. I commend this private member’s motion before the House.
today, because carers are truly Australia’s great people. *(Time expired)*

**Ms GEORGE (Throsby) (4.34 p.m.)* — I am pleased to have the opportunity this afternoon to speak in support of the sentiments expressed in the motion before the House, which goes to the heart of recognition of the invaluable contribution that carers make to our community in so many ways. All the speakers preceding me have agreed with the general thrust of the sentiments proposed by the member for Flinders, and I certainly commend the member for Riverina for the comments she just made — comments which express so well the collective views that all of us in this House share about the very valuable but often undervalued role performed by carers in the community.

We are talking here about an estimated 2.3 million carers across the nation. We all know that the physical and emotional support provided by our caring community is priceless. It is beyond any kind of economic recognition, though in economic terms alone the work of our carers saves the Australian economy an estimated $20 billion annually. We know that their loving care comes at a very high cost to carers in terms of their own wellbeing, their quality of life, their financial security, and their opportunity to be in paid employment. As the figures show, almost 80 per cent of primary carers are of work force age.

Primary carers, of whom there are around 450,000, ensure that many of our citizens are cared for outside an institutional setting and framework. Sixty-eight per cent of our primary carers have been providing such loving care for more than five years, and many — about 40 per cent — have been doing so for a decade or more. That is why we can all confidently say that the work that they do is priceless and their contribution often undervalued — they rate among the unsung heroes of our nation. There has been a belated recognition of their contribution in this year’s budget, and that is to be welcomed. But one might ask why it has taken an impending federal election to get this government moving on so many of the longstanding grievances that have been brought to the attention of all members of parliament by those involved in caring activities.

Every MP knows the range of issues and difficulties confronting our carers, including the lack of respite places; the lack of high-care aged places and places for dementia sufferers; the lack of specialised accommodation for people with disabilities; the difficulties of placing children with disabilities in child care, due to the freeze by this government of the Special Needs Subsidy Scheme; the previously tight residency requirements for the granting of the allowance; and the problems facing our ageing carers, who wonder with a great deal of anxiety who will be left to look after their children with disabilities once they pass on.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. I.R. Causley) — Order! The time allotted for private members’ business has expired. The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 104A. Debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting. The member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.***
cause of the plight they are in. Her parents, Mr and Mrs Soma, are currently residing in Zimbabwe. They have applied to migrate to Australia under the parent migration subclass 103. They have been accepted, and their queue date is August 2001. On current trends it will take them another four years at least before they can be granted a permanent residence visa. In the interim, Mrs Garrison has written numerous letters to the PM, to the previous and the current ministers for immigration and to other members of parliament, pointing out the dire circumstances of her parents.

Mrs Garrison has explained to me that her parents are now facing a crisis in Zimbabwe. They are struggling to meet their day-to-day living expenses in an environment where inflation is running at some 500 per cent. They are experiencing food shortages and shortages of other necessities of life for older people. Mrs Garrison has received responses from the former minister for immigration and feels that he was more interested in making political points than helping her parents—and others in Zimbabwe caught up in the dreadful regime there.

In one of his letters, former Minister Ruddock pointed out that there were 5,430 applicants ahead of Mr and Mrs Soma in the queue. He suggested that they may care to reapply under the contributory parent visa category. Indeed, he wrote to them in 2003 and said:

I am delighted to be able to advise you that the legislation I introduced for additional places under the existing parent visa category and a new contributory category will come into effect in the new financial year. These additional places will substantially increase the number of parents who are able to be reunited with their families and lessen the time that they are waiting in the queue. Applicants for the contributory parent visa category should receive a visa more quickly than applicants for the existing category who applied at the same time.

… applicants for the new visa will pay a health charge of $25,000 per adult to apply directly for a permanent visa or they can take up an option to spread this payment by applying for a temporary two-year visa, with a first instalment of $15,000.

Of course, the problem for Mrs Garrison and her parents is that they do not have access to these large amounts of money—$50,000 in their case. Also, as Mrs Garrison points out, why should someone already in the queue have to reapply under a new category when they cannot afford to—and why should they be jumped over by those who can afford to pay?

It is also interesting to note that when this issue was raised in Senate estimates last week it was revealed that, of the new contributory category, it was anticipated that 4,500 places would be taken up. That forecast was wrong, and it is now anticipated that only 3,000 places will be taken up by the end of the financial year. That leaves a surplus of 1,500 places not used, or available, under the contributory category. The government now needs to be asked why they have not transferred those remaining places to the original non-contributory scheme and allowed those existing original applicants to fill those places—applicants, I might say, who could be assessed on the basis of need rather than on the ability to pay. I think another question that needs to be asked is: why have these contributory places not been taken up? Surely the answer is that those who languish in the original scheme simply do not have the cash capacity to switch over to the new scheme. Surely this is a question that the minister and the government should be addressing, given the dire circumstances of people who are living in Zimbabwe and who are desperate for family reunification.

Mr and Mrs Soma already have their whole family living in Perth. These family
members have committed themselves to taking full responsibility for the couple when they arrive. In Mrs Garrison’s case, she has no dependants and has been in secure employment for many years, so she is able to make good that commitment. I do not seek to have my constituents’ parents given any special treatment. All I ask for is a fair go for this family and for other families caught up in these circumstances.

I understand that other countries, like the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand, take a far more compassionate and humanitarian approach to these issues. These countries have not turned their backs on fellow members of the Commonwealth. Zimbabwe may be out of the Commonwealth, but its citizens remain our Commonwealth brothers and sisters and we should not desert them. Sooner or later Australia will have to face up to its responsibilities in this matter, as nothing is more certain than the fact that it is only a matter of time before Zimbabwe becomes a complete basket case. It is inevitable.

The Prime Minister has condemned the Mugabe regime, but appears to have no commitment to the situation, other than simple rhetoric. There is certainly no commitment and no compassion for those people suffering under this appalling regime. We are all aware of the dangers, the acts of continuing and escalating violence that occur in Zimbabwe, and the dire concerns and worries that loved ones living in Australia have for aged parents caught under that appalling Mugabe regime. Surely, as a growing nation in need of positive migration, we can take more of these people under this parent program. Surely, as a compassionate nation, we can understand the trauma of families caught up in these circumstances. Surely, as a nation that claims to care about terror and those caught up in such violence, we should do something more positive to ensure family reunion in these circumstances.

I appeal to the Prime Minister, the government and the minister to re-examine their policies in this area. They should show some compassion, rather than just spouting empty rhetoric or simply saying that we will take only those who can afford to pay the miserable bounty on which the current government continues to insist. I urge the government to re-examine this whole question and to re-examine their policy in this area, particularly in light of the fact that there are 1,500 places surplus: that is, 1,500 places that have not been taken up under this contributory scheme. As I said, that in itself should indicate to the government, who are aware of the desperate need of some of these people—who have loved ones in Australia—that, suffering under that dire regime, they simply cannot afford to put together the necessary cash to pay under that contributory scheme. It is unfair and it should be reviewed.

Housing Affordability

Mr CADMAN (Mitchell) (4.47 p.m.)—I want to grieve today about the cost of housing in Australia and look at some of the factors that impinge on the massive increases that have taken place in the cost of housing. I think access to housing is one of the aspirations of most Australians. I remember a survey conducted by the Women’s Electoral Lobby in Western Sydney, which indicated that 95 per cent of families thought that their ultimate goal would be to own their own home. Years ago, Sir Robert Menzies said that the real life of the nation can be found in the homes where people see that their major contribution to society is the raising of their children in a safe and sound environment.

Across the political range, the acquisition of a house and the capacity to own a home has been something Australians excel at. The percentage of people who are home owners in Australia has always been very high—
somewhere between 65 and 70 per cent—and every one of them wants to own their own home and have an asset. There are a number of reasons for this. Certainly security for families in the raising of children is one aspect, but that investment then becomes a tradable investment as life advances. As people reach retirement, the value of their home becomes an investment in future security. Whether in a retirement village or a nursing home, the proceeds from the sale of the property—or the use of the value of that property—become a security factor later in life. It does not matter whether it is the sole remaining female of a family, cared for by her children, or a couple going for early retirement: they use that asset that they have saved for. They use what is probably the largest investment anybody makes in their whole lifetime as the basis for a comfortable and secure retirement, taking care of their health needs and their social needs later in life.

When I was attending the national conference of the Housing Industry Association recently, I was encouraged by an address I heard given by Bob Day. He is a vice president of the Housing Industry Association and Managing Director of Home Australia, a leading building company in South Australia, which has a full-time staff of 350 and about 1,000 trade contractors involved in building houses of high quality. He has recently expanded into New South Wales. He presented a very thoughtful speech, I felt, on some of the factors relating to the acquisition of homes by young people, particularly in the very active environment in the housing industry in Australia today. My electorate, Mr Deputy Speaker, as you would realise coming from New South Wales, is one of the huge growth areas in metropolitan Sydney, with hundreds of homes being put up each month. Young people and families are endeavouring to purchase and move into these new homes.

The role of the New South Wales government is something that I will look at, but what used to be the particular role of state governments—and Mr Day pointed this out in his address—was the consolidation of land to allow for the production of homes in an easier fashion: so that builders could go ahead and provide blocks and housing and not have to worry about dealing with a whole multiplicity of small landowners. I think that the objectives of the land commissions in Australia were to provide an adequate supply and to maintain affordability for housing land. The land commissions now seem to be driven by a desire to maximise the financial returns to state government. That has been a tragedy.

In 1975, the cost of a block of land was not a significant component of the total overall package. About 20 per cent of the cost of the total house-land package was made up of the block of land. Today it is closer to 60 per cent of the total house-land package cost. So the land component is now more than 50 per cent of the total package. This is a big turnaround. One wonders where the land commissions have led their state governments in this. Instead of sticking to their original objectives and seeing their role as being to consolidate and maximise the availability of land, they have seen land as providing a capacity to raise revenue.

The state governments have failed. They are loading the cost of roads and infrastructure on to landowners. Even the responsibility for main roads in New South Wales is being loaded on to the landowners, meaning no major trunk development can take place. For example, in my electorate, Windsor Road and some of the main highways contemplated with the future development of the Rouse Hill area are now going to be loaded
onto the individual home buyers. Even worse, there has been talk that the residents would contribute to the cost of any future railway line in the area.

The block of land for the family home is seen as a milking cow for state government revenue and infrastructure costs. I think it is absolutely intolerable that it has advanced to this point. We need only compare the cost of private and public components of the preparation of the house-land package to see this. When one compares prices in 1975 with prices today, the average price of a house has risen about seven times; in that same period of just under 30 years, the average price of a block of land has not risen seven times, 10 times, 20 times or 50 times—but 70 times. That is a comparison between the private enterprise activity of preparing a house for a young couple to buy and move into and the consolidation process undertaken by the land commissions of the state governments around Australia. There has been a 70-fold increase in the cost of the land component of a house-land package in that period.

Small blocks are now the feature so that even more revenue comes from each block of land. Bob Carr uses the term ‘McMansion’ in New South Wales to describe large houses on small blocks, and I believe it is a cry for smaller houses on smaller blocks. It is not a cry to solve the problem and deal with it; it is a cry for more revenue and an attempt to predict the size and lifestyle of families by making it more difficult for families to live in these conditions.

There are streets in these pristine new areas—and in Australia we should have the best conditions—that emergency services vehicles cannot drive down. If a car is parked on the side of the road, emergency services vehicles cannot use those streets. These are brand new, state-of-the-art, so-called gifted and brilliant developments proposed by the state government, but they have all these limitations that none of the inner city suburbs even have. So on our newest developments—which should be our greatest achievement and the best thing for new families—we have this difficulty.

In addition to this impost of state governments—with duties, stamp duties and conditions put on the development of the land so that everything in the whole district is paid for from the development of that land and is owned by the families buying it—we now have the union movement trying to control the housing industry. That would be a great shame and a great cost. There is no doubt that we would pay a 25 per cent premium for houses prepared by union controlled contractors or builders. It is certainly the case in the general construction area that, where there is heavy union activity, the cost of building preparation goes up. Australia has a proud and competitive home building industry. It is one of the most efficient in the world. Australian families are proud to own their own homes, thus providing themselves with a secure future. Instead, state governments and the union movement are seeking to subvert that by social planning. (Time expired)

Centrelink: Pensioner Debts

Ms KING (Ballarat) (4.57 p.m.)—I rise in this grievance debate to raise an issue that has to some extent slipped under the radar of media attention of late but which nevertheless is having a significant impact on a group of pensioners. The crackdown that the government has instituted on Centrelink payments for pensioners is causing significant distress to a group of older Australians who have not set out to defraud the government, have not set out to rip off the system and have acted in good faith but now, due to the fact that Centrelink have not been conducting even the most basic data matching
checks, find themselves being faced with significant debts.

With many of the reviews being conducted, going back as far as 10 years, even small variations in pension entitlements have now accumulated into massive debts. Many pensioners are being faced with the loss of their life savings, with the minister in August last year even threatening to sell their homes to recover these debts. I note that the member for Mitchell just told us in his contribution how important homes and housing security are for people as they age. This crackdown continues to have unwarranted and unnecessarily heavy-handed effects on my constituents.

To illustrate the point, I have collected just a small sample of the cases that have come into my office over the past six months. The people in the cases from my electorate alone—and these are the ones I want to raise in this debate—have been accused of owing a debt totalling $63,860.61. The first case is of a gentleman in receipt of a part Australian age pension and part pension from the Netherlands. He incurred a $2,062.48 debt, due to Centrelink claiming he did not notify them of the CPI increases to his Netherlands pension. His Australian pension fluctuated, and this gentleman believed that it did so automatically in response to changes to the exchange rate and also to increases in his Netherlands pension. Instead of notifying my constituent that there might be a problem—and there is a reciprocal agreement between the Australian government and the Netherlands government in relation to notification of CPI increases—and instead of even automatically reducing his payments as they became aware of the CPI increases, Centrelink allowed this debt to accumulate. This constituent has repaid the money, but he is distressed that he was made to feel a criminal by a system that should have been able to do something as basic as this.

The next case is of a 91-year-old who again was in receipt of a part-Australian and part-Netherlands age pension. Again, the woman assumed that because Centrelink had access to all her bank accounts and her pension fluctuated Centrelink knew of the CPI increases in her Netherlands pension and were acting accordingly. Imagine her distress when she was notified by mail that she owed $5,557.26. A similar case involved a $9,000 debt dating back to 1994. The woman has subsequently died and Centrelink is pursuing her estate for the debt. The debt has been consistently denied on appeal, and Centrelink, despite being sympathetic, have continued to blame the constituent and the Netherlands government for the mistake.

Centrelink had encouraged these people to apply for overseas pensions. The people in all of these cases are not disputing that where a debt is owed it should be repaid; the problem is that, by the time they are notified that there is a problem, their debts are often beyond their capacity to pay them. Debts going back over 10 years accumulate to such an extent that they place an unfair burden on people who are often unable to pay.

The fourth case is of a woman in her 70s who had been separated from her husband for 10 years. The ex-husband was living in Melbourne and she was living in a small community in my electorate. The ex-husband developed cancer and, even though they were no longer in a relationship, the woman nursed her ex-husband until his death. As the executor of his will, imagine her shock when she received a bill from Centrelink for $16,795.93, payable within one month. The debt had apparently occurred because Centrelink claimed her deceased ex-husband had failed to notify them that he was no longer single. I am pleased to say that the debt was eventually waived, but only after this constituent had spent several sleepless nights, contacted friends for help and made a solici-
The final case I want to raise is of a constituent that came to see me on Friday. This gentleman and his wife applied for the age pension in 1994. His wife was working on a casual basis, and they have proof of having told Centrelink of both the employment and the fluctuating nature of her income at the time of their application. They have completed tax returns each year, paid additional tax as required and supplied these tax returns to Centrelink on request on an 18-monthly basis. These constituents on Monday received debt notices from Centrelink in the amount of $30,444. They are 72 years of age and are by no means well off—and frankly they just do not have the money to pay the debt.

This small sample of cases from my district is replicated right across the country. For the period 2002-03 there were 3,529 reviews undertaken of age pension recipients; 2,003 cases resulted in debts, and these debts totalled $9,173,721. That is over $9 million expected to be repaid by age pension recipients for the last financial year alone. From my own experience of cases in my electorate I am not convinced that these debts represent systematic rorting of the age pension system. In many cases they represent administrative failure by Centrelink and a harsh and unwarranted crackdown on the part of the government.

Where the overpayment is due to an error by Centrelink and payment is received in good faith, the debts should be waived. There should be no argument about that—the debts should just be waived. Where the error has occurred due to an unintended lapse by pensioners—and you have to understand that the system is inordinately complex and that many of these people, particularly in the case of the 91-year-old that I was talking about, fail to even understand the letters that they are sent by Centrelink in the first place and that they have to report anything—then the government ought to be fairer and take into account the financial circumstances of the people they are seeking to recover this debt from. These pensioners are being hounded by the government to repay debts that they never knew that they had. People on age pensions deserve far better.

**Rural and Regional Australia: Doctor Shortages**

Mr SCHULTZ (Hume) (5.04 p.m.)—A little under two weeks ago I received a visit in my Goulburn electorate office from a young lady by the name of Trudi Beck. Miss Beck, who is 18 years old and lives in the small community of Towrang, north of Goulburn, had written to me of her concerns about the stumbling blocks placed in the way of young people, particularly in rural areas, looking to enter the field of medicine. I would like, if I may, to read to you some of Miss Beck’s letter and talk about some of the difficulties being faced by communities in my electorate due to the shortage of rural GPs. Miss Beck begins her letter by stating:

The thoughts of our local community have been with you in past months as you have endured ill health. Such hardships make you realise that Australia really is the lucky country, with a health care system that isn’t unaffordable to the general community and offers a top-quality, professional service.

It also makes you wonder how far resources can stretch and whether hospitals and medical clinics can continue to provide such a service with critical doctor shortages.

She goes on to say:

Living in your electorate, I am aware that you have long understood the need to encourage rural students to study medicine and then return to the bush and that you are active in promoting the
schemes developed at Federal level in the hope of attracting rural doctors.

I want to be part of the Federal Government’s solution to the shortage of rural doctors, using my passion for rural Australia to ensure that availability and quality of health care meets the community’s needs.

Unlike many young Australians who leave their home in the bush or on the farm to chase a career in the big city, Miss Beck shows an enthusiasm to learn and to serve the community in which she was raised. It was her hope that this year she would be studying medicine at the University of New South Wales, but that has turned out not to be the case.

Since year 10, Miss Beck has been working and studying towards her goal of becoming a rural GP. She undertook work experience at Westmead Hospital and Southern Highlands Private Hospital, she attended the Rural High Schools Medical Career Week, she experienced the day-to-day running of rural general practices and rural hospitals in Young, and she was a weekly volunteer at Goulburn Base Hospital during 2003. She completed the prestigious Duke of Edinburgh scheme, was vice-captain and a member of the student council at Mulwaree High School and involved herself in her local community, in particular the Marulan and Districts Lions Club.

Through year 12 Miss Beck made the necessary preparations for admission to university. She studied for and sat the medical entrance exam, spent hours preparing applications for the rural entry scheme at the University of New South Wales, sweated through the selection process, attended interviews for medicine at the university and gained acceptance to university accommodation. As she explained to me during our meeting, Miss Beck gave up a lot of study time during year 12 to make all of these preparations for university. Still she obtained the highest UAI at her school: 94.9. On 9 January she received the devastating news that she had not been offered a place in her chosen course. So, on the advice of the university and her school, she has courageously returned this year to repeat year 12 and improve her medical entrance and UAI results.

This young lady is determined to achieve her goals. Her commitment was recognised recently when she was named Marulan’s young citizen of the year. However, this brings me to question why a young Australian with so much drive, so much ability and so much enthusiasm should be denied her dream. It is a fact that in this country we have a shortage of rural and remote GPs. Miss Beck in her letter aptly points out:

I am concerned that a town of Goulburn’s size does not have a local student studying medicine from the class of 2003.

My UAI was the third highest in Goulburn last year, with the two students scoring higher than myself pursuing careers in law and journalism.

I must say, surely this country already has enough of both!

I certainly concur with her on that point. She ends her letter by saying:

Denying people like myself entry to medicine is not only a personal loss but a loss for the entire community.

I have forwarded a copy of Miss Beck’s letter to the Minister for Health and Ageing and have discussed her situation with the Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon. Brendan Nelson. Minister Abbott was kind enough to meet with a group of concerned people from Young, in Cootamundra, during the recent Pollie Pedal event. There he heard at first-hand the lengths being pursued by a regional community to attract and keep general practitioners in their area.

The Young District Medical Centre, whose staff were at that meeting, received assistance and advice from Minister Abbott’s
office, resulting in an initiative of the MedicarePlus package called the Rural and Remote Area Placement Program. This involves a rotation of postgraduate year 2 medical interns from Canberra Clinical School. The practice has also addressed registrars in the GP training program on a number of occasions with assistance from the academic unit of general practice of the Canberra Clinical School. This is showing some promise with definite interest from some registrars. The practice is also in negotiation with some overseas trained doctors via the Rural Doctors Network.

Yet here we have a young lady—and I am sure many more just like her—who is ready and willing to put in the many years at university and the thousands of hours of study, not to mention the significant financial outlay, needed to become a rural doctor. Perhaps as a government we should consider measures to eliminate some of these stumbling blocks for our young people, particularly the unrealistic UAI levels set by universities, to encourage and support them, rather than crush their hopes and dreams with university entrance requirements that seem to favour only the best of the best—many of whom will probably end up in city, rather than country, practices.

The point that I am making is that we have set the bar too high. Some young Australians like Miss Beck are students of above average intelligence who get very good results—up around the 95 per cent mark—but they are precluded from going into the medical profession because the universities have a limited number of places or they set the bar too high for students to jump over. It is to that end that I decided to bring in this young lady to talk to the two ministers to see what they could do to resolve her problem. She is not only personally committed to what she wants to achieve in life but also willing to forgo another year of her professional pursuits in the community to go back to school to try and get a higher level so that she can reach the bar that has been set by the universities.

I cannot emphasise enough how important it is for us as parliamentarians and as a community as a whole to encourage young people to do what they are willing to make sacrifices for, but we must set a realistic level for them to attain. I understand that in the past to be a GP you only needed to have a UAI, or the equivalent of a UAI, of about 90 per cent. But here we have a situation where a young person who achieves a level of 95 per cent cannot even contemplate going into medicine. I think that is deplorable and something ought to be done about it. We do not want everybody to be a rocket scientist or a brain surgeon, but we are desperately in need of GPs in our rural areas, and we need to encourage the commitment of young Australians like this young lady. I must thank Miss Beck for bringing this fact to my attention, and I hope you will all join me in wishing her well in her studies and future career as a rural GP. We need more courageous young people like her doing these sorts of things in the community. I commend her on her tenacity in pursuing her goal.

**Taxation: Mass Marketed Schemes**

*Ms JACKSON (Hasluck) (5.13 p.m.)*—It is not often that I find myself agreeing with the honourable member for Canning, whose electorate neighbours mine of Hasluck. But the experience of a number of our constituents in what have commonly become known as mass marketed tax effective schemes has provided us with a common commitment to ensure a just outcome for those mum and dad investors who have been exposed to the full weight and might of the Australian Taxation Office. The member for Canning, in his speech on the appropriation bill on 17 February, this year outlined a number of troubling
stories about his constituents who have suffered greatly as a result of the ATO’s heavy-handedness. Sadly, today I will be informing the House of a number of other families in my electorate of Hasluck who have suffered the same fate, and I will be urging the government to properly address this issue and not just make sympathetic noises.

Back in 2001, in the climate of the last federal election campaign, the Prime Minister offered some hope to those investors who had suddenly been issued with bills for tens of thousands of dollars. In an article entitled ‘Howard offers tax victims glimmer of hope’ in the West Australian on 11 April 2001, it was reported that during a meeting of investors in the goldfields the Prime Minister was informed by a local resident:

We have got the situation here where people are becoming bankrupt, losing their houses and losing their wives and husbands, losing their business and they are also in some cases suicidal.

The message delivered to the Prime Minister over three years ago echoes the sentiments and experiences of my constituents in Hasluck. I know of cases where investors have remortgaged their homes and had break-downs in their marriages or families, and I do not say this lightly but I have very grave concerns for the health and wellbeing of some of the investors whom I have met.

In the face of this kind of destruction of the lives of ordinary people, I cannot justify the heavy-handed approach taken by the Australian Taxation Office on this matter. I am, and always have been, a strong supporter of vigorous anti-tax avoidance measures in our taxation system. I greatly appreciate the need to collect taxation revenue to pay for essential services such as Medicare, education and roads. I firmly believe in closing taxation loopholes that allow those fortunate enough and wealthy enough to pay the best accountants and lawyers to dodge their taxation obligations.

However, I do not believe that mum and dad investors should bear the full force of the Taxation Office’s powers and be made to feel like criminals when you consider that, in some circumstances, it was an enormous systematic failure of the ATO and its administrative systems which was partly responsible for plunging these investors into the extreme financial difficulty and despair they are now experiencing. Indeed, the Prime Minister appeared to share this view when, as stated in the Financial Review on 13 November 2001, he was quoted as saying on Radio 2UE:

I don’t believe in the imposition of retrospective tax liabilities.

We did use it once years ago in relation to some blatant tax avoidance. I don’t think these tax-effective schemes fall into that category. I don’t think they’re in the bottom of the harbour.

I am sure that many of my constituents took heart in the Prime Minister’s words. They hoped that some suitable resolution could be found to the matter and that the Prime Minister felt the same way. Unfortunately, that sensible solution has never materialised.

I would like to inform the House of a constituent of mine from Walliston. She is a nurse with a modest income. As a single mother with little superannuation, she was persuaded to invest in one of these schemes initially by a friend and subsequently by a scheme promoter as a way of securing some income for her retirement. Following the retrospective ruling from the ATO, she was hit with a bill of $19,000. Having no savings to pay it, my constituent said she had agreed to sign the ATO settlement offer as she wanted to be able to ‘sleep at night’ without having this debt hanging over her head. She knew that if she did not agree to settle on the ATO’s terms, she would be hit with addi-
tional fees and charges at a later date. She also knew she did not have the resources required to fight the decision. She had to remortgage her home to settle with the ATO and now any plans she had to save for her retirement have been dashed.

After the courts found in favour of the Sleight Northern Rivers Tea Tree project—the project my constituent had invested in—I wrote to the ATO on her behalf to establish whether or not the ATO would refund the $19,000 she had paid to settle with them. The ATO, who had appealed the court’s ruling, waited to hear the outcome of their appeal before responding to me. In that correspondence the ATO stated:

Under the terms of the settlement agreement the Commissioner will not reopen settlement where a case is found in favour of the taxpayer nor will he reopen settlement where a case is found in favour of the Tax Office.

Even if the final result of lengthy appeals finds in favour of the taxpayer in these matters—that is, that they did nothing wrong—investors such as my constituent, who settled out of fear and by remortgaging her home, will not be able to recover any money.

Another constituent of mine, from Huntingdale, invested in a scheme in 1996 on the advice of an accountant. As a matter of course, my constituent was keen to ensure that the investment plan recommended to him was above board. He received advice from the ATO on 18 July 1996 that his application for variation of tax instalment deductions had been approved. The letter stated:

The prescribed rate of tax instalment deductions to be made from your salary and wages has been reduced to 16% of gross earnings. This is in accordance with Section 221D of the Income Tax Assessment Act 1936 ... This authority will remain in force from the next available pay period until 30 June 1997. Normal tax rates will apply from 1 July 1997 unless you apply and receive approval for a new variation before that date.

To an average taxpayer, such advice from the ATO appears to provide approval for the investment. But like so many other small-time investors, my constituent and his wife were caught out when the ATO hit them with a large debt.

The subsequent issuing of the debt notice to my constituents in Huntingdale not only took them by surprise but also had a significant impact on their financial security and wellbeing. I believe that neither the commissioner nor the ATO have any understanding of the dramatic effect that their actions have had on thousands of Western Australian families. Let me return to the Financial Review article that I quoted earlier. The article also attributed the following statement to the Prime Minister on 12 November 2001, when he said:

I think once you’ve been given an assessment and the idea that you can be given another one on essentially the same set of facts is double jeopardy.

I agree with the Prime Minister’s 2001 comments and I call on him now, in 2004—another election year—to finally take some action on this issue and assist those families in Hasluck, Canning and elsewhere in Western Australia who are still living with the fallout from the ATO’s mishandling of these so-called mass marketed tax effective schemes. There was a great Australian ethos: a fair go all round. It seems to me that the Howard government has overseen the demise of this ethos, and the treatment of the individuals I have mentioned is but an example of this. It seems that the Liberal Party—and you would think its coalition partners, The Nationals, would have learnt by now—always reverts to form: it is only the big end of town that it looks after.

**Iraq: Treatment of Prisoners**

Mr King (Wentworth) (5.22 p.m.)—I rise in this grievance debate to raise a ques-
tion concerning the treatment of prisoners in the war in Iraq and what obligations Australia might have in relation to that treatment. Mr Deputy Speaker, you may recall that there were two major operations involving Australian units in which Australian units could be said to have captured Iraqis during the conflict. The first was where both US and Australian ADF personnel boarded an Iraqi vessel operating in the Khawr Abdallah waterway. The second occurred when a convoy reportedly transporting Iraqi officers, political leaders and foreign mercenaries was stopped by mixed Australian and US forces west of Baghdad. This was during the main conflict. Since that time our forces have not been involved, certainly, in the main frontline activities of the principal coalition partners of Britain and the United States. It does, however, give rise to a question, which is an important one, as to what responsibility Australia should assume in relation to the conduct and treatment of prisoners by our coalition partners to ensure that we have addressed all of our international obligations, and also to ensure the appropriate conduct of the conflict on behalf of the Australian people. It was important that when President Bush gave his speech to the American people on 24 May he noted that on 30 June, which is now only a few weeks away:

… the Coalition Provisional Authority will cease to exist, and will not be replaced. The occupation will end, and Iraqis will govern their own affairs.

