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SITTING DAYS—2005

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- **ADELAIDE** 972 AM
- **PERTH** 585 AM
- **HOBART** 747 AM
- **NORTHERN TASMANIA** 92.5 FM
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FORTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FOURTH 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. David Peter Maxwell Hawker MP
Deputy Speaker—The Hon. Ian Raymond Causley MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Mr Henry Alfred Jenkins MP
Members of the Speaker’s Panel—The Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry Adams, Mr Robert Charles Baldwin, the Hon. Bronwyn Kathleen Bishop, Mr Michael John Hatton, Mr Peter John Lindsay, Mr Robert Francis McMullan, Mr Harry Vernon Quick, the Hon. Bruce Craig Scott, the Hon. Alexander Michael Somlyay, Mr Kim William Wilkie

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—Mr Anthony Norman Albanese 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 Kerry Joseph Bartlett MP
Government Whips—Mrs Joanna Gash MP and Mr Fergus Stewart McArthur MP

The Nationals
Leader—The Hon. Mark Anthony James Vaile MP
Deputy Leader—The Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP
Whip—Mr John Alexander Forrest MP
Assistant Whip—Mr Paul Christopher Neville MP

Australian Labor Party
Leader—The Hon. Kim Christian Beazley MP
Deputy Leader—Ms Jennifer Louise Macklin MP
Chief Opposition Whip—The Hon. Leo Roger Spurway Price MP
Opposition Whips—Mr Michael David Danby MP and Ms Jill Griffiths Hall MP

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

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**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 Trade and Deputy Prime Minister
The Hon. Mark Anthony James Vaile MP

Treasurer
The Hon. Peter Howard Costello MP

Minister for Transport and Regional Services
The Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP

Minister for Defence and Leader of the Government in the Senate
Senator the Hon. Robert Murray Hill

Minister for Foreign Affairs
The Hon. Alexander John Gosse Downer MP

Minister for Health and Ageing and Leader of the House
The Hon. Anthony John Abbott MP

Attorney-General
The Hon. Philip Maxwell Ruddock MP

Minister for Finance and Administration, Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate and Vice-President of the Executive Council
Senator the Hon. Nicholas Hugh Minchin

Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Deputy Leader of the House
The Hon. Peter John McGauran MP

Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs
Senator the Hon. Amanda Eloise Vanstone

Minister for Education, Science and Training
The Hon. Dr Brendan John Nelson MP

Minister for Family and Community Services and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women’s Issues
Senator the Hon. Kay Christine Lesley Patterson

Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources
The Hon. Ian Elgin Macfarlane MP

Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service
The Hon. Kevin James Andrews MP

Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
Senator the Hon. Helen Lloyd Coonan

Minister for the Environment and Heritage
Senator the Hon. Ian Gordon Campbell

(The above ministers constitute the cabinet)
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<td>The Hon. De-Anne Margaret Kelly MP</td>
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<td>The Hon. Sussan Penelope Ley MP</td>
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SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition                          The Hon. Kim Christian Beazley MP
Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow      Jennifer Louise Macklin MP
   Minister for Education, Training, Science and
   Research
Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, Shadow  Senator Christopher Vaughan Evans
   Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Shadow
   Minister for Family and Community Services
Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate   Senator Stephen Michael Conroy
   and Shadow Minister for Communications and
   Information Technology
Shadow Minister for Health and Manager of Oppo-  Julia Eileen Gillard MP
   sition Business in the House
Shadow Treasurer                                  Wayne Maxwell Swan MP
Shadow Attorney-General                           Nicola Louise Roxon MP
Shadow Minister for Industry, Infrastructure    Stephen Francis Smith MP
   and Industrial Relations
Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade   Kevin Michael Rudd MP
   and Shadow Minister for International Security
Shadow Minister for Defence                      Robert Bruce McClelland MP
Shadow Minister for Regional Development         The Hon. Simon Findlay Crean MP
Shadow Minister for Primary Industries, Re-      Martin John Ferguson MP
   sources, Forestry and Tourism
Shadow Minister for Environment and Heritage,    Anthony Norman Albanese MP
   Shadow Minister for Water and Deputy Manager
   of Opposition Business in the House
Shadow Minister for Housing, Shadow Minister     Senator Kim John Carr
   for Urban Development and Shadow Minister
   for Local Government and Territories
Shadow Minister for Public Accountability and    Kelvin John Thomson MP
   Shadow Minister for Human Services
Shadow Minister for Finance                      Lindsay James Tanner MP
Shadow Minister for Superannuation and Inter-    Senator the Hon. Nicholas John Sherry
   generational Finance and Shadow Minister for
   Banking and Financial Services
Shadow Minister for Child Care, Shadow Minister  Tanya Joan Plibersek MP
   for Youth and Shadow Minister for Women
Shadow Minister for Employment and Workforce      Senator Penelope Ying Yen Wong
   Participation and Shadow Minister for Corporate
   Governance and Responsibility

(The above are shadow cabinet ministers)
SHADOW MINISTRY—continued

Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs and
Shadow Minister for Population Health and
Health Regulation
Laurie Donald Thomas Ferguson MP

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

Shadow Assistant Treasurer, Shadow Minister for
Revenue and Shadow Minister for Small Business
and Competition
Joel Andrew Fitzgibbon MP

Shadow Minister for Transport
Senator Kerry Williams Kelso O’Brien

Shadow Minister for Sport and Recreation
Senator Kate Alexandra Lundy

Shadow Minister for Homeland Security and
Shadow Minister for Aviation and Transport Security
The Hon. Archibald Ronald Bevis MP

Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs and
Shadow Special Minister of State
Alan Peter Griffin MP

Shadow Minister for Defence Industry, Procurement
and Personnel
Senator Thomas Mark Bishop

Shadow Minister for Immigration
Anthony Stephen Burke MP

Shadow Minister for Aged Care, Disabilities and
Carers
Senator Jan Elizabeth McLucas

Shadow Minister for Justice and Customs and
Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate
Senator Joseph William Ludwig

Shadow Minister for Overseas Aid and Pacific
Island Affairs
Robert Charles Grant Sercombe MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Reconciliation
and the Arts
Peter Robert Garrett MP

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

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence and
Veterans’ Affairs
The Hon. Graham John Edwards MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Education
Kirsten Fiona Livermore MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Environment
and Heritage
Jennie George MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Industry,
Infrastructure and Industrial Relations
Bernard Fernando Ripoll MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration
Ann Kathleen Corcoran MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Treasury
Catherine Fiona King MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Science and
Water
Senator Ursula Mary Stephens

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern
Australia and Indigenous Affairs
The Hon. Warren Edward Snowdon MP
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The SPEAKER (Hon. David Hawker) took the chair at 12.30 pm, and read prayers.

COMMITTEES
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
Report
Mr BAIRD (Cook) (12.31 pm)—On behalf of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, I present the committee’s report entitled Australia’s human rights dialogue process, and I ask leave of the House to present the committee’s report entitled Reform of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.
Leave granted.
Ordered that the reports be made parliamentary papers.

Mr BAIRD—On behalf of the Human Rights Subcommittee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, I wish to make some brief comments on the committee’s two reports Australia’s human rights dialogue process and Reform of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. In 1997, the Australian government initiated a high-level bilateral dialogue on human rights with China. Similar formal talks commenced with Vietnam and Iran in 2002. The aim of the dialogues is to hold frank and constructive discussions to demonstrate the commitment of both countries to the talks and the overall strengths of their bilateral ties with Australia. Since 1997 there have been nine rounds of talks between Australia and China, three between Australia and Vietnam and one between Australia and Iran. In March 2005, an inquiry was established to review Australia’s human rights dialogue process to date.

The committee examined five areas: parliamentary participation and oversight, involvement of non-government organisations, the role and obligations of participating agencies, reporting requirements and mechanisms, and the monitoring and evaluation of outcomes. While the committee received the bulk of its evidence on the Australia-China dialogue—the more established of the three dialogues—the focus of the inquiry was on the process rather than specific dialogues. It is, however, worth noting the evolving developments of the Australia-China dialogue because they illustrate the potential of the dialogues for bilateral engagement on human rights concerns.

The committee was pleased to hear from the Australian government and NGOs alike that the Australia-China dialogue is characterised by an increasing degree of openness and trust. Over the years, the delegations from China and Australia have expanded to include representatives from a number of different agencies, and discussions take place on a widening range of human rights concerns. In recent years, the Australian delegation has been invited to visit provinces outside Beijing, and Tibet. In 2004, for the first time, Australian NGO representatives were able to meet with Chinese government officials in advance of the official talks to discuss human rights concerns. That meeting went well and, subsequently, the Chinese government invited the NGOs to attend future dialogue sessions in China.

The committee also acknowledges the important complementary role of the technical cooperation activities associated with the dialogues. The Australia-China Human Rights Technical Cooperation Program makes a practical contribution to improving human rights through capacity building and institutional strengthening activities, with a focus on legal reform, women’s and children’s rights, and ethnic and minority rights. At this stage, the Vietnam and Iran dialogues do not have a similar dedicated program.
However, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission has sponsored study tours to familiarise delegates from those countries with Australia’s institutional structure for the promotion and protection of human rights and has helped partner countries to identify areas in which Australian expertise might usefully contribute to their priorities for promoting and protecting human rights.

Although the committee notes the achievements of Australia’s bilateral human rights dialogues, it is of the view that there is scope for improving the transparency and accountability of the process as a whole. To that purpose, the committee has made five recommendations in its report which will build on and enhance the existing level of parliamentary participation and oversight, involvement of NGOs, and reporting requirements and mechanisms.

I will now turn to the committee’s most recent inquiry, which was into reform of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. On Wednesday, more than 170 heads of state and government, including the Prime Minister, will attend the 2005 world summit at the United Nations headquarters in New York. At the three-day gathering, world leaders will review progress made since the Millennium Declaration was adopted by member states in 2000. The agenda will be based on the UN Secretary-General’s report In larger freedom, which contains a range of recommendations for strengthening the three pillars of the UN: development, security and human rights. One of the more significant proposals is to replace the Commission on Human Rights with a Human Rights Council. The committee was pleased with the level of interest that the inquiry generated. Many witnesses commented on how important it was for these topics to be debated in parliament, and they appreciated the opportunity to address them in this roundtable format.

At this stage, it is difficult for the committee to comment on the suitability of the Human Rights Council proposal. Details remain vague for the implementation of the proposal and views are varied. Nonetheless, the committee will follow the outcomes of the September summit with interest. Irrespective of whether member states adopt the Human Rights Council proposal at the summit, the committee wishes to see this important human rights body continue to function in a strengthened rather than weakened form. In closing, I am grateful to all those who gave evidence to the inquiries. I also wish to thank my colleagues and the secretariat. I commend the reports to the House.

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (12.36 pm)—As Deputy Chair of the Human Rights Subcommittee, I would like to join my colleague the member for Cook in speaking to these two reports today. Firstly, the inquiry into Australia’s human rights dialogue process has highlighted the importance of dialogue as an instrument in promoting human rights. I and members of the opposition support all five recommendations in that report, as these recommendations serve to strengthen and improve the current nature and manner of our dialogue’s operations. In particular, recommendations 1 and 2, which call to encouraging dialogue partners to include parliamentary representatives in dialogue, are positive initiatives as all members of the committee believe that making parliamentary participation inclusive will enhance the effectiveness and status of these dialogues.
Our human rights diplomacy is intended to make practical improvements to human rights situations by pursuing a non-confrontational, cooperative dialogue. Currently, as the member for Cook has said, we are engaged in a dedicated human rights dialogue with China, Vietnam and Iran, and through these dialogues we can raise, and we seek to raise, with each other issues and concerns in a frank and open manner.

I want to speak in particular about our dialogue with Iran, as Australia is one of the few countries to have a dedicated bilateral dialogue on human rights with Iran, which was instigated by former Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer in 1999. The first and, to date, only talks were held in Tehran in December 2002. Since then Australia has funded a visit to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission by a delegation from the Islamic Human Rights Commission of Iran, and AusAID has funded human rights assistance to Iran via the Human Rights Small Grants Scheme, including over $48,000 for projects to assist women and children, which is particularly important given that 70 per cent of Iran’s population is under the age of 25. I am particularly keen to support and encourage our future dialogue efforts with Iran by developing a reciprocal visit to the 2002 dialogue, especially given the international community’s increasing need to monitor the activities of states who are developing nuclear energy programs—as Iran is in this case—and also because of the role that we have taken in Iraq, the overall international war on terror and the importance of stability and democracy in the Middle East.

Turning to the report Reform of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, I would like to say that in this the 60th year of the UN there have been a series of reform proposals around a number of aspects of UN activity, and in particular a new focus is sought with new structures to make the commission more efficient and accountable and to have greater support from the more powerful members of the world community. Despite its inadequacies, the UNCHR is a vital international body and I and many others could not imagine a situation where the world community would abandon it. This report looks at reform options for the UNCHR by exploring some of its shortcomings, such as the issue of block voting, the obstruction by the more powerful countries in preventing discussion of serious human rights violations, the inability to implement findings from investigations of human rights abuses around the world, as well as insufficient personnel and financial support for the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Having secured the presidency of the Commission on Human Rights in 2004, Australia was able to make some observations about the workings of the commission, so our committee’s decision to conduct an inquiry into reform of the commission was timely given this week’s Summit of Heads of State and Government taking place at the United Nations in New York. As the member for Cook rightly said, our report concluded, after the roundtable meeting on 12 August, that we should adopt a wait-and-see approach and seek a briefing on the outcomes of the UN September summit before forming a view on the proposal by the Secretary-General of the UN to replace the commission with a Human Rights Council.

I can report that the opposition shadow minister for foreign affairs will be arguing the case for the establishment of a council during this week’s summit deliberations in New York. We are moving into a global situation where we should be less tolerant of countries who do not implement their human rights obligations and who ignore UN resolutions on human rights abuses, and I agree
that we need to find an alternative and more effective structure and forum for addressing this vital function of UN activity. I recommend the report to the House and I certainly recommend that all colleagues and members who are interested in human rights in the commission and the work of the UN avail themselves of the report and its recommendations.

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

Mr BAIRD (Cook) (12.42 pm)—I move:
That the House take note of each report.

The SPEAKER—in accordance with standing order 39, the debates are adjourned. The resumption of the debates will be made orders of the day for the next sitting.

Environment and Heritage Committee Report

Dr WASHER (Moore) (12.42 pm)—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage, I present the committee’s report entitled Sustainable cities, together with the minutes of proceedings and evidence received by the committee.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

Dr WASHER—This report is entitled Sustainable cities. It tackles one of the most important and challenging issues that is facing us today: how to create and maintain Australian cities that are sustainable and remain so into the future. As one of the most urbanised countries in the world—with water shortages, high energy demands, sprawling development and transport congestion—Australia faces critical challenges. It is time for national leadership on sustainability. What does sustainability mean? This committee has come to the conclusion that there is no all-encompassing definition of sustainability; so we prefer to speak of a ‘vision for sustainability’. Sustainable cities are cities that are economically productive, environmentally responsible and socially inclusive. Sustainable cities are vibrant and healthy communities, where Australians can live productive lives while ensuring that their cities develop in ways that make them liveable into the future.

This inquiry was commenced in the last parliament under the chairmanship of the Hon. Bruce Billson. The committee of this parliament appreciates the substantial work undertaken by its predecessor. This committee felt so strongly about the significance of the topic that it asked to have the inquiry re-referred. We are glad we have done so for many reasons. The first reason is that, through the evidence we have gathered, we have found that much is being done by organisations, state, territory and local governments and individuals to improve the sustainability of our cities. This has been heartening. But the second reason is that we have had overwhelming evidence that, while much is being done, what is missing is concerted and coordinated action at the national level.

We are glad to have been given the opportunity to make a number of recommendations that we believe are critical for Australia on the path of sustainability. Mr Speaker, you will see that the report is divided into a number of chapters focusing on issues such as water, energy, building design and transport. The committee makes a number of recommendations that are aimed at alleviating some of the problems our major cities are facing in these areas today and that set a direction for future urban development.

We must be more efficient and effective with our water and energy consumption, and we must embrace other transport options. We
must be more creative and forward looking when we build our communities. We must research better ways and be prepared to evaluate our performance. But, most of all, the committee found that there is a need for an overarching framework that provides for coordinated action.

Organisations and individuals who have given evidence to the committee have stressed the importance of a framework that can provide integration and cooperation amongst the different levels of government and can involve the broader community. It is time for national leadership on sustainability. Accordingly, one of the most important recommendations that this committee has made is the establishment of an Australian sustainability charter which sets national targets across a number of areas, including water, transport, energy, building design and planning. It is envisaged that COAG would sign up to the charter and its targets.

A new, independent Australian Sustainability Commission would monitor the extent to which Commonwealth funds promote the agreed sustainability targets. The commission would also monitor the extent to which state and territory use of Commonwealth funds promotes the agreed targets. The committee has used the National Competition Council as its model for the Australian Sustainability Commission. The committee envisages that, similar to the operation of the National Competition Council, the Sustainability Commission would explore the concept of incentive payments to the states and territories for sustainability outcomes.

This committee is of the strong view that it is only through coordinated action at the national level that Australia can move towards creating sustainable cities into the future. I would like to thank all those who have made submissions and given evidence to the committee, and acknowledge the excellent effort of all committee members and our secretariat in the formulation and the completion of the report. I commend the report Sustainable cities to the House.

Ms GEORGE (Throsby) (12.47 pm)—As Deputy Chair of the Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage, I am pleased, in the short time available to me in this debate, to add some comments to those just made by the chair, the member for Moore, on the tabling of a very significant report into the issue of sustainable cities. The report is very important because I think Australians across the length and breadth of the country know that the health of our cities is in serious decline. They know there is something wrong when they are faced with water shortages, power blackouts, dying rivers, lack of public transport, transport congestion and crumbling infrastructure.

The most recent State of the environment report shows Australians to be high resource users and waste generators and, in some instances, the world’s worst. For example, our greenhouse gas emissions on a per capita basis are the world’s worst, as is our rate of water consumption. All the environmental statistics paint a bleak picture of the effects of unsustainable practices of the past.

With an increasing concentration of Australia’s population in urban and coastal areas, the case for action on sustainable cities becomes even more urgent. This government needs to engage, provide leadership and recognise it has a central role to play. It certainly has not done so until now. Failures in this regard were noted by so many submissions to the inquiry. We urgently need a new national focus on the health of our cities.

The committee believes that sustainability is as much an economic and social challenge as it is an environmental one. We have recommended, as the chair has announced, a new governance structure to drive the sus-
tainability agenda. We have recommended the creation of an independent Australian Sustainability Commission which will monitor the extent to which all levels of government adhere to and promote COAG agreed sustainability targets. We see these targets as being set across a number of key areas, including water, transport and energy. We believe very strongly that sustainability can be a key driver of future productivity and economic growth.

We have made 32 recommendations in a number of key areas and a number of these recommendations, I dare say, will be controversial as well as innovative. For example, we have asked that there be a review of the FBT concessions for car use and more funds for light and heavy rail. We have asked that the first home owner grant be increased to $10,000 for homes that meet stringent sustainability criteria and we argue for a national five-star rating for homes. We have asked that the National Water Commission prepare an independent report on water options for cities and regional centres.

In the time remaining, I want to thank the many organisations and individuals who contributed to the report, my fellow committee members, the chair and the admin staff for their efforts in bringing this much-needed and vital report to the attention of the parliament and the Australian community. I trust time will be allocated in the Main Committee for further detailed consideration of this report and its recommendations.

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

Dr WASHER (Moore) (12.50 pm)—I move:

That the House take note of the report.

The SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 39, the debate is adjourned. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Treaties Committee Report

Mrs MAY (McPherson) (12.51 pm)—On behalf of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, I present the committee’s report No. 67, entitled Treaties tabled on 21 June 2005, on an agreement on social security between the government of Australia and the government of Ireland, Dublin, 9 June 2005, and an exchange of notes constituting an agreement between the government of Australia and the government of the United States of America to amend and extend the agreement concerning the conduct of scientific balloon flights for civil research purposes, together with the minutes of proceedings and evidence received by the committee.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

Mrs MAY—Report 67 contains the findings and recommendations of the committee’s review of two treaty actions tabled in parliament on 21 June 2005. The proposed treaty actions relate to social security benefits between Australia and Ireland and to cooperation on scientific balloon flights with the United States. I will comment on both treaties.

The committee examined an agreement on social security between the government of Australia and the government of Ireland which provides access to certain Australian and Irish social security benefits. The agreement is part of a network of bilateral social security agreements that Australia has with other countries. The agreement makes the following changes to the existing agreement. The disability support pension, DSP, is restricted to people who are considered to be
severely disabled or people assessed as having no capacity to work or no prospects for rehabilitation within two years of being granted a DSP. The rate of benefit will remain the same for the first 26 weeks for temporary visitors to Australia. When a person departs Australia on a temporary basis the rate of benefit will remain the same for the first 26 weeks of their absence.

Double coverage provisions have been included to ensure that employers in both countries do not make two superannuation contributions for an employee working in either country temporarily. The agreement provides for shared responsibility in the provision of benefits between the parties and also allows people to lodge claims from either Australia or Ireland. The agreement will overcome restrictions on portability of payments between Australia and Ireland and provide for mutual administrative assistance to determine entitlements for recipients. The agreement also allows for the recognition of periods of working life residence in both countries in determining a claimant’s benefits. The changes bring the agreement into line with Australia’s other revised bilateral social security agreements, and are intended to reduce the incidence of overpayments to pensioners who undertake temporary visits between Australia and Ireland.

The committee was informed that the Australian government is currently negotiating a number of bilateral social security agreements with other countries, including Norway, Switzerland, Japan and Korea. Preliminary discussions have also occurred or are taking place with Greece, Hungary, Latvia and Sweden.

The second treaty examined by the committee will allow for the continued cooperation between Australia and the United States of America on scientific balloon flights. Since the expiration of the previous agreement in 2002, balloon flights have continued under a non- legally-binding arrangement between the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, CSIRO, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, NASA. Over 100 flights have been conducted from the Alice Springs balloon launching station. The fruits of the collaboration feature significant scientific findings over the last 10 to 15 years, such as the discovery of the first gamma ray emission from a spinning neutron star; the discovery of a gamma ray annihilation line from a black hole at the galactic centre; observations of 1987A, a supernova star that exploded in 1987, which have not been repeated since; and high resolution images of the centre of our galaxy. This agreement will enable Australia to continue to contribute to international research in astronomy, with increased potential for further significant scientific discoveries from its vantage point for viewing the Milky Way.

In conclusion, the committee believes it is in Australia’s interest for the treaties considered in report 67 to be ratified. I commend the report to the House.

Mr WILKIE (Swan) (12.55 pm)—I would also like to make some comments on the report 67 treaties tabled on 21 June. The Joint Standing Committee on Treaties report 67 contains a review of two treaties. These include a treaty relating to a revised social security agreement between Australia and Ireland, and an agreement relating to the conduct of scientific balloon flights for civil research purposes between Australia and the United States of America.

The social security agreement with Ireland is the last social security agreement to be revised to include changes to the disability support pension and double coverage provisions for superannuation purposes. Notably, the agreement shares administrative respon-
sibility and allows for the portability of payments and the recognition of length of working life residence in both countries. Interestingly, the committee found that Australia has not had a social security agreement in place with the United Kingdom since the previous agreement was terminated in 2001. The committee found that this is because the UK is unwilling to negotiate an agreement that includes indexed UK pensions to Australia, and that is something that we obviously need to address.

The balloon flights for civil research purposes agreement relates to balloon flights for civil research purposes in collaboration with the United States of America, and it provides a number of substantial benefits for Australia, as already outlined by the chair of the committee—namely, the treaty allows Australia to collaborate with the US and thereby share the costs, resources and risks associated with conducting scientific astronomy research through balloon flights while providing Australia with a competitive advantage in emerging technologies and space research.

The committee heard evidence that Australia’s location and political stability make it a desirable location for major ground infrastructure, which has led to Australia being host to major ground station facilities which support many space endeavours, including deep space exploration, manned space programs and from earth observation to telecommunications. The treaty will continue to facilitate Australia’s access to the benefits of space related research and will provide an estimated $5 million in revenue from each balloon campaign. Obviously, much of this money is spent in the Northern Territory, in the electorate of my colleague the member for Lingiari, and I am sure he is very happy to have the money spent in that way.

As a matter of interest, the committee was informed that a balloon made of a material similar to the texture of thin plastic film rises to an altitude 40 kilometres above the earth’s surface and, once fully inflated, can reach the size of the Melbourne Cricket Ground. The committee heard evidence that if only we could harness the energy from the other place here we could use hot air instead of helium to fill the balloon and thus rely on some renewable type energy!

Although not able to achieve a similar height, an aircraft may also be used to monitor or chase a balloon once it is in flight. Usually the aircraft is fitted out with radio equipment to enable command signals to be sent to the balloon and for limited data to be received from experiments being conducted. I commend the report to the House, and in so doing I would like to thank those organisations that put forward submissions and also the treaty secretariat for doing another sterling job.

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

Mrs MAY (McPherson) (12.59 pm)—I move:

That the House take note of the report.

The SPEAKER—in accordance with standing order 39, the debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

ASIO, ASIS and DSD Committee Report

Mr McARTHUR (Corangamite) (1.00 pm)—On behalf of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD, I present the committee’s report entitled Review of the Intelligence Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2005.
Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

Mr McARTHUR—The Minister for Defence referred the Intelligence Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2005 to the committee for inquiry and report on 16 June 2005. This bill results from a number of reviews of the operations of the Intelligence Services Act 2001. The first review of the intelligence services agencies, conducted by Mr Philip Flood, was a result of a recommendation of this committee made in March 2004. In his report, Mr Flood recommended that the mandate of the joint parliamentary committee be extended to encompass three additional agencies, the Office of National Assessments, the Defence Intelligence Organisation and the Defence Imagery and Geospatial Organisation, on the same basis as it currently oversees ASIO, ASIS and DSD. He also recommended that the functions and accountabilities of DIGO be formalised in the Intelligence Services Act on a basis comparable with that which applies to DSD and ASIS. The bill achieves these recommendations. Other amendments were initiated to create consistency of oversight. The act governing the powers of the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security will be changed to include scrutiny of DIGO and the Office of National Assessments Act 1977 will also be amended to reflect the changes recommended by Mr Flood.

A second review into the intelligence agencies was coordinated by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet following a recommendation in the annual reports of the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security. This review sought to fine-tune the accountability mechanisms of the agencies.

Finally, at the end of the last parliament, after the experience of the operation of the act over one parliament, the committee itself reviewed its role as specified in the act. The result was a letter to the Prime Minister from the chair of the committee, Mr David Jull, suggesting some amendments to change the structure, name and powers of the committee. These recommendations have been taken up in the current amendments, with the exception of a suggested amendment to section 7, narrowing the scope of the restrictions on disclosures to parliament.

The committee’s current review has sought to evaluate the implementation of all these recommendations in the legislation currently before the Senate. The amendments change the definition of ‘intelligence information’, which has been widened. Section 11 has been amended to allow this intelligence to be communicated to appropriate Commonwealth and state authorities, or to authorities of approved other countries. In respect of this change, the committee expressed the view that ‘while the removal of barriers to cooperation between government agencies may be helpful, it would be prudent to draw attention to the implications for the administration of a whole range of government policies of this increased communication’.

Other amendments relate to the collection of intelligence by ASIS and DSD: clarification of the roles and functions of these agencies and clarification of the ministerial authorisations necessary before the production of any intelligence on Australians. Consideration was given, in particular, to item 22. The amendment is intended to have the effect of protecting Australians in Australia in the same way as the existing act protects Australians who are overseas.

The committee noted in the report that ‘it is the case that the foreign intelligence gathering agencies can currently be authorised to obtain intelligence on Australians inside Australia regarding the capabilities and intentions of persons outside Australia’. The
committee, therefore, approved the proposed amendment at item 22, but requested additional provisions, to ensure consistency in the requirements on all agencies, domestic or foreign intelligence gathering. In particular, the committee recommended that, ‘as the regime moves from ministerial direction to legislated ministerial authority as proposed in item 22, it should generally replicate the provisions of and have identical authorisation to those that apply to ASIO’. I hope that these recommendations will be given due consideration in the debate over the passage of the bill. I commend the report to the House.

Mr KERR (Denison) (1.30 pm)—I also wish to commend to the House the recommendations of the Joint Committee on ASIO, ASIS and DSD. This committee will now have the oversight, if this legislation is passed, of all intelligence related agencies following the recommendations of the Flood report. Given that there is always a very large national interest in the operation and effectiveness of these agencies and also the related issue of the degree to which our cherished freedoms are affected by those agencies, the importance of this committee is evermore significant. This is again another unanimous recommendation of the committee, which works in an entirely bipartisan way. It is one of the greatest safeguards to the effectiveness of our intelligence agencies that this committee remain capable of exercising effective oversight.

In relation to the specific recommendations, we welcome the adoption of the Flood recommendations and the recommendations of this committee itself, with the exception of narrowing the restrictions on disclosure to parliament. We have made a number of specific recommendations to the houses in relation to further amendments that we would request. I will address the matter of intelligence gained by ASIS and DSD. In both instances, those agencies are tasked with developing intelligence reports in relation to the conduct of external bodies—in the case of ASIS to obtain, in accordance with the government’s requirements, intelligence about the capabilities, intentions, and activities of persons outside of Australia and, in the case of DSD, to obtain intelligence about the capabilities, intentions and activities of persons or organisations outside of Australia in the form of electromagnetic energy and the like, for the purposes of meeting the requirements of the government and, in particular, the requirements of the defence forces.

In each instance inevitably there are circumstances where, although a foreign source is the target of that intelligence gathering, incidental collections occur when those persons are the subject of communications from people in Australia. The amendments proposed make a protective and appropriate regime for dealing with those unintentional but inevitable interceptions.

A more significant issue that the legislation addresses is those instances where the agencies, in relation to their responsibilities of collecting intelligence with respect to overseas capacities, form a view that it is then necessary to target an Australian in Australia for further intelligence collection. This bill deals with a matter which was at best ambiguous, in relation to its legal authority previously, and makes it plain that that will now be authorised. The arrangements that are proposed in the legislation are ones which involve ministerial authorisation, and this committee has recommended that those measures be amended to bring them in line with, and identical to, those which are required when ASIO gathers intelligence about Australians in Australia. The rationale is that with respect to the authorisations for telephonic interception there should be a single regime, transparent and common to all such
collections, that the Australian community can believe to be robust and capable of confidence.

Given that there will now be specific legislative authorisation for such collections, we might also be wise to direct attention to what may appear, on some readings, to be a deficiency in the TI Act such that it does not appear to extend to collections outside of Australia. If that is the case, albeit the technical capacity to do this would be restricted to a very few organisations, it would appear that at least on some readings it would be lawful for interceptions to occur outside the Australian network with respect to telecommunications between Australians and overseas persons once the signal leaves Australia, and I am sure that that was never the intention of this parliament in relation to those matters.

Given that there will now be clear authorisation and rules for the management of such interceptions in relation to our intelligence agencies across the board, if there were such a loophole it can now be lawfully and properly closed. I commend the recommendations to the House. (Time expired)

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

Mr McARTHUR (Corangamite) (1.10 pm)—I move:

That the House take note of the report.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 39, the debate is adjourned. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Economics, Finance and Public Administration Committee Report

Mr BAIRD (Cook) (1.10 pm)—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration, I present the committee’s report entitled Review of the Reserve Bank of Australia annual report 2004 (2nd report) together with the minutes of proceedings and evidence received by the committee.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

Mr BAIRD—The committee’s August public hearing with the Governor of the Reserve Bank provided my committee with a timely update on the state of the economy and, in particular, on where interest rates and inflation are heading. The RBA again reported on an economy still in good shape but with some moderation in some key areas—namely, housing and consumer spending. In fact, the Governor of the Reserve Bank reported on an economy where the risks are now balanced rather than being on the upside. The report I have tabled today discussed some of the factors that have shaped the Australian economy during a sustained period of growth and prosperity which is now into its 14th year.

In March, following our first meeting with the RBA, interest rates were raised by 25 basis points. Whilst there was a great deal of speculation at that time about pending rate rises, that level of speculation had subsided somewhat at the time of our August hearing. Housing no longer poses a threat to inflationary expectations. On the contrary, housing prices have fallen or have remained flat in most states, and this has encouraged households to consolidate their balance sheets. Housing construction has also slowed. This has put domestic demand on a more sustainable footing.
Interestingly, the Reserve Bank has not revised its earlier inflationary forecasts and is still expecting inflation to peak at three per cent later next year. This forecast has not been revised, notwithstanding the recent rapid rises in oil prices. Predicting where interest rates will be in six or 12 months time is made all the more complicated by the mixed signals that are still coming from different parts of the economy. Our exports are at record levels, particularly in the resources sector, but housing and consumer spending are flat. Investment and employment are at new highs although manufacturing remains flat. With the services sector being much stronger, oil prices are at record highs and that impacts on every household but overall we are beneficiaries of the high prices because we are net exporters of energy.

After 14 years of continuous growth we have come up against some major capacity constraints, including skilled labour shortages, but this has not resulted in a major wages break out. Is this nirvana, as the Governor of the Reserve Bank has suggested, or is it that we are still the lucky country? Forecasts certainly indicate that positive GDP growth will be achieved for some time to come.

The other matter discussed with the Reserve Bank governor concerned the progress that has been made in relation to the reform of the payments system. The committee has received a great deal of conflicting evidence about the impact of these reports on various stakeholders. The main objective of the report agenda is to try and ensure that the costs involved in providing each form of payment—whether it be by way of credit cards, EFTPOS, cash or some other method—accurately reflect the price customers are charged for that method of payment. At present there are many cross-subsidies operating within the payments system, and it is the aim of the Reserve Bank to eliminate these so as to achieve an efficient and transparent payments environment.

The major issue is whether or not this can be done by way of voluntary cooperation or by regulation. The Reserve Bank has come down in favour of regulation because it believes that the normal forces of competition are unable to operate effectively to achieve the desired outcome. Central to this debate is the relationship between interchange fees and merchant services fees, and how these fees are set. Consumers are selecting a payment system that best suits their particular needs, including their desire to obtain maximum reward points offered by a particular scheme.

The committee has no argument with people selecting the system that best suits their needs as long as they are aware of all the costs associated with that scheme. The reform agenda still has a long way to go and the committee will follow the progress with great interest. In fact, the committee will again look at the payment system next year in a public forum so that all stakeholders can put forward their views in a public way.

The RBA hearings provide the community, the financial sector and the media with a valuable opportunity to monitor the way in which the Reserve Bank conducts monetary policy in Australia. The Melbourne hearing was a particularly important part of the ongoing accountability of the Reserve Bank of Australia to the federal parliament and the wider community. I thank the Governor of the Reserve Bank for his frank comments on monetary policy and the other issues at the hearing. The committee look forward to continuing this productive process. Our next hearing with the Reserve Bank will be in February 2006. I commend the report to the House. (Time expired)

Mr BOWEN (Prospect) (1.15 pm)—As Deputy Chair of the Standing Committee on
Economics, Finance and Public Administration, I am pleased to support the remarks of the chair in tabling the committee’s report entitled *Review of the Reserve Bank of Australia annual report 2004 (2nd report)*. In February, when the committee last had the Governor of the Reserve Bank before it, there was considerable speculation and interest regarding the possibility of interest rates increasing. Not long after that hearing, the bank moved to increase interest rates by 25 basis points. The interest and speculation in relation to this hearing was of a different nature. On this occasion, the bank had indicated in its statement on monetary policy that the stance of monetary policy was returning to neutral. The Governor of the Reserve Bank was at pains to point out to the committee that this means that the chances of the next movement in interest rates being up or down are 50 per cent for both.

This matches the views of the market, with analysts apparently evenly divided on whether the next movement in interest rates will be up or down. The governor indicated to the committee that the bank longer feels that there is an upward risk to the bank’s inflation target. The bank feels that inflation will peak in the second half of next year. Of course the question is whether it will peak above the bank’s target range for inflation. There are some worrying signs in the economy, including the latest labour market figures which were released the week after the committee hearing, that perhaps inflation is still heading in an upward direction.

I would like to take a few moments to briefly comment on the issue of whether the RBA should have issued public comments in relation to misleading statements in certain political pamphlets in the lead-up to the last election. The Reserve Bank was clearly of the view that these pamphlets were misleading. It wrote two strongly-worded letters in relation to the pamphlets in question: one to the authoriser of the pamphlets and the other to the Australian Electoral Commission. However, the bank did not make a public statement disassociating itself from references to it as the source of some quite provocative statements on interest rates.

As I pointed out to the governor, the bank has made statements correcting the record in the past. I want to emphasise that in my view the governor and the bank were not politically biased and in no way acted improperly. However, I do believe that they made the wrong decision. They should have publicly clarified that the bank is not a source of views on interest rates and that the bank has no view on which party is a better manager of the economy. I would encourage the bank to inform political parties before the next election that it will not tolerate its name being used in political pamphlets and that if there is any repeat of the bank being incorrectly quoted as a source for political pamphlets it will publicly correct the record, regardless of the stage of the political cycle.

The committee, as usual, took some time to question the governor about the payment system, particularly the impact of recently announced Reserve Bank reforms. In February 2005 the Payments System Board released draft standards for the EFTPOS and Visa debit systems for public comment. The proposed standards seek to address the distortions and costs of using different types of payments. From a personal point of view, my position would normally be that the market should be left to determine such matters and that regulation is likely to distort the market in such a way that nobody wins. However, I agree with the bank that the American experience is such that regulation is warranted.

The market does not operate efficiently unfettered, because of a lack of information for consumers as to the true cost of using a card with high merchant costs but lucrative
reward schemes when these costs are not passed on to consumers. The question is whether the reforms are the best way of ensuring an efficient and transparent system. The jury is out on this decision—for example, of exempting American Express and Diners Club cards from the requirements that other cards have in return for concessions and undertakings in relation to not prohibiting merchants from encouraging customers to use a cheaper card. I regard myself as an agnostic on this issue, and I think it is too early to tell whether the criticisms of the bank’s approach are valid or not.

I think that early next year we will have a clearer picture of the impact of the bank’s reforms, and I am glad that the committee has decided to revisit the issue next year by holding a public forum for all those interested to comment. In conclusion, I thank Mr Peter Keele, the committee secretary, and all the committee staff for their support, as usual, in the lead-up to this report. I commend the committee’s report to the House.

Mr BAIRD (Cook) (1.19 pm)—I move:
That the House take note of the report.

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

Mr BAIRD (Cook) (1.19 pm)—I move:
That the House take note of the report.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 39(c), the debate is adjourned. The resumption of 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.
eral Party. We now have government advertising of the Liberal government, by the Liberal government, for the Liberal government. The nakedly political nature of the Howard government’s industrial relations advertising was exposed by the appointment of the Liberal Party advertiser Ted Horton to run the government’s $20 million industrial relations advertising campaign. Mr Horton has worked on federal Liberal campaigns since 1994-95. It is quite improper to award a $20 million contract to someone with such close links to the Liberal Party. It is all too similar to the payment of over $400,000 of taxpayers’ money to another Liberal Party adman, Mark Pearson, to coordinate the $210 million GST advertising campaign in 2000. Liberal Party advertisers should not get lucrative government advertising contracts.

The government’s penchant for bullying and intimidation was on full display in its response to the serious concerns raised by the Clerk of the Senate, Harry Evans, about giving government advertising contracts to Liberal Party advertisers. The government demanded Harry Evans prove this arrangement to be corrupt or improper, but the onus is on the government to prove it is not. It is the government which cloaks advertising contracts in a veil of secrecy, refusing to disclose their financial details. It is the government which fails to have open tenders for advertising contracts. It is the government which will not let its agencies decide who will run ad campaigns but instead centralises control in a shadowy body called the Ministerial Committee on Government Communications, made up of Liberal Party insiders such as the former Liberal Party federal director Andrew Robb, now the member for Goldstein. Unless the government provides real transparency about the process of selection for advertising contracts, Harry Evans and others are quite right to blow the whistle on a system which is a recipe for corruption, tailor made for kickbacks and favours for mates.

So how does Labor’s bill, the Government Advertising (Prohibiting use of taxpayers’ money on party political advertising) Bill 2005, deal with these abuses? What it does is deliver on the Prime Minister’s 1995 promise to bring to bear the independent authority of the Auditor-General on government advertising. In 1998 the Auditor-General responded to the government’s GST advertising campaign with a set of proposed guidelines to ensure government advertising ‘be presented in an objective and fair manner’ and ‘not be liable to misrepresentation as party political’. The Howard government simply ignored these guidelines, but this private member’s bill would bring them into law in the form of a schedule.

The bill further provides that a minister could go to jail for up to seven years for the improper use of public money and defines the improper use of public money to include government advertising in breach of the Auditor-General’s guidelines. It requires all advertising campaigns costing in excess of $250,000 to be examined by the Public Service Commissioner, who will report to ministers on whether the proposed advertising complies with the guidelines. It would clearly be a very foolhardy minister, one prepared to risk imprisonment, who proceeded with an advertising campaign which had not received the approval of the Public Service Commissioner. Labor will put an end to the paid promotion of government policy which has not received parliamentary approval. (Time expired)

Bill read a first time.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)—In accordance with standing order 41, the second reading will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.
Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (1.25 pm)—It is almost three years since Justice Daryl Dawson recommended that the government embrace a new, less expensive and more streamlined authorisation process for collective bargaining for small business. Today my private member’s bill, the Trade Practices Amendment (Collective Bargaining for Small Business) Bill 2005, gives government members an opportunity to implement that new scheme. I will explain this for the benefit of the House because I have detected some blissful ignorance in this place, particularly on the other side, about what collective bargaining for small business is all about. Just as in the employment relationship, the parties to any bargain between small businesses and larger businesses are never equal. Small businesses regularly supply goods and/or services to larger businesses, and of course larger businesses regularly supply goods or services to smaller businesses. Being from your particular electorate, Mr Deputy Speaker Causley, and with the number of agricultural producers supplying big businesses on a regular basis there, you would understand that concept very well.

For many years now, small businesses have been able to get together, just like the work force does, to strengthen their bargaining position in this buying and selling arrangement. Typically, motor car dealers, agricultural growers and transport owner-drivers have been able to do it, but this authorisation process under the Trade Practices Act has been cumbersome, time consuming and very expensive. On that basis, many small businesses have not had proper access to this authorisation process. What Justices Dawson has astutely recommended is that we move from an authorisation process—although the authorisation process will remain in place—to a second option, and that is a notification scheme. So in future, under his proposal, if a group of small business people are getting together to strike this bargain with a larger business, rather than go through this expensive and cumbersome process of authorisation, they need only notify the ACCC of the arrangement. If they do not hear back from the ACCC, they can assume the ACCC has no difficulty with the arrangement and therefore they can proceed.

I made the point that it is now almost three years since Justice Dawson made that recommendation but, alas, we do not have any notification scheme in this country. We as a legislature still have not embraced the recommendation of Justice Dawson. Why haven’t we done so? It is pretty simple: the government put forward this initiative in a bill that has commonly become known as the ‘Dawson bill’. That bill has not just one initiative—that is, an initiative on notification—but three major initiatives. The other two initiatives are very concerning to the small business sector. The first is a watering down of our third-line forcing laws in this country—naturally a big concern to the small business sector.

The second initiative is the watering down of our merger laws—again, a big concern to the small business sector. The proposition is that the ACCC be entirely cut out of the merger authorisation process. In future, there will just be a big tick from the Australian Competition Tribunal, and when big business talk about mergers which will disadvantage small business they will not have to run the gauntlet of the ACCC. By tying the very important collective bargaining notification process to these anti small business processes, the government has effectively held up
the Dawson bill in the Senate and small business still awaits its opportunity.

One other very important point to make is that there is another hook in the government’s bill—not in the government’s original bill, which was introduced into the parliament prior to the last election, but in the bill introduced after that. That other hook is that the government now wants to deny trade union officials the right to progress and lodge a notification process—something they have always been able to do under the old authorisation process. My bill carves out that silly exclusion clause, which discriminates against small business people who historically have relied upon trade union officials to both develop their collective bargaining arrangements and lodge them with the ACCC. I commend the bill to the House. (Time expired)

Bill read a first time.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)—In accordance with standing order 41, the second reading will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

Bangladesh

Mr Baird (Cook) (1.31 pm)—I move:

That this House:

(1) notes the historic and turbulent background of the state of Bangladesh and its cultural and religious diversity;

(2) calls on the government of Bangladesh to adhere to the terms of the 1997 peace agreement which calls for the:

(a) demilitarisation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT);

(b) formation of a land commission to settle disputes;

(c) rehabilitation of international refugees and internally displaced people;

(d) establishment of a separate ministry for the CHT with an indigenous MP as its Minister;

(e) formation of a police force up to the level of sub-inspector drawn from among the indigenous population;

(3) calls on the Bangladeshi government to address the concerned region in a more compassionate and democratic way and also to recognise the autonomy of the Jumma people.

Recently, I received a delegation from the Jumma Peoples Network of the Asia Pacific, led by Kabita Chakma, who lives in my electorate. I feel that it is crucial for this House to recognise the historic and turbulent background of the state of Bangladesh and the particular concerns of the Jumma people. Bangladesh has been described as ‘a new state in an ancient land’, as ‘a country challenged by contradictions’. Its turbulent history and the recent events there are often seen as inconsistent. As a nation, it does not have a distinct geographical body, nor is it a well-defined historical or cultural unit. The key to these apparent contradictions lies in its history.

In the late 1970s, the Bangladeshi government initiated a transmigration of the plain land Bengalis of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, or CHT. In doing so, thousands of indigenous tribes and people living in the area, collectively known as the Jumma, were expelled from their homes by force. The Jumma are made up of Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Animists and have a different cultural and religious history to the Bengali majority. In 1992, the CHT was reported to be the most militarised area on earth. The Jumma had organised themselves militarily and politically and, in 1997, they forced a peace agreement between the Bangladeshi government and the Jumma political organisation. It is important for members of this
House to recognise the important diversity that exists within the state, even to this day.

The Hill district councils have been given partial administrative responsibilities. The accord entrusts them with managing line ministries and all development activities, but only around half of the 33 ministries have been transferred to Hill district councils and insufficient funds, including for development projects, have meant that they cannot operate as intended in the accord.

Attacks have continued throughout the region, despite the 1997 accord. With the Australian government supporting the full implementation of the 1997 peace accord in the CHT region, it is important for this House to again call on the Bangladeshi government to adhere to the terms of the agreement, which call for, firstly, the demilitarisation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts; secondly, the formation of a land commission to settle disputes; thirdly, the rehabilitation of international refugees and internally displaced people; fourthly, the establishment of a separate ministry for the CHT, with an indigenous MP as its minister; and, fifthly, the formation of a police force up to the level of sub-inspector drawn from among the indigenous population. If stability is to be bought to the region then mere agreement on the above points is not all that is required. Action on the part of the government of Bangladesh is required to allow the Jumma people to gain some form of equal representation and proper recognition.

The CHT accord has ended the decades of long, fierce armed conflict between the Jumma people and the government of Bangladesh. This accord was welcomed by not only the Jumma people of CHT and the democratic and progressive political parties of Bangladesh but also the United Nations, the European Union and many democratic governments of the world, including Australia.

The CHT is still in a difficult situation with respect to human rights violations. From the very beginning, governments have been trying to solve the political problems in CHT by military force. After the long seven years following the signing of the accord, no time limit has been fixed for the implementation of the agreed points. The army still holds authority and controls the general administration, entrusted to it through an administrative order from the Bangladeshi government. Bangladesh is now the biggest contributor to the international UN peacekeeping force. This has been seen by some as rather ironic, given that human rights violations are reported in the region on an ongoing basis.

Having had outlined to me the particular problems of the Jumma people, it is important that, despite their numbers and the conflict in the region, the Jumma people should have equal representation. The terms of the accord are taking a long time to evolve and be carried out. We call on the Bangladesh government to reaffirm and implement the agreement achieved in 1997 for the long-term welfare of the Jumma people and for their long-term peace and stability.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)—Is the motion seconded?

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

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Reid) (1.36 pm)—This is not a new issue. A parliamentary delegation from Australia visited the Chittagong Hill Tracts area in 1993. As a result of their meeting local residents who were critical of the government, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh at that stage—20 years ago—cancelled meetings with that delegation. So this is not a new phenomenon.

I join with the mover and seconder of the motion relating to serious concerns about Bangladesh. On 15 June last year, I put a number of questions on notice to the Minis-
ter for Foreign Affairs about this issue. He assured me that the Australian High Commission in Dhaka had made a number of representations in relation to human rights in Bangladesh but said that, in general, their conclusion was that it was not evident ‘that there is a degree of government tolerance of violence towards minorities and the non-government organisation sector’.

It is a conclusion that I certainly do not agree with. In reality, as the previous speaker—the member for Cook—detailed, since the 1970s there has been a systematic program of transmigration and movement of people into the region to change the population balance in the Chittagong Hills. There are debates as to whether there are 12 or 13 existing indigenous tribes or groups there, but the reality is that the population balance has indeed changed markedly. In the 1950s nine per cent of the population constituted Islamic Bengalis; now they constitute 48 per cent of the population, so there has been a very significant movement. There has also been the heavy presence of military forces in the region, supposedly to restore law and order but, in reality, to impose controls. There is also government assistance in the form of rations and food assistance to those people who have moved into the region as part of that population balance change.

Amnesty International, as far back as 2003, spoke of a climate of impunity surrounding human rights violations by security personnel. It spoke of rapes, murders, burning and looting of houses and also cited very strongly ‘the refusal of police to file legitimate charges by citizens’. As the member for Cook has detailed, a particular instance of a very overwhelming human rights problem in Bangladesh is the state of the Jummas. I believe it is a broader problem. It is interesting to note that it is not only in this parliament that attention has been drawn to it. In June this year there was a conference at the London School of Economics, convened by Lord Avebury—a person who has been very active with regard to a significant number of human rights issues and someone who further backed independence for Timor. It is interesting to note the extent of harassment and hooliganism conducted by the Bangladeshi High Commissioner in Britain by arriving at that conference with more people than had been invited and disrupting the processes. That indicates that these kinds of issues, when put on the agenda and when pushed for time, can cause some concern to the regime.

People’s land has been seized. A land commission was set up under these peace negotiations. It only recently got around to having a meeting six years after the agreement. As I understand it, only about a quarter of those people deprived of their land have regained it. That shows the concern, as does the continued installation and construction of military outposts there after a period when there was an agreement for demilitarisation. We have a strong military presence, we have police officers who do not instigate legal action that seems to be merited from assaults, and we have government assistance to aid half a million plain settlers, as they are called, who have been induced by the Bangladeshi government to move there. They did not walk out of the door one morning and look at the sun and decide to move there. This has been a campaign that the government itself has instigated and promoted.

It is right and proper that this matter is raised and that we try to focus on this nation. As I said earlier, this is not the whole story. We have had systematic complaints in that country by Bangladeshis regarding the current government’s victimisation of supporters of the opposition Awami League that attacks particularly Hindus in the country and also to some degree Christians and Buddhists. Finally, the other aspect of this matter that must cause some concern is the growth
of Madrashas in this particular area and concerns that extremist Islamic groups are—

*Time expired*

**Mrs MOYLAN** (Pearce) (1.41 pm)—It was as a result of a visit to this parliament by Kabita Chakma from the Jumma Peoples Network that brought about this motion. I thank the member for Cook for highlighting in this place the plight of the Jumma people and the continuous problems facing the tribes of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. Despite the 1997 peace agreement, nine villages were burnt down in August 2003. As my colleagues have said, the violation of the Jumma people continues. The issues are complex. There is no doubt about that. They go back to the 15th through to the 19th century when 13 hill tribes settled in that region. Twenty-seven years of insurgency have constrained economic development, adding to the problems of inaccessible production areas, very high costs of transport, a very low literacy level and a lack of security, despite the army maintaining 30,000 military personnel in 500 camps in the region, which I understand is one of the problems.

Under the peace agreement, a police force—up to the level of subinspector—was agreed on, but I understand there has been difficulty in implementing this aspect of the peace accord. The Australian government supports the full implementation of the peace accord, and it has the full support of the international community. It is timely that we call on the government of Bangladesh to get on with the job and to ensure, despite the complex problems, that the peace agreement is adhered to and is implemented in full. Apparently, the peace agreement was entered into by the previous government, but I understand from our high commissioner that the current government of Bangladesh has publicly stated its continuing support for the peace agreement and in the light of that it should proceed to make sure it is implemented.

This motion is timely. As I said, it calls on the government of Bangladesh to fully implement the terms of the 1997 peace agreement and to put a stop to the violation of these people. Once again, I thank the member for Cook for bringing the motion before the House, and I thank my colleagues who are supporting it.

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting. It being almost 1.45 pm, I call on members’ statements.

### STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

**Mr William Thomas**

**Mr GEORGANAS** (Hindmarsh) (1.44 pm)—I rise to speak on a matter concerning a constituent of the electorate of Hindmarsh by the name of Mr William Thomas. Mr Thomas has asked that I speak on his behalf in the House as a last resort to correct the parliamentary record. Back in December 1998, Mr William Thomas was referred to in the House and some inaccurate comments were made about him. Since then Mr Thomas has fought for his right to have the record corrected. In June this year I wrote to the Parliamentary Standing Committee of Privileges, on behalf of Mr Thomas, asking that he be given a right of reply. That request has been denied.

In the House on 7 December 1998, Mr Thomas was accused of writing a threatening letter to his federal member. It was also claimed that Mr Thomas attended the declaration of the poll after the election that year with the Labor Party when, in fact, he was a member of the Liberal Party. Further, it was claimed that Mr Thomas was broke—again, this was untrue. The fact is Mr Thomas was not broke. Mr Thomas was particularly con-
cerned by the comments that he was broke, because he runs his own business. He felt that such statements could be quite damaging to his reputation, along with the comments that he had sent the member ‘an absolutely threatening letter’. In my experience, Mr Thomas is not the sort of person who resorts to threatening behaviour; he simply has the completely reasonable expectation that his local member of parliament will do what they can to assist him.

Cecil Andrews Senior High School

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (1.46 pm)—It was with great pleasure that I advised the principal of Cecil Andrews Senior High School in Armadale last month that her school had been granted $2 million in funding from the Commonwealth government under the capital grants program. The upgrade will cost a total of $3 million, with the WA state government funding the remaining $1 million. I was quite surprised to learn that the WA state government and its ministers—including Alannah MacTiernan, the member for Armadale—had claimed credit for the entire project and announced that it was providing the school with $3 million for this project. The WA Treasurer announced in the 2004-05 budget that $3 million over two years would be granted to Cecil Andrews Senior High School. In February this year, just prior to the WA state election, the member for Armadale confirmed $3 million to complete additions and improvements for Cecil Andrews Senior High School. When the 2005-06 state budget was announced, the funding for Cecil Andrews Senior High School had been quoted at $2 million for more improvements to the high school. I found this interesting as the initial project was still awaiting approval from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education, Science and Training, Pat Farmer, and their figure was still inaccurate.

I am delighted that the school will receive a facelift, and I look forward to opening the upgraded facilities in April next year. It is a shame, however, that Alannah MacTiernan and the state government, which has responsibility for providing, maintaining and upgrading facilities, have only funded one-third of this project but disingenuously claimed credit for its entirety.

Diabetes

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (1.47 pm)—Type 1 diabetes is a chronic illness affecting thousands of Australians. With insulin treatment many sufferers can lead a relatively normal life. This is, however, dependent on having access to the insulin which gives the optimum results for each patient. One product, Lantus, the first once-a-day insulin, has allowed many type 1 diabetics to avoid some of the complications associated with other treatments. Since its introduction to Australia in March 2004, more than 2,000 patients have been using Lantus with very positive results. Lantus is, however, not listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and costs patients around $120 a month.

Despite four applications, the most recent one in July, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee has not recommended listing Lantus on the PBS. It cited clinical and cost reasons for its rejection. This has greatly distressed the many patients who have found Lantus of great assistance in treating their condition. I call on the government to honour its 2004 budget commitment to assist insulin-dependent diabetics by including Lantus on the PBS.