President Bush made reference to an executive of a president, two vice-presidents and a prime minister, and 26 Iraqi ministers overseeing government departments and so on. He then set out five steps which he saw as being important for the future of Iraq and which may involve coalition partners, including Australia. The third of those steps is relevant for the present purposes, and that is to continue rebuilding Iraq’s infrastructure so that a free Iraq can quickly gain economic independence and a better quality of life. In the course of considering that step, the President said:

A new Iraq will also need a humane, well-supervised prison system. Under the dictator—that is, Saddam Hussein—prisons like Abu Ghraib were symbols of death and torture. That same prison became a symbol of disgraceful conduct by a few American troops who dishonored our country …

President Bush then went on to make reference to other policy matters. Two issues arise from that brief factual outline. The first is whether or not the events which have occurred do involve Australian public policy. The second is whether or not these events should be seen as isolated or limited to those who were directly involved in the prison—in that case, Abu Ghraib, although there are examples of other areas in Iraq where not dissimilar incidents occurred. The first question ought to be introduced by an observation regarding ill-treatment of prisoners—and, indeed, others—by custodians in the past. One only needs to read the Aboriginal deaths in custody report to see that the treatment of Aboriginal people in Western Australia, in terms of violence as described in that report, was certainly no better than that which was meted out as described in the reports in Iraq, and the treatment by Japanese prison guards during the Second World War was probably far worse. We need to distinguish, for present purposes, between torture as a policy and harshness by individuals—and, indeed, disgraceful tactics and conduct by individuals. In that regard, it is important to ensure that we make the right policy adjustments.

The first question that I want to pose is: was the misconduct and ill-treatment of prisoners, as reported in Abu Ghraib, torture or inhumane treatment? That gives rise to a question as to the application of the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhu-
man or Degrading Treatment or Punishment—also known as CAT. Australia has ratified that treaty, as have the United States and the UK. Torture is defined in that treaty as:

... any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.

‘Cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment’ is not defined in CAT, but the Australian government report on the treaty has said:

... Australia understands that the acts or conduct encompassed by this expression entail some lesser degree of severity than those defined as ‘torture’, which nevertheless are inconsistent with the inherent dignity and rights of the person. Australia understands that the expression encompasses ... treatment which grossly humiliates and debases a person.

I do not have time to go into article 16 of CAT at present, but it is important to raise the question as to whether hooding, shackling, stress and duress, being kept in the dark and solitary confinement, sexual humiliation and similar conduct violates these various definitions. It is a vexed question, with surprisingly little jurisprudence on the topic. There is a tension between the conditional, which allows so-called lawful and appropriate punishment to take place, and the general prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment in the text of the treaty.

The oft-quoted case which makes the distinction was the European Union case of Ireland v. United Kingdom which involved the interrogation of a person by forcing them to stand on their toes against a wall for a long period, by covering their heads with black hoods and subjecting them to constant, intense noise and by depriving them of sleep and sufficient food and drink. That constituted inhumane treatment. Yet the court found that, while these techniques did involve inhumane treatment, they did not involve torture as defined. Torture has a special stigma attached to deliberate inhuman treatment causing very serious and cruel suffering. The court held that, in relation to the particular acts, the complainant did not occasion suffering of the particular intensity and cruelty implied by the word torture, as so understood.

That then brings us to the second question: assuming that, for present purposes, what occurred in Abu Ghraib is not torture within the meaning of that convention, did Australia, nonetheless, have responsibilities as a coalition power in respect of it? It seems from my research that the answer to that is yes. That arises in two different ways. It arises under the third Geneva convention and, indeed, the fourth Geneva convention, for the following reasons. Firstly, Australian forces originally captured prisoners who were subsequently abused after being handed over to US forces. That has not been proven to be the case, but assuming that that is the case then an obligation arises. Secondly, through our status as either, arguably, an occupying power in Iraq or an ally of an occupying power, and thus being in a position to influence the occupying powers, the obligation arises to correct the abuses that have come to light. Those obligations arise under the two conventions to which I have referred.

Time does not permit me to go into the details of article 3 of the convention or article 4 of Geneva convention III or, indeed, to the specific protections applying to prisoners of
war, especially article 12. Needless to say, the ill-treatment, for want of a better phrase, that I have described and that we should now accept occurred does fall within the obligations of Geneva conventions III and IV. The question arises: what should be done? Recently our government has convinced the United States to put both Hicks and Habib on trial. That was something that I certainly worked hard for, and I am pleased to see that it has happened. I think there is a similar solemn obligation for us to address these issues through our coalition partners. (Time expired)

Hunter Electorate: Boer War Memorials
Hunter Electorate: Branxton Lions Club

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (5.32 p.m.)—Yesterday, along with mayors Blackmore, Harvison and Colvin, state member John Price and Senator John Tierney, I had the very great pleasure of attending a service in Maitland to remember those who lost their lives in the Anglo-Boer War. The service also marked the commemoration of the restored Boer War memorial wall and the Transvaal drinking fountain. Both these features sit in Transvaal Avenue within the beautiful Maitland Park. The wall contains the names of the 275 volunteers who enrolled from within an area roughly marked out by the boundaries of my electorate.

It was only during the course of recent investigations into the Boer War memorials in Maitland Park that the significance of the 104-year-old Transvaal Avenue came to light. Through the research of conservation landscape architect David Beaver and historian Cynthia Hunter, it was found that Transvaal Avenue in Maitland Park is the only known avenue to have been planted in New South Wales to commemorate the Boer War. Its planting in 1900 also marks it as one of the first, if not the first, commemorative avenues planted in Australia—a custom which we are so familiar with today in many of our cities around the nation.

The planting of the avenue originally stemmed from local community desire to beautify its main park and to provide a permanent memento to the British and colonial successes in the Boer War. In particular, it was the allied victory in Mafeking that led to the establishment of Transvaal Avenue. A celebration of the victory was attended by a staggering 20,000 people. It was said at the time that this was the greatest gathering of people ever held outside Sydney. The planting of the avenue followed and it was officially opened on 31 August 1900, when 107 trees were planted. Each tree was named for a general of the Boer War or for a battlefield or victory.

The people of Maitland additionally commemorated the Boer War by the erection of the Transvaal war memorial drinking fountain, although it was not opened until 1930. For many years there was much debate about what form the memorial should take, with a rotunda being the original proposal. The memorial was funded by money raised through concerts and other functions within the community at the time. In 1929, at the same time as work was carried out on the World War I memorial in Maitland Park, the construction of the Transvaal drinking fountain commenced.

The rejuvenation of the memorial wall, the fountain and Transvaal Avenue was at the initiative of local members of the RSL movement—people like John Fenwick, Kevin Maker and other members of the Maitland RSL sub-branch. Those of us who have been lobbied for support over the past two years now know the names of Fred Goode and Max Paterson only too well! With the assistance of Maitland City Council and professionals like Clair James and Brian Teare, all of these people have worked tire-
lessly over the past two years. The result is a
credit to them all.

The Anglo-Boer War is in many senses
Australia’s forgotten war. Around 600 Aus-
tralians lost their lives through either death in
action or disease. Like the United States of
America now, in 1899 the British Empire
was at the peak of its power and prestige.
Like oil today, gold was the key in those
days to the door of economic power. At the
time, the discovery of gold in South Africa
made the Dutch Boer republics of Transvaal
and Orange Free State areas of keen British
colonial ambition.

Anticipating inevitable conflict with the
British, the Boers launched a number of pre-
emptive attacks in October 1899. As repli-
cated in events in Iraq, overconfident and
cocky British military leaders predicted the
war would be ‘all over by Christmas’. When
the imperial forces regained the capital cities
of the two Boer republics, many thought the
war was over. But they underestimated the
determination of the Boer ‘bitter enders’.
Sabotage and guerrilla warfare continued on
until peace was finally settled in May
1902—again, eerily like the events currently
being played out in Iraq.

Whatever the folly of the British com-
mand—the same sort of folly we saw again
on the Gallipoli Peninsula in 1915—we
should take every opportunity to regularly
reflect on the sacrifices of those who patri-
ottically followed them. Likewise, govern-
ment should not hesitate to put aside money
to restore and maintain memorials and sym-
bols which commemorate their bravery, loy-
alty, commitment, sacrifices and patriotism.
Let us hope the experiences of the Boer War,
the Iraq war and every conflict in between
are not lost upon us.

Among the many things that made yester-
day’s ceremony so special were the contribu-
tions of the British Army’s Major Duncan
Capps, who tactfully hinted that the Boer
War did not represent one of the finest mo-
ments in British military history, and of Mr
Mattheus Bernard, who represented the Afri-
kaner people. Along with descendants of
both New South Wales and Boer soldiers,
who yesterday marched arm in arm, they
were able to demonstrate that while it is im-
portant never to forget it is also important to
forgive.

I want to turn to another story. Along the
New England Highway in my electorate sits
the township of Branxton. Last year the town
celebrated its 150th anniversary, and it was
an occasion on which the strength of com-
community spirit was well and truly on display.
Tonight I make an appeal on behalf of the
Branxton Lions Club, a group which exem-
plifies this community spirit. The local Lions
Club have a fascinating story to tell. Some
years ago a Colonel Garland, the then com-
manding officer of the Singleton infantry
centre just north of Branxton, broke down on
his way back to camp. Again in keeping with
the strong sense of community spirit which
exists in Branxton, Mr Ron Black of Black’s
Garage assisted the good colonel and got him
on his way. Typically, Ron Black refused to
accept payment for his good deed; but, when
the commanding officer insisted, Mr Black
suggested he try to do something for the lo-
cal Lions Club, of which he was a member,
and therefore for the local community.

Subsequently Colonel Garland arranged
for the donation of a scout car, which took
pride of place in Branxton’s Lions Park for
many years. I am advised that a few years
ago the ADF retrieved the scout car. Lions
Club members at the time somehow believed
it was being taken away for restoration and
would be returned. Alas, it has never come
back, and not surprisingly the Lions Club
would like it returned to its rightful place.
Today I have written to the Minister for De-
fence appealing to him to make restitution

CHAMBER
and in the House tonight I again appeal for him to do so. The community of Branxton deserves no less.

In the last few moments left to me, I want to do two things very quickly. First of all, I want to send a cheerio to Cessnock resident Nellie Jowett, who on Saturday, 8 May celebrated her 100th birthday. Now taking a well-earned rest in Cessnock's Jacaranda Grove Nursing Home, Nellie was for many years a tireless worker within the local community. Mrs Jowett has had three children, nine grandchildren, 21 great-grandchildren and four great-great-grandchildren. You will not be surprised to learn that most of them, thankfully and happily, were there for the celebration on that great Saturday. I know that all members of the House will join with me in belatedly wishing her a happy birthday and very best wishes for the future.

Finally, I want to highlight what I would describe as a couple of misrepresentations by government ministers. Outrageously, today the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources, Ian Macfarlane, released a press release saying that Labor's six-point plan to strengthen competition in the retail petrol market would be disastrous for motorists and would be the end of the shopper docket scheme. Nothing could be further from the truth. I also want to make the point that, on the same day, Minister Hockey issued a media release in which he claims that Mark Latham has stolen government policy in the release of our petrol policy. So I thank Minister Hockey for both contradicting what Minister Macfarlane has had to say and welcoming Labor's six-point plan for a fairer deal for motorists.

Education: Literacy

Ms GAMBARO (Petrie) (5.42 p.m.)—Last Friday the Courier-Mail printed a story headlined 'Backflip to give pupils reading vouchers'. This refers to the $700 reading tuition bonus delivered by the Australian government to parents of students with lower than average reading skills which is being obstructed by the Queensland government, which refuses to pass on information to Queensland parents about their child's problem. In the misleading and inaccurate Courier-Mail article, the journalist, swallowing the bait thrown to her by Queensland's education minister hook, line and sinker, simply repeated without even checking against the facts that the federal education minister Brendan Nelson allegedly:

... did not indicate why he had changed his stance of 10 days ago, when he said Queensland was ineligible because it had not provided national benchmarks on reports to parents.

Once again, the Courier-Mail has got it wrong. The reason Dr Nelson did not indicate why he had changed his stance was very simple: he had not. The letter the minister wrote to the paper pointing this out to the editor has not been published, and I do not think it ever will be. Why spoil a good story with some facts? The fact that the Queensland state education minister successfully fed this gullible journalist an untruth that Dr Nelson had backflipped simply continues a litany of untruths being told to Queensland parents and the politicisation of education that the Queensland education minister has engaged in.

An untruth that has been told to Queensland parents is that the information about their child's performance cannot be measured against a national benchmark because it does not exist. It is something that the Queensland education minister now admits. This should not come as a surprise. After all, this is the same Queensland education minister who has been using children as an unwitting propaganda vehicle to distribute a political letter from the Queensland Teachers Union which breaches all rules about keeping politics out of the classroom. This has been
prompted by a barrage of complaints from parents who have been absolutely outraged by the abuse of schoolchildren of Queensland—some of them even in grade 1. This week I obtained one of the brochures that has been circulated throughout Queensland schools. I looked at some of the headings, such as ‘Seeing through political tricks’. There can be no more callous form of political trickery than sending home political propaganda with impressionable children.

Queensland Liberal shadow minister for education John-Paul Langbroek appropriately posed the question: if the Queensland Teachers Union message is so strong and truthful, why is the QTU so afraid to utilise a legitimate means to reach the community? Steve Ryan, Vice-President of the QTU, said the leaflets were ‘aimed at parents’. If Mr Ryan is correct then why send the leaflets home with impressionable children? Obviously the propaganda had its desired effect when Queensland children are having the message reinforced to them that ‘John Howard has been really mean to us’. If all the children enrolled in non-government schools were to enrol in government schools, Australian taxpayers would need to contribute an extra $3 billion to $4 billion per annum. It is startling then that the Queensland Teachers Union would attack the Howard government for ensuring that private schools obtain adequate funding.

It is really quite interesting that some principals have refused to allow the students in their care to be abused this way and will not let them disseminate this union material. However, the Queensland education minister is unrepentant and is still allowing it to be handed out by the union with the demand that children make sure their parents read it. It is little wonder that a state education minister who would stoop so low as to allow six-year-olds to be used as propaganda cannon fodder in the campaign against the federal government has consistently told untruths to the parents of those children about the availability of information about their children.

There has been no backflip. The situation remains that the Australian government has always offered the $700 reading tuition bonus to Queensland school students if the Queensland education minister fulfils her duty of care to those students by divulging information that their parents have a right to know and want to know—information which the Queensland education minister admits to the Courier-Mail she could have easily passed on and indeed admits she should pass on. The article, which is so inaccurate in every other respect, makes that very clear. It quotes the Queensland education minister as saying:

> Given my public announcement last year that Queensland was willing to change its reporting arrangements, this matter could have been settled by negotiation.

If she admitted that last year, why hasn’t she done it? Why hasn’t she given Queensland parents the information about the children that she says she has? This is a question that I hope parents of Queensland will ask her: why has their state education minister chosen to keep them in the dark, knowing that she has all that information at her fingertips, knowing that that information was necessary for them to get access to something the Australian government wants them to have for their children and also knowing that other states have already cooperated and they had no problem letting their parents know how their particular state’s schoolchildren were faring compared to the national benchmark?

The answer, like the answer that the Courier-Mail journalist who was so comprehensively gulled by the Queensland education minister failed to see, is blindingly obvious, and it is confirmed by the ugly tactic of using children to cart home propaganda. The
Queensland education minister is grandstanding. She is holding the schoolchildren of our state hostage to the state political agenda. She would rather those children miss out on something very special—something that many of them desperately need and are entitled to. And why is she doing this? It is a grubby political tactic.

It is making the parents of school students in my electorate very angry. They have seen through the minister’s ploy—even if the Courier-Mail has not. They are sick of the education minister’s cheap tricks, just as they are sick and tired of being kept in the dark by a government which plays God with their parental rights. I have had some very outraged phone calls from parents, both within and beyond my electorate, to register their feelings about this. They are really angry when they read about the education minister admitting that she has the information about how their children are doing at school but she will not release it to them. She thinks she has the right to know that information but they do not. She thinks that she has the right to keep them in the dark.

But the Australian government do want Queensland parents to know how their children are going at school. We believe they have a right to know. Queensland can claim the unenviable title of the state which keeps classrooms in the dark in more ways than one. I know that only too well from a recent visit to a state school in my electorate with the parliamentary secretary, Sharman Stone. While the students were showing us with great pride a video they had made, the lights suddenly went out—all over the school. The principal seemed pretty unfazed by this. When we asked her, she said she was used to it. It is a regular event, she said, because the school’s supply cannot cope with the demands of computers in the classrooms. Now that is going to ridiculous lengths to keep schools in the dark—but, in the Queensland state school system, it is considered normal. That says quite a lot about why Queensland’s education minister does not want her system measured against a national benchmark, doesn’t it? I bet she is keeping that little secret from Queensland parents as well—that some of their children are sitting in darkened classrooms because Queensland cannot fix their power supply.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Lindsay)—Order! The time for the grievance debate has expired. The debate is interrupted and I put the question:

That grievances be noted.

Question agreed to.

**EXPORT MARKET DEVELOPMENT GRANTS AMENDMENT BILL 2004**

Report from Main Committee

Bill returned from Main Committee without amendment; certified copy of the bill presented.

Ordered that this bill be considered forthwith.

Bill agreed to.

**Third Reading**

**Mrs VALE** (Hughes—Minister for Veterans’ Affairs) (5.51 p.m.)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

**AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2004**

Report from Main Committee

Bill returned from Main Committee without amendment; certified copy of the bill and schedule of amendment presented.

Ordered that this bill be considered forthwith.

Main Committee’s amendment—
(1) Schedule 1, item 27A, page 24 (lines 12 to 19), omit the item.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lindsay)—The question is that the amendment be agreed to.

Question agreed to.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

Third Reading

Mrs VALE (Hughes—Minister for Veterans’ Affairs) (5.53 p.m.)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

BILLS REFERRED TO MAIN COMMITTEE

Mr LLOYD (Robertson) (5.53 p.m.)—by leave—I move:

That, unless otherwise ordered, at the adjournment of the House for this sitting the following bills stand referred to the Main Committee for further consideration:

- Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2004-2005
- Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2004-2005
- Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 1) 2004-2005
- Appropriation Bill (No. 5) 2003-2004
- Appropriation Bill (No. 6) 2003-2004

Question agreed to.

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 1) 2004-2005

Cognate bill:

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 2) 2004-2005
APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENTARY DEPARTMENTS) BILL (No. 1) 2004-2005
APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 5) 2003-2004
APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 6) 2003-2004

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 27 May, on motion by Mr Costello:

That this bill be now read a second time, upon which Mr Crean 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

(1) Condemns the government for its cynical election driven spending spree which—while spending a record $52 billion over the forward estimates—failed to deliver crucial services to Australians, including:

(a) funding the pneumococcal vaccine for children
(b) funding VET in schools so young Australians can either Earn or Learn
(c) ensuring access to Higher Education without excessive fees or increasing student debt levels
(d) ensuring all Australians can access bulkbilling services
(e) ensuring adequate measures to respond to Australia’s skill shortage, and

(2) also condemns the Government for failing to present a strategy to adequately address the long term fiscal challenges facing the nation”.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lindsay)—Before the debate is resumed on this bill I remind the House that it has been agreed that a general debate be allowed covering this bill and orders of the day Nos 3, 4,
5 and 6. The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this the honourable member for Hotham has moved as an amendment that all words after ‘That’ be omitted with a view to substituting other words. The question now is that the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

Mr Griffin (Bruce) (5.54 p.m.)—I rise today to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2004-2005 and cognate bills. I want to discuss a number of issues which I believe are central to our economic performance as a nation and relate to the real situation facing families throughout the country. I want to speak in particular about our banks and, firstly, on the issue of banking fees. I would like to start off by enlightening the House about some figure work over the last few years over which this government and this Treasurer have presided. I want to talk about total domestic banking fee income, and I am quoting from Reserve Bank of Australia statistics going back to 1997. In 1997 the total banking fee income was some $4,042 million. In 1998 it went up to $4,802 million. In 1999 it went up to $5,425 million. In 2000 it went up to $6,281 million. In 2001 it went up to $7,071 million. In 2002 it went up to $7,764 million. The latest figures just released the other day for the year 2003 show that it went up to $8,674 million. That is $8.6-plus billion.

When you subset that and go to the question of how much businesses and Australian households have been paying, you are looking at a similar sort of trend. Again, we are talking millions here. For businesses in 1997 the figure was $2,880 million. In 1998 it was $3,277 million. In 1999 it was $3,701 million. In 2000 it was $4,186 million. In 2001 it was $4,810 million. In 2002 it was $5,126 million, and in 2003 it was $5,634 million. Household fees were as follows: in 1997, $1,162 million; in 1998, $1,524 million; in 1999, $1,724 million; in 2000, $2,095 million; in 2001, $2,262 million; in 2002, $2,637 million; and in 2003 bank fees for Australian households cracked the $3 billion mark and went up to $3,039 million.

Australians are paying almost three times as much in bank fees as they did back in 1996, as best we can estimate from the figures on the trend line. Total bank fees paid by households rose by 15 per cent last year alone. The proportion of the take from households is also growing. In 2003 households contributed 35 per cent of the revenue banks net through fees and charges. In 1997 households accounted for 29 per cent. So the figure has gone up overall and the percentage take has gone up overall. Households in fact paid an average of almost $400 in bank fees last year. Again, we go back to the figures. In 1997 the average paid in bank fees was about $175 per household per year. Then it went up to $230, $254, $296, $313, $359 and, last year, $398. Almost certainly, this year it will be more.

One of the biggest areas of growth has been in credit card fees. In 2003 credit card charges totalled $604 million, up 38 per cent on the previous year and up 344 per cent since 1997. Back in 1997 the figure was $136 million, in 1998 it was $168 million, in 1999 it was $225 million, in 2000 it was $299 million, in 2001 it was $345 million, in 2002 it was $438 million and in 2003 it was $604 million. The fee per card in 2003 was $55, up from $41 per card in 2002.

I am going through these figures in a lot of detail to give you a clear idea about the trend over the last few years—the definite increases we are seeing right across the board in bank fees and charges for the Australian community. Let us have a look at some of the averages—the average banking fees of the four major banks, by type of transaction, back in June 1995 and then in
June 2003. In June 1995, the average fee for counter withdrawals—that is, going into a branch and making a withdrawal over the counter—was $1. In June 2003, that was up to $2.50 on average. That is an increase of 150 per cent. To issue a cheque in 1995 cost 70c. In June 2003, it was $1.35, up some 93 per cent. Using your own bank’s automatic teller machine cost 40c in 1995. It was up to 60c in 2003—again, a 50 per cent increase. Using ATMs from other banks cost 40c back in 1995. In June 2003, we are talking about fees of $1.45, which is an increase of some 262 per cent. EFTPOS transactions cost 40c back then. They were 45c in 2003, which is only a 12.5 per cent increase. I do not know what they were doing there! Back in June 1995, telephone banking was not an issue and nor was Internet banking but, even though these services were meant to be a major saving for the bank in infrastructure costs et cetera, we are still in a situation where customers are paying for them. In June 2003, telephone banking cost 45c and Internet banking cost 25c.

When we consider the sorts of increases announced by the major banks in 2003 alone, we see that there was a litany of them. The Commonwealth Bank raised annual fees for no awards credit cards from $24 to $30, which is a 25 per cent increase. Late payment fees also rose 25 per cent, from $20 to $25, and a brand-new fee of $15 was charged for each additional cardholder. The ANZ raised late payment and over-limit fees from $20 to $25, and a brand-new fee of $15 was charged for each additional cardholder. The ANZ raised late payment and over-limit fees from $20 to $25, and a brand-new fee of $15 was charged for each additional cardholder. The ANZ's First Free Days Visa card rose from $26 to $30, up 15 per cent. Westpac’s annual fees on Altitude credit cards went up by 53 per cent to $75. Overdrawn account fees went up by 20 per cent to $30. Fees for periodic payments not being made went up by 60 per cent to $40. Non-Westpac ATM fees went up by 20 per cent to $1.50. Regarding the National Australia Bank’s small business fees, there was a 50 per cent increase in fees for business cheque accounts, rising from $10 to $15; a $10 impost on the previously fee-free GST business offset accounts; and a 20 per cent increase in over-the-counter fees, rising from 70c to 90c.

Looking at that, you would say, 'Obviously, the banks must have been in a fair bit of trouble over that period and that is why they have needed to increase fees,' or 'They certainly have issues that they have to deal with and they have taken a business decision to make that money out of the Australian consumer.' Then I think you have to look at the profits of the big banks over that same period because we have seen a very successful sector of the Australian economy becoming even more successful. If you go back to 1997 figures, you will find that the National Australia Bank made a profit of $2,223 million, ANZ made a profit of $1,024 million, Westpac made a profit of $1,291 million and the Commonwealth Bank made a profit of $1,078 million. So the total across the four major banks was $5,616 million—some $5.6 billion. Collectively, the four banks made a profit of $5.482 billion in 1998; $7.179 billion in 1999; $9.401 billion in 2000; $8.254 billion in 2001—there was a drop; I do not know how they managed that—$10.542 in 2002, recovering from that drop; and, according to these figures, $10.498 billion in 2003. Last year, the National Australia Bank made $3.955 billion, ANZ made $2.348 billion, Westpac made $2.183 billion and the Commonwealth Bank made $2.012 billion. This is not a sector that has been struggling; it is a sector that has been doing extremely well. Yet what we have seen right through that period is that part of that growth and part of that profit has come directly out of our
pockets. The fact is that this has gone on for much too long now.

Just the other day, in response to these figures, the editorial of the Herald Sun, under the heading ‘Bank fees soaring’, made some valuable points on this issue. The editorial said:

The revelation that Australian families and businesses paid more than $8.6 billion in bank fees last year should come as no surprise.

We have sadly become used to the grossly bloated profits of our major banks and their insatiable desire to squeeze customers for their last cent.

Fees overall have more than doubled in just six years but for domestic customers the hike is worse—from $1.1 billion in 1997 to more than $3 billion last year.

Families are now being slugged an average $398 every year in bank fees alone.

Clearly the banks are embarrassed and have used a variety of mealy-mouthed excuses to try to justify their greed.

But the fact remains that while fees have soared the level of bank service is at its lowest ever.

Many customers no longer have a local branch, are forced to do their banking electronically and if they have a query that needs to be answered by a human being they are often shunted off to a call centre on the Indian sub-continent.

We cannot expect the banks to curb their greed but it is time the Federal Government did more to save the community from this blatant rip-off.

Numerous articles to that effect came out at that time under headlines like, from the Courier-Mail, ‘Banks get fatter on card fees’; from the Age, ‘Revenue from bank fees soars’; and from the Daily Telegraph, ‘Bank fee blitzkrieg. In your pocket for $400 a year.’ I could quote ad nauseam from those articles but I will spare you that today, other than to say there is a very clear pattern there and a very clear need for action.

One of the things that Labor has suggested is that this matter should be formally referred to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to ensure that we have proper monitoring of what the banks are up to. The experience of that in the past, even under this Treasurer, has been that banks will listen when they are brought to account and they do not like having light shone on the detail of what they are doing to this sort of area. Some time ago the National Australia Bank made some change to the value of its awards points system that was, in effect, retrospective. The Treasurer, to his credit, at the time said he would refer that to the ACCC for consideration. Within 24 hours of that referral the National Australia Bank backed off and realised that it could not get away with it.

So referring it to the ACCC is in fact a useful thing to do. It is also something the Treasurer has thought was a useful thing to do in the past. Back in 1996 the Treasurer responded as follows to a question from the member for Petrie on bank fees and charges:

If there is any suggestion of anti-competitive activity or collusion in fees and charges, the government does have the option of referring the matter to the relevant body, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission. And we will take that action if necessary, or if any information arises of inadequate competition in that area of products as well.

I do not know what other evidence the Treasurer requires to actively understand that that is what we have seen happen: the increases that I mentioned earlier, with fees in total going up from $4 billion to over $8.6 billion, the increased fees on households alone, the massive percentage increases in particular types of fees, and the range of new fees that banks are finding every other week to put on the accounts of yours and mine. It would seem to me that there is ample evidence for the Treasurer to actually take an-
other look at this issue and do something about it.

I raised this matter with the Treasurer just the other day. In fact, I have raised it with him previously in the House. The problem I have had is that he just does not seem to get it; he does not seem to realise. The other day I asked the Prime Minister a question, but the Treasurer answered it. The question read:

Is the Prime Minister aware of Reserve Bank of Australia statistics showing personal bank fees soared to more than $3 billion last year and have increased by 161 per cent since 1997? Isn’t it the case that the government’s hands-off approach to regulating the banks has failed to restrain bank fees? Given that Australian households are under record financial stress, why won’t the Prime Minister adopt Labor’s plan to direct the ACCC to monitor bank fees and charges, to impose some discipline on the banks and to provide some relief for Australian families?

I will pick the key points from the Treasurer’s response:

I indicate at the outset that the government’s policy in relation to bank fees is the same policy the Labor government had from 1983 until 1996. At no time in those 13 years did the Australian Labor Party ever have control over or monitoring of bank fees.

That is true, and in fact it was mentioned on several occasions in the last year or two of the Labor government that we should be looking at that very issue. The point is that the figure back then was well under $4 billion. It is now up over $8.6 billion. The percentage increases we are seeing right across the board show that this is a much greater problem now than it ever was under a Labor government. In fact, for a large period of that Labor government we were not in a situation where this was actually occurring. In 1991 they were not charging any account keeping fees for a standard transaction account. It is only in the last years of Labor in government that fees started to become an issue. The fact of the matter is: just because action was not taken over the last 12 months of those 13 years, in a situation where it was not an issue over those 13 years, that is absolutely no excuse for this government to do nothing over its term, which goes back to 1996.

Interestingly, the Treasurer then sought to justify his position in the following terms:

In fact, from time to time you will hear other members of the Australian Labor Party boasting that the Australian Labor Party deregulated the financial markets. The Labor Party ought to decide which position they want to take: either they had the great achievement of deregulating the financial markets or they believe in re-regulating the financial markets. But they cannot hold both positions at the one time ...

The point I would make about that is that we are not trying to hold both positions at the one time. In this case we are not talking about re-regulating in a manner that he might suggest. We are saying that proper monitoring in this area, at this time, by the ACCC will have a positive effect on the actions of the banks. That is what we are talking about here. We stand proudly behind the changes we have made in the financial markets in the past and we believe they have had a positive effect. But what has not had a positive effect is this government not taking its responsibility seriously with respect to monitoring in these areas and ensuring that there is a proper review of what has been done. The banks are clearly taking advantage of that opportunity to do their own thing, incrementally ramping up fees and charges on a regular basis and hoping no-one takes account and no-one takes any notice.

The Treasurer also raised some issues, which I will not have time to go into today, regarding the interchange fee reforms. I will pick up one of his points:

The RBA’s credit card interchange fee standard is expected to reduce credit card interchange fees by around $400 million a year—a reform which the
RBA put in place and which was endorsed by this government.

The Treasurer may not be awake to what has been happening, but large parts of those changes have occurred in relation to credit cards and it is part of a process that we have supported. But we said at the time, and we warned the Treasurer at the time, that if there is not proper monitoring of what occurs we will see the banks taking those fees back by gouging other fees out of the Australian public.

What we can see in those Reserve Bank figures is exactly that. A 38 per cent increase in the last 12-month period shows that the banks are all consciously working to recover that fee loss on interchange by pulling it straight out of your pockets and my pockets. It shows a fundamental failure of this government in not being prepared to actually watch what is happening within the industries that they have some responsibility for monitoring. Instead they have the hands-off approach, and the result of that hands-off approach is that Australian families and the Australian community are paying more and more every single day. It is not good enough. There is more that can be done. It is a simple matter for the Treasurer to do it. He has done it in relation to particular individual issues in this area; he could do it in a more general sense. He would have a positive impact on the market and it is something that needs to be done urgently. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lindsay)—Before I call the member for Leichhardt, I advise the House that it is the honourable member’s birthday today and I am sure that all members would want me to wish the member for Leichhardt many happy returns.

Mr ENTSCH (Leichhardt—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources) (6.15 p.m.)—Thank you very much indeed, Mr Deputy Speaker Lindsay. I rise this evening to put my very strong endorsement to the recent budget, through this Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2004-2005 and its cognate bills. I would like to begin my contribution by, firstly, congratulating the government on once again delivering a budget that is tailored to all Australians in one way or another, whether it be in tax cuts, increased family assistance, more aged care places, child-care places et cetera. This year’s federal budget certainly proves and confirms the coalition’s outstanding record in economic management.

In 2004-05 we are certainly able to reach some very significant milestones in relation to our economy, and this is despite economic troubles that have hit our South-East Asian neighbours, the US and Europe. Despite all of this, Australia has certainly managed to continue to prosper, maintaining low unemployment, record low interest rates and reduced government debt, and—in spite of living through one of the worst droughts in recorded history—our country remains the best performing nation in the OECD.

Good economic management, as I am sure you are well aware, Mr Deputy Speaker, does not come about by accident, but it has meant that the government has continued to deliver a budget surplus yet again. Like many of my coalition colleagues, I was also very pleased to see the budget in surplus for the seventh time—$2.4 billion, in fact, which demonstrates that this government is ensuring that the Australian public’s finances are in a very sound position. This budget demonstrates that the Australian government is determined to keep our economy strong. It includes a growth forecast of 3½ per cent, unemployment still at 5.34 per cent—it is the lowest, in fact, in 23 years and has been steady now for the last 12 months—and inflation forecast to be a low two per cent.
After funding our current spending, we are still able to make repayments for that debt of $96 billion that we inherited back in 1996, currently around $26 billion and decreasing. I think that certainly puts sound proof to the commitment we made when we came in that we would cut up the credit card. We have certainly done that, and over the last seven or eight years we have never borrowed a cent to pay for any of those programs that we have been required to fund; it has been done purely by good, sound economic management. Our net GDP ratio for debt is the lowest in the OECD, about three per cent, showing that Australian government debt is now about the lowest in the world. I think in Japan, just by comparison, it is about 60 or 70 per cent.

We have been able to implement a significant benefit in relation to tax cuts. In 2000, you would recall that the income tax for all Australians was cut by the largest amount ever, about $12 billion per year, following the introduction of the new tax system. Last year, thresholds were changed yet again to reduce income tax for low-income earners, and of course we have had the low-income earners enjoying the benefits of those cuts now since 2000. Unfortunately, we have not been able to get the tax cuts that we had intended right across the board back in 2000. We have been able to introduce them again this year in the budget, so we are looking at another $14.7 billion over four years, with about 80 per cent of all the taxpayers in this country facing a top marginal tax bracket of no more than 30 per cent for the next four years. Tax cuts are certainly a good reward for good economic management. In those cuts, you are looking at the 42 per cent rate going to $58,001 in 2004-05, then to $63,001 in 2005-06. The 47 per cent rate will go to $70,100 in 2004-05 and then on to $80,001 in 2005-06.

One of the other major focuses in this budget has been on delivering the largest package of assistance to families ever put in place by an Australian government. It is going to cost about $19.2 billion over five years. It will include an immediate payment of some $600 to all families eligible for family tax benefit A before 30 June this year and a further $600 lump sum for those families after 30 June 2004, meaning that nearly all families will be eligible for an additional $1,200 per child over the next 12 months. Add to that the $3,000 maternity payment for every mother giving birth to a child, which will increase to $4,000 in July 2006 and then to $5,000 in July 2008.

It was also great to see the increase in the number of child-care places. We see an extra 30,000 outside school hours places and 1,500 family day care places to be provided. This is in addition to the announcements that were made in December last year and will bring a total of some 40,000 outside school hours places and 4,000 new family day care places from 1 July 2004. It certainly puts paid to any of the nonsense that was peddled by the opposition that this government was intending to axe family day care—a campaign that was run some months ago. I think that people need to take notice of some of the nonsense that is being peddled when they then look at the reality of what is being delivered by this government.

I know that the additional places that have been announced are welcomed by a number of providers. I remember talking with P and J Murray’s Daycare Services at Mt Sheridan, St Andrews at Redlynch and the Mother of Good Counsel in Cairns—just to name a few who received more after school places in December, and they were very happy with those allocations.

As our population ages, it becomes clearer that we are going to need more and more
aged care services, and this is why the government has announced an investment of some $2.2 billion over the next five years to enable the aged care sector to provide affordable and quality aged care. Included is a new conditional adjustment package for providers, meaning that the average care subsidy will increase from $30,500 per year for each resident to $35,000 in 2007-08. Another area where we have had a chronic shortage over a period of time has been in trained nurses. There is $101 million being provided for more trained nurses. Included in that are 15,750 vocational education and training places and 400 new undergraduate nurses' places by 2005.

There is also an additional $58 million in 2006-07 and 2007-08 for an additional 108 aged care places for every 1,000 Australians aged over 70. This is a significant increase which is certainly needed in this sector. There is also a one-off payment for providers of $3,500 per resident to be made before 30 June 2004. This is an area where there has been particular concern for some time with the ageing of some of the infrastructure and, with the changing of standards, there has been a need to upgrade facilities. In some cases, as we see at Bethlehem in Cairns, there is a need to relocate and build a new facility. There is always a desperate need for funding to provide this infrastructure. Only recently the Catholic diocese embarked on a program of expanding the Stella Maris facility in Port Douglas. The costs associated with that have been quite significant and it cannot be done without support from government. I am glad to see that we are now starting on the process of offering that support. While I am sure that there is more that will need to be done, it is certainly a significant boost for the aged care sector in my region.

Among the other unsung heroes are those carers who provide a great service to the community by supporting and caring for those who are incapable of taking care of themselves. It is great to see that we have continued to recognise their contribution, and increasing support to the carers is something that we really needed to do. A one-off carer bonus, totalling $255 million, will be paid to eligible carers in June 2004 in recognition of the very significant role that they play in our community. This includes a $1,000 bonus payment for recipients of the carer payment and a $600 bonus for recipients of the carer allowance. This bonus is tax free and will not be treated as income when calculating social security benefits.

Another $107 million will be provided over four years to expand the eligibility for the carer allowance. One area that has been of particular concern to me is carers who are not domiciled with the person they are caring for. Up until this budget, they had been excluded from being able to access any carer payments. This anomaly—and it is an anomaly in my view—has been rectified through the allocation of funding in this budget. An additional $73 million will be provided over four years to expand access to respite services for older carers who care for adult children with disabilities. I had the opportunity to see the value of these respite centres recently. I was at St John Community Care at Gordonvale for the opening of a dementia garden which was built by two people from a Work for the Dole project—Keith Thompson and Brian Bartels. When you go there you see the outstanding work that is being done and the number of people that they are providing a service for by giving those carers a bit of time for themselves and a bit of a break. Dino Bazarbassis is the coordinator there. The St Johns program was originally set up many years ago and they really deserve recognition for the work that they do in providing this invaluable service. I spoke to them about this additional funding for the
expansion of the service, and they were quite excited about. It certainly gives them an opportunity to look at expanding their services.

Another recipient of funding, which is relatively small in the overall picture of the budget but very close to my heart, is the cochlear implant funding. I have spoken in this place on a number of occasions and referred to a young man by the name of Sam Endres. He was fitted with a cochlear implant at a very young age, and it made a profound difference. I presented a photograph in this House when he first had the implant fitted and it was switched on. The expression on his face when he heard sound for the first time was very moving.

The Hear and Say centres like the one I have in Cairns do a wonderful job, but they all have difficulty with resourcing. One of the problems that we have with the cochlear implants is that it is important that, as children grow, the technology is continually updated. Any down time, if you like, means that they are missing out on vital education at a young age. It is great to see that $8 million will be provided over four years, which will basically eliminate the current waiting list in 2004-05 and also provide some 230 upgrades each year thereafter, allowing deaf children to get quicker access to the technology. That will certainly change their lives.

There are another 12 medical places for JCU at some $2.2 million. That is certainly a major boost. The sugar industry package of $444 million was also funded out of this budget. I am pleased to see, after working very closely with the industry, that Mossman mill in my electorate, which employs quite a significant number of people, was able to access this package. Bill Phillips-Turner, the Chief Executive Officer, said of the package: This package has put more confidence back into the industry. It means growers will be able to plant this year. It may also mean that bankers in the industry gain some confidence as well. In our 110th year I believe this gives us our best chance of saving the Mossman Mill.

I think that says it all. There will be some $7.7 million in funding for RASS, which is very important in my electorate. Some years ago I was successful in getting the first extension of the scheme in quite a number of years. Recently a bid was put in and quite a number of people who were receiving the service looked like missing out. I was pleased and I congratulate the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr John Anderson, for taking into consideration the concerns that I raised with him.

The $7.7 million in funding over four years is to not only maintain the service but also expand it. That is certainly good news for people like Leslie Whyte from Kendall River, who had looked like losing her service; Alan and Merylin Holmes from Kalinga; and Mick Callaghan, who contacted me raising concerns not only for himself at Palmerville but also for his brother Kev and sister-in-law Sally at Fairlight Station. Kev has not been travelling well healthwise recently and it was absolutely vital that we maintain the service. So it is certainly good news for all of those people on those properties; they can now be reassured of an ongoing service.

It was great to see that the Roads to Recovery program is continuing, the Black Spot Program has $90-odd million for ongoing funding for the widening of the Bruce Highway and the upgrading of the Peninsula development road will be funded through Roads of National Importance. There is certainly significant money for conservation initiatives in my area—in particular, for the Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, which has some $30-odd million, $10 million of which is to go towards compensation for those who may lose their livelihood or some of it through the recent RAP programs. As
the minister has said, that is only a deposit. As the calculations are being done, compensation will be available for anybody who is impacted by the federal government’s decision. There is also another $900,000 to fight the crown-of-thorns.

On top of that, for tourism, the white paper funding is $235 million. Recently you may recall the launching of the $360 million tourism program for advertising both domestically and internationally, with outstanding results. Indigenous funding is up some $37 million, including funding for the family violence program, which I think is very important. Of course, the biggest funding is $16.2 million over three years for ongoing projects throughout the Torres Strait. This is the third tranche of infrastructure development funding in that area. Hopefully this will finalise the upgrading of water, sewerage and waste disposal facilities that has been going on for some time.

Finally, this is a very positive budget and it is certainly in stark contrast to that which was delivered in the reply to the budget by the opposition leader. Not a cent was committed to the protection of our borders nor for illegal fishing other than the three Coast Watch vessels that are going to be anchored around the country. There was absolutely no depth in it. Labor has a record of high debt, high inflation, high interest rates, high unemployment and has absolutely no vision for the future. The opposition leader’s ad hoc response only proves that we will be in serious trouble if Labor were to get into office at the next election. (Time expired)

Mr GAVAN O’CONNOR (Corio) (6.35 p.m.)—The ninth budget brought down by the Howard government is a blueprint for its re-election, not a blueprint for the next three years or, indeed, the next 10 years. It is certainly not a plan for the nation. Laid bare in this budget are the values that this Prime Minister and his colleagues hold dear to their hearts—namely, their naked quest for political survival at all costs and the manipulative contempt in which they hold the Australian people.

This politically crafted budget is simply too clever by half and is based on the cynical belief that the Australian people at the end of the day are mugs who can be bought off with 30 pieces of silver at election time. The truth of the matter is that the highest taxing, highest spending Treasurer in Australian history has had his hands in the pockets of Australian wage earners through bracket creep every year that he has been in office. Having taxed them mercilessly and hoarded the gold, he has now embarked on the father of all spending splurges to buy his way back into office at the next election. Australia’s Prince Charles wants the prime ministerial throne, but King John will not abdicate. So the Treasurer spends like a sailor who is on land after six months at sea, hoping to buy the prime ministership one more time so that the Prime Minister can hopefully hand him the prime ministership if the coalition is re-elected.

Not having the intestinal fortitude to take on the Prime Minister, after having been dudged and doublecrossed and outsmarted by the Prime Minister, the Treasurer sulks late at night in his office, producing surpluses so that he can spend, spend and spend again to compensate for his loss of the big job. Over this side of the House we simply call him Ole Yeller. The tragedy for the Treasurer and many of his lemming supporters on the coalition back benches is that their political cowardice is hurtling them towards the political abyss. It would appear that the ninth Howard-Costello budget has gone down like the proverbial lead balloon. Following a $52 billion spend in this budget, the government’s political fortunes have failed to bounce. There is a political reason for that:
dead political cats don’t bounce. I note in the chamber tonight the honourable member for Corangamite, a supporter of the Prime Minister. Let me say once again for the honourable member for Corangamite: dead political cats don’t bounce. This Treasurer has wilfully accumulated those surpluses while Geelong families have bled financially and shouldered ever-increasing burdens in health and educational expenses.

The government, for over 18 months, has been told by aged care providers in the Corio electorate and elsewhere of the adverse impact of funding shortfalls on their capacity to provide aged care services. But the Howard government has acted only because there is an election around the corner. It has crafted its tax cuts to people whose incomes are in excess of $52,000, yet some 66 per cent of taxpayers earn much less than that amount and will receive no tax relief at all. It has brazenly offered cheques to families under its family tax benefit arrangements, but it has deceptively failed to tell people that the benefits will be offset against family tax benefit debt accumulated by families as a result of the government’s own flawed scheme.

Our grinning, arrogant Treasurer has failed to address the increasing financial burden on Geelong families, and he now cynically throws money around like confetti at a country wedding, believing that voters can be bought off. While Geelong families have borne this burden, the Treasurer seeks to line the pockets of commercial advertisers with a hundred million dollar pre-election campaign to sell the budget. I want Australian taxpayers, particularly electors in the seat of Corio, to ponder that one fact. This is a government that withdrew the Commonwealth dental scheme, worth some $35 million a year, that would have given pensioners some relief from the pain they suffer as a result of their dental problems. But, in one pre-election year, this government is prepared to spend $100 million, lining the pockets of advertisers all around Australia for its own political gain.

Geelong students face increasing HECS burdens, with increased fees and educational expenses hitting to make more and more debt. Yet this Treasurer has forgotten them in the budget. Geelong aged care providers and Geelong families with aged relatives have had to shoulder increased financial burdens over the past two years as a result of the government’s misplaced priorities. And now, with some relief in this budget, they are expected to get on their knees and give thanks to a Treasurer, a Prime Minister and a government which has bled them dry financially.

I therefore support the second reading amendment moved by the honourable member for Hotham, Simon Crean, which:

...condemns the Government for:

(1) its cynical election driven spending spree which, while spending a record $52 billion over the forward estimates, failed to deliver crucial services to Australians, including:

(a) funding the pneumococcal vaccine for children;

(b) funding VET in schools so young Australians can either Earn or Learn;

(c) ensuring access to Higher Education without excessive fees or increasing student debt levels;

(d) ensuring all Australians can access bulkbilling services;

(e) ensuring adequate measures to respond to Australia’s skill shortage;

(2) also condemns the Government for failing to present a strategy to adequately address the long term fiscal challenges facing the nation.

This budget is not about fairness. It is not about social investment and building community. It is not about vision for advancing the nation. It is simply of crude attempt by the Prime Minister and the Treasurer to buy
and bribe their way back into office one more time.

There are several matters I wish to raise in the context of this debate relating to my electorate of Corio, which is based in the greater Geelong area. Firstly, many constituents in my electorate will be particularly disappointed at the targeting of the tax cuts to people with incomes in excess of $52,000.

We know the government has indulged itself again in a cynical political exercise with these tax cuts, but recent census figures show that 84 per cent of Geelong income earners in the electorate of Corio earn less than $50,000 per year. There are 95,000 income earners in Corio according to the 2001 census and, of these, at least 79,717 earn less than $50,000 a year.

Around Australia, the pattern is repeated. Four out of five income earners and singles receive no relief at all from this budget. Indeed, NATSEM has confirmed that three out of five families and single people will not receive anything by way of tax cuts or family benefits in the budget. Furthermore, although the government has provided some additional income to families through the family tax benefit, the debt clawback from some families still exists, and there is no relief from the high marginal tax rates on working families where a partner does some casual work or part-time work to supplement the family income. So the government has basically failed a large part of my constituency in this budget, which as I intimated earlier is fairly and squarely aimed at getting the Prime Minister re-elected rather than really addressing the pressing needs of Geelong families.

The second matter that I wish to raise in this debate relates to my disappointment that the government has failed to provide federal funding input into the Geelong ring road project. I raise this issue not in a party political sense, as the needs of the people in the Geelong region and the overall national and regional economic benefits that will flow from the early completion of this project transcend the political boundaries drawn by the Electoral Commission. Indeed, if this particular project were to be completed, significant benefits would accrue to my electorate of Corio and, of course, to the electorate of Corangamite. The member for Corangamite is in the chamber with me tonight. I understand from the member for Corangamite that, like me, he has received a large number of representations from people who support the completion of this bypass road.

On 24 April I wrote again to the Prime Minister and the Minister for Transport and Regional Services outlining the case for supporting this important project in the Geelong region. Like many in the community, I was hoping for a favourable decision in the budget, and regrettably that favourable decision was not forthcoming. However, I do note in the budget papers that the government intends to announce its AusLink funding priorities on 7 June. I ask once again that this project be considered for priority funding.

The 2004-05 Budget sets out the funding for the Government’s new land transport plan, AusLink, which will incorporate the National Highway system, many Roads of National Importance and other freight links into a broader network of transport corridors.

I note in the tables that are provided that new projects for 2004-05 will receive an allocation of $155.3 million. I would imagine that any new land transport projects will be the subject of announcements by the government in June. It is very clear from the criteria that the Commonwealth employs in assessing whether a proposal fits its Roads of National
Importance category that this particular proposal fits quite neatly. Although it is not part of the national highway system, it is certainly a road of national economic significance. We have recently seen the Jetstar announcement in Geelong and I understand that tomorrow the first jet will be landing in Avalon from Sydney. I will speak a little bit more about that, but certainly that particular event gives impetus to considerable tourism traffic along the Great Ocean Road.

It is a sad fact of our national planning that the heavy reliance on road transport to move freight and passengers is putting quite intolerable pressure on existing infrastructure. It is contributing to urban congestion, pollution from greenhouse emissions, higher accident costs, energy depletion and a loss of social amenity.

These problems are very acute in the Geelong region. Recent demographic and economic changes now make the completion of the ring road around Geelong really compelling from an economic, social and environmental point of view. As I pointed out in my recent submission to the Prime Minister, the growth in tourism along the Great Ocean Road which I alluded to previously will be given a huge impetus with the recent Jetstar announcement to locate at Avalon. I congratulate Qantas and LinFox on the deal that they have done to locate Jetstar at Avalon. I cannot be there tomorrow when the first jet from Sydney to the Geelong region lands at Avalon, but I do wish the venture well and I hope that the people of the Geelong region as well as the western district hinterland and further afar support this service, as well as the people from Melbourne. It is a very important regional initiative, one that not only will bring that increased tourist traffic to the region but will certainly spawn a significant degree of employment growth as well.

The ring road is a strategic investment that, with Commonwealth support, will integrate the existing road network and propel benefits far in excess of any actual monetary contribution from the Commonwealth government. I want the project completed for the benefit of Geelong and I am not fussed how it is funded in the context of the total Commonwealth-state road funding effort in Victoria. Simply put, I want the road built. The project is necessary, nationally and regionally, and meets the criteria employed by the Commonwealth to evaluate similar projects around Australia.

However, I sound a warning to those who mistakenly believe that the completion of the ring-road around Geelong will be the answer to all our traffic problems in Geelong along Latrobe Terrace and the linkages from east to west. I have seen reports that it is anticipated that the road will only lead to reductions of 30 to 35 per cent in traffic volumes along Latrobe Terrace. Significant as that may be, the City of Greater Geelong has an onerous responsibility to get its traffic planning right, particularly in the CBD area of Geelong, as there is a view about in my electorate that the council decisions have exacerbated the movement of freight and passengers within and through the city. Even if a favourable decision were to be made today by the Commonwealth government, it would be a number of years before the project was fully completed, so the community needs an interim traffic management strategy to cope with existing and future traffic loads.

There is one more matter I wish to raise in the context of the budget appropriations, and it relates to aged care funding in this country. After years of neglect—and years of ignoring pleas from the industry, the opposition and, indeed, the community generally—the Howard government is now in election mode, proposing one of its short-term fixes in aged care funding.
I have received numerous representations from people in my electorate in relation to the aged care funding issue. I will not go through those arguments once again, because my time in this debate is coming to a close, but in the course of 2003 aged care providers alerted me to the dire financial consequences of the underfunding arrangements of the Howard government. Indeed, as I pointed out to them, the federal government deliberately used the Hogan review as a mask for shifting the costs of aged care funding onto the aged care providers.

The Hogan review was tabled in December last year, but it was not until the budget context some five months later that the government moved to address some of the capital funding issues that the aged care sector had been raising with me and other members of this place over a long period of time. Simply put, the Howard government bled the aged care providers dry so that they could drop a bucket of money in the context of this pre-election budget. That is the reality, and that is a real shame.

In conclusion, we have the highest taxing government in Australia’s history and we have the highest spending government in Australia’s history. Each year the Treasurer’s taxation harvest has netted $2.5 billion in bracket creep, but in 2004-05 his budget relief only returned $1.9 billion. The average taxpayer in this country is paying an extra $5,500 in income tax every year under the Howard government, and by 2007-08 they will be paying a further $2,800. Over the eight years of the Howard government, average election year spending has been $32.7 billion; non-election year spending has averaged $3.9 billion. (Time expired)

Mr McARTHRU (Corangamite) (6.55 p.m.)—I am delighted yet again to follow the member for Corio, because, like his leader and the shadow Treasurer, he is providing a magic pudding solution to the problems of the Australian economy and the budget. He is, as I hear him, suggesting cuts in taxes. He is spending more money on health and more money on aged care, and he is still going to have a surplus. As a member of the Hawke-Keating government he had a very good understanding of those issues, because at that time they were real experts on bracket creep. He did mention in the conclusion of his speech that bracket creep has been a problem, and I will allude to that later in my speech. In the area of aged care, I suggest to the honourable member that the government have addressed those problems and they have increased their expenditure since 1996. They have addressed the problems within the area of aged care to the best of their ability as a government, and I think they have done an exceedingly good job.

For all the public comment on the budget, the fundamental issue is: can the Australian economy sustain a good budget and is it fundamentally based in terms of inflation, surpluses and interest rates? When you ask those kinds of questions about this budget, you can see that the Australian economy has got good growth rates. It also has a low inflation rate, predicted to run at about two per cent. Interest rates are between five per cent and seven per cent—a far cry from the 23 per cent that the member for Corio precipitated with his government. All the electors should be very aware of any argument about interest rates and the possibility of returning a Labor government to the Treasury benches. The government debt, which I will allude to in a minute, is quite remarkable, and business confidence in Australia is also very good. So, looking at all those criteria, and with a budget surplus of $2.4 billion, we have a situation where the budget is a fundamentally sound document. We cannot say that for the Hawke-Keating years, when the budget...
deficit grew year by year—and I will mention that again in a minute.

The key to the budget outlays and the budget source of income is the good economic conditions in Australia. These have been brought about by the reforms of the Howard government since 1996. I would like to quote from budget document No. 1, statement 4, ‘Sustaining growth in Australia’s living standards’, which is the key to the argument before the parliament today. It says:

This exceptional productivity growth was a pay-off from sustained macroeconomic and structural reforms. The OECD, in its 2003 Economic Survey of Australia, noted that:

‘Dogged pursuit of structural reforms across a very broad front, and prudent macroeconomic policies firmly set in a medium-term framework, have combined to make Australia one of the best performers in the OECD, and also one notably resilient to shocks, both internal and external.’

There we have a comment from an independent source indicating that Australia, because of its reform program under the Howard government, has achieved a prosperity not seen for 40 years in this country. This has been brought about by changes to the industrial relations system.

The industrial relations reform introduced by the Hon. Peter Reith in 1996, something that I have had a long interest in, made the work force more flexible and freed up labour relations between management and the work force. The honourable member opposite has often referred to the waterfront dispute. Industrial relations reform brought about such a dramatic—historic—change on the waterfront that productivity on the waterfront is now reaching world-class levels of performance. It was suggested at the time of the waterfront dispute that we would never manage more than 20 containers per hour. We are now managing 25 to 26 containers per hour. Not only is the productivity higher but the reliability of the waterfront has also improved remarkably.

There was the introduction of the GST, which the honourable member opposite fought tooth and nail against. We know that the revenue growth to the state treasuries will be better. Over time it will ensure that the states can sustain their support for hospitals and education. There was the competition policy. Again, the honourable member opposite has been somewhat critical on occasions about it, although his government did implement parts of the competition policy, and I commend them for that. Dairy deregulation was another step in the right direction. That industry now will become world competitive and will contribute to export earnings of over $2 billion a year. That will add to the prosperity of all Australians.

Debt reduction is an aspect of economic management that I would like to dwell on particularly. No member opposite can deny that the increase in government debt that occurred under the Hawke-Keating government caused horrendous problems. The budget paper in 1996-97 put the government debt at $96 billion. That was 18 per cent of GDP. Interestingly enough, at that time they were paying $8.5 billion in interest. That is a lot of money that could have been allocated to other parts of the budget. By this year’s budget, 2003-04, the debt is down to nearly $30 billion, which is about 3.7 per cent of GDP. More importantly, the government is only paying $3.6 billion in interest on the debt. So there is $5 billion extra every year for the Treasurer to allocate to those parts of the budget that the government sees fit to spend it on. There is no way that those opposite can suggest that the government debt that was created in the term of the Hawke-Keating government was not a problem in maintaining prosperity in Australia.
It is interesting to compare the debt in Australia to the debts of other nations around the world. I will be very brief on this. Looking at the general government debt levels as a percentage of GDP, Germany is in the range of 45 per cent, the OECD is in the range of 45 per cent, the European Union is 45 per cent to 30 per cent, Japan is up to 80 per cent and the United States is in the range of 35 per cent, whereas Australia is gradually reducing down to negligible levels of government debt. That is a remarkable performance, and it is one that I think we should all be very proud of. Very little credit has been given by those opposite to the government’s performance in reducing the debt level so that future governments—eventually the member for Corio will be in government, though it will not be for a long while—have a sound base on which to run their economic policies.

I want to look at the overall situation around the world, just to compare Australia’s position. Global growth continues to rely very much on the USA, which accounts for a quarter of the world’s goods and services production. Domestic demand in Japan and Europe is hampered by financial weakness, particularly bank weakness in Japan. The US current account deficit is a considerable worry to those Australians who trade with America and who understand the importance of America in the global financial system. US official interest rates are at approximately 40-year lows. Again, that is a matter of concern. If the US interest rate moves up just a couple of points, that will obviously reflect on Australian interest rate settings. More importantly, the fiscal situation in the US has moved from surplus to deficit, with a turnaround of about five per cent of GDP over the last two years. I must say it is of great concern to me that that powerhouse economy has moved into such a situation in such a short time. The price of oil is a major difficulty facing the Australian economy. Nobody—neither those on the opposition benches nor the members of the government—can be quite sure what will happen with the price of oil over time. It is about US$40 a barrel at this moment and, with the uncertain world out there, it could be a real problem.