Mr Ben Martin

Mrs Jeanette Martin

Mrs DRAPER (Makin) (1.48 pm)—I rise in the House today to honour Mr Ben Martin and Mrs Jeanette Martin, who are constituents of Makin. Not only are they constituents but they are well respected volunteers within
my electorate and loyal friends. Recently Ben and Jeanette were recognised for their tireless efforts within the Liberal Party, being awarded the Meritorious Service Award by the Prime Minister, the Hon. John Howard MP, at the state Liberal Party annual general meeting on Saturday, 27 August 2005.

The Meritorious Service Award is awarded to Liberal Party members who have contributed to the success of the Liberal Party and have dedicated large amounts of time and effort to the party. With this eligibility in mind, I could not think of more worthy recipients. At 76 and 65 respectively, Ben and Jeanette are both delegates to the Makin FEC, Ben being the vice-president and fundraising coordinator. When election time comes around every three years, they are the first up the poles to put the posters up, the first ones to arrive at the booths on the day and the last scrutineers to leave. They often stay late that day or arrive early the next morning to help clean up.

Outside the party, Ben and Jeanette are involved with their community. They are both involved with two local RSLs, the Early Settlers Club, the historical society and the Tea Tree Gully Garden Club, where Jeanette has just recently finished a three-year stint as president. She is also a life member of that club and is now the zone coordinator of garden clubs Australia-wide. I would like to publicly acknowledge and pay tribute to them and say, ‘Go Crows!’ (Time expired)

Cranbourne Primary School

Mr BYRNE (Holt) (1.50 pm)—I rise today to bring to the House’s attention a magnificent piece of work that has been created by the Prep (W) students of the Cranbourne Primary School which is called Silly snow stories for Mr Byrne. I have it here. As you can see, it is a magnificent piece of work and a lot of thought has gone into it. I would like to commend the students involved. This arose out of a session that I attended through the Reading Rocks! program as part of National Children’s Book Week. I read to some magnificent students there and, upon going to Cranbourne Primary School on Friday, I was presented with this magnificent book, which will be held in my office for display. I would like to thank the students that created this book and their teacher, Mrs Wrigley. I say to Chelsea, Adam, Megan, Abby, Joshua, Ben, Jessica, Jason, Trey, Patrina, Clinton, Charlie, Jason, Kira, Brodie, Katelyn, Charlie, Tayla and Jack: this is a fantastic piece of work and I will show this work with pride in my office. Thank you very much, Students; you are a fantastic group to read to and it was a great privilege and pleasure to attend your school.

Corio Electorate

Mr McARTHUR (Corangamite) (1.51 pm)—In this House of Representatives chamber, Corangamite and Corio are mortal enemies. However, the people of Geelong will be short-changed by branch-stacking led by Australian Council of Trade Unions Assistant Secretary Richard Marles. In Geelong Richard Marles has no support, so much so that his own trade union movement are kicking him out of town. We have the amazing scenario that, whilst Corio ALP branches are being roll cleansed by the Labor Party head office, at the same time the Geelong Trades Hall Council do not want the ACTU carpetbagger and potential candidate in town. An un-named Geelong Labor Party official said in the Geelong Independent on Friday, 9 September:

“Trades Hall doesn’t want some ACTU figure driving into town, cruising around in a car at rallies, not even talking to unionists, claiming to be here for the Geelong people and then running off back to Melbourne.”

The big question facing the electorate of Corio is: will the right-wing bullyboys of Lygon Street crush the local Labor Party
members in supporting an out-of-towner? The member for Corio is the only Labor Party member in the parliament who knows anything about primary industry. The preselection of a right-wing apparatchik, Richard Marles, would confirm that the Labor Party is for the union bosses, not the people.

**Prospect Electorate: General Practitioners**

Mr BOWEN (Prospect) (1.52 pm)—I wish to bring to the attention of the House the campaign for a general practitioner in Horsley Park in my electorate. Horsley Park has had no general practitioner for five years. It is a semirural town which desperately needs a doctor to service the local community. In June I held a mobile office in Horsley Park, and the issue of a lack of a general practitioner was raised with me. Since then, we have organised a campaign and 350 people have signed a petition calling for a general practitioner in Horsley Park. I wrote to the minister for health, and Horsley Park has been declared a district of workforce shortage. It is now entitled to receive incentives for general practitioners who relocate their practice to Horsley Park.

Apart from ongoing local media, I have also written to the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and all local general practitioners about the issue. I have also placed community ads in the September editions of the general practitioner magazines, the *NSW Doctor* and the *Australian Family Physician*, encouraging general practitioners thinking of moving to move to Horsley Park. My office has received two calls from general practitioners who are interested in moving to Horsley Park. They are keen to make a difference in the Horsley Park area and are currently looking at the suitability of the area for opening a practice. This is a heartening response. However, the campaign to have a general practitioner in Horsley Park will continue until the doctor’s surgery opens. This campaign has highlighted to me the need for the federal government to introduce more incentives for general practitioners to move to semirural areas in outer Sydney—not just general practitioners who currently have a practice, but also new general practitioners who have not yet opened a practice anywhere. *(Time expired.)*

**Mackintosh International College of Hair**

Mrs MAY (McPherson) (1.54 pm)—I recently had the opportunity of officially opening the Mackintosh International College of Hair at Palm Beach with my state colleague Jann Stuckey. I would like to put on the record my congratulations to Darren and Dianne Mackintosh for achieving this milestone in their successful registered training organisation. Mackintosh College was first established in 1994, and in 11 years Darren and Dianne have built a nationally recognised training organisation with a clear mission and commitment to improving employment prospects for their students within all industries throughout Australia and internationally.

The college provides the highest level of education and training in areas such as tourism and hospitality, cookery, business, IT, numerous short courses, English language and now hairdressing. Many of the courses are tailored to the local Gold Coast business and tourism industries. The international college of hair campus is state-of-the-art and will offer certificate II and III in hairdressing. The qualified lecturing team is headed by Paul Goddard, who has run his fingers through some of the most famous heads of hair on the planet, including our own Nicole Kidman, Heath Ledger, Jodie Foster, Tina Arena, kd lang, Peter Andre and Boy George.

Until now, a lack of training courses offering appropriate qualifications in the region has forced students to commute to Brisbane, so the college is not only filling a local need...
but also lifting the standard of this industry specific training in the area. My congratulations once again to Darren and Dianne Mackintosh and all their team at Mackintosh college—you have provided yet another pathway of learning for the young people of the Gold Coast.

Millennium Development Goals

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (1.55 pm)—I want to put on the record my views, and those of my party, with regard to the Millennium Development Goals. In particular, I would like to highlight the Howard government’s failure to action these goals and reaffirm Labor’s commitment to these goals. Labor understands very well the responsibilities we, as a nation, have to provide development assistance for other nations. Eliminating the disparities between the world’s rich and poor is one of the critical international challenges of our time. But altruism and self-interest require that we actively assist the economic and social advancement of people in developing countries, especially the poorest countries and communities.

To that end, Labor believes the Millennium Development Goals should constitute the new framework for global overseas development assistance and Australia’s national contribution. Consistent with our commitment to the ideals of equality and social justice, Labor accepts the challenge of working towards these goals as an urgent priority. This objective fully supports Australia’s long-term security and economic interest. By contrast though, the government talks but delivers very little. The current ratio of Australia’s aid to gross national income is estimated at 0.25 per cent. Australia’s overseas aid as a percentage of GNP should not be reduced any further and, as a first step, the government should restore development assistance to Labor’s 1995-96 ratio of at least 0.32 per cent of GNP. These are worthy goals and goals that all Australians should be supporting. I know that Labor supports them, and I believe the government should be doing more. (Time expired.)

Buy Australian Campaign

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (1.57 pm)—We all know there is nothing like a home-cooked dinner. What better way to do it than with home-cooked and home grown ingredients? Yet unless we do something about making that choice to buy Australian easier for consumers around the country, then many of the students in the gallery will not grow up to enjoy those same choices—to be able to buy Australian. Mr Speaker, you would be surprised to know that the $60 billion retail and grocery sector has never done any research on exactly when Australians will buy Australian and what premium they are prepared to pay for Australian produce—extraordinary in a $60 billion sector. We need that research—not sentimental questionnaires where 80 per cent of Australians say they want the labels and 50 per cent of Australians look for Australian made. We need the research done in the shopping centres themselves.

We know already that labels have to be simple and usable. Many of us are busy; many of us are in too much of a rush. You can imagine people with a child on one hip and pushing a trolley with the other hand trying to find home-grown products. We need a promotional campaign that goes with that, and obviously with research comes a simpler system of labelling. In a $60 billion sector, we need to work with groups like Ausveg and the Australian Food and Grocery Council and with Growcom. I thank them for their interest in working with Minister McGauran and Parliamentary Secretary Pyne on improving country-of-origin labelling laws. I know that in the electorates of many members on the other side of this chamber eggs are not even laid anymore, but I ask
them to consider and support this proposal—

(Time expired.)

Rankin Electorate: St Francis College

Dr EMERSON (Rankin) (1.58 pm)—I would like to take this opportunity before the parliament today to congratulate St Francis College in Logan City in my electorate on winning an excellence award for literacy. I had the honour of presenting a $5,000 cheque at a school assembly just the other day. There was an enormous roar from the children when I announced that they had in fact been successful. It is a tribute to the children at that school, and also very much to the teachers for the great contribution they have made to improving literacy at St Francis—one of the great schools of Logan City and, indeed, one of the great schools of Queensland. It not only produces excellent students, but it produces great rugby players as well. The Queensland Reds will be very keenly anticipating another influx of rugby union students from St Francis College, so congratulations to the college on its great work.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 2 pm, in accordance with standing order 43 the time for members’ statements has concluded.

CONDOLENCES

Dame Eileen Nancy Butfield DBE

The SPEAKER (2.00 pm)—I inform the House of the death on Sunday, 4 September 2005 of Dame Nancy Eileen Butfield DBE, a former senator. Dame Nancy Butfield represented the state of South Australia from 1955 to 1965 and from 1968 to 1974. As a mark of respect to the memory of Dame Nancy Butfield, I invite honourable members to rise in their places.

Honourable members having stood in their places—

The SPEAKER—I thank the House.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mr VAILE (Lyne—Acting Prime Minister) (2.00 pm)—I inform the House that the Prime Minister will be absent from question time today and for the remainder of the week. He is in New York for a special summit of the United Nations. I will answer questions on his behalf. I also advise the House that the Minister for Foreign Affairs will be absent from question time today and for the remainder of the week. He is traveling to the United Kingdom and Europe to attend EU presidency consultations and bilateral discussions. The Attorney-General will answer questions on his behalf, including questions relating to defence matters.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

United States of America: Terrorist Attacks

Mr VAILE (Lyne—Acting Prime Minister) (2.01 pm)—by leave—Yesterday, being 11 September 2005, marked the fourth anniversary of the terrorist attacks on the United States. I know that all Australians took some time to reflect on this tragedy and honour those who lost their lives or were injured at that time. As I reflect on these terrible events, which have significantly changed the lives of people across the world, I am reminded of the remarkable resilience of American society and the incredible acts of heroism and bravery by individuals who responded to those events.

This evil attack by terrorists on the globalised world in which we live was an attack on mankind itself, to which the United States and its allies, including Australia, have responded. There is no doubt we will continue to fight the scourge of terrorism, no matter what form it takes, across the world. Since September 11, 2001 Australia has responded to the challenge to protect its people and our Australian way of life. However, we should not underestimate the extent of the challenge
we face in protecting our society against terrorism.

The Bali tragedy on 12 October 2003 and the horrific Australian Embassy attacks in Jakarta in 2004 also remind us that Australia and its people are not immune from terrorist acts. The new threat environment, which was so dramatically demonstrated to us all by the terrorist attacks on London in July, demands our utmost vigilance. The recent videotape allegedly naming Melbourne as a target, which is still being assessed by security agencies, is a further reminder of the constant threat we face and of the need for further strengthening of our counter-terrorism armoury.

The Australian government has acted quickly and decisively to strengthen Australia’s national security arrangements in response to heightened threats from global terrorism. Since 11 September 2001, the government has committed around $5.6 billion to put in place a range of robust and comprehensive national security measures. These arrangements include: significantly increased resources for intelligence agencies, specialist police counter-terrorism units, new laws dealing with terrorism, enhanced Australian Defence Force tactical response capability, tighter aviation and maritime security regimes, initiatives to protect critical infrastructure and counter-terrorism capacity building in regional countries.

The announcement made by the Prime Minister last week on a framework to strengthen our counter-terrorism laws will help us to minimise the risk of terrorist attacks in this country. The government will continue to review Australia’s national security arrangements and capabilities to strengthen our capacity to respond to the ongoing threat of terrorism. Indeed, the Prime Minister will be discussing our national security arrangements further with states and territories at the special Council of Australian Governments meeting on counter-terrorism on 27 September.

This anniversary reminds us of a shocking occasion in world history and reaffirms the importance of our task to fight terrorism. I record my sadness and that of the government and offer our condolences to the people of the United States and other countries following the loss of nearly 3,000 lives, particularly to the Australian families who lost loved ones on September 11, 2001 in New York.

Mr BEAZLEY (Brand—Leader of the Opposition) (2.05 pm)—by leave—Mr Speaker, September 11 is etched in the memory of everybody in this chamber and, I would say, just about all Australians, indeed it is etched in the memory now of all Americans. The world witnessed the shocking sight of two of the world’s best known buildings collapsing after a vicious assault and the sight of the Pentagon—the headquarters of US military might—on fire. It introduced the rest of the world to bin Laden’s cult of death and evil—a stance in global politics which has since launched a substantial struggle between those of us who support a world in which tolerance, respect for each other’s views and respect for each other as individuals hold sway as opposed to those who would interpret a religious position in a way that enslaves. This is a struggle which simply must be won.

Our thoughts go to the families of those Americans who lost their lives. Family members have been at various commemorations around the country, reinspiring their fellow Americans and the world’s citizens with their courage and their resilience. My thoughts go in particular to the 15 Australians who lost their lives. Among them was Yvonne Kennedy, a widow with two sons from Westmead, who had retired from the
Red Cross after 25 years of service and was on her retirement holiday. Those of us in the Labor Party in particular remember Andrew Knox, an industrial advocate, who had been at some point in time a Labor Party organiser. He was working on the 103rd floor of the north tower of the World Trade Center. For Leanne Whiteside of Melbourne it was her second day on the job working for an insurance company. Alberto Dominguez was a retired Qantas baggage handler of 21 years service and a very prominent member of the Australian Spanish community. Leslie Thomas from the New South Wales Central Coast was working in New York as an options trader for Cantor Fitzgerald, a company that lost 700 employees on September 11.

We also, of course, recollect the other atrocity since that time: our own version of September 11 which occurred with the death of 88 Australians in the Bali bombing a year or so after the shock of September 11. It is a world, as I said earlier, that has changed very substantially. New burdens come on governments; new burdens come on societies. The conflict that we now confront is a challenge to our morale and it is a challenge to our internal strength. Also, a challenge to our intelligence is our capacity to really understand the terms and conditions of victory here and what sort of relationships we need with communities that are also directly threatened by bin Laden’s cult of death and evil, in particular the Islamic community. What do we say to the Islamic community? What do we expect of our fellow Australians who are Muslims? What is the most effective way we can support those moderate Muslim governments and societies that are also under direct challenge from bin Laden? These are tests. We are not always doing as well in these tests as we might. We have had some victories in the struggle that has taken place in the last four years, but they have not all been victories. We are not necessarily coming out as we should in terms of victory in each of the phases that the conflict has taken. We have to do better. It is appalling that bin Laden, four years on, is still at liberty. He should by now have been caught or taken out of the struggle; it is not adequate that he is still there.

It is important that we support those forces in Afghanistan in particular who find themselves at the vortex of this struggle. It is important that we accept our responsibilities in the region around us and in the region at home. By now our defences should be complete, four years on, and yet there are many practical measures which we have identified over the past few months that really should by now have been undertaken by Australian governments. We urge the Australian government to look at the suggestions we have made. We hold high hopes for the conference that will take place between the Prime Minister and the premiers in a couple of weeks from now, but those hopes will not be realised unless the breadth of all the defences that we need in the struggle with terrorism are considered and plans that would complete the task of organising those defences are put in place. We urge the government to make sure that the agenda is broad enough to handle that.

Finally, again, we extend our deepest condolences from this parliament to all the people of all nationalities, but particularly those in the United States and our own, who suffered death and the dislocation and destruction of their family lives. We remember in particular those who died and we understand that their names will live in the minds and hearts of our communities forever.

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

**National Security**

Mr BEAZLEY (2.11 pm)—My question is to the Attorney-General. I refer the minister to his two-page press release last week
outlining new counter-terrorism measures. When will the minister release the details of these new measures and will this detail include assessments by the AFP and ASIO of their effectiveness in providing adequate protection for the Australian community?

Mr RUDDOCK—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. I assume he is referring to the joint press release between the Prime Minister and me in relation to measures that were announced last Thursday. As I recall, there was attached to that document some further elaboration. The point we have now reached is that after the discussion with state officials, involving Commonwealth officials that operate as a legal reference group, preparations are under way for the meeting to be held on 27 September, jointly involving the Prime Minister, premiers and territory leaders.

The measures that we are pursuing will be advanced in those discussions with the leaders, and when that has been concluded and agreement is reached, because a number of these measures do require the willing engagement of the states and territories, drafting of the more detailed provisions will commence. Some consideration has been given already to that process, but as for the detailed legislation we will undertake the normal review that we would expect through the party room structures on this side of the House with time for your colleagues on that side of the House to also consider the matters and for parliamentary committee examinations as appropriate. We hope to get the passage of that legislation before the end of this year.

National Security

Mr WOOD (2.13 pm)—My question is addressed to the Attorney General. Four years after the September 11 terrorist attacks, how is Australia placed to deter, prevent and respond to threats against our interests?

Mr RUDDOCK—As I think we were so properly reminded by the Acting Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, people across the world yesterday paused to remember the more than 3,000 innocent lives that were tragically lost on that date four years ago. Among the more than 3,000 lives taken were 10 of our fellow Australians. As we have seen recently in the city of London, the threat of terrorism remains very real and a very dangerous prospect.

A video released overnight claiming to be issued by al-Qaeda has, for the first time, included a reference to an Australian city—Melbourne. Relevant agencies are currently assessing the statements made in the video, but at this stage indications are that it is authentic. But that does not mean that the statements in it are anything more than rhetoric. I can confirm American al-Qaeda convert Adam Gadahn, also known to security agencies here and overseas, has been said to be the author and participant. This would be his second-known video statement, the first being in October 2004. It also appeared on its face to be little more than anti-Western rhetoric. The information contained in the video does not provide any basis to change the threat levels to Australia or Australian interests overseas.

Of course, al-Qaeda threats against Australia are not new. Australia has been mentioned previously in al-Qaeda statements and has been viewed as a potential target or a location for an attack well before the September 11 attacks. As the Prime Minister reminded us last week, our counter-terrorism laws are subject to regular review and, where appropriate, refinement and, as I have often said, remain an unfinished canvas.

The legislative proposals that we announced last week were in response to law enforcement and security agencies examining whether more could be done to enable
Australia to better respond to the threat of terrorism. As I said earlier, the details of the legislation are still being developed and will be subject to normal and appropriate levels of parliamentary scrutiny. But consistent with our approach to counter-terrorism laws, appropriate safeguards will be a feature of the new legislation, and I want to assure the Australian public that the legislative response will be commensurate to the threat—a threat which we are reminded of in a very unfortunate but nevertheless timely way today.

National Security

Mr BEAZLEY (2.17 pm)—My question is to the Acting Prime Minister. I refer to the release of a videotape of a masked terrorist threatening an attack on Melbourne. Does the Acting Prime Minister agree that Australia needs more than new laws to address the security threat? When will passenger-screening facilities be introduced into regional airports such as Burnie and Devonport, all of which could be used as a starting point for an attack from the air on Melbourne?

Mr VAILE—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. The Australian government is treating this threat very seriously and the relevant agencies are currently assessing the statements made in the video. Security agencies such as ASIO and the AFP are working closely with their overseas counterparts to obtain further information about the tape and the people who made it. The video appears to be authentic, but that does not mean that the statements in it are any more than rhetoric. The American al-Qaeda convert Adam Gadahn is known to security agencies here and overseas. As the Attorney-General has also just indicated, we propose to introduce some new measures and we propose to work very closely with the states. We have announced over the last three or four years, as I mentioned earlier, $5.6 billion worth of investment in extra security measures following September 11 and other terrorist events that have taken place across the world. The government will continue to take decisions as and where it sees fit to ensure the security of Australians.

Trade

Mrs MAY (2.19 pm)—My question is addressed to the Acting Prime Minister and Minister for Trade. Would the Acting Prime Minister and Minister for Trade inform the House of the importance of using trade liberalisation to address world poverty? How is the government working to improve the lives of millions of people around the world?

Mr VAILE—I thank the member for McPherson for her question. I recognise her very keen interest in these matters, particularly the linkage, as far as poverty alleviation is concerned, between official overseas development aid and trade policy. Australia is delivering a message to the rest of the world, and that is that aid and trade liberalisation can lift millions of people out of poverty if targeted and engaged in properly. The Prime Minister is in New York at the UN world leaders summit. He will outline Australia’s regional successes in terms of targeted aid. At the same time, he will encourage major players such as the European Union and the United States of America to reduce trade barriers, to allow the developing world access to their wealthier markets.

We are approaching a crucial time as far as the Doha Round is concerned with a critical ministerial meeting to take place in December of this year in Hong Kong. We need to see more leadership from leading economies in the world to break the impasse, particularly over agriculture, because it is agricultural trade that initially allows the developing world access into those wealthier markets across the world. Of course, it is also
very important for the Australian economy that we see an improvement in global agricultural trade. I welcome the comments from Prime Minister Tony Blair last week when he said, ‘All countries stand to benefit from increased trade and the importance of poor country access to rich country markets.’ We would say, ‘More strength to his arm.’ Prime Minister Blair needs to also convince his colleagues in the European Union about those objectives, as we continue to do. I welcome comments made by the EU Commissioner for External Trade, Peter Mandelson, that trade barriers are ineffective and only distract domestic industries from becoming competitive. This government is engaging both the EU and the US at this time to secure an agreement in Hong Kong.

We should never underestimate the importance and the significance of a developed country like Australia strongly advocating trade-liberalising policies across the world for the benefit of the developing world and, at the same time, playing our role and discharging responsibilities as far as aid is concerned. The World Bank estimates that freeing up world trade and abolishing agricultural subsidies would boost global welfare by up to $240 billion a year and lift 140 million people out of poverty across the world by 2015. These are certainly objectives that are worth pursuing, and we as the Australian government are certainly going to maintain our engagement in pursuing those objectives.

National Security

Mr BEAZLEY (2.22 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. I refer the minister to his commitment to Victorian farmers reported in the *Weekly Times* on 20 July to ‘wind back security arrangements for the handling of ammonium nitrate’. How does the minister propose to wind back the regime for handling and transporting ammonium nitrate agreed by the Council of Australian Governments last year? Given the minister’s stated intention to reduce the level of security surrounding the handling of ammonium nitrate, does he oppose today’s calls from some Victorian members, the member for La Trobe and the member for Flinders, for a further tightening of security arrangements relating to this material?

Mr McGAURAN—I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for his question. Of course farmers and primary producers understand the requirements of, and the necessity for, national security and the interests and safeguards that the government must pursue. I will certainly check the quote that the Leader of the Opposition seeks to throw at me, but I will not be taking it at face value because what my comments were directed at was that the cost impost not fall unfairly on one sector of the community over another. Consequently, how the issue of ammonium nitrate progresses, in what way and under what regulatory regime, particularly involving the states, is still being worked out, particularly as we look at other chemicals as well. Do not misunderstand my comments or the intent of agricultural sectors, which fully understand and accept their responsibilities in contributing to national security.

Economy

Mr BAIRD (2.24 pm)—My question is addressed to the Treasurer. Would the Treasurer outline to the House recent trends in investment and consumption. What is driving these results and what do they imply for Australia’s economic outlook?

Mr COSTELLO—I thank the honourable member for Cook for his question. Last week’s national accounts figures showed that the Australian economy continued to strengthen in the June quarter, growing by 1.3 per cent to be 2.6 per cent higher through the year. When you consider the challenges
we have had in the economy this year, that is particularly pleasing—challenges such as the trade weighted increase of the Australian dollar, which was eight per cent above its post-float average. There is also the challenge that world oil prices are now giving to the economy, with world oil prices, on average, now 45 per cent higher in 2004-05 than in 2003-04.

The other feature of the national accounts which was pleasing is that, although we are seeing a moderation in household demand and dwelling investment, they showed a very strong growth in business investment. Business investment is what will drive growth in the future and increase the capacity of the Australian economy. The business investment results could be shown with a pick-up of seven per cent from the June quarter, to be 15 per cent higher over the year; new building investment, 13 per cent higher over the year; new machinery and equipment, 18 per cent higher than a year ago; and new engineering and construction rose by 18 per cent over the year. In nominal terms, businesses invested around $110 billion in 2004-05. Of that $110 billion, $10 billion was in the mining industry. As you can imagine, in response to high prices, new investment in the mining industry has gone in for bulk commodities. We will be increasing capacity in both the iron ore and the coal industry to take advantage of an appreciation in Australia’s terms of trade and high mineral prices. So it is not just the growth in the national accounts; it is the quality of those national accounts, which shows that Australia is now investing and rebalancing growth, and that the export sector will be stronger in the years ahead.

**Telstra**

Mr SWAN (2.26 pm)—My question is directed to the Treasurer. Is the Treasurer aware that, under the Corporations Act, companies are required to put their remuneration reports, which include performance hurdles, termination payments and the salaries of the top 10 executives, to a shareholder vote at their annual meeting? Can the Treasurer confirm that the Telstra CEO, Mr Trujillo, is entitled to a termination payment of at least $6 million if he is fired before July 2006? Will the Treasurer inform the House whether the government intends to vote against this $6 million payout.

Mr COSTELLO—Under the government’s Corporations Law changes in the CLERP 9 amendments that we put into the act, a company is required to put its remuneration policies to an annual general meeting. That goes to a non-binding resolution and, as I understand it, it is also done in arrears. If that is the case, at this year’s annual general meeting it would be the remuneration practices applying in 2004-05.

Having said that let me go on and say that a directors’ pool is put to an annual general meeting. The government as a shareholder would be required to vote in relation to directors. I understand that the shareholding minister, Senator Minchin, the Minister for Finance and Administration, has indicated that the government will not be voting against that resolution, so that would give an indication as to what is required in relation to the market and what the proper remuneration is. Given consideration of other corporate salaries of comparable companies, the shareholder minister takes the view that it is reasonable in the circumstances and therefore would not be voting against it.

**Workplace Relations**

Mr HENRY (2.28 pm)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations. Would the minister update the House how red tape is reducing productivity in the Australian work force? Are there any alternative views?
Mr ANDREWS—I thank the member for Hasluck for his question and for his interest in the ongoing reform of the workplace relations system in this country. The old system of awards that operates in this country still contains many ridiculous provisions and, indeed, inordinate amounts of red tape. Let me give the House a few examples of this. One award contains an allowance of $3 a day if office workers have to share facilities with building workers. So if an office worker has to share a lift with a building worker who has some mud on his boots or if he needs to share the same bathroom facility because a building is being renovated, there is an award provision which says that the office worker gets an extra $3 a day—absolutely ridiculous.

There is another award provision that says that unionists should not be required to work with non-union members. In the private sector union membership has fallen to 17 per cent, and yet there is an award that says that union members should not be required to work with non-union members. Another award limits the number of apprentices that can be employed in the workplace. In Australia we want businesses to take on more apprentices yet we have an award provision that limits the number of apprentices that a business can employ. This is absolutely ridiculous.

The Australian Labor Party’s policy is a policy that wants more of this. Its policy says that we should have a system of comprehensive awards—something which the Leader of the Opposition has endorsed. So too does the union movement. At last year’s election the CFMEU distributed a pamphlet which demanded, if the Labor Party was elected in last October’s election, the re-insertion into awards of matters such as seniority, limitations on hours of work and preferences for unionists. Imagine what a disastrous impact this would have on building sites in Australia. Building unions would determine who was employed on the building sites and the hours of work and the conditions under which they are employed. That would mean that in the member for Hasluck’s state of Western Australia Kevin Reynolds would effectively be the human resources manager for every building site in Perth. These are examples of how ridiculous and rigid the old award system is. This is what the Labor Party wants. This is why we have to change workplace relations in Australia.

Fuel Prices

Mr FITZGIBBON (2.32 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer, and I welcome him back. Can he confirm that on 12 August the Singapore price for petrol was $95 per barrel but more recently it rose to $120 per barrel, while the crude oil price a month ago and today has more consistently hovered at $89 per barrel? If so, does the Treasurer agree with the Chairman of the ACCC, Graeme Samuel, who said: ‘Something funny is going on with refiner margins’? Will the Treasurer now do what the Prime Minister did not do, and direct the ACCC to formally monitor fuel prices? In the Prime Minister’s absence, will the Treasurer show some leadership and pick up the ball that the Prime Minister dropped?

The SPEAKER—I call the Treasurer. The Treasurer will ignore the last part of that question.

Mr COSTELLO—I thank the honourable member for his welcome back. It is good to be back. I missed him very badly! I do not have the price of Singapore oil on particular days with me, but I can tell him that the ACCC does not need any direction from the government to investigate improper practices in this market or indeed in any other market. If there is monopoly conduct or if there is predatory pricing, or if there is some other breach of the Trade Practices Act,
the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has full power to bring proceedings and investigate. Indeed, we would recommend that it do so. If Mr Samuel wants to know the government’s view, the government’s view is of course that the ACCC should investigate any evidence—any credible evidence at all—of profiteering or anti-competitive conduct in this market. The ACCC would hardly need a direction from this government to do that because this is the government which has increased its resources, this is the government which has given it a very clear direction in relation to competitive prices and this is the government which has indicated that it will be moving to increase fines against anti-competitive conduct because we believe in free and open and efficient and competitive markets.

Can I also say, while I am on it, that the ACCC should have a very good idea indeed of this market because the ACCC has conducted numerous investigations into this market. When the government did its last fuel tax inquiry, the fuel tax inquiry noted that there had been 44 inquiries into the oil market since 1983. I can assure the House that the problem in this industry is not a lack of inquiries. There have been 44 in the last 20 years.

Ms Plibersek—What is the problem?

Mr COSTELLO—The member for Sydney asks what the problem is with petrol prices. Let me tell her what the problem is. The member for Sydney might have heard of the world oil price. The world oil price does have just a little bit to do with the price you pay for petrol, surprisingly enough. If you see the world oil price at all time records then it is a fair bet that the price will flow through to the petrol pump. That is the thing about markets—as upstream prices go up; downstream prices tend to follow. That is the way an economy works.

Mr Fitzgibbon—I rise on a point of order. I seek leave to table a graph which shows the huge inconsistency in the price rise of crude oil as compared to the price rise in the refined product.

The SPEAKER—Leave is not granted.

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

Mr TICEHURST (2.37 pm)—My question is addressed to the minister for Health and Ageing. Would the minister update the House on how the government has continued to provide Australians with affordable access to the medicines they need?

Mr ABBOTT—I thank the member for Dobell for his question. While I am on my feet I probably should mention that the electorate of Dobell has had an 8.3 per cent rise in the GP bulk-billing rate over the last 12 months thanks to the policies of the Howard government. As well as universal insurance for medical expenses and a guarantee of free treatment in public hospitals for public patients, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme is one of the three pillars of Medicare. Thanks to the PBS, Australians have affordable access to life-saving and life-enhancing drugs. This year the PBS is expected to cost some $6.5 billion, and the cost has been growing at a compound rate of almost 10 per cent over the last decade, even though all new listings are subject to rigorous cost-effectiveness evaluation.

Since October 2003 there have been some 300 new listings on the PBS, adding over $1 billion to the PBS forward estimates. For instance, from 1 October a drug called Eloxatin will be extended to patients who have just had colon cancer surgery. This will increase their chances of avoiding a recurrence of the tumours by some 25 per cent. This drug costs $12,000 a year. Every month patients will pay $28.60 or $4.60 and the government will pay more than $1,000 every month towards these patients’ treatment.
costs. But provided they are cost-effective and provided they meet rigorous evidentiary tests, the government is happy to see new listings on the PBS, because we believe in Medicare and we believe in the PBS.

I happened to go onto the web today and I looked up the Australian Labor Party’s policy on the PBS. The Australian Labor Party’s policy on the PBS amounts to just 10 words. It is a $6.5 billion area of government expenditure and Labor’s policy is just 10 words. Labor will, they say, ‘deliver affordable medicines and improve the quality use of medicines’. That is not a policy; that is a cliche. It is because there is nothing but cliches from those opposite that the Australian people have concluded that the Howard government is the best friend that Medicare has ever had.

Telecommunications Services

Mr ANDREN (2.41 pm)—My question is to the minister representing the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts. Can the minister confirm that the subsidised HiBIS satellite plan for rural internet subscribers who cannot access broadband by any other means is about to be wound up, that the two-way satellite is incapable anyway of handling the new and substantially cheaper voice-over-internet and that the ACCC is insisting on de-averaging access prices for the so-called local loop, meaning a likely charge of around $8 in Sydney and over $140 in rural and remote areas? Minister, where is the future proofing, parity pricing and protection of rural subscribers in this?

Mr McGAURAN—I thank the honourable member for his question. It is a detailed question that deserves a considered response. I will take it on notice and ensure that all his points are fully answered. Towards the tail of his long question he asked about future proofing. I need only direct him to the government’s legislation with respect to future proofing—first raised some years ago in the Estens inquiry—which has as its basic meaning that rural and regional areas will not miss out in the future on the introduction of new technology because it is uncommercial for telecommunication carriers to invest in it. It is exactly for that reason that the government has the communications fund—$1.1 billion over four years—to invest in upgrades of HiBIS, broadband, faster internet and so on. At the same time there is the $2 billion telecommunications fund which will provide an income stream for investment in new technologies in the future.

Mr Tanner—I rise on a point of order with respect to relevance. The minister has been asked specific questions about the future of HiBIS and differential pricing for rural consumers, and he is refusing to answer them.

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

National Security

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (2.43 pm)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Transport and Regional Services. Would the minister advise the House of the government’s initiatives to upgrade security at Australia’s regional airports?

Mr TRUSS—As the honourable member is aware, the government is involved in an extensive campaign to upgrade security at airports around Australia—$162 million has been allocated, about half of which will be spent in regional areas. Of course the airports themselves and the airlines also have significant responsibilities in that regard and they are investing large amounts of money to improve their security networks.

Today I am announcing another group of regional airports that will benefit from this program. The honourable member will be particularly pleased to know that three of
them are in his own electorate. Three are in quite remote parts of Queensland at Bedourie, Birdsville and Blackall. Those are small communities where it would be very difficult for them to fund the airport upgrades that are necessary, and the government is helping them in that regard. There will also be assistance for the airports at Coober Pedy, Kowanyama, Toowoomba, and Warrnambool. I also particularly mention Ravensthorpe in Western Australia because I know that local members there have been interested in that airport, which has had upgraded services over recent times. This group of eight will now bring to 31 the airports around regional Australia that have received funding assistance from the federal government to upgrade their security.

Of course that is not all that the federal government are doing. We are assisting in relation to the development of rapid deployment teams, doing experimental work with CCTV at airports, improving access control and implementing a whole range of other measures to help make our regional airports as safe as they can be. A lot of work needs to be done in relation to security and a multi-faceted approach needs to be taken. The government are responding positively to the concerns of regional airports to deal with those issues.

**Telstra**

**Mr BEAZLEY** (2.45 pm)—My question is to the Acting Prime Minister. If the government is not a distressed seller of Telstra, why is it that only one day was provided for submissions to be received for the Senate legislative inquiry, and only one week to consider the five pieces of legislation before a vote in parliament? Will the Acting Prime Minister commit to ensuring that the parliament has sufficient time to debate the bills before the House and that members in this House will not be gagged?

**Mr VAILE**—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. Of course the parliament will have ample opportunity to debate these bills. We will provide the parliament the opportunity that the Labor Party did—actually, we will provide more opportunity than the Labor Party provided on Qantas, the Commonwealth Bank and the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories. Not one of those privatisation processes were referred to a Senate committee at all. It is important to note that the parliament should deal with these bills expeditiously, because of issues that are very well known.

This has been debated for years. I have not got the record—there have probably been more inquiries into this issue than there have been into petrol pricing across the nation. Can I make the point again: the Labor Party come in here and argue that we should be taking a lot more time—and I have heard the arguments of Senator Conroy—but let me point out to the Labor Party that when they were in office they did not refer the Commonwealth Bank sale bill to a committee, they did not refer the Qantas sale legislation to a committee—

**Mr Beazley**—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. I want to know whether the debate today is going to be gagged.

**The SPEAKER**—The Acting Prime Minister is in order.

**Mr VAILE**—I am answering the Leader of the Opposition’s question by saying that we are going to provide more opportunity for debate on these matters than the Labor Party did on the privatisations that they oversaw when they were in office.

**Drought**

**Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON** (2.47 pm)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Would the Minister advise the House on
economic conditions facing Australia’s primary industries at this time? How is rural Australia responding to the challenges of drought?

Mr McGAURAN—I thank the honourable member for Bass for his question and his continuing and deep interest in Australia’s primary producers—particularly in Northern Tasmania. He is joined by the member for Braddon in that regard. These two new members of the government have very strongly—even fiercely—brought the interests of their vegetable growers and other constituents to my notice and that of the government at large. I am glad to be able to advise the House that, following improvements in rainfall, there is some degree of growing optimism in the rural sector in many areas that conditions of and returns to primary producers will improve. I hasten to add, though, that the recent rains over many parts of Australia do not mean the drought at large is over—not by a long shot.

Just yesterday, for example, the New South Wales drought was reported to have eased, but 77 per cent of the landmass of that state is still drought declared. However, crop reports issued by ABARE just a few days ago reflect the growing potential for a break in the worst and arguably most prolonged drought in 100 years. But we are by no means out of danger. Total winter crop production in Australia is now forecast to reach 31.1 million tonnes, which is down only two per cent on the 2004-05 financial year. Importantly, it is a significant improvement since ABARE’s June forecast. Across the nation, the Australian government has provided $750 million directly to farmers through exceptional circumstances payments, which amounts to some $4 million each week. Every eligible farmer receives 100 per cent of their entitlement.

It is a reminder to us of the importance of the agricultural sector to the nation’s local, regional and national economies that during the 2002-03 financial year the drought wiped one per cent off the nation’s GDP. The agricultural sector is doing a great many brilliant and new things. It is a very innovative, productive and efficient part of the economy. Its social importance to rural communities can never be overstated. Let us also remember the great stories that come out of agriculture because of the efforts of farmers, food processors, distributors and transporters. It is one of the leading sectors in productivity year in, year out—that is required of them. As of today, 386,000 people are employed in agriculture and over 187,000 in food and beverage processing.

While many industries have undergone significant reform, often forced upon them by international as well as domestic circumstances, primary industries have changed, altered and improved more than most. In these times of drought, commodity downturn, international change and international trade barriers, the government stands shoulder to shoulder with the nation’s farmers.

Telstra

Mr GAVAN O’CONNOR (2.51 pm)—My question is to the Acting Prime Minister. Is the Acting Prime Minister aware that there has been little or no investment to upgrade exchanges in regional South Australia since they were converted from manual to automatic 40 years ago? Is he aware that during peak periods such as harvest time many farmers cannot even get a line out because the network is overloaded? How can the Acting Prime Minister describe the situation where farmers cannot even make a simple phone call as satisfactory? Why is the Acting Prime Minister supporting the sale of Telstra and selling out the bush?
Mr VAILE—I thank the member for Corio for his question. We are not selling out the bush. We are guaranteeing investment into the future in bush telecommunications. We are guaranteeing that there will be an ongoing ability to deal with the need for future technology in regional Australia with what we are proposing. I am not aware of the exact and specific circumstances that the member for Corio raises. I am quite happy for him to give me the information on specific exchanges. I will take that up.

Can I say that this government sets the rules to ensure that customers are provided with a guaranteed minimal level of services under the USO and the CSG, and the member for Corio knows that. Telstra has reported capital expenditure on its networks of more than $3.6 billion in 2004-05 and is forecasting to spend $4 billion this financial year. Can I just make the point that out of this whole process—and I refute the allegation that the member for Corio makes that we are selling out the constituency in the bush as far as telecommunications are concerned—I have not heard one word from the Australian Labor Party about how they are going to ensure and guarantee services in the bush and in regional Australia in the future. At least we have outlined a plan that is well thought out and well structured that focuses on investment, focuses on competition and focuses on regulation.

Employment

Mr CADMAN (2.53 pm)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Workforce Participation. Would the minister inform the House how the government’s employment programs are helping to build new small businesses and create jobs?

Mr DUTTON—I thank the member for his question and for his interest in what has been a very successful employment program of this government. Can I say that, as I go around the country visiting members in their electorates and talking to different constituents, one of the main questions I get asked is: ‘How come when Kim Beazley was the employment services minister unemployment was 10.7 per cent and under you it’s five per cent? Why was it double under Labor?’

Mr Price—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. He was not asked about unemployment rates; he was asked about unemployment.

The SPEAKER—The minister has the call and the minister is in order.

Mr DUTTON—Why can’t the Australian people take the Labor Party seriously? Who knows? One of the reasons we have an unemployment rate today that is half the rate at the time when Labor was in power is related to the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme, NEIS, which is a wonderful program. We know that since the program started 90,000 people have become self-supporting and independent through that scheme.

Mr Albanese—It’s ours! It’s a Labor program.

Mr DUTTON—we know that it has been an incredibly successful scheme—

Mr Crean—Yes, and who set it up?

Mr DUTTON—which has been supported and refined by this government. When I was in Hobart recently, at the awards night, I was there when a presentation was made to JJ’s pools and spas, located in Bundaberg. I know that the member for Hinkler is a great supporter of the NEIS program in his part of the world. We know that the proprietors there have performed incredibly well since their business was set up in 2004. So why was unemployment double under the Labor Party? Because they have no idea about labour policy programs. It is why this government has been able to put in place an unem-
employment rate of five per cent and it is why the Labor Party remain a joke in this country.

The SPEAKER—Before calling the next question, I remind the minister that he should refer to the Leader of the Opposition by his title.

Telstra

Mr CREAN (2.56 pm)—My question is to the Acting Prime Minister. Is the Acting Prime Minister aware that in Queensland since 2000 there have been a large and increasing number of rural faults not repaired within the time specified by the customer service guarantee? Given that the standard of services in regional and rural Queensland continues to deteriorate, why has the National Party, with the possible exception of Senator Barnaby Joyce, sold out its own constituency and rolled over on the sale of Telstra?

Mr VAILE—I thank the member for Hotham for his question. I again direct the Labor Party's attention to the published statistics with regard to fault repairs. The public statistics from ACMA show that more than 99 per cent of services were fault free in July 2005.

Mr Tanner—that means they didn't have a fault in July!

Mr VAILE—the regulator, the Australian Communications and Media Authority, publicly releases information every three months.

Mr Tanner interjecting—

Mr VAILE—if I can just draw the Labor Party's attention—

Mr Tanner interjecting—

The SPEAKER—the member for Melbourne is warned!

Mr VAILE—to some of the things that we are doing in this package, it was the coalition government that introduced the USO, that legislated the USO and that legislated the consumer service guarantee. It was not the Labor Party. We set the standards. We propose to tighten those standards as part of the current package and, on top of that, under the network reliability framework we propose to instruct Telstra to deal with about 480 of those cable runs each year. It is quite clear that we have a proposal in place that deals with a lot of these issues, but I again draw the attention of the Labor Party to the published official material as far as the reported faults are concerned.

Education and Training

Mrs DRAPER (2.59 pm)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Vocational and Technical Education. Would the minister update the House on the latest training statistics? What is the government doing to recognise the contribution apprentices make to Australia?

The SPEAKER—in calling the honourable Minister for Vocational and Technical Education, I remind the member for Makin that it is not expected that she wear that scarf. She might remove it.

Mr HARDGRAVE—Mr Speaker, in answering the member for Makin’s question, can I let her know that she was a winner not only as regards her team over the weekend but also as regards her electorate, because there has been a 492.3 per cent increase—that is almost a 500 per cent increase—since March 1996 in the number of people in new apprenticeships, in training, in the Makin electorate. In simple figures: 390 people were in training in 1996; and 1,920 are in training in 2005. Just imagine how much better off things will be in Makin when the South Australian government finally signs up to the new national training agreement. Today, the state of Victoria joined Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory in signing the agreement, and South Austra—
lia, Tasmania and the ACT will be signing up soon, leaving poor old New South Wales, yet again, the isolated case.

I must also say to the member for Makin that I know that she is not satisfied with the 500 per cent increase. When I visited her electorate recently and the combined campuses of Golden Grove High, Gleeson College and Pedare Christian College at Golden Grove, we spoke to 1,500 students. They are themselves sorting out where they want to go and what they want to do. They understand that being involved in a vocational trade is a mark of great success. The Australian government is also doing its part with the new Australian technical college at Elizabeth West in Adelaide’s north. This will service both the Makin and Wakefield electorates and the suburbs of northern metropolitan Adelaide. We congratulate the Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide and Northern Adelaide Industry Group for their success in that.

To further update the House, the most recent figures show that, as at 31 March this year, 390,200 people were in training as new apprentices. That is up from 138,800 in March 1995. In the last 12 months, some 161,400 trade and related workers were in training—41 per cent of all new apprentices. These occupations only make up 13 per cent of the employed workforce. The commencement in trades has seen an increase of 13 per cent. In the last 12 months, 265,800 new apprentices have commenced. In the last 12 months there has been a 49 per cent increase in school based new apprenticeships and 70 per cent of all commencements are at certificate level 3. Again, imagine if the state of New South Wales came on board and signed up to the national training agreement. They are doing absolutely nothing to assist school based apprenticeships in that state.

The member asked about recognition. Last week, the best welder in the world was here in the gallery, and the Prime Minister got to shake his hand. Imagine how we get to the point where a bloke from Eugowra—those opposite are laughing—was judged the best welder in the world at the recent world skills competition held in Helsinki. He was a gold medal winner. He came to Parliament House, along with a number of other gold and bronze medal winners. This chap comes from country New South Wales. He beat apprentices from Korea and Japan. They traditionally take that prize. Australian apprentices are taking on the world by getting world’s best training. The government is determined to assist that process and to advance the cause, because for Australia’s economic viability in the short, medium and long term the work we do is very important indeed.

**Telstra**

Mr BEAZLEY (3.03 pm)—My question is to the Acting Prime Minister. I refer him to the Prime Minister’s October 2001 pledge that the government would not move to fully privatise Telstra until: ‘We are completely satisfied that things in the bush are up to scratch.’ Is the Acting Prime Minister aware that the Prime Minister repeated that pledge a further 19 times between November 2001 and March 2005? Can the Acting Prime Minister confirm that the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts has conceded that metropolitan telephone services are more reliable than rural regional and remote services? Given that things in the bush are not up to scratch, why is the government breaking its word?

Mr VAILE—The government are not breaking their word. Over the last nine years or so, we have invested over $1 billion in telecommunications infrastructure across Australia, and it has dramatically improved on what it was when we inherited it. When we inherited the whole regime from the La-
bor Party in 1996—and there is no question about this—we all recall that one of the last acts of the Labor Party and the Keating regime was to turn off the analog mobile phone system and replace it with nothing. There were no plans to fill the gap that was going to be left by the switching off of the analog mobile phone system. We have spent $1 billion over those nine years and we are proposing to continue to invest in regional Australia.

The Labor Party just need to read the published statistics as far as services are concerned. The latest fault repair time performance figures show that 91 per cent of telephone faults were repaired within the CSG time frame in the last quarter. This is three per cent higher than in 2004. To give you an idea of how Telstra’s performance has improved since we have been in office, back in 1998 when we introduced the CSG, Telstra was repairing just 70 per cent of those faults; it is now 91 per cent—a 20 per cent improvement. We should also reflect that when Labor were in office they did nothing to lift standards. People could wait up to 27 months for a phone. They are a hell of a lot better now than they were under Labor, and they stand to get a hell of a lot better under this government.

Small Business

Mr VASTA (3.05 pm)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Small Business and Tourism. Would the minister advise the House of the confidence levels of Australian small business?

FRAN BAILEY—I thank the member for Bonner for his question and I congratulate him for his very strong advocacy of small business. I can advise the House that the business confidence levels of small business in Australia are overwhelmingly positive. The recent MYOB survey stated that eight out of every 10 small businesses were overwhelmingly positive in their dealings. This followed very closely on the Sensis small business index survey, which showed an increased percentage of small businesses again demonstrating how overwhelmingly positive they felt. In fact, they nominated tax cuts, in particular, which have been stimulating demand.

The other area that they nominated was the government’s industrial relations reform. I guess this is not rocket science for small business, because small business understands—unlike the shadow minister for small business—that the flexibility that they need in the workplace will be delivered by this government and that the unfair dismissals legislation that they have been crying out for for years will be delivered by this government.

Let me get on the record exactly what small business had to say in the Sensis business index survey. When they were asked why they were supporting the federal government, the No. 1 reason was their industrial relations policies, followed by the belief that they were trying to help small business. SMEs across all sectors and all political leanings are supporting changes to the current industrial relations environment. When you drill down into some of these surveys, there was one disturbing factor that small business identified—that is, their problem in dealing with state governments and state government taxes. They nominated in particular both the Victorian and New South Wales state governments. When you look at the rate of land tax, the levies on fire insurance and issues like that, is it any wonder that small business criticises state governments but regards very highly what this government is doing for small business?

You add to that—what small business have already identified in these surveys—our 25 per cent entrepreneur’s tax discount and
the amendments to the Trade Practices Act. I must get it on the record that the shadow minister for small business and tourism held a press conference on 11 August and encouraged the Treasurer to withdraw all of the amendments to the Trade Practices Act. So is it any wonder that small business in this country regard this government as the champion of small business?

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

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

House of Representatives: Dress Code

Mr PRICE (3.09 pm)—Mr Speaker, last week during a division—and I think a quorum—you drew attention to dress standards. When looking at House of Representatives Practice it appears that members in the past have been allowed some leniency in relation to divisions and quorums. I wonder whether you would clarify that. In relation to the honourable member for Makin, would it be all right if I wear my Parramatta colours?

The SPEAKER—I thank the Chief Opposition Whip. The answer to the second part of his question is obvious from my response to the member for Makin. In answer to the first part of his question, I am preparing some notes on that. I will report back so that all members are aware, but I will be building on a previous statement that Speaker Andrew made on that subject.

Parliamentary Procedure

Ms ROXON (Gellibrand) (3.10 pm)—Mr Speaker, I have a question about the use or misuse of parliamentary procedures to allow appropriate debate in this House. I wonder whether you could refer to the two occasions last week—but it has happened on a number of other occasions as well—when the Attorney-General used question time to announce government policy, instead of making a ministerial statement. As you would be aware, there is a prohibition on asking questions in such a form but not necessarily on answering them in that way. Could you consider that and provide some advice to the House on why and how ministers fail to use the opportunity to make ministerial statements—which of course provide the opposition with an opportunity to respond, unlike using question time where they do not have an opportunity? We had another example of that today with a different minister. If this House is going to be a house of debate, I think ministerial statements should be used when government policy is announced so the opposition has an opportunity to respond.

The SPEAKER—I thank the member for Gellibrand for her question. I will look carefully at the Hansard and report back to her on that matter, as appropriate.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mrs VALE (Hughes) (3.11 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mrs VALE—Yes.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mrs VALE—I refer to a report on page 6 of the Australian of 30 August this year by Matt Price and Patricia Karvelas which was factually incorrect, misleading and damaging to me personally. For the benefit of those members in the House, I quote from the article:

Mrs Vale ordered an investigation after the Herald Sun revealed she had ignored a report to increase veterans’ benefits by $650 million and instead presented cabinet with a plan costing $150 million.

This report is incorrect in two respects. Firstly, I did not take a plan for veterans’ entitlements worth $150 million to cabinet. Secondly, and more importantly, at no time
did I instigate any police investigation into the matter—which is the leak from my department. Also, I would like to place on the record a clarification printed in the Australian on page 2 on Wednesday, 7 September 2005 in relation to this matter.

Mr TANNER (Melbourne) (3.13 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr TANNER—Just a bit.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr TANNER—In the discussion of a matter of public importance in the House on Thursday, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, in his capacity as Minister representing the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, claimed that a press release that I distributed in June last year had endorsed the Telstra dividend policy that was the subject of the 11 August document that was given to the Prime Minister. In fact, that press release did no such thing. It simply commented favourably on Telstra deciding not to use any further money for dubious investments in Asia or attempting to buy Channel 9 or Fairfax, and that it was better that it should be redistributing its money back to shareholders.

Mr BEAZLEY (Brand—Leader of the Opposition) (3.13 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr BEAZLEY—Absolutely, by the Minister for Workforce Participation—and not in that part of his answer which suggested that 12 years on all sorts of people are walking up and down the streets discussing how I had conducted myself as Minister for Employment, Education and Training. I do not know whether they followed my personal history very closely, but they did not on that one. The other was the suggestion that I and others in the Labor Party did not have a single idea when it came to employment policies. For 10 minutes the only scheme he discussed was one of ours—NEIS.

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (3.14 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr FITZGIBBON—I do indeed, by the Minister for Small Business and Tourism during question time.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr FITZGIBBON—The Minister for Small Business and Tourism accused me of calling for the withdrawal of a trade practices amendment which she claims was going to be beneficial for the small business sector. What I did do was ask for it to be withdrawn and redrafted for the removal of two anti small business components and the retention of the very important collective bargaining provisions for small business.

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (3.15 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Ms GRIERSON—Yes, scurrilously so.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Ms GRIERSON—Last Thursday, whilst speaking on the adjournment debate in this House, the member for Paterson discussed a Newcastle City Council resolution which condemned the Howard government’s extreme industrial relations proposals, supported union-friendly workplaces and proposed that the council not enter into contracts with businesses that had AWAs. In that speech the member for Paterson claimed that
by publicly supporting Newcastle City Council’s resolution I support ‘illegal action’. This is not true. Firstly, the council has not acted illegally. It is not illegal to pass a motion.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member will come to where she has been misrepresented.

Ms GRIERSON—Secondly, in public statements I stated my support for the motion’s important principles of fairness in the workplace and the right of communities to speak out and protect themselves against the government’s extreme industrial relations proposals. I did not state any support for illegal action.

Mr HUNT (Flinders—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage) (3.16 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

The SPEAKER—Does the parliamentary secretary claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr HUNT—Yes, I do.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr HUNT—In question time today the Leader of the Opposition asserted that the member for La Trobe and I had called for ‘tighter handling’ of ammonium nitrate. This is incorrect. We specifically did not seek or call for any further changes in farm handling or sales procedures for ammonium nitrate. We did, however, call on the state Labor premiers to make existing information on ammonium nitrate sales available to the Commonwealth CrimTrac database. Contrary to the Leader of the Opposition’s assertion—

The SPEAKER—The member will resume his seat. He will not debate the issue.

PETITIONS

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

### Workplace Relations

To the Hon Speaker of the House and Members of the House assembled in Parliament:
The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws the attention of the House to the fact that:
WE BELIEVE that Australians should have basic rights at work, including decent minimum wages and awards conditions, protection from unfair dismissal and the right to reject AWA individual contracts and negotiate collectively with their employer.
WE OPPOSE the Howard Government’s plans to:
- Remove employment conditions from awards.
- Change the way minimum wages are set to make them lower.
- Use individual contracts to undercut existing rights and conditions.
- Keep unions out of workplaces and reduce workers’ negotiating and bargaining rights.
- Abolish redundancy pay and protection from unfair dismissals for the 3 million people who work in small business.
- Reduce the powers of the independent Industrial Relations Commission to settle disputes and set fair minimum standards at work.
- Take away rights at will with laws that unilaterally override and weaken State industrial relations systems, awards and agreements.