Looking at Australian conditions, it is worth noting that the housing market is a problem facing all investors: whether the housing market will continue to hold, whether it will expand or whether the bubble will burst. Regarding the current account deficit, I again express my concern, as I did in last year’s budget. From about 5.25 per cent of GDP it is up to 5.75 per cent. That current account deficit is a matter of concern to Australia, and it is important that our exporters continue to export profitably and that exchange rates remain favourable. The trade weighted index as of today stands at 61 and the Australian dollar at US71c. Exporters are very dependent on these exchange rates and they make a dramatic difference to their final profitability.

I would like to move to the problem of progressive tax. Other members have raised it in earlier debate, and it has been a matter that concerns me. The progressive tax system has now made it very difficult for middle of the range taxpayers. In 1970, the top rate was 8.6 average weekly earnings—the top rate was 67c. At that time, it was a multiplication of 8½ times. In this year’s budget, 2002-03, the multiple is 1.3. Admittedly, the tax rate is only 48.5, but it gives an indication of the impact that the progressive tax system has had in terms of bracket creep. If the tax rate had been indexed from 1970, the top tax rate of 48c would kick in at $270,000.

The member for Corio and other members opposite have talked about bracket creep, but we had a situation during the Hawke-Keating
years where a nine per cent inflation rate meant that a large number of taxpayers moved from one bracket to the other. It is interesting to note that in 1970, when the top rate was 67c, fewer than one per cent of taxpayers were in the top bracket. By 2000, about 17 per cent of taxpayers were in the top bracket. That shows you exactly how many taxpayers have moved into the top bracket. At the end of my speech, I will seek leave to table the taxation bracket table as set out in the budget documents. The table sets out the exact movement of the new tax thresholds. I am particularly pleased to hear that members opposite will on this occasion support the proposed movement, particularly that occurring in the high tax bracket—from the present level of $62,000 up to $70,000 on the first change and then to $80,000. Those taxpayers in the higher brackets will receive some relief by moving into a new bracket. As the Treasurer has said on a number of occasions, these changes will mean that 80 per cent of taxpayers will stay in or below the 30c tax bracket. Bracket creep goes inexorably. As inflation—even with the low inflation rates now—has its effects, people move into higher brackets as their salaries increase, and that becomes a difficulty for all taxpayers.

I wish to quote from some people who are interested in the problem of bracket creep. Mr Stephen Harrison, the Chief Executive Officer of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia, wrote an interesting article in the Australian on 31 May 2004. It is headed ‘Give us a break, the tax system stinks’. I would like to read a couple of quotes from that article, because he supports the views I have expressed in this parliament for some years. In the article, Mr Harrison says:

... personal income tax accounts for about 40 per cent of Australia’s total taxes while the OECD average is about 30 per cent.

So again we see the emphasis in the budget process on individual taxpayers. He goes on to talk about the effective marginal rate, saying:

As it now stands, the effective marginal tax rate inequities discourage people from undertaking further work or starting work because of the combined effect of the loss of welfare and increased tax for earning additional income.

For many, the effective marginal tax rate inequities mean any additional work is taxed so highly it is not worth the effort, or worse, there is actually no benefit for the additional effort.

I have argued that strongly in the parliament over many years, and at least at this stage the government has moved to address the problem. I have no doubt that those opposite will make no effort to really address the difficulty of bracket creep.

Finally, I want to quote an interesting article that the Australian newspaper ran when trying to bring about some public awareness of the problem of bracket creep. The editorial on 12 December 2003 stated:

While bracket creep has been marked at every level of the taxation scale, with the tax-free threshold it has been particularly severe: wages have risen by about 350 per cent since 1980, but the threshold has only risen by about 50 per cent.

That is an interesting comparison: wages have gone up, particularly with the inflation that occurred under the Hawke-Keating governments, yet the taxation scale has not allowed for those thresholds to keep pace with that increase in wages. The editorial continued:

The two biggest weaknesses of the current system are the low level of $62,500 at which the top marginal rate of 48.5 cents in the dollar kicks in, and effective marginal tax rates as high as 90 cents at the bottom end, once loss of means-tested welfare benefits is factored in.

There you have it. With the problems of family payments and the high marginal tax rates, many Australians are finding it very difficult
to make ends meet. After these excessively high rates of tax they are finding it hard to have any cash on the table.

The budget, contrary to a lot of the publicity about it, has two major expenditures locked in. Social security spending accounts for 43 per cent of the budget—and it is diffi-
cult for the Treasurer of the day to make too many changes to that—and health spending accounts for 18 per cent of the budget. That means that 61 per cent of the budget is fund-
damentally expenditure that is locked in. There is very little capacity to change those parameters. As I have mentioned before, 53 per cent of revenue coming to the budget is from income tax. So we have a fundamental difficulty in Australia: more than 50 per cent of the money in the budget is received from hardworking taxpayers and they are suffering bracket creep to provide the major propor-
tion of budget revenue. Those opposite have made some noises about how they are going to put forward a tax policy: I challenge them to tell me how they can handle that funda-
mental problem facing Australia. Social security payments are things that governments are forever trying to contain. There are needy persons in our community, but those pay-
ments do take up a large proportion of the budget. Likewise, the health budget is ever increasing, with increasing technology and an ageing population putting demands on both federal and state budgets.

I wish to finish as my colleague the member for Corio did by advocating publicly the government’s support for the Geelong ring-
road. I made a submission to the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, the Hon. John Anderson, and I led a delegation and pointed out the benefits that the Geelong ring-road would bring to the people of Geelong. I have argued the case quite strenu-
ously to the Treasurer, to the Prime Minister and to Minister John Anderson. The Latrobe Street thoroughfare is now totally clogged up with 18 traffic lights, and the ring-road, which has been on the drawing board since 1960, needs to be constructed at the earliest opportunity. The public position I have been advocating is that the ring-road should be a six-lane bypass and that the allocation of $196 million would allow this particular pro-
ject to start. Hopefully the minister will look to the interests of Geelong in the AusLink statements on 7 June. I have advocated the ring-road along with the member for Corio. On that issue, we have been together.

I have been encouraged by the support of the City of Greater Geelong, the mayor, Councillor Ed Coppe, and other leading citi-
zens who have supported this project and the public campaign. I put on the public record my ongoing enthusiastic support for this par-
ticular project around Geelong—completing the ring-road at long last, after it sitting on the books since 1960, with successive gov-
ernments doing nothing about it. I commend the project. I commend the budget for its stability, long-sightedness and the fundamen-
tal correctness of the way in which it has been constructed. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wilkie)—In regard to the document that the member for Corangamite seeks leave to ta-
ble, would he prefer to have it incorporated in Hansard?

Mr McARTHUR—I seek leave to have it incorporated.

Leave granted.

The table read as follows—

2004-05 Budget Overview

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More than 80 per cent of taxpayers will stay in or below the 30 per cent tax bracket.

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand) (7.16 p.m.)—I would like to talk on Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2004-2005 and cognate bills in three separate parts. Firstly, I would like to talk about the impact that this budget is going to have in my electorate of Gellibrand—or, more importantly, the impact it is not going to have but could have had if the government had put its priorities and its money somewhere else. Secondly, I want to talk about a number of issues that particularly affect women, in my capacity as the shadow minister assisting the Leader of the Opposition on the status of women. Thirdly, I would like to deal with a range of legal and justice issues that are within the budget papers that obviously relate to my portfolio as shadow Attorney-General.

It was very disappointing on budget night to sit and listen to the announcements made by the Treasurer in this House and to go through in detail the commitments that were being made by the government. Everyone is aware that a large amount of money is being spent in this budget, going out to members of the community—but unfortunately not many of those people live in Gellibrand. In particular, the way the tax cuts are designed so that they are only delivered to people who earn over $52,000 a year has meant that many thousands of people living in my electorate of Gellibrand are not going to receive a single cent of that money through tax cuts. Many of them, because of the incomes that they are on, will be paying increased amounts of tax over the period of the next couple of years and will not be getting any of the benefits that are being offered by the government.

In fact, 87,689 people in Gellibrand will not get any tax cuts. Of course, some of those people are not working and would not receive any tax benefits, but a large chunk of those people are and will receive nothing. That is about 90 per cent of people living in my electorate who will receive nothing from the tax cut that the government has paraded around the country and said is such a big deal and people should be delighted that it has been passed. It is a real shame in Gellibrand the way the priorities have been put so that so many people on moderate incomes will be left out. According to the census material, the median weekly family income in my electorate of Gellibrand is $860 a week—significantly lower than the amount that you would have to earn to be able to receive these tax cuts. That is actually the median weekly family income, not individual income. This is of great concern to us.

The average income in Gellibrand—to do those sums—is $36,000 a year. Those people will not receive any benefits. Clearly, if people have children they may receive something under government initiatives in terms of the family tax benefits and other payments, but there are nearly 11,000 couple families living in my electorate of Gellibrand who do not have children, and they will not receive any of those benefits either.

Importantly, in my electorate we have been campaigning for a long time and urging the government to allocate more child-care places. We welcome the fact that there are some additional child-care places, but the critical issue of long day care and families in my electorate not being able to find places for their very young children has not been dealt with in any way by this government.
The pressure has not been eased for them, and it is growing into an even more serious problem every day while we have a lack of places for families in my electorate. I am concerned that my electorate seems to miss out in all directions: people who are not earning enough money to get the tax benefit, the large numbers of families who do not have children and who are not going to get the family benefit, and those with children who might get some of the family benefits but who have no child-care places.

Really, there are no solutions on any of the service delivery issues that are a problem in my electorate. We have a massive waiting list in the dental area. We have a public dental hospital, which is a great service in Footscray, but the waiting lists are enormously long. Some people have to wait several years to be able to get their services. This has a huge impact on their quality of life. It is difficult to believe—I know, Mr Deputy Speaker Wilkie, you would be surprised to find this out—that in all the western suburbs of Melbourne there is not one single rebatable MRI machine. If you go across the river and into the eastern suburbs, you will find that there are 11 of them all in the same area. But in the entire western suburbs there is not one. This means a combination of things: either people who cannot afford to have an MRI scan without a Medicare rebate go without, to the detriment of their health, or they often travel significant distances and have time delays, also to the detriment of their health. Labor have been campaigning for a long time to get a rebatable machine in the western suburbs of Melbourne. We were disappointed that there was nothing in this budget that deals with any of those problems.

I also want to speak briefly about the fact that there was nothing in the budget to deal with youth unemployment. This is still a very serious problem in my electorate. There is a 23.5 per cent teenage unemployment rate in my electorate. Those figures are from January 2004. More than one in five teenagers is unemployed. It is a serious problem for us. I am very concerned that the government had no initiatives in this area, but I am delighted that the Leader of the Opposition has announced Labor’s youth guarantee, our commitment to young people that they should be either learning or earning. We will make commitments to ensure that they have opportunities either to stay at school with more support or to go into training or employment in a way that is meaningful so that we do not squander the potential of those young people who might otherwise drop out of school or be unemployed. We know that people need a little bit of extra assistance sometimes. That is when the government should intervene—when people are young and still have the opportunity to learn more and to get some hands-on experience on the job. They should be able to go on to be active and well-engaged members of our community rather than be stuck, as are many young students who drop out of school, without many prospects for the future.

Secondly, I want to talk about issues relating to women. As I said in my capacity as shadow minister assisting the leader on the status of women, I am also concerned that, in a similar way to my electorate, working women in Australia do not do very well out of this package at all.

Mr McGauran interjecting—

Ms ROXON—The Minister for Science might guffaw about this, but he would be interested to know that about 90 per cent of Australia’s working women do not earn $52,000 a year. They do not earn $52,000 a year because they work in professions that are often low paid, and they often do part-time and casual work. They are not going to receive any benefits at all from these budget tax cuts. In particular, women without chil-
Children are the big losers. Just look at the sorts of average weekly earnings: hairdressers, $523 a week; shop assistants, $582 a week; receptionists, $622 a week; an enrolled nurse, $726 a week; and a social worker, $761 a week. All these people are working in industries where there are large numbers of women. They are not going to get any benefit from these tax cuts, and I think they have been seriously forgotten by this budget.

In fact, this is the first time for 20 years that the government have not released a women’s budget statement as part of the budget package. It is the first time in 20 years that the government did not think that their budget had enough to offer women for them even to put out a statement explaining the impact of these measures on women. We know why. We know that they did not do it because all they were going to have to do was break the bad news to Australian women that they were not getting the benefits that many other people in our community were getting. They were not prepared, obviously, to explain or argue that. Labor is seriously disappointed that something that has been in place for 20 years as a way of measuring government commitment to Australian women has just disappeared without trace. I think that is a real tragedy.

I am also concerned that there is nothing in the budget that goes to another range of issues that have an enormous impact on women—that is, in relation to Medicare. Women are very heavy users of Medicare services in this country. Across our entire lifespan we use Medicare services 50 per cent more than men. But, interestingly, between the ages of 20 and 45, in those key child-bearing years, women use Medicare services 100 per cent more than men. If we do not deal with the problem of the lack of accessibility to bulk-billing doctors and the increased cost of going to the doctor, we are going to have women making decisions about their sexual health, their pregnancies and their child-rearing based on whether they have enough money to go to the doctor and not based on their health care needs. This is a serious problem that is being not only neglected by the government but made worse by the initiatives that they are taking which do not deal with the problems of accessibility for ordinary families in our communities who need health care services. This is a very serious problem.

I also want to flag my disappointment that the budget does not really contain anything new in relation to women at all. It does keep in the budget items a commitment to run a campaign that I have been talking about a lot in this House: one called ‘No respect, no relationship’. Labor was bitterly disappointed that this campaign was cancelled when the government had spent a significant amount of money—several million dollars—and two years planning it. The campaign was planned to be a major prevention campaign about violence against women. The government at the last minute cancelled the campaign. I am pleased that in the budget papers it appears that there is still money to run the campaign. The Prime Minister has made some commitments in this House that the campaign, in some form, will run. But following the Senate estimates process on this budget we find out that the government are actually intending to change the focus of this campaign. Instead of running a prevention campaign, they are going to run a campaign which tells people where they should go if they have been victims of violence. Whilst that might be of assistance, the states already run crisis phone lines, domestic violence services and CASA—Centres Against Sexual Assault—services. The distinctive role that the Commonwealth could have played—and we hope, when we see the campaign material, still might—is in preventing this violence.
from happening to start with and educating the community about ways to form happy and healthy relationships without resorting to violence, particularly focusing on young people, who were the target of the campaign previously.

Labor, as part of our response to the budget, have released a plan to combat violence against women. I will not have the time in this speech to go through the detail of it, but I do commend it to the House, to any listeners or to readers of Hansard. This is a package which shows what we can do to significantly make a difference, to combat what is a growing tragedy of violence against women both in the home and in the broader community. We have made a range of commitments that we think will make people's lives a lot better and will give us an opportunity to tackle this problem in the way that we can at the Commonwealth level, by taking a national perspective in the way that the individual states cannot.

The third matter that I want to deal with in this speech on the appropriation bills is in relation to my shadow Attorney-General portfolio. I want to flag that the initiatives in the budget in this area are very few and far between. There was some initial interest in an extra amount of money that has been put into legal aid funding—which, since this government has been elected, has been drastically cut. We have seen some adjustments over the past few years which do put in additional money. There is an additional $13 million each year for the next four years. As I say, I am sure that will be welcome, but it still does not bring our Commonwealth legal aid funding, in real terms, back up to where it was in 1996. I have had some representations from the legal aid commissions and the states that the restrictions that are being put on the legal aid services in order to access this new money may well in fact cost more than the extra amount that has been put in the package.

There is also an argument about the way the money has been distributed. Some states have had offers made to them that are far more beneficial than those made to other states. In my home state of Victoria, there is only a very small adjustment—I think it is even less than the CPI—and there is a concern that they are not getting a fair share of the money, which has marginally increased in this area.

The most important issue to raise with regard to the legal areas is my concern that the items set out in the budget that tell us how much we spend on the High Court, the Federal Court and legal aid all pale into insignificance when we consider how much the government spends on getting its own legal advice. We have had to do an extraordinary amount of work to find out exactly what the government does spend on its legal advice because, search as you might through the budget papers, you cannot find anything that actually itemises that. We have had to ask questions on notice, use the Freedom of Information Act and go to great lengths to get the government to come clean about the amount of money that it is spending in getting its own legal advice. We are now in a position to be able to tell you what we have found.

Although we have some more current figures, the following figure will make my point in relation to the budget. For the year 2001-02, the Commonwealth spent more money on its own legal advice—in fact, twice as much money on its own legal advice—than it spent on the whole Commonwealth legal aid budget. This means that the Commonwealth government spent more money on its legal advice—getting QCs to draft opinions or appear in immigration matters or elsewhere—than on its whole Com-
monwealth legal aid budget, which is supposed to provide for everybody across the country who might need some financial assistance in taking their legal matters to court. There is a very strict means test. Most of the money at the Commonwealth level is used for family law matters, but we are in the ridiculous situation where in my electorate—or the electorate of the member for Hunter or another member—an ordinary constituent, who might be on a moderate income and in the difficult situation whereby their family has broken down and they need the assistance of the Family Court, cannot get legal aid because there is not sufficient money. People that qualify to get legal aid—they meet all the means and merits tests—are turned away because there is not enough money, yet we have the government spending twice as much money on its own legal advice to make sure that it gets absolutely the best rolled-gold advice that it can.

We are going to be asking a lot of questions about this because I think it is extraordinary that, in the latest answers to our questions, it has emerged that the Department of Defence can spend $60 million on its legal advice just in one year and just for one department. The parliamentary secretary at the table, the member for Murray, might want to spend some time thinking about just what that $60 million could have been spent on had it been given to her electorate in the budget. I know that, in my electorate, $60 million could make a huge difference. Think of the child-care centres that we could build. Think of the programs that we could run in our schools. Think of getting that MRI machine rebatable. Think of all of the things that could be done for that amount of money. To put it in perspective, when you look at the other areas in the Attorney-General’s portfolio, the community legal centres, which provide invaluable advice in all of our electorates—and I do not think anyone here, no matter what side of the House—

Mr Fitzgibbon interjecting—

Ms ROXON—I am not sure whether the member for Hunter thinks he is being helpful in this or not. The entire annual funding for the community legal centres is around $23 million. We see that one individual department spends three times that amount on its own legal advice. Just imagine in each of our electorates how many people on low incomes there are who need some basic legal advice but cannot afford to go to private solicitors and cannot get the support from community legal centres because of the extraordinary pressure that those centres are under. A few million dollars being saved on the government’s own legal advice could actually make a significant difference to the community legal centres, who did not get any increase under this budget at all. I think it does come down to a question of priorities: is the government prioritising its spending properly when it comes to the legal advice that it wants and needs and the support that it gives members in our community when they want and need legal advice and are not in a financial situation to pay for it themselves?

I want to make sure that people understand the significance of the amounts of money that are being spent on external legal advice. It certainly puts it in perspective when you find out that the Commonwealth spends more on its own legal advice than it spends on running our entire federal court system. The High Court, the Family Court, the Federal Court, the federal magistrate’s court, registries around the country, and staff and judges cost us less each year than the Commonwealth’s own legal advice costs. This is an extraordinary comparison and I think it is very serious and legitimate for us to be asking questions about whether we are getting value for money. I am concerned that
the budget papers do not reveal anything about this expenditure and that we have had to ask questions on notice and use the Freedom of Information Act to obtain this information. I am also concerned that we do not know which law firms are providing this advice—it is a small number of mostly very large firms—and which areas they act in, yet they are benefiting significantly, getting millions and millions of dollars each year, in giving the government advice. I think that the public is entitled to know who that money is going to and at least ask the questions and be satisfied that it is necessary for the government to obtain this advice and spend the sort of money that could otherwise be prioritised on significant community projects, legal aid, community legal centres or other initiatives in individual members’ electorates which might be much more worthy.

(Time expired)

**Dr STONE** (Murray—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage) (7.36 p.m.)—I rise to support Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2004-2005 and cognate bills before the House, Mr Deputy Speaker, you can imagine that I have awaited the details of the Labor Party’s environment policy with some real interest. We had no details delivered in the Leader of the Opposition’s reply to the Treasurer’s budget, except a fleeting reference that said the environment was good—something like motherhood. I presumed that there was some hard work going on into the formation of the Labor Party’s environment policy somewhere and over some time because it is the state of the environment—and access to water in particular—that will underpin the future productivity of rural and regional Australia, including the mining industry, and that will underwrite the amenity and future shape of our cities. But it is more than that. Australians deserve to know that the landscape and the elements that interact to shape and protect that landscape will be understood, preserved and remediated by any future Australian government.

The public knows what the coalition have delivered and what we stand for. The community only has to look at the commitments and achievements of the coalition since 1996, when a new era of nationally driven environmental policy and the largest financial commitment of any government since Federation were put in place. The John Howard government have revolutionised the way vulnerable species and heritage can be protected through the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. The government have changed the way Australians think and act. We have delivered the world’s first oceans policy and created some of the world’s largest marine protected areas, including the Great Barrier Reef and around the subantarctic Heard and McDonald islands. We have created the first national institution dedicated to greenhouse gas emissions reduction and we gave it $1 billion to ensure that Australia met its Kyoto greenhouse emissions reduction targets. At the same time we managed the economy in such a way that we produced one of the strongest eras of growth this nation has ever seen despite the extraordinarily difficult international circumstances.

The Howard government made Australia’s biggest, strongest and longest environmental commitment ever to a Natural Heritage Trust. This trust is now driving total catchment planning and, hence, a strategic approach to funding biodiversity protection, water and soil protection, sustainable agriculture, feral animal and weed eradication, land care, coast care and Indigenous land remediation. The Howard government made the nation’s first commitment to halting the sweeping scourge of dryland salinity and put together a package of more than $1 billion to do the job through the national salinity and...
water quality action plan. It brought the states and territories to the table, some very reluctantly, and forced them to acknowledge the threat of encroaching soil salinisation.

Just as we stepped up to the waterfront bullies and turned the joke of waterside go-slows into one of the most efficient systems in the hemisphere, the Howard government tackled some of the most intransigent and difficult problems of failed federalism that affected the management of the environment every day. In the first serious attempt since Federation, the John Howard led coalition has sought, via a National Water Initiative, to have agreed state and territory principles of water entitlement and allocation, and a set of guidelines for the provision of adjustment assistance, where changes are made to private water entitlements.

The breadth of experience and the scope of the interests of members of the John Howard government have never been more apparent than in the development of the national water initiative. The Deputy Leader, John Anderson, himself the member for an electorate with serious water overallocation issues—created of course by the New South Wales government—understood the significance of the issues and provided a driving force for reform. Perhaps it is the lack of on-the-ground engagement that is the reason successive Labor governments have never tackled the real and difficult issues impacting on natural resource management.

There is no federal rural electorate represented by the Labor Party. I do not believe there is a single primary producer, much less an irrigation farmer, amongst the Labor Party’s elected members and senators. The day-to-day issues of paper-thin cost price squeezes, the declining terms of trade, drought survival, labour shortages, water security and property entitlements are not on the Labor agenda because it is all unfamiliar territory. The complexities and intensities of the debates have frightened the Labor Party into simple slogans and vague references, presumably in the hope that no-one who matters to them will notice.

How else can you account for the failure of Mark Latham, the Leader of the Opposition, to mention rural and regional Australia, beyond the standard general health and education references, in his budget in reply statement? Why is it that the Labor Party apparently has targeted 13 government programs for axing, including FarmBis, the diesel fuel rebate scheme, tax write-offs for water conservation and land care expenses, tax concessions for telephones and electricity lines, drought proofing investments, income tax averaging, education allowances, and exemptions from capital gains tax for farmers? The Leader of the Opposition’s budget reply speech said nothing hopeful or useful about Labor’s commitment to those who live outside the cities, and he said little more about its commitment to the environment.

Let me quote from the limited references the member for Werriwa’s budget reply speech made. He said:

... Labor believes in investing in the environment, passing on our natural assets and heritage to the next generation ...

Mr Latham repeated this line virtually verbatim last week in his Fraser Lecture speech on Labor and the environment. Clearly it has made an impression on him. I wonder: does the Labor Party realise that some 70 per cent of the stewardship of the continent is in the hands of private primary producers? Intergenerational farm succession is the most common way that Australia’s natural resources, assets and heritage are passed on to the next generation. Does the Labor Party realise that due to the worst drought on record; the concentration of ownership of Australia’s supermarkets, which continuously
screws down prices; and the unfair competition in corrupted and subsidised export markets, farming families are often too financially stressed to protect their inheritance? They farm the land for the benefit of all who depend on the environmental services. At the same time they produce some of the developed world’s cheapest and best food and fibre. The production of this cheap food at prices that producers must take from the supermarkets and the export markets means that much food production is simply not sustainable. It is literally costing our society the earth.

If the opposition does know and does care about this critical natural resource threatening dilemma, what is it going to do about it? We would all like to know. What is Labor’s policy for sustaining primary production in this country? Instead, we find that one of Mr Latham’s greatest concerns for the future, as espoused in his environmental policy speech, is the creation of new World Heritage areas. The listing of new heritage areas and the support of the currently declared ones is in itself a very laudable occupation. That is why the John Howard government has created new heritage protection regimes through the EPBC Act and has advanced this work. We have also instigated a new $52 million heritage program called Distinctively Australian.

But I would not have thought that the creation of new World Heritage areas rated as more critical than strategies to deal with our overallocated or droughted river systems, or with feral animal and weed invasions, Indigenous owned land rehabilitation, salinity, acid sulphate soils, climate change impacts on water supply and biodiversity, capping the Great Artesian Basin bores, protecting Indigenous intellectual property, establishing new Indigenous protected areas, revegetating the landscape, overfishing and the list goes on—to name just a few threatening processes and key issues that the John Howard government is now tackling with some of the biggest budget injections ever committed by a federal government.

I suspect the clutch by the opposition leader, Mark Latham, at World Heritage listings as a key plank of his environmental platform is in part testimony to his ignorance but, as well, he has probably been advised that this represents some safe and non-controversial pandering to the urban constituencies who might be tempted away from Labor to vote for the Greens. I think Mr Latham is sadly out of touch with environmentally aware Australians throughout rural and metropolitan Australia. I am sure that thinking Australians want more than motherhood statements and iconic references when it comes to making their decision about which party is serious, for example, about policy settings that tackle such issues as equity balance between consumptive water use and environmental health, between holders of a water entitlement and the wider community, including taxpayers, and between current and future generations. All Australians need to know how the next federal government will respond to these potentially national development stalling issues.

We do know a little bit about the ignorance of the Labor leader, Mark Latham, in regard to Australian rural enterprise. The member for Werriwa is on record describing the farm sector as the most heavily subsidised part of our economy. Is he really unaware of the facts, or in this case is he again pandering to those who know nothing about the realities of modern agribusiness but who love to imagine that the countryside is peopled with rich capitalists driving cut-down Bentleys? The fact is that Australian farmers rank the lowest in the value of government support received compared to the other 30 countries in the OECD. That is why even our most efficient producers battle to compete
against the subsidised competition in export markets.

I do not think the opposition leader has tried that old ‘subsidised farmer’ line outside a capital city. I suspect he would not have survived to repeat it. This is old Labor trade union speak. It reflects the old jealousies and ignorance about owning land and landed gentry, make-believe class distinctions and a divide and rule mentality that has been dusted off and given a new lease of life under Latham’s Labor. We see it in the references to so-called subsidised farmers and in any reference to so-called elite school funding.

The reality for Australia’s rural and regional populations today is that many depend on the $900 million payments in exceptional circumstances that flow in fortnightly to put food on their tables and to pay down drought-induced debt. In the electorate of Murray, this amounts to over $1 million a fortnight to cover over 1,000 farm households. In this worst drought on record, some lenders in Victoria are pressuring farm households to sell their water entitlements to restore some equity in their assets. Selling permanent water rights has the potential to make parts of our irrigation systems non-viable and is strangling the chances of whole regions to recover from drought when rains eventually restore the irrigation supply.

Drought relief or the impacts of drought on communities did not rate a mention in the Leader of the Opposition’s budget reply—not a single reference to the D word—nor did it occur in his Fraser Lecture environment statement. The John Howard government has committed over $900 million to drought relief—nearly $1 billion—and it is an open-ended commitment. What is the opposition’s policy in relation to the future of exceptional circumstances and drought policy? What does the shadow Treasurer think about the drought response of fellow Victorian, Premier Mr Bracks, in that state?

The Victorian government has refused to make drought declarations over parts of northern Victoria, in particular in the electorate of Murray. Only months after offering $20,000 per drought-stricken farm, Premier Bracks pulled this offer without notice, leaving communities bewildered and angry. Needless to say, the drought in northern Victoria continues, and for many this season is proving to be the hardest yet.

Perhaps the opposition’s studied silence with respect to this government’s $900 million drought relief fund reflects the intention of Labor to redirect the fund away from struggling rural families to fill their budgetary black hole, if they are ever in office. They have promised, of course, extra tax cuts and increased spending on all manner of favourite new city-centric policies that their union bosses have wheeled out. I challenge the Labor Party to clearly enunciate their exceptional circumstances policies and their intentions in relation to the $900 million commitment that this government has made. Rural families are waiting for that commitment.

It was also interesting to see Mark Latham, the member for Werriwa, waxing lyrical in relation to Tasmanian forest policy in his environmental speech, because not once did he call the Tasmanian Labor government to task for mismanaging elements of the regional forestry agreement, the RFA—for example, the clear-felling right down into the creek beds and gully lines, destroying the habitat and endangering the survival of the Tasmanian giant freshwater lobster. Not once did he refer to the use of poisons to kill off the species that try to survive on regenerating or new plantings in areas after the clear-felling and burning of the old-growth forest.
in Tasmania. Instead, the opposition leader, Mark Latham, thundered:

It’s not social justice to put mature age workers with a single set of skills onto the dole queue. Working class communities in Tasmania would be devastated by such a policy.