And we, your petitioners, ask the House to ensure that the Government upholds Australians’ rights at work and does not implement these plans that we oppose.

by Ms Hall (from 28 citizens)

### Workplace Relations

To the Honourable Speaker of the House and Members of the House assembled in Parliament:
The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws the attention of the House to the fact that Australians should have basic rights at work, including decent minimum wages and awards conditions, protection from unfair dismissal and the right to reject AWA individual contracts and negotiate collectively with their employer.
The petitioners also draw the attention of the House to the fact that we oppose the Howard Government’s plans to:

- Remove employment conditions from awards.
- Change the way minimum wages are set to make them lower.
- Use individual contracts to undercut existing rights and conditions.
- Keep unions out of workplaces and reduce workers’ negotiating and bargaining rights.
- Abolish redundancy pay and protection from unfair dismissals for the 3 million people who work in small businesses.
- Reduce the powers of the independent Industrial Relations Commission to settle disputes and set fair minimum standards at work.
- Take away rights at work by using federal laws to unilaterally override and weaken State industrial relations systems, awards and agreements.

And we, your petitioners, ask the House to ensure that the Government upholds Australians’ rights at work and does not implement these plans that we oppose.

by Mr Jenkins (from 33 citizens)

Workplace Relations

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

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

WE BELIEVE that Australians should have basic rights at work, including decent minimum wages and awards conditions, protection from unfair dismissal and the right to reject AWA individual contracts and negotiate collectively with their employer.

WE OPPOSE the Howard Government’s plans to:

- Remove employment conditions from awards.
- Change the way minimum wages are set to make them lower.
- Use individual contracts to undercut existing rights and conditions.
- Keep unions out of workplaces and reduce workers’ negotiating and bargaining rights.
- Abolish redundancy pay and protection from unfair dismissals for the 3 million people who work in small businesses.
- Reduce the powers of the independent Industrial Relations Commission to settle disputes and set fair minimum standards at work.
- Take away rights at work by using federal laws to unilaterally override and weaken State industrial relations systems, awards and agreements.

And we, your petitioners, ask the House to ensure that the Government upholds Australians’ rights at work and does not implement these plans that we oppose.

by Mr McArthur (from 61 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 The Church of Christ, Burwood – Mount Waverley VIC 3149, petition the House of Representatives in support of the above mentioned Motion.

AND we, as in duty bound will ever pray.

by Ms Burke (from 20 citizens)
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 Dunstan’s Anglican Church, Camberwell, VIC 3124, petition the House of Representatives in support of the above mentioned Motion.

AND we, as in duty bound will ever pray.

by Mr Georgiou (from 14 citizens)

Human Rights: Falun Dafa

To the Honourable the 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 the persecution Falun Dafa in China.

Falun Dafa is a peaceful spiritual practice with over 100 million adherents in over 40 countries. In July 1999 the Chinese Central Government launched a propaganda campaign against Falun Dafa and declared the movement to be illegal. Tens of thousands of practitioners have been imprisoned without trial, while hundreds have been tortured to death. This crackdown is clearly a breach of fundamental human rights.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the House urge China’s leadership to immediately:

(1) Lift the ban on Falun Dafa and restore its legal status.

(2) Withdraw the warrant of arrest for Mr Li Hongzhi, founder of Falun Dafa.

(3) Cease the torture of all detained Falun Dafa practitioners and release them forthwith.

(4) Guarantee the full civil rights of released practitioners and their relatives.

(5) Rectify all false propaganda used to defame Falun Dafa.

We further request that the Australian government issue a clear statement supporting the right of Falun Dafa practitioners to freely exercise their beliefs, and condemning the aforementioned abuses of human rights.

by Mr Albanese (from 9,014 citizens)

Villawood Detention Centre

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 officers of the Department of Immigration and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) removed two, long-term students, aged six and eleven, from Stanmore Public School on the 8th March, 2005. Not only was this
horrendous for the two children involved, but the ramifications of their removal and detention at Villawood has caused a serious ‘ripple effect’ amongst the school community as a whole. The officers arrived without notification and without a guardian present. The children, who had been expecting their mother to arrive back in Australia from overseas that day, were brought to the school office by school staff. Expecting their mother, they were shattered to be met by the two DIMIA officers. These officials refused to let them say goodbye to their friends and took them away.

This event was played out in the media with Senator Vanstone indignantly defending her department. For the two children involved, their friends, the rest of the students and staff, this was a devastating event.

We teach our children never to go with strangers. Teachers are entrusted with ‘duty of care’ for our children. Yet Stanmore PS staff were compelled to hand two children in their care to strangers, in disregard of Duty of Care and Child Protection Policies. Senator Vanstone falsely claimed that the children could not be allowed to return to an empty house. Yet these children were being looked after by relatives and friends whilst their parents were overseas. Given the decision was made to remove the children from the school grounds, WHY wasn’t their mother brought along, after all she was in the custody of the Department of Immigration having been detained at the airport.

We are desperately concerned about the welfare of our two students who are currently detained. The mental well being of these children is at the forefront of these concerns. Ian, who is only eleven years old, has already witnessed attempted suicide and self harm whilst in detention. He has been placed in an invidious situation by a DIMIA officer and asked to act as an interpreter for his mother on documents which now appear to have been deportation documents. This is in breach of DIMIA’s own regulations that legal representation and a qualified interpreter be present. Young children should not be exposed to these stresses. The psychological damage to these children falls squarely on the shoulders of Senator Vanstone and her department.

As parents and community members, we expect the welfare of the children to come first. As a society, we are judged by how we treat the most vulnerable. It is time for Senator Vanstone to take responsibility for the decisions of HER department. It is time to end the lies. It is time to rectify the breach of trust that has taken place.

Your petitioners ask the House for the immediate release of Ian and Janey from Villawood detention centre, pending decisions about their long-term future.

by Mr Albanese (from 2,410 citizens)

Workplace Relations

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

The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws the attention of the House to the fact that Australian employees will be worse off as a result of the Howard Government’s proposed changes to the industrial relations system.

The petitioners call upon the Howard Government to adopt a plan to produce a fair industrial relations system based on fairness and the fundamental principles of minimum standards, wages and conditions; safety nets; an independent umpire; the right to associate; and the right to collectively bargain.

The Petitioners therefore ask the House to ensure that the Howard Government:

(1) Guarantees that no individual Australian employee will be worse off under proposed changes to the industrial relation system.
(2) Allows the National Minimum Wage to continue to be set annually by the independent umpire, the Australian Industrial Relations Commission.
(3) Guarantees that unfair dismissal law changes will not enable employers to unfairly sack employees.
(4) Ensures that workers have the right to reject individual contracts and bargain for decent wages and conditions collectively.
(5) Keeps in place safety nets for minimum wages and conditions.
(6) Adopt Federal Labor’s principles to produce a fair system based on the fundamental principles on minimum standards, wages and conditions; safety nets; an independent umpire; the right to associate; and the right to collectively bargain.

by Ms Burke (from 294 citizens)

Protection of the Minorities Treaty
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 Parisian Peace Conference at the end of WW1, where the “Wilsonian” plan was not accepted, created the ongoing trauma of the last 85 years for Hungarians.
At all times the Conference were making decisions the Hungarian delegation was forcefully excluded. How can a Treaty under those conditions be accepted by the world today?
The over 1000 year’s old Hungary was butchered: 73% of territory, 63% population was given to newly created states. As a pre-condition of receiving territory, each of the successor states have signed the “Protection of minorities Treaty”, but not one of these states have ever respected their commitments. With the exception of the town Sopron, the population was not given the right of self determination over their region.
As a consequence human and cultural devastation, forced assimilation still exists.
The signatories secured in the Trianon Treaty the “Self Governing Autonom” what was never realized, and further more, there is no section or clause in the Trianon Treaty stating that the originally-Hungarian territories be given to the now RE-CREATED countries as they exist today.
Your petitioners therefore respectfully request that the House encourage employers to provide fair working conditions for their employees.

by Mr Byrne (from 719 citizens)

Abortion
The Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives.
This petition of citizens draws to the attention of the House that the majority of the Australian population believe that the decision about whether or not to terminate a pregnancy should be up to the women concerned and her doctor. Furthermore, this majority is growing.
The majority pro-choice public opinion should, in a democracy, be reflected in the law and government policy. That means:
(i) all criminal and other laws that codify/limit abortion access should be repealed, so that abortion is not subject to more restrictions than any other medical procedure; and
(ii) abortion services should be made freely available through the public health system, with full Medicare coverage for terminations.
Your petitioners, therefore, demand that the House reject any attempt to limit Medicare coverage of abortion.

by Mr Causley (from 71 citizens)

Workplace Relations
To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.
We the undersigned call on the Federal Government to preserve the basic rights of Australian workers, including a preservation of a basic minimum wage and award conditions and the retention of the Industrial Relations Commission.
Australian workers should be protected against unfair dismissal and also have the right to reject AWA individual contracts and negotiate collectively with their employer.
Your petitioners therefore respectfully request that the House encourage employers to provide fair working conditions for their employees.

by Ms Hall (from 48 citizens)

Whaling
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:
The petition of certain citizens of Australia draw to the attention of the House:

- The failure of the Government to protect 400 whales slaughtered in Australian waters by Japanese factory ships in the last four years despite laws passed by the Parliament in 1999 which gave it the power to do so; and
- Japan’s intention to seek an expansion of its whaling quota at the June meeting of the International Whaling Commission.

Your petitioners therefore request the House to:

(1) Take all steps to prevent an increase in Japan’s “scientific research” quota at the International Whaling Commission meeting to be held in Korea in June 2005.

(2) Take all necessary legal steps to enforce Australian laws creating an Australian Whale Sanctuary in the Southern Ocean and making it an offence to kill or injure whales in Australian waters.

(3) Challenge the legality of Japan’s abuse of the “scientific research” exemption to the ban on commercial whaling by taking a case to the International Court of Justice.

by Mr Jenkins (from 335 citizens)

Small Business

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 proposed changes from 1 July 2005 to the payment of employees superannuation will mean unacceptable amounts of paperwork for small business. We ask the House to exempt small business from these superannuation changes.

by Mr Jenkins (from 184 citizens)

Human Rights: Falun Gong

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: Sydney resident David Liang, father of two, was shot in both feet only hours after he and eight other Australians arrived in South Africa to file a lawsuit against Chinese officials who were visiting South Africa.

This proposed lawsuit charged China’s Vice President Zeng and Minister of Commerce Bo with torture, genocide and crimes against humanity, committed according to Jiang Zemin’s personally stated policies regarding Falun Gong to “Ruin their reputations, bankrupt them financially and destroy them physically,” as well as, “Killing them won’t matter because their deaths will be counted as suicides.” Zeng and Bo have been served with lawsuits during previous overseas visits for their pivotal role in prolonging the persecution of Falun Gong in China.

South African Police are investigating the incident as attempted murder against an Australian.

Australians Terrorised

Falun Gong practitioners have long been the victims of discrimination, harassment and assault from Chinese officials on Australian soil and worldwide. A known ‘blacklist’ has been circulated to prevent Falun Gong practitioners travelling overseas. This incident in South Africa is the most severe case to date and marks a new level of violence in the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners outside of China.

YOUR PETITIONERS THEREFORE REQUEST THE HOUSE TO:

- Pay close attention to the safety of Australians, including Falun Gong practitioners, who face terrorist attacks by Jiang Zemin’s faction within the Chinese Government to help prevent such terrorist activities.
- Co-operate with authorities in South Africa to thoroughly investigate this incident and bring to justice those responsible for this attempted murder.
- Condemn the acts of terrorism by Jiang Zemin’s faction against Falun Gong practitioners both inside and outside of China.

by Mr Melham (from 575 citizens)

Community Pharmacies

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

The Petition of citizens of Banks draws the attention of the House to the important role that Com-
Community Pharmacies play in the health care system. The petitioners call upon the House to ensure the Howard Government opposes the extension of pharmacies to major retail supermarkets. The petitioners also ask the House to note that a failure to do so would:

(a) Lead to the closure of many Community Pharmacies, the majority of whom are hard working small businesses;

(b) The loss of jobs among the 30,000 assistants currently employed in community pharmacies;

(c) Put at risk the 80 million free services provided by Community Pharmacies to the Australian community, many of who cannot afford the cost of going to the doctor due to the decline in bulk billing; and

(d) The reduction in training and career opportunities for people who have chosen pharmacy as their career.

by Mr Melham (from 385 citizens)

Petitions received.

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (3.19 pm)—Mr Speaker, since some tens of thousands of people were involved in those petitions, I wonder if there have been any ministerial responses to those petitions.

The SPEAKER—I am not aware of any.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

Veterans’ Affairs

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON (Batman) (3.20 pm)—I move the motion relating to the Clarke review of veterans’ entitlements in the terms in which it appears on the Notice Paper:

That this House:

(1) expresses its concern at the prosecution by the Howard Government of Melbourne Herald-Sun journalists Harvey and McManus for exposing the Government’s intention to adopt only five of the sixty-five changes recommended in the Clarke review of veterans’ entitlements, including the Government’s intention not to overhaul the Totally and Par-
community to report stories of the day honestly, openly and without partisanship. They are required to make a serious contribution to constructive debate about the issues facing the nation, communities and people. But they do deserve to be taken to task when they act dishonourably.

The Howard government, however, has clearly decided that journalists will be pursued whenever they report something it does not like. In fact, they will be threatened with jail if they refuse to name professional contacts who provide information the government does not want reported. That is what happened to Harvey and McManus. They are threatened with jail for doing their job in accordance with the professional code of conduct, their professional code of ethics. It is interesting that Andrew Bolt did not face a similar threat. Why? Because the government wanted Bolt to publish leaked information—highly sensitive, classified security information—to soften up the public to justify the government’s involvement in the Iraq war.

This case brings to a head the need for reform of the law in relation to the compellability of evidence in relation to professional confidences. I suggest it is long overdue. Indeed, I note a number of the Prime Minister’s own colleagues have already reminded him of this need. I refer in particular to comments by Senator Brandis and the member for Kooyong, who have exercised the courage of their convictions on this issue. The fact is that the Howard government made a mistake in seeking to bury the recommendations of the Clarke review. The fact is that Harvey and McManus did the community an important service in exposing the arrogance of the Howard government in denying veterans and war widows decent improvements in entitlements. The Howard government decided to dud them and their widows, but it did not want the community to know about it. It certainly did not want the Australian community to know about it in an election year or in the lead-up to the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. I suppose it is fair to say this is the hallmark of the increasing arrogance of the Howard government.

I believe very strongly that the community has benefited from Harvey and McManus’s reporting of this issue, and it is time for the Howard government to front up to the fact that it was at fault because it sought to deny veterans and war widows justified improvements in entitlements. It is time for the Howard government to front up to the fact that it is doing the wrong thing by the public servant and the journalists who exposed it and respected the right of the community to know. As the member for Kooyong recently said:

In a healthy democracy, it is hard to believe that a journalist might be imprisoned for accurately reporting a story of significant public interest that poses no risk to national security. I call on this House to express that sentiment here today, and I call on the Prime Minister and the government to take action to prevent an unnecessary prosecution. Let us also remind the House that the public servant involved in this story has been suspended without pay and faces up to two years jail if convicted by a jury of the unauthorised disclosure of information. This debate is a sad indictment of the bullying and intimidating behaviour of the Howard government and its incompetence with respect to the right of entitlements of our veterans community. It reflects the Howard government’s arrogance and complete disregard for the community’s right to know. (Time expired)

The SPEAKER—Is the motion seconded?

Ms Gillard—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.
Mrs GASH (Gilmore) (3.25 pm)—The member for Batman is very strong on rhetoric but is very weak on substance. I rise to speak to the motion, but I must preface my comments with the observation that the subject matter of the member’s motion is a matter before the courts and, therefore, I am constrained from commenting directly on the case.

The Department of Veterans’ Affairs referred the alleged leak of departmental information concerning the government’s response to the Clarke review for investigation by the Australian Federal Police in February 2004. I am advised that following the AFP investigation the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions preferred charges against the departmental employee under the Crimes Act 1914. The staff member has been suspended from duty without pay since charges were laid on 29 March 2004. However, I have noted the judge’s decision relating to the two journalists. As the matter is before the court, it is not appropriate for me to comment further.

Ms Roxon—They haven’t been charged yet!

Mrs GASH—Just hold on! Just wait. I do want to comment on the other two elements of this motion: the alleged right of journalists to rely on a self-imposed code of ethics to protect their sources and the facts of the review into veterans’ entitlements, commonly referred to as the Clarke report.

On the first aspect, it has to be observed that journalists sell news. It is a commercial, even mercenary, vocation, so in that respect the high moral ground assumed in relying on a code of ethics when the pressure is on must surely create a dilemma. In my mind, the law of the land must prevail over any philosophical or ideological view, and if that reliance is placed on that position then it constitutes a contempt of court. This is well documented, so it is trite to stand here and condemn the government for upholding the law. The media has a right to report the facts and certainly we do not want to encourage suppression of truth. On one hand the government must be transparent, yet on the other accountability means that there are times when confidentiality must be preserved for the greater interest. It is not for a journalist to judge an issue. That is why we have courts—to interpret and apply the laws made by government.

But commenting without supporting their view with facts is tantamount to making a public judgment. This is made worse by the fact that they may be commenting without knowledge of the implications of what they are commenting on. If it is for pure sensationalism, then they have no right to rely on their code of ethics. In fact the principles of this code of ethics include the principles of truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness and public accountability. All of those principles must be met if the code is to have any credence. You cannot just cherry-pick to suit your circumstances. But, most of all, journalists must respect the law, for if they do not they simply brand themselves as sanctimonious hypocrites when relying on their ethical code.

Can I now make comment on the second aspect of this motion, the assertion that somehow the government denied veterans certain entitlements from the review. The purpose of the review was to see if the philosophy underpinning the Veterans’ Entitlements Act was still valid today, and the review committee found that it was. It did not identify any need to change something that has held veterans in good stead since the inception of the original act. That having been determined, the rest was academic.

Sure there may have been 109 recommendations originally, and if all were upheld it
would have been at considerable cost to the
government. But over half were overturned
because not all of these recommendations
accorded with the underlying principles of
the act and, consequently and understanda-
ably, were disallowed. The net result was an
additional $267 million over five years for
veterans and war widows. It built on our
strong track record for veterans and it
brought the veterans’ budget to $10 billion in
its first year—an additional $4 billion overall
since 1996.

The review was conducted at arms length
to the government and the recommendations
were formed in conjunction with the terms of
reference. This does not mean that the gov-
ernment is constrained to comply with those
recommendations without some discretion.
This discretion was exercised with a number
of significant recommendations overturned,
with the result that veterans’ benefits were
improved. As expected, not everyone was
happy with the outcome, but in general terms
it was a very satisfactory result. The new
treatment of veterans’ disability pensions and
indexation arrangements is particularly laud-
able. It is specious for this motion to imply
that somehow many veterans were robbed
when any objective examination of the dy-
namics of the process shows the reverse. It is
also a mischievous and misleading gesture
which can only raise unfair expectations.
This motion deserves to be consigned to the
place it rightly belongs—in the rubbish bin.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor) (3.30 pm)—I rise
to support the motion moved by the member
for Batman. Let us remind ourselves that the
starting point for this matter was a very im-
portant revelation in the Herald Sun on 20
February 2004, an article entitled ‘Cabinet’s
$500m rebuff revealed’. In that article were
details of a party room revolt against cabi-
net’s proposal that only five out of 65 rec-
ommendations of the Clarke review—
recommendations meant to benefit veter-
ans—were going to be picked up by the gov-
ernment.

Interestingly, in a personal explanation to-
day the former Minister for Veterans’ Affairs,
the member for Hughes, denied that she was
the one who caused the police investigation
into the leak on which this article appears to
be based. Interestingly, the Prime Minister
has also denied being the person who
brought about the police investigation, which
must make you wonder, if it was not the
Prime Minister and it was not the relevant
minister, who it was who called in the police
to investigate this matter. That is a question
that I trust we will have answered, if not dur-
during the course of this debate then by the gov-
ernment at some point. You would think the
rational sources of the Prime Minister or the
former Minister for Veterans’ Affairs could
resolve this. She has denied it; he has denied
it. If those denials are to be believed, then
there must be a third party involved. Who is
that third party that brought the police into
this matter? That is a question we would like
answered.

But the police were brought into this mat-
ter. Why? A possible answer would be that
the government calls in the police to investi-
gate each and every leak, but we know that is
not true. We know, of course, that there was
a leak to Andrew Bolt of Office of National
Assessment material, which has never been
investigated by the police. So why were the
police called in on this occasion but not on
other occasions when matters have been
leaked? Of course, that is because the gov-
ernment goes around strategically leaking
stuff itself when it wants to, and the Bolt
matter might well be in that category, from
the Minister for Foreign Affairs or his office.

The government goes around strategically
leaking stuff when it feels like it, but when
the leak is to its disadvantage it comes over
all unctuous and moral about the law and
calls in the Federal Police. I can see that the member for Kooyong is considering the use of the word ‘unctuous’ in this context, but I think unctuous is the right word. We know that the government objected very much to this leak and it set about getting the AFP to conduct an investigation that has involved trawling through records of 3,000 telephone extensions and hundreds of mobile phones within the Department of Veterans’ Affairs. That costly investigation was carried out and then charges were laid. As a result of those charges, two journalists, Michael Harvey and Gerard McManus, are now in the impossible situation where their professional code forbids them to acknowledge who it was who gave them the information and, if they stand by that professional code, they could well be jailed.

This development is not in the interests of our democracy. It comes from a government that likes to revel in extreme measures but, when it is caught out, has a glass jaw. The glass jaw has been shown on this occasion by the bringing in of the police, which has led to the situation we are in now where two journalists who were going about their daily work of uncovering the truth in the public interest now face being jailed because this government has a glass jaw.

This is not the only leak that the police have been called in to investigate; it is not the only time this government has shown a glass jaw. During Senate estimates the Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee was told that there have been 111 investigations into leaked government documents since 1997. An investigation into leaks of intelligence material about East Timor, for example, has reportedly cost upwards of $1 million. This is a government that to protect itself will spend any amount of money trying to track down people who may have leaked information because of their concern about the public interest while, on the other hand, when the government wants even security material to be out there in the public domain, it cheerfully goes around leaking it without any suggestion that an investigation be called. These are double standards, pure and simple—double standards that have a cost to our democracy because it is very important in our democracy that journalists can go about finding the truth. They can only do that if they are protected in these circumstances. (Time expired)

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (3.35 pm)—I am pleased to speak on this motion that the member for Batman has put before the House on the Clarke review of veterans’ entitlements, though I would prefer to refer to it as ‘contempt of court by journalists’. This motion is not very genuine in its stance on freedoms of journalism; it is more of a hatchet job on the former Minister for Veterans’ Affairs. In fact, in contributing to this debate I would like to quote an article by Paul Jacob, the US term limit senior fellow:

Any organisation has a right to decide who works for it, but when people are fired solely because they are exposing somebody that needs exposing, that’s wrong.

That is correct; there are so many varying forms of leak. There are leaks that are in the national interest; there are leaks that are in the interests of the people who leak them. However, there are other leaks which go to the whole security of a nation. For example, the Department of Homeland Security in the US has issued a warning for law enforcement agencies to watch out for Americans who ‘expressed dislike of attitudes and decisions of the US government’, implying that legitimate dissent could be equated with terrorism. The department, established in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, does not guarantee its employees protection for whistleblowers.

Where national security is at stake there is a different view of this whole issue. How-
ever, as I said, this motion is not a defence of the journalists and their codes of ethics but a personal attack on the former Minister for Veterans' Affairs and member for Hughes, Danna Vale. To put it in context, I was one of the 13 members of the party room who saw that the Clarke report was inadequate. It is the democracy of our party room that, when we saw something seemed to be quite wrong with the Clarke recommendations, the Prime Minister committed to go away and change it. It is democracy in action from our party room that helped the veterans receive a better deal so that they got CPI or MTAWE, whichever was higher, on their entitlements.

Matt Price is somebody whom I know and for whom I have a lot of respect, but I did think it was a very cheap shot when, in the Australian newspaper recently, he actually used the article in defence of his colleagues. I thought it was a cheap shot that he should then decide that he would involve this particular minister, because there are so many other leaks and issues that even the other side have brought up about journalists receiving information.

The member opposite asked, 'Was it the minister or the Prime Minister?' with her own figures. The fact is that the department initiate these proceedings where they find leaks from their own department. As the member opposite said, there have been 111 investigations by the AFP into leaked government documents since 1997, 37 leaked inquiries have commenced between 2002 and 2005 and there have been 22 convictions of journalists since 1991. So this is not new or relevant to this government; this has been part of the whole make-up of government, certainly at a national level.

My point—and let us not get too cute about it—is that the member for Hotham came on national television and said that he had been able to download the travel entitlements of members from a public servant who had had them downloaded to him. He was dumping information himself, so he is no lilywhite in this case. But it is not the journalists in this case who are at fault. The public servants who leak this information often sign confidentiality agreements and when they do so there is a civil obligation under law for them to stick to these agreements. They are signed legal documents. When they do it, they do it knowing that there could be consequences. I am not an apologist for journalists, but we do know, as the member opposite said, that these people are not always your friends. They certainly do not mind taking your head off if they get an opportunity—do not stand between them and a good story. What I do support in the member’s motion is the fact that Australia is not a totalitarian society, it is a democratic society, and I therefore support the reform of the laws in relation to the democratic rights of journalists to print material judiciously that they have received from whatever source.

Dr Emerson (Rankin) (3.40 pm)—This is a vicious, nasty government. It is a government that has presided over a Federal Police investigation involving the checking of 3,000 telephone extensions within the Department of Veterans’ Affairs and hundreds of mobile phones. The document involved was not even a cabinet-in-confidence document; it was not a document relating to national security. From memory, it made page 3 of the Herald-Sun. Though the two journalists would have regarded it as an important discovery, it was not in the scheme of things something that would have threatened national security or undermined the cabinet processes of this government. Yet this government pursued an investigation and it asked the Federal Police to conduct that investigation.
Then we had the former Minister for Veterans Affairs standing up here giving a personal explanation, which was just a repetition of a letter that she sent to the *Australian* newspaper, where she talks about the ‘standard practice in the event of a departmental leak’. There is no standard practice that says that departments must investigate every possible leak with no discretion. In any event, who runs the department? Surely the minister runs the department. There is discretion in these matters, and certainly in the Hawke-Keating years there was no compulsion to launch Australian Federal Police investigations into every possible leak. Obviously there is discretion, but the minister has taken no responsibility for the leak. It is very difficult to actually find a minister or a prime minister who will accept any responsibility for these very unfortunate sets of circumstances which have led to two journalists being lined up for contempt charges. We do know that there is a double standard in relation to these leaks. We would at least understand it if the government investigated every leak; but, of course, if it did that it would be investigating itself until the cows come home because it never investigates the leaks that it inspires.

While we are on issues—and I pointed out that there was not an issue of national security here—there was a much more important leak, and that was the leak of an ONA document to the journalist Andrew Bolt. I do not remember indignation on the part of the government, saying this was a breach of national security, even though only government members realistically were in possession of those documents. There was no zealously, there was no energy for pursuing that and in fact—surprise, surprise—no-one was fingered for having been the source of that leak. Why? Because government ministers and their staff would not have cooperated properly. They would know exactly who was behind that leak and why. The purpose was to discredit Andrew Wilkie, the whistleblower. But in this case the government agreed to just five out of 65 recommendations relating to Australian veterans, and that document was leaked. It was embarrassing, but it was not a matter of national security or a cabinet matter.

The judge then asked the Victorian DPP to prepare contempt charges against Harvey and McManus. If found guilty of a criminal offence, this can obviously affect their careers; it can affect their capacity to work overseas, including in countries such as the United States. This government has a very energetic record in relation to leaks. By mid-2004, as my colleague the member for Lalor has pointed out, the AFP had launched 111 investigations of suspected leaks and, in just the four years for which information is available, nearly 33,000 hours were spent tracking down leaks. The fact is that the government investigates some leaks but refuses to investigate others.

This is an extreme government. It is a government that has embarked on a process here which is an abuse of power. Of course there should be discretion in the management of government information and investigation of leaks. The government could have applied that discretion, but it has chosen not to. I have not seen any government ministers intervene and say, ‘This has gone too far.’ Surely there is a capacity on the part of government to at least consider this possibility because of the unfortunate situation that these journalists now find themselves in. Why? Because they upheld the journalists code of ethics on a matter that is not a very important matter in the scheme of things. This government has exercised no discretion whatsoever and that is for one reason and one reason only: because it is a vicious and nasty government and it ought to be ashamed.
of itself for its appalling handling of this incident.

Mr GEORGIOU (Kooyong) (3.45 pm)—Journalists Michael Harvey and Gerard McManus face possible imprisonment for refusing to reveal the source of a story of significant public interest, a story which posed no risk to national security. That is an appalling prospect in a democratic nation. No-one is above the law, but a law which permits journalists to be punished for protecting their sources is a bad law and should be changed. Given the importance of the issue which confronts us, it is regrettable that the motion the opposition moved sought to politicise the issue. I just make a couple of observations. Firstly, it is not the government that is threatening to lay charges; it is the court in the ordinary exercise of its powers. Secondly, the code of ethics that the motion endorses sets out the professional obligations of journalists; it does not establish rights in any meaningful sense. The code has no legal force, and that is where I am pleased that opposition speakers came back to the issue of amending the law. With one exception, Australian laws do not recognise the right of journalists to protect their sources. That is the critical issue with which the motion is purportedly concerned but which it fails to properly address.

The key role of the media is to hold governments accountable through open debate and information. The protection of sources is fundamental to this. As the European Court of Human Rights has said:

... without such protection, sources could be deterred from assisting the press in informing the public on matters of public interest. As a result, the vital public watchdog role of the press could be undermined.

Similarly, US Republican Senator Richard Lugar—certainly no dangerous leftie—has recently said that without protection many whistleblowers will refuse to step forward and reporters will be disinclined to provide constituents with information they have a right to know. Promises of confidentiality are essential to the flow of information the public needs about its government. Senator Lugar was speaking in support of a bill he has drafted for a national law to protect journalists and their sources, following the imprisonment of a New York Times journalist. Many European countries and American states have legislated so-called shield laws to protect journalists and their sources. For example, the UK Contempt of Court Act provides—and we are giving particular attention to UK acts at the moment:

No court may require a person to disclose ... the source of information contained in a publication for which he—

and presumably she—
is responsible unless it is established to the satisfaction of the court that it is necessary in the interests of justice or national security or for the prevention of disorder or crime.

New South Wales laws give judges discretion to direct that evidence will not be demanded of a witness where doing so would disclose a protected professional confidence in certain proceedings. That law is of very limited application, but it has to be said that the Australian Law Reform Commission has recently proposed that the Commonwealth follow the New South Wales model, acknowledging that it may apply to journalists but without looking specifically at the profession.

In the absence of an overriding public interest, the intimidation of journalists to reveal sources under threat of imprisonment makes declarations about the value of a free and fearless press ring hollow. The Harvey-McManus case demonstrates that the law does not provide the guarantees essential for the media to serve as an effective watchdog. Legislation is necessary to strengthen protection for the press to undertake its vital role as
a pillar of democracy. Government members have raised this matter with the Attorney-General and he has indicated that he is looking at a range of issues and it is the subject of an ALRC investigation.

As I said earlier, no-one is above the law. But a law which punishes journalists for refusing to reveal sources of an accurate story of significant public interest which poses no risk to national security is a bad law. I hope the court takes note of the importance attached by this House—and all the speakers, I believe—to the contribution of the media to Australia’s democratic processes and that the protection of confidential sources is vital to this. I trust as well that the consequences for the journalists’ futures are borne in mind. There are potentially very serious consequences if criminal convictions are recorded.

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

Poverty

Mrs May (McPherson) (3.50 p.m.)—by leave—I move notice No. 5 as amended:

That this House:

(1) recognises:

(a) that poverty and hunger remain the most important challenges facing the international community;
(b) that there are 2.2 billion children in the world, over 1 billion children are severely deprived of at least one of the essential goods and services they require to survive, grow and develop and millions of children are severely deprived of nutrition, water, sanitation facilities, access to basic health-care services, adequate shelter, education and information;
(c) that impoverished children often grow up to be impoverished parents who in turn bring up their own children in pov-

erty and that in order to break the generational cycle of poverty, poverty reduction must start with children;
(d) the contribution the Australian Government agency AusAID makes to reducing poverty in developing countries and the real funding increase of over 11 percent that AusAID received in this year’s Federal Budget over last year’s Budget figure; and
(e) the work done by UNICEF on behalf of children of the world;

(2) calls on the Australian Government to:

(a) continue on with its outstanding overseas aid program; and
(b) continue to focus on the essential building blocks for progress towards the Millennium Development Goals; and

(3) on a bipartisan level, supports the work being done by UNICEF.

Poverty and hunger remain, in my view, the most important challenges facing the international community. I wonder how many of us in this House have experienced hunger or thirst or what it is like to be freezing cold because of a lack of shelter. Over one billion children across the globe are deprived of at least one of the essential goods and services they require to survive, grow and develop. The failure of states and declining government, conflict, terrorism, religion, drought, culture, the spread of HIV/AIDS and the emergence of new pandemics continue to throw up challenges for overcoming poverty. And it is the children who suffer. Impoverished children often grow to be impoverished parents. The generational cycle of poverty needs to be broken and must start with the children.

I want to commend the Australian government and AusAID for the programs they deliver on the ground in developing countries in an attempt to alleviate poverty. But I also say to my government, ‘Please look at increasing the aid budget next year—every
dollar will make a difference.’ Our Australian aid programs reach more than 58 million people living in poverty around the world, with most of our projects being delivered on the ground in the Asia-Pacific region. Our programs are well targeted, are well funded and have ongoing and far-reaching benefits for local communities in these areas. One program that is having positive poverty reduction outcomes is the primary education enhancement project in India. This project increases the participation and retention of all children up to the age of 14 in quality education programs with a special emphasis on the education of vulnerable children, including girls, working children, children of the poor and those with special needs.

By providing education in a manner which addresses and builds upon the self-worth of the child and by enhancing community and government based structures to reinforce this, children in disadvantaged circumstances are able to undertake formal education. The long-term benefits are that children, especially girls, are provided with an education that equips them for more productive lives, thus lifting them out of poverty, and that the capacity of the education system to provide quality education is enhanced.

I also want to recognise today the international work undertaken by UNICEF, an organisation that relies solely on voluntary contributions to sustain its programs. The work undertaken by this organisation is impressive and indeed global. This non-political organisation is a member of the United Nations family, which gives it a position of unique strength and influence, and without political influence it retains the flexibility of an independent field based agency. In the 2005 UNICEF report Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, states:

Poverty denies children their dignity, endangers their lives and limits their potential. Conflict and violence rob them of a secure family life, betray their trust and their hope. HIV/AIDS kills their parents, their teachers, their doctors and nurses. It also kills them.

The quality of childhood is largely determined by the care and protection children receive, or fail to receive, from adults. Children do have rights. They have a right to a loving and understanding family environment, they have a right to an education, they have a right to food, shelter and clean drinking water and they have a right to live an individual life in society in a spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity.

As a member of UNICEF, I encourage all members of this House to join this group within our parliament and encourage your constituents and friends to become a global parent of UNICEF. Being a global parent is like being a real parent, only on a much bigger scale. You need the same qualities: to be loving, dependable, caring and committed. Parenthood is about taking responsibility for another human being; global parenthood is much the same. Helping vulnerable children, no matter where they live, no matter what their religious beliefs and no matter how horrendous their circumstances, to achieve their full potential can be a massive task. To achieve this end, I call on the world community to increase their efforts to find ways to reduce childhood poverty and hunger and make a difference to those one billion children. As nations we can do that by supporting the MDGs and the global push to make poverty history. I commend the motion to the House, and thank members from both sides of the House for supporting it.

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

Mrs Markus—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.
Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney) (3.55 pm)—I want to congratulate the member for McPherson for putting this motion on the Notice Paper. It really is a very important issue, and it is very timely. At the moment, world leaders from a variety of countries are heading to New York, including our own Prime Minister, to debate the Millennium Development Goals. In a world where cows receive more aid than many of the world’s children, I think there could not be a better time to put on the public record that the interests of the poorest children in the world should be a priority for each and every one of us. So I thank the member for McPherson for raising this issue today.

Every single day 30,000 children around the world die from poverty related causes. Any one of us who thinks about the tragedy of the death of a single child, or anyone who has had that happen in their family or to a friend, would know how devastating it is for the family and for the community involved. The fact that the deaths of these children are, for the most part, entirely preventable makes them so much more tragic. Two million people die from tuberculosis every year, and 11 million children under the age of five die each year from preventable diseases. Many of these diseases we no longer recognise in the Australian community, and they would be very easily treated if they were treated quickly enough. Children still die of dehydration because they cannot get rehydration salts quickly enough. The cost of providing treatment for these children is so very low that I cannot help but consider it immoral that we do not make a greater effort to do this. A billion people lack access to potable water. Four million people each year are newly infected with HIV-AIDS, and many of them will leave behind very young children. They will leave behind children of seven, eight or nine years of age who suddenly become the head of the family, with younger brothers and sisters to care for because they have been orphaned.

The Millennium Development Goals that we wish to achieve by 2050 aim to halve extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, reduce child mortality, promote gender equality, combat AIDS, improve maternal health and ensure a sustainable environment. These Millennium Development Goals provide an international framework through which we can make a real dent in extreme child poverty.

This is an unprecedented chance, a once-in-a-lifetime chance, for Australia to make a true and honest commitment, and for the rest of the world to make a true and honest commitment, to changing the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable people on our planet. What we are being asked to do is just doing our fair share. I am very pleased that the Prime Minister did make the decision to travel to New York. It is a very important gesture, and I hope that he will be able to convince his friends in the United States that their 700 objections to the draft document really are of enormous concern to the world community. The watering down of the Millennium Development Goals would be an incredible waste of an opportunity to end extreme poverty.

This year is also the International Year of Microcredit. Microcredit gives a wonderful opportunity to end poverty in some of the world’s poorest countries. Women in particular have been terrific recipients of microcredit and have made family businesses that lift themselves and their children out of poverty.

I want to conclude by saying that UNICEF is a wonderful organisation. I have been a long-term member. With the permission of the Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer, Mr Brough, who is at the table, I would like to table this message that
was written by people urging the Prime Minister to visit New York this week and to continue to commit Australia to achieving our share of the Millennium Development Goals. This is a policy that has enormous public support. I believe that the Prime Minister’s gesture this week is a good one. I hope that he will be able to recommit Australia and to convince his friends in the United States that these Millennium Development Goals will play an important role in ending extreme poverty as we know it.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—Order! Is there any objection to leave being granted to table the document? There being no objection, leave is granted.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth) (4.00 pm)—Jesus said, ‘The poor are always with you,’ but are we always with the poor? The extreme poverty and hunger which grips more than a billion children and their families around the world is all too often overlooked as we struggle with other issues which appear to be more immediate or perhaps more soluble. Too often we regard our commitment to helping the poor as being discharged just by the giving of more money, but money can be wasted just as easily—perhaps more easily—as it can be wisely and effectively spent. Africa has received more than $1 trillion of aid since the end of European colonisation yet there are few parts of that continent where poverty is being reversed. Central to Africa’s tragedy is bad government, civil war, corruption, tyranny and disease. A trillion dollars has done more for the troubled conscience of the West than it has for the desperately poor of Africa. What would do more to alleviate poverty in Zimbabwe—another million dollars of aid or the replacement of Robert Mugabe with a competent and honest government? What would do more to stop the spread of AIDS in South Africa—more aid for the dying or a president who recognised that HIV causes AIDS and that, without a change to the sexual behaviour of South African men, there can be no stopping of the plague.

The most effective antidote to poverty is economic growth. From 1981 to 2001 it was a growing world economy that saw the proportion of the world’s population living below $1 a day decline from 33 per cent to 18 per cent. More than half a billion people were lifted out of poverty in East Asia alone and, of course, this was largely in China. Australia’s aid budget is almost $2.5 billion for this year—the fifth annual increase in a row, and an increase of almost 12 per cent over the previous year. Our aid budget has been criticised as being too low. It represents 0.28 per cent of our gross national income. This is above the average of donor nations but below the UN target of 0.7 per cent. I believe we should continue to increase the resources devoted to overseas aid, both in dollars and as a percentage of gross national income. This is the Prime Minister said two years ago:

It’s an unmistakable reality that, unless countries are well-governed, have law and order and physical safety for people, they’re not going to attract foreign investment and, if they don’t attract foreign investment in a globalised economy, their living standards, far from rising, run the risk of sinking further.

This is not just a First World view. The Prime Minister’s sentiments are confirmed by the work of the great Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto, who has pointed out that very often the poor are not without property, but without rights to that property recognised by law. Our aid program recognises that good governance is the basic building block for development, and that is why Australia’s support for governance has increased from 15 per cent of total overseas development aid.
in 1999 to 36 per cent this year. This will amount to more than $1 billion spent this year on activities directly and indirectly related to good governance.

The government’s outstanding RAMSI initiative in the Solomon Islands is a great example of the way in which Australia can engage, deeply and intensely, with a challenged state to help rebuild its institutions and, in doing so, create a platform from which economic growth can take off. Just as vital as promoting good governance is free trade. There are many on the left who regard globalisation and trade as being a cause of poverty. The reality is that the developing world needs more trade, not less. After all, at no time in the history of the world have more people been lifted out of poverty than in China in the last 20 years. What was the engine of their delivery? Was it overseas aid? No—it was overseas trade. The World Bank estimates that developing countries would gain over US$100 billion a year if the developed world removed its trade barriers against developing country exports. The Europeans give more dollars in aid than we do. In 2003 it was 0.35 per cent of their GDP. But they spent 1.3 per cent of their GDP supporting their inefficient agricultural sector from competition, a ratio of nearly four to one.

Australia, by contrast, is generous with overseas aid and, unlike many other countries, committed to free trade. We have eliminated quotas and tariffs for all goods from the least developed countries since 2003. We have one of the lowest average tariff rates of all OECD countries. This is an important point to bear in mind when we weigh our commitment to overseas aid against that of other countries. Economic growth is the best route—perhaps the only route—to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Countries unlike Australia who are comparatively long on aid and short on trade freedom are working at cross-purposes.

Mr GARRETT (Kingsford Smith) (4.05 pm)—I rise to support this motion on poverty moved by the member for McPherson, Mrs May, with some necessary qualifications, but especially to support the comments of the member for McPherson in relation to the work of UNICEF and to join with other members in this House in acknowledging their endeavours. I want to reiterate what is being said in this House and in countless other parliaments, forums and gatherings worldwide, and that is that this week’s meeting of world leaders and non-government organisations at the United Nations to review progress on the Millennium Development Goals, which were signed onto in 2000, is critical. This meeting represents a truly historic opportunity to gather up the global momentum and to work to end poverty.

I cannot let the comments of the member for Wentworth go unanswered in the House. To argue that economic liberalisation has provided all the answers to world poverty is disputed by the levels of world poverty that we still have and the clear deficiencies in that approach, whilst some successes have been evident. Poverty remains a grinding, desperate fact of life for millions upon millions of people. Poverty is a rebuff to our esteemed high standard of living. For what quality is our comfort if it sits so uneasily, as it does in comparison to the misery of many others with whom we share the planet?

It is truly the eleventh hour for leaders to respond to the call that has issued from the United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, and those countries who have pressed this issue. This has been a people’s movement, driven by countries, non-government organisations and citizens groups who have sought to make our attack upon the scourge of poverty more robust and more immediate.
In this case, that attack on poverty has been joined by the nations who signed on to the Millennium Development Goals in 2000. As Jeffery Sachs, the special advisor to Kofi Annan, says, this is the make or break session on global poverty. The action that is needed, as far as Australia goes, is to commit to 0.5 per cent of GNI to overseas development aid, and set a date for realisation of the 0.7 per cent figure identified by the United Nations as necessary to reach those goals. At present Australia sits at 0.28 per cent, a figure which is the high-water mark of the Howard government’s commitment but which sees us at about 16th of 22 comparable OECD countries. And if that figure is not increased our rating is likely to fall to about 19th of the 22 OECD countries. We can, and we must, do better.

This side of the House acknowledges that under the Howard government overseas aid has increased—especially because of the tsunami, I must note. The increase is welcome, as is the greater commitment to Pacific nations, and the attention to governance and law and order, but this is by no means an outstanding overseas aid program, as the motion asserts. It is on the moderate to low end, and considering the 14 years of economic growth and the levels of overseas aid Australia has achieved under previous governments, including Labor governments, more is needed. Critically, the need is great to incorporate the Millennium Development Goals into the planning and evaluation of Australia’s aid program. It is time to take the words of the Millennium Development Goals and turn them into practical and achievable results. That is the only way in which the words of this motion can have any effect.

In question time the Deputy Prime Minister made reference to trade liberalisation—and, yes, it has a role, especially in relation to those less developed countries with burgeoning manufacturing industries which are currently denied export opportunities. But of real interest and significance is whether or not Australia and Prime Minister Howard, who is now in New York at the UN, will commit us to increasing aid and, critically, to implementing Australia’s aid program with a targeted and measured approach which actually integrates the Millennium Development Goals. That is what the business in New York is all about and that is what we will be looking to the Prime Minister to do.

Mr Deputy Speaker, 0.5 per cent would produce real benefits—an estimated 9,000 fewer cases of AIDS to treat per annum and 11 million more people with access to safe drinking water. These are tangible results and would be positive steps which Australia could confer. We should also commit to extending on-ground basic services to island states and to poorer countries in the region as a significant component of our aid.

There is some concern that the new US ambassador to the UN, Mr Bolton, has recently sought to distance the US from commitment to these and other goals. The member for Sydney referred to this in her comments. This would be an extremely negative development if it spilled into this week’s negotiations, and clear statements by our Prime Minister supporting the totality of the MDGs is certainly now essential.

Mrs MARKUS (Greenway) (4.11 pm)—It is a privilege to rise today to address the chamber and to support the member for McPherson’s motion in relation to world poverty. In the year 2000, at the Millennium Summit, the member states of the United Nations unanimously adopted the Millennium Declaration. This document established a set of eight Millennium Development Goals. These goals focus on essentials: the eradication of poverty; the education of children; improved health; a focus on environmentally sustainable practices; combating
HIV-AIDS and other rampant diseases; and entering into a global partnership for development. These courageous goals require commitment from both developed and developing nations.

Infrastructure and the maintenance of basic conditions are critical for entry into the global marketplace. Columbia University economist Jeffrey Sachs correctly notes in his latest book, *The End of Poverty*, that when the basic preconditions of fundamental infrastructure, such as roads, ports, power and human capital—such as health and education—are in place, markets are powerful engines of development. Without those preconditions markets can bypass large parts of the world, leaving them impoverished.

One-sixth of the world or one billion people live in extreme poverty. That means those people are ill, destitute and hungry. All of these people live in developing countries. Another 1.5 billion people live just above basic subsistence. They face problems such as an absence of safe drinking water and functioning sewerage systems. They experience chronic financial hardship. All told, the extreme poor make up 40 per cent of the global population. There is little doubt that poverty and hunger are the biggest problems facing the international community today.

Even more telling is the way that this problem affects the children of the world. The planet is home to 2.2 billion children, of whom more than half are severely malnourished. These children often lose their parents and extended family members to disease. They become the caregivers to brothers and sisters. Impoverished children become impoverished adults and the circle continues. As with any cycle, intervention is best aimed at teaching and empowering the children. The work of non-government organisations recognises the importance of teaching these precious children and should be acknowledged; in particular, the work of UNICEF is critical. Whilst they often struggle with limited resources, and work in countries with unstable political climates, these organisations focus their attention on the young people and offer some relief, assistance and hope.

The situation is not hopeless. More than half of the world, in broad terms, is experiencing economic progress in some form. This is not to say that progress is happening quickly and efficiently in all areas. The latest progress report shows that while many of the goals are on track, assistance is required, particularly in Africa and South-East Asia. It is in this situation that a nation like Australia makes a positive difference. AusAID delivers targeted assistance. Its current annual budget stands at $2.5 billion, which is a 12 per cent increase over the previous budget.

Our commitment to the Millennium Development Goals is commendable, and I call on the Australian government to continue its excellent overseas aid program, continue its focus on the Millennium Development Goals and increase the annual budget—both in dollars and in percentage of GDP—to targeted assistance. In particular, I want to highlight the educational aid that Australia provides. Since 1999 we have built or refurbished 1,200 schools and trained 45,000 teachers. Over the next 12 months we will invest $330 million in educational aid. This directly assists in providing children with the tool kit to move out of extreme poverty.

What is most critical to the success of the goals is the concept of partnership. There will be no significant and sustained improvement if developed nations simply hand over funds. This does not provide the necessary safeguards to ensure that assistance gets to the people who are most in need. Instead, the Millennium Declaration acknowledges that the welfare of people is the responsibl-
ity of the nation. Developing nations have recognised the need for sound political process to address corruption. *(Time expired)*

Mr Jenkins (Scullin) (4.16 pm)—The cross-section of members who have taken part in this debate on the motion moved by the member for McPherson shows that this House recognises that poverty and hunger are the most important challenges facing the international community. I think the debate has also shown that this House understands that it is the children of the world who are the greatest sufferers of the effects of poverty and hunger. Quite rightly, the honourable member for McPherson has highlighted in her motion the fact that this is a generational cycle that can exist in many countries of the world.

The type of global cooperation that we have seen is an important example of the way in which the global community can come together and strive to do a proper and positive job of tackling the problems that confront the nations that we are talking about. It is therefore sad that in the run-up to the important meetings to be held in New York this week the United States officials should be causing a ruction by querying the way in which the targets that were originally agreed under the Millennium Development Goals should be set down. I do not think we want to quibble about the words; I think we want to quibble about the progress that is being made and the way in which we are going forward. We want to recognise organisations such as UNICEF for the work that they do across all boundaries and without any value judgments about people. The tolerance and cooperation that are conveyed by the type of work that an organisation such as UNICEF can do on behalf of the children of the world are also important. I applaud the comments that have been made, not only by the member for McPherson but also by others in this debate, about the work of UNICEF.

I am also pleased that in her contribution, while acknowledging efforts that are being made by the Australian government, the member for McPherson called upon the government to give great consideration to increasing the level of overseas development aid in the budget. At 0.28 per cent of GNI, it is well below the targets that are indicated by the Millennium Development Goals. We have seen the case in Britain, where Prime Minister Blair on behalf of his nation has committed the United Kingdom to 0.5 per cent of GNI by 2010 and 0.7 per cent of GNI by 2013. Along the way, commitments by France, Germany and other European nations and Canada have also been made along these lines. That is what we must work towards. As I have reflected before, even though there was an additional effort earlier this year after the tsunami, it still only saw the level in Australia creep up to 0.28 per cent.

I was interested to pick up some analysis of the UNDP report on the record of the global development efforts made during the 1990s. It indicated, amongst a number of things, that there were two million fewer child deaths a year and 130 million people lifted out of extreme poverty. But on the other side, 2.5 billion people still live on less than $2 a day. There are 10 million preventable child deaths every year. Let us remember that under the Millennium Development Goals a target has been set for the year 2015 and the UNDP report indicates that, on the progress that is being made at the moment, that target will not be achieved until 2045. That is a reduction by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, of the under-five mortality rate.

The Deputy Speaker (Hon. IR 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.

**GRIEVANCE DEBATE**

Question proposed:
That grievances be noted.

**Rural and Regional Health**

Ms BIRD (Cunningham) (4.20 pm)—I take the opportunity of today’s grievance debate to inform the House that today I presented to the Minister for Health and Ageing a petition signed by 16,357 residents of the Illawarra requesting that the federal government provide a Medicare licence for the medical resonance imaging machine at Wollongong Hospital. It is clear from the extensive local support indicated by the large number of people who took the time to sign the petition that this is an important health resource for the Illawarra region. This petition was well received and widely supported by local residents and community groups. I would like to thank the many people who worked to circulate and collect the petitions—including Wollongong City Council, who made it available in local libraries. There was also excellent local media support for the campaign. The Illawarra Mercury, WIN TV and the Northern Leader all assisted the campaign and made many calls for the federal government to provide the licence.

When I started this campaign in 2002 the hospital was working to get an MRI machine. Many local people, health specialists and administrators had identified this as a critical piece of health infrastructure for the major referral hospital of our region and particularly identified its important role in supporting the work of the new stroke unit at the hospital. As a result of this campaign and the lobbying of state Labor members representing the region, the state government provided the machine to Wollongong Hospital in June 2004, with a commitment for recurrent funding for in-patient services provided in November 2004.

This commitment by the state government was very strongly welcomed at the time by patients and clinicians. The state minister at the time, now Premier, Morris Iemma, indicated that the state’s recurrent funding would allow approximately 20 scans per week for in-patients and that this would be increased as demand grew. Clinicians indicated that full use of the machine, including for outpatient services, would see up to 20 scans a day being performed. This indicates that the demand level is well and truly established. This commitment by the state government was particularly important to local people because until this time 400 to 500 people a year had to be sent to a private facility in Wollongong or to Sydney for scans for which it could take as long as three weeks to get an appointment.

Cases were brought to my attention of inpatients having to be taken by ambulance, very inefficiently, or wheeled in a wheelchair—or, indeed, in one case I was told of, on a hospital bed—up the main road to the private facility. The ongoing problem is that many patients are chronically ill people with a need for ongoing and regular scans to manage their condition, but they are not inpatients of the hospital. This means that they cannot access the MRI machine at the hospital. In some cases they have had to be admitted overnight in order to have the scan as an in-patient. This is a significant inefficiency for the health system and a less than optimal treatment practice for the patients.

Wollongong Hospital is the major hospital in the Illawarra region and is identified as a priority hospital for the allocation of an MRI licence by the state government, yet each time there is an allocation of licences the hospital again misses out. It is my hope that the serious concern of the residents who have
signed the petition and the informed argument of the specialists of our area will convince the minister for health not to overlook Wollongong Hospital in the next round of licence approvals. In January this year, I and the member for Throsby relaunched the MRI petition and we have been inundated with support for the campaign. I also acknowledge the commitment of hospital service campaigners Peter Edwards and Victor Reid.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank my state colleagues for their support in this campaign and to invite the new senator, Senator Fierravanti-Wells, to publicly support local people in this campaign and to make her support known to the minister for health. There is little use to local residents of my area in having a government senator based in Wollongong if she is not willing to take action on an issue that is clearly important to the health needs of the Illawarra. It would be interesting to know her position on this matter, as she has so far been silent. But I acknowledge that she is new to the Senate and maybe she just has not had time to make her position clear. I would invite her to take this opportunity to do so. I am sure her support and a bipartisan approach to the minister would greatly improve the chances of a successful outcome for local patients in the Illawarra. I have written to the senator inviting her to provide support to our region in this campaign and I am hopeful that she will take that in the spirit in which it is intended and make a commitment and write to the minister indicating her support.

For many local people with chronic illnesses it is important to their ongoing diagnosis and treatment that they have access to an MRI machine at Wollongong Hospital as outpatients. In living a day-to-day life full of the pressures of managing a chronic illness and trying to sustain quality of life, it is surely not too much to ask that this service be provided. During the time that the petition was being collected, many individuals and specialists contacted me with their experiences and problems in accessing this service. An example is Chris Monnox from Mount Keira. Chris, who is 17, wrote a letter to me, enclosed with the many signatures he had collected on the petition. Chris’s letter states:

Owing to an illness of mine I have had to undergo numerous tests and other medical procedures in recent years and will most likely have to undergo such procedures in the future. Among the tests I have undergone have been several MRI’s, all of which I have had to travel to Randwick Children’s Hospital to undergo. A trip to Sydney to undergo MRI testing can prove both inconvenient and costly.

Chris needs a scan approximately every 18 months to check on the progress of his disease. Chris currently has to travel to Sydney Children’s Hospital in Randwick, as indicated in his letter. When he turns 18 next year it will become even more difficult. He will have to either go to Sydney or use the private facility and try to manage the cost involved, as his family does not have private health insurance. Chris feels so strongly about the issue that he has not only collected many signatures for the petition but also come to Canberra today to show his support for the campaign.

Another local man, Dean Fury, outlined his problems to me. Dean, who is 32, has a brain tumour that was removed through three operations last year, but it sadly recurred in January this year. Dean is a patient of local specialist Dr Phil Clingan, who has raised many concerns about individual patients with me and has been a constant supporter of the extension of the MRI service to his many outpatients struggling with cancer. Dean needs to have an MRI scan once every six months. He is no longer able to work and relies on the public health system. Dean has to be unnecessarily admitted overnight to hospital in order to have the procedure. Oth-
otherwise, he needs to travel to St George Hospital or Prince of Wales Hospital, with all the added pressure that this involves.

Chris and Dean are just two examples of young adults dealing with chronic illnesses or health management challenges who have contacted me during this campaign. Wollongong Hospital is the major referral hospital for our region, and local specialists in Wollongong treat many patients with ongoing illnesses and disability management challenges. A critical part of this health support network to local patients is the availability of accessible and affordable diagnostic services, such as MRI scans. The minister’s assertion that the existence of a privately licensed machine in Wollongong precludes the public hospital from obtaining a licence does not resolve the many concerns of these patients and their treating specialists.

I urge the minister to consider the issue from the perspective of these patients and specialists. I urge the minister to respect the professional clinical opinions of the specialists when they indicate the need for this service attached to the public hospital for outpatients. I urge the minister to avoid the obvious political trap of seeing this only as a Labor Party campaign and to acknowledge the genuine community basis of the call for this service. I call on the minister to address the concern of the 16,357 Illawarra residents who have signed the petition which I have delivered to the minister and to provide the licence to Wollongong Hospital in the next round of allocations.

Victory in the Pacific

Mr Richardson (Kingston) (4.30 pm)—I rise today to acknowledge and celebrate the 60th anniversary of Victory in the Pacific. It is 60 years since the end of the war in the Pacific when, on the 15th day of August 1945, the Japanese surrendered and, for the first time since September 1939, Australia experienced relief and freedom as a nation.

To celebrate this day, many celebrations were held in my electorate of Kingston. On Sunday, 7 August, I was thrilled to attend and officially open the McLaren Vale RSL memorial rose garden. I was also exceptionally honoured when I was presented with my first plaque as the federal member for Kingston upon opening this important monument. I am particularly appreciative of this plaque because it has such meaning and history behind it. Memorials such as the rose garden are exceptionally important to local communities because they provide a visual reminder to everyone who passes them of the sacrifices made by those Australians who fought for our freedom. They also provide a place where we can come and remember fallen mates and a time when freedom and security were not taken for granted. I was also privileged and humbled to be there in the presence of Keith Payne, the last remaining recipient of the Victoria Cross.

I recently spent some of my time in Canberra visiting the War Memorial. I was being taken around by a World War II veteran who told me of the heroic acts which had resulted in individuals being awarded a Victoria Cross. The acts of the men who were awarded these medals were truly amazing and courageous—beyond anything I can comprehend. I will not tell the story of Mr Payne today, because I have no doubt that everyone here is already well aware of how he and other veterans saved Australian lives while injured and under heavy fire. Mr Payne’s actions left me dumbfounded because I could not comprehend the circumstances of his bravery.

On VP Day, I held a morning function at the South Adelaide Football Club to present surviving veterans and the wives of fallen veterans from the Second World War with
medallions in recognition of their service and to commemorate the occasion. The recipients were accompanied by many close family and friends. It was not long before those who had arrived alone had bumped into friends whom they had lost contact with and had not seen for anything from one to five or, on one occasion, 15 years. Mr Ray Gilbert, Mayor of the City of Onkaparinga, assisted me in presenting the medallions, while Robert Brockenshire, the member for Mawson, read poems and stories of those who had left their loved ones in Australia and had made so many sacrifices to serve on the civilian front at that time. I do not believe that one person in the room was left unmoved after hearing those tales.

Students from Flaxmill Primary School and Wirreanda High School also attended and joined in the celebrations. They sang Advance Australia Fair and a medley of wartime songs. Many in the room joined in with the students, who created an amazing and very emotional atmosphere. It was fantastic to see so many young people from the local schools in the area take part in this celebration of history and the commemoration of VP Day.

It is vital to Australian culture that future generations understand the legacy left to them and the eternal sacrifice made by so many who fought and died under our flag to deliver us a free nation. All of us play a massive part in that education process by allowing our history to be not something just documented in a book but a truth and a reality documented in our hearts and minds and passed on through stories. Every day when we take for granted our freedom—all the freedoms we enjoy without a second thought—we must remember that it came at a price, not one paid by the generations of Australians who have benefited from it but by the men and women who served our country in treacherous conditions, who lost their lives or who were wounded. And let us not forget those who significantly suffered as prisoners of war.

On the afternoon of VP Day, I was invited to speak at a ceremony held by the Morphett Vale RSL at the eternal flame at the Morphett Vale site. This was another event at which I felt so privileged to speak in front of such brave people, whose experiences I will never be able to comprehend, and to tell them: ‘Thank you for the way of life which we are so lucky to live and for the freedom that we enjoy today.’ Victory in the Pacific Day will stand eternally as a testament to the relief Australians felt on that day and the gratitude they felt for the Australian soldiers who were scattered throughout the Pacific, fighting to ensure that we remained a free people.

We must never forget the heroes who served as a part of the Defence Force, but we must also acknowledge how important the post World War II relationship between Australia and Japan is. Australia’s relationship with Japan is one of the most important relationships we hold and one that will continue to develop on more than an economic level.

We so often bandy around the word ‘hero’ and in doing so I believe we devalue its meaning. After hearing the legendary stories of some of the medallion recipients, I can assure all of you that, no matter how many Davis Cups Lleyton Hewitt secures for the country, how many wickets Glenn McGrath takes or how many times Mark Ricciuto holds up the premiership cup, they will never be considered heroes in my heart or mind, because I have heard the stories of true Australian heroes. VP Day will always hold a very significant place in the hearts and memories of Australians, particularly those Australians who were alive on that very significant day 60 years ago.

On a personal note, I would like to take the opportunity to simply say thank you to
the wonderful people who allowed me to be a part of their celebrations. I was both honoured and humbled to commemorate such a significant day, as I always am when invited to attend events which honour our veterans.

Fuel Prices

Sporting Infrastructure

Mr EDWARDS (Cowan) (4.37 pm)—The cost of fuel—mainly petrol and diesel—in Australia has reached record highs and it is hurting people who can least afford it. In the face of these incredible costs, it is evident that the Howard-Costello government has deserted the Australian motorist. The PM has washed his hands of the issue and flown out to his favourite resort, ‘New York, New York,’ and the Treasurer is busy hiding from any responsibility on the issue while the PM is away. Part of the reason for the high cost of fuel in Australia is caused by this government’s failure to invest in infrastructure in our own country. I have complained long and hard about the manner in which the Howard-Costello government has, for instance, turned its back on infrastructure development in my state of Western Australia.

Western Australia contributes $2 billion more to federal coffers than it receives in federal funding. Every man, woman and child in WA subsidises the rest of Australia to the tune of $1,000. It is self-evident that, when the economy in WA is healthy, the whole nation prospers. Yet, when it comes to funding infrastructure development in the west, the PM and his Treasurer refuse to contribute to assist the Western Australian government and the state’s industry to continue to grow and prosper.

There are a number of areas where the Howard-Costello attitude runs into the fund-proof fence they constructed to keep federal finance out of Australia’s greatest state. Just as a rabbit-proof fence was constructed years ago to keep the rabbits out, the government has now constructed an invisible fence to keep federal infrastructure development and investment funding out. Let me tell you, the bunnies in this case are on the wrong side of the fence, and not just Western Australians; all Australians are paying a price for the Howard-Costello financial fence and their lack of infrastructure investment in the future.

At the bowser in many parts of the state, Western Australians are paying a greater price for fuel than are other Australians. Yet, as a state, we sit on some of the richest gas resources in the world—resources which our PM brags about, in his own state of hubris, as he claims personal responsibility for negotiating the deal to export these valuable national resources to China. But do we see this federal government contributing to the Western Australian government’s attempts to work with industry to further improve our investments in the future? No.

That is despite the fact that, by 2020, demand for fuel in Australia is projected to increase by some 50 per cent. The electricity industry alone has estimated that at least $37 billion in energy investment will be required by 2020 to meet our nation’s energy needs. If we have increases of this magnitude in that sector, just how much more will be needed in the transport fuels industry?

Already, we as a nation import some 60 per cent of our domestic oil needs, yet in the government’s white paper on fuel—released just last year—we were told that supply security is not a problem. It is not a problem for the PM, as he jets his way to the United States; it is not a problem because the taxpayer is picking up the tab for his fuel. I ask: where is our investment in the future? That question needs to be put to the Prime Minister, and it is about time we received an answer. Have we seen the government devise policy aimed at long-term resource manage-
ment, infrastructure development, resource protection of our natural riches and skills development? Once again, the answer to that crucial, important question is no. What we have seen them do, however, is ditch the Keating government’s policy of an 18c per litre production bounty for ethanol in the 1993-94 budget, in addition to the zero excise rating.

I have said before in this place that the Prime Minister should not be the goose that kills the state that lays our nation’s richest egg. This government must start to invest in the future of our nation and that start must be made in Western Australia. Western Australia sits on immense reserves of natural gas resources. We need a federal government to invest in the development of a local gas-to-liquid industry to make us more self-sufficient and less dependent on transport fuels and therefore less vulnerable to the uncertainty of future oil supplies and their inherent vagaries.

Australian motorists are paying a high price for this government’s failure to address the issue surrounding the cost of our fuel. But none are paying more than those people who live in many parts of Western Australia. This federal government committed Australia to a war that has largely contributed to the destabilisation of the Middle East, yet it did nothing to foresee or mitigate the inevitable rise in the cost of fuel. The government now blames Hurricane Katrina for our woes, but everyone is aware that the cost of fuel was sky high well before Katrina came along.

The PM has visited America before in an attempt to sell Australia’s natural gas to the United States in a bid to help them reduce their dependence on imported fuel, but has he put forward a policy to reduce Australia’s exposure to OPEC? Once again, the answer to that question is no.

In the meantime mums and dads, pensioners, retirees on long-saved-for motoring trips around Australia, young kids at university or people travelling to and from work are now paying the penalty for this Prime Minister’s policy of abandonment of Australia’s needs as he makes yet another visit to the United States. The chairman of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission—Australia’s competition and consumer watchdog—recently said, ‘Something funny is going on with refiners’ margins.’ Did the PM order an investigation? Once again, no—but you can bet that he is laughing all the way to New York.

In the time that is available to me, I want to turn to another area where the federal government has for a long time failed to support development in Western Australia and I want to talk about the wonderful record that Western Australia has in the development of sporting facilities. I am not talking about just the current Western Australia government, because the Court government, prior to the current Labor government, and the government which I was proud to serve in as minister for sport, have also carried by themselves the burden of sporting infrastructure development in Western Australia. We have seen this federal government plunge millions upon millions of dollars into huge sporting investment in the Eastern States. I am not arguing that some of that development was not warranted; it certainly was with the Olympic Games and it certainly is with the Commonwealth Games. But in the face of all of those millions upon millions of dollars that have been invested in sporting infrastructure on the eastern seaboard we in WA have seen not one red cent of federal government money go into a whole range of sporting facilities which have been important to match the sporting ambitions, development and dreams of a lot of young Western Australians as to their sporting futures. No
federal government has contributed to the Western Australia Institute of Sport’s facilities, Challenge Stadium, the State Equestrian Centre, the Perth Hockey Centre, the State Baseball Facility, the rowing course or the facility at Whitewater Park. It is time that one did. (Time expired)

Workplace Relations

Mr ROBB (Goldstein) (4.47 pm)—I rise to urge the union movement to change their ways. I am an optimist by nature. In the coming weeks, the government will spell out the detail of its vital workplace reforms, continuing the 12-year process started by those opposite me with coalition support. When it was announced by Paul Keating in 1993, it was described in the following terms:

... both employers and employees are coming to understand that only productivity improvements can guarantee sustainable real wage increases.

... We need to make the system more flexible and relevant to our present and future needs.

To this end, Mr Keating went on to say that ultimately we need to:

... find a way of extending the coverage of agreements from being add-ons to awards, as they sometimes are today, to being full substitutes for awards ...

This is at the heart of the current round of reforms. We are looking to decouple the 4,000 awards from agreements negotiated between employers and their employees within each workplace. We are looking to replace hundreds of pages of choking and unintelligible awards with workable and flexible arrangements and detailed agreements of 10 to 15 pages whilst still providing necessary protection.

This is an agenda on which both major political parties agree. The Leader of the Opposition, Mr Beazley, was the leader of this very House when the then Minister for Industrial Relations, Laurie Brereton, heralded in this new age of workplace relations—a cooperative and flexible age in which employees and employers worked together for the common good. Since this cooperative age was heralded in, this country has enjoyed a historically significant period of sustained prosperity based on the associated productivity improvements. Only last week the latest economic figures showed a continuing strong performance: unemployment is low, incomes are high, inflation is low, our terms of trade are strong and the dollar is strong. The only area again beginning to drag its feet is productivity.

Despite the growth in workplace agreements and the associated improvement in prosperity, the full productive potential of our work force is yet to be unleashed. This is because only parts of our workplaces have been given the opportunity to strike agreements which unlock the real potential in each workplace. We have to complete the reforms begun 12 years ago. We cannot sit idly by or jobs will be lost and pressure will come on both take-home pay and interest rates. We cannot stand still. We must continue the evolution of our workplace to extend the coverage of agreements from being add-ons to awards to being full substitutes for awards as envisaged 12 years ago by those on the other side of the House in the Labor government at the time.

While those opposite me agree today in their hearts, if not in their rhetoric, with the further reforms which we are about to undertake, there is one body which has been consistent in its objection to freeing up our workplaces—the ALP’s masters, the union movement. In 1993, the union movement nobbled Mr Keating’s vision, and the reform package which had shown so much promise was watered down to appease the union movement. The union movement’s record since the 1993 reforms has been appalling. Aided by an often-complicit Australian In-
Industrial Relations Commission, they have engaged in all sorts of dubious tactics to frustrate and debase the bargaining process at the enterprise level, with the aim of discouraging any move to agreements at the workplace level. The unions have opposed better bargaining and agreements at every turn because proper agreements at the workplace level do not see a mandated role for unions. They would give up something that they have enjoyed for much of the last century. They would have to earn their place at the table.

The union movement has bragged about its frustration of the 1993 and 1996 reforms and its desire to frustrate the latest reform, and its opposition to vital reform shows no sign of slowing down. As the secretary of Unions WA recently said:

... we will consider every form of action and a lot of that I can tell you now will be quite creative.

Since the inception of enterprise level agreement making, we have seen the self-serving union movement do everything possible to undermine the bargaining process and debase the value of reaching agreement, so that employers are discouraged from pursuing enterprise agreements with their work force. For example, unions have brazenly disregarded orders from the Australian Industrial Relations Commission and the Federal Court to stop unlawful industrial action. They have used almost every conceivable trick in the book to add to the costs and frustrations involved in bargaining, such as dragging employers through the courts just for choosing to offer Australian workplace agreements to their workers, arguing that recovering damages from illegal industrial action was coercion, taking out ‘anti-suit’ injunctions and ‘anti-anti-suit’ injunctions, and taking employers through appeal after appeal just because the employees decided not to ask for the union’s help when making an agreement.

Unions have deliberately flouted the law by encouraging employees to take sickies en masse. This is known as the ‘blue flu’, one of the ‘creative’ dirty tactics that unions will stoop to. They have used violence, threats and intimidation to force employers into union-friendly agreements. They have defiantly taken illegal action to pressure employers to sign new deals to avoid this government’s latest reforms. They have used pattern bargaining to stymie enterprise level discussions. They have reached agreement and then taken further industrial action to get even more. They have unashamedly used illegal secondary boycotts to achieve their goals. They have victimised employees for not being union members. And during bargaining in some circumstances they have even vilified employers for their religious beliefs.

Despite the fact that details of the legislation are yet to be announced, we have already seen the ACTU commit millions of dollars of its members’ hard-earned money to promote fear and uncertainty in a television scare campaign designed to drive a wedge between employers and employees and undo the prosperity which workplace reform has begun to deliver to our country. This is a wedge which brings prosperity only to the union movement—protecting a privileged place that they have enjoyed in industrial relations over much of the last century. They want a return to the ‘them and us’ days of bitter and divisive conflict at the workplace and days of low-productivity industry-wide bargaining. The union movement is run by people who are unashamed in their desire to return to industry-wide bargaining and to refuse to accept productivity trade-offs.

The government’s workplace reforms will underpin future prosperity for all Australians. They continue the evolution of a process that was started in 1993 and added to in 1996 by further reforms, and now we are seeing stage 3 of those reforms. This will bring true
agreement making at the workplace level which meets the needs, the capabilities and the productivity opportunities of each workplace and satisfies the desires and the family requirements of individual workers within the workplace. True agreement making leads to a more collaborative and more productive workplace. To this end, the unions should change their ways, and those opposite should not acquiesce to further interference.

Parliamentary Debate
Goods and Services Tax

Mr JENKINS (Scullin) (4.56 pm)—Today I am confronted by a veritable smorgasbord of grievances, but I will have to be disciplined and concentrate on the ones I have come to talk about. In reply to dixter questions to the Attorney-General during question time on both Wednesday and Thursday of last week, I was disappointed that answers were given that I believe could more properly have been given via ministerial statements. They were in relation to important topics such as national security and counter-terrorism and changes to the way we treat native title. In answer to a question today, we saw the Minister for Transport and Regional Services again alluding to announcements about regional security.

While I am pleased that the member for Gellibrand has raised this with the Speaker, I think it continues a trend that has developed where mechanisms are used to avoid the full scrutiny that this place can impose on public policy matters. Let us consider policy on counter-terrorism, which, it is now revealed, was subject to a fairly interesting debate in the coalition party room at 11 o’clock on Thursday. It was then announced to a gaggle of members of the parliamentary press gallery in the Prime Minister’s courtyard—and that is the way things are to be announced on important subjects such as counter-terrorism. I think that we really have to look at better mechanisms that see a fuller presentation and fuller questioning of the government’s intentions.

I have grieved about this in the past. In the past I grieved that, subsequent to the two lengthy debates that we had about the commitment of troops to Iraq, a deathly silence had come over the chamber about the matter. Since then we have not seen a full debate about what continues to happen in Iraq—the thousands of deaths that continue to occur and the continuing deployment of Australian troops. Unlike during the occasions before the conflict really started, when we had two very long debates, we heard silence—it has not had a mention. It is always interesting in these public policy matters that, after the event, we do not return to them.

Today I want to raise a matter. In the outside world a number of our colleagues, on both sides of the chamber, have been using op-ed pieces in the media to start a tax debate. That reminded me that, since we had—and I use the Prime Minister’s words—the ‘immensely visionary root-and-branch reform’ which was the GST, there has been no debate in this place about what those changes have resulted in, and, interestingly, I find that there has been very little debate outside this place. Since the implementation of the GST there has been a dearth of literature on what has been the effect of the burden of the GST—for instance, across income groups.

I would have thought that, given that part of the debate about the institution of the GST was that, on admission from the government, we were moving a large swag of income tax as a progressive tax through to a flat GST as a regressive tax, we might have been interested in what that redistribution did across income groups. But, as I said, I am amazed that there has been very little study of that subject, which is what I want to grieve about today. If we are going to have colleagues
debating income tax, we should go back and look at what is now the total tax take. It is quite instructive to go to evidence that has been presented in certain articles about the nature of the distribution of tax take.

I refer to a graph on page 132 of a paper in the *eJournal of Tax Research*, Volume 3, No. 1, June 2005 by Neil Warren, Ann Harding and Rachel Lloyd entitled ‘GST and the changing incidents of Australian taxes’. This graph, figure 1, is of the estimated Australian taxes paid as a percentage of gross income by domestic households. It has the classic progressive curve for personal income tax. When you are in the lowest decile of income earners, you pay next to nothing. As a progressive tax, it quite rightly curves up to show that those that earn the most are paying the most.

I am indebted to the Treasury’s online *Pocket Guide to the Australian Tax System*, because I thought that I would have to write out these words myself. On personal income tax, it says:

The personal income tax system is progressive in nature. The intent of a progressive tax system is for the tax burden to be concentrated on those individuals who are best placed to bear it, while those individuals who have limited means bear relatively little or no tax burden.

For once in my life I have to say thank you to Treasury. I seek leave to have the graph incorporated in *Hansard* so that people that are reviewing this speech may also get the drift of it.

Leave granted.

*The graph read as follows—*

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**FIGURE 1 ESTIMATED AUSTRALIAN TAXES PAID AS A PERCENTAGE OF GROSS INCOME BY DOMESTIC HOUSEHOLDS, BY DECILE OF EQUIVALENT GROSS INCOME: 1994-95 AND 2001-02**

Figure 1 presents a diagrammatic representation of the results in Table 10, illustrating the trend change more simply. While the burden of taxes appears to have increased most for those households in the 6th
to the 9th decile, the results indicate a decline for those in the 4th decile due to a fall in the impact of “Other taxes” on this group. What is interesting is that despite all the reforms of the past decade, the tax burden on the lowest four deciles appears little changed.


Mr JENKINS—if you were to add the reformed indirect taxes and all other taxes to this figure, the progressive nature of our tax system in Australia, based on income tax, changes dramatically. The lowest decile of income earners—those earning the least—go from paying zero per cent as income tax of their total tax take to a total tax take of over 50 per cent. If you add all the indirect taxes and other taxes that low-income earners are paying and compare that to their incomes, that is the impact. We have a gross flattening of the impost by income.

I ask those that want to suggest the manner in which we change our tax system to think of the effect. I would imagine that constituents of the members for Page and Riverina from the National Party are going to get very little, because the members represent rural electorates where their constituents are very much income poor but asset rich and the question of income tax is different for them, and because we are talking about giving tax cuts to the higher end. This is not something that I have investigated. On this occasion I wish to raise the questions that I think need investigating, but I would suggest that constituents in those two electorates, who are asset rich, will have a different form of impost when other taxes are applied.

This study by Warren, Harding and Lloyd—‘GST and the changing incidents of Australian taxes’—compares the income years 1994-95 and 2001-02, the very early days of GST. The income tax cuts have only been returning bracket creep, so I think that we need to look at the later figures. The authors concluded that, for this ‘immensely visionary root-and-branch’ change, as the Prime Minister described it, there was very little change in the total impost—and that is shown in the chart.

I, in a way, intuitively dispute that, because I would have thought that the wholesale changes by way of GST would mean that there had been a greater impost on lower income earners, but I accept that this study has come to another conclusion. I say to those that wish to have a debate about tax: let us not just have a debate about income tax; let us have a debate about the full impost of taxes, whatever they are, whoever is governing them—state, federal or local governments—and understand what it means to families in Australia. (Time expired)

Kurrajong Waratah

Mrs HULL (Riverina) (5.06 pm)—I rise again today to support the many carers across Australia who give their lives and devote their time and attention to caring for friends, family members and children for many years. I also want to come back to a report that I spoke about in parliament just a few months ago. It is a report that was commissioned by Kurrajong Waratah in Wagga Wagga called Growing old with a disability: who cares? To me, the report is fundamental in determining how we must plan for our ageing disabled communities—those disabled people who have ageing parents who themselves need assistance and care but who cannot access it simply because they have nowhere for their ageing disabled children to go to.

All of us in this House know the primary role that carers play in saving the govern-
ment billions of dollars. No matter which government it is, each government is saved billions of dollars because family members, friends and communities take responsibility in caring for disabled people.

The issue that Kurrajong Waratah raised concerns something that is very close to my heart: how do we appropriately plan for those disabled in the community who are ageing? There simply is no national benchmark for disability. There is no national benchmark for the respite that is required for disability services. There is no national benchmark required for people who are supported and who are dependent on disability outlets. Many of the people that I represent in and around the Riverina are on waiting lists for very sparse and scarce respite in order for them to have some quality of life that we as everyday citizens take for granted.

The report that I mentioned, which Kurrajong Waratah commissioned, has a discussion section. As I said, I have referred to the report in this House before, but the issue bears raising again and again. Somewhere along the way, somebody must take responsibility for a burgeoning disability sector. The more R&D we put in place, the more babies are saved at 23 weeks and 24 weeks who may then go on to have difficulties and disability needs. And the more emerging technology and R&D in the health area provide for car accident victims, the more people who once may have been unable to be saved are now, thankfully, able to be saved. There is a need for understanding their disability needs into the future—and certainly their aged care. The discussion section of the Kurrajong Waratah report says:

The results of this report indicate that there is for many families a crisis in care now which will worsen in the next ten years if planning and action does not occur to better meet the needs of people with a disability and their ageing parents and family carers.

A number of the current carers will pass away in the next ten years. At the same time their sons and daughters with a disability will continue to age, some more rapidly than the general population, due to the nature and type of their disabilities. That is my great concern. What can we put in place? How can we empower communities? How can we empower families, relatives and friends of ageing disabled people so that they can enter into a contract of care? How can we offer some peace of mind to carers? As I have mentioned before in this House, there is nothing worse than caring for a family member, relative or loved one when you are spending 24 hours a day and seven days a week for 12 months of the year caring for this person and you are concerned that your health may not be good and that you may be ageing yourself. There is no peace of mind, because there are no answers in life for parents of ageing disabled children.

And let me tell you that there are no answers in death. There has to be a responsibility on us as a community—on our families—and we have to work out how we can best together bring families, communities and governments of all persuasions, at the local, state and federal levels, to ensure that ageing people can perhaps make arrangements for their children and be able to see them operational before they pass on into another world, so they can actually have peace of mind and see that their child is being cared for, that their child is being nurtured, that their child’s needs are being met and that their child is not in a vacuum of the unknown.

This is something that confronts and faces carers every single day of the week. The report from Kurrajong Waratah also indicates that, whilst many families may have someone in mind to act as a formal or informal carer, most have not discussed the role in depth with that person or discussed what the current carer’s expectations of that role are. This is a sadness. I do not think there is any-
body around who is able to bring people together to help them to plan. The report says:
The disability, aged care and community care sectors will be unable to provide flexible, responsive and appropriate action to prevent a care crisis without the necessary cross sector policies, procedures and funding to meet the changing needs of people with a long-standing disability who are ageing and their ageing carers.

We probably have well over two million carers who are providing an extremely important and valuable function, sometimes with very little assistance and sometimes with absolutely no planning and no-one to turn to. It is these people who I am constantly worried about. How do I work with a community pilot project that enables people to have a tax-effective treatment for the establishment of future care—future proofing for a disabled child? How do we have a community-led program that involves communities? And how do we provide valuable support and much-needed funding at times for family members who have the responsibility of day-to-day care for a disabled family member or friend?

The Kurrajong Waratah report is an extensive report that has continually caused me to think: how can I assist to resolve this, particularly in my electorate? This model could be picked up and put in any place, if we could get it to be effective. I became the target of some attack because I failed to attend a party meeting some weeks ago in lieu of attending a meeting to talk about these very needs with a gentleman who was here from England. I thought he may have had some answers as to how we can go about providing a program and a planning platform which will give some peace of mind to carers.

Tomorrow, in front of Parliament House, we will have Walk a Mile in My Shoes. Many of the carers from across Australia—from my electorate and perhaps from all members’ electorates—will come to Canberra sporting their shoes to try to impart upon members the very difficult circumstances that they face on a day-to-day basis, with no real planning needs that will satisfy the objectives of carers now and into the future and no real planning needs that understand how we are going to provide the services, the respite and the primary care should a person need that. (Time expired)

United Nations World Summit

Mr SERCOMBE (Maribyrnong) (5.16 pm)—I rise in this grievance debate to take the opportunity to speak about the UN leaders summit, which is occurring in New York this week and which Prime Minister John Howard is visiting along with most other heads of government. It is a vitally important United Nations conference dealing with a range of very important issues, including the restructure of the United Nations itself. But I believe there is no more important an issue on the agenda for this summit than achieving proper levels of coordination and effort in attacking issues of global poverty.

In a recently released report by the UNDP, the United Nations Development Program, on human development there were a number of interesting quotes. US President George W Bush is quoted in the report as saying:

This growing divide between wealth and poverty, between opportunity and misery, is both a challenge to our compassion and a source of instability.

President Bush is not known to often agree with the Brazilian President Lula da Silva—in fact, they very regularly disagree—but I think at least some of the comments by President da Silva could be agreed with even by President Bush. President da Silva said:

Hunger is actually the worst of all weapons of mass destruction, claiming millions of victims every year. Fighting hunger and poverty and promoting development are the truly sustainable way to achieve world peace … There will be no peace without development, and there will be
neither peace nor development without social justice.

Media reports over recent days have been suggesting that our Prime Minister is intending to make some sort of pledge in the context of this summit of Australian aid being expanded up to $3.5 billion, up from the claims made of the recently completed financial year of $2.8 billion. So it is quite a significant increase. If the Prime Minister is able to achieve that, it would probably be a larger increase even than the figures suggest, because there is a fair lack of transparency in some of the ways in which the aid budget is frankly reflected. One of the most significant factors in the increase in the last year were the moneys allocated for post-tsunami Indonesia. However, we have seen over recent times that an extraordinarily small proportion of that money that the government trumpeted about immediately post the tsunami has in fact been spent. The government has had the habit of doing other strange things with the aid budget—for example, paying for asylum seekers in Nauru, which I would have thought was a singularly inappropriate call on the aid budget.

Nonetheless, if the Prime Minister does expand Australian aid in line with other developed countries, that would be welcome. We will await with great interest what he does say, but it is certainly quite unclear at this stage as to whether there are going to be any time lines associated with a prime ministerial commitment on this matter. It would appear that an increase in the aid allocation from Australia would not be linked to the Millennium Development Goals, which is the key international framework adopted by the international community, including Australia, in September 2000. There appears to be no indication that any increase in Australian aid would be directly associated with that. I suspect that the sorts of things that the Prime Minister may seek to address with an increase in Australian aid will be things like the forgiveness of part of Iraq’s debt to the Australian Wheat Board, which is an extraordinarily high figure. Whilst one would not begrudge working to make more suitable financial arrangements, according to World Bank definitions Iraq is not a low-income country.

The Australian government puts a lot of spin on aid issues. For example, recently the foreign minister was crowing about a ranking of Australia somewhat higher on the international indicators of developed countries by an American private sector organisation called the Centre for Global Development, which deals in its rankings not so much with levels of aid—which I would have thought was the primary consideration in rankings in this area—but a variety of other matters, including the country’s performance on security, trade, environmental investment matters and even arms sales. The UN Development Program report says:

International aid is one of the most powerful weapons in the war against poverty. Today, that weapon is underused and badly targeted. There is too little aid and too much of what is provided is weakly linked to human development. Fixing the international aid system is one of the most urgent priorities facing governments at the start of the 10-year countdown to 2015.

On these UNDP points, Australia’s performance has been very poor. The United Kingdom has recently committed to 0.5 per cent of GNI for development assistance by 2010 and 0.7 per cent by 2013. Most major European countries—France, Germany, the Scandinavian countries and the Benelux countries—are world leaders in this respect. Canada has recently announced, in the context of the G8 summit, substantial increases in development assistance—certainly well in excess of what Australia, presumably by selective leaks from the Prime Minister’s office to the Australian, is now talking about. Look at
what informed commentators say about Australia’s performance. The head of World Vision, Tim Costello, the more impressive of the Costello brothers, describes Australia’s commitment in this respect as pitiful. Mary Robinson, a respected international figure, made much the same point on television in Australia recently, though perhaps a little more diplomatically. The policy director of Oxfam recently said that the government is again running dead on achieving the Millennium Development Goals or is actively working against explicit poverty reduction and aid targets being agreed to at the summit.

The Labor Party has a longstanding commitment to the internationally agreed target of 0.7 per cent of GNI as our long-term aid objective. At the 2004 election Labor committed to restore Australia’s aid to 0.32 per cent of GNI, the level it was at when Labor left office. It is now clear, however, that Australia should aim even higher. Consistent with the need to fulfil the Millennium Development Goals and ongoing budgetary requirements, Labor believes the government should commit to increasing Australia’s aid effort to 0.5 per cent of GNI as circumstances permit.

Frankly, the government has been somewhat mealy mouthed on the Millennium Development Goals, which, as I said, are the centrepiece of international efforts to achieve a new deal to halve global poverty by 2015. The recent progress report by the government on the Millennium Development Goals in Australia was lacking in rigour and analysis of our performance against these goals; rather, it was a collection of interesting anecdotes about what our aid policy does. Much more is required at the UN summit. The Prime Minister needs to sharpen his commitment, make the millennium goals central to our policy and make a real effort to encourage our American friends to play a constructive role and not seek to water down the draft outline documents before the conference.

This is all in Australia’s interests. It is also the right thing to do. It is what Tony Blair and Gordon Brown in the UK call ‘the great moral issue of our time’. Australia’s interests, in focusing international development attention in our own Asia-Pacific region, are vital. Africa, which was very much the focus of the G8 summit, is important; but many more poor people live in the Asia-Pacific than in Africa and, frankly, if Australia expects other developed countries to do more in our own region, we have to do more ourselves. Australia lives right next door to the largest Moslem country in the world. It is a fundamental part of our nation’s security that the people of Indonesia achieve significantly improved outcomes and improved hope for their social and economic future. There needs to be a real focus on reinforcing development in Indonesia so that people are not attracted to the siren song of the bin Ladens or the Jemaah Islamiyahs.

In this respect, I think it is very important that Australia’s Moslem community have the opportunity to be actively engaged. In my experience, Australian Moslems overwhelmingly are deeply committed to this country. There are some real opportunities for some very innovative approaches to more closely link Australian Moslems with Moslems in Indonesia and the Philippines to assist with the development process, improve the social and economic circumstances of those societies and, in the process, contribute to draining the swamp that is the breeding ground for terrorism. (Time expired)

Sunshine Coast: Roads

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher) (5.26 pm)—I wish to speak today about the most important issue confronting rapidly growing sea-change communities such as the Sunshine Coast, and that is the issue of how to best cope with the
infrastructure challenges that accompany our high population growth. Everyone knows that the Sunshine Coast is one of the most attractive parts of our nation and one of the most wonderful areas in which to live. It is probably no surprise that people move from less desirable parts of the country to live on the Sunshine Coast, but with the influx of new residents comes a proportional increase in the demand on services such as sewerrage, water and roads. Water services provided by local governments are particularly strained at present due to the extended periods of dry weather in many areas.

Today I would like to focus on the road and transport needs in my own electorate of Fisher on the Sunshine Coast and raise the possibility that tolls may be investigated as a useful funding option to help meet those needs. Firstly, I want to place on record that I am totally opposed to tolls being placed on any existing road. I am also opposed to tolls being placed on a road that is the only means of travelling from one place to another. It is important that elected representatives at all levels of government fight to make sure that the Sunshine Coast continues to receive its share of government funding at a state and Commonwealth level. We ought not to forget that the Beattie Labor government receives some $7.3 billion each year by way of GST revenue, giving it an unprecedented ability to meet its responsibilities to residents of the Sunshine Coast. I have to say that state Labor members on the Sunshine Coast have been singularly ineffectual insofar as we always appear to be short-changed by the state government.

Having said that, it is important to recognise the high growth rate of the region I represent. The Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that the growth rate for the Sunshine Coast in the five years to 2003 was 3.53 per cent, making us the third fastest growing region in Australia behind only Mandurah, 74 kilometres south of Perth, which had a growth rate of a little over four per cent, and the Gold Coast-Tweed area, which is also in south-east Queensland, which had population growth of 3.67 per cent. Roads cost big money and, with growth figures like that, the demand on roads is on the rise.

In travelling from the Sunshine Coast to the Gold Coast, many people opt to use the Gateway Arterial Road, for which, for an ordinary vehicle, there is a toll of about $2.40—and most people do not hesitate to pay it. In addition, Campbell Newman, the Lord Mayor of Brisbane, is looking at the possibility of having cross-city toll tunnels in Brisbane and of involving the private sector to help speed up their construction, as they are much needed infrastructure in Brisbane.

Tolls are no substitute for an appropriate level of spending by governments because, let us face it, citizens pay taxes. I would be absolutely appalled if any level of government were to shirk its infrastructure funding responsibilities by suggesting that in some way tolls should be a substitute for government spending to, in effect, repay residents for the tax that they pay.

On the Sunshine Coast, tolls are a very sensitive issue because of the broken promise by the Goss Labor government in 1989. It pledged that, if elected to government, it would scrap the tolls on the Sunshine Motorway. It got elected and immediately reneged on its promise, and from 1990 three tollbooths were located on the Sunshine Motorway. What made those tolls so obnoxious was that the Labor Party in opposition had said that, if it were elected to office, it would remove the tolls; but, when elected, it said it did not want to remove them.

Consequently, an organisation known as Toll Busters, a lobby group, was formed in an effort to fight back against the Labor government’s broken promise. Like many resi-
dents on the Sunshine Coast, I supported the principle of Toll Busters. Its strategies were very successful. There was a massive sense of civil disobedience. People avoided the tolls by travelling on other roads. It was only when the Borbidge-Sheldon government was elected in 1996 that the tolls were finally scrapped, after a six-year struggle.

That is one of the reasons why the issue of tolls is not particularly popular on the Sunshine Coast—and I fully understand that. That was a situation where a toll was placed on an existing road, in express opposition to what the Labor Party said prior to its election to office. The Labor government paid a price for its straight-faced lies. Residents let their voices speak on polling day and Labor lost local support. The Sunshine Motorway today remains a free road, and as long as I am the elected representative for the federal electorate of Fisher I will strongly oppose the return of tollbooths on the Sunshine Motorway.

It is important to recognise also that the Australian government—and, I suspect, other levels of government—simply does not have the financial capacity to meet every community’s wish list with respect to infrastructure spending and, in particular, road spending. We could get $1 billion on the Sunshine Coast and yet we could spend $2 billion or $3 billion. No matter how much money we get from state or federal government, we will never have the capacity to meet all our infrastructure requirements from existing financing means. That is one of the reasons why I have suggested that local councils and the local community really have to think outside the square. We have to get whatever dollars we can from governments at all levels and then build on those dollars through maybe private sector involvement and by looking at innovative solutions to meet the logjam that we currently have on the Sunshine Coast as a result of inadequate road infrastructure.

Using a toll road is voluntary. People do not need to use it. It would not be the only means of travelling from one point to another. But many people might find it to be economically sensible to pay a toll of $2, $3 or $4 if they are going to save maybe 10, 15 or even 20 minutes in travelling between one point and another. It has been suggested that there ought to be a toll road between Pelican Waters, in the far south of my electorate, and Beerwah. That would shave some 12 minutes off the trip to Brisbane. Paying a cost of, say, $3 or $4 to save 12 minutes on the way to Brisbane would be seen by many people as a very sensible investment.

The upside of having toll roads, which would be new, purpose-built roads, is that the existing free roads would become less congested and people would be able to travel more quickly on them. I am not suggesting that tolls are in any way, shape or form the ultimate solution to all our problems, but it is important to have a community debate to see whether there is a place for toll roads amongst the various funding options we have to obtain the necessary infrastructure improvements that are needed on the Sunshine Coast.

I have written to the office of the minister for roads, as no doubt many of my fellow members have done, to request consideration of there being more government spending on roads in the electorate of Fisher. In fact, a further letter from me on the topic should be arriving in the minister’s office today. I do thank the minister for his serious consideration of all of my requests. It would not be easy to prioritise and balance the many requests he receives against limited funding.

Federal members in my area come under fire—I believe, unfairly—from other levels of government, who suggest that we are not spending an adequate amount federally on road infrastructure on the Sunshine Coast.
This accusation is quite unfair because the Sunshine Coast has been the beneficiary of millions of dollars of Australian government money. Some $200 million has been spent or is in the process of being spent on upgrading the Bruce Highway from Brisbane to Caboolture, thus removing the worst bottleneck between Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast. In addition, there is a whole range of other programs that will see road infrastructure improved on the Sunshine Coast as a result of the policies of the Australian government.

I really do not have time to go into all of the initiatives that we have with respect to Roads to Recovery, the black spot program, financial assistance grants for roads, and so on. But I suggest that as a community we need to think outside the square. All levels of government need to contribute whatever they can towards road infrastructure on the Sunshine Coast, but, in addition, we need to look at other funding options. I believe that toll roads are an option that should be considered in certain circumstances.

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

That grievances be noted.

Question agreed to.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr JOHN COBB (Parkes—Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs) (5.37 pm)—I move:

That leave of absence for the remainder of the current period of sittings be given to Dr Southcott on the ground of parliamentary business overseas.

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS

Mr JOHN COBB (Parkes—Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs) (5.37 pm)—I move:

That standing orders 31 (automatic adjournment of the House) and 33 (limit on business after 9.30 pm) be suspended for the sitting on Monday, 12 September 2005.

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Employment, Workplace Relations and Workforce Participation Committee

Australian Crime Commission Committee

Public Accounts and Audit Committee

Membership

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hatton)—Mr Speaker has received advice from the Chief Opposition Whip nominating members to be members of certain committees.

Mr JOHN COBB (Parkes—Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs) (5.38 pm)—by leave—I move:

(1) Mr T. S. Burke be discharged from the Standing Committee on Employment, Workplace Relations and Workforce Participation and that, in his place, Mr Hayes be appointed a member of the committee;

(2) Mr Byrne be discharged from the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission and that, in his place, Mr Hayes be appointed a member of the committee; and

(3) Ms A. E. Burke be discharged from the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit and that, in her place, Mr Emerson be appointed a member of the committee.

Question agreed to.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (FUTURE PROOFING AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2005

Cognate bills:
TELECOMMUNICATIONS (CARRIER LICENCE CHARGES) AMENDMENT (INDUSTRY PLANS AND CONSUMER CODES) BILL 2005
APPROPRIATION (REGIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICES) BILL 2005-2006
Second Reading
Debate resumed from 8 September, on motion by Mr McGauran:
That this bill be now read a second time.
Ms KING (Ballarat) (5.39 pm)—In continuing my remarks in this cognate debate on the bills to flog Telstra, the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proofing and Other Measures) Bill 2005 and related bills, I again reiterate my opposition to these bills and the government’s process for handling them. The government has not been truthful with the Australian public. Either the government genuinely believed that everything at Telstra was rosy or else it knew that it was not and was just not talking about it.

Communities such as the one which I represent have been telling the government for years and years that everything with Telstra is not up to scratch. We on this side of the House have been saying it, and even our colleagues in the National Party have occasion-ally plucked up the courage to say it. The member for Riverina, in her contribution to this debate, had the courage to come into this place and tell the truth about the experiences of country people in her district. I hope she has the courage to vote against the bills, rather than abstain, and that she supports her colleague Senator Joyce by encouraging him to make a vote that is in the national interest and not in the greedy self-interest of this arrogant government.

If the government simply ignored the warnings about Telstra’s services then it is more arrogant and incompetent than even we had believed—and I have to say that that would not be easy. But it is clear that in this situation the government knew a great deal more than it chose to share. No amount of wiggling and finger pointing will fool the Australian public. This government knows that Telstra is now unsellable.

What did the Prime Minister do when he was confronted with Telstra coming to him, as the major shareholder, and disclosing information that will have a significant impact on the share price of Telstra? What did he do when he was told by Telstra of over 14 million fault calls and 14 per cent of all lines with faults on them? What did he do when he was told by Telstra that it will take a $5 billion investment to get Telstra’s services in country areas up to scratch? What did he do when he was told by Telstra that they are using their resources to pay dividends? What did he do about that?

Did the Prime Minister come out and say: ‘This is pretty hot information. I’d better go out to the marketplace and make sure that mum and dad shareholders know about it’? Did he go out and say: ‘We need to cool this off a bit. The services in country areas are not up to scratch and we need to do something about them’? Did he pick up the phone or tell Telstra executives when they were in the room with him that they needed to go out and start telling their shareholders the truth about Telstra? Did he put the mum and dad shareholders’ interests above his own? No, he did not. Did he disclose the information? No, he did not. He remained mute. Even worse than that, he went one step further and had the gall to suggest not only that Telstra should have kept these difficulties to themselves but also that Telstra executives should be talking the share price up.

It is not hard to see why the Prime Minister would do this. When Telstra tell the truth about how they are faring in the marketplace,
if that truth is unattractive the share price will go down. That is what happens and that is their obligation. If the share price falls the government will get a bad price when it sells its shares. What is the government’s solution? What does the Prime Minister say to Telstra? What is his suggestion? Does the Prime Minister say to the Australian people, ‘Look, we may have a problem with Telstra and it might not get you a good price, so we are going to fix the problems and think before we rush into this sale’? Does the Prime Minister say, ‘Perhaps we had better think a bit longer and harder before we barrel straight ahead with this decision to sell’? If the Prime Minister had said that, he would be in agreement with the Telstra board, which very responsibly warned:

We ask that you give our findings and recommendations full and appropriate consideration ... our findings suggest that a decision made without revision could have serious short, medium and long-term consequences for Telstra, the industry and users and shareholders.

But, no—the Prime Minister has decided to push ahead regardless, possibly hoping that the government could sneak this legislation through before the truth actually came out. Let us not forget where the assets and business which the Telstra board and the government are currently haggling over come from. What is at stake is a great telecommunications system built up over many years by the Postmaster General’s Department, then Telecom and now Telstra, all paid for by the Australian people. Let us also not forget that the 51 per cent held by the government is not the Prime Minister’s own personal stakeholding; it is held by the government on behalf of the Australian people.

As soon as the truth about the state of Telstra was known by the government, it should have revealed it to the Australian public. But what has been the Prime Minister’s approach? To keep it secret and, when the truth comes out, shoot the messenger. Far from being transparent, the government has been running down and failing to invest in Australia’s communications system. This failure has seen Telstra’s share price plunge. The Howard government’s neglect and mismanagement of Telstra has seen $10 billion stripped away from Telstra’s share market value in the last 10 weeks.

But far worse than this is that since 1997 the government has taken $14 billion of dividends, which represents about one-third of all government surpluses. In essence, the government has been ripping the guts out of Telstra to prop up its own budgetary position, and we know that this has come at the cost of investment in Telstra’s capital and infrastructure. Tony Abbott used to come into this place and roar about the ‘rent rort rip-off’. He loved to do it at question time; it was one of his party pieces. This can only be described as the Telstra cash cow con. It is a cash cow con because the government has been stripping Telstra of its resources. It has been allowing it to dip into its reserves in order to pay for the dividends—$14 billion of dividends stripped out of the company, which represents one-third of all government surpluses. It is a cash cow con, and this government has treated Telstra as a cash cow for a long time.

It is of little surprise that the Howard government does not want any scrutiny of this legislation. It has sought to limit scrutiny of the bills through the Senate inquiry, and it is proposing, I understand, to gag debate on these bills tonight. However, by killing the debate, the Howard government will only harden in the minds of the Australian people how arrogant it has become. This is one of the most important bills before this place that we will have seen in a long time. This is about the future of our telecommunications system in this country, and it is about the future availability of telecommunications for
regional and rural Australians. Just imagine what we could have done with that $14 billion in dividends if that money had been invested back into infrastructure and into the telecommunications network. Telstra should not be sold; we should be using that money to fix it—we should be getting in there and fixing it.

Mr John Cobb—Wouldn’t sell it at any price.

Ms KING—I hear the member at the table say that we would not sell it at any price. No, we would not. As a National Party member who represents country areas, you should be ashamed of yourself for selling these people out. That is what you have done. Our experience in Victoria of privatisation of the gas lines, for example—the gas company—has meant that, despite there being a government subsidised program, trying to get a privatised gas company to connect a small town to gas has been absolutely impossible. The price has gone up and up, and even the large amount of money that the government has put aside to make those connections has not gone very far at all. That is what will happen with the National Party slush fund. I reiterate that I oppose these bills. (Time expired)

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher) (5.47 pm)—It is interesting to listen to members of the Australian Labor Party in this place in their contributions to this debate on the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proofing and Other Measures) Bill 2005 and related bills, seeking to oppose the three measures currently before the chamber. Those people who are observers of politics would be aware that during the time of the former Labor government various options were looked at for the sale of Telstra, and various options were looked at for breaking up and selling off part of Telstra. For the Labor Party to come into the chamber and to huff and puff and to say that somehow allowing the Australian people and others to buy the government’s 51 per cent interest in Telstra is inappropriate I find just a little astounding.

It is important that in Australia in 2005 we have a high level of communications infrastructure throughout the nation, but the Labor Party wrongly seems to be making a connection between the ownership of a telecommunications company and the level of service provided. The way to control Telstra is through regulation. The government would be able to put in place certain terms and conditions and, if Telstra failed to meet those terms and conditions, Telstra simply would be unable to operate as a telecommunications company in Australia. It really provides a conflict of interest for the government to be the regulator of close to 100 telecommunications companies and to be the majority shareholder in one of those companies.

Australia is often affectionately known as the wide brown land. It is described by tourists the world over as a must-see country, with our vast open landscapes and terrain incomparable to anywhere else in the world. One of my staff members has relatives in the Netherlands and, on a recent holiday there, this staff member and his wife heard it remarked that the two most memorable things in Australia were the friendly, carefree people and the wide open spaces. But, of course, the vast areas of regional and rural Australia have also presented massive challenges for contemporary Australia. Our population in those areas is vastly spread out, and reliable telecommunications has always been an issue. It is not the same issue in Europe or in countries which have a much denser population within a much smaller area. This has been the challenge that successive governments have faced—when the PMG and Telecom Australia were government owned and
now with Telstra being majority government owned.

When the telecommunications company Telstra was fully owned by the Australian people, I think that most people would say that the service provided by the old Postmaster General’s Department and Telecom Australia was nothing short of shocking. One of my constituents told me that, when he set up an office some 20 years ago, the Telecom technicians came in and said that they were not prepared to put the telephone plug closer to the floor than one metre. When my constituent looked at them perplexed and asked why on earth such an amazing statement would be made, he was told, politely but firmly, that the union representing them had decreed that in 30 or 40 years time those technicians could possibly have back problems if they had to bend over and put a plug out of sight of clients and conveniently located close to the floor.

Happily, all of that nonsense is gone. I just find it astounding and amazing that the Labor Party somehow suggests that the problems we have with Telstra, the problems about Telstra’s service, are all created because Telstra is partially privatised. As Telstra has become progressively privatised, the service has actually gone up. I am not suggesting that all is right with Telstra, even in my own electorate, where I am calling for residents to come forward to let me know where they are having inadequate levels of service from Telstra. I am interested to know where the mobile black spots are. I am also interested to know where people are having trouble connecting to broadband. I have mobile coverage in part of my home but not in other parts of the house. I know that other residents of the area experience difficulties as well. Part of the reason for this is that Telstra is finding it hard to find additional sites for mobile phone towers at Buderim. On the one hand the community, quite understandably, is concerned about the unsightliness of mobile phone towers, but then equally we complain over the fact that we are not getting adequate telecommunications infrastructure. Buderim is one of those areas which has problems with mobile phone coverage. It is something we have been working on with Telstra Country Wide to try to achieve an improved outcome.

The area of Pelican Waters in the southern part of the city of Caloundra also has problems with mobile phone coverage, as does the Conondale area, close to Maleny. The problem with Conondale is that the terrain is very difficult to service; a large number of towers would be needed and there is only a very small population. That remains an ongoing work in progress. I am hopeful that the service at Pelican Waters will improve. Also, as you drive to Brisbane, there are certain places where mobile phones drop out, and that clearly is unacceptable.

But I do want to place on the record how pleased I am that Telstra Country Wide has established an office on the Sunshine Coast. The manager there, Jason Law, is an outstanding individual. Whenever we have problems with Telstra, he does whatever he can to sort out those problems. Over the years that I have been the member for Fisher the proportion of complaints coming to me from constituents which relate to Telstra diminishes and diminishes. We now get very few complaints about Telstra service, whereas when I was first elected, Telstra was top of the list of those areas where people were unhappy with government services.

The three pieces of legislation before the chamber—the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proofing and Other Measures) Bill 2005, the Telecommunications (Carrier Licence Charges) Amendment (Industry Plans and Consumer Codes) Bill 2005 and the Appropriation (Regional Tele-
communications Services) Bill 2005-2006—are particularly important initiatives which will finally allow the government to take that next step forward to see a fully privatised Telstra. The Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proofing and Other Measures) Bill 2005 puts in place several government initiatives to shore up the quality of telecommunications services to all Australians. Firstly, the bill allows for the implementation of the $2 billion Communications Fund, which is to be used to fund government actions that may be needed to meet the requirements suggested as a result of regional telecommunications service reviews. The bill also allows for $1.1 billion in funding for the Connect Australia package, which aims to bring affordable broadband to remote, regional and rural Australia through a $878 million support package; $113 million to help in the establishment of new broadband networks for the spreading of education and health services; $30 million to widen mobile phone coverage and satellite phone assistance; and investment in improved communications services for Indigenous Australians.

The Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proofing and Other Measures) Bill 2005 will also bring in the suggestions of the Estens inquiry that regional telecommunications should have regular reviews of service levels. The three elements of the bill that will guide the reviews are that they are held independently of the government, that they should occur at regular intervals and that the government should issue a public response to any of the recommendations put forward by the panel. The review system will be a welcome introduction in that it will give the administrators of the service provider the ability to monitor the acceptability of the services that it is providing, particularly to residents of rural and remote areas and regional Australia. The Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proofing and Other Measures) Bill 2005 will ensure that those who live outside the metropolitan areas of Australia will have access to acceptable telecommunications services.

The second bill being debated, the Telecommunications (Carrier Licence Charges) Amendment (Industry Plans and Consumer Codes) Bill 2005, will help introduce a new scheme whereby telecommunications industry bodies can be reimbursed for the money they spend in the preparation of industry codes. Mr Deputy Speaker, you would be aware that the codes are an important element of the future proofing of telecommunications in Australia. The reimbursement system will be assisted by increasing the maximum number of fees that can be charged to licensed telecommunications carriers.

The third bill is the Appropriation (Regional Telecommunications Services) Bill 2005-2006. It is, simply, a bill that allows the spending increase required for the successful implementation of telecommunications framework for the future package. This funding will go towards two programs—the Higher Bandwidth Incentive Scheme, or Hi-BIS, and the Connect Australia package, about which I spoke a little earlier.

There has been much speculation in the media over how the government has arrived at the provisions included in the three bills currently before the House. There has been a suggestion that credit ought to be given to one or other individual member of the coalition, particularly in the Senate, for the provisions which are included in these bills. One thing about the coalition is that we have had a long and hard discussion in relation to Telstra. We went to the last election with a pledge to sell off the rest of Telstra, subject to certain conditions. The government received a mandate at the election—we re-
ceived a majority in both houses of the parliament. The people of Australia found the Labor Party so unworthy of support that they chose to give the coalition a majority in the Senate. Thus we now find ourselves in the position of being able to implement, in full and on time, the pledge given by us as a government to the Australian people—namely, that if you elect the Howard-Costello government the remaining government interest in Telstra will be made available for sale, because we take the view that in 2005 it is inappropriate for governments to operate telecommunications companies.

To be honest, when one looks at what the Australian Labor Party is saying in its opposition to these bills, it is somewhat strange, because when the Labor Party was in office it did not hesitate to sell off the Commonwealth Bank, Qantas or so many other companies which were previously operated by the government of the day. The difference between this government and its predecessor is that its predecessor was prepared to sell off government enterprises, to privatise government enterprises, and then to use the funds not to pay off debts, which is what this government has largely done, but rather to simply move towards balancing the budget. I find that situation—where one would sell off assets and then use the proceeds for recurrent expenditure—unacceptable.

Having said that, this government are not going to apologise. Unlike our predecessors, we stood up prior to an election and said that if elected we intended to sell off the government’s remaining interest in Telstra. We are seeking to implement that promise in this legislation before the House. The Labor Party said before an election that they would not sell Qantas or the Commonwealth Bank. After an election, they sold those government companies, notwithstanding the pledge that they had made to the Australian people prior to the poll. That is the difference between the Howard-Costello government and the Labor Party: we are prepared to stand up and say what we are going to do, and when we do receive the support of the Australian people, as we did at the election last year, we are not going to apologise for delivering on our promises in full.