And what policy was Latham, the member for Werriwa, referring to? Apparently, it was the ‘phasing out the clear-felling of old-growth forests’.

Certainly, the Labor government of Tasmania have to do much better in managing the regional forestry agreements in Tasmania. Their own population is becoming increasingly disturbed about the way they see some of the old-growth forests being trashed. But Mr Latham fails to make clear what Labor’s commitment is to properly managed RFAs. After all, the RFAs are supposed to deliver sustainable forestry practices that look after the jobs of those employed in associated industry, while adequately reserving and protecting species and important ecosystems. As I say, the budget response and last Wednesday’s environment speech from the Leader of the Opposition were a real window—or I should say the lack of it—of environmental thinking from the other side of the House.

I met with some of Australia’s leaders in eastern Australian irrigation enterprise last night, and they were appalled by the limitations and the naivete of the opposition leader’s speech content when it strayed into the condition of the Murray River. The Leader of the Opposition feigned mock sincerity and declared:

It’s time to end the buck-passing between the Federal Government and the States. Not tomorrow. Today. Scientists tell us the Murray/Darling needs an additional 450 gigalitres of environmental flows to re-open its mouth to the sea—the starting point for cleansing and regenerating the river.

For a start, dredging the mouth of the Murray is not the starting point for a Murray system cure; it is the last of a number of impacts that come from the worst drought on record and the reversal of the natural flow regime in the river. The coalition government and its Murray-Darling Basin Council state and territory colleagues have approved funds to dredge the mouth to restore the sea connection, while we all get on with the even more important and effective work upstream. So what does the Labor Party mean? Is it supporting the Murray-Darling Basin Living Murray initiative—which, under Commonwealth leadership, has brought the five jurisdictions in the basin to an agreed first cut of additional water allocation to the Murray, with $500 million on the table to undertake the work that will find that water from savings in the systems and improved water-use efficiency while, at the same time, being mindful of the social and economic impacts on the communities which also need to survive?

Does Labor support the Snowy joint government agreement that allocates another 70 gigalitres to the Murray River and 212 gigalitres to the Snowy River, with a further $375 million to find this water in overallocated systems or where water can be saved? Again, that agreement is between the states and the Commonwealth. Doesn’t Labor understand that an agreement has been made? The farmers certainly want to know. Where does Labor think it is going to find the 1,500 gigalitres that it now claims is needed, within 10 years, from the Murray to be added downstream? Rural communities want to know if the Labor Party supports the principles of the National Water Initiative, which is in the process of negotiation with all states and territories and is led by the Commonwealth.

We all need to have some sense of the future as we work through extraordinarily
complex water allocation and property rights issues. We do not need breast-beating nonsense. All we have had to this point is slogans from the Leader of the Opposition. I am most fearful when I look at what is happening in rural and regional communities that are droughted. There is the struggle to get a fair go with a decent price for produce when a lot of that produce is some of the cleanest and most efficiently produced in the world. I am also concerned about small- and medium-sized businesses in rural and regional communities. I want to pay my respects to the owners of the John Anderson Pharmacy who are in the gallery tonight—Aggie and John Anderson, their daughter and her friend. They manage a medium-sized business in Shepparton which gives excellent service to the communities of Shepparton-Mooroopna in these difficult times, in an area which has experienced its third and fourth years of the worst drought on record.

Small businesses in rural and regional Australia also want to know what the Labor Party has in mind in terms of policies in relation to their futures. One issue is how they can employ labour without the threat of unfair dismissal laws catching up with them. Too often in small rural and regional communities there are labour shortages. In the face of labour shortages, there is a strong disincentive for employing a new, untried workforce when they know they could end up in court defending actions which have no basis. Unfair dismissals laws have been brought before the Senate 40 times in an attempt to get Labor to support them. I ask that Labor does so that people like the Andersons can continue to do excellent business in superb regions like the Murray in northern Victoria. I thank the House.

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Reid) (7.55 p.m.)—I would certainly associate myself with the amendment to the Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2004-2005, and associated bills, which was moved by the member for Hotham. That amendment goes to the issue of the electoral driving force behind the budget—the question of pneumococcal vaccine for children; funding with respect to children who drop out of school; the increased cost of people going into higher education in this country; and the decline in bulk-billing, particularly in rural and regional Australia.

Before getting to the broader issues, however, I would like to deal with a few aspects in the area of settlement. I noticed that today the related minister has come out with a press release in which he defends his latest extravaganza in Melbourne: $200,000 to hire the Royal Exhibition Building for one citizenship ceremony. That is $200,000 for one day at the Royal Exhibition Building. This is supposedly part of a grand citizenship advertising campaign. Admittedly, there are reasons for some action by him. As opposed to an average citizenship rate of 109,000 people under Labor, citizenship has again declined in the last year, after a short-term increase. Previously the minister has said that he believes the essential important days for citizenship ceremonies are Australia Day, Harmony Day and his newly-created Citizenship Day in September. However, this latest event was justified because it was Mothers Day. Unfortunately, the reason for this grand $200,000 event in Melbourne was unknown to his public servants who appeared before Senate estimates last week. When they were asked why this event occurred and why there was this expenditure for hiring the centre, they said: ‘No particular reason. It was not an important day. We are not really sure why it happened.’ So now it is Mothers Day. I gather that Apple and Pear Day is either today or tomorrow. I could be corrected as to which day it is. Maybe the minister will be doing Carmen Miranda impersonations with headgear decorated with apples and pears in
a further attempt to milk citizenship for all it is worth.

However, other aspects of this budget are of concern in this portfolio. The government says it will be expending an additional $29.8 million over four years on promotional measures to encourage humanitarian settlement in rural and regional areas. We all know—the previous speaker talked about this—about the need to try to attract population to rural and regional Australia. The government is claiming that $30 million over the next four years is going for this. However, if we look at other portfolios, we find reductions in Medicare expenditure of $36 million over four years and a reduction of $30 million in social security payments for this new rural and regional migration platform. DIMIA will also gain $58 million from these new settlers over four years as a result of visa application charges for its new regional visas. So, in actual fact, this much-vaunted, much-promoted increased expenditure of $30 million is dwarfed by $58 million of revenue gains and $65 million of cuts in other portfolios—a net saving to the budget of $93 million. This much-promoted, much-speculated-about thrust for regional migration is essentially, at the end of the day, a revenue gain for the government rather than a massive, multimillion dollar initiative by the government.

I also note, with regard to settlement services, that the overall increase in the budget is largely a matter of the higher migration intake. The government of small migration, the government that was hitting the previous government over the head for having excessive migration intakes, has of course been slowly increasing the intake each year and has announced a further rise this year—mainly around regional and humanitarian refugee intake.

It is interesting to note that much of the supposed increased spending in this field is actually to do with medical checks for those coming into Australia and transport costs of arriving here. They are not really about settlement service within Australia. Once again, there is gilding of the lily to some extent in regard to these claims. There was one gesture that seemed very worth while and we would not criticise it for a moment—that is, English language tuition for refugees. For some unknown reason, it is limited to those from 16 to 24 years of age. The paper speaks of refugees getting up to—and I stress ‘up to’—400 additional hours. However, we know from past experience that these citations of supposed figures of assistance are often not from the real world. In the past we know the minister talked about refugees getting up to—again, up to—an additional 100 hours, but we found that in reality the average was 68 hours. So there are a few concerns with regard to that portfolio.

I turn to the broader issues. The previous speaker spoke at one stage about make-believe class distinctions. Quite frankly, there are two fundamental aspects of this budget: one of them is the class based decisions in a number of portfolios and the other is the clear relationship of this budget to the electoral cycle. Other speakers have mentioned that 80 per cent of revenue initiatives by this government have occurred in the three pre-election years. It is nothing to do with the state of the economy or the supposed or very real budget positives in those particular years; it has more to do with the election cycle. Here we see $52 billion of initiatives, following the 2001 level of $25½ billion and the 1998 level of $20 billion, and included in this is $6 billion to be spent in a period of six weeks.

The real rub of this lies in the accompanying advertising campaign by the government—$100 million of taxpayers’ money is
to be devoted to selling to the Australian electorate the brilliance, management and initiatives of the government, an organisation that have attempted over the last decade constantly to create new loopholes in our electoral laws and find new ways of concealing the money that they are obtaining from the private sector. The infamous Greenfields Foundation is indicative of these kinds of problems. They are not content with that. They are not content with having a cloak-and-dagger approach to telling the Australian people where the government’s revenue for their campaigning comes from; they are now seeking to spend $100 million of taxpayers’ money on electoral promotion. I am very interested in my adjacent seat of Parramatta and it is interesting to note the campaign there. One of the aldermen from the council was out the other week campaigning in the Winston Hills area, which is probably the best part of the electorate for the coalition, and the comments of a Sri Lankan resident were probably a resounding indication of how this budget is coming over. He said: ‘In Sri Lanka they try to bribe us with a sack of rice. Here today we see the same kind of endeavour by this government—a desperate measure to try and survive.’ That is indicative of the reaction in the electorate at this stage. Anyone who is a realist and a pragmatist knows that, over the next period, this campaign will have some impact at least. But at this stage it is not going very far.

In this $52 billion extravaganza there is the question of tax cuts. Many speakers have talked about the degree to which this government has increased tax revenue over its period in government—$9,000 on average and $5½ thousand in income tax. But it is interesting to note that, while the previous speaker spoke about these ‘fanciful’, ‘imaginary’ and ‘unreal’ class distinctions as not being around the place these days, these tax cuts are very much targeted at a particular sector in the economy—that is, people on particular revenue levels. I notice from the 2001 census figures—and I understand that this is self-reporting—that 92.7 per cent of people in the Reid electorate will not be assisted by these measures. In the adjacent seat of Parramatta, that figure is 85 per cent.

So the vast majority of people who trudged out to Parramatta Stadium the other week to watch Parramatta go down again to St George, the people who go to the Westfield shopping complex in Parramatta and the parents of the students at Delany College in my electorate or at Parramatta High School will not be assisted by this budget. Those figures for electors in the Parramatta subregion of our two seats contrast very sharply with the 33 per cent approximately of Bradfield electors who gain some benefit from this scheme and the 73.3 per cent of Kooyong electors who are in a similar situation. So much for claims that there is no class basis to these initiatives by the government. Clearly the vast majority of Australians will not gain by these measures. They are the people on lower incomes and who characteristically are settled in the electorates of Western Sydney.

We also have the $600 measure. It is interesting to note that this afternoon the shadow minister cited supposed system problems in the government department in regard to debts in the family benefits area. It appears that up to 150,000 families who lodge early tax returns will not be advised of their debt. He is quite correct in saying that this is reminiscent of the 2001 election, when the government decided to hold back debts until after the election. That is similar in fashion to the way in which they are holding back one of the two $600 payments. So there is no real guarantee that it is going to happen. Historically, given the pattern of core and non-core promises, one can have no confidence that it will. Today we see that, reminiscent of
past practices in this particular area, people will not be receiving their bills until they cast their ballot papers. All up, it has been reported that 60 per cent of Australians will receive neither the tax cuts nor the family benefit.

In contrast, Labor has a series of proposals to address crucial problems confronting the people of this country. The issue of bulk-billing and the attempt to save Medicare, efforts in regard to children, the baby care payment that the government has now become attracted to in a very tardy fashion after Labor’s announcement, the issue of 20,000 university and TAFE places and the earn to learn programs are worthwhile national initiatives.

I want to talk briefly about dental care. In 1996, when this government came in, one of its first measures was to scrap the then existing programs. It is interesting to note the very recent article ‘Social inequality in perceived oral health among adults in Australia’ by Anne Sanders and John Spencer in the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health Vol 28 No. 2. They said:

For subjective oral health measures, the magnitude of difference across income groups was most pronounced in the 18-44 years age group. In multivariate analysis, low household income, blue-collar occupation, and high residential area disadvantage were positively associated with social impact from oral conditions and pathological tooth loss. Speaking other than English at home (relative to English), low household income (relative to high income), and vocational relative to tertiary education were each associated with more than twice the odds of poor self-rated oral health. They furthermore said:

... that socio-economic factors ... are markers of other genetic, social and psychological phenomena that drive variation in health. Such factors differentially expose people to risk and protective factors, thereby producing patterns of disease in populations correlated with socio-economic position. Prominent among the social determinants for health inequalities are social support and stressful living conditions.

That very recent article hit on the realities. Once again, the issue of class based politics in this country is supposedly imaginary, but one of the first actions of this government, as I said, was to scrap the then existing dental scheme. It has come up with something since then, reacting to Labor driving this issue over the last few months. It is a very minimal scheme—in the area of $5 million—helping only 23,000 Australians.

We have large numbers of people in this country who cannot get their teeth treated because they have not got the money. There have been a variety of surveys that have come to that conclusion. There are vast numbers of people in this country who cannot afford to go to dentists. This article discusses those decisions being based on socio-economic circumstances, yet the government come in and abandon a program. Only at the last minute, just before the election, have they come up with a very minimal program to do something about it. Labor, in contrast, many months ago, proposed an initiative of $120 million which will actually do something. It will actually accomplish something—it will actually help people.

The other measure is, as I said, just an advertising gimmick—an indication that it is not just sitting around doing nothing but is out there. I was out at Westmead hospital in the electorate of Parramatta the other week and I was amazed to see the facilities that are unutilised in the hospital from the former dental care program that operated out of there. On this front, the government’s program has a number of conditions: you have to have a very serious health problem and your dental issue has to be related to that particular health problem.

Medicare in my electorate still has a very high level of bulk-billing because of the na-
ture of the constituency and the degree of competition, but we know that in vast parts of Australia it has been in freefall. Of course, that has led to initiatives by the government to try to delay and suppress statistics on this matter. Labor has said that it will immediately increase the patient rebate for each bulk-billed service to 95 per cent of the schedule fee and to 100 per cent in 2006-07. In contrast, the government has shambled together a proposal which sees people in Tasmania, which in many areas have higher levels of bulk-billing, being subsidised to encourage bulk-billing whereas vast parts of the outer regional belts of Sydney and Melbourne and regional Australia, particularly on the North Coast of New South Wales, have abysmal levels. They are going down because basically in some of those places doctors are intimidated not to bulk-bill as they are not towing the line, they are not part of the team. But, as I said, because of the way in which some Tasmanian senators jumped on the government’s wagon, we see this anomaly where some parts of that state gain from enhanced encouragement of bulk-billing while other areas of Australia that need it far more suffer.

Labor has recognised that there is a significant problem in this country regarding people completing high school. Labor’s earn or learn proposal has been very much welcomed as an initiative to do something about that problem. It is interesting to note that Kenneth Davidson, in an article in the last week or so, made the point that a variety of players in the system went to the Treasurer, Mr Costello, and suggested that this kind of initiative was very worth while. However, nothing occurred and it is now up to the Labor Party to come forward. I quote Kenneth Davidson:

As the middle-class obsesses over the alternative public and private school pathways to higher education, the question of what happens to the 50,000 young people each year who don’t achieve a year 12 or equivalent qualification has tended to be ignored by the Howard government and the public.

But Mark Latham has now put the issue on the political agenda with “Labor’s Youth Guarantee: Learn or Earn” which, to my surprise, is a serious attempt to put into practice the Coalition’s concept of “mutual obligation”.

He further commented about the economics of this:

Even if the program was paid for by government borrowings at 5 per cent, the anticipated return of around 9.6 per cent over the period 2004 to 2005 means that it would more than pay for itself. Yet the proposal was comprehensively ignored in the budget. Costello appears obsessed with cutting taxes and repaying government debt rather than building up human capital that can generate additional net wealth for the future.

That submission came from the group of nine, which includes the Business Council of Australia, the Australian Industry Group and a variety of other players, including the ACTU. It was rejected but has now been put forward by the Labor Party and welcomed in large parts of Australia to make sure that every person at least gets the opportunity to get either a job or else some training. It does of course form a stark contrast to jobs for the dole, where people very often come out with lamentable skills improvements—pieces of paper sometimes but very little accomplished by way of learning.

Another facet of the budget is education. There is not only the question of earning or learning but the question of the government’s obsession with helping the alma maters of the frontbench of the coalition. If you were to go along the front bench you would find that some of the schools that have been assisted are very much of that character—the King’s School, in particular, has had an increase of 190 per cent over recent periods. That contrasts with Trinity Catholic College in my own electorate—the largest Catholic
college in New South Wales—which has had a 20 per cent rise, and Fairvale High School, in Western Sydney, which has had a rise of 25 per cent.

I do not think the King’s School really needs that money. Many have commented on the rifle range, the boat sheds, the swimming pools and educational facilities that outrun what the vast majority of Australian students receive. Labor promises a national resource standard with money to match it. It says that there certainly has to be a redistribution of funding amongst schools to make sure that some equity comes back into the process. It is all right for members opposite to talk about some cleaner who might send their kids to King’s but that is not the reality of the school in Parramatta. (Time expired)

Mr TUCKEY (O’Connor) (8.16 p.m.)—Even in responding to the appropriation legislation we get misleading statements like, ‘The Howard government discontinued the dental program introduced by the Keating government.’ It was introduced for four years and was to be finished at the end of four years. It was designed to clean up the backlog and it was recognised that that responsibility had always resided with state governments, whatever their political persuasion.

It is interesting to note, too, when one gets lectured about school funding and private school funding, that I have been in this place long enough to remember the new schools program, better known in my electorate as the ‘no new schools program’. It was the policy of the previous Labor government. That program made it impossible for the average community group to get a school off the ground, because the first thing they had to get was 50 full fee paying paid-up students, which was extremely difficult. I am getting fed up with being told about King’s or some of the other so-called elite schools, whose parent bodies have been contributing through fees and donations for centuries in some cases—certainly decades—and have built up assets at their cost. Many no longer have the financial capacity of their parents or grandparents, who were in a different economic situation. Those people are entitled to have a share of the government largesse in this particular area.

I am old enough to remember the original program from the schools debate—I will think of the name of it in a minute—that was conducted during the Menzies era, when state governments were doing everything in their power to starve private schools out of existence. It was a philosophical debate. Menzies said that we wanted a choice for people and commenced the role of the Commonwealth government paying money into education which, of course, the states had never conceded to the Commonwealth doing at the time of Federation.

There are so many things that we hear from speakers like the member for Reid when they suddenly become enamoured of the earn or learn strategy. I do not know what that exactly means for some, because if you are at school and your academic capacity has been exceeded and you are just a nuisance in the classroom to those kids who can progress, then what are you doing there? The only way that kids will get a job is through having a job opportunity. I have seen it with three children and I will be seeing it very shortly with grandchildren. Getting that first job, whatever it might be, puts you on the rungs of the ladder to long-term employment that we often hear about. Many years ago I encouraged one of my children to take a job for nothing to get that first reference. I knew she had the ability, and it was demonstrated not many years later when she was receiving very high wages for a person of her age in that period. But she would never have got there without that first job. As far as I was concerned it did not matter what she got
paid: it was about the employer having knowledge of her previous employment.

I had the privilege of going to see the musical stage show *The Lion King*—the lion king, not the lying king! *The Lion King* has some amazing characters and, for what I guess we would have thought was a kids' story, a pretty interesting interweaving story. There is the lion king, a man of great stature representing good governance, and his conniving, nasty brother. He goes to tell the hyenas how he will get them into power. When I was listening to the response of the Leader of the Opposition to the budget, I thought of that speech, which is set to music. He says, ‘I will save you. I will get you everything you want, you hyenas, just back me when I kill the king. Help me.’ It is interesting to watch the hyenas all slavering away, waiting for the goodies to arrive. He sees off the prince consort, who goes away and lives, I think, with a warthog and some other animal. He convinces him that he is not wanted and that he contributed to the death of his father—it is an absolute lie.

I hope you can see the parallels, Mr Deputy Speaker Baressi. In the end, the people go searching for the prince consort because, when the conniving brother takes over on the death of the king, the economy collapses and they are in all sorts of trouble as a nation. There is no food for the hyenas—they were promised unlimited food and got nothing. The reality of that story is that you have to do more than promise; you have to make sure that you can fulfil those promises when the time comes.

When we look at the budget papers and the tax initiatives and we see that there are adjustments being made to the thresholds in the higher levels, we are told that they can do that better. But what seems to be totally misunderstood among the arithmetically challenged members of the opposition—and I will have to join them in a three-legged race, I think—is this fact of life: everybody that pays tax pays it at the lower marginal rates of 17c and 30c. Some—an ever increasing number of Australians—also pay tax at the higher rates. When we look back a bit in history we find that there was a time not that long ago when you had to earn five times average weekly earnings—have five times the purchasing power of an average worker—before you hit the top marginal tax rate. Recently, as we know, it was almost getting to one to one; it was certainly below 1½ times average weekly earnings.

When that happens, government has a responsibility to make some adjustments to those rates, and those adjustments are modest. But what seems to be overlooked is that, if you go back and lower the other rates, as this government has done during its term of office, that is still a benefit for the higher paid, because they pay 30c on the component of their income that fits within the thresholds, they pay 17c on the lower component and they pay nothing on $6,000. The Leader of the Opposition in his budget response did not bother to enlighten the Australian people, let alone the parliament, on the arithmetic associated with his ‘I’ll save you’ type speech. The cost of even a 1c reduction in the tax rate—or the cost of extending those thresholds—is extremely high. But, furthermore, it is equally a benefit to those on higher incomes who, we are told, do not really need it. Our government thought they did need it, because the relationship between the different tax scales had become ridiculous.

Of course, there is a very good reason that so many people are getting into those higher income brackets: good economic management. That happens when a government, such as the Howard government, manages to deliver wage increases that buy more goods and not, as occurred in the Hawke and
Keating years, wage increases that buy fewer goods. Please be reminded that throughout the 13 years of the Labor government, in a highly regulated industrial relations arrangement known as the accord, the buying power of the working man’s wages increased by one per cent—not one per cent per annum, but just one per cent. Compare that to the current situation where, every year since the Howard-Costello economic team have been at work, we have seen a substantial increase in the buying power—the real power—of workers’ wages. And that is with, surprisingly, substantial deregulation.

It is interesting that, down at the waterfront, as we have been told, half as many people are working and they have achieved a 30 per cent increase in productivity. That is what allows wages to grow and prices to be stable—productivity exceeding or at least matching wages growth. That is not the policy of the unions, who run the Labor Party. Their policy is that they have to be somewhere—in the Industrial Relations Commission or something—cranking up the nominal value of wages—with all the add-ons that employers must then bear—because it gives them a nice warm inner glow. But throughout its period, the Hawke and Keating government did not do much for the workers. They, in fact, had virtually negative buying power increases—and when they are not spending, there are no new jobs, including no new jobs for kids. Yet we are told that, by some miracle of legislation and a further strain on the taxpayer, the earn or learn policy will fix all that up.

Kids are primarily in demand today. Yes, we can be quoted certain streets or certain suburbs that may still be enduring high teenage—not youth—unemployment. But this budget is going to give parents of a lot of those children more buying power, and their taxation responsibility is to be reduced. The differentiation is that, instead of just going to the 30 cent bracket, which currently applies to 80 per cent of Australians—they do not go above it—and making a 1c or 2c adjustment, the government has gone along and made an assessment that the people who have the greatest pressure on their earnings are those who are supporting children.

I laughed—in fact, I picked up my pen and wrote to the Financial Review—when I read a letter in that paper. One would think, when they are as discriminatory as they are in publishing letters to the editor, that they would have thought twice about publishing this one. This letter was from someone in their 30s, I think, who complained bitterly that they were not getting any special treatment out of the budget—someone who was single, had a single income and had no kids. Anybody who has had the opportunity to compare that lifestyle with the lifestyle you have when you are raising a family, with all the additional pressures that go on your income, knows that you could be taxed three times as much in that category—single, single income, and no kids—and still compare favourably to someone on a single income with a wife or husband and two or three kids.

So where have we delivered the benefits in this budget? We have added a substantial amount of money: $600 per child prior to the end of the financial year and another $600 thereafter. The member for Reid chose to run this rabbit down a hole, with the member for Lilley claiming that there is something dishonest and wrong about sometimes asking people at the reconciliation period to pay back overpayments they have received through the tax arrangements.

But what I have not heard from the Labor Party is their solution. Is it their intention to let people strap up against the regular taxpayers—with $1,000 of overpayment—and say: ‘It wasn’t my fault. You can’t have that back’? Is that going to proceed through to
our income tax arrangements, where we have some discretion in how we get PAYE taken out of our wages if our employer goes: ‘Wink, wink, nod, nod, I’ll only take this much out of this week. Don’t worry about it, we’ve got a new Labor government and they won’t ask you to settle that extra amount at the end of the financial year’? Is that what Labor are talking about? I can tell you that I bet it is not and they never have. Of course, if it is a tax arrangement, once a year we are expected by the community to reconcile it. Some of us might get a refund; others will get a tax bill. Some get them quarterly, if they are private businesses. Nobody has ever suggested that that is not the case. The more that can be done to make sure that people are not misled in the arrangements that they make with Centrelink and others, the better.

But the reality of how the system works is showing up in the statistics the Prime Minister gave us today. Fewer and fewer people are receiving overpayments during the financial year; therefore, fewer and fewer people have to make arrangements to refund that money. But they have had it. It has been in their pockets. They have spent it. It is not as though it floated through their bank account and disappeared back out again. I find this one of the most illogical arguments that has ever been presented in this parliament since I have been here.

There is another major factor in the budgets of the Howard-Costello government—that is, real taxes have not risen. I have to say that in my early years in this place and throughout the Hawke-Keating government, we never came to the budget to find out which taxes were going down; we just wanted to know which ones were going up. When some people in this place started to raise the issue of fuel prices, I went to the library to get confirmation of my own recollections. When the Hawke government was elected, excise on petrol was a bit over 7c a litre. When the Keating government was defeated, that excise was up around 34c a litre. Of course, that was a result of indexation. It was a self-generating tax mechanism, because petrol is part of the CPI. The CPI goes up, petrol goes up. Furthermore, there were discretionary decisions, as I recollect: one of 6c a litre—just a straight increase, over and above the CPI adjustment—and another of 3c a litre, which occurred in the l-a-w law tax election.

And please remember what that was about. Outside of politics, the coalition put forward the Fightback proposal, which included a goods and services tax. Then the leader of the government at the time, Mr Keating, told Australians: ‘You don’t need a GST to get tax reform. I will deliver it without tax reform. To prove how dinkum I am, I’ll put the actual personal tax cuts into l-a-w law, and I promise you faithfully there will be no increase in indirect taxation. I can do it.’ Of course, the l-a-w law was discontinued after the election, we saw a 3c discretionary amount go onto petrol and, as I recollect, about two per cent or thereabouts on sales tax, with some more dramatic increases on individual items.

Here we are facing it all again. We had the speech from the lion king’s brother to the hyenas, in response to a fully structured, carefully thought out financial plan. That is where the circumstance remains today, with the government delivering good economic management, putting the figures before the people, saving and reducing debt, and the opposition getting up and giving us all sorts of promises, with no evidence of where the money will come from. In fact, the other day I thought of the science of alchemy—turning lead into gold. There is plenty of lead on the Labor Party front bench, but I do not know whether they will ever be able to find the gold. (Time expired)
Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (8.36 p.m.)—I do not intend wasting any time on the member for O’Connor’s contribution on this Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2004-2005 and its cognate bills—save to point out that the coalition engages from time to time in a furphy about wage increases and wages during Labor’s period of office compared to those during the coalition’s period of office. That furphy involves not taking into account advances in what are described loosely as the social wage—for example, the establishment of Medicare and the establishment of superannuation and employer contributions to superannuation, which are going to nine per cent and which make a substantial difference to the capacity of ordinary Australians to provide for themselves in retirement. His observation about wages also failed to take into account the impact of cost-of-living issues, such as the goods and services tax, rising petrol prices and the like.

The first thing I want to talk about in relation to this budget is the provision for defence spending, particularly in the context of the war in Iraq. That war has been a disaster—first and foremost for the people of Iraq themselves, but also in its ramifications right around the globe, including here in Australia. Progressively, misleading statements—indeed outright lies—have been exposed about the nature of that war. Firstly, we were told that we needed to go to war in Iraq to prevent the use of weapons of mass destruction. In fact, those weapons of mass destruction were not used when the war eventuated. They have never been found. The truth is they simply did not exist. They do not exist, and those governments and political leaders who told us that they did exist were misleading ordinary Australians for their own political advantage.

Secondly, we were told that going to Iraq was a part of the war on terrorism. It was never part of the war on terrorism. Al-Qaeda was not involved in Iraq. Indeed, al-Qaeda is now involved in Iraq, so invading Iraq has been completely counterproductive. It has made the war on terrorism more difficult, and the leadership of the war on terrorism—whether it is in the United States or here in Australia—has been found wanting.

Thirdly, we were told that the Iraqi people wanted us to get rid of Saddam Hussein—that they wanted him out and, as soon as we got him out, people would rise up and sing hallelujah and rejoice. Some polling has been conducted in Iraq, and it tells us that most Iraqi people want the Western forces out. We are now engaged in fighting against the Sunnis, the Shiites, various militias and the remnants of the Baathist regime—which makes you wonder from time to time just who in Iraq is supporting us.

So what have been the achievements of going into Iraq? The first achievement that tens of thousands of innocent Iraqi men, women and children have been killed. Frankly, all the consequences that we talk about pale into insignificance beside that tragic and entirely unacceptable outcome. The second achievement is that this has made Australia a bigger terrorist target. This is the thing that the AFP commissioner, Mick Keelty, spoke about on TV—a statement of the bleeding obvious. For his pains, he was heaved by representatives of the Howard government and effectively forced to issue a retraction. But the truth stands—the truth will out—and there is no doubt that our involvement in Iraq has made us a bigger terrorist target.