Mr Ripoll—Rubbish!

Mr SLIPPER—This legislation before the House is positive legislation.

Mr Ripoll—You’re flogging it off.

Mr SLIPPER—The member for Oxley ought to be aware that this legislation will improve telecommunications services in rural and regional areas. I suspect that part of those rural and regional areas will be close to the area represented by the member for Oxley, if his whole electorate is not included. I am pleased to be able to support this legislation. I am very sorry that the member for Oxley and his colleagues call out ‘rubbish’ when we talk about the positive benefits for the Australian community from the bills currently before the House.

The final point I want to make is that the credit for this legislation really ought to go to the government and not to any individual senator, because rural and regional members of the Liberal Party took just as strong a stand in the interests of improving rural and regional telecommunications infrastructure as did certain members of the National Party. It has been a coalition effort. We have worked well together. It is an absolutely great result, and I am pleased to be able to commend these three bills to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hatton)—I thank the member for Fisher for not naming the person from another place.

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (6.03 pm)—It is always good to follow one of the government members on a bill like the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proof-
ing and Other Measures) Bill 2005, because you get to hear some of their views on what they are actually about in flogging off Telstra. The member for Fisher could not help but take in some of my interjections. All I have to say to him is that he is one of the few members, at least from Queensland, who have stood in this place and put their views on the record. I cannot say as much about the other members of the coalition in Queensland, most of whom have cut and run on this issue. They will not come into this place and put on the record their real views about Telstra, because they know their own constituents do not believe them; they do not support the full sale of Telstra.

I am one of the lucky ones speaking on these bills today. We know that later tonight the government will gag debate. They will end the debate on this very critical legislation about Telstra because they do not want to hear the views of every member in this place. If you have a look at who is on the speakers’ list, you will see that the Labor Party members probably outnumber members of the coalition by three to one. We are prepared to stand up and be counted. Unlike the coalition members, we are prepared to go on the record with our views.

Oh, what dodgy deals governments do when they rush to flog off the assets of the people! For nearly 10 years now the Prime Minister has promised to sell Telstra, and for nearly 10 years the community has opposed him. For just as long, people have also believed that the government’s promise to sell Telstra would never be supported in the Senate, because Labor promised that it would not allow the full sale of Telstra to go ahead. So, on the one hand, they knew what the government was saying it was going to do, but they always felt safe in the back of their minds that it would be protected through the Senate—that the sale would never go through because Labor would not let that happen.

The scenario has changed. It changed at the last election, with the community’s greatest fears being realised, with John Howard and the government taking power in both houses: an unforeseeable, unimaginable outcome of the last election. But not all was lost. There was one last hope remaining that a brash, new, National Party senator who was elected on the basis of opposing the sale of Telstra would stick to his guns, that he would stand up and hold the government accountable on services and on its record. We now know where that has ended. It appears that The Nationals are not sure about their own final position—but I will get back to that a little bit later.

The government, as on so many of its other agenda issues, is driven purely by ideology. There is no logic, there is no commonsense, there is not even any economics in the full sale of Telstra. The sale of Telstra for the Liberal Party is about ideology. It has been called an article of faith. That is what John Howard said. It is a mantra about who they are, rather than who they represent. I will make an exception: take out a few lonely dissenters, and the Liberals and The Nationals all march to the tune set by the Prime Minister. The PM tells us that the full sale of Telstra is about removing the conflict of interest between the organisation and the government. That is what he told us in the House just last week. He tells us that it is about making Telstra deliver better services and that it is all about ensuring that Telstra will be ready for the future. Such great ideological views—unfortunately, none of them true. It is not about anything like that at all.

Mr Turnbull—What was the ideology then that impelled you to sell the Commonwealth Bank?
Mr RIPOLL—I will take the interjection from the member for Wentworth, and I will get to the ideology of selling the Commonwealth Bank and the airlines. We have heard that from government members; the member for Fisher was also loud on those points. What is the member for Wentworth suggesting? Do you want to renationalise the bank? Do you want to renationalise the airlines? Is that what governments should be doing? Should governments be in the business of running airlines? I do not think so. It does not make good economic sense.

The member for Wentworth knows all too well that that is true. If he were in that same position today he would be the first to line up to sell an airline, which should not be in government hands. It is not an essential service. It is not as though people are queuing up because there is only one possible provider of these services, with infrastructure paid for by people’s taxes for over 100 years.

It is not the same thing. Should governments be in the business of banking? I do not think so.

Mr Turnbull interjecting—

Mr RIPOLL—Maybe the member for Wentworth has a different view and perhaps, when it is his turn to speak, he can tell the House about how renationalising banks would be good for the economy. He seems to be so adamantly in favour of renationalising banks and airlines, and I would like to hear his views on that.

The Prime Minister claims that the sale of Telstra is necessary because there is a conflict of interest between the ownership and the government—because the government is the regulator and it is also a potential source of funding. In reality, none of these is a problem. It has worked very well in the past. However, if we accept the case the Prime Minister puts forward for privatisation, we must then look at other areas that have the same conditions and the same problems, as the Prime Minister might say. Where will the government next turn its focus after it has dealt with Telstra? This is what worries people. Not only are they worried about the essential services—which banks and airlines are not—that Telstra provides, they are also worried about which other services are on the government’s hit list. What really worries me is that Australia Post is next.

Once the government have dealt with Telstra, they will move on to the next one on their list, and that is Australia Post. The government say, ‘Believe us, we don’t want to sell off Australia Post,’ but how can we trust them? Labor have asked the question: ‘Will you give us a rock-solid, ironclad guarantee?’ Of course, the government are always prepared to give that, but they break it just as quickly as they give it—just like the ‘rock-solid, ironclad’ guarantee we were given on the Medicare safety net, the ‘never, ever’ GST and a whole raft of other things.

This government does have a privatisation hit list. It has an ideological bent about organisations such as Telstra. Just because the government says it does not want to privatisate Australia Post, it does not mean Australia Post is safe. On the Prime Minister’s logic, Australia Post is next. You know that Telstra is at the top of the government’s privatisation list but, by stealth, Australia Post is also on that list. People out in the community understand that. They fear what will happen to their essential services—to their telecommunications—if Telstra is fully privatised. Hence, that is why more than 70 per cent of Australians do not support the sale. People understand very well the essential nature of postal services; hence, they do not want postal services privatised either. However, I do not think this government is listening. People understand these issues very clearly.
No-one trusts the Prime Minister on these issues for one simple reason: he is wrong. The government is wrong on the issue of the sale of Telstra. It is wrong on the privatisation that the Prime Minister says will deliver better services. The Prime Minister is also wrong that privatisation will somehow make Telstra future proof. Privatising this company does not do any of these things. So difficult is the task of trying to explain to the community why Telstra should be sold that we are hearing quite a bit of unease from the Liberal Party caucus room, so much so that one government frontbencher—that is right; a frontbencher—said, ‘The PM is off the boil. They’ve wanted to sell Telstra for the last 10 years. You’d think they would have thought it through. Howard just wasn’t on top of his brief in the party room.’

These are the sorts of things that are coming out of the Liberal Party caucus room. You can imagine what this is doing to people out in the community. You can imagine the unrest that is out there. Those were pretty harsh words from one of Howard’s own team. According to the member for Fisher, they are all singing from the same song sheet—apparently all is rosy and everyone is happy with the sale—but I do not think that that is the case. I think he was embellishing the real mood and the secret goings-on behind the closed doors of the coalition party room.

The reality is that the government is botching the sale of Telstra. Labor do not want it sold but the government is botching the process. The government has no understanding of the issue. It has no understanding of what the community thinks, believes and wants. I want to stand up here today and speak out. I want to be heard on the issue of Telstra and to make some comments on the impact the sale will have on our phone services in the bush, in the suburbs and in the regions and on small business. I and Labor Party members want to stand up and talk on this issue but government members will not. They will not stand up for their constituents. They will not stand up for the people who elected them to this place, even though so many of their constituents are telling them what they think.

This is why so many Labor members are on the list of speakers for this debate. They want to stand up and be counted on this issue. Labor understands what needs to be done in the community. Labor understands the impact that privatisation will have on services out in the bush. You do not need to be a National Party member to understand that, but you do need to be a Labor Party member to vote against the legislation in the best interests of people in the bush. If the people in the bush wait for the National Party to stand up for them, they will have to wait for a long, long time because it will not happen in this place.

I also want to ask on the record about the whereabouts of the members for Longman, Dickson, Petrie, Moreton, Bowman and Blair. Where are these silent members on this critical issue that will impact on their constituents? Where are they on the issue of Telstra? I can tell you, Mr Deputy Speaker Hatton, that they are not in here and they are not on the list of speakers. They will not put their views onto the record. They will not stand up for their own constituents. They will not come in here and defend the rights of their constituents to decent telecommunications services. They will not stand up for their small businesses that are suffering because they cannot get broadband access and cannot get the service levels and the maintenance they need from Telstra.

We have heard very few members from Queensland speak on this issue. I had a look at what the member for Herbert had to say in this place, and he thinks that everything is
fine and dandy; Telstra is just trucking along beautifully. He thinks that the world is rosy, that all is good and that everyone in his electorate is fine. In fact, I heard on the grapevine that apparently he has not even had one phone call, one complaint, about Telstra. I find that very hard to believe. Or is it simply a case of a member who is so out of touch with his community that he does not even know about the phone calls coming into his own office?

The other member from Queensland who has spoken on this issue is the member for Hinkler, who I think is genuinely concerned. He ought to be genuinely concerned, because he has one of the most marginal seats in Queensland. He knows the impact that this is going to have on him personally. He also understands how bad it is going to be for his community, but I reckon that he is more worried about his own hide. Where are these members when they get the phone calls to their offices about the lack of services and the inability to get broadband access? Where are they in this place, defending the rights of their own constituents?

And then there is the grandaddy of them all—one of The Nationals, as they now like to be called, the ones who were supposed to stand up and defend services to the bush and defend their own constituents. It is the on-again, off-again sale with regard to Senator Joyce, who does not know whether he is voting for it or not. We are all waiting with bated breath to find out what he is going to do.

The government’s program to sell Telstra is simply a disgrace. It is a shameful act of selling out on an irreplaceable icon, a piece of infrastructure that was paid for by people’s taxes. It is unlike any other piece of infrastructure. It does not have a conflict of interest; it has a national interest. That is the real issue: it has a national interest. It is important to every single person. It is an essential service that cannot be replaced.

Last week we discovered that the Prime Minister had been exposed. He was exposed through a leaked Telstra document that revealed the secrets, the lies and the true meaning of what the PM is talking about when he keeps saying that people ought to be talking up Telstra. The Prime Minister has been caught out. He has been caught out misleading ordinary people—mums and dads, those ordinary investors who have invested their hard-earned money in what they believed was a good deal, something that was backed by government.

There is something special about that: when it is being backed by government, people tend to go for it. But those people who fell for the con were sold a pup. They bought the shares at $7.40 to $7.80 and now their shares are worth a little bit more than half of that. They must be feeling just a little bit sore, a little bit tired of hearing this government talking in the sort of language that the Prime Minister has been using—that is, ‘Everything is okay; just talk the company up and it will all be good.’ The government and the past executive of Telstra have been talking it up, but they have also failed to fully disclose the true position of Telstra. It is a scandal and a betrayal of ordinary people that the government has not come clean on the true value of Telstra, its true financial position and where it actually is in the marketplace. These investors are the same people who are being shut out of the real news about Telstra’s actual position.

I have a copy of the leaked report right in front of me. There are some really interesting points in it that I want to put on the record about what Telstra says is its real position. According to this report, free cash flows—less dividends and buybacks from this year, next year and 2007—are due to go negative.
Revenue is diminishing as a percentage of growth this year and next. Telstra’s earnings before income tax growth will be down to zero by 2005-06. The total performance is on the way down. This leaked report says that the challenges for Telstra are a meltdown in the PSTN business; the mix shift to lower margin products; and the threat to wholesale revenues from ULL pricing. And the kicker, the big one, is underinvestment in core infrastructure and capabilities. You need to understand what underinvestment means. The government and Telstra have colluded in what I believe are unfair practices—

Mr Fitzgibbon—Surely not!

Mr RIPOLL—that have stripped revenue. They have dipped into reserves to pay dividends to prop up the share price. The member for Hunter says, ‘Surely not!’ Unfortunately, the answer is: surely, yes. The government has done these incredible things that you would not think that a government would do. If people out in the community did these things, they would go to jail. The government has colluded with this organisation to strip assets from this company and dip into reserves. It has underinvested to prop up the share price and run down the services.

What will this do in the future? In the years 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010, in the corporate plan period, Telstra PSTN revenues are down to minus 4.8, from a positive today. In coming years, they will be minus 4.8, minus 6.1, minus 8 and minus 7.6. It is not a very rosy position.

The story does not get any better; the leaked report continues on. What is the problem in Telstra? Telstra has received 14.3 million fault calls. Think about that: that is three-quarters of the population of Australia. There are 20 million people and there have been 14.3 million fault calls. How is that even possible? Seriously, if this were not a Telstra document, you would not believe it. Over 14 per cent of all lines have faults. There needs to be a replacement of obsolete and non vendor supported equipment.

Telstra have simply not been doing their job. There is an ageing of the work force and a lack of training in new workers—that explains why you cannot get anyone to fix your fault when there is one. The legacy IT system is not capable of handling the volumes and new services currently being offered. There are all those small businesses that are trying to get broadband access and are told all sorts of stories—now we know why. We do not need the stories; we need a bit of action when it comes to delivering.

What is required in the future? The answer is pretty obvious. The report says that what is required is significant training in the network, a proactive maintenance program, the replacement of obsolete equipment and technologies, investment for tools and equipment, and training to bring the work force to benchmark levels. Since this government has been in power, Telstra has stripped away 40,000 jobs—no wonder people cannot get their phone lines serviced. It needs to invest in fixing or replacing current IT systems, which just cannot handle volumes and complexity or, for that matter, new technologies.

The sad story just continues and continues. There is a national broadband plan—which is good to see—but the report says: ‘Telstra and the government need to commit to building a world-class high-capacity broadband infrastructure within three to five years.’ This should already have been completed. This should have been done in the last three to five years. If this government and Telstra had been doing their job, this would now have been completed and rolled out.

We now know that we have been conned in this place. If it were not for the new executive of Telstra and this leaked report,
none of us would have known. We had our suspicions, but none of us could have confirmed them with actual written evidence. Ninety-eight per cent of Australian homes and businesses would have access to high-capacity, next generation broadband services, not the current level we have. We have this lightweight, low-brand broadband system. We are ranked 21st out of 30 in the OECD in terms of providing these services. What sort of a country are we when we are trying to compete internationally, increase productivity and do something for the economy, when Telstra, our most essential organisation in providing telecommunications, is run down and ill-maintained, has revenues stripped out of reserves and does not invest in the future? What sorts of services and infrastructure are we providing to ensure that Telstra and our economy actually have a future?

In the minute or so I have left, I want to put on the record a couple of important points. Labor does not believe in the full privatisation of Telstra. There is a simple explanation here: don’t sell it; just fix it. If the government says that it cannot control Telstra today—to get it to do what it needs to do—through all its regulation, all its powers, and as the major shareholder, how is anyone expected to believe that it can do that when it is no longer a shareholder? This government needs to get proactive with Telstra. It needs to make Telstra comply. (Time expired)

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth) (6.23 pm)—Central to the whole debate about Telstra is one great falsehood, and nobody has propagated, promoted and persisted with that falsehood more than the opposition. That falsehood, that great untruth, is that we are debating whether the government should sell Telstra. The falsehood is repeated daily. ‘Are you in favour of selling Telstra?’ the pollsters ask. Headlines announce in letters inches high that the Telstra sale is on or off, depending on the latest news from Queensland. But Telstra has already been sold, and long ago.

From the moment the government ceased to own 100 per cent of Telstra shares, from the moment in 1998 when the government took into its Treasury the savings of ordinary Australians for one-third of Telstra, the government ceased to be able, consistent with the law, to use its majority shareholding to direct Telstra to act other than in a manner consistent with the best interests of all of the shareholders of Telstra. By reason of its remaining 51 per cent of Telstra, the Commonwealth government has been able, effectively, to determine the composition of the board of Telstra; and it is the board of Telstra, through its supervision and direction of the management of Telstra, that determines how Telstra’s business will be conducted. But once those directors are appointed their duty is not to the government, much less to any constituency they may be perceived to serve.

Telstra’s chairman, Mr Donald McGauchie, for example, is a former chairman of the National Farmers Federation. I understand he lives on his property in the homestead where he was born. But while that background gives him a formidable insight into the needs of rural Australia, it makes no difference to the obligations which the law imposes on him. And they are simple: he is to act as a director in a manner which is in the best interests of Telstra and all its shareholders. If that means disagreeing with the policy of a government then he must disagree. If it means resisting the establishment of uneconomic services then he must resist. He will encounter, as all directors do, many and varied factors affecting his decisions. The best interests of the company are rarely measured only in dollars and cents. But is he or any other director on the board to promote a political or sectional interest? No, he is not.
If the Labor Party were serious in their objection to the sale of the remaining government shares in Telstra, they would advocate the nationalisation of the 49 per cent belonging to the public. The Leader of the Opposition is fond of the heroic pose. Only last week he was proposing to lay siege to New Orleans. Surely, instead of the Labor Party constantly reaching back to the glory days of Gough Whitlam, now is the time for the Leader of the Opposition to go right back to Ben Chifley, whose most quixotically heroic but catastrophic political moment was when he sought to nationalise the banks. If the honourable member for Brand is considering stepping into the shoes of Ben Chifley, he should think first about how he reconciles his past life as a remorseless privatiser of government businesses.

The Leader of the Opposition was a prominent member of the Labor governments which sold one Australian icon after another: the Commonwealth Bank, founded as the people’s bank by that great early Labor Party leader King O’Malley; and Qantas, probably the best known and best loved corporate symbol of Australia. And there was the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories—if there was ever a government business which dealt in life and death issues, that was it, but out it went. And in 1995 the Leader of the Opposition took part in discussions between the Chief Executive Officer of BHP, John Prescott, and the then Prime Minister, Paul Keating, with a view to selling Telstra to ‘the Big Australian’. Mr Keating is on the record now as supporting the sale of the remaining government shares in Telstra. He at least has the integrity to remain consistent—not so his former finance minister, the member for Brand.

With such a distinguished track record of privatisation behind him, the obvious course of action for the Leader of the Opposition would be to support the sale of the government’s remaining shareholding. Why break the habit of a lifetime? We know that all of the thoughtful members of the opposition are hoping this legislation passes, and the sooner the better. They know that a 51 per cent shareholding in Telstra is just another investment. It confers no power to direct the company in a manner which suits the political agenda of a government, and were a government to encourage its directors to act in such a fashion it would be placing those directors in a position of real legal peril. Labor know that they would never nationalise the balance of Telstra, and they know that if they ever won government again the same conflicts of interest faced by this government would confront them.

As a regulator, the government has an interest in promoting competition and more access by rivals to Telstra’s infrastructure. As a regulator, the government has an interest in promoting lower telecommunications prices for Australian consumers, and therefore lower margins for Telstra. But as a shareholder, the government has an interest in preserving Telstra’s ability to resist competition. As a potential vendor, the government has an interest in preserving a high share price. These conflicts are hopelessly irreconcilable, and the events of the last few weeks have demonstrated that abundantly.

Consider the absurd claims by the opposition that the government, having received a confidential briefing on 11 August, should have immediately published that briefing or caused it to be published. I suppose that, if you are prepared to canvass sending Australian troops into New Orleans, you are unlikely to be troubled by urging the government to engage in what would be a comprehensive dishonour roll of corporate wrongs.

Public companies disclose confidential information, often price sensitive information,
to governments and/or major shareholders all the time. They often disclose it to governments in respect of regulatory matters, and major shareholders are often consulted about corporate activity, especially when their consent is likely to be required. The recipient of confidential information in those circumstances has two obligations. First, they are obliged to keep that information confidential. That is a function both of the law of confidence and corporations. In addition, as the Prime Minister pointed out last week, the express provisions of the legislation applicable to Telstra prevent the government from disclosing this type of information. Second, they are prohibited from trading in the securities affected by the information.

When Telstra presented its briefing to the government on 11 August—the same day it released its results to the market—the one thing the government should not have done, could not have done, was to make that information public—at least not without the consent of Telstra. The only party upon whose shoulders rested an obligation to make disclosures of price sensitive information was Telstra itself. Moreover, it is important to remember that the obligation is to keep the market informed. Telstra and the key market participants are the only people really able to judge whether or not a particular item of news is in the market. The government would have no basis for determining whether an item of information was already priced into the market.

I should note that it is far from clear whether the material in the 11 August briefing to the government was earth shattering at all. Some or all of the document was leaked, apparently. On 5 September Telstra released it together with updated earnings guidance—guidance which presented a rather gloomier earnings outlook than had been contained in the presentation of 11 August.

The reaction of the analyst community was calm—in marked contrast to the high anxiety of the Leader of the Opposition in his speech in this House on 6 September. Christian Guerra, of Goldman Sachs JB Were, described the presentation as ‘not, in our view, material’. The key points that the opposition homed in on were all well known: the decline in PSTN revenues as the number of fixed lines decline—just as they have everywhere else in the world; and the fact that Telstra was dipping into retained earnings to pay its dividends—you only had to read the accounts to see that. In fact, Telstra’s capital management program, announced in mid-2004, was designed to take advantage of Telstra’s relatively lightly geared balance sheet—described as a strong or lazy balance sheet, depending on what point you wanted to make at the time—to return capital to shareholders by buybacks and dividends. It was also designed to return surplus franking credits.

I am sure the government appreciated these dividends, but there has been plenty of pressure from the other shareholders to return capital too. The fact that Telstra was borrowing to fund that capital return was obvious, widely discussed and commented upon, not least by the ratings agencies. But, perhaps most importantly, the capital management program of enhanced dividends and buybacks was welcomed by none other than the shadow minister for communications, the member for Melbourne. In his press release dated 21 June 2004, he said:

"Labor welcomes today’s announcement to the Stock Exchange by Telstra that it will focus on its existing businesses and return money to shareholders—"

The announcement by Telstra, he said, was ‘a major blow for the government’s case to privatise Telstra’. But what a difference a year makes. Only last week in this House the member for Melbourne said that Telstra was
paying high dividends ‘at the government’s behest’ in a desperate effort ‘to prop up the share price to maximise the prospects for privatisation’. I ask the member for Melbourne: what was it? Was it a major blow for the government’s privatisation agenda or was it yet another cunning plan to promote the government’s privatisation agenda? Surely it cannot be both, but, depending on the purpose sought, it can be either—whatever suits the member for Melbourne. What about Telstra’s need to increase its capital expenditure? Mr Guerra writes:

Telstra’s increasing capex requirement is not “new” news.

He goes on to note that his own firm had already been estimating that Telstra’s 2006 domestic capex would be greater than that indicated by the company. If it was not for Dr Burgess’s disgracefully inappropriate turn of phrase, the whole episode would have been something of a corporate yawn. I will not trouble the House with other analysts’ views, but they displayed a similar degree of calm. All recognised, as the opposition apparently did not, that the Telstra management has been endeavouring to persuade the government and the public as noisily, brashly and abrasively as it can that the company cannot afford any further regulation that will open it up to greater competition.

Telstra, like every other company faced with more regulation, is mounting a ‘we’ll be rooned’ defence, with a particularly North American style of hyperbole and determination—for the purpose of advocacy—to present the glass as half empty instead of half full. The Prime Minister was quite right to criticise the management for running the company down in their efforts to resist regulation, but the management’s tale of woe is nothing compared to the campaign of denigration we have heard from the Australian Labor Party, particularly in the member for Oxley’s address to the House earlier. Rhetoric aside, the well-understood reality is that Telstra’s high margins from its PSTN business will continue to come under pressure from competitors and that will put pressure on its earnings. Is it realistic to expect the government to regulate the telecommunications industry simply to maximise the profitability of the one company it happens to partly own?

Labor’s case for retaining Telstra is based primarily, therefore, on the one great falsehood that the government owns and controls Telstra today. It does not and it cannot. The government has merely an investment which, while being a bare majority in numbers of shares, gives it no ability in its capacity as a shareholder to direct the company. Labor’s secondary argument is that Telstra is a good investment and that the government should hang onto the stock as a nice little earner. It has been a good earner, that is true. But to say that the government’s equity portfolio is an overweight Telstra is more than an understatement. The truth, however, is that, regardless of how good an investment Telstra may be, it is simply not desirable or appropriate for the government to remain in this position of hopeless conflict of interest as regulator, shareholder and potential vendor. This is a stock which, all other things being equal, the government should not own.

Labor’s third and weakest argument is that Telstra has problems and that the government should fix it, not sell it. The management challenges of Telstra are real enough, but it is important to remember that most companies in Australia would give their right arm to have revenues and margins as rich as those enjoyed by Telstra. Telstra may be suffering from increasing competition but, with more than $4 billion a year in free cash flow before dividends, it is a long way from financial stress. And, whatever fixes Telstra needs, only the Labor Party would imagine that the Commonwealth government is likely to de-
liver the management answers. The real issue concerns not whether the shares should be sold—in truth, they should have all been sold years ago—but rather the regulatory changes being made to enhance competition, on the one hand, and, on the other, the measures being taken to ensure that regional and rural Australia receives first-class telecommunications services.

Access to telecommunications is a fundamental prerequisite for effective participation in a developed society like Australia. The distances involved in regional and rural Australia, however, pose real challenges. The more remote the community, the more dispersed the population is and the less economic incentive there is to provide telecommunications services to it. None of this is made easier by the constant move away from small communities to cities and large towns.

Since 1997, in response to several inquiries, the Commonwealth government has spent more than $1 billion on improving telecommunications in regional, rural and remote Australia. A particularly popular part of this effort has been HiBIS, the Higher Bandwidth Incentive Scheme, for which total funding has now topped $160 million. There is a way to go yet, but the fact is that, thanks to the commitment of the Howard government over many years, telecommunications have improved apace in regional Australia. Today broadband is available in places where not so long ago the telephone service was unreliable. But progress has not been uniform, and that is why the government is getting on with the job. More needs to be done, and should be done.

The Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proofing and Other Measures) Bill 2005 provides for the $2 billion Communications Fund. As the Prime Minister and the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts have both confirmed, that is $2 billion cash, and not a penny less. Regular reviews will assess the adequacy of telecommunications services in the bush, and these reviews will inform the manner in which the income from this perpetual fund will be spent.

In addition to the $2 billion fund, there is the comprehensive communications package announced in August, Connect Australia, which commits $1.1 billion over the next four years. The largest part of Connect Australia is the $878 million commitment to Broadband Connect, which will expand on the HiBIS program to subsidise ISPs to provide high-speed internet access in the bush. Other parts of the package will tackle mobile phone black spots and service deficiencies in Indigenous communities, among other objectives.

The measures contained in this bill and associated initiatives constitute a massive effort to bridge the digital divide and ensure that the bush has the same access to telecommunications as can be had in the city. That is a tall order and, as we have seen, it is not cheap. But it has to be done and it should be done. It cannot be done without the sale of the remaining government shares in Telstra. Senator Barnaby Joyce summed it up neatly last week in the Senate committee hearing. He said:

If we were prepared to walk across the floor and not vote for it, that would be the end of the package ... Delivering nothing is a piece of cake.

The Australian people do not deserve nothing from their parliament. They deserve a liberated Telstra, free of government ownership. They deserve a government free of the conflicts of owning Telstra, free to regulate the whole telecommunications industry with no conflicts of interest. And, perhaps most importantly of all, they deserve a nation where the resources are made available—resources in great abundance—to ensure that
the science of the internet is able to strike another great blow against the tyranny of distance.

Mr BEAZLEY (Brand—Leader of the Opposition) (6.41 pm)—I am very glad that last week the opposition was able to present to the parliament, indirectly, the submission made by Telstra senior management to the Prime Minister and his ministerial colleagues when they sought to change the views of the Prime Minister on whether or not Telstra ought to proceed to immediate sale and suggested to him very clearly that policies which had been influencing Telstra to that point were neither in the national interest nor in the company’s interest, that a new direction needed to be sought and that the government and Telstra ought to sit down and seriously discuss it.

Had we not been able to provide that to the general public, the previous speaker, the member for Wentworth, would not have had a speech on the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proofing and Other Measures) Bill 2005. A substantial proportion of the information which informed the remarks he made was based on the factual data contained within the submission of the Telstra management to the government—factual data which simply would not have been available for this debate, or to the general public as far as that is concerned, but which is critical to the public’s right to know how the biggest company in this country is managed, particularly a company in which they currently have a 51 per cent shareholding.

The truth of the matter is this, and this is what the public understands with complete clarity: if Telstra is sold, all the programs that are out there meeting the vast inadequacies in communications now in regional Australia—but, I might say, not meeting the inadequacies that lie in the outer metropolitan areas of Australia—disappear. All those programs disappear the day it is sold. Not one of those programs out there represents any genuine conviction. Every single one of them represents a determination—an absolutely pig-headed determination—by this government to get this company sold and an understanding that somehow or other they have to inveigle the National Party into accepting that this is the correct course. Of course, they will attempt to get that at a very cheap price indeed, and, from what we have seen in recent times, it is a very cheap price that the National Party is available for on this.

Having said that, once this is over so is their interest. Once this is over, their concerns about broadband communications in regional Australia end. They are for the big end of town. They are concerned with the character and quality of communications in the central business districts of this country—beyond that, they do not have the slightest bit of interest. They believe, quite sincerely on their part, that whatever happens the interests of the CBD in obtaining modern, contemporary communications will be well looked after by whomsoever buys Telstra or by one of Telstra’s competitors—and that, I have to say, is a more open question than they are prepared to concede. Nevertheless, I do agree that there is a much higher likelihood that they will experience decent telecommunications outcomes than will be experienced by people in the suburbs of Australia or in its regional parts.

I cannot believe, and most Australians cannot believe, that the government is persisting with its proposition now in the face of all the public debate over the last four weeks in its absolutely purblind, pig-headed course. I cannot believe that it continues down this road. I cannot believe, when you sit down and look at the information that was in the submission that CEO Trujillo made to the government a month or so or go, at the pub-

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lic reaction to that submission, at the sorrows of the T2 shareholders and at the collapse of Telstra’s price, that a government, faced with all of that, would take the asset that is its biggest, and probably the most significant of all the single company entities in this country in nation building terms, and be prepared to proceed with this course of action no matter what trashing it does of this critical piece of Australian infrastructure. Australians are baffled indeed.

Let me make absolutely clear the Labor Party’s position on this. Our political opponents are always trying to give us a guernsey on these things, which we do not deserve. Since this has been a matter of open debate—and I guess it has been for the last 20 years—the Australian Labor Party has had one position and one position only on the ownership of Telstra: that it should be in public hands. We have never had any other position. We have of course introduced competitors to Telstra, we have sought to improve the character of communications in this country by obliging Telstra to enter into competition with other players and we have been prepared to see a regulatory regime put in place that gives those competitors a real go. We have also believed that as a result of that Telstra would experience a bit of pressure on the quality and the price of the services that it provides for the Australian population. And to some extent we have been satisfied with the result of our handiwork.

But we have always understood clearly that Telstra is not simply about a business per se; it is an important factor in every business in this country. Of all the parts of our infrastructure and infrastructure companies there is absolutely none more important in contemporary nation building than Telstra. To place that in private hands, in a market dominant and in some cases monopolistic position, would be an act of crass irresponsibility, given the significance of Telstra in the budget of numerous companies around this country.

On talkback radio and in opinion polls across the country Australians are demanding that the Prime Minister, his deputy the Treasurer, the communications minister, National Party senators and coalition backbenchers get on with the job and fix Telstra, not sell it off. The Prime Minister says there is nothing he can do, that the only way he can sort out the bush’s problems is by selling Telstra. He has run out of ideas to help people in regional Australia, just as he has run out of ideas on petrol. He says it is a $3 billion package, but he will be 87 years old by the time they have spent that $3 billion in the bush.

This $3 billion issue is becoming crucial, so it seems, given the statements that are being made by Barnaby Joyce and others. They point to Minister Helen Coonan and say, ‘Look, she says that this package will disappear if this bill is defeated.’ If this bill is defeated you can be certain, and people in the bush understand this, that the government will have the capacity to push Telstra in the direction of doing all those various programs that the previous speaker and other speakers have been pointing to, if they are left for those programs currently operated out of Telstra’s resources—and, with the revelations this week, resources that ought to be more generously provided for by the government backing away from some of the dividend that they are demanding. Instead of that we have this furphy of the $3 billion.

The $3 billion does nothing at all—$2 billion of it will simply sit earning interest and the basis of $100 million or $200 million that comes out of it each year is going to be put in. I was up in the area of the member for Hinkler, sitting down talking with a few Telstra operatives around the town of Bunda-berg. They said that you were talking about
$100 million if they were going to do the job that is necessary to bring that town alone to a sufficient standard.

With the $3 billion that The Nationals cling onto like a drowning man clings onto a lifeboat, whether it is waterlogged or not, you would have thought that they had a least some memory of positions that they once took. The bargaining position of the National Party, where they started from on the sale of Telstra—don’t ever forget this—was $7 billion. Why did they want $7 billion to fix the bush? Because they had actually had a rational, reasonable piece of analysis done on what over the next 10 to 20 years they would need to do the things that needed to be done in regional Australia and they had been given the figure of $7 billion. They were not wrong. If you take a look at the time period and at the propositions put forward by the CEO of Telstra and his approach to the government, they are of a piece. So you have the $7 billion figure that The Nationals used to have out there, you have the $5.8 billion figure that was put to the government by Telstra as what was required to be done, and they settle for $3 billion—$2 billion of which is really just an interest earning deposit, if you like, with the interest to be spent over the next 20 years. They expect all the rest of us to fall about thinking this is magnificent or that something has been lost if it is defeated.

It is, in fact, an illusion, and one of the great things about illusions is that, when you have lost them, you have lost nothing. When you lose an illusion, the great thing about it is that, whatever happens to you psychologically, in practical terms you have lost nothing, because an illusion is essentially unreal. And what is unreal is the notion that this particular proposition does anything for the bush or anything remotely close to what Telstra would be expected to do, from its own resources, for regional Australia over the next 10 to 15 years should it remain a public entity. The simple fact of the matter is that this government is completely out of touch with the needs of regional Australia and completely out of touch with public opinion on what ought to happen to Telstra. John Howard in particular, as the head of this government, is the most out of touch. He is out of touch with the 1.6 million shareholders whom he has deliberately kept in ignorance about the true financial position of the company.

Government members have attempted to defend the Prime Minister’s refusal to reveal his bogus legal advice, the time or date it was received, the source of it or the content of it, so one is entitled to suspect that that legal advice might be an illusion as well. Whatever it is, it does not have the status of a serious legal opinion. Nevertheless, they have clung to that and said it would have been completely wrong for the Prime Minister to reveal the information he was given a month or so ago. It is as though it was a matter only for him. It is as though there was only one mechanism by which it might be revealed. It is as though it was not possible for the Prime Minister to pick up the phone, or sit down with the Telstra executives, and say: ‘Hey, fellas, you don’t think what you are telling us might be a bit market sensitive? Out there they don’t know that 14 per cent of your lines are faulty. Out there they don’t know that your lines are faulty. Out there they don’t know that we have been chronically under-investing in infrastructure. Out there they don’t know the dimensions of the way you have dipped into reserves and the impact that has had on your flexibility as a company. These are all market sensitive points that ought to be made. Whether we choose to make them or not, you should make them. By the way, there is a clause in your act which says that, if you do not do reasonable things on this, we are capable of directing you. So bear that in mind if you think you
ought to continue to conceal this from the Australian public."

Of the 1.6 million shareholders, the small shareholders—the T2 investors—suffered a 41 per cent loss since listing, representing a $3,580 loss on the purchase of 2,000 T2 shares in 1999. And then there are the consumers, who have made a whopping 14 million complaints about services and the 14 per cent of lines that are faulty. The Australian people quite rightly expect the government to take responsibility for the state of Telstra and not to hoodwink them until the Telstra sale could be pushed through the Senate. They can see through the government’s attempts to limit scrutiny of the legislation to a hasty one-day inquiry, because the Prime Minister is so fixated with selling Telstra that he has sacrificed all pretences of propriety and process. We are not getting an investigation; we are getting this cowboyed through—and not because of the way things have been handled previously in this parliament but because the government think that tying down Barnaby Joyce for another week is just too much effort. They believe this has got out of control so, rather than listen to the public, they want to bolt from the public and get this out of the way as quickly as possible. This is more evidence of a 10-year-old government’s contempt for the people they are supposed to be representing—as opposed to ensuring that one of the ways they are represented is by good process in government.

The real importance of the debate today is not about the politics; it is about the importance of getting our national telecommunications infrastructure right. Telstra is much more than just another private sector business or even just another very big business. Given its market dominance and its ownership of the backbone of our communications networks, Telstra is a crucial part of our national infrastructure and is every bit as important as our roads, railways, ports and utilities. Poor information and communications technology performance undermines our international competitiveness and economic performance. One estimate is that the next generation of broadband could produce economic benefits of between $12 billion and $30 billion per annum for Australia. That is what Sol Trujillo was talking about to the Prime Minister as part of his deal to be provided for all Australians—putting it in place could be worth between $12 billion and $30 billion per annum to this nation. You do not think that might be worth about $5.8 billion over the next three to five years, which is what he was asking for? Australia’s broadband performance of 7.7 subscribers for every 100 people is the worst of any major industrialised country and is 21st in the developed world—a fact put to the government by Telstra’s new CEO, and a fact that ultimately undermines our economic performance.

There is also a more direct economic impact of this government’s neglect of information and communications technology. One estimate has put Australia’s information and communications technology trade deficit at $19 billion. That means almost three-quarters of our annual trade deficit could be attributed to our laggard performance in ICT. Australia’s ICT trade deficit is equal to three-quarters of Australia’s total trade deficit problem. That is an extraordinary figure given the dimensions of the problem that we are suffering at the moment from our trade deficit. Nothing the government proposes to do with Telstra is going to resolve that; in fact, it is going to have exactly the opposite effect. We had all those things laid out for this government, in gory detail, by Trujillo when he presented the case for Telstra being maintained, in his mind, a little bit longer in public ownership and these very serious problems fixed.
When Trujillo told the government that key indicators would head south—market share, return on investment, earnings per share—and other indicators of financial performance were soft and some were declining, he was saying: ‘This company, which you have hold of and which you rely on now to invest so substantially in a nation-building way across our nation, is now no longer in a fiscal position to be able to do that. It is not in that fiscal position’—and he did not put it in these words—‘because you have looted it for the last 10 years. You have looted it for your budget surplus. You have looted it for the purpose of trying to sustain, bogusly, shareholder value until you get rid of it; keep them fooled for another few months until you are out of the business and you will be right.’ Trujillo said: ‘Because you have done all those things, you have placed us in a parlous position. As a result, the services are not up to scratch, as you happen to think they are, and they never will be.’

He has told the government: ‘They never will be up to scratch. You keep going down the road you are going down and it will never happen. It might happen in some select areas of this nation. It might happen in the CBDs. It might happen in one or two places that get particularly smart or that, for some reason or other, either we or somebody else get an interest in. But will it happen for all Australians? It simply cannot and will not.’ It is a joke that the Prime Minister has gone around this nation talking about the notion that Telstra services in regional areas are somehow up to scratch. They simply are not and never will be.

There is a lot at stake in defeating this legislation. Should this legislation be carried, there is a lot at stake in making sure that the government does not proceed with the sale. I want to promise the government this—and we will have other opportunities this week to talk about it: even if it gets this legislation through, our agitation is not going to stop. We understand how critical this is to nation building in this country. We are not going to let this go without a fight. We understand that it is in the interests of the people of this country that Telstra should not be sold and that it does its job properly in nation building. We will fight for that; we will fight for that until hell freezes over. (Time expired)

Miss Jackie Kelly (Lindsay) (7.02 pm)—I am delighted to be following the Leader of the Opposition in the cognate debate on the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proofing and Other Measures) Bill 2005. He was in government in 1995, when we had a faltering economy so typical of a Labor government, which had already sold Australian Airlines, the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation, the Moomba-Sydney pipeline, CSL, the Commonwealth Bank, Qantas—shall I go on? In opposition, the Liberal Party were liable to be attacked on our election promises, along the lines of: ‘Oh, and how are you going to fund that?’ We said we would fund our election promises from the sale of Telstra. The Labor Party took a different tack. Instead of saying, ‘Telstra looks like another thing on the horizon to sell. We’d sell Telstra too and try to wallow our way out of debt. We’ve spent every dollar of the proceeds from the sales we have had, and at the end of the financial year we have had neither the shares nor the proceeds to show for it; in fact, we have run up debt,’ they have said, ‘No, we won’t sell it; we will distinguish ourselves from the Liberal Party by not selling Telstra.’ On this, they have been hoisted with their own petard.

In the 1996 by-election in my electorate, the sale of Telstra was an issue and I was elected anyway—and again in 1998, 2001 and 2004. We took this promise to every one of those elections and we were elected. In fact, the people of Australia gave us the Sen-
ate so that we could finally do it. The Labor Party could not be more pleased than to have it privatised and off the agenda as an issue so that they can finally move away from the ridiculous position they have maintained since 1995.

I am fully supportive of the privatisation of Telstra and there being appropriate regulations to ensure future services to the bush and outer metropolitan areas, such as my electorate of Lindsay. The government should not be involved in private enterprise. Mr Deputy Speaker Baldwin, from being on the Joint Public Accounts and Audit Committee you and I have both seen enough government waste to be convinced that the government is not a good model for efficiency, profitability or response to market forces. Let me contrast this with the Labor Party, which just wants to take an opportunistic rather than philosophical opposition to this sale. If you think that has not inflicted damage over the last decade, you are wrong. It has been an enormous, costly mistake and very damaging to the sale and it has led to a number of government funds being squandered, when a properly regulated market could have easily prevailed.

The share price of T2 was $7.40; it is now substantially lower than that. Much of the Labor Party’s posturing is to do with that, and I will come to that in a minute. The sale of the remaining 51 per cent of Telstra will not remedy communications complaints in rural and regional areas of Australia any more than did the $1 billion already spent by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts since 1997 or the rural transactions centres and electronic point of sales funds spent by DOTARS. It will certainly not future-proof the bush.

To be future-proofed, consumers will require two-way videoconferencing capable of being used in a health crisis. An example of this real-time video dialogue—which does not look like a robot dancer from the eighties under strobe lights—is being used in a virtual critical care pilot project by the Sydney West Area Health Service, which links Nepean Hospital specialists in Penrith with triage nurses in Katoomba Hospital. This currently requires 100 megabits per second both ways. That may be reduced in the future, but at the moment the image data cannot be compressed, because of the latency that develops in the dialogue between medical staff, and that undermines staff confidence in the system. There it is—a definition for future-proof broadband: 100 megabits per second. It is a long way from the promise of ADSL2-plus on copper.

At three kilometres from the exchange, it is approximately six megabits per second to the subscriber and 1.3 from the subscriber. You can get fast internet telephony IP and one compressed standard definition TV service. At two kilometres, things slightly improve, to about 12 megabits per second. I have been told by the minister’s office that ADSL2-plus will deliver 25 megabits per second up to five kilometres from the exchange, with a back channel of about five megabits per second. If that is the case, then Telstra has a great growth story to tell the markets and should be getting out there and selling it.

However, Ericsson, the leader in wireless technologies, really backs optic fibre. I am citing those figures from Ericsson’s report on the various technologies into broadband. Another aspect of that report is:

Many people confuse speed and capability. It’s important to understand both. Optical fibre to the home is far superior to other broadband technologies not only in terms of speed but also in its capability to deliver many simultaneous services alongside a fast internet service.
The technology options, as we all know, are
dial-up on copper; ADSL on copper; satel-
lite; wireless, which is the WiMAX 802.16;
mobile wireless, which is the 2G network;
mobile wireless, which is the 3G network;
and fibre to the home. The capability of fibre
to the home is what makes it the absolute
winner—the future-proofing service in all of
this. All the other fixed and wireless broad-
band technologies have a life span of a mere
couple five to 10 years before they become obsolete
and have the potential to be replaced by
higher speed technologies. Ericsson, the
world leader in wireless technologies, cate-
gorically endorses optic fibre as the only
technology capable of delivering true broad-
band of high quality, durability and sustain-
ability.

Let us look at the massive improvements
in services to the bush to date. For 13 years
under Labor, customers complained about
the wholly owned government enterprise to
no avail. There were huge numbers of com-
plaints. Most of Telstra’s responses to com-
plaints have come in areas where a competi-
tor has been introduced into the market, like
WorldxChange in Penrith. We suddenly saw
community call rates for the people of Pen-
rith; prices came down. This was not due to
government ownership but due to competi-
tion. Without competition, Telstra will not be
driven to provide extensive new-age services
to the 80 per cent of fixed line customers in
areas not simultaneously served by the Optus
HFC network. It is not about government
ownership; it is about government regulation
and proper application of government fund-
ning in the non-profitable areas to promote
competition and service.

For all the money that has been spent, I
cannot see a billion dollars of infrastructure.
In fact, Telstra has certainly profited from
this largesse and its share price should really
reflect the extra $1 billion in revenue from
Broadband Connect that is coming Telstra’s
way. The $878 million for Broadband Con-
nect does little more than HiBIS, which has
seen Telstra spend 66 per cent of the $150
million and the remaining 30 providers
struggle to spend the rest. Do not forget that
HiBIS is only 60 per cent of a peak
download data speed of 256 kilobits per sec-
ond—that is, as low as 153 kilobits per sec-
ond—for 75 per cent of the time, with a back
channel of 60 per cent of 64 kilobits—that is,
as low as 38.4 kilobits per second—on a
monthly usage allowance of at least 500
megabits. You would be waiting a long time
to download that. Granted, most HiBIS pro-
viders get a back channel of up to 128 mega-
bits, but weather conditions can affect satel-
lite et cetera. Also, what happens when the
three-year service subsidy runs out? Where
are the competitors’ DSLAMs within Telstra
exchanges to offer real choice to rural cus-
tomers and outer metropolitan customers?
Without competition and roll-out of new in-
frasture, the complaints will continue.

I estimate that under Broadband Connect
Telstra will get a windfall of $579 million to
connect a one-way ‘broadband’ service to
remote users and will then profit from future
downloads over the next three years. The
remaining $300 million will go to other pro-
viders, who must still connect back over one
of the 800 Telstra exchanges at some point.
Competitors’ DSLAMs are only ever likely
to be in 100 to 200 exchanges. With govern-
ment intervention, they could be in 650 ex-
changes. That is 80 per cent of the popula-
tion, and they could probably be in all 800
for a lot less than the $2 billion we are
spending. I refer to Optus’s ‘bridge to broad-
band’ proposal, which I understand is still an
option for the government to pursue after the
sale.

Currently, even if Telstra do not get your
business, they get a cut of it via the other
providers. If the management of Telstra can-
not show the Stock Exchange opportunities
for growth, they really are not worth the excessive salaries they are getting. The Telstra share price has bombed in recent weeks and it has only been supported by investment banks pitching for the T3 fee fest. Share price is a function of much more than just profit. Key elements of the share valuation process are interest rates, which are not an issue here; the risk of the particular stock against the whole share market, commonly known as beta, a measure of volatility; growth—and I think the opportunities for growth within Telstra have been severely talked down, but with strategic thinking there are some fantastic opportunities there for that company; cash flow; and market sentiment, which has really taken a beating from Beazley’s bombastic attitude since T2. I will come back to those if I have time later in my speech. Market sentiment is a big one to talk about.

The sale has been delayed due to Labor’s opportunism and political ineptitude. This has resulted in reduced earnings, which are bordering on being unreliable; negative growth in prospect; reduced cash flow due to the need for increased infrastructure; and negative sentiment. We have all the ingredients for a downward-spiralling share price. This results in a cost of equity which is too high to allow acquisitions or growth through investment of new capital. Shareholders become disgruntled and the company becomes a target for a predator or a break-up. But I predict that it will end up in the Future Fund because the opportunities for Telstra are immense under new management.

To proceed with its potential, Telstra needs to stop engaging in its current dysfunctional, predatory behaviours. It could build great value in itself and the market in which it operates by its ability to generate increasing levels of service and innovation, by generating trust in all of its shareholders by showing it is investing in a way which ensures sustainability of cash flow and profit, by setting the agenda for ownership of interactive assets in Australia and Asia and by leveraging its IP into new and aligned product markets—in short, by ending its defensiveness and bringing its members, employees and markets into a frame of leadership and responsiveness. By cooperating with government, rather than fighting with it, Telstra would reduce its volatility, take away the threat from earnings expectations and significantly reduce the negativity of current sentiment. This sentiment centres around the fear of the company spiralling into ever-reducing earnings, which will continue because of the uncertainty around a non-proactive management.

Telstra’s rural presence guarantee is a licence condition developed by Telstra, whose local presence plan must outline how Telstra intends to maintain an effective local presence in rural, regional and remote Australia. The plan must involve consultation with regional, rural and remote customers to ensure that their concerns and service requirements are accommodated. It must focus Telstra’s work force and management on meeting the needs and interests of its customers and provide measures that will enable the minister and the ACMA to monitor Telstra’s compliance with the plan.

Unless Telstra’s plan includes a clear financial declaration as to how much it currently spends on the 3.4 million regional and rural fixed phones and the 2.2 million outer metropolitan fixed phones currently serviced by Telstra Country Wide and gives a commitment to continue that level of funding to those customers via Telstra Country Wide, then it is not a guarantee that those customers can put much store in. Any underspends from this guaranteed amount due to improving technologies can be used on updating infrastructure within the Telstra Country Wide areas.
If the fault rate in outer metropolitan areas is 12 per cent with a recurring fault rate of 20 per cent and if the fault rate in regional and rural areas is 25 per cent—although some sources say it is 20 per cent—with a recurring fault rate of 20 per cent, this will result in repairs to 1.3 million phones. It must cost Telstra at least $400 to fix each fault, and therefore I estimate that Telstra Country Wide needs guaranteed funding in perpetuity of about half a billion dollars. Telstra estimates that it spends $198 million servicing Telstra Country Wide, with 4,260 staff. On the other hand, Telstra claims staff costs of 31 per cent of $11.9 billion in operating costs for 45,000 employees—that is, $350 million for Telstra Country Wide. Either way we need some certainty about what Telstra Country Wide costs, how that is guaranteed into the future and how future proofing will occur.

The $130 million for Clever Networks is for e-health, e-education and e-government initiatives like the $247 million already spent on Networking the Nation. Many of these projects are no longer in existence—just shifted costs from local and state governments. Nearly all were web based services or studies with high administrative costs, such as 26 per cent for RTCs, and have not updated telecommunications infrastructure—for example, Norlink, $2 million; Grower Direct, $894,000; and CoastCall, $385,000. I will let the Greater Green Triangle speak for itself. Again there is no infrastructure from it.

The $30 million for extending mobile phone coverage to remote areas where there is no terrestrial mobile network via satellite or new towers will probably all go to Telstra, just as the $15.9 million expansion of terrestrial mobile phone coverage did, the $50 million regional mobile phones program did and the $8.3 million TAPRIC did, except for the $23.3 million mobile phones on highways, which went to Vodafone. Even the $50 million for outer metropolitan black spots will, in all probability, go to Telstra. The opportunities for growth for Telstra are extreme. There is a great story to be told there. As we put money into these mobile phone networks, the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit needs to have some key performance indicator to show that things have been achieved. The public accounts committee cannot keep coming back to these programs without much to gauge them on. When a non-profitable network is identified for government intervention and it is subsequently proved to be profitable, government needs to recover its money in some fashion. It is ridiculous that we are expending funds on networks that turn out to be profitable.

In remote Indigenous communities there is $90 million for basic telephony and internet capacity. However, this sounds exactly like the $18 million for remote islands, $9 million for TIGERS and $40 million for intelligent islands, which have all been promised to resolve the problem. I hope this time that they get it right.

The regulation of Telstra fixed line services caps revenue growth in this area of Telstra’s business, which is largely regarded as stagnant by business analysts. Investment advisers are looking for growth opportunities, which affect the share price as much as earnings. The promise of a wind-back of regulation in 2009 can hardly be welcomed by Telstra’s competitors, who are expecting a long term of stability in regulation after the float. I expect the government will be asked to fund yet more services than we already do from the proceeds of T1, T2 and T3. The government is not against that, but let us see where this all goes, and let us have a look at the management and growth opportunities of Telstra.

As I mentioned before, a telco’s market share, especially Telstra’s, should be a real
growth story. Although it has not been of late, the investment community has priced in some growth because it believed that, under a new management, the growth would come. The growth has now turned negative and the result on the valuation process has been dramatic. Why has the growth story turned negative? There is no talk about the possibilities for the company and the market; only talk of the downside. True, there are serious clouds around; just think of the consequences for Telstra revenues of voice over internet protocol—international phone and data for the price of a local phone call. Telstra is making no effort to show the investment community and the public any sense of strategic thinking around new services and products, new technology and the enormous scope for the company to enhance the lives of every Australian along the lines of different business plans. The potential for commercialisation of IPTV, remote health, music and so many things that can grow Telstra’s revenues long after voice over copper is history. There is a strong business story there to sell if the overpriced management dares to put the plan together.

The other impact on stock market prices is the beta value—the less volatile the stock the higher its value. In the last two years or so this volatility has been managed. In the last couple of weeks the investment community has come to think that there is a significant gap between stated earnings and sustainable earnings, so a higher volatility is measured into the stock and the market price reduces.

Companies are best valued by reference to the net cash flow they produce for the benefit of shareholders. They may also be measured on the net earnings line after accounting for depreciation. Whichever way you do it, what is important is that all infrastructure which is necessary for the creation of a sustainable earnings platform be invested. What Telstra management is trying to have us believe is that its infrastructure is well behind its ability to generate income and therefore very significant amounts of capital will need to be invested in order to maintain earnings, let alone increase them. This tells the stock market that the net cash flows will be reduced or the reductions of profit due to depreciation will be substantial. There needs to be a strong business plan for future technologies. Earnings from downloads have increased exponentially. Most businesses would love to be on broadband. It is a new revenue stream and Telstra is doing CPR on copper, basically. That is what happens when you put technical guys in charge of a float.

We really need a financial manager who is prepared to do everything necessary to float a company. We need to mix the technology messages, stop undermining confidences and grow the share price. Telstra is a total cash cow. We all have a phone, and we all pay Telstra monthly bills. In my area of Lindsay, we will have all been paying these bills over and over again for years and years. There is a serious cash flow within Telstra. One wonders what they do with it.

Market sentiment has the final impact on share price. Market sentiment is about the feel of a business. That has an extraordinary impact on the market’s valuation of its stock. For a few years the sentiment was bland to poor because the management was not regarded as one which showed any necessary leadership. It was essentially priced as a commodity. Now there are doubts about the ‘cowboy’ management, perceived trouble with the regulator, allegations that the company is far from transparent, allegations that the infrastructure needs massive investment and, last but by no means least, the management has chosen to bag the major shareholder and the public when what was needed was an intelligent, inclusive approach. In short, the government is seen as untrustworthy under the new management.
Labor has continually opposed the sale of Telstra. Despite the fact that we have carried this in our saddlebags to election after election, people really do not believe that Labor would not sell it. That is the bottom line. People would rather we sell it, take the cash and build a Future Fund, pay debts—do everything we have said we are going to do with it. We are not in the market of saying that government is any good at running businesses. I do not think we are—in fact, we are appalling at it—but we are great regulators. We can come back into this market in the future and make a difference. (*Time expired*)

Mr Swan (Lilley) (7.22 pm)—The events of the last week have shown the sale of Telstra to be a debacle on every level and certainly strip away any management credentials that many in this government would claim to have. It has been a debacle, and it has been a debacle for a long period of time. That is what the briefing to the Prime Minister on 11 August showed. It showed that the government had been stripping away dividends in an unsustainable way and that that had produced fundamental underinvestment in the network that has produced substantial problems not only for rural and regional Australia but also for suburban electorates such as mine, where 15 kilometres from the GPO it is very difficult for many people to get adequate access to broadband to either, on the one hand, conduct their businesses or, on the other, provide the level of service that would be required even for their children to do the most basic amount of work on the net.

What we are dealing with here is the consequences of an ideologically motivated policy that has no regard for the implications for telecommunications services, for taxpayers or for the ordinary mum and dad investors. It has left the country unprepared for the future, which in many ways describes the whole approach of this government. The government has surfed a wave of prosperity built upon record terms of trade but has not been attending to the future by putting in place the necessary initiatives which will give us the productivity boost we so require to be internationally competitive into the future. No area could be more important there than telecommunications, and when it comes to telecommunications in this country Telstra must play a critical role. The government has simply been blinded over nine long years by its ideology and the incapacity of senior levels of this government to understand the task of preparing this country for the future.

The facts are these. Telstra did provide a secret briefing on 11 August to the federal government and selected big investors. It revealed, firstly, that Telstra had been borrowing from reserves to pay for dividends and, secondly, that this policy had resulted in underinvestment in its network and was unsustainable. It also revealed that Telstra had failed to disclose this information to all investors and that the government failed to use its power to direct Telstra to disclose this information to all investors. We have seen the Prime Minister and even, indeed, the Treasurer, come in here and say, ‘Nothing to do with us,’ as if they did not have some arms of legislation available to them to readdress the problems—as if that did not exist. The Prime Minister immediately he was given this information should have been talking to the Stock Exchange or talking to Telstra about talking to the Stock Exchange. He did nothing. Neither did the Treasurer. The Treasurer failed to use his power to direct the Australian Securities and Investments Commission to investigate—something he has neglected to talk about at all. The result of this is that mum and dad investors have been hung out to dry. Two thousand Telstra shares would today be worth $1,440 less than they were worth on 11 August. The fact is that mum and dad investors have taken a bath,
and they have taken a bath because of the incompetence of the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Treasurer.

Why was this information on 11 August so price sensitive? In recent days the Prime Minister and the Minister for Finance and Administration have tried to argue that the Telstra briefing contained nothing that had not already been reported. If that is the case, perhaps they would like to explain why the Telstra share price had hovered around $5 until around 11 August and then dropped like a stone. What is the explanation for that? I am sure all those mum and dad investors out there would certainly like to know. Can the government also explain why the volume of Telstra shares traded after 11 August reached their highest levels since the launch of T2? It is very simple: many of the big investors received that briefing as well. The ones who did not were the mum and dad investors, who have taken a bath. Mum and dad investors—1.6 million of them—were not privy to the information that sent the big end of town running for the door. The big end of town got the information and went out there and sold; mum and dad investors were not privy to that information.

Small investors buy Telstra shares for one key reason: because they pay relatively high, fully franked dividends—that is, they offer a tax-effective income stream. Since T2, dividends have been the only plus from holding Telstra shares. Two thousand shares would have earned a dividend of $2,640. However, this has been more than offset by the capital loss from a falling share price. Even taking into account dividends, investors who bought 2,000 shares in T2 at $7.40 would now be nursing a loss of $3,480. That is the record of this Prime Minister. That is the record of the Treasurer and that is the record of the finance minister. But had those mum and dad investors been privy to news that dividend payments were unlikely to continue into the future, many if not all would have sold out. That explains the enormity of the consequences of the failure of the Prime Minister, the failure of the Treasurer and the failure of the finance minister to take appropriate action when they were briefed about these matters. Now that they have found out, there is no doubt that they are certainly less likely to buy any Telstra shares if there were to be a T3.

The Prime Minister’s defence goes something like this. He has sought to argue that he was powerless to do anything to protect these investments—that somehow all of this was at arm’s length; that there was nothing he could have done. I doubt that small investors, or mum and dad investors, will accept the PM’s claim of impotence, and they certainly would be right. They are a bit smarter—a lot smarter—than the Prime Minister or the Treasurer gives them credit. The Prime Minister’s argument that he would have been breaking the law to disclose information that Telstra had provided to the government in its role as a shareholder is nothing more than a red herring.

This Prime Minister is the doyen of distraction. Whenever he is out there with his political back to the wall and he is pointing in one direction, always look in the other. Always look in the other direction with this Prime Minister. When you are driving along the road and there are major roadworks or when there has been a crash, a terrible accident, he is like the guy standing there with a sign saying: ‘Diversion; go round here.’ That is our Prime Minister and our Treasurer, but particularly our Prime Minister. It is a well-worn tactic that has served him well. The people who have been sent on that diversion are the mum and dad shareholders, the small investors. That diversion has led them to a dramatically lower share price, with tragic consequences for their financial wellbeing. Meanwhile, the crash scene is still littered
with debris, and that is where we are at the moment.

The fact is this, and it is very simple: under section 9 of the Telstra act, he has the power to direct the board of Telstra to take any action if he believes it to be in the public interest. So he is not powerless, as he has claimed in this House. That is a complete diversion, a complete red herring, but it is so John Howard—the doyen of distraction. Surely it is in the public interest that Australia’s largest public company not breach Corporations Law by failing to disclose price-sensitive information. But that is the Prime Minister, the doyen of distraction.

That brings me to the Treasurer. The Treasurer has desperately tried to distance himself from the Telstra fiasco, but he will not get away from it that easily. You are a wise man, Mr Deputy Speaker Somlyay. You have been watching these events, and you know he will not be able to escape them. The Treasurer has admitted that he was aware of ‘scuttlebutt’—I am not sure which part of that he was really aware of, but he called it scuttlebutt—that Telstra was borrowing from reserves to pay dividends. We pay him a lot more money than to be aware of scuttlebutt. The Treasurer has tried to justify his inaction by claiming Telstra is not covered by his portfolio. That is a beauty, isn’t it? That is probably a bit richer than the red herrings we have had from the Prime Minister. I beg to differ. Corporate regulation and financial regulation lie at the very heart of the Treasurer’s portfolio responsibilities. And doesn’t he come in here all the time to tell us how good he is? This Treasurer has such a high opinion of himself that he fascinates himself, and he comes into this House to tell us what a successful Treasurer he has been. But of course, once again, when he gets into trouble: ‘It’s not really my responsibility; it’s somebody else’s. There’s a bit of scuttlebutt around. I’ll dodge that. I’ll go on a holiday to Indonesia. I’ll go and preen my leadership credentials elsewhere.’ When the Treasurer is in trouble, he is always seeking, like the Prime Minister, to avoid responsibility.

The truth is this: the Treasurer is the chief corporate regulator of the government, and Telstra is Australia’s largest company. Fair dinkum, the way you hear the Prime Minister and the Treasurer talk, you would swear you are dealing with some sort of minor problem for which they have no responsibility. If there was a suggestion that Telstra had breached Corporations Law by failing to meet its obligations for continuous disclosure, the Treasurer should have directed ASIC to investigate, and he has the power to do so. If he is the world’s greatest, or even second greatest, Treasurer, why didn’t he utilise that power? But, no, he just heard some scuttlebutt.

I think the Treasurer has gone as far as claiming that ministers cannot direct regulators to take action. This is not true. Under section 12 of the ASIC Act, the Treasurer has the power to:

... give ASIC a written direction about ... priorities it should follow, in performing or exercising any of its functions or powers under the corporations legislation ...

That is an open-and-shut case, so I do not know how the Treasurer can claim that he cannot direct regulators to take action. And, of course, there is ample precedent for the Treasurer directing ASIC to take action on particular cases. For example, in relation to James Hardie, the Treasurer stated on 4 September 2004 that ASIC:

... will be asked to investigate every possible breach of the Corporations Act and to bring to justice anybody that has been in breach of that Act ...

It is an open-and-shut case. So the Treasurer’s failure to exercise his power to direct
ASIC makes him as culpable as his colleagues in duping the mum and dad investors, who have been in the first instance the victims of this government’s rank incompetence—let alone all of those other people out there who had the expectation that the network would supply their needs and would be kept in a manner which they expected.

In this case we have Australia’s largest company, and the Treasurer has basically, through his negligent behaviour, proved that he is not the great, competent, world-champion economic manager that he claims to be. Last week he suggested that he had no influence over the dividend paid by Telstra; he just received and banked it. That was his response when it came to dividends. The Treasurer has a most direct link to Telstra when it comes to dividends, and he has said so in the past. Some time ago, he said:

When I’m doing a budget I write out to Telstra, I say what’s the dividend going to be?

Yet we have heard from members of the government, from Senator Brandis and others, that the government have no role; they never talk to Telstra about its dividend. Suddenly it just turns up, they bank it and there are no discussions. What a load of nonsense!

The truth is that this Treasurer has been complicit in stripping dividends and running the company and its services into the ground. That is his culpability, and that is the other reason why he has no claim to being a competent economic manager or a competent manager. What he has been doing is very simple: he has used these dividends to prop up his budget, to enhance his reputation at the expense of mum and dad investors and all of those people who are not getting proper services, not only in regional Australia but also in suburban Australia. Since T1 in 1997, Telstra has provided dividends of $14 billion, or 35 per cent of the Treasurer’s surpluses. The Treasurer has carved dividends out of more than just Telstra. If you add up all the dividends stripped from investments or enterprises since 1997, you will find that they account for almost the entire surplus. This has been one of the well-worn techniques of the Treasurer, Mr Costello.

That brings us to the issue of the Future Fund. The Treasurer told us at budget time that the proceeds of asset sales would be invested in the Future Fund—it would be a locked box, it would be completely independent and it would be there to deal with some of the intergenerational costs that flow from the ageing of the population. The locked box would be there to pay off Public Service superannuation, which would be a tremendous thing. That did not last very long; in fact, it hit the fence some months ago. The Treasurer then agreed to plunder the assets of the fund and invest them into a communications fund to buy off The Nationals. He put his political interests ahead of the long-term interests of Telstra and the long-term national interest.

The Treasurer had said that the Future Fund would be managed at arm’s length from the government by independent experts, but that was before price-sensitive information was leaked to selected investors and the Telstra share price began to slide. The Prime Minister is now planning to use the Treasurer’s Future Fund to park unwanted Telstra shares. How can it be independent? How can it be a locked box? Will we have a situation whereby Telstra shares are parked in the Future Fund, with the government directing the Future Fund as to when they can sell them down? If that is the approach of the government, what are mum and dad investors expected to make of that?

This was supposed to be a locked box. There are now many people in the community who are extremely sceptical about that. Now that mum and dad investors are in the
loop on the true state of the company, they should be very concerned. The Treasurer’s Future Fund can no longer claim to be managed independently of government unless the Treasurer agrees that the fund can sell the shares at any time that it chooses. Of course, we are yet to hear from the Treasurer on that. This Treasurer has been complicit in running Telstra into the ground to prop up his budget—that is the only conclusion that can be reached—so the Treasurer’s claim to be a superior economic manager has been completely undermined.

That brings us to the Communications Fund. Today we heard the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts say that, if Senator Joyce does not accept the Telstra sale legislation as it currently stands, the $2 billion communications fund offer will be taken off the table. This confirms that the Communications Fund is a political bribe. People have been to jail for this sort of behaviour in other circumstances. The government simply does not understand that services outside the capital cities are not up to scratch. It is prepared to play political games with this offer, and it is playing political games with the future of Australia’s telecommunications.

Senator Joyce and indeed all Nationals senators should take their time and not be bullied by this government into a package that short-changes the bush. This Communications Fund could end up being the telecommunications equivalent of the dredging of Tumbi Creek. Money from the Communications Fund is to be spent at the government’s discretion. Where have we heard that before? It was in the Regional Partnerships Program, through which we heard about the dredging of Tumbi Creek. The Communications Fund is to be set up as a special account under section 20 of the financial management act. The Minister for Finance and Administration will determine how much money will be deposited in the account and it cannot be disallowed. The government will receive so-called independent advice on spending priorities, but it will decide how the money is spent. This will leave ample opportunity for the government to spend the money to its own political advantage. Essentially, the Communications Fund is a rort in the making.

According to all published opinion polls, seven out of 10 Australians oppose the full privatisation of Telstra. Understandably, most in our community are concerned about a privatised Telstra’s ability to provide decent services, especially in the bush and in some suburbs where services are already below par and where any potential impact on call and line rental costs will be substantial. The public’s suspicion is well founded.

That brings us to the anticompetitive consequences of selling Telstra. There is a compelling economic case against the sale. Telstra dominates the local market, with 55 per cent of the retail telecommunications market and 65 per cent of the wholesale market. Selling Telstra with its current business structure would mean turning a massive public monopoly into a massive private monopoly. This will have serious anticompetitive consequences. Fred Argy, a respected economist, has recently pointed out that giving a privatised Telstra its head would eventually create a private monopoly in many telecommunications areas—an outcome less efficient and less friendly to consumers than a public monopoly.

There are many other reasons why we must attend to our basic services. If we do not get the provision of broadband right through this process, Australia will struggle to compete in the information age. That is why we must oppose this sale. (Time expired)
Mr BARTLETT (Macquarie) (7.42 pm)—I usually choose to ignore the utterings of the member for Swan, but there was one gem there that cannot go unattended. He somehow wanted to criticise the government because the dividends from the government’s 50 per cent stake in Telstra have added to the government’s surpluses over the last few years. I might remind the member for Swan and those listening that the dividends of 100 per cent ownership of Telstra under the Labor government did not do enough to reduce the deficit of Labor, which averaged $14 billion a year for its last five years. Not only did they get the dividends from 100 per cent ownership of Telstra, not only did they flog off everything they could; they still ran up deficits that averaged $14 billion a year for their last five years. What nonsense and what hypocrisy from the member for Swan.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. AM Somlyay)—Order! I am sure the Chief Government Whip means ‘the member for Lilley’.

Mr BARTLETT—I did. Thank you for your correction, Mr Deputy Speaker. This legislation has attracted a lot of public attention. And quite rightly so; it is a very significant issue. This legislation will determine the state of Australia’s telecommunications industry and services over the coming decades and, understandably, it is an issue of some concern to some of our constituents. But I need to make this point: those concerns have been fanned by the rhetoric, the nonsense and the hypocrisy of the opposition. I will return to that in my comments later on.

This sale—the government’s divestment of the last 51 per cent of its ownership of Telstra—is good for Telstra’s customers, it is necessary for Australian telecommunications services and Australia’s telecommunications industry, and it is of benefit and will be of benefit to Australian taxpayers and Telstra shareholders.

The sale of Telstra will be of benefit for two reasons, and they are the two fundamental points that I want to make. The first point is that there is a fundamental conflict of interest for the government in being, on the one hand, the major shareholder of Australia’s biggest telecommunications company and, on the other hand, its regulator. It is the shareholder and regulator, owner and regulator. As a major shareholder, the government’s focus is understandably on Telstra’s profitability—the dividend flow that will result from profits—yet, as regulator, the government’s focus is understandably on customer service. There is a fundamental conflict between those two roles. The media frenzy that we saw last week regarding Telstra’s share price is illustrative of that conflict. It is difficult, almost impossible, for any government to adequately focus their attention on both those roles as shareholder and regulator.

The die was cast in 1991 when, under the member for Brand, the then Labor government corporatised Telstra. In corporatising Telstra, Labor put on the agenda their focus on Telstra’s commercial imperatives and profitability. Once Telstra was corporatised, it was inevitable that its sale would eventually occur. Labor cannot have it both ways. That step in 1991 under the member for Brand, Kim Beazley, to corporatising Telstra meant that its eventual sale and privatisation were inevitable.

The second point is that it is better for Telstra, and therefore Telstra’s customers—Australian taxpayers and Telstra shareholders—for Telstra to be freed from the shackles of government majority ownership. Currently Telstra is in the position of having to compete with other telco providers with one hand tied behind its back. Telstra needs to be free to be able to raise capital—to issue
shares in order to get that capital to invest in necessary infrastructure—if it is going to remain competitive with the other telcos. If Telstra is going to have to rely on annual government budgets to provide the capital it needs for expansion and to purchase new infrastructure for upgrading, it will never be able to compete adequately.

Telstra itself needs to be freed from the shackles of majority government ownership. The current situation of being hamstrung by majority government ownership is untenable for Telstra. All independent commentators recognise that this position is untenable and that Telstra needs to be sold. For instance, last Thursday, on 8 September, the *Sydney Morning Herald*’s editorial—which does not necessarily make a habit of supporting the government’s position—stated:

... the Government’s continuing problem in trying to reconcile its differing roles as shareholder, regulator and the ultimate guarantor of services. As the biggest shareholder, it wants to see growth in the billions of dollars it has tied up in Telstra.

Yet the Government must also be the dispassionate regulator, creating a fair legislative environment for all telecommunications companies. On top of that, it has a responsibility as the national government to see that all Australians have a decent standard of telecommunications.

The Government needs to clarify its role by quitting its 51.8 per cent Telstra shareholding.

On the same day, the *Daily Telegraph* stated:

Once the Government ceases to be Telstra’s majority share holder, regulator, and source of new funding, the company will be more flexible and more profitable.

On the same day, the *Australian* stated:

The case for selling Telstra is as strong as ever. For the Government to own just over half a phone company makes no sense.

Other editorials around the country reinforced that same message.

I acknowledge that there are concerns about the proposed privatisation of Telstra. I do not want to dismiss or trivialise those concerns, but those concerns are unjustified. The main concern relates to services—concerns that customers will somehow suffer and be the losers and that services will diminish. The point is that it is not ownership which determines the level of telecommunications services or the price of those services. The vast improvements that we have seen over the past decade have come from four sources: technology, competition, strong regulation and specially focused government support. They have been there regardless of the ownership of Telstra. It is these four factors which will continue to drive lower prices and improved services over the next decade, despite ownership. Regardless of who owns Telstra, it will be technology, competition, regulation and government programs that will continue to see those improvements in services.

On technology, the incredible advances in data transmission, mobile phone technology, fibre optics, wireless broadband, satellite communications and a whole range of other advances in recent years have really changed the telecommunications industry and will continue to do so. I dare say that in a decade’s time we will look back and wonder at how archaic the telecommunications facilities that we used were. Look at the changes that we have seen in just the last 10 years. They will continue because of changes in technology.

Another aspect to the concerns is increased competition. The important point is that we no longer have a telecommunications monopoly, nor do we have the duopoly that existed in 1996, when this government came into office. We now have 96 licensed tele-
communications carriers. We have over 700 internet service providers. It is this increased competition—because the Howard government opened up the industry to competition—that has driven prices lower, improved services in telecommunications and added to the national economy and to jobs. The report by the Allen Consulting Group, commissioned by the Australian Communications Authority in 2000, estimated that the economy is $10 billion larger and that 100,000 new jobs have been created because of the extra competition in the telecommunications industry.

Also essential for continued improved services is a tough regulatory regime. This will happen more effectively by the government being a tough regulator, once it has divested itself of majority share ownership. In recent years we have seen the universal service obligation, the customer service guarantee, the network reliability framework, price controls and access to untimed local calls all lead to improved services.

For instance, the Estens inquiry report said that Australia has one of the most comprehensive frameworks of telecommunications-specific consumer safeguards in the world. These protections will continue, and they will be strengthened because of a government that can now focus totally on regulation and improved service. For instance, in this legislation the government is committing to strengthening the customer service guarantee by restricting the number of exemptions and by increasing penalties for non-compliance. There will be tougher requirements on Telstra to remediate at least 480 of its worst cable runs every year, thereby improving service reliability and reducing the incidence of faults. We will be introducing new price controls between 2006 and 2009. As part of those price controls I want to see fully untimed local call rates from outer-metropolitan areas in my electorate to the CBD, and I will continue to work for that. As part of this legislation, we will also see a requirement for Telstra to produce a local presence plan to ensure service in regional, rural and remote Australia.

The fourth area that has improved and that will continue to improve services is the specially targeted assistance to address specific black spots and other areas of need. So far we have seen well over $1 billion spent by this government—for instance, $140 million under the national broadband strategy, including $107 million under the HiBIS, the Higher Bandwidth Incentive Scheme. Under that scheme, $960,000 in the past two or three years has been spent in my electorate, bringing on broadband access to many areas that would not otherwise have reached the threshold of customer interest. We have seen subsidies for mobile phone coverage, base stations and satellite services. The Networking the Nation program has funded well over 1,600 public internet access services, and there are many other areas of improvement.

The good news is that under this legislation the new package to future-proof telecommunications in this country will continue to deliver special assistance to give Australians access to first-class telecommunications services. It will include $1.1 billion up front, and that will include $878 million to provide all Australians with access to affordable broadband services, $113 million for innovative broadband networks for health and education and essential services, $30 million to extend mobile phone coverage and $90 million to improve Indigenous access to telecommunications services. In addition, there will be $2 billion for a Communications Fund to earn money to invest those earnings to address the findings of regular reviews into telecommunications needs in rural, remote and regional areas. This package is about continuing to target areas of need. The sale of Telstra is necessary for Telstra to be
able to compete, necessary to remove the conflict of roles that the government currently experiences and necessary to improve ongoing access to services.

In the remaining time, I want to point to Labor’s position on this, Labor’s transparent, cheap hypocrisy on its position in relation to Telstra. As we all know, it is a fact that Labor itself wanted to sell Telstra and would have sold Telstra if it had been given half a chance. Look at the track record—and the member for Prospect nods his head: Labor sold everything it could. It sold the Commonwealth Bank, it sold Qantas, it sold the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories, it sold the Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation and it sold Australian Airlines. There was no doubt that the Labor agenda was to sell any assets that it could, and the member for Brand and Leader of the Opposition was part and parcel of the Labor cabinet that was on that program of privatisation and that was determined to sell Telstra as well. When the Leader of the Opposition was finance minister, he made a number of comments about privatisation. In 1994, he said:

... asset sales allow the Government to maintain public services and benefits to the Australian people ...

He went on to say:

And despite some critics suggesting asset sales amount to ‘selling off the family jewels’, they do not result in a loss of infrastructure, but rather a transfer of ownership.

He continued:

... it may be a simple case that the reasons for government ownership may no longer apply, either because of Australia’s changed economy, the development of our markets, or advances in technology.

He told the National Press Club:

... privatisation, for instance, can strengthen the performance of enterprises by allowing private capital injections—

and on and on went the current Leader of the Opposition, then a member of the Labor cabinet, on a program justifying privatisation.

There was a very interesting article in the West Australian of 29 October 2001 which said that, in a 1995-96 budget paper marked ‘highly protected’—for obvious reasons—but later obtained under freedom of information, the then Labor government had drawn up a detailed proposal to sell 100 per cent of Telstra in five tranches. Don’t try to deny that Labor were planning to sell Telstra—thus the rank hypocrisy of their current position. And we have continued to see it since they have been in opposition—for instance, at a meeting between the member for Melbourne and Macquarie Bank. Just following that meeting in 2000, the Macquarie Bank newsletter said:

The ALP is considering such a break-up of Telstra. Our discussion with senior members of the Opposition have indicated that a split between Telstra’s network and its retail businesses is an option being considered by the ALP.

It continued:

The retail business could be either fully or partially privatised.

This is the Labor opposition’s shadow frontbenchers negotiating with Macquarie Bank. And we could talk about the member for Melbourne, one of Labor’s frontbench, saying in his 1999 book Open Australia:

Part-private ownership of Telstra creates internal tensions and contradictions and inhibits the extent to which social value can be obtained from a huge investment of public capital.

It is perfectly clear that Labor intended to sell Telstra and, given half a chance, they would do it. But there are two significant points that need to be made: there are two differences between Labor’s position on Telstra and ours—there is not a difference on whether or not to sell; both the government
and the opposition, if they had a chance, would sell Telstra—firstly, the government have been up front and during every election since 1996 have said that they will sell Telstra. Labor, on the other hand, deny what they want to do. They denied that they would sell the Commonwealth Bank. You cannot trust what Labor say about privatisation.

In 1993—remember when Labor were flogging off the first half of the Commonwealth Bank?—in an official prospectus to Commonwealth Bank shareholders, the then finance minister, Ralph Willis, said:
The government has no intentions whatever of further reducing its shareholding.

What did Labor do two years later? They flogged off the other half of the Commonwealth Bank. Labor’s promises about privatisation are not worth the paper they are written on. If they can break a pledge in a prospectus to shareholders, then they cannot be trusted on privatisation.

The first big difference is that the government is up front; Labor are denying what they would do. The second big difference is that with Labor’s privatisations they wasted the money; this government will invest the money in a future fund. In Labor’s last five years they not only sold the Commonwealth Bank, the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories, the Snowy Mountains network and Australian Airlines et cetera but had nothing to show for it. They spent like drunken sailors and still ran up $70 billion worth of debt in five years. They sold off all the assets, spent the proceeds of those assets and still went into deficit to the tune of $70 billion in just five years. This government will invest the money from the privatisation of the remaining half of Telstra in a future fund so that future taxpayers will not have to bear the burden of an ageing Australian population. The money will not be spent, it will not be squandered, it will not be wasted as it was under Labor; it will be invested in the future of this country.

Labor or the coalition would sell Telstra if they had a chance. Labor are in denial in the same way that they were about the sale of the Commonwealth Bank: they reneged on that promise. They wasted the money. This government will invest the money from the sale of Telstra in the future of this country. As a result of the sale we will see improved telecommunications services, improved asset growth for Australian taxpayers and Australian investors and a stronger economy.

Mr BOWEN (Prospect) (8.02 pm)—The Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proofing and Other Measures) Bill 2005 is very important. It is certainly one of the most important bills that will come before this House during this term. I am opposed to the privatisation of Telstra. Telstra is an organisation which provides essential services and which has enormous market power in a very important area.

The government constantly raise previous privatisations—we just heard it again from the member for Macquarie, the Chief Government Whip. We heard all about the Commonwealth Bank, the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories and Qantas. Those opposite try to paint a picture of Labor being in favour of all privatisations and that somehow we are being hypocritical. We heard it again from the Chief Government Whip. It is a very convenient argument for the government but it is also a very wrong argument.

The Labor Party take the approach that privatisation should be approached on a case-by-case basis. The things that were privatised by the previous Labor government did not have monopoly powers; they were competing with similar companies in competitive markets and, frankly, they no longer played the role in society that they once legitimately played when they were estab-
lished. The government, on the other hand, have taken an extreme ideological approach. The Prime Minister said just last week in a press conference: ‘That’s why as a matter of philosophy I’ve never favoured governments owning enterprises’—any enterprise, regardless of the role it plays in society, regardless of its monopoly power, regardless of the good work it does. This Prime Minister believes governments should own no enterprises.

We heard the member for Macquarie say that the Labor Party would have introduced the privatisation of Telstra if they had had a chance when they were in government. I have news for the member for Macquarie: we were in government for 13 years. We would have been able to get the privatisation of Telstra through the Senate if we had tried and no doubt the opposition at that stage would have supported us. But we did not. In 13 years in government, we did not once try to privatise Telstra, yet the Chief Government Whip comes in here and says that we would have sold it if we had had half a chance. I suspect that some time in those 13 years we would have had half a chance.

We do not privatise monopolies. Telstra earns 75 per cent of the fixed line voiced revenues in this country and has an 82 per cent market share of basic line rental. It also earns 79 per cent of revenues from the broadband market. The transfer to private ownership does not alter these facts. Will our regulatory regime ensure that all Australians, regardless of where they live, have access to affordable and new telecommunications services? I doubt it. The government are privatising an essential service and what is, in many cases, a monopoly. We need to keep Telstra in government hands so that it invests in infrastructure needed to provide cutting edge services like e-health and e-education. Labor have voted against and consistently opposed the sale on every occasion the Howard government have brought the legislation into this House. We have had one simple policy: do not sell it; fix it. A fully privatised Telstra will desert communities where it cannot make a profit. It will leave towns quicker than the banks did.

The government’s rationale for the sale of Telstra—and we just heard it again from the Chief Government Whip—is that it is inconsistent to have a body owned and regulated by the government. This is a very strange argument. As the member for Melbourne has pointed out, that would mean that Australia Post and Medibank Private would need to be privatised. So either the government have a secret plan to privatise these organisations or they are being extremely hypocritical. I suggest the latter is the more likely construction you can put on these events.

The member for Wentworth addressed the House earlier this evening. He repeated the argument of the Prime Minister that it is inappropriate for the government to own Telstra while it regulates it. He called it a hopeless conflict of interest. He did not indicate whether he thought it was a hopeless conflict of interest for the government to own and regulate Australia Post and Medibank Private. And he went a bit further: he said this debate is not about whether Telstra should be sold; he said it has already been sold. I think he called it a great lie, or words to that effect, to say that this debate is about selling Telstra. He said Telstra was sold when the government first sold off the first two tranches. He said that is when the government lost effective control.

Of course, that is not what the government said at the time. They went to the 1996 election saying, ‘We’ll sell off 33 per cent of Telstra and we’ll maintain government control.’
That is what they said. That is how they sold it to the Australian people. They said, ‘We’ll sell off a third but we’ll keep control.’ But now the member for Wentworth comes in and says, ‘Well, that’s not really right. We never had control back then.’

This is not just about telecommunications or selling off a body that provides important infrastructure. This decision, if the House takes it, will represent poor economics. The privatisation of Telstra does not represent a sound economic decision. It is a net loss for the nation’s finances. The Treasury’s own analysis of the dividend stream the government receives for its share of Telstra compared to selling Telstra shows a loss to the public coffers of $140 million a year. That is $140 million a year that we cannot spend elsewhere.

And it gets worse than this. This government, in its ideological obsession, is moving to sell Telstra now when we have just seen a crash in Telstra’s share price. We have seen the Telstra share price tumble over the last few weeks. If the government proceeds to sell Telstra at that share price, we will be seeing the taxpayers of Australia short funded; we will be seeing the government in a fire sale as a distressed seller, putting Telstra on the market at a time when it would not get the absolute maximum share price available. That just shows how this government is being driven by its ideological obsession—its extremist approach that we have seen on so many matters. This is not good economics; it is poor economics. It is also a poor decision for the infrastructure future of Australia.

This debate also goes to the poor information communications technology performance that we are seeing in this nation. Australia’s broadband performance of 7.7 subscribers for every 100 people is the worst of any major industrialised country: Australia is 21st in the developed world. Australia’s information and communication technology trade deficit is equal to three-quarters of Australia’s total trade deficit problem. Broadband prices in Australia are amongst the highest in the industrialised world. And when it comes to the take-up of broadband services, we are years behind. There are 20 OECD nations ahead of us in broadband uptake.

Arguably, it is more important to keep Telstra in public hands now than it was when the Postmaster-General’s Department, the old PMG and Telecom, were in existence, because any modern economy depends very closely on the knowledge economy. A country’s economic performance in the world is largely determined by the value and importance of its telecommunications infrastructure.

This was brought home to me at a local level by an issue in my electorate—an issue in the rural part of my electorate, in Horsley Park and Kemps Creek. These two parts of my electorate did not have broadband. Some residents raised that with me and we organised a petition to get broadband. I had as much response on the lack of broadband in this part of my electorate as I have had on any other issue throughout my electorate. Hundreds of people signed the petitions.

It was brought home to me just how much business relies on broadband these days. As I said, this is a rural area, but one with many small businesses. These small businesses all came to me and said: ‘Our business is being affected because we don’t have broadband and we can’t compete efficiently with other businesses’—and some of them were export businesses—‘because we don’t have broadband. We have to dial up, it falls out and people can’t make contact with us.’

At Horsley Park and Kemps Creek, another large group of people who approached
me were families with children—students who are trying to get ahead, who are trying to study and who do not have broadband to do their assignments. That is what brought home to me just how important telecommunications infrastructure is to the future of our economy. As I say, Telstra arguably does more nation building now than it has at any time in its history—than its predecessors did when they laid the telegraph lines and telephone lines across the country. It is arguably more important now that Telstra be kept in public ownership than it has been at any other time, and it is even more important when this government, with its ideological obsessions, is proceeding to sell taxpayers short.

Labor will continue to oppose the privatisation of Telstra. Labor is taking up the fight on behalf of the vast majority of Australians who oppose the sale. The government claim they have a mandate to sell Telstra. Every opinion poll tells us that somewhere between 70 and 80 per cent of the Australian people oppose the privatisation of Telstra. On the issue of mandate, there is one rather prominent National Party senator from Queensland who also has a mandate. Twelve months ago, almost to the day, on 7 September 2004, now Senator Joyce said:

I agree with John Howard on most things, but I won’t be endorsing the sale of Telstra.

On 2 August 2004, he said:

Telstra is a national icon, and if you launch yourself as a political party into destroying national icons then you will come unstuck with the electorate.

On 1 August 2005, he said:

I’ve got to look after the people who elected me. I’ve got to look after the people of Queensland.

A former President of the Queensland Nationals, Mr Terry Bolger, said:

[We] won a Senate Place in our own right, saying we would oppose the sale of Telstra. It was not with the coalition.

He also said:

Our policy is Telstra should not be sold. We are against any sale of Telstra unless the community tells us to do otherwise.

The government claims to have a mandate, but what of Senator Joyce’s mandate? The Labor Party certainly has a mandate to oppose the sale of Telstra. Senator Joyce says that he has negotiated a package which therefore justifies the sale of Telstra. But it is not the $5 billion package that he originally asked for. It is not even the $5.7 billion package proposed by the Telstra CEO. And it is not the $7 billion that the National Party originally proposed—required for a fibre-optic network—or even a $3 billion package. This is a package spread out over many years which falls far short. The Nationals are auctioning off their support under attack from the Independents and One Nation, but they are selling out the people of Australia who oppose this privatisation.

On the weekend we saw Senator Joyce have a wobbly day—he wobbled on his support for the sale of Telstra. He said, ‘We were promised $2 billion, but the legislation doesn’t deliver $2 billion—it says ‘up to $2 billion’.’ He demanded that the legislation be amended and he got his wish. He was not prepared to take the government on trust. He was not prepared to accept government assurances. He is on the record in the past as saying that you have to watch the government; you cannot take them on trust. I think he said, ‘You can’t trust these guys; you’ve always got to watch these guys.’ I endorse Senator Joyce’s remarks—you do always have to watch these guys, the government. He is right not to take them on trust; he is right to demand that the legislation be amended—I would not take them on trust either. But what would be even more right
for Senator Joyce would be for him to oppose the sale of Telstra outright. What would be even more right for him would be for him to keep faith with the people of Queensland who elected him on a mandate of opposing the sale of Telstra. That would be even more right.

As I said at the outset, this is a vitally important debate. It is perhaps the most important piece of legislation that will be introduced during this term of the parliament. I call on honourable members opposite who have misgivings about this legislation to do what Senator Joyce is doing—to stand up for their communities, to oppose the privatisation of Telstra, to oppose this legislation, to cut out the hypocrisy and to keep a vitally important Australian institution in the public’s hands.

Mr PROSSER (Forrest) (8.16 pm)—I rise to address and support the three bills before the House in this cognate debate, the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proofing and Other Measures) Bill 2005, the Telecommunications (Carrier Licence Charges) Amendment (Industry Plans and Consumer Codes) Bill 2005 and the Appropriation (Regional Telecommunications Services) Bill 2005-2006, because, along with my fellow Liberal colleagues, I am a strong supporter of regional Australia.

The Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proofing and Other Measures) Bill 2005 establishes a $2 billion Communications Fund and the $1.1 billion Connect Australia package and provides for regular independent reviews into the adequacy of telecommunications in regional, rural and remote parts of Australia. Schedule 1 to the bill creates a new part 9C of the Telecommunications (Consumer Protection and Service Standards) Act 1999 to establish a Communications Fund. The purpose of the Communications Fund is to provide an income stream to fund the Commonwealth government’s response to any recommendations proposed by the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee to the government in a report of a review of the adequacy of telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote parts of Australia.

This bill also confirms the government’s intention to introduce legislation to appropriate a total of $1.1 billion for the Connect Australia package. This funding will encompass: $878 million for the provision of affordable broadband access to all Australians living in rural, regional and remote Australia; $113 million for the roll out of innovative new broadband networks to support the delivery of health and education services; $30 million for the extension of terrestrial mobile phone coverage and the satellite phone handset subsidy scheme; and $90 million for improved communication services to remote Indigenous communities.

Schedule 2 to the bill inserts a new part 9B of the Telecommunications (Consumer Protection and Service Standards) Act 1999 relating to regular independent reviews of regional telecommunications and inserts relevant definitions in that act. This bill gives effect to the recommendations of the Estens inquiry in relation to regular reviews of regional telecommunications. There are three core features of this section of the bill, namely: a requirement that reviews be conducted at regular intervals; a requirement that the review panel be independent of government and Telstra; and a requirement that governments must publicly respond to the recommendations of the reviews. The first review will commence before the end of 2008 or at an earlier time determined by the minister in consultation with other relevant ministers. Each subsequent review will be required to be commenced within three years after the completion of the previous review.
The reviews will be undertaken by an independent expert committee appointed by the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts known as the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee. The committee will be required to report to the minister on its findings and recommendations and this report will be required to be tabled in the parliament. Reviews must also include public consultation. An essential requirement of the reviews is that they consider the question of whether people in rural, regional and remote Australia have equitable access to the telecommunications services that are available to a significant proportion of consumers living in metropolitan Australia. The committee members must also have knowledge and experience in matters affecting rural, regional and remote Australia.

This gives rise to item 7 of schedule 4 to the bill, which will make a consequential amendment to subsection 8BUA(1) of the Telstra Corporation Act 1991 to ensure that at least two directors of Telstra will be required to have knowledge of, or experience in, the communication needs not only of regional areas but also of rural or remote areas of Australia.

Schedule 3 to the bill relates to amendments proposed by the Telecommunications (Carrier Licence Charges) Amendment (Industry Plans and Consumer Codes) Bill 2005 to change the Telecommunications (Carrier Licence Charges) Act 1997 to allow for the costs of development of consumer related industry codes to be recouped from the charges imposed on carrier licences.

This bill will enable the recoupment from licensed telecommunication carriers of costs incurred by industry bodies, such as the Australian Communications Industry Forum, in developing consumer related industry codes of practice in the telecommunications sector. Currently, industry bodies or associations rely almost entirely for funding on voluntary membership fees. It is becoming increasingly difficult to meet the costs of developing consumer related codes from these fees, particularly as these costs have risen substantially in recent years.

Through the amendments proposed in the bill, the Australian Communications and Media Authority will be able to recoup these payments from telecommunications carriers. Under the existing arrangements, carrier licence charges are equitably based on each carrier’s share of total telecommunications revenue. This bill will result in more equitable funding of consumer related codes and will increase funding certainty for industry bodies. It will also enable increased consumer participation in, and more timely development of, industry codes that benefit residential and small business consumers.

Schedule 4 to the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proofing and Other Measures) Bill 2005 switches on appropriations in sections 8AL, 8AS and 8BA of the Telstra Corporation Act 1991 which were temporarily switched off by the Telstra (Transition to Full Private Ownership) Bill 2005 for constitutional reasons. It also expands the appropriation in section 8AL to deal with calls on guarantees and obligations to make payments of amounts in relation to sale scheme hybrid securities issued by the Commonwealth in connection with a Telstra sale scheme as well as authorising any borrowing of money by the Commonwealth in connection with the issue of sale scheme hybrid securities under a Telstra sale scheme. And here the Appropriation (Regional Telecommunications Services) Bill 2005-2006, being the third bill in the government’s package of measures, will support a robust, competitive telecommunications environment and advance communications services in regional and remote Aus-
tralia. These measures deliver on the government’s commitment to give Australians access to first-class telecommunications services now and into the future.

This bill proposes additional funding for the continuation of the Higher Bandwidth Incentive Scheme, or HiBIS, and the implementation of the Connect Australia program. It seeks total appropriations of $2.19 billion. The Higher Bandwidth Incentive Scheme provides registered internet service providers with incentive payments to supply higher bandwidth services in regional, rural and remote areas at prices comparable to those available in metropolitan areas. This bill seeks appropriation for 2005-06 of $67 million to enable the continued operation of this scheme under the higher levels of demand. That amount will be partly offset by bringing forward $17 million from funding originally planned for 2006-07. The Connect Australia program is part of the largest regional telecommunications assistance package in Australia’s history. It is a targeted package aimed at providing Australians living or working in regional, rural and remote areas with access to first-class telecommunications now and into the future. The Connect Australia program will involve funding totalling some $1.1 billion.

The bill seeks appropriation of $148.8 million to enable two program elements of Connect Australia to operate in 2005-06. The first element, Broadband Connect, will be based on the Higher Bandwidth Incentive Scheme and is proposed to commence on 1 January 2006. It will continue to assist residential customers, small businesses and not-for-profit organisations in regional and remote areas to access broadband at affordable prices. However, it will introduce refinements to encourage providers to expand their areas of service supply and will limit the possibility of providers recovering more than the legitimate capital costs of installing broadband infrastructure. Other minor refinements are being made so that the scheme will continue to reflect metropolitan pricing levels. They will increase broadband penetration rates in regional, rural and remote areas. Broadband Connect will be developed in consultation with key stakeholders. The second element, Mobile Connect, will build on the Mobile Phone Handset Subsidy Scheme to extend terrestrial mobile coverage to areas where operating costs can be recovered and investment is commercially viable. It will continue to subsidise satellite handsets for other areas, taking over from the Satellite Handset Subsidy Scheme. The various components of Mobile Connect will commence during 2005-06.

Lastly, this bill requests appropriation of $3.5 million to cover the department’s costs arising from the increased program activity during 2005-06. This bill is part of a comprehensive and forward-looking package. It is a significant demonstration of the government’s ongoing and proactive commitment to ensuring that Australia’s telecommunications system combines the best elements of competition and access to first-class telecommunications now and into the future, and it has my full support.

My electorate of Forrest will benefit from measures that this government introduces to improve the way in which telecommunications companies have to work and function, because better competition will mean that the telcos simply have to maintain a focus on looking after their customers—everyday Australians. Forrest has benefited from the roll-out of new telecommunications technology. However, as in many other parts of Australia, more still needs to be done. I agree that regular reviews of regional communications services are the only way to ensure that people in regional and rural Australia do not miss out on the benefits of telecommunications service developments that metropolitan
Australia enjoys. It has to be said that Connect Australia is the biggest regional telecommunications assistance program in Australia’s history. The newly targeted funding package is a key element of the government’s strategy to future proof telecommunications services in regional Australia.

I believe it is in the best interests of consumers that ownership and regulation are separate entities. You do not have to have ownership in order to be able to regulate. It is simply inappropriate that the regulator of telcos in Australia is also a major shareholder. My colleague the member for Wentworth quite rightly said that there is a conflict of interest, and I agree with him on that point. The government does not control Telstra’s operations. Selling Telstra will allow the government to get on with regulating the industry in the best interests of all Australians. The package will prove a better commitment by government to people in rural and regional areas of Australia. The government is taking this opportunity to ensure that there is better regulation, better consumer safeguards, better competition measures and a local presence plan which must be approved by the minister. The government is taking this opportunity to improve and enhance regulation so that we will see better services at lower prices for all Australians, irrespective of where they live.

These bills are a comprehensive response to the core future-proofing recommendations of the regional telecommunications inquiry. They ensure that the telecommunications needs of regional Australia will be identified and addressed by all future governments. They also confirm the government’s commitment to regional telecommunications services, with $1.1 billion in funding over the next four years as well as the $2 billion Future Fund. The future privatisation of Telstra will be a very positive move that will allow an improvement in services in regional and remote parts of Australia and a reduction in costs. I support the bills before the House.

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (8.31 pm)—Opinion polls show consistently that around 85 per cent of Australians oppose the sale of Telstra. If tonight’s contribution to the cognate debate on the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proofing and Other Measures) Bill 2005 by the member for Forrest was designed to reassure them, I have to say that I believe it failed dismally. In fact, I do not think he looked all that convinced himself. He looked as though he really did not want to be here. But I do congratulate him and other regional Liberals for having the courage to come in here and defend the indefensible. It is not something that they always do. I notice from the speakers list that a number of members of the National Party have been prepared to come in here and bravely defend this decision to sell the balance of Telstra.

I do note that there have been a few new speaking arrangements tonight—a bit of a reshuffling of the deck chairs. I think I have just worked out why that is. I was a bit concerned that I would be late getting here because I had difficulty making my way up the corridor and through the bevy of journalists, cameras and lights parked outside the National Party party room. Here we are at half past eight on Monday evening debating the sale and full privatisation of Telstra, and the National Party is still down the corridor making its decision. Indeed, I happen to know that most of those media representatives were there waiting for one person and one person alone—and not the Acting Prime Minister. I did see him twaddle down there. But no, they were waiting for Senator Barnaby Joyce to decide, in fact, whether and for what price the National Party would sell out its constituency.
In my almost 10 years here, I have never seen this situation before: the issue is being debated in here and by the National Party around the corner in its party room, with Senator Joyce determining whether and under what conditions it would support the sale of Telstra. History tells us that it will sell out its constituents. It will push for a slightly better price. It will demand a slightly higher price for its sell-out. But you can be sure of one thing: at the end of the day it will fall into line and disgracefully and outrageously support the full sale of this important government institution.

I note that the member for Paterson is next on the speaking list. I congratulate him—although he has not turned up yet; we shall wait and see—for having the courage to come in and defend this sale, given the impact it will have on so many of his constituents in places like Gloucester, Dungog and all those rural constituencies that he claims to represent so strongly. Indeed, what would be the impact of this sale on a beautiful little place called Dirty Creek? That is a little place on the Myall River between Tea Gardens and Bulahdelah where I understand the member for Paterson has a block of dirt he wants rezoned. He has gone to war with the local council to have the land rezoned. In fact, someone accused him of being behind the push to have the council sacked. If the member for Paterson spent as much time sticking up for his constituents and getting landline services and broadband into those rural constituencies he represents, we all would be much better off.

From my perspective, this has a touch of deja vu in a couple of ways. In my almost 10 years in this place, this is the third time I have found it necessary to stand here and oppose the sale of Telstra. The first time was in December 1996, not all that long after my election, when I had to speak to the Telstra (Dilution of Public Ownership) Bill 1996. The second time was on 7 April 1998, when I opposed the Telstra (Transition to Full Private Ownership) Bill. And here we are again tonight. The deja vu, as I said, is twofold. Not only are we here debating the same or very similar issues but also we are about to be gagged on this debate. On this very important debate—very important to every person in this place and to every person we represent—again the government will gag debate.

Like the member for Prospect, I listened with great interest to the contribution by the member for Macquarie. Like so many before him, he raised the old issues about the Commonwealth Bank, the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories and the things sold in the past by the former Labor government—airlines, of course, amongst them. Like the member for Prospect, I apply a test to each of these issues and deal with them on a case-by-case basis. For me, there are basically three points in the test of privatisation. The first is the question: is public ownership providing social and economic outcomes that the company would not be providing if it were not in public ownership? In the case of Telstra, I say absolutely, which I will go into later in more depth. It is obvious that rural users of Telstra services are cross-subsidised by their city cousins; otherwise, in a sparsely populated large landmass like Australia, we would not have equal access to services.

The second test is whether the company involved requires a significant capital injection to meet the demands of the market and keep itself profitable. In the case of Trans Australian Airlines, for example, it did. But, to go back to the first test, the airline was not providing any social benefit. The majority of Australians were not getting any social or economic benefit out of the airline being owned by the government, but the public certainly get a benefit out of Telstra being at least partly owned by the government.
Telstra require a capital injection? Organisations like the airline I mentioned required a huge capital injection to remain competitive, but this is not true of Telstra. It does, of course, require a capital injection, but it has a $2 billion annual income stream from which it can draw to inject that capital into the business.

The third test is: does the retention of the company involved negatively, or adversely, affect the budget bottom line? In the cases of many before it—and airlines are again a perfect example—they did. But that is not the case with Telstra. Telstra makes a positive contribution to the budget bottom line, providing significant dividends to the government of roughly $2 billion a year, depending on which year you look at. I remind the House that in 2001-02 the Commonwealth budget would have gone into deficit if it were not for the positive impact of Telstra dividends at that time.

Australians are asking: ‘Why are we selling this thing? Why are we selling Telstra?’ They just cannot understand why the government would be giving up such a profitable business and a business that is best placed in part government ownership to provide cross-subsidies and services to rural and regional Australia. I constantly think back to a very good report by the Australian Statistician some years ago now, in around 1997 or 1998, where he posed a question about the role of government in redistributing wealth in this country.

Mr Baldwin—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I bring up the issue of relevance. The member for Hunter is talking repetitiously about the sale of Telstra. The three bills under cognate debate are about future proofing, about carrier licence charges and industry plans and consumer codes, and about regional telecommunications services. None of these bills are about the sale of Telstra. Those bills will not be here until they are finished with in the Senate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—I understand that this has been a far-reaching debate about not only matters to do with the bills before the chair but also issues that arise from the sale of Telstra. I think that other chairs have ruled in that manner.

Mr Baldwin—Mr Deputy Speaker, further to the point of order: with all due respect, there will be plenty of time to address the sale of Telstra when the bills are finalised in the Senate and referred back to this House. I would ask that you bring the member’s attention to the three bills that are up for debate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The member for Hunter is always aware of the requirement to be relevant to the bills, and I am sure that he will be.

Mr FITZGIBBON—Of course, Mr Deputy Speaker. The member for Paterson has just made a complete goose of himself.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The honourable member for Hunter is not assisting the chair.

Mr FITZGIBBON—As he would be aware, this has been a free-ranging debate about the sale of Telstra—

Mr Baldwin—Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I take personal offence at that and I ask that the member withdraw those statements.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—It would assist the proceedings tonight, not to be a precedent, if the honourable member for Hunter were to withdraw the remarks.

Mr FITZGIBBON—I will withdraw the remark. The member for Paterson has made a complete fool of himself by coming in here and taking points of order when this debate has been absolutely free ranging. Every member on that side of the House has taken
the same approach. The Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proofing and Other Measures) Bill 2005 and related bills go to the support of the sale of Telstra, and that is what we are all talking about tonight. But I am very keen to assist the chair, so let me take the invitation to digress and go to some aspects of the cognate debate. Let me go to the future-proofing provision, which obviously has the support of the member for Paterson.

If Menzies had set the standard during his time in the fifties—if he had proposed to privatise the Postmaster General’s Department—the standard would have been one of those old black phones where you turn the dial and pick the receiver up. This is the point: we do not know what tomorrow’s technologies will be, and on that basis we cannot possibly know what they will cost. The member for Paterson thinks something quite different apparently. He thinks he knows exactly what the needs of his constituents will be in 10 years time and exactly what they are going to cost—but of course he does not. He does not know what the technologies of the future will be and he does not know what the costs will be. But I can tell him that he has invited us to call a few quorums during this debate. The government has already gagged us on this bill and denied and restricted our opportunities to speak, and now he comes in here and takes frivolous points of order to deny me the opportunity to speak.

I invite the member for Paterson, when he speaks on the cognate bills after me, to explain, first of all, why you are going to deny—

Ms Corcoran—He isn’t speaking.
Mr FITZGIBBON—He is not speaking?
Ms Hall—He has chickened out.
Mr FITZGIBBON—Have they gagged it?
Ms Gillard—No, he has chickened out.

Mr FITZGIBBON—I began my contribution by saying that I do not often congratulate the member for Paterson but that I do not mind giving credit where credit is due, even in this case. I congratulated the member for Paterson for having the courage to come in here and attempt to defend this privatisation fire sale.

Ms Corcoran interjecting—

Mr FITZGIBBON—But I also qualified that, as the member for Isaacs has just pointed out. I said, ‘But he hasn’t spoken yet.’ Now I am informed that he has no intention of speaking. Do not worry about it, Mr Deputy Speaker; we will get a little media release out in the Hunter tomorrow and we will let the constituents of Paterson know that the member for Paterson squibbed it, that he was not prepared to stand up and fight against the sale of Telstra. He was not prepared to come in here and defend either the sale or this weak package that has been put up in an attempt to sell the sale to country areas.

All this talk is about $3 billion. We all know about the $3 billion. We know that Barnaby Joyce does not like it. That is why the National Party is currently having a meeting in its party room. We know that the $3 billion announced for this—$1 billion upfront for certain measures and then the interest of some $2 billion over the next however many years—amounted to some $100 million a year to compensate those in
rural and regional Australia who are going to be dudged by these arrangements.

In the Hunter electorate there are 32 exchanges, 26 of which are not enabled for broadband. The great irony in the government’s argument in all of this is the one I am about to share with you. Telstra Country Wide, I am pleased to say, have been doing a good job. The member for Paterson shakes his head. They have been doing a good job, fast-tracking some of the long-overdue facilities and services we need in rural and regional Australia. How have they been able to do that? By way of a significant injection of additional funds to take Telstra up to a level the government would argue is right for privatisation. But here is the great irony: the member for Paterson and I pick up the phone to Telstra Country Wide all the time, if we have a mobile service where we currently are driving, and we demand that Telstra Country Wide help us switch on another exchange, fix a constituent’s landline fault or deal with a mobile black spot. But the member for Paterson will not be doing that. When he rings Telstra after the sale, do you know what they will say to him? ‘Sorry, we’re not half-owned by the government anymore; you’ve got no say over us,’ and they will basically tell him to go running. So the great irony is that the government has proved, by way of the creation of Telstra Country Wide, that it is important to keep Telstra in country hands and that it is important to keep some government control, and we will require an ongoing injection of funds to keep services in rural and regional Australia up to levels that people would expect.

I am very disappointed in the member for Paterson, but I should have known better. I was all excited at the prospect of him standing up here tonight and defending this decision and explaining to his constituents why they need not bother ringing his office in a month’s time or so on a Telstra issue, because he will no longer have any say or influence over what Telstra does in his local constituency. So we will get that media release out there tomorrow. If he is not prepared to be held to account here, we will make sure he is held to account back in his electorate.

Debate interrupted.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (8.47 pm)—
Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—Does the honourable member claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr BALDWIN—I do.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr BALDWIN—Earlier in the debate this evening, the member for Hunter made incorrect statements to this House about a property that I own at Norong. I am not seeking a rezoning, and I expect an apology from the member for Hunter. I am following due process and I have put in a development application for a property, which is before the council. What we see from the member for Hunter is yet another case of muckraking.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The honourable member has explained where he claims to have been misrepresented.

Mr Fitzgibbon—If the member for Paterson is bashing up the council over a DA rather than a rezoning application, I apologise for my mistake.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The honourable member for Hunter will withdraw those remarks.

Mr Fitzgibbon—Did the Deputy Speaker find some of those remarks offensive?
The DEPUTY SPEAKER—In the hubbub I heard some remarks that I found offensive, and I ask that you withdraw.

Mr Fitzgibbon—Mr Deputy Speaker, if you personally found them offensive, I am happy to withdraw.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—No, the withdrawal is on behalf of the chamber.

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (8.49 pm)—Mr Deputy Speaker, I wish to make another personal explanation.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—Does the honourable member claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr BALDWIN—Yes.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr BALDWIN—The member for Hunter has stated twice tonight that I have ‘abused’ and ‘bashed up’ the Great Lakes Council. I have made no such comment in the media or otherwise about the Great Lakes Council. This is just the member for Hunter on yet another flight of fancy. Mr Deputy Speaker, I also raise a point of order. In the standing orders it is up to a member as to whether they find an inference personally offensive and request a withdrawal.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The chair gave some guidance to the member for Hunter. He took that guidance and I think that that matter is now satisfactorily closed for the moment.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (FUTURE PROOFING AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2005

Cognate bills:

TELECOMMUNICATIONS (CARRIER LICENCE CHARGES) AMENDMENT (INDUSTRY PLANS AND CONSUMER CODES) BILL 2005

APPROPRIATION (REGIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICES) BILL 2005-2006

Second Reading

Debate resumed.

Mr CAMERON THOMPSON (Blair) (8.50 pm)—It is a pleasure to rise this evening and speak in the debate on the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proofing and Other Measures) Bill 2005 and related bills. It is a very important debate and sets the future direction for telecommunications in Australia and provides some very important ballast that will, as has been stated in the title of the bill, future proof our country for telecommunications.