The third achievement is that this has been a detour from the war on terrorism. If the sorts of resources that have been put into Iraq had been put into the hunt for Osama bin Laden, perhaps Osama bin Laden would have been captured. The truth is that, instead of the United States and other forces seeking
to properly apprehend Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda representatives, they chose to go off on an unrelated frolic of their own in Iraq. Indeed, if a fraction of the resources which have been put into the war in Iraq had been put into seeking to find a lasting peace in the Middle East and dealing with the Palestinian question, we might have made progress there and we would be much better placed in the war on terrorism. There is no doubt in my mind—and I have many people of Arabic and Islamic background in my electorate—that one of the ongoing sources of grievance for people of Islamic background is the failure of the West to find an outcome in relation to the Palestinian question and to establish a genuine Middle East peace.

The fourth achievement that going into Iraq has done is to damage the United Nations and the idea of an international rule of law. It has damaged Australia’s standing in the world. It has encouraged a cowboy and vigilante mentality, the international rule of the jungle and the belief that might is right and that, if we are able to go in there and overthrow a regime, we can do that. That kind of arrogant ‘we know best’ attitude coming from United States Republicans has done the world a great disservice. Some on the other side say that Labor representatives are anti-American. Nothing could be further from the truth. I have no doubt that, had Al Gore been elected president of the United States, the war on terrorism would have been handled differently. We would certainly not have been invading Iraq and this debacle would never have happened. It is not about being anti-American. It is about asking: what is the correct approach to international affairs, what is the right way to achieve peace and justice around the world?

The fifth achievement is that the price of petrol has gone up. I do not accept it as a legitimate element of foreign affairs policy to say that we can go into Iraq and kill tens of thousands of people in order to keep the price of petrol down but, even if you thought that was the objective, the opposite has occurred. This policy has been so spectacularly unsuccessful that we now find that the price of petrol for ordinary motorists is going up as a result of Middle East instability. So what we have got here is an absolute debacle—a shameful debacle—in the conduct of international affairs. We have the prisoner abuse scandal. We have got no exit strategy. We were deceived by the likes of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who said that we would be out of there in months, not years. The truth is we have been there for well over a year and the Howard government is unable to set any date at all for this country to remove itself from Iraq.

The impression given by those opposite was that this would be a walk in the park; in fact, it has been turning into another Vietnam. We are not wanted there. We should never have gone there without United Nations backing. The idea of Australia invading other countries who have not attacked us is repulsive. The idea that they were going to attack us and use weapons of mass destruction to do so was fanciful. It has been exposed as a charade, a fraud, and the impact of this monumental stuff-up on the part of the coalition will live on in Australia for years and years after those who made this error have departed. It is disgraceful.

The second thing I want to talk about is the fact that this is a budget for the few. I am sure it has come as a bit of a surprise to Liberal Party representatives opposite, whose branch members may well earn over $52,000 per annum, but the fact is that most voters do not earn over $52,000 a year and therefore have received nothing from the tax cuts. There is nothing for pensioners in this budget. That is something of particular concern to me in relation to the electorate that I
represent. Wills has the highest number of aged pensioners of any electorate in Victoria—it had over 18,000 age pensioners as at June 2003—and the second highest number of any electorate in Australia.

By contrast, Labor do intend to support pensioners. For example, we believe that some of the budget proceeds ought to be invested in a dental care program. We propose that a Labor government would invest $300 million in Australian dental care over four years—that is to say, $120 million a year for this program when it is fully operational. Many people on the waiting list for dental care—and the waiting list is now over 500,000 strong, with people waiting up to five years to get their teeth fixed—are elderly. Our program will revive the vision of Ben Chifley, when he inserted an amendment into the Constitution in 1946 which said that affordable dental health treatment was as essential as other medical treatments.

Under our plan, concession card holders such as pensioners, health care card holders and their dependents will now get free check-ups when they need them and subsidised dental treatment, restorations and dentures. Our plan will also assess the dental health of every person admitted to residential care and put in place an action plan to provide ongoing care. We will target programs for Indigenous communities, and we will provide public education awareness programs that help with prevention. We think that is important.

We also think that other aspects of health are important, and that is why we have put forward the proposal to help restore bulk-billing from the levels to which it has been falling under this government. Under us, there was a year in, year out increase in the level of bulk-billing. Under this government, there is a year in, year out decline in the percentage of bulk-billing. Medicare needs the support of a Labor government genuinely committed to bulk-billing and to restoring Medicare.

The other thing we intend to do which is very important for many Australian families is in the area of access to higher education and post-secondary education—that is, to provide some 20,000 new university places and 20,000 new TAFE places and to reverse that 25 per cent increase which universities have been allowed to charge in relation to HECS. You will be aware that most universities have been putting their hand out and saying, ‘Thanks very much; we’ll take the full 25 per cent’—the full tote odds—and that has placed a very great burden on students and their families and has diminished ongoing access to higher education. One of the great achievements of Labor governments was the establishment of better and improved access to higher education, more places and more affordable places. That has been in reverse under this government.

That third thing I want to refer to is the appalling handling of cooperative research centres by the government. Just prior to the bringing down of the budget, we discovered that it had changed the guidelines in relation to cooperative research centres to rule out those which are engaged in research for public good—to say that, unless you have a commercial focus, we are not going to support you. And so it was that cooperative research centres like the reef CRC and the rainforest CRC were told that they would be defunded. We found, when we looked at the budget, that the amount of Commonwealth spending for CRCs was $202 million in 2003-04, $193 million in 2004-05 and that it will shrink to $152 million by 2010-11. The Commonwealth has been getting out of support for cooperative research centres and undermining them. In the environmental area, the figures in the government’s budget papers show that funding for environmental
CRCs will decline from $54 million this financial year to $48 million next financial year, to $34 million the year after that and just $29 million the year after that. This government has treated cooperative research centres very poorly.

The final thing I want to talk about is this government’s lamentable performance on environmental issues generally and in particular as revealed by the budget. The government likes to talk about deficit and debt. In the area of the environment, we are building up a legacy of environmental deficit and debt for our children and for our grandchildren. In the Treasurer’s speech, we heard not a word about the environment—not one word, just like last year—demonstrating again the Howard government’s contempt for the environment. In a budget which was splashing around money like there was no tomorrow, there were no serious environmental initiatives. To add insult to injury, it was able to find $21 million over four years for a program to be called ‘Climate change strategies—influencing international climate change policies’. We all know what that is about. That is money to be used to undermine the Kyoto protocol and collective international efforts to tackle climate change. In other words, this is not expenditure to save the environment; this is expenditure to wreck it.

The Minister for the Environment and Heritage’s claim of a $2.4 billion record level of environmental expenditure support for environmental action is an utter furphy. In fact, if you look at the $2.4 billion, you discover that over $2 billion of that $2.4 billion claimed environmental expenditure for 2004-05 is being spent by departments and agencies other than the Department of the Environment and Heritage. For example, Customs is spending $350 million; AusAID, $280 million; the tax office, $43 million; and other agencies, $162 million. So over $2 billion of the money the government claims it is spending on the environment is in fact being spent by other bodies.

When the environment budget expenditure is defined according to the more rigorous international standards used in the government finance statistics, we realise that from 1999-2000 to 2004-05 funding for environmental protection has plummeted from $555 million to $257 million per annum. It is scheduled to further decline to $233 million in 2007-08. As a proportion of total budget expenditure, this is a drop from 0.35 per cent to 0.13 per cent for environment protection expenditure. That is a drop of over 60 per cent. If you add in expenditure on ‘conservation and sustainable use and repair of the natural environment’ from national parks, the national estate and natural resources development, expenditure has dropped by $58 million, from $984 million in 1999-2000 to $926 million in 2004-05. As a percentage of total budget expenditure, this is a drop from 0.61 per cent to 0.48 per cent—a drop of over 20 per cent.

So here is the reality: since 1999 the proportion of the Commonwealth budget being spent by the environment department on environment protection matters has been in virtual free fall. In order to make these outlandish claims of environmental expenditure, we have to have, for example, the AusAID budget counted as environment spending to the tune of $320 million last year, compared with $195 million in 2002-03, and we have to include spending by Customs on border protection, which has increased from $253 million to $295 million.

These claims of environmental expenditure are bogus. Unfortunately for our children and those who come after them, it is the Australian environment which will suffer as a result of this government’s legacy of deficit and debt and their failure to tackle this na-
tion’s environmental problems. If this government were serious about tackling this nation’s environmental problems they would adopt Labor’s policies. They would adopt our policy to ratify the Kyoto protocol on climate change. They would adopt our policy to increase the mandatory renewable energy target to five per cent by the year 2010. They would introduce a national emissions trading regime. They would introduce a greenhouse trigger into the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. They would find 1,500 gigalitres in environmental flows for the Murray-Darling. They would establish a Commonwealth corporation, as we would—the Riverbank Corporation—with an initial capital injection of $150 million to enable that water to be found. They would save Point Nepean. They would do something about land clearing—(Time expired)

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (8.56 p.m.)—I am delighted to rise and support the Commonwealth Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2004-2005 and cognate bills, more commonly known as the Australian budget for the coming financial year. In looking at this legislation I want to do two things. I want to firstly point out the fact that this is a bill and this is a budget and this is a government about families. It is about delivering for families on a range of fronts. Secondly, I want to deal directly with some of the issues raised by the member for Wills. The fact is that you cannot do something like this, you cannot have a budget like this, unless you have a base achieved from eight years of economic discipline and resolve.

What is this budget about for families? There are four great initiatives which are the pillars of this budget. First, the family tax benefit changes mean that for all of those families with an income, combined between husband and wife, of under $80,000 there will be per child an immediate benefit of $600. That will be repeated next year and again the year after. But just in case this seems in some way like a small thing, let me give you an example. A woman from Hastings came to my office last week and talked to members of my staff. She was in a desperate situation. She was a single mother because the marriage had broken up. To the best of my knowledge, she was not receiving any of the appropriate or proper support, and it was a difficult situation that she faced. She has to make choices weekly about clothing and food. She has four children. We asked a little bit about the ages of the children and we discovered that these four children, all at primary school or younger, together mean that she will receive $2,400 within the next month and within the next year she will receive an additional $2,400. When the member for Wills and others talk about the fact that this budget does not help families, that it does not help people on low incomes, they could not be more wrong. This woman, who came to my office with a difficult situation but who did not realise that she qualified for the immediate benefits, will receive $2,400 between now and the end of the financial year—less than a month away—and $2,400, non-taxable, to be paid in full within the coming financial year. That is what this budget is actually about.

I have a second example in relation to the carers payment. This family gave me the right to mention their name in parliament. The Omonds, who also live in Hastings, will receive $1,600 under the carers payment and carers allowance benefits. Ultimately, that is what this budget is about. It is about families who have done it hard and who will be rewarded in either of two ways: firstly, through direct payments through family tax benefit part A and through the support for carers or, secondly, through income tax deductions for those families who are working hard. That is the basis of this budget. I will continue with the economic platform and the specific bene-
fits for the electorate of Flinders at a later time.

Debate interrupted.

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 9 p.m., I propose the question:
That the House do now adjourn.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Mr ORGAN (Cunningham) (9.00 p.m.)—I would like to talk about chronic fatigue syndrome, or CFS, a silent epidemic and debilitating disease evidenced by profound exhaustion and extreme flu-like conditions. It was CFS Awareness Week in Australia from 8 to 15 May, providing an opportunity to consider its impact locally and abroad as well as the work of organisations such as the Wollongong ME/CFS Support Group and the ME/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Society of New South Wales.

CFS is difficult to diagnose and cannot be cured and the causes are largely unknown. Some 250,000 Australians are affected by the illness and five in every 1,000 people attending a doctor have it. Its impacts are widespread, costing millions of dollars each year in medical expenses and loss of productivity. Urgent help is needed for sufferers and carers via Medicare and the welfare system to give them access to drugs such as neurontin and maintain their quality of life, pending recovery.

The personal cost is enormous. I know, for I acquired CFS in 1989 and was incapacitated and bed-bound for approximately six months. I suffered overwhelming fatigue, aching bones, sickness, blurred vision, tingling in my arms and fingers et cetera. I was unable to read or concentrate for six months as mental and physical activity would exhaust me. I had to quit my job in Sydney and return home—although, after six months of rest and a good diet, I was able to start part-time work and after a period of about two years I had enough energy to return to full-time work. I have largely recovered from CFS, though I occasionally suffer bouts of fatigue and need to manage my time and energy to make sure I do not have a relapse. I was one of the lucky ones.

Not so lucky is Kerri Stephenson of Wollongong. Kerri was born in 1976 and developed symptoms of CFS during her first year of university in 1994. By 1996 she was forced to quit her studies and return home. Kerri has been bed-bound ever since. For the last eight years her parents, John and Winsome, have had to care for her around the clock, putting their lives on hold. Various treatments, including exercise and hospitalisation, have been tried but none work. As Kerri said in a letter published in the Illawarra Mercury in 2001:

To me, ME/CFS is not just about feeling tired, it is about feeling so physically worn out that I can’t even get out of bed by myself.

At the age of 25, I have to be taken to the shower by the nurse, by wheelchair.

ME/CFS is about pain in every muscle. It’s a whole body experience, affecting all the systems of the body through the central nervous system and the immune system.

I have the pain and the weakness, but the symptom that frustrates me the most is the cognitive destruction.

Like so many others with ME/CFS, I have trouble putting my thoughts into words, then having the energy to speak ...

Kerri’s case is nothing less than tragic. We need to find a cure so that young people such as Kerri can get their lives back. Unfortunately, the medical politics of the disease in Australia in recent years has left the CFS community feeling let down and abandoned. The publication just this month of a paper suggesting that exercise could alleviate the debilitating conditions of CFS has outraged sufferers and their carers. Exercise is impor-
tant in the recovery phase, as in life generally, but CFS sufferers are usually so tired and fatigued that forced exercise can worsen their condition—and I know this from personal experience.

I am told that in Australia the severely affected—people such as Kerri—are not included in clinical studies. They are ignored. The severely affected are being harshly neglected by this government. In May 2002, outrage surrounded the release of the Commonwealth funded Royal Australian College of Physicians clinical practice guidelines for CFS in the Medical Journal of Australia. CFS was no longer an organic disease. It was now, according to the guidelines, primarily psychological in origin—a common mental disorder. What rubbish! Patient groups said the guidelines trivialised the condition, blamed sufferers for their illness and promoted harmful therapies.

Richard Larkins, former President of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, wrote to the Medical Journal of Australia, unequivocally stating:

There is no evidence that the illness is primarily psychological in origin.
There is significant evidence of a range of biological abnormalities occurring in people with CFS.
It is evident that, amongst the medical fraternity in Australia, there is a lot of misinformation and misunderstanding about CFS—and the guidelines do not help. Doctors and researchers need to work with sufferers and their families to find the truth, to find treatments and to find a cure.

They need to learn lessons from people such as Kerri, John and Winsome Stephenson of Wollongong; from Christine Hunter of the Alison Hunter Memorial Foundation, set up in memory of a young 19-year-old Sydney woman who died in 1996 from complications arising from CFS; and from overseas research and experience. In 2000, I understand that Kerri Stephenson did not have the energy in her body to blow out the candles on her birthday cake. I look forward to the day when Kerri can blow out those candles and return to university to finish her degree. I know that day will come soon.

Sutherland Shire: Relay for Life

Mr BAIRD (Cook) (9.04 p.m.)—On Saturday I attended the Cancer Council’s Sutherland shire Relay for Life that was held at the Sylvania Waters athletics track. The relay is now an annual event run by the Cancer Council to raise funds for research and treatment of cancer. In each relay event around the nation, individuals, families and workmates seek sponsorship for their teams of between 10 and 15 people who take it in turns to walk around a local athletics track or oval for 24 hours. I would like to thank our corporate sponsors for the event, Cronulla and Miranda RSLs and Britton Marine, along with many individual sponsors, who helped our team to raise more than $1,200 to help with cancer research in Australia.

The Relay for Life started in 1985 with one man, Dr Gordy Klatt. After a close friend of Dr Klatt finally succumbed to cancer, he put on his running gear, gained sponsorship and ran for 24 hours, running a distance of 81 miles and raising $27,000 for the American Cancer Society. Since then, the Relay for Life has developed into the world’s biggest fundraising event, with more than 3,000 relays in the USA and scores within Australia. The Cancer Council of Victoria brought the Relay for Life to Australia in 1999, with the inaugural relay held in Melbourne and 34 teams raising $75,000. In 2001, the Relay for Life became a national event, with 30 events raising $3 million for the Cancer Council of Australia. In 2002, over 45,000 people participated, raising more than $4.5 million.
I am happy and proud to advise the House that the Sutherland shire relay held on the weekend was the largest ever metropolitan Relay for Life, with 104 community teams, including the Liberal Party team, participating. The relay itself was launched with the survivors walk, where shire residents who had survived cancer, along with carers of those with cancer, walked around the track to applause and cheers of support from the hundreds of residents who were present. As dusk fell, the Candlelight Ceremony of Hope was held, in which local residents brought messages to loved ones on paper bags and placed a candle inside. This was a poignant reminder of the prevalence of cancer in our society, and the number of candles reinforced just how many people have succumbed to cancer in my electorate.

The organising team, made up entirely of volunteers from my electorate, have to be praised for their tireless efforts which made the weekend’s event the most successful ever held in metropolitan Sydney. People such as Val Coy, Julie Foldi, Lorraine and Clive Johnson, and the relay organising committee, made up of Rod Coy, Bob Brown, Kim Taylor, Karen Scutts, Steve Clarke et cetera, did a fantastic job. I have been informed today by Brett Maguire of the Cancer Council that the event has so far raised more than $130,000 for cancer research, with more than 50 teams yet to submit their fundraising totals.

The event was extremely well managed, with great entertainment and musical displays helping to foster a real community spirit on the track. Performing on the day were Sean Atkins and Chris Collins, who recited the national anthem prior to the Survivors Walk. Throughout the day, relay participants and supporters were entertained by groups, including the St George and Sutherland Shire Scottish Pipe Band, the Leonie Renee Academy of Dance, and local bands Dr Shag, the Young Once and the Vibrators.

Cancer is an insidious and devastating disease, one that would have touched each member of the House in one way or another through the loss or illness of a friend, family member or partner. Cancer is one of the biggest challenges facing health in this country. In 2001 there were 29,964 new cases of cancer diagnosed in New South Wales alone, of which 16,200 were diagnosed in males and 13,700 in females. In 2001, there were 12,331 deaths from cancer in New South Wales. In Australia the most common cancers which affect males are prostate, bowel, lung and skin cancers; in women they are breast, bowel, skin and lung cancers. In terms of mortality rates, in males lung, prostate and bowel cancers cause more than 47 per cent of cancer related deaths; in women breast, lung and bowel cancers cause more than 43 per cent of all cancer related deaths. In Australia cancer causes death for 500 in 100,000 males per annum, and for 419 in 100,000 women per annum. In the decade 1991-2001 the incidence of cancers for all age groups rose by 6.5 per cent among Australian women, but for males there was no significant increase. Because of that, I am very pleased to see that the Relay for Life, held by the people of the Sutherland Shire, was so successful in raising so many funds. Many people in the shire were involved. It was a significant contribution and a great achievement for those who gave their time.

Djerrkura, Mr

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (9.10 p.m.)—I would like to use tonight’s adjournment debate to express my deep sadness at the passing of the former ATSIC chair, Mr Djerrkura, who died in Gove Hospital last Wednesday. Particularly on behalf of my family and on behalf of the Australian Labor Party, I offer
my sincere condolences to Mr Djerrkura’s family and also to the Wangurri people of eastern Arnhem Land, who in losing Mr Djerrkura have lost one of their senior elders.

Mr Djerrkura was one of Australia’s most prominent Aboriginal leaders across a couple of decades. He was an intelligent, passionate and highly articulate advocate for Indigenous Australians and was widely respected across the political spectrum. Personally, I had the greatest respect and admiration for him and regarded him as a close friend, although, to be clear, at times we had political differences. He was, in essence, a conservative person who once stood for the Country Liberal Party in contesting the seat of Nhulunbuy in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly. However, I am advised that he did not maintain long-term membership of the CLP.

When the Howard government appointed Mr Djerrkura to chair ATSIC in 1996, some were quite cynical of what might come, but this cynicism was clearly misplaced, because Mr Djerrkura proved to be a strong defender of self-determination, land rights and justice for Indigenous Australians. He proved his doubters wrong and proved true to those he represented. As Michael Gordon wrote in the Age last Thursday:

When Mr Djerrkura became the last appointed chairman of ATSIC, there was widespread suspicion that he would be a yes-man to the Howard Government because he was a conservative ...

But doubts were swept aside when Mr Djerrkura clashed with the Government, declaring: “That’s where my loyalty lies—to my people, not to the Government.”

Mr Djerrkura was a man who chose to work with the current government, for he held the genuine belief that he could help improve its relationship with Indigenous Australians. In the end, it did not work and, sadly, he was wrong. His relationship with the government soured and he was moved to reassess his political position.

Over the last couple of years in particular, no-one could have accused Mr Djerrkura of being pliant. In a marked change of political tone, he became a forceful activist and a passionate advocate. Just two weeks ago he wrote the following in an opinion piece for the Canberra Times:

In the classic imperial fashion, without negotiation, without understanding and with little empathy, the great white leader announced that Aboriginal people had, yet again, been a “failure” and ATSIC would be abolished.

I suppose we should not be surprised. The Prime Minister walks early and often, but he has never walked for reconciliation. Nor has he been able to bring himself, as the leader of our nation, to say sorry.

In the Northern Territory in particular, Mr Djerrkura will be remembered for his campaign against the Northern Territory’s mandatory sentencing legislation and his push to strengthen regional autonomy for Aboriginal people.

He was also a passionate believer in the role of education as a means of liberating his fellow Indigenous Australians from their continuing poverty and disadvantage. This was reflected in his role as chair of the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, where he was an energetic and enthusiastic leader of that important institution. Ms Veronica Arbon, the director of the Batchelor Institute, provided an indication of that passion and energy in her tribute to Mr Djerrkura last Thursday:

A leader with great wisdom has been lost to us. The Chairman walked the local, national and world stage with grace and goodwill and during my time as Director guided with clear direction and vision. We will carry his dreams into the future.

Without question, Mr Djerrkura had a lot more to contribute to Australian life and the
wellbeing of Indigenous Australians, but, sadly, he was one of the 75 per cent of Aboriginal males who fail to reach the age of 65. I would like to quote from Mr Djerrkura’s last published words, again going back to the Canberra Times article published two weeks ago, where he wrote:

If we want to break away from the colonial past, and begin anew, then we have to walk together—hand in hand and side by side—as a truly reconciled nation. A republic that does not make the first concrete gesture towards reconciliation is a republic that walks in the footsteps of the Crown. Is this the impoverished vision of a republic we want? My answer is No. Our vision must be more substantial. My dream is of Australia as a reconciled republic.

Mr Djerrkura is survived by his former wife Jenny, his three children, Damian, Fiona and Nathan, and his six grandchildren. I pass on to them the sympathy of my family and me, and, I am sure, that of the Labor Party. He was a great Australian leader, and his family and community have our deepest sympathy.

Victoria: Law Enforcement

Ms PANOPOULOS (Indi) (9.14 p.m.)—It is with some sadness that I rise to speak this evening. There were two local stories that prompted some thinking. One was from the Wangaratta Chronicle last Friday. That paper reported that, the night before, a 21-year-old female staff member working at the local Movieland was threatened with a knife or a screwdriver in a very brazen robbery. Although this young lady was not physically hurt, I am sure she will bear the mental scars for some time. Following on from that, today’s Border Mail reported another incident of crime in my home town of Wangaratta, where a fire, believed to have been caused by some youths aged between 15 and 16, caused $7,000 worth of damage at Wangaratta’s Yarrunga Primary School, where the shelter shed was burnt out.

It got me thinking about the broader implications of crime. These are terrible crimes: a waste of community assets at the school and a terrible personal trauma for the young lady involved in that armed robbery last Thursday night. Looking at the broader community, and particularly at what is happening in my home state of Victoria, I am very saddened, because we do live in the greatest democracy on earth. It has not had a history of great difficulty, of civil war. We have gained—and evolved into—possibly the most open and most democratic society in the world today.

It is even more disturbing that we find ourselves, particularly in Victoria, overwhelmed by an almost suffocating and oppressive wave of organised crime involving, of course, as we all now know, members of the Victorian police force. The reason this is very disturbing is that a civilised society needs laws, it needs institutions, but also—just as importantly—it does need the ability to enforce these laws. We do not need to go too far back in history; we just need to go back to the 1929 police strike in Melbourne, which saw shops looted from Collins Street to North Melbourne because there was no one available within the police force to enforce the law.

What we now have in Victoria are senior police informants being shot dead because of believed leaked documents from corrupt police. Since 1998, we have had almost 30 gangland murderers, some performed in front of children and many of these linked to corrupt police. We have had a senior Victorian corruption investigator being intimidated and threatened by his police colleagues.

Where will this all end? Where is the action from those legislators that the good people of Victoria rely upon, not to be silent, not to procrastinate, but to actually do something
effective? How can we as legislators, whether at the federal or the state level, expect the community to have faith in parliaments, to have faith in the laws, to have faith in our endeavours to create a better society, if at the very basic level we do not tackle organised crime and we do not try to genuinely deal with police corruption?

I have seen the reports and the very sad history of police corruption in New South Wales, and it is almost as if they have given up there. I do not want that story repeated in Victoria. It needs leadership, and I plead, on behalf of the people of Victoria, with the Premier and his executive not to be afraid but to take a lead and actually do something about this very dangerous monster that is a cancer on our society. It has been very disturbing that we have politicians who like to have their photos taken swimming, on the beach, handing out bouquets to schoolchildren, but on an issue that is critical to the safety of Victorians they do nothing about it. (Time expired)

Employment: Workers Conditions

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney) (9.20 p.m.)—If you try to buy running shoes, as I have, you will find that it is impossible to get a straight answer from the owners of sporting goods companies about whether the shoes are produced under conditions of sweated labour. You can see the country of origin of the shoes or the clothing, but you cannot tell what the conditions of the workers are. It does not matter how much investigation you do; it is almost impossible to find out. The price paid by consumers for these sorts of goods usually represents less than one per cent of the retail price of sporting goods—for example, shoes—so the direct labour costs are a very tiny proportion of the cost of the goods, and yet they are the part of the cost of the goods that is most frequently squeezed.

With the Olympics coming up, it is an excellent opportunity for us to put pressure on major sportswear manufacturers to actually pay the workers in developing countries who make shoes—who make sporting clothes—a decent wage and provide them with decent working conditions. A report being launched entitled Play Fair at the Olympics by the Clean Clothes Campaign Network, Oxfam and Global Unions goes right to the heart of the conditions in which workers are making these shoes and clothes. It urges a number of key things that people can do to support workers in their campaigns for decent pay and conditions.

Oxfam suggest that people write to sportswear companies demanding that they change their purchasing policies to ensure workers’ rights are protected. They suggest that consumers write to the Australian Olympic Committee and the International Olympic Committee asking that they only licence sportswear companies that respect workers rights. Oxfam also suggest that people get involved in helping to make the Lives of Sportswear Workers quilt that they are putting together and that they sign the Big Noise labour rights petition. People can find out more about these campaigns and also about a planned rally by looking on the Oxfam web site.

Looking at the report that Oxfam and the other organisations are putting out, it is very interesting to see that the report details the conditions that 186 workers from six different countries work in. The countries surveyed are Bulgaria, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Thailand and Turkey. The consistent pattern shows abysmally low wages, workers being forced to work excessively long hours, exploitative terms of employment, bullying, sexual harassment and physical and verbal abuse. The report also says that, given that the global market for sportswear goods was about $US58 billion in 2002 and the price of
running shoes, in particular, is actually falling as a unit price, what is happening is that the profits are increasing but the cost of producing the shoes is being squeezed when it comes to what the workers are being paid. A Honduran supplier of sportswear to global companies reported a fall of 23 per cent in the unit prices over three years—or what they were being paid for the goods that they manufactured; and that comes out of ordinary workers’ wages and conditions.

It is important to say that some companies do have codes of conduct that they present to the public; unfortunately, they do not often follow them. What they do is to farm out the work to factories overseas. They do not do any follow-up to see that their ethical statements are put into practice by the factories that they are contracting to do the work. The overtime that people are working can be up to 80 hours a month. That is not uncommon. The major corporations that are involved are corporations like ASICS, Kappa, Lotto, Fila, Mizuno, Puma and Umbro; but the problem is certainly not limited to those companies. They are some of the largest ones some of the ones most involved in this sort of super exploitation. (Time expired)

Roads: Queensland

Mr LINDSAY (Herbert) (9.25 p.m.)—If you want to get a North Queenslander going, there is just one word you have got to say in a conversation or a social gathering. That word is ‘roads’. It is a single word that unites archenemies in the north. It unites people from Mackay, Townsville, Cairns or Mt Isa. Just mention the words ‘roads’ and there is a unanimous view that the roads in the southeast of the state—or, indeed, in southern Australia—are so much better than what we have in the north that it is not funny. People think that in the north we talk about football, basketball or certain other things that I cannot mention in the parliament; but we do not. We talk about roads. The reason we talk about roads is that we have got the national highway right around Australia and right up the coast of Queensland all the way to Cairns, and do you know, Mr Speaker, that in the wet season you cannot travel along it. Why can’t you travel along it? It is flooded. How could we have a national lifeline in a situation where, in the wet season, it floods and stops the flow of goods and services along that major artery?

People in North Queensland are, quite rightly, very concerned about this. Enough of this talk of four-laning the national highway; let’s flood-proof the national highway first and foremost. After we flood-proof it, then we should be getting some passing lanes on the national highway. But at this stage we are not getting enough attention from the federal government in relation to road funding in the north, and we need to get that extra money spent to make sure that our lines of communication in the summer season, in the cyclone season, stay well and truly open. I can tell you, Mr Speaker, that I confidently speak for all of the people in North Queensland—to a person—that we want to see this happen and we want to make sure that our lines of communication stay open.