But I am concerned about the position being adopted by the Labor Party. The position that the Labor Party has put on Telstra is a lie. Its members know it, its supporters know it, business knows it, unions know it—everyone else in the community knows it. They know it because it is just not sustainable to maintain the current position, to operate Telstra and to present to Australia the view that, if Telstra is in public ownership, consumers of phone and data services across Australia, whether in rural or remote areas or in cities—no matter where you are—will be protected because, simply, the government has a stake in Telstra. It is a complete falsehood presented there by the Labor Party, and I want to underline it by quoting from the Leader of the Opposition’s speech earlier this evening, where he said:

The truth of the matter is this, and this is what the public understands with complete clarity: if Telstra is sold, all the programs that are out there meeting the vast inadequacies in communications now in regional Australia—but, I might say, not
meeting the inadequacies that lie in the outer metropolitan areas of Australia—disappear. All those programs disappear the day it is sold.

That, on its face, is a falsehood. It is impossible for the opposition to present the idea that the ownership of this company predetermines the level of service that Australians will have. People do not get all their services from Telstra; they get them from an increasing range of other communications companies. And from Telstra themselves people get a service that is underpinned by the universal service obligation and by the customer service guarantee. Without that underpinning there would not be a guarantee, there would not be a level of service that could be relied upon. It has been this government’s role to put those sorts of underpinnings in place. Because we have those underpinnings in place, people in my electorate of Blair and people throughout Queensland and throughout Australia can look forward to improved services from not just Telstra but all telecommunications companies in this country for the foreseeable future.

It seems that the opposition is taking a leaf from the new CEO of Telstra and his friends, the three amigos. In that little excerpt I read from the opposition leader’s speech just a minute ago, Labor was, in effect, arguing against the regulation of Telstra—arguing against the provision of those very important underpinnings that will be necessary if we are going to have a continually improving level of telecommunications service. And when I say ‘improving’, I am not saying improving against a flat level of service as things apply today; I am talking about improving against the world standard as it continues to progress in the years ahead.

Labor is arguing against regulation of Telstra. It wants to go back to the days when it had Telstra as a kind of a pup that it could order about and in so doing predetermine what was going to be happening in people’s homes by way of their telephone communications. That has all gone. Even the Leader of the Opposition knows that. There have been many changes in the telecommunications sphere. The prospect of having your own pet telecommunications company and using that as a way of providing these essential services against other competitors, which now exist, and in a corporatised environment, which now exists, is just not possible. It would be the ultimate brick glider: it would fly like a stone. There is just no way. A Telstra operated as you could expect by the Labor Party—without any universal service obligation, without a customer service guarantee—would be a glider made of lead. It would go down fast. Once again you would have the Australian taxpayer picking up the mess left behind by a Labor government.

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We have of course introduced competitors to Telstra, we have sought to improve the character of communications in this country by obliging Telstra to enter into competition with other players and we have been prepared to see a regulatory regime put in place that gives those competitors a real go. We have also believed that as a result of that Telstra would experience a bit of pressure on the quality and the price of the services that it provides for the Australian population. And to some extent we have been satisfied with the result of our handiwork.

That is from the opposition leader. So somewhere in that great fog, that great policy vacuum that is the Australian Labor Party, there is a perception that there have been changes out there in the environment and a move in the marketplace. But as to the impact it should have on the way the Labor Party should operate they seem to be completely unaware. They seem to be completely im-
mune to a move to keep themselves in touch with the environment within which we must operate to provide the best possible services to people in rural and regional Australia, to people in the cities, to people who want ADSL and to people who want things from two-way satellite type communications to all those types of internet services that are well supported under the government’s HiBIS to things such as the PSTN.

The small business spokesman opposite was talking about the old black phones, the ones with the handle on the front. He is obviously not aware that in country areas those disappeared a long time ago and were replaced by digital radio concentrator systems, which were in turn replaced by satellites and other types of communications networks. We have had this continual renewal within the system, but the Labor Party is trading on ancient perceptions like: ‘A phone has got to come from Telstra. It’s got to be the PMG that delivers it.’ The Labor Party is relying on these ancient perceptions and these ancient views about the way the system works. That is what it is seeking to cash in on. When the opposition leader said, ‘All those programs disappear the day it is sold,’ he was endeavouing to fan those old fires, those old concerns. So the big scare campaign gets going.

I would like to ask a couple of things, because it is important we get to the bottom of what the Labor Party would do with something like the universal service obligation, which provides resources for the continuing development of telephone resources in country areas, and what they would do with the customer service guarantees, which provides people with protections so that, if their phone has not been reconnected, they can have a mobile service provided to them or get compensation if they are not provided with adequate service within the time set by the guidelines. Those two areas of regulation were provided by this government, not by the opposition. The opposition seem to be indicating, by their opposition to regulation and by leaping into bed with Sol and the amigos: ‘We want to be in a position where there should be less regulation.’ Are they saying that the universal service obligation—under which the government sets the quantum, under which companies first provide the money in accordance with their market share, under which the phone companies then tender to provide the work and then the work gets done—is to be done away with? If the opposition want to do away with that, there goes a very important structural beam that provides support to people in my electorate today that was not there before. By using these simplistic arguments about the ownership of Telstra, the opposition are trying to say that there is a threat to this kind of service when in fact what the government is on about is strengthening those beams, building those beams up, making sure that there is adequate regulation and making sure that there is provision of sources of capital.

That brings me to another point. Under the Labor Party’s proposed model for the operation of Telstra, we would be left with a scenario under which the real source for capital could only ever be the government. If major advances in the provision of infrastructure were to occur under the Labor Party model across Australia, where would the supply of capital come from? Of course, Labor would own Telstra, so it would come from Telstra. Therefore, I suppose, that would come from the Labor Party dividend, so that would reduce that a bit. On top of that, if that were not enough, Labor would have to kick in some more. If Labor had done away with the universal service obligation, you would not get any from Optus and you would not get any from Vodafone. All of those would not contribute. So you would be left with the government paying the way.
It is no wonder Labor were so totally incompetent at the management of the economy of Australia while they were in charge of it, and it is no wonder that we got into a situation where we wound up with $96 billion of government debt and where the coalition government is still in the throes of paying that money down, because Labor cannot run it. For heaven’s sake, having the Labor Party running a phone company is like having them running a government. It is an appalling prospect. To me, the idea that that form of regulation—that support which provides real comfort to people in my electorate today—could be knocked out by the Labor Party is absolutely reprehensible.

I would like to see the Labor Party commit to the retention of the universal service obligation and the customer service guarantee, but of course there is absolutely no policy and absolutely no position from Labor at all. Just as they said that they would not sell the Commonwealth Bank and they went ahead and did it, now they are happy to say this about Telstra. You know the old saying about making hay while the sun shines. That is what they are on about. They are not about putting a position that would be in the long-term best interests of the taxpayers of this country, the people in my electorate or the people in any of the electorates Australia wide.

The way ahead in Australia is to ensure that we introduce and continue to introduce strengthened competition into the phone industry. The way ahead is not only to keep developing the universal service obligation and the customer service guarantee but to keep our eye on the need for other regulations as time progresses and as demands develop in the marketplace. This is not the responsibility of the government; it is not the obligation of the government to also own a phone company. We are under no obligation to do that. We are under an obligation—on behalf of all taxpayers of this country, all operators, all people who have a phone and everybody who is coming in the next generation—to be in a position to lay down the law about what happens with phones in this country. And that is exactly what this government is doing.

The opposition is saying: ‘Get out of it. Don’t make any rules. Have a free-for-all, just so long as we have this great big pet phone company of our own.’ We know what would happen. Under Labor, you would wind up with Telstra owning all the least profitable sections of the phone business. They would be in an untenable position very quickly. They would be going down the chute so fast you could not keep up with them, no matter what you were riding. On the other side of the fence, you would have their competitors laughing all the way to the bank, being able to cherry-pick all the good, creamy opportunities, particularly in the capital cities, at no real risk.

Why do the Labor Party take this expedient position? It is expedient—and they keep saying it—because of those old biases, because of the old days of the PMG where the only way you would get a phone was by ringing up Telecom, as it was then. And everybody knows the great disdain with which you were treated when you were trying to hook up a phone back in the late seventies or the eighties under Telecom. People today complain about what are very short time frames for the delivery of services, compared to the absolute months that you had to wait to get an on-the-wall phone back in those days of Telecom.

The real, core issue is: where is the capital for infrastructure going to come from? The government model, the direction that we are heading in, provides us with a range of different sources that will all contribute to providing the capital we need in order to pro-
vide not just the ADSL type services we see today. The other day I heard that in Korea they are already planning a broadband service 1,000 times faster than broadband as it stands in Australia today, and they expect to deliver that within about three years. If they are going to do that and we have this sudden quantum leap again, where are the sources of capital going to be under the Labor model? They are going to be the government.

On the government side, we have Telstra, which would be in private hands; we have the other phone companies that contribute under the universal service obligation; and on top of that the government can contribute if it is a major step forward and there is real public need. Those options all remain in place, but not under Labor. It is no wonder that they keep on getting into strife. It is no wonder that, despite those very strong public sentiments that make people automatically want to cling to what has been in their view a relatively successful way of doing things in the past, having Telstra as a security blanket, we need to look to the future, to these real developments and to providing this level of capital, which is not going to be provided in any other way.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (9.06 pm)—I move:

That the debate be adjourned, and the resumption of the debate be made an order of the day for a later hour this day.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor) (9.06 pm)—I shall move that the debate be adjourned and the adjourned—

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (9.06 pm)—I move:

That the question be now put.

Ms Gillard—Mr Deputy Speaker, I believe that I had the call and I was moving a motion.

Mr Abbott interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—I do not need the help of the Leader of the House at this stage. I want to take the member for Lalor through this. The question before the chair was that the House do now adjourn, to which the member for Lalor indicated that she wished to seek the call. The Leader of the House then sought the call to move that the question be put.

Ms Gillard—On what basis did I lose the call before reading a motion? In accordance with page 515 of House of Representatives Practice, I move that the words 'a later hour this day' be omitted with a view to substituting '13 October 2005'.

Mr McClelland—I second the—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—No, the honourable member for Barton does nothing at this moment but sit at the table. A forensic perusal of the standing orders will reveal that the question can be put at any time.

Question put:

That the question be now put.

The House divided. [9.12 pm]


Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (9.17 pm)—I move:

That, in relation to the proceedings on the following bills, so much of the standing and ses-sional orders be suspended as would prevent the Leader of the House making one declaration of urgency and moving one motion for the allotment of time in respect of all the bills:

Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proofing and Other Measures) Bill 2005;

Telecommunications (Carrier Licence Charges) Amendment (Industry Plans and Consumer Codes) Bill 2005; and

Appropriation (Regional Telecommunications Services) Bill 2005-2006

In so moving, I point out to the House that the sale of Telstra has been an issue before this nation for almost a decade. I point out to the House that this government has taken to the last two elections the policy of the full sale of Telstra and that this issue has been debated up hill and down dale in our nation for the best part of a decade. There has already been more debate in this House on this issue than the former government allowed in the Senate on the sale of the Commonwealth Bank.
Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Manager of Opposition Business) (9.19 pm)—This process is a disgrace and the National Party should be ashamed of itself for cooperating with it. This process is an absolute disgrace. You reckon that you are not a distressed seller, but what does this look like?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (9.19 pm)—I move:

That the question be now put.

Question put.

The House divided. [9.23 pm]

(The Deputy Speaker—Mr Jenkins)

Ayes………… 78
Noes………… 58
Majority…… 20

AYES

NOES

* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—The question now is that the motion moved by the Leader of the House be agreed to.

The House divided. [9.29 pm]

(The Deputy Speaker—Mr Jenkins)
Ayes………..  79  
Noes………..  60  
Majority………  19

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* denotes teller

Question agreed to, with an absolute majority.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (FUTURE PROOFING AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2005

TELECOMMUNICATIONS (CARRIER LICENCE CHARGES) AMENDMENT (INDUSTRY PLANS AND CONSUMER CODES) BILL 2005

APPROPRIATION (REGIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICES) BILL 2005-2006

Declaration of Urgency

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (9.30 pm)—I move:

That the bills be considered urgent bills.

Question put.

The House divided.  [9.32 pm]
(The Deputy Speaker—Mr Jenkins)

**AYES**

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<tr>
<th>Ayes</th>
<th>Noes</th>
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Andrews, K.J.  
Baird, B.G.  
Baldwin, R.C.  
Bartlett, K.J.  
Bishop, B.K.  
Broadbent, R.  
Cadam, A.G.  
Ciobo, S.M.  
Costello, P.H.  
Dutton, P.C.  
Entsch, W.G.  
Fawcett, D.  
Forrest, J.A.  
Gash, J.  
Haase, B.W.  
Hartsuyker, L.  
Hockey, J.B.  
Jensen, D.  
Keenan, M.  
Kelly, J.M.  
Ley, S.P.  
Lloyd, J.E.  
Markus, L.  
McArthur, S.  
Moylan, J.E.  
Nelson, B.J.  
Panopoulos, S.  
Prosser, G.D.  
Randall, D.J.  
Robb, A.  
Scott, B.C.  
Slipper, P.N.  
Somlyay, A.M.  
Thompson, C.P.  
Toller, D.W.  
Tuckey, C.W.  
Vaile, M.A.J.  
Vasta, R.  
Washer, M.J.  

* denotes teller

**NOES**

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Andren, P.J.  
Bevis, A.R.  
Bowen, C.  
Burke, A.S.  
Corcoran, A.K.  
Danby, M.  
Elliot, J.  
Ellis, K.  
Ferguson, L.D.T.  
Fitzgibbon, J.A.  
Georganas, S.  
Gibbons, S.W.  
Grierson, S.J.  
Hall, J.G.  
Hayes, C.P.  
Irwin, J.  
Kerr, D.J.C.  
Lawrence, C.M.  
Macklin, J.L.  
McMullan, R.F.  
Murphy, J.P.  
O’Connor, G.M.  
Plibersek, T.  
Quick, H.V.  
Roxon, N.L.  
Sercombe, R.C.G.  
Swan, W.M.  
Thomson, K.J.  
Wilkie, K.  

* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

**Allotment of Time**

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (9.33 pm)—I move:

That the time allotted in connection with the bills be as follows:

1. **Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proofing and Other Measures) Bill 2005:**
   - (a) For the second reading, until 9.45 p.m. this day; and
   - (b) For the detail stage, until 10 p.m. this day; and
   - (c) For the remaining stages, until 10.10 p.m. this day.

2. **Telecommunications (Carrier Licence Charges) Amendment (Industry Plans and Consumer Codes) Bill 2005**—For the remaining stages, until 10.20 p.m. this day.
(3) Appropriation (Regional Telecommunications Services) Bill 2005-2006—For the remaining stages, until 10.30 p.m. this day.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor) (9.34 pm)—I move, as an amendment, that the times 9.45 pm—

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (9.34 pm)—I move:

That the question be now put.

Question put.

The House divided. [9.35 pm]

(The Deputy Speaker—Mr Jenkins)

Ayes…………… 80

Noes…………… 60

Majority……… 20

AYES

Abbott, A.J. Anderson, J.D.
Andrews, K.J. Bailey, F.E.
Baird, B.G. Baker, M.
Baldwin, R.C. Barresi, P.A.
Bartlett, K.J. Billson, B.F.
Bishop, B.K. Bishop, J.I.
Broadbent, R. Brough, M.T.
Cadman, A.G. Causley, I.R.
Ciobo, S.M. Cobb, J.K.
Costello, P.H. Draper, P.
Dutton, P.C. Dutton, P.C.
Eatsch, W.G. Entsch, W.G.
Fawcett, D. Farmer, P.F.
Forrest, J.A. * Ferguson, M.D.
Gash, J. Gambaro, T.
Haase, B.W. Geourgiou, P.
Hartsuyker, L. Hardgrave, G.D.
Hockey, J.B. Henry, S.
Jensen, D. Hunt, G.A.
Keenan, M. Johnson, M.A.
Kelly, J.M. Kelly, D.M.
Kelly, J.M. Laming, A.
Lee, S.P. Lindsay, P.J.
Lloyd, J.E. Macfarlane, I.E.
Markus, L. May, M.A.
McArthur, S. * McGauran, P.J.
Moylan, I.E. Nairn, G.R.
Nelson, B.J. Neville, P.C.
Panopoulos, S. Pearce, C.J.
Prosper, G.D. Pyne, C.
Randall, D.J. Richardson, K.
Robb, A. Ruddock, P.M.
Scott, B.C. Secker, P.D.
Sliper, P.N. Smith, A.D.H.
Somlyay, A.M. Stone, S.N.
Thompson, C.P. Ticehurst, K.V.
Tollner, D.W. Truss, W.E.
Tuckey, C.W. Turnbull, M.
Vaile, M.A.J. Vale, D.S.
Vasta, R. Wakelin, B.H.
Washer, M.J. Wood, J.

NOES

Adams, D.G.H. Albanese, A.N.
Andren, P.J. Beazley, K.C.
Bevis, A.R. Bird, S.
Bowen, C. Burke, A.E.
Burke, A.S. Byrne, A.M.
Corcoran, A.K. Crean, S.F.
Danby, M. * Edwards, G.J.
Elliot, J. Ellis, A.L.
Ellis, K. Emerson, C.A.
Ferguson, L.D.T. Ferguson, M.J.
Fitzgibbon, J.A. Garrett, P.
Georganas, S. George, J.
Gibbons, S.W. Gillard, J.E.
Grierson, S.J. Griffin, A.P.
Hall, J.G. * Hatton, M.J.
Hayes, C.P. Hoare, K.J.
Irwin, J. Katter, R.C.
Kerr, D.J.C. King, C.F.
Lawrence, C.M. Livermore, K.F.
Macklin, J.L. McClelland, R.B.
McMullan, R.F. Melham, D.
Murphy, J.P. O’Connor, B.P.
O’Connor, G.M. Owens, J.
Plibersek, T. Price, L.R.
Quick, H.V. Ripoll, B.F.
Roxon, N.L. Sawford, R.W.
Sercombe, R.C.G. Smith, S.F.
Swan, W.M. Tanner, L.
Thomson, K.J. Vamvakikou, M.
Wilkie, K. Windsor, A.H.C.

* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—The question now is that the motion moved by the Leader of the House allotting times be agreed to.

The House divided. [9.38 pm]

(The Deputy Speaker—Mr Jenkins)
Ayes............. 80
Noes............. 60
Majority......... 20

AYES
Abbott, A.J. Anderson, J.D.
Andrews, K.J. Bailey, F.E.
Baird, B.G. Barresi, P.A.
Baldwin, R.C. Billson, B.F.
Bartlett, K.J. Bishop, J.I.
Bishop, B.K. Brough, M.T.
Broadbent, R. Cadman, A.G.
Cadman, A.G. Cobb, J.K.
Ciobo, S.M. Costello, P.H.
Costello, P.H. Draper, P.
Dutton, P.C. Farmer, P.F.
Entsch, W.G. Ferguson, M.D.
Fawcett, D. Forrest, J.A. *
Forsyth, R. Gash, J.
Hadlow, B.W. Haase, W.
Hartsuyker, L. Haase, M.
Hockey, J.B. Haase, M.
Jensen, D. Kelly, M.
Keenan, M. Kelly, J.M.
Kelly, J.M. Ley, S.P.
Lloyd, J.E. Lloyd, P.C.
Markus, L. McDonald, L.
McArthur, S. * McNamara, T.
Moylan, J.E. Nairn, G.R.
Nelson, B.J. Neville, P.C.
Panopoulos, S. Pearce, C.J.
Prosser, G.D. Pyne, C.
Randall, D.J. Richardson, K.
Robb, A. Ruddock, P.M.
Scott, B.C. Smith, A.D.H.
Sliper, P.N. Seeker, P.D.
Somi, A.M. Smith, S.N.
Thompson, C.P. Ticehurst, K.V.
Tollner, D.W. Truss, W.E.
Tuckey, C.W. Turnbull, M.
Vaile, M.A.J. Vale, D.S.
Vasta, R. Wakefield, B.H.
Washer, M.J. Wood, J.

NOES
Adams, D.G.H. Albanese, A.N.
Andrus, P.J. Beazley, K.C.
Bever, A.R. Bird, S.
Bowen, C. Burke, A.E.
Burke, A.S. Byrne, A.M.
Corcoran, A.K. Crean, S.F.
Dunby, M. * Edwards, G.J.
Elliot, J. Ellis, A.L.
Ellis, K. Emerson, C.A.
Ferguson, L.D.T. Ferguson, M.J.
Fitzgibbon, J.A. Garrett, P.
Georganas, S. Gillard, J.E.
Gibbons, S.W. Griffin, A.P.
Grierson, S.J. Hatton, M.J.
Hall, J.G. * Hoare, K.J.
Hayes, C.P. Irwin, J.
Kerr, D.J.C. Katter, R.C.
Lawrence, C.M. King, C.F.
Macklin, J.L. Livermore, K.F.
McMullen, R.F. McClelland, R.B.
Murphy, J.P. Melham, D.
O’Connor, G.M. O’Connor, R.P.
Pilcher, T. Price, L.R.S.
Quick, H.V. Ripoll, B.F.
Roxon, N.L. Sawford, R.W.
Sercombe, R.C.G. Smith, S.F.
Swan, W.M. Tanner, L.
Thomson, K.J. Vamvakina, M.
Wilkie, K. Windsor, A.H.C.

* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (FUTURE PROOFING AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2005

Second Reading

Debate resumed.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—The question is that this bill be now read a second time.

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (9.39 pm)—It is a disgrace that we cannot debate in this chamber the sale of Telstra. It is a disgrace to see this in Australia today. The railways came to this country and then the highways. Today for regional Australia it is telecommunications. Regional Australia has only one chance, and that is to get modern telecommunications. It has not had that, and it will not get it in the near future, because of the
sale of Telstra. By forcing the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proofing and Other Measures) Bill 2005 and related bills through this House, this government is sacrificing the future of regional Australia.

The sale of Telstra has been a thorn in the side of the electors of Lyons for a long time. I have been trying to get some attention paid to many areas before Telstra is finally lost—and I mean lost, because, when it is sold, it will be gone, and getting some areas in my electorate upgraded will be impossible.

Selling Telstra at this stage and expecting many billions of dollars to flow through the sale seems to be a bit of a non-reality. It is worth about a pinch of manure. That is what the marketplace seems to be looking at. The share price plunges daily and the community investors have been really angry that their money has been so cavalierly thrown away or paid to Telstra management for a job that is not done. Telstra management have not done the job. The general public are unsure whether they will have a reasonable service after the sale.

In other parts of the world, examples of services that have been privatised are not encouraging according to most people I have talked to. When I visited the United States I found a different telco in each state and no one source to retrieve numbers. I do not know what happens to all that. We have not heard how they are going to manage to do that. All the outsourcing that Telstra has done will probably close.

In the grievance debate last week, I spoke in the House about the problems that I have had in Lyons. They are enormous. I have many issues there, with exchange after exchange that people say are just not up to it. Getting anything upgraded is an impossibility. After a few months, somebody was told that they could not get upgraded. My colleague was suffering. Half an hour out of the middle of the cities of Launceston and Hobart we cannot get upgraded services. We cannot get upgraded services in Tasmania 30 minutes from the GPO of Launceston and Hobart. Outer metropolitan areas are suffering. People who are trying to run businesses there are suffering. And further out people are going to have greater difficulties.

As you go out into the broader expanses of Australia, there are real problems. I know that people are saying, ‘I’ll sell Telstra and new capital will come in to expand it.’ You tell me why capital will go somewhere where it cannot get a return. It will not, and there is no reason why it will. It has to be done. Those services needed to be upgraded, and it has not been done. We have failed the people out there and so has the management of Telstra.

We know what has been going on. I remember just recently we had a very big storm hit northern Tasmania. It almost finished off whatever connection one of my constituents had. He was unable to stay connected to the internet; his BigPond account will show up to 50 connections in one day because of faults within the system. Sometimes those connections last for only a few seconds, but he has to pay. His telephone is just as bad as that.

I have an area in my electorate, in a small town in country Tasmania, where, when people drive into their driveway, they run over the cable. The cable gets split and faults occur. We cannot get anything to dig that cable deep back into the soil. It is a major issue that we have not been able to get—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)—Order! It being 9.45 pm, the time allotted for the second reading of this bill has expired. The question is that this bill be now read a second time.

The House divided. [9.49 pm]
AYES


* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Message from the Administrator recommending appropriation for the proposed amendment announced.

Consideration in Detail

Bill—by leave—taken as a whole.

Mr PEACE (Aston—Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer) (9.53 pm)—I present a supplementary explanatory memorandum to the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proofing and Other Measures) Bill 2005 and move the government amendment as circulated:

(1) Schedule 1, item 1, page 6 (lines 19 to 27), omit section 158ZJ, substitute:
Credit of $2 billion to the Fund Account

(1) The sum of $2 billion is to be credited to the Fund Account on the first business day after the later of:

(a) the day on which the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proofing and Other Measures) Act 2005 receives the Royal Assent; and

(b) the day on which the Telstra (Transition to Full Private Ownership) Act 2005 receives the Royal Assent.

Note: The balance of the Fund may exceed $2 billion as a result of future investment growth.

(2) However, the sum of $2 billion is not to be credited to the Fund Account if the event mentioned in paragraph (1)(b) does not occur.

(3) In this section:

business day means a day that is not:

(a) a Saturday; or

(b) a Sunday; or

(c) a public holiday in the Australian Capital Territory.

This bill establishes the Communications Fund and the framework for regular independent reviews on the adequacy of regional telecommunications services. The amendments will provide that $2 billion in cash will be credited to the Communications Fund on the first day after the future-proofing bill and the Telstra (Transition to Full Private Ownership) Bill 2005 receive royal assent.

The sale bill has been drafted to allow the government the flexibility of constituting the fund of cash, shares or a combination of cash and shares. These amendments provide that the fund will consist of cash and not shares. This will allay any concerns that constituting the fund of shares would somehow have eroded its value or integrity. The $2 billion will be invested in a term deposit with the Reserve Bank of Australia in the short term while machinery is put in place to manage broader investments. Because term deposits are not directly mentioned in the definition of ‘financial asset’ in section 158ZF of the future-proofing bill, regulations will be introduced shortly to add this class of asset. The fund will provide an ongoing income stream to fund the government’s response to independent reviews of regional telecommunications services.

Mr STEPHEN SMITH (Perth) (9.55 pm)—This amendment is opposed by the opposition. This is a last-minute, drop-in-the-ocean National Party bribe. This is the ‘Backdown Barnaby’ bribe.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)—The member for Perth will withdraw the unparliamentary language.

Mr STEPHEN SMITH—Which bit was that?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The member will withdraw the unparliamentary language.

Mr STEPHEN SMITH—I withdraw the reference to a bribe and replace it with ‘public policy incentive for the sell-out’. Black Jack McEwen would be rolling in his grave at the sell-out of this once great National Party, as would all those old and great National Party and Country Party members—the Nixons, the Hunts, the Sinclairs and the Anthonys—Anthony Senior, that is. What would they see now? They would see a great sell-out by the Leader of the National Party and Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Vaile; the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, Mr Truss; and, as he skulks from the chamber, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Mr McGauran, who represents the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts in this place. Those old members would see the leader, Mr Vaile, destroying a once great party, as did his predecessor, Mr Anderson. Mr Vaile and Mr Anderson make their prede-
cessor Mr Blunt look like an effective Leader of the National Party. At least you could say of Charles Blunt that he put his stamp on the National Party.

So here we have it: the last-minute, drop-in-the-ocean public policy incentive payment for the National Party and Backdown Barnaby to sell out and sell off Telstra—a flog-off which is against our national interest, against our social and economic interest, against the interests of rural and regional Australia and against the interests of trying to ensure that Australia will be internationally competitive as far as its communications platform is concerned.

What do we see? We see the pretence of a $2 billion fund which will not even get $2 billion; it will get the interest on that over a period of years. It is a last-minute, drop-in-the ocean public policy incentive payment for the National Party to sell out rural and regional Australia—to sell out the national interest. Black Jack McEwen would be rolling in his grave at the way Mr Vaile, Mr Truss, Mr McGauran and the rest of the National Party members have sold out rural and regional Australia—and sell it out they have. Mr Deputy Speaker Causley, in the end that will be to their political cost and yours. The bush will not forgive or forget.

This is an outrage not only as far as public policy is concerned. The National Party and the government went to the last election saying, ‘We won’t flog off Telstra unless we are satisfied that services to the bush are adequate, that they are up to scratch.’ We know from Telstra’s own admission on 11 August that that service level simply cannot be met. The National Party leadership—Mr Vaile and Mr Anderson—have tried, day in and day out, to pretend that service levels are somehow up to scratch. They could not even persuade Mr Besley, who on his own admission was a full privatiser. They cannot even persuade the National Farmers Federation that, as a result of the Estens inquiry, services are up to scratch. This is a last-minute, drop-in-the ocean incentive payment to the National Party to sell out rural and regional Australia and our national interest. The House should not just reject this amendment; it should condemn the National Party.

Mr ANDREN (Calare) (9.59 pm)—I would like to say a few words, if I may, on this particular amendment. These are the Barnaby billions that should have gone directly to the restitution of the network that Sol Trujillo himself—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)—It being 10 o’clock, the time allotted for the consideration in detail stage of the bill has expired.

Question put:
That the amendment (Mr Pearce’s) be agreed to.

The House divided. [10.04 pm]

(The Deputy Speaker—Hon. IR Causley)

Ayes……………... 77
Noes…………….. 61
Majority……….. 16

AYES

Abbott, A.J. Anderson, J.D.
Andrews, K.J. Bailey, F.E.
Baird, B.G. Baker, M.
Baldwin, R.C. Barresi, P.A.
Bartlett, K.J. Billson, B.F.
Bishop, B.K. Bishop, J.I.
Broadbent, R. Brough, M.T.
Cadman, A.G. Ciobo, S.M.
Cobb, J.K. Draper, P.
Dutton, P.C. Elson, K.S.
Entsch, W.G. Farmer, P.F.
Fawcett, D. Ferguson, M.D.
Forrest, J.A. * Gambaro, T.
Gash, J. Georgiou, P.
Haase, B.W. Hardgrave, G.D.
Hartsuyker, L. Henry, S.
Hockey, J.B. Hunt, G.A.
Jensen, D. Johnson, M.A.
Mr ANDREN (Calare) (10.08 pm)—In his second reading speech, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry described the $2 billion Communications Fund as a ‘dedicated’ and ‘perpetual’ fund. ‘Perpetual’ suggests that, as defined by the Australian Oxford Dictionary, this fund is intended to last forever; indefinitely; to be continuous; to be uninterrupted. But the Prime Minister himself told this parliament there is no way that a future parliament can be held to the decision of a previous government, and so there is no way this fund means anything. It is a con.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)—Order! It is past 10 pm, so the detail stage of the bill has now been completed.

Mr Albanese—But it is not 10.10 pm!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I have advice from the clerks that this is the order of the day.

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The member for Grayndler! I have advice from the clerks that this is completed. The question is that the bill, as amended, be agreed to.

The House divided. [10.14 pm]

(Ayes……………. 78

Noes……………. 61

Majority………. 17

AYES

Abbott, A.J.

Anderson, J.D.

Andrews, K.J.

Bailey, F.E.

Ayes:

Vamvakinou, M.

Wilkie, K.

Windsor, A.H.C.

* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The question now is that this bill, as amended, be agreed to.

Mr ANDREN (Calare) (10.08 pm)—In his second reading speech, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry described the $2 billion Communications Fund as a ‘dedicated’ and ‘perpetual’ fund. ‘Perpetual’ suggests that, as defined by the Australian Oxford Dictionary, this fund is intended to last forever; indefinitely; to be continuous; to be uninterrupted. But the Prime Minister himself told this parliament there is no way that a future parliament can be held to the decision of a previous government, and so there is no way this fund means anything. It is a con.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)—Order! It is past 10 pm, so the detail stage of the bill has now been completed.

Mr Albanese—But it is not 10.10 pm!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I have advice from the clerks that this is the order of the day.

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The member for Grayndler! I have advice from the clerks that this is completed. The question is that the bill, as amended, be agreed to.

The House divided. [10.14 pm]

(Ayes……………. 78

Noes……………. 61

Majority………. 17

AYES

Abbott, A.J.

Anderson, J.D.

Andrews, K.J.

Bailey, F.E.
Baird, B.G.  
Baldwin, R.C.  
Bartlett, K.J.  
Bishop, B.K.  
Broadbent, R.  
Cadman, A.G.  
Ciobo, S.M.  
Draper, P.  
Elson, K.S.  
Farmer, P.F.  
Ferguson, M.D.  
Gambaro, T.  
Georgiou, P.  
Henry, S.  
Hunt, G.A.  
Kelly, D.M.  
Laming, A.  
Lindsay, P.J.  
Macfarlane, I.E.  
May, M.A.  
McGauran, P.J.  
Nairn, G.R.  
Neville, P.C.  
Pearce, C.J.  
Pyne, C.  
Richardson, K.  
Ruddock, P.M.  
Somlyay, A.M.  
Thompson, C.P.  
Tollner, D.W.  
Tuckey, C.W.  
Vaile, M.A.J.  
Vasta, R.  
Washer, M.J.  
Baker, M.  
Barresi, P.A.  
Billson, B.F.  
Bishop, J.I.  
Brough, M.T.  
Causley, I.R.  
Cobb, J.K.  
Dutton, P.C.  
Entsch, W.G.  
Fawcett, D.  
Forrest, J.A. *  
Gash, J.  
Haase, B.W.  
Hartsuyaer, L.  
Hockey, J.B.  
Keeman, M.  
Kelly, J.M.  
Ley, S.P.  
Lloyd, J.E.  
Markus, L.  
McArthur, S. *  
Moylan, J.E.  
Nelson, B.J.  
Panopoulos, S.  
Prosser, G.D.  
Randall, D.J.  
Robb, A.  
Scott, B.C.  
Smith, A.D.H.  
Stone, S.N.  
Ticehurst, K.V.  
Truss, W.E.  
Turnbull, M.  
Vale, D.S.  
Wakelin, B.H.  
Wood, J.  
Grierson, S.J.  
Hall, J.G.*  
Hayes, C.P.  
Irwin, J.  
Katter, R.C.  
King, C.F.  
Livermore, K.F.  
McClelland, R.B.  
Melham, D.  
O’Connor, B.P.  
Owens, J.  
Price, L.R.S.  
Ripoll, B.F.  
Sawford, R.W.  
Smith, S.F.  
Tanner, L.  
Vamvakinou, M.  
Windsor, A.H.C.  
* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

Third Reading

The SPEAKER—The question now is that the remaining stages of the bill be agreed to.

The House divided. [10.18 pm]

(The Speaker—Hon. David Hawker)

Ayes…………. 78

Noes………….. 61

Majority…….. 17

AYES

Abbott, A.J.  
Andrews, K.J.  
Baird, B.G.  
Baldwin, R.C.  
Bartlett, K.J.  
Bishop, B.K.  
Broadbent, R.  
Cadman, A.G.  
Ciobo, S.M.  
Draper, P.  
Ferguson, L.D.T.  
Fitzgibbon, J.A.  
Geoghegan, S.  
Gibbons, S.W.  
Anderson, J.D.  
Bailey, F.E.  
Baker, M.  
Barresi, P.A.  
Billson, B.F.  
Bishop, J.I.  
Brough, M.T.  
Causley, I.R.  
Cobb, J.K.  
Dutton, P.C.  
Entsch, W.G.  
Fawcett, D.  
Forrest, J.A. *  
Gash, J.  
Haase, B.W.  
Hartsuyaer, L.
Monday, 12 September 2005  HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Henry, S.  Hockey, J.B.
Hunt, G.A.  Jensen, D.
Johnson, M.A.  Keenan, M.
Kelly, D.M.  Kelly, J.M.
Laming, A.  Ley, S.P.
Lindsay, P.J.  Lloyd, J.E.
Macfarlane, I.E.  Markus, L.
May, M.A.  McArthur, S.
McGauran, P.J.  Macfarlane, I.E.
Nairn, G.R.  Markus, L.
Neville, P.C.  Moylan, J.E.
Pearce, C.J.  Nelson, B.J.
Pyne, C.  Panopoulos, S.
Richardson, K.  Pearl, A.
Ruddock, P.M.  Scott, B.C.
Secker, P.D.  Smith, A.D.H.
Somlyay, A.M.  Stone, S.N.
Thompson, C.P.  Ticehurst, K.V.
Tollner, D.W.  Truss, W.E.
Tuckey, C.W.  Turnbull, M.
Vaile, M.A.J.  Vale, D.S.
Vasta, R.  Wakin, B.H.
Washer, M.J.  Wood, J.

**NOES**

Adams, D.G.H.  Albanese, A.N.
Andren, P.J.  Beazley, K.C.
Bevis, A.R.  Bird, S.
Bowen, C.  Burke, A.E.
Burke, A.S.  Byrne, A.M.
Corcoran, A.K.  Crean, S.F.
Danby, M.*  Edwards, G.J.
Elliot, J.  Ellis, A.L.
Ellis, K.  Emerson, C.A.
Ferguson, L.D.T.  Ferguson, M.J.
Fitzgibbon, J.A.  Garrett, P.
Georganas, S.  George, J.
Gibbons, S.W.  Gillard, J.E.
Grierson, S.J.  Griffin, A.P.
Hall, J.G.*  Hatton, M.J.
Hayes, C.P.  Hoare, K.J.
Irwin, J.  Jenkins, H.A.
Katter, R.C.  Kerr, D.J.C.
King, C.F.  Lawrence, C.M.
Livermore, K.F.  Macklin, I.L.
McClelland, R.B.  McMullan, R.F.
Melham, D.  Murphy, J.P.
O’Connor, B.P.  O’Connor, G.M.
Owens, J.  Pibersek, T.
Price, L.R.S.  Quirk, H.V.
Ripoll, B.F.  Roxon, N.L.
Sawford, R.W.  Sercombe, R.C.G.

Smith, S.F.  Swan, W.M.
Tanner, L.  Thomson, K.J.
Vamvakinos, M.  Wilkie, K.
Windsor, A.H.C.

* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS (CARRIER LICENCE CHARGES) AMENDMENT (INDUSTRY PLANS AND CONSUMER CODES) BILL 2005

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 7 September, on motion by Mr McGauran:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Question put.

The House divided.  [10.23 pm]

(The Speaker—Hon. David Hawker)

Ayes……………... 78

Noes……………… 61

Majority……….. 17

**AYES**

Abbott, A.J.  Anderson, J.D.
Andrews, K.J.  Bailey, F.E.
Baird, B.G.  Baker, M.
Baldivis, R.C.  Barresi, P.A.
Bartlett, K.J.  Billson, B.F.
Bishop, B.K.  Bishop, J.I.
Broadbent, R.  Brough, M.T.
Cadman, A.G.  Causer, J.R.
Ciobo, S.M.  Cobb, J.K.
Draper, P.  Dutton, P.C.
Elson, K.S.  Entsch, W.G.
Farmer, P.F.  Fawcett, D.
Ferguson, M.D.  Forrest, J.A.*
Gambaro, T.  Gash, J.
Georgiou, P.  Haase, B.W.
Hardgrave, G.D.  Hartswyker, L.
Henry, S.  Hockey, J.B.
Hunt, G.A.  Jensen, D.
Johnson, M.A.  Keenan, M.
Kelly, D.M.  Kelly, J.M.
Laming, A.  Ley, S.P.
Lindsay, P.J.  Lloyd, J.E.
Macfarlane, I.E.  Markus, L.
Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

The SPEAKER—The question now is that the remaining stages of the bill be agreed to.

The House divided.  [10.25 pm]

(The Speaker—Hon. David Hawker)

Ayes.............  78

Noes.............  61

Majority.........  17

AYES


Baird, B.G.  Baldwin, R.C.  Bartlett, K.J.  Bishop, B.K.  Broadbent, R.  Cadman, A.G.

Cogbo, S.M.  Draper, P.  Elson, K.S.  Forrest, J.A.  * Gash, J.

Farmer, P.F.  Ferguson, M.D.  Gambaro, T.  Haase, B.W.  Hartley, L.


Johnson, M.A.  Kelly, D.M.  Laming, A.  Ley, S.P.  Lloyd, J.E.

Lindsay, P.J.  Macfarlane, I.E.  May, M.A.  McArthur, P.J.  Nairn, G.R.

McGauran, P.J.  Neville, P.C.  Pearce, C.J.  Pyne, C.  Richardson, K.

Ruddock, P.M.  Secker, P.D.  Somlyay, A.M.  Thompson, C.P.  Tollefson, D.W.

Turnbull, M.  Vaile, M.A.J.  Vasta, R.  Wakefield, B.H.  Wood, J.

NOES


Danby, M.  Edwards, J.A.  Edwards, G.J.  Ellis, A.L.  Emerson, C.A.

Ferguson, M.J.  Garrett, P.  George, J.  Gillard, J.E.  Hatton, M.J.

Hayes, C.P.  Irwin, J.  Katter, R.C.  King, C.F.  Lawrence, C.M.

Ligott, J.G.  Livingstone, K.F.  Mclintock, R.B.  Melham, D.  O’Connor, B.P.

Owens, J.  Price, L.R.S.  Ripoll, B.F.  Sawford, R.W.  Smith, S.F.

Tanner, L.  Vanvakinos, M.  Windsor, A.H.C.  May, M.A.  McGauran, P.J.

Moylan, J.E.  Nelson, B.J.  Panopoulos, S.  Prosser, G.D.  Randall, D.J.

Robb, A.  Scott, B.C.  Smith, A.D.H.  Stone, S.N.  Ticehurst, K.V.

| Vaile, M.A.J. | Vale, D.S. | Wood, J. |
| Vasta, R. | Wakelin, B.H. | |
| Washer, M.J. | | |

**NOES**

| Adams, D.G.H. | Albanese, A.N. |
| Andren, P.J. | Beazley, K.C. |
| Bevis, A.R. | Bird, S. |
| Bowen, C. | Burke, A.E. |
| Burke, A.S. | Byrne, A.M. |
| Corcoran, A.K. | Crean, S.F. |
| Danby, M.* | Edwards, G.J. |
| Elliot, J. | Ellis, A.L. |
| Ellis, K. | Emerson, C.A. |
| Ferguson, L.D.T. | Ferguson, M.J. |
| Fitzgibbon, J.A. | Garrett, P. |
| Georganas, S. | George, J. |
| Gibbons, S.W. | Gillard, J.E. |
| Grierson, S.J. | Griffin, A.P. |
| Hall, J.G.* | Hatton, M.J. |
| Hayes, C.P. | Hoare, K.J. |
| Irwin, J. | Jenkins, H.A. |
| Katter, R.C. | Kerr, D.J.C. |
| King, C.F. | Lawrence, C.M. |
| Livermore, K.F. | Macklin, J.L. |
| McClelland, R.B. | McMullan, R.F. |
| Melham, D. | Murphy, J.P. |
| O' Connor, B.P. | O'Connor, G.M. |
| Owens, J. | Plibersek, T. |
| Price, L.R.S. | Quick, H.V. |
| Ripoll, B.F. | Roxon, N.L. |
| Sawford, R.W. | Sercombe, R.C.G. |
| Smith, S.F. | Swan, W.M. |
| Tanner, L. | Thomson, K.J. |
| Vamvakinou, M. | Wilkie, K. |

* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

**APPROPRIATION (REGIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICES) BILL 2005-2006**

**Second Reading**

Debate resumed from 7 September, on motion by **Mr McGauran**:

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Mr ADAMS** (Lyons) (10.27 pm)—On many occasions we have talked about the huge problems that still exist out in the regions of Australia. It is unlikely that the issues will be dealt with when Telstra is sold by the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Future Proofing and Other Measures) Bill 2005 and related bills passing the parliament. What company would want to go out and invest in the infrastructure that needs to be replaced in regional Australia? What company would do that without the opportunity of getting a return? None, I would say. There could be a few who would pay, who might get something done, but the majority can forget about getting anything done to be a part of the 21st century.

As I said earlier, regional Australia benefited from getting the railways and then it benefited from getting highways. Now it needs to get modern telecommunications. It is not going to get modern telecommunications. It has been denied that by this government. The government is selling the only opportunity that regional Australia has—Telstra. They have let it run down. They have taken the money to have a surplus and have neglected regional Australia. Telstra has been run down over the last 10 years and the money that we should have spent in regional Australia has not been spent. I read in the *Canberra Times* that Telstra was being investigated over a possible breach of the Stock Exchange rules after a secret report revealed that it had borrowed from reserves to pay its share dividend. Inquiries are being conducted by the Australian Stock Exchange and the corporate regulator, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission.

According to the media, the exchange said that it was investigating the allegations because of what we, the federal opposition, said—that Telstra had withheld price-sensitive information that should have been declared under exchange rules. It will be interesting to see what the Stock Exchange has to say from its inquiry and to see this secret...
information that it has had. Yet there was a denial from Telstra, saying that all material provided to the government had been provided in accordance—

The SPEAKER—Order! The time allotted for the remaining stages of the bill having expired, the question is that this bill be now read a second time.

Question put.

The House divided. [10.34 pm]

(The Speaker—Hon. David Hawker)

Ayes……………… 79

Noes……………… 60

Majority………. 19

AYES

Abbott, A.J. 
Andrews, K.J. 
Baird, B.G. 
Baldwin, R.C. 
Bartlett, K.J. 
Bishop, B.K. 
Broadbent, R. 
Cadman, A.G. 
Ciobo, S.M. 
Draper, P. 
Elson, K.S. 
Farmer, P.F. 
Ferguson, M.D. 
Gamboro, T. 
Georgiou, P. 
Hardgrave, G.D. 
Henry, S. 
Hunt, G.A. 
Johnson, M.A. 
Kelly, D.M. 
Laming, A. 
Lindsay, P.J. 
Macfarlane, I.E. 
May, M.A. 
McGauran, P.J. 
Nairn, G.R. 
Neville, P.C. 
Pearce, C.J. 
Pyne, C. 
Richardson, K. 
Ruddock, P.M. 
Secker, P.D. 
Smith, A.D.H. 
Stone, S.N. 
Ticehurst, K.V. 
Truss, W.E. 
Turnbull, M. 
Vale, D.S. 
Wakelin, B.H. 
Wood, J.

NOES

Adams, D.G.H. 
Andren, P.J. 
Bevis, A.R. 
Bowen, C. 
Burke, A.S. 
Corcoran, A.K. 
Danby, M. * 
Elliot, J. 
Ellis, K. 
Ferguson, L.D.T. 
Fitzgibbon, J.A. 
Georganas, S. 
Gibbons, S.W. 
Grierson, S.J. 
Hall, J.G. * 
Irwin, J. 
Katter, R.C. 
King, C.F. 
Livermore, K.F. 
McClelland, R.B. 
Melham, D. 
O’Connor, B.P. 
Owens, J. 
Price, L.R.S. 
Ripoll, B.F. 
Sercombe, R.C.G. 
Swan, W.M. 
Thomson, K.J. 
Wilkie, K.

* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

The SPEAKER—The question now is that the remaining stages of the bill be agreed to.

The House divided. [10.38 pm]
(The Speaker—Hon. David Hawker)

Ayes 79  
Noes 60  
Majority 19

AYES
Abbott, A.J.  
Andrews, K.J.  
Baird, B.G.  
Baldwin, R.C.  
Bartlett, K.J.  
Bishop, B.K.  
Broadbent, R.  
Cadman, A.G.  
Ciobo, S.M.  
Draper, P.  
Elsom, R.S.  
Farmer, P.F.  
Ferguson, M.D.  
Gambor, T.  
Georgiou, P.  
Hardgrave, G.D.  
Henry, S.  
Hunt, G.A.  
Johnson, M.A.  
Kelly, D.M.  
Laming, A.  
Lindsay, P.J.  
Macfarlane, I.E.  
May, M.A.  
McGauran, P.J.  
Nairn, G.R.  
Neville, P.C.  
Pearce, C.J.  
Pyne, C.  
Richardson, K.  
Ruddock, P.M.  
Secker, P.D.  
Smith, A.D.H.  
Stone, S.N.  
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Truss, W.E.  
Turnbull, M.  
Vale, D.S.  
Wakelin, B.H.  
Wood, J.  

Bowen, C.  
Burke, A.S.  
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Danby, M.  
Elliot, J.  
Ellis, K.  
Ferguson, L.D.T.  
Fitzgibbon, J.A.  
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Owens, J.  
Price, L.R.S.  
Ripoll, B.F.  
Sercombe, R.C.G.  
Swan, W.M.  
Thomson, K.J.  
Wilkie, K.  

* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

ADJOURNMENT
Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (10.39 pm)—I move:
That the House do now adjourn.

Fuel Prices
Mr JENKINS (Scullin) (10.39 pm)—
Given the dismissive and puerile answer that the Treasurer gave in question time today to the member for Hunter’s question on petrol pricing, one can only conclude that, because the Treasurer was overseas last week, he does not understand that the mums and dads of Australia around the dinner table are talking about one thing and one thing only in relation to their family budgets: the cost of petroleum and petrol products. Especially in rural areas and in the outer suburbs of cities

CHAMBER
such as Melbourne and Sydney, the cost of petrol is of paramount importance in the family budget. When a journey to the childcare centre is not simply around the corner, or when the journey to work is 40 kilometres one way along a ring road, the cost of getting there by private transport is very important. The Treasurer tried to suggest that there was nothing the government could do and that he had no powers in that regard other than to suggest that the ACCC could quite easily go forward and do positive things.

It was therefore interesting that this glossy from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, headed ‘Understanding petrol pricing in Australia: answers to some frequently asked questions’, arrived in members’ offices. On the back page it talked about the ACCC’s role. Interestingly, there are two items in bold on that page. ‘The ACCC currently has an informal monitoring role regarding petrol’ and, further down, ‘The ACCC currently has no power to regulate wholesale or retail petrol prices in Australia’. The ACCC emphasised that it has only an informal role.

The Treasurer said that there have been so many inquiries and everything is rosy because of the inquiries, so why are people still concerned? Why won’t the Treasurer adopt the proposals that the Australian Labor Party went to the last election with and that it has confirmed over the past few weeks: to strengthen the Trade Practices Act to prevent the abuse of market power and other unfair practices which drive our competition, especially section 46; and to monitor petrol prices under the prices surveillance provisions and have the ACCC report six monthly on movements, particularly in regional Australia.

We have also talked about strengthening and changing the Petroleum Retail Marketing Franchise Act and the Petroleum Retail Marketing Sites Act, but the point of the question was why the price paid by consumers at the bowser in a suburb like Bundoora is out of whack compared with the movements in the crude oil price. That question was put to the Treasurer today in question time. The Australian Institute of Petroleum’s web site contains a graph. The graph for the crude oil price is a flat line but the cost of unleaded petrol, as every motorist in Australia knows, is around 139.9c. One has to ask why this is out of whack. A month ago, in relative terms we had a similar exchange rate and a similar crude oil price per barrel, yet petrol was somewhere around 30c or 40c cheaper. The people of Australia want to know why the government is just sitting on its hands on this most important issue. This will go right through the economy. It will be no good the government saying in a couple of weeks or a couple of months time, ‘We weren’t aware; it’s all because of some overseas influence.’ We want to see that the government takes this issue seriously. I seek leave to have incorporated in Hansard a graph of average daily retail prices.

Leave granted.

The graph read as follows—
I apologise to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer because, as a result of the preceding events, I have not showed it to him. The graph shows that, back in August, the price of petrol was 120c a litre and, by 8 September, it was up to 136c. That sort of hike, between 10 August and 8 September, is out of proportion with the changes in the barrel crude oil prices. We know that the tax take as a percentage reduces as the price increases. Is there room to manoeuvre on that? Can the states find it in their hearts to reduce their windfall from the GST? The Victorian state government already has a state petrol subsidy of 0.42c, which reduces the excise from 38.1c to 37.7c. (Time expired)

South Australia: Mental Health Services

Mr RICHARDSON (Kingston) (10.44 pm)—I rise today to bring to the attention of the House the appalling state of mental health services, particularly with regard to mental health funding in South Australia. Last week I sat and listened to the presentations of the National Youth Roundtable here in Parliament House. A young Asian girl stood up and spoke about her battle with mental health issues and the inability of her family and culture to accept her illness. I spoke earlier this year on the Gash motion which related to mental health and specifically mental health funding, but listening to this young lady has prompted me to stand up today and remind the House of the particularly appalling situation in my state of South Australia.

South Australia has received little or no attention from the state Labor government since I last stood in this place and discussed mental health. Earlier this month, we saw a tragic example of how the state’s mental health system is significantly failing South Australians. This week saw a man with a serious mental illness being charged with endangering life and assaulting police. The man has already spent time in James Nash House for manslaughter and escaped from Glenside in 2003. According to the state shadow minister for health, the Hon. Dean Brown, the man appears not to be receiving
any treatment or support for his mental health issues and is now facing criminal prosecution as a result. This is just one example of the failure of mental health services in South Australia and how that failure is impacting on South Australians.

We deserve better. As South Australians we deserve a state government who will care about the plight of those suffering from mental health problems, and we deserve protection, as a society, from individuals who become violent because they are not receiving appropriate treatment. South Australians have seen resignations right across the state of top doctors and psychiatrists who were working directly in the field, from a psychiatrist at the Royal Adelaide Hospital to the South Australian director of mental health. Those resignations are directly attributable to the failure of the state government to adequately address the crisis facing the South Australian mental health system.

We are talking about our most vulnerable citizens, those who are often unable to integrate into society and ask for the help they so desperately require. They are being left out in the cold by the state Labor government simply because helping these people will not grab headlines or score votes. This is an issue which needs to be above politics and cheap point scoring. It is about time that the state government to act and do something about the state of mental health services in South Australia.

Those suffering, the families looking after them, the community organisations offering services that the government should be offering and the members of the community who are in danger from untreated patients suffering mental health disorders will simply buckle under the pressure if the Rann government does not throw away the spin, stop thinking about making headlines and do something about this crisis, which is rapidly becoming the shame of our fine state. I can personally assure every South Australian suffering as a result of this shameful display from Mike Rann and his inept government that I will not go away. I will be back in this place bringing their failings to the attention of this House and fighting back home to shame them into facing up to the plight of the mentally ill in South Australia and into doing something to help their desperate cause.

Telstra

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (10.49 pm)—In rising to speak in the adjournment debate tonight, may I say that it certainly is a very sorrowful night for me with the sale of Telstra being passed through this House. All we can do is hope and pray that it is not passed through the upper house. Those in the government are saying to the people of Australia, ‘You are a bunch of nongs. You do not know anything; we know more than you.’

Sixteen per cent of Australia is in favour of the sale of Telstra; 70 per cent is opposed to it. We can assume that the people on the government side of this House are repositories of great wisdom not available to the rest of Australia! Yes, we were not privy to the inside information which would appear to indicate that Telstra is falling over and collapsing and which was not divulged to the people of Australia. The opposition of the people of Australia to the sale of Telstra has been strengthened dramatically by the events of the last week, yet the government proceeds down this pathway.

It is one thing to be considered a fool; it is another thing to be treated as a fool. Speaking on behalf of the 70 per cent of Australians who the government obviously think
are fools, I would like to ask the government something. They say that they are going to provide a service in the outback, whether it be in Forbes, Burke, Brewarrina, Quilpie or Julia Creek. When a telephone breaks down there, are they going to fly someone out from Sydney or Brisbane to fix it? Do not insult our intelligence by coming into this place and telling us that those telephones and those telephone services will be fixed. Yes, they will be fixed—on a time scale that is acceptable to the privatised telco.

Let me give you a series of examples. Brian Kruske, who owns a supermarket in Karumba, rang up to have his Commander system fixed. He had had it fixed once before and it had cost him $250. The bloke came in and fixed it in two or three days and then took off. Brian got a bill for, I think, $2,000 because that section of Telstra had been privatised, and he was now being hit with a colossal bill. As a result of Telstra still being in the hands of government, we were able to dramatically criticise Telstra and ensure that every single person who was so serviced in the future would be given notification of the huge bill they were likely to receive.