Closer to home, in Townsville, the current road project that is being proposed is the Townsville port access road. Brisbane got a road of national importance put through to its port; Gladstone got one; Cairns got one. Now it is Townsville’s turn. We need a road of national importance port access road established to open up significant new opportunities in the Stuart industrial area and to connect the port directly to this greenfield site. It is a proposal that has been around for a long time. Many of us will understand that the bureaucracy gets hold of these proposals and, if the bureaucracy does not think it is a good idea, then they do not have the propensity to move quickly.
About a year ago we finished an environmental impact study on this particular road corridor. It took only four years to do an EIS on a piece of road corridor that is perhaps four or five kilometres long. The reason it took that length of time is because the system wanted to slow it down. We have done the EIS; now it is time to get the corridor in place, it is time to do the detailed designs, it is time to get it up and going. But guess what? The bureaucracy has got to it again. The state government has now announced that it has applied to the federal government for funding as a road of national importance to do stage 1. Stage 1 is right at the other end of the project. Instead of actually building an access road to the port and building the bridge that is needed across the mouth of the Ross River, the state government has said: ‘We’ll build the other end. We’ll build the tail end.’

The state government is putting the cart before the horse. Unfortunately, the Labor Party are supporting that position too, with Martin Ferguson, the shadow minister, announcing today that they would fund the tail end. It is hopeless. To open up that area, you need a bridge across the river, you need a connection over to the Bruce Highway, and you need to get the port access road built—not a connection that is further back between the Bruce Highway and the Flinders Highway. I stand up for the constituents in my electorate. I want to see this project built. I want to see it built quickly, but I want to see it built in a way that opens up the port area immediately.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 9.30 p.m., the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 9.30 p.m.
QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The following answers to questions were circulated:

Strategic Investment Coordination Program
(Question No. 565 amended)

Dr Emerson asked the Prime Minister, upon notice, on 20 June 2002:

(1) What is the total value of incentives offered under the Strategic Investment Coordination Program to date.

(2) What projects have been offered assistance under the Program to date and what was the level and composition of each of the assistance packages.

(3) How many projects have been offered accelerated depreciation under the Program.

(4) Which projects have received assistance and what sum has each received.

(5) What is the total value of concessions offered under the Program for accelerated depreciation.

(6) Are there any projects that have received assistance under the Program of which the Strategic Investment Coordinator has recommended against supporting.

(7) What criteria are employed in assessing applications under the Program.

(8) How many applications have been rejected.

Mr Howard—On 27 August 2002 (Hansard, 27 August 2002, page 5896) in response to part (2) of question on notice number 565, I advised the House that as at 31 July 2002 benefits accrued to the Asia Pacific Space Centre totalled $1.497 million. This advice was based on information made available to me at the time. I have now been advised that upon reconciliation of expenditure against the Common Use Infrastructure projects which the Government is funding as part of the facilitation of the space centre, the Department of Transport and Regional Services has identified that the benefits accrued to the end of July 2002 as measured by invoices paid against the projects, totalled $1.680 million.

Australian Securities and Investments Commission
(Question No. 2515)

Mr Jenkins asked the Treasurer, upon notice, on 7 October 2003:

(1) When did the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) first become aware that Mr Francis James Muller, a US citizen, was operating Foreign Currency International in Bangkok, Thailand.

(2) When did ASIC first become aware of allegations against Mr Muller, and the Thai companies named Global Option Co. and Foreign Currency International, which are involved in foreign exchange speculation.

(3) What action did ASIC take to assist the Thai police in their prosecution of Mr Muller.

(4) What role did ASIC take in the Thai court case of Mr Muller.

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

(1) November 2000.

(2) ASIC became aware of allegations that Foreign Currency International and Global Option Co. were involved in the practice known as “cold-calling” in August 2000 and September 2001 respectively.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
(3) and (4) Mr. Muller recently faced trial for murder in Thailand, however the allegations were dismissed. ASIC had no role in that case.

Mr Muller is currently awaiting trial in Thailand on Foreign Exchange fraud charges in relation to the operations of Foreign Currency International and Global Option Co. ASIC has been in contact with the Thai Securities Exchange Commission but at this stage ASIC has not been requested to provide any assistance and to date has taken no formal role.

**Veterans: Gold Card**

(Question No. 2783)

Mr Price asked the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, upon notice, on 24 November 2003:

(1) For each year since the Gold Card was introduced for veterans of World War 2, what was the number of veterans with a Gold Card and what was the total cost.

(2) How many WW2 veterans of relevant age but not service are ineligible for the Gold Card.

Mrs Vale—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) Prior to 1996-97 when Gold Cards were introduced, the Personal Treatment Entitlement Card (PTEC) entitled the holder to the same benefits as the current Gold Card. Between 1997 and 1999 only the following veterans were entitled to a Gold Card:
   - World War 1 veterans;
   - prisoners of war;
   - female World War 2 veterans of 70 years of age or over and with qualifying service;
   - veterans in receipt of disability pension at 100% or more of the general rate;
   - veterans in receipt of 50% or more of the general rate plus any amount of service pension;
   - veterans in receipt of an age or invalidity service pension who satisfied the treatment income and assets reduction limit; and
   - veterans in receipt of an age and invalidity service pension and were permanently blind in both eyes.

On 1 January 1999, Gold Card eligibility was extended to all Australian veterans of World War 2 with qualifying service and who were 70 years of age or over.

The total number and cost of veterans from all conflicts, including World War 2, holding Gold Cards for the period 1996-97 to 2003-04 inclusive was:

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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numbers</td>
<td>161,040</td>
<td>156,821</td>
<td>188,556</td>
<td>180,618</td>
<td>174,853</td>
<td>169,865</td>
<td>164,991</td>
<td>160,532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>934.0</td>
<td>1035.0</td>
<td>1301.0</td>
<td>1372.7</td>
<td>1468.8</td>
<td>1588.2</td>
<td>1702.7</td>
<td>1886.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note “Numbers” are as at June for all financial years except 2003-04, which is as at December.

(2) Qualifying service is the principle criterion for eligibility for the Gold Card. As at November 2003, the number of World War 2 ex-service persons who do not have qualifying service is estimated to be 85,400. However, some of these will have a Gold Card because they are in receipt of disability pension at 100% or more of the general rate, or because they meet other eligibility criteria such as:
   - Receipt of a disability pension including an additional amount under section 27 of the VEA for specific service-related amputations or blindness in one eye; and
   - Receipt of a disability pension for pulmonary tuberculosis before 2 November 1978.
**Taxation: Income Tax**  
*(Question No. 2834)*

**Mr Murphy** asked the Treasurer, upon notice, on 3 December 2003:

Further to the answer to question No. 1641 (*Hansard*, 15 September 2003, page 19411), what is the (a) average gross income, and (b) average value of deductions for taxpayers in the Business Industry Code (i) 86110 which includes: eye hospitals, hospital operation - except psychiatric, dental or veterinary hospitals, maternity hospital operation, obstetric hospital operation, psychiatric hospital, convalescent homes, hospice operation, and nursing home operation, (ii) 86210 which includes: clinic - medical practice, general practice, flying doctor service, general practitioner - medical, and medical service, (iii) 86221 - anaesthetist, (iv) 86222 - consultant physician, (v) 86223 - dermatologist, (vi) 86224 - gynaecologist, (vii) 86225 - pathologist, (viii) 86226 - psychiatrist, (ix) 86227 which includes: radiologist and radiologist services, (x) 86228 which includes: allergist, medical service - specialist, neurologist, ophthalmologist, otorhinolaryngologist, paediatrician, plastic surgeon, rheumatologist, specialist medical practitioner, surgeon - medical, thoracic specialist and urologist, (xi) 86230 which includes: clinic - dental, dental hospital operation, dental surgeon, endodontist, oral pathologist, orthodontist, paedodontist, periodontist and prosthetist, (xii) 86231 which includes: contact lenses dispensing, eye testing - optometrist, optical dispensing, optician, orthoptist and spectacles dispensing, (xiii) 78420 which includes: accountant, accounting service, auditing service, bookkeeping service and tax agent, and (xiv) all business activities listed under code 86392.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Industry Code and Name</th>
<th>Average income* ($)</th>
<th>Average deductions** ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>86110 Hospitals</td>
<td>213,929</td>
<td>102,459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86210 General practice medical services</td>
<td>212,833</td>
<td>106,066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86221 Anaesthetist (own account)</td>
<td>329,695</td>
<td>83,497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86222 Specialist medical clinic operation</td>
<td>283,071</td>
<td>123,398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86223 Dermatologist (own account)</td>
<td>464,330</td>
<td>262,134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86224 Gynaecology/Obstetrician (own account)</td>
<td>424,009</td>
<td>201,810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86225 Pathologist (own account)</td>
<td>228,890</td>
<td>125,939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86226 Psychiatrist (own account)</td>
<td>155,501</td>
<td>60,357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86227 Radiologist (own account)</td>
<td>339,457</td>
<td>147,165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86228 Specialist medical services n.e.c</td>
<td>326,867</td>
<td>147,044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86230 Dental services</td>
<td>380,357</td>
<td>276,161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86320 Optometry and optical dispensing</td>
<td>178,398</td>
<td>120,519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78420 Accounting services</td>
<td>84,026</td>
<td>44,112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86392 Health services n.e.c</td>
<td>51,050</td>
<td>20,628</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on 2002 tax return data for the total population of individuals lodging income tax returns.  
As at 15 December 2003.

* Average income equals total income (including business income) divided by number of taxpayers in specific industry code.

** Average deductions equals total deductions (including business deductions) divided by number of taxpayers in specific industry code.

See earlier response to question 1641 for explanation of ‘own account’ and ‘n.e.c’ (not elsewhere classified).
Mr Danby asked the Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer, upon notice, on 10 February 2003:

(1) Is Mr Yousef Nada on (a) the United Nations (UN) list of suspected terrorists, and (b) the Australian list of people whose funds are required to be frozen and who is prohibited from entering Australia.

(2) Is the Minister able to provide details of Mr Yousef Nada’s business interests.

(3) Is the Minister able to say whether Mr Yousef Nada has received any money from (a) individuals, (b) corporations, or (c) charities in Australia; if so, (i) what are the details, and (ii) what action has the Government taken.

(4) Does Mr Yousef Nada, either directly or through his businesses, have any interests in Australia; if so, (a) what are the details, and (b) what action has the Government taken.

(5) Does Mr Yousef Nada, either directly or through his businesses, have any agents, contacts, connections or links to people or organisations in Australia; if so, (a) what are the details, and (b) what action has the Government taken.

Mr Costello—The Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

The same questions were asked of the Attorney-General and the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

With respect to question 1, I refer the honourable member to the Minister for Foreign Affairs’ response to question 1 of Question No. 2945.

With respect to questions 2 to 5, I refer the honourable member to the Attorney-General’s response to questions 2 to 5 of Question No. 2946.

Mr Danby asked the Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer, upon notice, on 10 February 2003:

(1) Is Mr Idris Nasreddin on (a) the United Nations (UN) list of suspected terrorists, and (b) the Australian list of people whose funds are required to be frozen and who is prohibited from entering Australia.

(2) Is the Minister able to provide details of Mr Idris Nasreddin’s business interests.

(3) Is the Minister able to say whether Mr Idris Nasreddin has received any money from (a) individuals, (b) corporations, or (c) charities in Australia; if so, (i) what are the details, and (ii) what action has the Government taken.

(4) Does Mr Idris Nasreddin, either directly or through his businesses, have any interests in Australia; if so, (a) what are the details, and (b) what action has the Government taken.

(5) Does Mr Idris Nasreddin, either directly or through his businesses, have any agents, contacts, connections or links to people or organisations in Australia; if so, (a) what are the details, and (b) what action has the Government taken.

Mr Costello—The Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

The same questions were asked of the Attorney-General and the Minister for Foreign Affairs.
With respect to question 1, I refer the honourable member to the Minister for Foreign Affairs’ response to question 1 of Question No. 2948.

With respect to questions 2 to 5, I refer the honourable member to the Attorney-General’s response to questions 2 to 5 of Question No. 2949.

**Health: Aged Care Assessment Team**  
(Question No. 2982)

Mr Kerr asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 10 February 2004:

1. What is the average waiting period for an appointment for an assessment by the Aged Care Assessment Team in Tasmania.
2. Are there differences in the waiting periods in different parts of Tasmania; if so, what are the details.
3. Is it the case that a person seeking an assessment by the Aged Care Assessment Team can expect to wait 10 to 12 weeks before the assessment takes place; if so, is that delay considered normal and acceptable.
4. Does the delay before the conduct of assessments potentially lead to the hospitalisation or other inappropriate placement of some aged persons who experience changes in their health while waiting for the assessment.
5. Is his department experiencing difficulties with the management and organisation of the Aged Care Assessment Teams in Tasmania; if so, what are the details.
6. Will he re-establish the Home and Community Care Advisory Committees under the Home and Community Care Scheme to restore client and community input to the scheme.

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

1. and 2. This information is not available.

The revised national Minimum Data Set for the Aged Care Assessment Program has only recently been introduced.

State and Territory Governments, who are responsible for the management and organisation of Aged Care Assessment Teams (ACATs), are responsible for collecting, analysing and reporting data on ACAT activity.

3. No. ACATs respond to referrals in a timely and efficient manner by allocating a priority category at the time of referral. The three priority categories are:

- Within 48 hours refers to a person who, based on the information available at referral, requires an immediate response ie within 48 hours. This would include circumstances where a person’s safety is at risk, or there is a high likelihood that the person will be hospitalised or required to leave their current residence.
- Between 3 and 14 days when information available at referral indicates that the person is not at immediate risk of harm. This would include progressive deterioration in the person’s physical, mental or functioning status, or that the level of care currently available does not meet their needs.
- More than 14 days when available information indicates that the person has sufficient support at present but that an assessment is required in anticipation of future care requirements. This could include approval for residential respite services or a recognition that a person is having increased difficulty in living independently and options for future care need to be discussed with the person and their carer or family.

4. No. The prioritising of referrals for ACAT assessments has been put in place to prevent this.
(5) No. The Tasmanian Government is responsible for the management and organisation of ACATs in Tasmania.

(6) State and Territory Governments are responsible for the day to day operations of the Home and Community Care (HACC) Program. The Tasmanian Government has chosen not to have a HACC Advisory Committee.

**Freedom of Information**  
(Question No. 3171)

Ms Roxon asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, upon notice, on 1 March 2004:

(1) Can the Minister indicate (a) whether the Minister’s department has a dedicated Freedom of Information (FOI) officer, and (b) how many officers are employed to deal with FOI requests, and (c) at what levels they are employed.

(2) How many applications did the department have under the FOI Act in the 2002-2003 Financial Year and how did this figure compare to previous years.

(3) How many internal reviews of applications occurred in the last financial year and how many reviews affirmed the original decision.

(4) Can the information in (2) and (3) be broken down into applications requesting individual information and applications requesting information for other reasons (i.e media, opposition MP’s etc.)

(5) What proportion of cases go to external review and what proportion of these are upheld.

(6) In respect of FOI applications, (a) how much was charged, (b) how much was actually collected, and (c) what proportion of fees were waived.

(7) How much did the Minister’s department spend in defending FOI appeals.

(8) In respect of refusals to grant requests, can the Minister provide details on (a) which exemption categories are used when information is refused, and (b) what proportion of refusals are in each category (i.e. commercial – in-confidence and other categories).

(9) Will the Minister provide statistics over the last 5 years indicating whether the use of particular exemption categories is static, falling or increasing.

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

(1) (a) Yes.

(b) The Department has one Freedom of Information (FOI) officer who spends 60% of their time on coordination of FOI matters. The FOI officer is assisted by another officer who spends approximately 20% of their time on FOI related matters.

(c) The levels of these two officers are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Officer</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FOI Officer</td>
<td>DPIE Band 3 Work Level 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td>DPIE Band 2 Work Level 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each FOI request received is assigned to a decision maker at the SES level. An officer within the range of DPIE Band 2 Work Level 6 and DPIE Band 3 Work Level 8 is also assigned to undertake discovery of documents and provide assistance to the decision maker.

(2) During the 2002-2003 financial year the Department received 29 requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (the Act). The number of requests received during the previous four financial years were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Requests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2001</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-1999</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
This information is provided in Appendix A of the FOI Annual Report 2002-03.

(3) During the 2002-03 financial year the Department received three requests for Internal Review. In all cases the decision reviewer provided access to further information originally withheld – likewise parts of the original decision were upheld.

This information is provided in Appendix E of the FOI Annual Report 2002-03.

(4) No requests for personal information were received during the 2002-03 financial year.

This information is provided in Appendix A of the FOI Annual Report 2002-03.

Applicants fell into the following categories:

- Lawyers/Solicitors: 10
- Individuals/other: 9
- Companies/Business: 6
- Journalists: 3
- Members/Senators: 1

(5) During the 2002-03 financial year, one case out of the 29 was referred to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT). An outcome in this case is pending.

This information is provided in Appendix F of the FOI Annual Report 2002-03.

(6) (a) Applicants were notified of charges totalling $27,162.

(b) $6,448 was collected. Pursuant to the Act, papers requested under FOI are not released until the final payment is received.

This information is provided in Appendix D of the FOI Annual Report 2002-03.

(c) Under the Act the Department is not required to keep or report on statistics relating to waiver of fees.

(7) The Department spent $76,019 defending FOI appeals during the 2002-2003 financial year.

This information is provided in Appendix L of the FOI Annual Report 2002-03.

(8) (a) During the 2002-03 financial year, access to information was refused under Section 24(A) of the Act — Requests may be refused if documents cannot be found or do not exist.

(b) All requests refused were under Section 24(A) of the Act.

The number of cases where access was refused is provided in Appendix B of the FOI Annual Report 2002-03.

(9) An answer to this question would involve a substantial diversion of resources.

Under the Act the Department is not required to keep or report on statistics relating to exemption categories used when granting or refusing access to documents.

The FOI Annual Report 2002-03 is available electronically on the web site of the Attorney General’s Department.

Medicare

Ms Vamvakinou asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 2 March 2004:

(1) What proportion of Medicare services by broad type of service were direct billed during (a) 2001-2002, and (b) 2002-2003 in (i) Victoria and (ii) the electoral division of Calwell.

(2) How many Medicare services were provided during (a) 2002-2003, and (b) 2003-2004 in (i) Victoria, (ii) the electoral division of Calwell, and the postcode area (iii) 3036, (iv) 3037, (v) 3038, (vi) 3043, (vii) 3046 (viii) 3047, (ix) 3048, (x) 3049, (xi) 3059, (xii) 3060, (xiii) 3061, (xiv) 3064, (xv) 3427, and (xvi) 3428.
(3) How many Medicare services were provided per capita during (a) 2002-2003, and (b) 2003-2004 in (i) Victoria, (ii) the electoral division of Calwell, and the postcode area (iii) 3036, (iv) 3037, (v) 3038, (vi) 3043, (vii) 3046 (viii) 3047, (ix) 3048, (x) 3049, (xi) 3059, (xii) 3060, (xiii) 3061, (xiv) 3064, (xv) 3427, and (xvi) 3428.

(4) What proportion of Medicare services were provided at or below the scheduled fee during (a) 2002-2003, and (b) 2003-2004 in (i) Victoria, (ii) the electoral division of Calwell, and the postcode area (iii) 3036, (iv) 3037, (v) 3038, (vi) 3043, (vii) 3046 (viii) 3047, (ix) 3048, (x) 3049, (xi) 3059, (xii) 3060, (xiii) 3061, (xiv) 3064, (xv) 3427, and (xvi) 3428.

(5) How many individuals held a Safety Net Concession Card in (a) 2002-2003, and (b) 2003-2004 in (i) Victoria, (ii) the electoral division of Calwell, and the postcode area (iii) 3036, (iv) 3037, (v) 3038, (vi) 3043, (vii) 3046 (viii) 3047, (ix) 3048, (x) 3049, (xi) 3059, (xii) 3060, (xiii) 3061, (xiv) 3064, (xv) 3427, and (xvi) 3428.

(6) How many families held a Safety Net Concession Card in (a) 2002-2003, and (b) 2003-2004 in (i) Victoria, (ii) the electoral division of Calwell, and the postcode area (iii) 3036, (iv) 3037, (v) 3038, (vi) 3043, (vii) 3046 (viii) 3047, (ix) 3048, (x) 3049, (xi) 3059, (xii) 3060, (xiii) 3061, (xiv) 3064, (xv) 3427, and (xvi) 3428.

(7) How many individuals reached the Medicare Safety Net Threshold during (a) 2002-2003, and (b) 2003-2004 in (i) Victoria, (ii) the electoral division of Calwell and the postcode area (iii) 3036, (iv) 3037, (v) 3038, (vi) 3043, (vii) 3046 (viii) 3047, (ix) 3048, (x) 3049, (xi) 3059, (xii) 3060, (xiii) 3061, (xiv) 3064, (xv) 3427, and (xvi) 3428.

(8) How many families reached the Medicare Safety Net Threshold during (a) 2002-2003, and (b) 2003-2004 in (i) Victoria, (ii) the electoral division of Calwell and the postcode area (iii) 3036, (iv) 3037, (v) 3038, (vi) 3043, (vii) 3046 (viii) 3047, (ix) 3048, (x) 3049, (xi) 3059, (xii) 3060, (xiii) 3061, (xiv) 3064, (xv) 3427, and (xvi) 3428.

(9) How many families registered for the Medicare Safety Net Threshold during (a) 2002, and (b) 2003 in (i) Victoria, (ii) the electoral division of Calwell and the postcode area (iii) 3036, (iv) 3037, (v) 3038, (vi) 3043, (vii) 3046 (viii) 3047, (ix) 3048, (x) 3049, (xi) 3059, (xii) 3060, (xiii) 3061, (xiv) 3064, (xv) 3427, and (xvi) 3428.

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

(1) The percentage of Medicare services, by broad type of service, that were bulk billed during (a) the calendar year 2002 and (b) the calendar year 2003 in (i) Victoria and (ii) the electoral division of Calwell, is as follows:

**Medicare: percentage of services bulk billed by broad type of service in Victoria and the electorate of Calwell**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad Type of Service</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>Calwell</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Referred Attendances</td>
<td>69.3%</td>
<td>64.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Primary Care</td>
<td>95.2%</td>
<td>95.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Non-Referred Attendees</td>
<td>83.0%</td>
<td>77.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist Attendances</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstetrics</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anaesthetics</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathology</td>
<td>80.9%</td>
<td>82.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic Imaging</td>
<td>58.7%</td>
<td>57.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optometry</td>
<td>95.7%</td>
<td>95.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mr Abbott—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
(2) The number of Medicare services provided during (a) the calendar year 2002 and (b) the calendar year 2003 in (i) Victoria, (ii) the electoral division of Calwell, and the postcode areas (iii) 3036, (iv) 3037, (v) 3038, (vi) 3043, (vii) 3046 (viii) 3047, (ix) 3048, (x) 3049, (xi) 3059, (xii) 3060, (xiii) 3061, (xiv) 3064, (xv) 3427 and (xvi) 3428, is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad Type of Service</th>
<th>Victoria 2002</th>
<th>Victoria 2003</th>
<th>Calwell 2002</th>
<th>Calwell 2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
<td>93.7%</td>
<td>91.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>66.9%</td>
<td>64.9%</td>
<td>87.3%</td>
<td>80.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(3) The number of Medicare services per capita, provided during (a) the calendar year 2002 and (b) the calendar year 2003 in (i) Victoria, (ii) the electoral division of Calwell, and the postcode areas (iii) 3036, (iv) 3037, (v) 3038, (vi) 3043, (vii) 3046 (viii) 3047, (ix) 3048, (x) 3049, (xi) 3059, (xii) 3060, (xiii) 3061, (xiv) 3064, (xv) 3427 and (xvi) 3428, is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calendar Year</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>Calwell</th>
<th>Selected Postcodes*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(4) The percentage of Medicare services provided at or below the Schedule fee, during (a) the calendar year 2002 and (b) the calendar year 2003 in (i) Victoria, (ii) the electoral division of Calwell, and the postcode areas (iii) 3036, (iv) 3037, (v) 3038, (vi) 3043, (vii) 3046 (viii) 3047, (ix) 3048, (x) 3049, (xi) 3059, (xii) 3060, (xiii) 3061, (xiv) 3064, (xv) 3427 and (xvi) 3428, is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calendar Year</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>Calwell</th>
<th>Selected Postcodes*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>74.7%</td>
<td>87.8%</td>
<td>89.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>71.8%</td>
<td>82.0%</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(5) The number of individuals that held a Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme Safety Net Concession Card, during (a) the calendar year 2002 and (b) the calendar year 2003 in (i) Victoria, (ii) the electoral division of Calwell, and the postcode areas (iii) 3036, (iv) 3037, (v) 3038, (vi) 3043, (vii) 3046 (viii) 3047, (ix) 3048, (x) 3049, (xi) 3059, (xii) 3060, (xiii) 3061, (xiv) 3064, (xv) 3427 and (xvi) 3428, is as follows:
PBS: individuals that held a safety net concession card in Victoria, THE electorate of Calwell and selected postcodes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calendar Year</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>Calwell</th>
<th>Selected Postcodes*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>132,434</td>
<td>1,992</td>
<td>3,108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>105,746</td>
<td>2,122</td>
<td>3,291</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Selected postcodes are: 3036, 3037, 3038, 3043, 3046, 3047, 3048, 3049, 3059, 3060, 3061, 3064, 3427 and 3428

(6) The number of families that held a Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme Safety Net Concession Card, during (a) the calendar year 2002 and (b) the calendar year 2003 in (i) Victoria, (ii) the electoral division of Calwell, and the postcode areas (iii) 3036, (iv) 3037, (v) 3038, (vi) 3043, (vii) 3046 (viii) 3047, (ix) 3048, (x) 3049, (xi) 3059, (xii) 3060, (xiii) 3061, (xiv) 3064, (xv) 3427 and (xvi) 3428, is as follows:

PBS: families that held a safety net concession card in Victoria, the electorate of Calwell and selected postcodes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calendar Year</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>Calwell</th>
<th>Selected Postcodes*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>238,452</td>
<td>3,637</td>
<td>5,499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>145,874</td>
<td>3,923</td>
<td>5,894</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Selected postcodes are: 3036, 3037, 3038, 3043, 3046, 3047, 3048, 3049, 3059, 3060, 3061, 3064, 3427 and 3428

(7) The number of individuals that reached the Medicare Safety Net Threshold, during (a) the calendar year 2002 and (b) the calendar year 2003 in (i) Victoria, (ii) the electoral division of Calwell, and the postcode areas (iii) 3036, (iv) 3037, (v) 3038, (vi) 3043, (vii) 3046 (viii) 3047, (ix) 3048, (x) 3049, (xi) 3059, (xii) 3060, (xiii) 3061, (xiv) 3064, (xv) 3427 and (xvi) 3428, is as follows:

Medicare: individuals that reached the safety net threshold in Victoria, the electorate of Calwell and selected postcodes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calendar Year</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>Calwell</th>
<th>Selected Postcodes*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>3,503</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2,936</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Selected postcodes are: 3036, 3037, 3038, 3043, 3046, 3047, 3048, 3049, 3059, 3060, 3061, 3064, 3427 and 3428

(8) The number of families that reached the Medicare Safety Net Threshold, during (a) the calendar year 2002 and (b) the calendar year 2003 in (i) Victoria, (ii) the electoral division of Calwell, and the postcode areas (iii) 3036, (iv) 3037, (v) 3038, (vi) 3043, (vii) 3046 (viii) 3047, (ix) 3048, (x) 3049, (xi) 3059, (xii) 3060, (xiii) 3061, (xiv) 3064, (xv) 3427 and (xvi) 3428, is as follows:

Medicare: families that reached the safety net threshold in Victoria, the electorate of Calwell and selected postcodes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calendar Year</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>Calwell</th>
<th>Selected Postcodes*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>6,607</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>5,979</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Selected postcodes are: 3036, 3037, 3038, 3043, 3046, 3047, 3048, 3049, 3059, 3060, 3061, 3064, 3427 and 3428

(9) The number of families registered for the Medicare Safety Net Threshold, during (a) the calendar year 2002 and (b) the calendar year 2003 in (i) Victoria, (ii) the electoral division of Calwell, and the postcode areas (iii) 3036, (iv) 3037, (v) 3038, (vi) 3043, (vii) 3046 (viii) 3047, (ix) 3048, (x) 3049, (xi) 3059, (xii) 3060, (xiii) 3061, (xiv) 3064, (xv) 3427 and (xvi) 3428, is as follows:
Medicare: number of families registered for the safety net threshold in Victoria, the electorate of Calwell and selected postcodes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calendar Year</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>Calwell</th>
<th>Selected Postcodes*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>387,705</td>
<td>8,589</td>
<td>11,670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>436,800</td>
<td>9,537</td>
<td>13,085</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Selected postcodes are: 3036, 3037, 3038, 3043, 3046, 3047, 3048, 3049, 3059, 3060, 3061, 3064, 3427 and 3428

Notes to the Statistics

Medicare statistics are not available at postcode level for confidentiality reasons.

The statistics compiled in response to Questions (1) to (4) relate to services that were rendered on a ‘fee-for-service’ basis and for which benefits were processed by the Health Insurance Commission in 12 months to December 2002 and December 2003 (year of processing). Excluded are details of services to public patients in hospital, to Department of Veterans’ Affairs patients and some compensation cases.

The statistics for Questions 1 to 4 were compiled from Medicare data by servicing provider postcode, while the statistics for Questions 5 to 9 were based on patient enrolment (mailing address) postcode. Where a postcode overlapped electoral boundaries, the statistics were allocated to electorate using a concordance file derived from Population Census data, showing the proportion of the population of each postal area, in each electorate.

The nominated selected postcodes do not coincide precisely with those postcodes/portions of postcodes which make up the electoral division of Calwell.

In relation to Questions (5) and (6), Safety Net Concession cards only apply to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

**Brisbane Electorate: Nursing Home Beds**

*(Question No. 3250)*

Mr Bevis asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 3 March 2004:

1. For each year since 1996, how many nursing home beds were (a) approved, and (b) actually available, in (i) the electoral division of Brisbane, and (ii) each postcode area in the electoral division of Brisbane.

2. What was the estimated unmet demand for nursing home beds in (a) the electoral division of Brisbane, and (b) each postcode area in the electoral division of Brisbane.

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

1. (a) (i) and (ii), (b) (i) and (ii) The Department of Health and Ageing does not use electorate or postcode information in planning aged care provision. The planning basis for the Australian Government funding of aged care is Aged Care Planning Regions. The electoral division of Brisbane is located partly within the Brisbane North Aged Care Planning Region and partly within the Brisbane South Aged Care Planning Region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aged Care Places as at:</th>
<th>High Care Residential Places:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brisbane North and Brisbane South Aged Care Planning Regions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 December 2003 a</td>
<td>4,727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 December 2002</td>
<td>4,744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 December 2001</td>
<td>4,667</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a. Includes the approval of an additional 34 places for the Brisbane North Planning Region and 29 places for the Brisbane South Planning Region, announced in February 2004.
Comparable information prior to 2001 is not available.

(2) (a) and (b) The Australian Government’s planning framework for aged care provides for 40 high care (nursing home) residential care places per 1,000 people aged 70 years or more. This ratio is met in both the Brisbane North and Brisbane South Aged Care Planning Regions.

**Office of National Assessments**

(Question No. 3318)

Mr Rudd asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs, upon notice, on 11 March 2004:

(1) In respect of the Office of National Assessments (ONA) assessment of 16 February 2002 referred to at paragraph 2.3 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(2) In respect of the ONA assessment of 1 March 2001 referred to at footnote 10 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(3) In respect of the ONA/Defence Intelligence Organisation (DIO) joint assessment of 19 July 2002 referred to at footnote 6 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(4) In respect of the DIO assessment of 2 August 2002 referred to at footnote 14 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.
(5) In respect of the ONA assessment of 6 September 2002 referred to at footnote 5 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(6) In respect of the ONA assessment of 12 September 2002 referred to at footnote 4 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(7) In respect of the ONA assessment of 13 September 2002 referred to at footnote 21 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(8) In respect of the DIO assessment of 19 September 2002 referred to at footnote 49 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(9) In respect of the ONA assessment of 20 September 2002 referred to at footnote 24 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which
speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(10) In respect of the DIO assessment of 25 September 2002 referred to at footnote 40 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(11) In respect of the ONA assessment of 10 October 2002 referred to at footnote 26 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(12) In respect of the DIO assessment of 10 October 2002 referred to at footnote 41 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(13) In respect of the ONA assessment of 1 November 2002 referred to at footnote 28 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(14) In respect of the DIO assessment of 14 November 2002 referred to at footnote 48 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy
advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(15) In respect of the ONA assessment of 27 November 2002 referred to at footnote 29 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(16) In respect of the ONA assessment of 12 December 2002 referred to at footnote 30 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(17) In respect of the ONA assessment of 19 December 2002 referred to at footnote 19 to Chapter 4 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(18) In respect of the DIO assessment of 31 December 2002 referred to at footnote 43 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(19) In respect of the ONA assessment of 17 January 2003 referred to at footnote 31 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office,
(d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(20) In respect of the ONA assessment of 24 January 2003 referred to at footnote 32 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(21) In respect of the ONA assessment of 30 January 2003 referred to at footnote 39 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(22) In respect of the ONA assessment of 31 January 2003 referred to at footnote 33 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(23) In respect of the ONA assessment of 6 February 2003 referred to at footnote 36 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(24) In respect of the ONA assessment of 18 February 2003 referred to at footnote 37 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(25) In respect of the DIO assessment of 24 February 2003 referred to at footnote 54 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(26) In respect of the DIO assessment of 10 March 2003 referred to at footnote 30 to Chapter 4 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(27) In respect of the ONA assessment of 11 March 2003 referred to at footnote 38 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

(28) In respect of the DIO assessment of 2 April 2003 referred to at footnote 52 to Chapter 2 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction, (a) was a copy of this assessment received by his department; if so, (i) when, and (ii) to which divisions and branches was the assessment sent or circulated, (b) was a copy of the assessment received by his office; if so, when, (c) was the assessment used in the framing of policy advice; if so, (i) what form did this advice take, and (ii) when was it conveyed to his office, (d) was the assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech, (e) was any policy advice based on this assessment used in the preparation of a ministerial speech; if so, (i) which speech (ii) when was it delivered, and (iii) if the speech was written in his office, was the final draft sent back to his department for clearance.

Mr Downer—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
(1)(a) to (28)(a)

(i) The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade received all the ONA and DIO reports which are the subject of this question, except for the DIO assessment of 24 February 2003 (Q. 25) which the Department has no record of receiving. The reports were received on, or within a few days of, the date of their issue.

With regard to (Q. 1), ONA has advised that the report referred to at paragraph 2.3 of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD Report on Intelligence on Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction was issued on 16 February 2000, not 16 February 2002.

(ii) I have been assured that all reports received by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade were appropriately distributed within the Department.

(1)(b) to (28)(b)

ONA and DIO assessments are delivered separately to the Minister’s Office by the agencies.

(1)(c) to (28)(c)

ONA and DIO assessments, and, to a lesser extent, material received from other intelligence agencies, are one of several sources of information taken into account in the policy formulation process. DFAT policy advice draws extensively on information from other sources, including diplomatic reporting and other information in the public domain.

(1)(d) to (28)(d) and (1)(e) to (28)(e)

I have delivered a number of speeches referring to Iraq. These are on the public record.

The preparation of ministerial speeches is, on most occasions, a collaborative effort between my Office and my Department. A range of policy advice was used in the preparation of the ministerial speeches. Where specific intelligence material was used, the details of particular references were cleared by the Australian Intelligence Community.

Health: Haemophilia

(Question No. 3339)

Mr Andren asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 22 March 2004:

(1) Is it the case that people with haemophilia, due to the nature of their required treatment, are amongst the first to be exposed to infection when viruses or other pathogens enter the blood supply and that many have died as a result of past blood-borne diseases.

(2) Is it the case that there remains a risk of blood-borne diseases entering the blood supply; if not, why not.

(3) Can he confirm that (a) most haemophilia sufferers still use plasma derived treatment products, and (b) the use of recombinant treatment products is safer and carries less risk of transmitting blood-borne diseases such as Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease; if not, why not.

(4) Is he aware that some haemophilia sufferers are limiting their use of plasma derived treatment products because of the disease risk, and are therefore suffering severe pain due to joint damage and arthritis.

(5) Can he explain why the implementation of recommendations in the report of the Government’s Factor VIII and Factor IX Working Party to adopt safer recombinant treatment products by 2004 was again deferred by state and federal health ministers in November 2003 and referred to another committee for further inquiry delaying the adoption of this recommendation for another three years.

(6) Will he support the immediate adoption of the recommendation to adopt recombinant treatment products; if not why not.
(7) Do all treatment products for haemophilia sufferers meet the benchmarks established by the
National Blood Authority; if not, why not.

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

(1) Yes. People with haemophilia, due to the nature of their required treatment, are amongst the first to
be exposed to infection when viruses or other pathogens enter the blood supply. It is not known
how many people with haemophilia have died as a result of past blood-borne diseases.

(2) Yes. There remains a risk that blood-borne diseases may enter the blood supply. This is
particularly true for diseases that have not yet been identified.

(3) (a) It is not known how many people with haemophilia still use plasma derived treatment products.
The National Blood Authority has advised that in 2003 – 04, approximately 58% of factor VIII
(clotting factor) used by haemophilia A patients is plasma derived.

(b) Recombinant treatment products are considered to have a lower risk of transmitting blood borne
diseases than plasma derived treatment products.

(4) No.

(5) No.

(6) No. There are already alternative treatments available for people with haemophilia, a considerable
number of whom already have access to recombinant Factor VIII and IX.

(7) Treatment products approved for marketing in Australia have been assessed for quality, efficacy
and safety by the Therapeutic Goods Administration. A small number of Australian patients may,
from time to time, use plasma or blood derived products under the Special Access Scheme
arrangements allowed for under the Therapeutic Goods Act 1989. These patients would be
expected to provide informed consent for treatment.

Employment: Job Network

(Question No. 3356)

Mr Albanese asked the Minister for Employment Services, upon notice, on 23 March
2004:

For the period 1 January 2004 to 29 February 2004 and for each Employment Service Area, how many
people of 16-24 years of age entered the Job Network as (a) Fully Job Network Eligible, and (b) Job
Search Support Only jobseekers.

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

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<th>Employment Service Area</th>
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QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
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<th>Potentially Eligible For</th>
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### Employment Service Area

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**Australian Fisheries Management Authority**

*(Question No. 3395)*

**Mr McClelland** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, upon notice, on 23 March 2004:

Has the Minister’s department developed a boarding guide or other manual to guide officers in respect of suspect illegal entry vessels; if so, what procedures and processes are set out in that guide or manual.

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

The Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) has developed guidelines Compliance Decision Guidelines for Commonwealth Fisheries Offences which provide guidance for fisheries officers conducting operations at sea. The Guidelines cover all domestic and foreign fishing offences in the Australian Fishing Zone (AFZ).

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**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**
The Guidelines outline the features of foreign fishing offences, possible responses to foreign fishing offences (including decision making and record keeping), actions available to fisheries officers (including verbal warnings, forfeiture of catch and fishing gear, apprehensions, forfeiture and prosecution processes and hot pursuits).

AFMA have also developed Notes for Guidance for Fisheries Officers Boarding FFVs Inside the AFZ HIMI Area with Support from Customs Vessels. These notes provide more detailed information on the steps involved in the apprehension process specifically in the remote waters surrounding Heard Island and McDonald Islands where apprehensions are likely to be more complex. The notes include a comprehensive appendix that contains information on relevant provisions of the Fisheries Management Act 1991 and the Crimes Act 1914.

Fisheries: Illegal Operators
(Question No. 3423)

Mr McClelland asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, upon notice, on 29 March 2004:
Has the Australian Fisheries Management Authority reported an increase in incidents of armed Indonesian fishermen refusing to stop and of making threats of violence; if so, when were the reports made and what action has been taken in response.

Mr Truss—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
The Australian Fisheries Management Authority has not reported an increase in incidents of armed Indonesian fishermen refusing to stop nor of threats of violence.

Education: Funding
(Question No. 3432)

Ms Burke asked the Minister for Education, Science and Training, upon notice, on 31 March 2004:
(1) For each scholastic year since 1994-1995. what was the total (a) sum of Commonwealth funding for, and (b) number of students enrolled at (i) Deakin University and (ii) Monash University.
(2) For each scholastic year since 1994-1995. how many (a) HECS-funded undergraduate places, and (b) full fee paying undergraduate places were there at (i) Deakin University and (ii) Monash University.
(3) For each scholastic year since 1994-1995. what was the (a) sum of Commonwealth funding for, and (b) total number of students enrolled at Universities in (i) Victoria (ii) NSW, (iii) South Australia, (iv) Queensland, (v) Tasmania (vi) Western Australia, (vii) the ACT, and (viii) the Northern Territory.
(4) For each scholastic year since 1994-1995. how many (a) HECS funded undergraduate places, and (b) full fee paying undergraduate places were there in (i) Victoria (ii) NSW, (iii) South Australia, (iv) Queensland, (v) Tasmania (vi) Western Australia, (vii) the ACT, and (viii) the Northern Territory.

Dr Nelson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
(1) (a) and (b) The Department of Education, Science and Training publishes total revenue received by universities from Commonwealth Government sources and this information has been provided in the table below.
Commonwealth revenue and the number of domestic students for Deakin University and Monash University

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<th>Year</th>
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<th>Deakin University</th>
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<td>All domestic students</td>
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Source for financial data: Selected Higher Education Finance Statistics

* This amount does not include revenue relating to the Higher Education Contribution Scheme

(2) (a) and (b) Domestic Undergraduate Student Load (EFTSL) for HECS liable and fee paying students enrolled in Award Courses

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<td>Full fee paying undergraduate EFTSL</td>
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(3) (a) Total Commonwealth revenue by State and Territory ($000s)*

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<th>QLD</th>
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<th>SA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>NT</th>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>1,278,325</td>
<td>999,550</td>
<td>702,779</td>
<td>370,630</td>
<td>356,329</td>
<td>105,158</td>
<td>41,687</td>
<td>295,102</td>
<td>41,276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1,275,886</td>
<td>1,028,813</td>
<td>713,188</td>
<td>351,111</td>
<td>361,391</td>
<td>108,622</td>
<td>44,400</td>
<td>294,602</td>
<td>40,872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1,336,181</td>
<td>1,087,026</td>
<td>742,186</td>
<td>408,575</td>
<td>382,729</td>
<td>112,678</td>
<td>44,032</td>
<td>313,075</td>
<td>43,729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>1,416,165</td>
<td>1,151,563</td>
<td>768,324</td>
<td>442,633</td>
<td>41,063</td>
<td>123,508</td>
<td>53,371</td>
<td>335,718</td>
<td>50,239</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source for financial data: Selected Higher Education Finance Statistics

* does not include revenue relating to the Higher Education Contribution Scheme
(3) (b) All Domestic Students (Undergraduate and Postgraduate) by State and Territory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>Multi-State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>167,068</td>
<td>150,358</td>
<td>91,646</td>
<td>50,871</td>
<td>42,625</td>
<td>11,214</td>
<td>4,258</td>
<td>18,612</td>
<td>8,289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>173,611</td>
<td>152,319</td>
<td>93,349</td>
<td>52,022</td>
<td>43,535</td>
<td>11,382</td>
<td>4,717</td>
<td>18,356</td>
<td>8,698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>180,797</td>
<td>158,271</td>
<td>99,733</td>
<td>53,733</td>
<td>45,032</td>
<td>11,679</td>
<td>4,850</td>
<td>18,392</td>
<td>8,418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>187,392</td>
<td>158,936</td>
<td>104,422</td>
<td>56,251</td>
<td>45,065</td>
<td>11,722</td>
<td>4,550</td>
<td>18,463</td>
<td>9,052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>191,100</td>
<td>158,233</td>
<td>106,522</td>
<td>56,251</td>
<td>45,065</td>
<td>11,415</td>
<td>4,512</td>
<td>18,346</td>
<td>9,961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>193,719</td>
<td>156,353</td>
<td>108,640</td>
<td>56,539</td>
<td>43,812</td>
<td>11,722</td>
<td>4,558</td>
<td>18,104</td>
<td>9,539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>194,334</td>
<td>154,320</td>
<td>110,200</td>
<td>55,591</td>
<td>42,583</td>
<td>11,479</td>
<td>4,321</td>
<td>17,509</td>
<td>9,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>223,652</td>
<td>171,730</td>
<td>131,219</td>
<td>63,913</td>
<td>45,946</td>
<td>13,437</td>
<td>5,812</td>
<td>18,957</td>
<td>10,309</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: In 2001 the scope for all enrolments was changed. Prior to 2001 the scope was all students enrolled at the March census date with load in semester one. From 2001 the scope is all students enrolled between September of the year prior to the reference year and August of the reference year.

(4) Domestic undergraduate student load for HECS liable and fee paying students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>NSW</th>
<th>VIC</th>
<th>QLD</th>
<th>WA</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>TAS</th>
<th>NT</th>
<th>ACT</th>
<th>Multi-State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994 HECS</td>
<td>102,048</td>
<td>93,332</td>
<td>57,838</td>
<td>31,225</td>
<td>27,499</td>
<td>7,768</td>
<td>2,221</td>
<td>11,507</td>
<td>5,091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 HECS</td>
<td>107,729</td>
<td>97,427</td>
<td>63,959</td>
<td>33,290</td>
<td>29,196</td>
<td>7,979</td>
<td>2,487</td>
<td>11,246</td>
<td>5,320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998 HECS</td>
<td>115,806</td>
<td>99,648</td>
<td>70,276</td>
<td>35,607</td>
<td>28,998</td>
<td>8,254</td>
<td>2,258</td>
<td>11,491</td>
<td>6,387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fee paying</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>603</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999 HECS</td>
<td>118,550</td>
<td>97,850</td>
<td>72,262</td>
<td>36,620</td>
<td>29,178</td>
<td>8,418</td>
<td>2,396</td>
<td>11,233</td>
<td>6,328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fee paying</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>1,270</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 HECS</td>
<td>119,006</td>
<td>95,679</td>
<td>74,202</td>
<td>36,775</td>
<td>28,586</td>
<td>8,184</td>
<td>2,447</td>
<td>10,587</td>
<td>6,112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fee paying</td>
<td>561</td>
<td>1,923</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001 HECS</td>
<td>123,377</td>
<td>95,948</td>
<td>78,203</td>
<td>38,121</td>
<td>29,179</td>
<td>8,268</td>
<td>2,357</td>
<td>10,472</td>
<td>5,993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fee paying</td>
<td>1,359</td>
<td>2,358</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002 HECS</td>
<td>126,675</td>
<td>97,426</td>
<td>81,227</td>
<td>39,608</td>
<td>30,295</td>
<td>8,625</td>
<td>2,542</td>
<td>11,103</td>
<td>6,442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fee paying</td>
<td>1,702</td>
<td>2,859</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>1,139</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: From 1998, universities were given authority to offer undergraduate fee paying places to students.

National Security: Terrorism

(Question No. 3447)

Mr Danby asked the Attorney-General, upon notice, on 1 April 2004:

(1) Further to the answer to question No. 2942 (Hansard, 30 March 2004, page 26470), is he aware of the United Nations (UN) Security Council resolutions 1363, 1390 and 1455 which require Australia to take actions against persons and organisations named as suspected terrorists and report back to the UN about the action taken and, in particular, the requirement that named individuals be prohibited from travel to Australia.

(2) Can he explain the procedure for communicating the names provided by the UN to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) for inclusion on that department’s Movement Alert List (MAL).

(3) Have the names on the UN list been supplied by ASIO to DIMIA for inclusion on the MAL where minimum data requirements (i.e. full name and year of birth) are met; if so, (a) when, and (b) how many individuals have been named; if not, why not.

(4) What reports on the inclusion of the names provided by the UN on the DIMIA MAL have been provided to the UN.
Can he confirm that Australia has stated in its report to the UN that “all names from the consolidated list that meet minimum data requirements have been included on the MAL”; if so, is he able to say why this information was not provided in answer to question No. 2942.

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

(1) Yes.

(2) As per question 2942, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) is the principal source of advice to DIMIA on the entry to Australia of people of security significance. This includes the entry by ASIO of names that ASIO assesses to be of security interest into DIMIA’s MAL database. These names are derived from a variety of sources, including the UN designated lists of terrorists.

(3) (a)-(b) See (2) above. Information about when and how many individuals have been named is not on the public record.


(5) Yes. Question 2942 did not ask for the information provided to the UN. There is no inconsistency between information given to the UN and the response to question 2942.

Health and Ageing: Domestic and Overseas Air Travel

(Question No. 3455)

Mr Quick asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, upon notice, on 1 April 2004:

(1) For the financial year (a) 2000/2001, and (b) 2002/2003, what sum was spent by the Minister’s department on domestic and overseas air travel.

(2) For the financial year (a) 2000/2001, and (b) 2002/2003, what proportion of domestic air travel by employees of the Minister’s department was provided by (i) Ansett, (ii) Qantas, (iii) Regional Express, and (iv) Virgin Blue.

(3) For the financial year (a) 2000/2001, and (b) 2002/2003, what was the actual expenditure by the Minister’s department on domestic air travel provided by (i) Ansett, (ii) Qantas, (iii) Regional Express, and (iv) Virgin Blue.

(4) For the financial year (a) 2000/2001, and (b) 2002/2003, what sum was spent by the Minister’s department on business class travel on (i) domestic routes, and (ii) overseas routes.

(5) For the financial year (a) 2000/2001, and (b) 2002/2003, what sum was spent by the Minister’s department on economy class travel on (i) domestic routes, and (ii) overseas routes.

(6) For the financial year (a) 2000/2001, and (b) 2002/2003, what proportion of the expenditure on air travel by the Minister’s department was on the domestic routes (i) Sydney to Canberra, (ii) Melbourne to Canberra, (iii) Sydney to Melbourne, (iv) Sydney to Brisbane, (v) Melbourne to Hobart or Launceston, and (vi) Sydney to Perth.

(7) For the financial year (a) 2000/2001, and (b) 2002/2003, how many employees of the Minister’s department had membership of the (i) Qantas Chairman’s Lounge, (ii) Qantas Club, (iii) Regional Express Membership Lounge, and (iv) Virgin Blue’s Blue Room paid for by the department.

(8) Which company provides travel management services to the Minister’s department.

Mr Abbott—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
Notes to the tables:
(i) CRS Australia has been included as part of the Department from 2002-03;
(ii) the data was not available and the Department is not able to provide this information due to the resource intensive nature of obtaining the information from the Department’s finance and travel system; airline not in operation; and excludes GST.

(1) (a) and (b)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Departmental Air Travel</th>
<th>2000/2001</th>
<th>2002/2003 (i) (iv)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$</td>
<td>$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>Not Available (ii)</td>
<td>8,965,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas</td>
<td>Not Available (ii)</td>
<td>1,034,031</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) (a) (i), (ii), (iii) & (iv) & (b) (i), (ii), (iii) & (iv) and (3) (a) (i), (ii), (iii) & (iv) & (b) (i), (ii), (iii) & (iv)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Airline</th>
<th>2000/2001</th>
<th>2002/2003 (i) (iv)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% and $</td>
<td>% and $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ansett</td>
<td>Not Available (ii)</td>
<td>Not Applicable (iii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qantas &amp; subsidiaries</td>
<td>Not Available (ii)</td>
<td>91.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Express</td>
<td>Not Available (ii)</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virgin Blue</td>
<td>Not Available (ii)</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Not Available (ii)</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Not Available (ii)</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(4) (a) (i) & (ii) & (b) (i) & (ii) and (5) (a) (i) & (ii) & (b) (i) & (ii)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Departmental Air Travel</th>
<th>2000/2001</th>
<th>2002/2003 (i) (iv)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business and $</td>
<td>Business and $</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$</td>
<td>$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>Not Available (ii)</td>
<td>2,032,181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas</td>
<td>Not Available (ii)</td>
<td>866,662</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(6) (a) (i), (ii), (iii), (iv), (v) & (vi) & (b) (i), (ii), (iii), (iv), (v) & (vi)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Departmental Air Travel</th>
<th>2000/2001</th>
<th>2002/2003 (i) (iv)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney to Canberra</td>
<td>Not Available (ii)</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne to Canberra</td>
<td>Not Available (ii)</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney to Melbourne</td>
<td>Not Available (ii)</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney to Brisbane</td>
<td>Not Available (ii)</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne to Hobart/Launceston</td>
<td>Not Available (ii)</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney to Perth</td>
<td>Not Available (ii)</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Not Available (ii)</td>
<td>54.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(7) (a) and (b) The following response is provided in relation to airline lounge membership:

(i) and (ii) The Department is unable to provide information about Qantas Lounge membership paid by the Department due to the resource intensive nature of obtaining the information from the Department’s finance and travel system. Qantas Airways is unable to provide lounge membership data.
information for a previous financial year, but has advised that access to the Qantas Chairman’s Lounge is by invitation only;
(iii) all Departmental travellers using Regional Express flights have access to the Regional Express Lounge for no membership cost; and
(iv) there was no lounge membership paid by the Department for Virgin Blue’s Blue Room for either 2000/2001 or 2002/2003.

(8) Qantas Business Travel provides travel management services to the Department, including CRS Australia. However, as a result of CRS Australia’s previous administrative arrangements in the Family and Community Services (FACS) portfolio, CRS Australia operates under the FACS Travel Consortium contractual arrangements while the rest of the Department is part of the ATO/Health Travel Consortium.

Foreign Affairs: Indonesia
(Question No. 3524)

Mr McClelland asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs, upon notice, on 11 May 2004:
(1) In respect of the Budget measures “Increasing counter-terrorism capability in Indonesia” disclosed in the 2002-2003 Mid-year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, what sum of additional funding has been spent during (a) 2002-2003 and (b) 2003-2004 on assisting Indonesia to build its counter-terrorism capability.
(2) In respect of each initiative (a) what are the details, (b) what is its purpose, and (c) how much has been provided.

Mr Downer—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
(1) On 25 October 2002, the Prime Minister announced the $10 million, 4-year, Counter Terrorism Capacity Building Initiative (CTCBI), to help build the capacity of Indonesian agencies with responsibility for countering terrorism. Under the initiative:
(a) $714,000 was spent in 2002-2003.
(b) it is estimated that around $1,216,000 will be spent in 2003-04.
(2) (a) The CTCBI has three broad priorities: counter-terrorism capacity building for the Indonesian Police Force; restricting the flow of financing to terrorists; and enhancing travel security. The particular initiatives being supported are:
   i) Trans-National Crime Centre Capacity Building Project ($4.75m - $3.5 AusAID, $1.25 AFP).
   ii) Anti-Money Laundering/Countering Financing of Terrorism ($3.5m).
   iii) Special Travel Security Fund ($3m)
(b) The purposes of the three initiatives listed above are as follows:
   i) Trans-National Crime Centre Capacity Building Project - a four-year program of counter-terrorism capacity building assistance to the Indonesian Police. Project activities include: crisis management training and intelligence officer and analyst training; institutional support for the establishment of a Trans-National Crime Centre; and development of a Criminal Information Management System for Indonesia.
   ii) Anti-Money Laundering/Countering Financing of Terrorism - building on previous assistance, Australia is supporting Indonesia’s efforts to strengthen its anti-money laundering regime. Initial support in 2002-2003 was provided in the areas of legislative drafting, the development of ‘Know Your Customer’ regulations and procedures, and processes associated with suspicious transaction reporting. Current support through Australia’s Financial
Intelligence Unit, AUSTRAC, is building the capacity of Indonesia’s Financial Intelligence Unit to implement the upgraded legislative/regulatory regime.

(iii) Special Travel Security Fund – This fund supports activities designed to enhance the capacity of the Indonesian institutions responsible for ensuring travel security. The following three Australian Government agencies have identified capacity building activities for funding:
- DIMIA – implementation of a Border Management and Alert Processing System for the Indonesian Directorate General of Immigration;
- Australian Customs Service – capacity building for the Indonesian Directorate of Customs and Excise in the areas relating to seaport security; and
- DOTARS – capacity building for Indonesian Department of Transport and Communication (Directorate-General of Air Communications) in areas relating to aviation security with a focus on passenger screening and airport security inspection.

(c) The following funds have been expended/committed to 30 June 2004 on these three initiatives:
(i) Trans-national Crime Centre Capacity Building Project - $753,000
(ii) Anti-money Laundering/Counter Financing of Terrorism - $993,000
(iii) Special Travel Security Fund - $184,000

Foreign Affairs: Philippines
(Question No. 3539)

Mr McClelland asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs, upon notice, on 11 May 2004:

(1) In respect of the Budget measures “Philippines - counter terrorism assistance” disclosed in the 2003-2004 Mid-year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, what sum of additional funding has been spent on counter terrorism assistance to The Philippines, during 2003-2004.

(2) In respect of each initiative (a) what are the details, (b) what is its purpose, and (c) how much has been provided.

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

(1) On 14 July 2003, the Prime Minister announced a three-year, $5 million counter-terrorism assistance package for the Philippines. An estimated $1.48 million will be spent in 2003-2004.

(2) (a) The package aims to build the capacity of key Philippines Government agencies with responsibility for countering terrorism, with a particular focus on law enforcement, border control, port security and regional cooperation. The four initiatives being supported are:

(i) Counter Terrorism Capacity Building Project – Law Enforcement: $3.7m ($3.2m AusAID, $0.5m Australian Federal Police) over 30 months.
(ii) Document Examination Laboratory Equipment and Training Project: $0.52m (AusAID $0.26m, Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs $0.26m) over three years.
(iii) Port Security Capacity Building Project: $1.3m over 18 months.
(iv) Regional Co-operation. $25,870 approved to date.

(b) The purpose of these four initiatives is as follows:

(i) Counter Terrorism Capacity Building Project – Law Enforcement: to improve the capability of the Philippines law enforcement community to address counter-terrorism issues collaboratively at both the strategic and operational levels. The project is working with three key agencies with responsibility for criminal intelligence: the Philippines National Police, the Philippines Centre on Trans-national Crime and the National Bureau of Investigation.
(ii) Document Examination Laboratory Equipment and Training Project: to help the Philippines enhance its border management. DIMIA is working with the Philippines Bureau of Immigration to build its capacity to deter irregular migration and people smuggling through better detection of fraudulent travel documents.

(iii) Port Security Capacity Building Project: to help the Philippines build a national framework for port security and develop and implement port security plans. The project aims to build the capacity of the coordinating body, the Office of Transport Security, as well as personnel at 20 international ports.

(iv) Regional Co-operation: to support security cooperation in the region encompassing southern Philippines, northern Indonesia and eastern Malaysia. To date meetings have been held bringing together customs, immigration, quarantine and security officials from Mindanao and their counterparts from nearby Indonesian and Malaysian ports.

(c) The following funds have been expended/committed to 30 June 2004 on these four initiatives:

(i) Counter Terrorism Capacity Building Project – Law Enforcement: $1,251,290.


(iii) Port Security Capacity Building Project: $116,000.

(iv) Regional Co-operation: $25,870.