Tens of thousands of consumers lost their telephone service the week before last—ironically, when this bill was supposed to be passing through this place—and it turned out that Optus had no re-routing system. They were privatised, they are trying to make a quid and of course the cost of re-routing is very expensive, so they did not re-rout. Telstra had a re-routing system available to them and they were able to continue to deliver services to the people of Far North Queensland, but Optus could not. If you can see the problems that arose for those tens of thousands of North Queenslanders who were without their telephone services approximately 30 hours—and this was just one tiny aspect that had been privatised—you can see the problems that are going to arise in the future when the whole system is privatised.

Mr Speaker, you will realise that the cost of air travel between Melbourne and Brisbane has gone down dramatically. But of course during the same period of time the cost of air services from the centres that I represent has gone up dramatically. When I last looked, the cost of going from Brisbane to Melbourne was $220 and the cost of going from Mount Isa to Townsville, half the distance—and there are 30,000 people living in the Mount Isa area—was $440, more than twice the cost for half the distance travelled. That is the sort of cost that will be imposed upon us with a privatised telco. (Time expired)

Papua New Guinea

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (10.54 pm)—On Friday, 16 September, we celebrate the 30th anniversary of Papua New Guinea being an independent state, and it is appropriate that that important milestone be recognised in this House. Obviously Papua New Guinea is our closest neighbour and we share a very rich history with that nation, right back to those defining moments in World War II. It is notable that about an hour from now we also mark the 60th anniversary of the Japanese surrender at Wom Point, a small geographic point near Wewak on the north-west coast of Papua New Guinea.

As the administrative power from that time on, Australia played a major role in helping to prepare the country for independence. We should not always think of these things in nationalistic terms; we need to also remember the people who gave their lives during the war and those who gave through their careers thereafter—first of all, the explorers who opened up the highlands, the very inaccessible and remote areas of central Papua New Guinea; the pilots who then flew onto dangerous airstrips to bring supplies...
and make it possible for those who worked with the churches to deliver social, health and welfare services to that country; and also the Kiaps, who provided the administrative services throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s.

Many historians, far more learned than I, will know that through the 1960s there was enormous pressure brought to bear by the United Nations to see colonial powers move out of developing economies, and one could argue that we did withdraw from Papua New Guinea in quite a rush in the early 1970s after decisions made by both sides of this chamber led to Michael Somare becoming Prime Minister. As a young boy, I remember flying into Mendi Airport and looking with such awe upon this man who in 1974 was about to lead this new country—and he is still a statesman in that country today.

Australia has a strong national interest locally and regionally in the success of Papua New Guinea. We are committed to building upon those achievements that Papua New Guinea has recorded since independence. Twenty per cent of our foreign aid goes to Papua New Guinea, including until recently an enhanced cooperation program worth over $1 billion and the $492 million of aid that Australia delivers to Papua New Guinea each year. That seeks to protect the vulnerable, to build on law and order and to create the conditions for broad based economic growth. Papua New Guinea has faced some great challenges, but none is greater than the threat of AIDS, with 2,500 recorded cases and the possibility of many more yet to be reported. This will be an enormous challenge for Papua New Guinea in the future, not only because of the health and social impacts but also because of the economic impact that that scourge will have upon the country.

The Australian government remains committed to bilateral defence arrangements with Papua New Guinea and to strengthening our trade links, being both the No. 1 importer and exporter for Papua New Guinea. Let us never forget, though, that it was all founded upon people-to-people links between Australia and our nearest neighbour in sport, culture, religion and education.

We were privileged this year to see that the first election for an autonomous Bougainville went so smoothly after a precarious set of events that preceded the election in April this year. I congratulate Joseph Kabui, the President of the newly autonomous region of Bougainville, but let us not forget the lesson from countries such as the Ukraine, which shortly after its first democratic election has already fallen into disarray. We have seen the dismissal of the entire team of Victor Yushchenko just last week, including Yulia Timoshenko and her team. We cannot assume that democracy will come from one single election and, from that, the development of a civil society. That will be a challenge for Bougainville, and it remains one for Papua New Guinea as well.

We share a rich history. It goes back to World War II, from the defence of Papua New Guinea in turning around the Japanese forces in World War II, right through to the development that has been delivered by generations of people who worked with the Papua New Guineans to take the country to where it stands now. We are Papua New Guinea’s No. 1 importer and exporter, and I think it is important that in this House that special relationship and the future partnership that we are bound to share are recognised. It is important that we in this House pass on our congratulations to the people of Papua New Guinea on their reaching that milestone, the 30th anniversary of independence.
New South Wales Council of Social Services

Mr LAURIE FERGUSON (Reid) (10.59 pm)—I continue the theme of anniversaries in recognising the 70th anniversary of NCOSS, the New South Wales Council of Social Services, an important institution in that state. In their celebration of 70 years, they commented:

NCOSS has been at the forefront of public debates about the social impacts of the 2000 Olympics, reforming property and gaming taxes, better child protection systems, fairer pricing of energy, water and transport and the future of disability and community care services.

Ironically, within weeks of NCOSS’s 70th anniversary, Helen Halse Rogers, who was an executive secretary back in their early days, died. A very impressive obituary was written by her niece Jill Hickson, the wife of the former New South Wales Premier Neville Wran. That article also cemented the image of this organisation and the contributions it has made to the state. In the 1930s it borrowed the US idea of a central index of people in need and in the first six months 2,862 inquiries had been made.

This organisation stemmed from a variety of organisations, including the Red Cross, the YMCA, the Social Workers Association of New South Wales and—what would now perhaps be regarded as a politically incorrect organisation—the Racial Hygiene Association, amongst others. NCOSS went on to play a very pivotal role in social welfare policy in New South Wales. After the postwar years it provided migrant services, was involved in the expansion of the immigration program of that period, provided the services of marriage counsellors and established one of Australia’s first senior citizens organisations at Camperdown. NCOSS clearly had an involvement in all of those things.

NCOSS can claim credit for establishing institutions that we take for granted: the Council of Ageing, the Mental Health Association and the Association of Sheltered Workshops of New South Wales. When we look at those institutions’ policy development, we can see their contribution over a wide expanse of policy.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (11.02 pm)—I move:

That the question be now put.

Question agreed to.

Original question put:

That the House do now adjourn.

The House divided. [11.06 pm]

(The Speaker—Hon. David Hawker)

| YAYS | 69 |
| NOS | 31 |
| MAJORITY | 38 |

AYES

Abbott, A.J. Andrews, K.J. Barber, P.A.
Baird, B.G. Baker, M. Bartlett, K.J.
Baldwin, R.C. Billson, B.F. Bishop, B.K.
Cadman, A.G. Brough, M.T. Ciobo, S.M.
Broadbent, R. Cobb, J.K. Draper, P.
Elsom, K.S. Dutton, P.C. Farmer, P.F.
Ferguson, M.D. Ensch, W.G. Gambaro, T.
Haase, B.W. Georgiou, P. Hartsuyker, L.
Hunt, G.A. Hardgrave, G.D. Johnson, M.A.
Kelly, D.M. Henry, S. Laming, A.
Lloyd, J.E. Jensen, D. Mark, L.
McGauran, P.J. Keenan, M. Nairn, G.R.
Panopoulos, S. Kelly, J.M. Prosser, G.D.
Pyne, C.
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**NOES**

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Question agreed to.

**House adjourned at 11.14 pm**
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Transport and Regional Services: Programs
(Question No. 58)

Mr Martin Ferguson asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, in writing, on 17 November 2004:

(1) Would he provide a description of all the programs administered by his department including (a) the number of people directly receiving funds or assistance under the program, (b) a breakdown on those receiving funds/assistance under the program by electoral division, (c) the policy objective of the program, (d) whether the program is ongoing, and (e) the funding in each financial year of the forward estimates for the program (with a breakdown of administered and departmental expenses), including (i) how much funding was allocated for the program, (ii) how much is committed to the program, (iii) how much is unspent, and (iv) whether an evaluation of the program’s effectiveness has been conducted; if so, when that evaluation occurred and what were its conclusions.


(3) What was the base and top (including performance pay) salaries of APS 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 (or equivalent), Executive Level 1 and 2 (or equivalent), and SES Band 1, Band 2 and Band 3 (or equivalent) in his department in (a) 1996-1997, (b) 1997-1998, (c) 1998-1999, (d) 1999-2000, (e) 2000-2001, (f) 2001-2002, (g) 2002-2003, and (h) 2003-2004.


(8) What are the details of all ‘management retreats/training’ conducted by his department which were attended by employees during (a) 2000-2001, (b) 2001-2002, (c) 2002-2003, and (d) 2003-2004, indicating, in respect of those meetings held off departmental premises, (i) where (location and hotel) and when they were held, (ii) how much was spent in total, (iii) how much was spent on accommodation, (iv) how much was spent on food, (v) how much was spent alcohol/drinks, and (vi) how much was spent on transport.


the cost (i) in total, (ii) for accommodation, (iii) for meals and incidentals allowances, and (iv) for airfares.


(18) Did his department conduct any surveys of attitudes towards programs it was responsible for in (a) 1996-1997, (b) 1997-1998, (c) 1998-1999, (d) 1999-2000, (e) 2000-2001, (f) 2001-2002, (g) 2002-2003, and (h) 2003-2004 to date; if so, (i) on which programs were the surveys conducted, and (ii) what were the findings.

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

(1) To provide the details as requested would require an extensive use of resources which the Department is not able to commit. The Department’s Portfolio Budget Statement for 2005-06 (Budget Related Paper No. 1.15) and the Department’s Annual Report for 2003-04 contains details of all programmes administered.

(2) to (4) The data for SES numbers is sourced from the Department’s Annual Report for the year in question. Data comparisons from year to year may be misleading due to changes in the method of calculation each year including the treatment of inoperative staff and those temporarily performing SES duties.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>SES Numbers</th>
<th>Salary Ranges for DOTARS Staff by Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS1</td>
<td>From -</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To -</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS2</td>
<td>From -</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To -</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS3</td>
<td>From -</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To -</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APS4</td>
<td>From -</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Number of Phones</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>240</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>244</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>269</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Not all of this information is available for 1996/97 through until 1999/00. The missing information cannot be obtained without devoting substantial resources to the task.

2 As at the last day of the financial year.

3 From September 2002, SES remuneration changed from annual salary plus an additional amount for a vehicle or cash to a Total Remuneration Package approach.

(5) Mobile phones were not managed centrally within the Department until 2001-2002 and information on the numbers issued to staff before this date is not available.

The number of mobile phones issued varies throughout any given year; the information provided is an approximate of the peak number of phones issued in the given year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>Approximately $101,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>Approximately $122,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>Approximately $98,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that figures provided are gross and therefore do not reflect reimbursements by staff.
(7)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Executive Leases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996-97</td>
<td>There is no data available for the 1996-97 financial year, as it pre-dates the Tied Contract and the detail does not provide for the classification of leases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-98</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-00</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-01</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(8) The department does not routinely collate this information. As such, the department would need to devote substantial resources to answer these questions which it is not able to commit.

(9) (a)  (b)  (c)  (d)  (e) As a consequence of the Ansett collapse and the concurrent transition to a new financial management system, data for the earlier periods would require a lengthy manual and costly process to extract.

(f) Our service provider has advised that historical data only goes back 27 months therefore they are unable to provide data for the 2001/02 financial year. Detailed information on destinations would require a lengthy manual process to extract.

(g) DOTARS officers undertook 211 overseas visits in the period 2002/2003. However 101 of these visits were to Cocos Is, Christmas Is and Norfolk Is. Those destinations while considered domestic travel within DOTARS travel policy, are considered international travel, based on IATA (International Association Travel Agents) travel regulations. For overseas destinations please see the following table.

2002-2003 International Destinations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BRAZIL</td>
<td>Sao Paulo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CANADA</td>
<td>Montreal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ottawa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Toronto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vancouver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Calgary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHILE</td>
<td>Santiago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHINA</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DENMARK</td>
<td>Copenhagen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRANCE</td>
<td>Paris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GERMANY</td>
<td>Cologne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frankfurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Munich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HONG KONG</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDONESIA</td>
<td>Dili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Denpasar Bali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jakarta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRELAND</td>
<td>Dublin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAPAN</td>
<td>Nagoya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Osaka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALAYSIA</td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Penang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NETHERLANDS</td>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW ZEALAND</td>
<td>Auckland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christchurch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wellington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Queenstown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SINGAPORE</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOUTH AFRICA</td>
<td>Durban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>East London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPAIN</td>
<td>Madrid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWEDEN</td>
<td>Norrkoping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWITZERLAND</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAIWAN, REPUBLIC OF CHINA</td>
<td>Taipei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THAILAND</td>
<td>Bangkok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TONGA</td>
<td>Nuku Alofa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vava U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNITED KINGDOM</td>
<td>London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manchester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNITED STATES</td>
<td>Atlanta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chicago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Denver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dallas</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Detroit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fort Myers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Honolulu</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mendota</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Miami</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pensacola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>San Diego</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>San Francisco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St Louis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Washington DC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country (Australia)</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Trips</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHRISTMAS ISLAND</td>
<td>Christmas Island</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocos (Keeling) Islands</td>
<td>Cocos Islands</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NORFOLK ISLAND</td>
<td>Norfolk Island</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

QUESTIONS IN WRITING
DOTARS officers undertook 224 overseas visits in the period 2003/2004. However 90 of these visits were to Cocos Is, Christmas Is and Norfolk Is. Those destinations while considered domestic travel within DOTARS travel policy, are considered international travel, based on IATA (International Association Travel Agents) travel regulations. For overseas destinations please see the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARGENTINA</td>
<td>Buenos Aires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUSTRIA</td>
<td>Vienna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BELGIUM</td>
<td>Brussels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRAZIL</td>
<td>Sao Paulo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CANADA</td>
<td>Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vancouver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHILE</td>
<td>Santiago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHINA</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIJI</td>
<td>Nadi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRANCE</td>
<td>Paris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GREECE</td>
<td>Athens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HONG KONG</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDONESIA</td>
<td>Denpasar Bali, Dili, Jakarta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lhokseumawe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRELAND</td>
<td>Dublin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISRAEL</td>
<td>Tel Aviv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITALY</td>
<td>Milan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAPAN</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALAYSIA</td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NETHERLAND</td>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW ZEALAND</td>
<td>Auckland, Christchurch,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Queenstown, Wellington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAPUA NEW GUINEA</td>
<td>Port Moresby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHILIPPINES</td>
<td>Manila</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SINGAPORE</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOUTH AFRICA</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOUTH KOREA</td>
<td>Pusan, Seoul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPAIN</td>
<td>Madrid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWEDEN</td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWITZERLAND</td>
<td>Geneva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THAILAND</td>
<td>Bangkok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNITED ARAB EMIRATES</td>
<td>Dubai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNITED KINGDOM</td>
<td>Manchester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNITED STATES</td>
<td>Boston</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(10) Total cost for overseas travel by DOTARS staff for the financial year:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Airfares</th>
<th>Accommodation, Meals and Incidental</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996-97*</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-98*</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-99*</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2000*</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>$0.361m</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-01#</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>$0.402m</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-02#</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>$0.311m</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>$0.776m</td>
<td>$0.286m</td>
<td>$1.062m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>$0.891m</td>
<td>$0.222m</td>
<td>$1.113m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Financial records prior to 1999-2000 were on a different financial system and are now not able to be accessed.

# Information for these years drew on systems provided by Ansett Airlines as the Department’s travel provider. When Ansett collapsed these records were lost.

(11) Total cost for domestic travel by DOTARS staff for the financial year:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Airfares</th>
<th>Accommodation, Meals and Incidental</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996-97*</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-98*</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-99*</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2000*</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>$1.443m</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-01#</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>$1.622m</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-02#</td>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>$1.626m</td>
<td>Not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>$2.565m</td>
<td>$1.754m</td>
<td>$4.319m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>$1.682m</td>
<td>$1.456m</td>
<td>$3.138m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Financial records prior to 1999-2000 were on a different financial system and are now not able to be accessed.

# Information for these years drew on systems provided by Ansett Airlines as the Department’s travel provider. When Ansett collapsed these records were lost.

(12) The Department does not fund overseas travel for Ministerial staff – the Department of Finance and Administration, through its Ministerial and Parliamentary Services Group funds these expenses.
(13) The Department does not fund overseas visits for Ministerial staff – the Department of Finance and Administration, through its Ministerial and Parliamentary Services Group funds these expenses.

(14) Expenditure on advertising is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Personnel Advertising (i)</th>
<th>Non Personnel Advertising (ii)</th>
<th>Total Advertising</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996-97</td>
<td>Information not available</td>
<td>$0.5m</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-98</td>
<td>Information not available</td>
<td>$3.3m</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td>Information not available</td>
<td>$0.7m</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>$0.3m</td>
<td>$0.3m</td>
<td>$0.6m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-01</td>
<td>$0.3m</td>
<td>$0.5m</td>
<td>$0.8m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>$0.2m</td>
<td>$1.2m</td>
<td>$1.4m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>$0.1m</td>
<td>$3.4m</td>
<td>$3.5m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>$0.3m</td>
<td>$1.2m</td>
<td>$1.5m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(i) Financial records prior to 1999-2000 were on a different financial system and are now not able to be accessed.

(ii) Includes payments of $1,500 or more as published in respective annual reports.

(15) No.

(16) To provide the details as requested would require an extensive use of resources which the department is not able to commit.

(17) The total amount paid by the Department on consultancy services is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount paid for Consultancy Services (i)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996-97</td>
<td>$10.1m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997-98</td>
<td>$10.9m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td>$9.6m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td>$8.0m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-01</td>
<td>$10.7m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-02(ii)</td>
<td>$5.3m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>$6.0m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-04</td>
<td>$4.0m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(i) Includes total expenditure on consultancy services with contracts valued more than $10,000.

(ii) Includes only consultancies engaged during 2001-02 with a contract price greater than $10,000. Information on payments was not separately published in the 2001-02 Annual Report.

(18)(a) to (h) Yes – surveys of attitudes towards some programs for which the department is responsible were conducted in each of the years specified. These surveys are not recorded in one location but a search of departmental records has identified the following.

(i) Surveys were conducted on:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996-97</td>
<td>- ‘Speed’ road safety campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ‘Rural Speed’ road safety campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Pilot ‘Drink Drive’ road safety campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- ‘Young Drivers’ road safety campaign</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(ii) Findings

Many of the above survey reports are very lengthy and could not be accurately reflected in summary form without use of significant resources which the Department is unable to commit.

Avalon Airport
(Question No. 61)

Mr Martin Ferguson asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, in writing, on 17 November 2004:

(1) Was he, his department or Airservices Australia consulted by the operators of Avalon Airport, Jetstar Airlines or Qantas about the lack of Aviation Rescue and Fire Fighting Services at Avalon Airport prior to the announcement by Jetstar Airlines that it would use Avalon Airport; if so, what was the response.

(2) Will the Government act to ensure there will be a dedicated Aviation Rescue and Fire Fighting Service at Avalon Airport from the time Jetstar Airlines commences operation from Avalon Airport.

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

(1) No.

(2) Aviation Rescue and Fire Fighting Services (ARFFS) are currently provided at eight capital city and nine regional airports in line with the Government’s policy that ARFFS be provided at airports with more than 350,000 passengers in the previous financial year, and at all international airports. This is intended to cover at least 90% of fare-paying passengers and meets Australia’s obligation
under the Chicago Convention to provide ARFFS at international airports. Should airports that fall outside the criteria choose to, there is nothing precluding them from providing a non-ARFF service at their airports, or requesting a certified supplier to provide ARFFS to the appropriate standard.

My Department, the Civil Aviation Safety Authority and Airservices Australia monitor passenger numbers at airports with scheduled passenger services, and where the passenger numbers exceed the 350,000 figure, Airservices negotiates the establishment of an ARFFS with the relevant operator.

Avalon Airport has provided an on site fire service, using ex-ARFFS trucks for several years as an initial response facility. This is complemented by a Memorandum of Understanding with the Country Fire Authority. The airport also has an emergency plan which is audited by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority.

Avalon Airport
(Question No. 64)

Mr Martin Ferguson asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, in writing, on 17 November 2004:

(1) In respect of the commencement of Jetstar operations from Avalon Airport, has either Avalon Airport or Jetstar provided the Government with anticipated passenger figures for (a) 2003-2004, and (b) 2004-2005; if so, what are they.

(2) Has Avalon Airport contacted the Government in respect of aviation rescue and fire fighting services; if so, what are the details.

(3) Has Avalon Airport been granted an exemption by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority from the usual regulatory provisions relating to aviation rescue and fire fighting services.

(4) Does he intend to allow Jetstar services to operate from Avalon Airport for 12 months before an aviation rescue and fire fighting service is established.

(5) Is he aware that (a) the nearest fire fighting response to Avalon Airport is 30 minutes away, and (b) the local brigade tasked with the responsibility is not accredited to respond to aircraft incidents.

(6) Is a 30 minute delay in aviation rescue and fire fighting services acceptable for an airport that will accommodate at least seven Boeing 717 flights each day.

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

(1) No, nor is there any requirement for them to do so.

(2) No.

(3) No.

(4) (5) and (6) Under current policy, aviation rescue and fire fighting services (ARFFS) are provided at airports with international airservices and at airports with more than 350,000 passengers in the previous financial year, in line with regulatory standards contained in Subpart 139.H of the Civil Aviation Safety Regulations 1998. An ARFFS was not in place at Avalon Airport when Jetstar commenced operating there, as the airport did not meet the policy criteria. This situation is no different from that of other airports with jet operations that did not have an ARFFS until they met the criteria – eg Sunshine Coast Airport (Maroochydore) and Yulara Airport, at which ARFFS have only recently commenced operating.
complemented with a Memorandum of Understanding with the Country Fire Authority. The airport also has an emergency plan that is audited by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority.

I am further advised that Avalon’s passenger throughput for the 2004-05 financial year exceeded the 350,000 passenger benchmark, and therefore the airport now falls within the policy criteria. Airservices Australia, the primary service provider, is therefore upgrading the current fire service to an ARFFS and aims to have it operating in December 2005.

**AusLink Investment Program**

(Question No. 511)

Ms Bird asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, in writing, on 8 February 2005:

(1) What sum has been allocated for the implementation of the AusLink White Paper, and specifically to each of the priorities indicated at page 35.

(2) What sum has been allocated to the Sydney-Wollongong link of interregional corridor investments for the five-year period 2004-2005 to 2008-2009.

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

(1) Under AusLink, the Australian Government has provided $12.7 billion for land transport investment in the period 2004-05 to 2008-09. This funding, broken up according to the priorities on page 35 of the White Paper, is shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding Priorities</th>
<th>$m</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>interstate corridor investments</td>
<td>2832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interregional corridor investments</td>
<td>1319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>capital city urban corridor investments</td>
<td>1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rail and intermodal investments</td>
<td>1100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>network wide investments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>corridor strategies, intermodal developments and technology investments</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maintenance</td>
<td>1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>providing for higher mass limits</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>local and regional transport investments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regional transport investments</td>
<td>1629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>black spots</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>untied local road grants</td>
<td>2578</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) The Sydney-Wollongong corridor comprises the Princes Highway and the Southern Freeway road connection and the rail connection from Moss Vale to Port Kembla. No funding has been allocated for construction works on this corridor in the first AusLink Investment Programme from 2004-2005 to 2008-2009. However, the Australian Government is contributing about $548 million during this period to the maintenance of the AusLink Network in NSW including the Sydney-Wollongong corridor. The NSW Government has responsibility for allocation of maintenance funding across the network.

The Australian Government is also providing funding to local and regional transport projects through the Roads to Recovery and Black Spot Programmes. For example, Wollongong City Council will receive approximately $3.7 million under the Roads to Recovery programme over the next four years and Black Spot projects to the value of $835,000 have been approved for 2004-05 and 2005-06 in the Council area.
During this period to 2008-09 it is also planned to develop a corridor strategy for the Sydney-Wollongong link for consideration in the development of the next five-year AusLink Investment Programme.

Family Law Matters
(Question No. 730 amended)

Ms Roxon asked the Attorney-General, in writing, on 9 March 2005:

(1) Is he aware of the case of Ms Vivienne Phillips-Crole, a Family Law matter which was heard by Justice Hannon.

(2) Is he aware of a delay in the delivery of the judgment in this case; if so, what action has the Government taken in this matter.

(3) Is he aware of other matters before Justice Hannon that have involved delays in the delivery of a judgment; if so, how many.

(4) Has the Government taken any action in relation to delays in matters being heard by Justice Hannon.

(5) How many Family Law matters take (a) 0-6 months, (b) 6-12 months, (c) 12-18 months, (d) 18-24 months, and (e) 24 months or more between the final hearing and the delivery of judgment.

(6) Have Act of Grace payments ever been made to litigants in Family Law matters; if so, (a) how often and (b) what sum has been paid in each instance.

(7) What are the criteria for making an Act of Grace payment.

(8) Have Act of Grace payments ever been made to litigants in other matters where the Commonwealth is not a party; if so, (a) how often and (b) what sum has been paid in each instance.

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

(1) and (2) In order to protect the privacy of the individuals involved, the Government does not provide information on individual cases.

(3) I am aware that some matters before Justice Hannon have involved delays. However, no parties in matters before Justice Hannon have specifically brought their matters to my attention. I am aware that on 28 May 2003 my predecessor tabled a response to question on notice 1556 from Mr D Kerr indicating that, as at 28 February 2003, of 81 judgments nationally which had been reserved for more than three months, eight were in Tasmania. The response noted that the figures, which were provided on a State by State basis, included judgments reserved by judges visiting a State under arrangements for judicial relief or circuits. I am not otherwise aware of the number of matters before Justice Hannon at particular times which involved delays.

(4) I take very seriously any concerns about the performance of federal judicial officers. I have made a number of inquiries, both orally and in writing, of the Family Court about the performance of Justice Hannon, and requested the Chief Justice and her predecessor to keep me informed of measures being taken by the Court to ensure the provision of adequate services in Tasmania. The Government’s action has been consistent with the independence of the judicial branch of government under the Australian Constitution and the responsibility of the Family Court under the Family Law Act 1975 for its operation and management.

(5) I have been advised by the Chief Justice of the Family Court and the Chief Federal Magistrate that, as a result of incomplete data entries and a programming error which has now been rectified, the figures provided by the Family Court and the Federal Magistrates Court to my Department which were used to compile the table in the original response to the honourable member’s question overstated by nine the number of judgments outstanding for 18 months or more. The following table has been amended accordingly. The table shows the time between final hearing and the delivery of
reserved judgments in the Family Court and Federal Magistrates Court for final orders applications in family law matters (excluding divorce applications) in the period 1 January 2004 to 31 December 2004 (including matters that were dismissed or stood down).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0-6 months</th>
<th>6-12 months</th>
<th>12-18 months</th>
<th>18-24 months</th>
<th>24 months or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number</strong></td>
<td>826</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proportion</strong></td>
<td>87.87%</td>
<td>8.51%</td>
<td>3.06%</td>
<td>0.43%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As at 31 July 2005, no judgments were outstanding for more than 18 months in either the Family Court or the Federal Magistrates Court.

(6) The Department of Finance and Administration advises that no Act of Grace payments have been made by the Government to litigants in family law matters.

(7) The Department of Finance and Administration advises that the criteria for making an Act of Grace payment are set out in Attachment C to Finance Circular 2001/01, available at www.finance.gov.au, of which a copy is attached.

(8) The Department of Finance and Administration also advises that no Act of Grace payments have been made by the Government to litigants in non-family law matters where the Commonwealth is not a party to proceedings.

**Depleted Uranium**

(Question No. 963)

Mr Fitzgibbon asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, in writing, on 10 May 2005:

(1) Which types of civil aircraft operating in Australia incorporate the use of depleted uranium for ballast or other purposes.

(2) In respect of each type of civil aircraft which uses depleted uranium, what amount of depleted uranium is used and for what purpose.

(3) What safety precautions are laid down for maintenance personnel and other persons who may come into contact with depleted uranium in aircraft.

(4) What provision has been made for public health and safety in the event of the crash of an aircraft which might cause the dispersal of depleted uranium.

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

(1) and (2) The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) has advised that at present there are no aircraft on the Australian register of civil aircraft that use depleted uranium for ballast or other purposes.

(3) Should depleted uranium be used in any aircraft, it would be noted in the applicable aircraft maintenance manuals and applicable safety precautions would also be listed in the manual. This manual is used by the maintenance personnel when they are working on the aircraft.

(4) The ATSB’s investigators are very conscious of the potential hazards at aircraft crash sites. After securing the crash site to limit unauthorised access, the ATSB’s investigators undertake an onsite assessment of potential occupational health and safety risks. As standard practice, investigators suspect all freight, mail and passenger baggage as potentially hazardous and seek technical details of the composition of cargo and aircraft components. The ATSB Occupational Health and Safety manual lists the possible use of depleted uranium in aircraft and outlines steps to be taken should it be advised that it was in use in the accident aircraft.

Public health and safety are largely State issues. Whilst the ATSB does secure search and rescue accident sites, if hazardous materials are identified it will contact the relevant State authorities. In

QUESTIONS IN WRITING
the case of radioactive materials, the ATSB procedure is to enlist the services of the relevant Environmental Protection Agency to identify and remove any depleted uranium from the aircraft accident site.

Road Funding
(Question No. 970)

Mr Bowen asked the Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, in writing, on 10 May 2005:

For the years 2002, 2003 and 2004, what sum was allocated to each project that was funded in the electoral division of (a) Prospect, (b) Lindsay, and (c) Greenway under the (i) Roads to Recovery, (ii) Roads of National Importance, and (iii) Blackspot Program.

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

Roads to Recovery allocations are based on the recommendations of the State and NT Local Government Grants Commissions for the roads component of Financial Assistance Grants. The amounts have been gazetted. All Roads to Recovery payments are made to Local Government Authorities (LGA). Consistent with this, the Department holds Roads to Recovery data by LGA and not by electorate.

The question seeks information on a calendar year basis but the Department’s records hold it on a financial year basis.

Under Roads to Recovery, councils decide the projects to be funded. A full list of projects funded under Roads to Recovery in these electorates has been provided to the member’s office.

(a) Electorate of Prospect

The electorate of Prospect contains parts of four LGAs. These councils overlap into other electorates. The total funding provided to the councils in Prospect (listed below) may also cover projects in the adjacent electorates.

(i) Roads to Recovery
The funding provided was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Council</th>
<th>2001-02</th>
<th>2002-03</th>
<th>2003-04</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blacktown</td>
<td>1,219,252</td>
<td>812,836</td>
<td>2,235,301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairfield</td>
<td>814,028</td>
<td>542,688</td>
<td>814,028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holroyd</td>
<td>225,980</td>
<td>245,533</td>
<td>386,387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penrith</td>
<td>892,701</td>
<td>606,204</td>
<td>925,914</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(ii) Roads of National Importance Funding
Nil.

(iii) Black Spot Road Funding
The National Black Spot Programme funds cost-efficient safety-oriented projects that will help to reduce the road toll on state and local government roads.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project No</th>
<th>LGA</th>
<th>Suburb</th>
<th>Roads Treatment</th>
<th>Approved Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001/2002</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002/2003</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003/2004</td>
<td>Fairfield</td>
<td>Fairfield Heights</td>
<td>Polding and Granville Streets - Install single lane roundabout</td>
<td>$20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N03143</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(b) Electorate of Lindsay
The electorate of Lindsay contains parts of two LGAs. These councils overlap into other electorates. The total funding provided to the councils in Lindsay (listed below) may also cover projects in the adjacent electorates.

(i) Roads to Recovery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Council</th>
<th>2001-02</th>
<th>2002-03</th>
<th>2003-04</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blue Mountains</td>
<td>611,604</td>
<td>407,738</td>
<td>1,044,580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penrith</td>
<td>892,701</td>
<td>606,204</td>
<td>925,914</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(ii) Roads of National Importance Funding
Nil.

(iii) Black Spot Road Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project No</th>
<th>LGA</th>
<th>Suburb</th>
<th>Roads Treatment</th>
<th>Approved Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001/2002</td>
<td>Penrith</td>
<td>South Penrith</td>
<td>Maxwell and Aspen Streets - seagull island</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002/2003</td>
<td>Penrith</td>
<td>Penrith</td>
<td>Great Western Highway and High Street - install traffic signals</td>
<td>$35,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N03079</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003/2004</td>
<td>Penrith</td>
<td>Penrith</td>
<td>Great Western Highway and Russell Street - right turn bay</td>
<td>$170,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N03188</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004/2005</td>
<td>Penrith</td>
<td>Emu Plains</td>
<td></td>
<td>$483,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N03310</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(c) Electorate of Greenway
The electorate of Greenway is wholly within the Blacktown City Council area.

(i) Roads to Recovery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Council</th>
<th>2001-02</th>
<th>2002-03</th>
<th>2003-04</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blacktown</td>
<td>1,219,252</td>
<td>812,836</td>
<td>2,235,301</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(ii) Roads of National Importance Funding
Nil.

(iii) Black Spot Road Funding
Nil.
Media Training  
(Question No. 1057)

Mr Bowen asked the Minister representing the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, in writing, on 10 May 2005:

(1) Did the department or any agency under the Minister’s portfolio engage the services of a media training company in 2004; if so, how many individuals (by agency/department) received media training.

(2) Did the Minister personally receive any media training.

(3) What was the cost of the media training.

(4) What was the name and postal address of each company engaged to provide media training.

Mr McGauran—The Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

(1) The details of media training services engaged by the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts is in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of individuals who received media training</th>
<th>Cost of media training</th>
<th>Name and postal address of company engaged to provide media training.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26 staff received media training.</td>
<td>$3,795</td>
<td>Stone Wilson Consulting 16 Arthur Circle FORREST ACT 2603</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Portfolio agencies which did engage in media training services have provided the following details:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Number of individuals who received media training</th>
<th>Cost of media training</th>
<th>Name and postal address of company engaged to provide media training.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Broadcasting Authority</td>
<td>10 ABA staff received media training.</td>
<td>$8,711</td>
<td>Stone Wilson Consulting PO Box 4239 Manuka ACT 2603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Communications Media Authority (ACMA)</td>
<td>18 Australian Communications Authority (ACA) officers received media training in 2004.</td>
<td>$22,589</td>
<td>Media Manoeuvres Level 1 319 Clarendon Street South Melbourne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia Post</td>
<td>19 Australia Post staff members received media related training in 2004.</td>
<td>$65,000</td>
<td>Media Manoeuvres 1/319-321 Clarendon Street, South Melbourne VIC 3205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telstra</td>
<td>Telstra conducts media training for its staff on an ad hoc basis as required. The media training is generally organised by the person or group that requires it and no centralised record is maintained that would allow this information to be provided.</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(2) to (4) The Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts did not receive any media training in 2004.

Media Training
(Question No. 1060)

Mr Bowen asked the Minister representing the Minister for the Arts and Sport, in writing, on 10 May 2005:

(1) Did the department or any agency under the Minister’s portfolio engage the services of a media training company in 2004; if so, how many individuals (by agency/department) received media training.

(2) Did the Minister personally receive any media training.

(3) What was the cost of the media training.

(4) What was the name and postal address of each company engaged to provide media training.

Mr McGauran—The Minister for the Arts and Sport has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

(1) Details have been provided by the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts in response to Question No. 1057.

(2) to (4) The Minister for Arts and Sport did not receive any media training in 2004.
Mr Melham asked the Minister representing the Minister for the Arts and Sport, in writing, on 10 May 2005:

Will the Government act to ensure that correspondence between Australia’s Governors-General and Australia’s Head of State, Her Royal Highness Queen Elizabeth II, is examined for public release after thirty years and specifically brought within the definition of ‘Commonwealth records’ in the Archives Act 1983.

Mr McGauran—The Minister for the Arts and Sport has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

The National Archives has advised that the records of the official establishment of the office of the Governor-General are classed as Commonwealth records under the Archives Act 1983 and the access provisions of the Act apply to these records in the usual way.

They have advised however, that correspondence of a private and personal nature does not fall within the provisions of the Act and the conditions of access are determined by the depositor(s). The Archives has advised that it would not wish to undermine any future donations of personal papers by acting against the express wishes of the depositor(s).

Mr Melham asked the Minister representing the Minister for the Arts and Sport, in writing, on 10 May 2005:

(1) Is he aware that the National Archives of Australia holds two sealed boxes of letters written by Sir John Kerr as Governor-General to Her Majesty the Queen and/or Her Majesty’s Private Secretary (National Archives Series AA1984/609).

(2) Will he seek Her Majesty’s agreement to the public release of this correspondence at the same time as the Whitlam Government’s Cabinet records for 1975 are released on 1 January 2006 and other relevant Commonwealth Records become available for public access; if not, why not.

Mr McGauran—The Minister for the Arts and Sport has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

(1) I have been advised that the Archives does hold some personal and confidential correspondence between Sir John Kerr and Her Majesty the Queen.

(2) No. The Archives has advised that conditions under which this correspondence might be released were made explicit by the depositors. The Archives has advised that it would not wish to undermine any future donations of personal papers by acting against the express wishes of the depositor(s).

Mr McClelland asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, in writing, on 10 May 2005:

Has an agreement been entered into between the Commonwealth and the State and Territory governments since 11 September 2001 to (a) improve the security of (i) railroad infrastructure, (ii) major rail facilities, and (iii) key rail hubs and (b) improve the security of passengers travelling by rail; if so, what are the details; if not, have any negotiations taken place between the Commonwealth and the state and territory governments.
Territory governments since 11 September 2001 to (a) improve the security of (i) railroad infrastructure, (ii) major rail facilities, and (iii) key rail hubs and (b) improve the security of passengers travelling by rail; if so, what are the details.

Mr Truss—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
Yes, the Intergovernmental Agreement on Surface Transport Security (IGA) was signed by members of the Council of Australian Governments on Friday 3 June 2005. The Northern Territory Government was in caretaker mode at that time, but is expected to sign the IGA in due course.

The IGA establishes the framework for cooperation in the development of nationally consistent preventative transport security measures. The agreement covers both freight and passengers and requires that governments identify surface transport operations for security purposes and ensure appropriate action is taken in relation to these operations (such as conducting risk assessments and developing security plans and business continuity plans). The agreement aims to reduce the likelihood that the surface transport system will be the target of terrorism and other security threats.

The IGA acknowledges that State and Territory Governments have primary responsibility for surface transport security.

National Archives
(Question No. 1270)

Mr Melham asked the Minister representing the Minister for the Arts and Sport, in writing, on 11 May 2005:

(1) Is the Minister aware that the National Archives of Australia holds two sealed boxes of letters written by Sir John Kerr as Governor-General to Her Majesty the Queen and/or Her Majesty’s Private Secretary (National Archives Series AA1984/609).

(2) Will the Minister write to the Prime Minister to recommend that he approach Her Majesty to obtain her agreement for the public release of this correspondence at the same time as the Whitlam Government’s Cabinet records for 1975 are released on 1 January 2006 and other relevant Commonwealth Records become available for public access; if not, why not.

Mr McGauran—The Minister for the Arts and Sport has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

(1) I have been advised that the Archives does hold some personal and confidential correspondence between Sir John Kerr and Her Majesty the Queen.

(2) No, the Archives has advised that conditions under which this correspondence might be released were made explicit by the depositors. The Archives has advised that it would not wish to undermine any future donations of personal papers by acting against the express wishes of the depositor(s).

Media Monitoring and Clipping Services
(Question No. 1311)

Mr Bowen asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, in writing, on 11 May 2005:

(1) What sum was spent on media monitoring and clipping services engaged by the department and agencies in the Minister’s portfolio in (a) 2002-2003, (b) 2003-2004, (c) 2004-2005 to date.

(2) Did the department or any agency in the Minister’s portfolio order newspaper clippings, television appearance transcripts or videos, radio transcripts or tapes on behalf of the Minister’s office in (a) 2004 and (b) 2005; if so, what sum was spent by the department or agency on providing this service.

QUESTIONS IN WRITING
Mr McGauran—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department/agency</th>
<th>Cost 2002-03</th>
<th>Cost 2003-04</th>
<th>Cost 2004-05 (to date)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF)</td>
<td>$110,260.51</td>
<td>$109,436.78</td>
<td>$98,561.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Bureau of Agricultural Resource Economics (ABARE)</td>
<td>$16,470.12</td>
<td>$18,164.04</td>
<td>$13,260.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS)</td>
<td>$38,058.39</td>
<td>$46,764.65</td>
<td>$55,305.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureau of Rural Sciences (BRS)</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation (AWBC)</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA)*</td>
<td>$9718.49</td>
<td>$18,766.61</td>
<td>$20,199.28</td>
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<td>Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA)</td>
<td>$29,842.12</td>
<td>$26,459.65</td>
<td>$18,939.97</td>
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<td>Wheat Export Authority (WEA)</td>
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<td>$4,312.03</td>
<td>$8,160.14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC)</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC)*</td>
<td>$6,734.43</td>
<td>$16,168.61</td>
<td>$34,969.84</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forest and Wood Products Research and Development Corporation (FWPRDC)</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC)</td>
<td>$19,540.43</td>
<td>$31,795.35</td>
<td>$24,469.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation (GWRDC)</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Land and Water Australia (LWA)</td>
<td>$7,917.92</td>
<td>$12,349.57</td>
<td>$13,508.26</td>
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<td>Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC)</td>
<td>$4,991.63</td>
<td>$7,848.14</td>
<td>$8,276.73</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sugar Research and Development Corporation (SRDC)</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* FRDC and AFMA share the costs of media monitoring. In 2003-04 a new electronic media portal approach was trialled for a period of six months in an attempt to cut down duplication and increase efficiency. This however, proved more expensive than the paper based media monitoring services. The increase in illegal foreign fishing and a general rise in interest on fishing issues resulted in a more extensive range of fishing issues being reported in the media and their subsequent monitoring. In 2004-05 the continuing focus on illegal foreign fishing in the media required extensive monitoring to be maintained. The costs of the company monitoring services also increased in 2003-04 and 2004-05.

(2) The department did not order newspaper clippings, television appearance transcripts or videos, radio transcripts or tapes on behalf of the Minister’s office in 2004 or 2005. Only one agency within the Minister’s portfolio ordered newspaper clippings, television appearance transcripts or videos, radio transcripts or tapes on behalf of the Minister’s office in 2004 or 2005.
### Media Monitoring and Clipping Services
**(Question No. 1317)**

**Mr Bowen** asked the Minister representing the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, in writing, on 11 May 2005:

1. What sum was spent on media monitoring and clipping services engaged by the department and agencies in the Minister’s portfolio in (a) 2002-2003, (b) 2003-2004, and (c) 2004-2005 to date.
2. Did the department or any agency in the Minister’s portfolio order newspaper clippings, television appearances transcripts or videos, radio transcripts or tapes on behalf of the Minister’s Office in (a) 2004 and (b) 2005: if so, what sum was spent by the department or agency on providing this service.

**Mr McGauran** — The Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

#### (1) (a) to (c)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>2002-03</th>
<th>2003-04</th>
<th>2004-05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department of Communications, Information</td>
<td>$24,521.11</td>
<td>$30,730.53</td>
<td>$27,059.44</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technology and the Arts</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>$36,661.49</td>
<td>$85,049.24</td>
<td>$17,198.68</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBS</td>
<td>$51,088.00</td>
<td>$77,686.00</td>
<td>$72,492.00</td>
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<td>Australian Communications Authority</td>
<td>$32,378.19</td>
<td>$38,402.76</td>
<td>$28,195.31</td>
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<td>Australian Broadcasting Authority</td>
<td>$27,424.49</td>
<td>$51,764.00</td>
<td>$41,589.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australia Post</td>
<td>$93,400.00</td>
<td>$116,600.00</td>
<td>$128,800.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Telstra</td>
<td>$873,804.32</td>
<td>$734,408.98</td>
<td>$431,745.08</td>
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<td>Australian Sports Commission</td>
<td>$37,422.00</td>
<td>$50,632.00</td>
<td>$53,407.00</td>
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<td>Australian Sports Drug Agency</td>
<td>$16,288.24</td>
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<td>$17,860.81</td>
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<td>Australia Council</td>
<td>$57,120.20</td>
<td>$41,183.59</td>
<td>$21,364.59</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australian National Maritime Museum</td>
<td>$6,786.53</td>
<td>$6,367.56</td>
<td>$6,111.14</td>
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<td>National Gallery of Australia</td>
<td>$7,563.49</td>
<td>$3,326.20</td>
<td>$11,949.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Archives of Australia</td>
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<td>$14,932.55</td>
<td>$8,487.10</td>
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<td>National Museum of Australia</td>
<td>$21,295.03</td>
<td>$29,585.54</td>
<td>$13,765.00</td>
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<td>National Library of Australia</td>
<td>$19,600.00</td>
<td>$19,000.00</td>
<td>$22,700.00</td>
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<td>Film Finance Corporation</td>
<td>$13,910.00</td>
<td>$16,998.00</td>
<td>$15,552.00</td>
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<td>Film Australia Ltd</td>
<td>$18,349.00</td>
<td>$18,174.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australia Film, Television and Radio School</td>
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<td>$14,927.00</td>
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<td>Australian Film Commission</td>
<td>$39,650.00</td>
<td>$47,750.00</td>
<td>$56,559.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### (2) Yes, the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts ordered on behalf of the Minister’s Office portfolio related newspaper clippings and transcripts costing:

(a) 2004 $10,989.67
(b) 2005 $2,964.36 (until 30 April 2005)
Media and Communications Officers

(Question No. 1420)

Mr Bowen asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, in writing, on 24 May 2005:

(1) How many media and communications officers are employed in the Minister’s department.

(2) How many media and communications officers were employed in the Minister’s department in 1996.

(3) What sum was allocated to the media and communications unit in (a) 1996-1997, (b) 2004-2005, and (c) 2005-2006

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

(1) As at 30 June 2005, there were nine ongoing and three non-ongoing media and communications officers employed in the Department.

(2) At 30 June 1996, there were five media and communications officers employed in the Department.

(3) (a) Financial records for 1996-97 are no longer available. (b) $1,661,767. (c) $1,883,000.

Transport and Regional Services: Staffing

(Question No. 1627)

Mr Bowen asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, in writing, on 31 May 2005:

(1) How many of the Minister’s department’s staff were employed at the Senior Executive Band 1 level in (a) 1996, (b) 1997, (c) 1998, (d) 1999, (e) 2000, (f) 2001, (g) 2002, (h) 2003, (i) 2004, and (j) 2005.

(2) How many of the Minister’s department’s staff were paid at the Senior Executive Band 1 level in (a) 1996, (b) 1997, (c) 1998, (d) 1999, (e) 2000, (f) 2001, (g) 2002, (h) 2003, (i) 2004, and (j) 2005.

(3) How many of the Minister’s department’s staff were employed at the Senior Executive Band 2 level in (a) 1996, (b) 1997, (c) 1998, (d) 1999, (e) 2000, (f) 2001, (g) 2002, (h) 2003, (i) 2004, and (j) 2005.

(4) How many of the Minister’s department’s staff were paid at the Senior Executive Band 2 level in (a) 1996, (b) 1997, (c) 1998, (d) 1999, (e) 2000, (f) 2001, (g) 2002, (h) 2003, (i) 2004, and (j) 2005.

(5) How many of the Minister’s department’s staff were employed at the Senior Executive Band 3 level in (a) 1996, (b) 1997, (c) 1998, (d) 1999, (e) 2000, (f) 2001, (g) 2002, (h) 2003, (i) 2004, and (j) 2005.

(6) How many of the Minister’s department’s staff were paid at the Senior Executive Band 3 level in (a) 1996, (b) 1997, (c) 1998, (d) 1999, (e) 2000, (f) 2001, (g) 2002, (h) 2003, (i) 2004, and (j) 2005.

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

(1) (3), (5) For the required years, the numbers of Senior Executive Service staff (nominal and operative) employed at each level were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>SEB 1</th>
<th>SEB 2</th>
<th>SEB 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30/06/1996</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/06/1997</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/06/1998</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/06/1999</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/06/2000</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/06/2001</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(2) (4), (6) For the required years, the numbers of Senior Executive Service staff (operative only) paid at each level were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>SEB 1</th>
<th>SEB 2</th>
<th>SEB 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30/06/2002</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>30/06/2003</td>
<td>26</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/06/2004</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/06/2005</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: The numbers in this table include employees acting and may vary from the table provided in the previous response.

The data for this question has been extracted from the department’s HR reporting system in order to reflect total staff employed within a given year according to SES Band, as sought. This information is not published in this form in the Department’s Annual Report which reports aggregate numbers.

* Financial records are only maintained for six years so this information is not readily available for 1996-1997, 1997-1998, and 1998-1999 and cannot be obtained without devoting substantial resources to the task. The department is therefore unable to provide that information.

Sir Laurence Street
(Question No. 1668)

Ms Roxon asked the Minister representing the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 14 June 2005:

(1) In respect of the tender for the Air Warfare Destroyer contract, can the Minister explain the reasons for the appointment of Sir Laurence Street as a probity adviser on the bid process.

(2) What were the concerns about the probity of the process that lead to the appointment of Sir Laurence.

(3) Was Sir Laurence provided with terms of reference in relation to his role; if so, what were they.

(4) To whom was Sir Laurence responsible and to whom did he report on his findings.

(5) Did he produce a written report; if so, (a) who has seen it, (b) who is entitled to see it, (c) will it be made public, and (d) will the Minister provide a copy.

(6) What were Sir Laurence’s findings.

Mrs De-Anne Kelly—The Minister for Defence has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

(1) Sir Laurence Street was engaged by the Secretary of the Department of Defence as an independent adviser to report and advise in relation to the Air Warfare Destroyer Project and also the Amphibious Ships Project, and the sale of ASC Pty Ltd in relation to the two shipbuilding projects, to en-
sure that the probity management of the selection processes for the two shipbuilding projects were beyond reproach.

(2) See answer to question (1).

(3) Sir Laurence Street is acting under terms of engagement which require that he acts as an independent adviser, reporting to the Secretary of the Department of Defence, concerning probity issues associated with Air Warfare Destroyer Project, Amphibious Ships Project and advising on probity issues on the sale of ASC Pty Ltd in relation to the two shipbuilding projects. In relation to these activities, he provides advice with respect to agency stakeholder governance, including process integrity, conflict of interest management and probity review.

(4) Sir Laurence Street reports to the Secretary of the Department of Defence.

(5) Sir Laurence has provided a number of written reports, including at particular stages of the Air Warfare Destroyer selection process.

(a) Copies of the reports have been provided to the Secretary of the Department of Defence, the Chief Executive Officer Defence Materiel Organisation, Deputy Chief Executive Officer Defence Materiel Organisation, General Counsel Defence Materiel Organisation and the Program Managers for the Air Warfare Destroyer and Amphibious Ship projects. Where appropriate, other senior Defence personnel and their legal and probity advisers, have been provided with copies of his reports. His findings have been referred to in Defence’s advice to Government.

(b) The above persons, including the Government where it requires to do so.

(c) No.

(d) No.

(6) Sir Laurence has advised that there was no valid basis for concern that the selection process inevitably favoured ASC Pty Ltd, whether intentionally or otherwise, or that there were any breaches of due probity process.

Airservices Australia

(Statement of 23 June 2005)

Mr Tanner asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, in writing, on 23 June 2005:

(1) Has Airservices Australia established a subsidiary to deliver air traffic control services in Hawaii.

(2) Are any members of the Airservices board also members of the subsidiary’s board; if so, who.

(3) Are there other members of the subsidiary’s board who are not members of the Airservices board.

(4) Has the subsidiary’s board held a meeting in Hawaii; if so, (a) at whose expense, (b) when did the meeting occur, and (c) for how many days did it meet.

(5) Have there been any other board meetings outside Australia; if so, (a) when, (b) where, (c) for how long, and (d) are any future meetings planned to occur outside Australia.

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

(1) Yes, Airservices Pacific Incorporated.

(2) Yes. Air Marshal Les Fisher AO (Ret’d), Deputy Chairman of Airservices Australia.

(3) Yes. Hisham El-Ansary, Chief Financial Officer and General Manager Corporate Services, Airservices Australia; Alastair Hodgson, General Manager, Airport Services, Airservices Australia; Merv Fowler, National Towers Manager, Airport Services, Airservices Australia; and Roger Ray, an independent director.
(4) Yes. (a) The Airservices Australia group met the expenses associated with the Board meeting. (b) 3 June 2005, (c) One day.

(5) No. (a), (b) and (c) are not applicable. (d) Nothing scheduled at this point in time.

**Australian Electoral Commission**

(Question No. 1814)

Mr Murphy asked the Minister representing the Special Minister of State, in writing, on 23 June 2005:

Further to the answer to Question No 224 (*Hansard*, 20 June 2005, p192):

When will the Australian Electoral Commission complete its analysis of informal voting for the 2004 federal election?

Mr Abbott—The Special Minister of State advises that the following answer has been provided to him by the Australian Electoral Commission:

It is anticipated that the analysis of informal voting for the 2004 federal election will be completed by the end of August 2005.

**Bass Strait Passenger Vehicle Equalisation Scheme**

(Question No. 1817)

Mr Kerr asked the Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, in writing, on 23 June 2005:

(1) What sum did the Commonwealth provide to the TT Line under the Bass Strait Passenger Vehicle Equalisation Scheme for the (a) Devonport to Sydney and (b) Devonport to Melbourne service in 2004-2005.

(2) Has he investigated the discrepancy that exists between vehicle and passenger numbers; if so, can he explain the reason for it.

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

(1) (a) Devonport to Sydney: $4.2M; (b) Devonport to Melbourne: $28.2M

(2) Eligible passengers receive an Australian Government rebate against the fare charged by a Service Operator for the shipment of an eligible vehicle across Bass Strait. Not all vehicles that travel across Bass Strait are eligible to claim a rebate and not all passengers travel with a vehicle.

The rebate is deducted from the fare charged and the service operator lodges a monthly claim for re-reimbursement which, after assessment, is paid directly to the service operator. Post payment audit checks include a reconciliation of rebates paid with passenger manifests.

The Government is not aware of any discrepancy between eligible vehicle numbers and eligible passenger numbers.

**Water Management**

(Question No. 1881)

Mr Rudd asked the Minister representing the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, in writing, on 9 August 2005:

Does the Government have a contingency plan for the projected water crisis in South East Queensland; if so, what are the details?

Mr Truss—The Minister for the Environment and Heritage has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:
As the primary responsibility for water resource management in Australia rests with the individual state and territory governments, the Queensland Government is responsible for regulating water service providers; allocating and managing water resources; and facilitating strategic water supply in South East Queensland.

The Australian Government’s role is primarily one of providing national leadership and strategic direction through its participation in high-level fora such as the Council of Australian Governments and its work on water, and through its key natural resource management programmes.

I am aware that the State Government recently released the South East Queensland Regional Plan, which will guide growth and development in South East Queensland over the next two decades. The Plan includes an integrated approach to water cycle management and identifies a number of water infrastructure investment priorities. I am advised that the Queensland Government is currently preparing a South East Queensland Regional Water Supply Strategy which will provide the basis for a comprehensive policy framework and further investment priorities for South East Queensland (due to be finalised late 2006).

Zimbabwe
(Question No. 1890)

Mr Danby asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs, in writing, on 9 August 2005:

(1) Can he confirm that the Government of Zimbabwe is conducting a campaign to destroy urban vegetable gardens which are relied upon by the same poverty-stricken Zimbabweans who have recently had their homes demolished?

(2) Can he confirm that (a) Zimbabwe imports 1.2 million tonnes of food to avoid famine and (b) 1.5 million people in Zimbabwe have been left homeless by the housing demolition policy?

(3) What is the Government’s response to the view expressed by Reverend Oskar Wermter, former secretary to the Zimbabwe Roman Catholic Bishops’ Conference, who characterised the campaign as “insane and evil” and a “crime against humanity” and has he communicated this view to the Embassy of the Republic of Zimbabwe?

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

(1) On 21 June, the Police Commander of Harare, Senior Assistant Commissioner Edmore Veterai, announced that, as part of Operation Murambatsvina, “urban farming” would no longer be allowed. A clarification by a Harare City Council spokesman suggested that people could still grow maize and vegetables in their back yards, but not in open areas throughout the city.

(2) (a) The Zimbabwe Government told the World Food Program (WFP) on 1 June that it would import 1.2 million tonnes of grain to address food shortages, and was seeking an additional 600,000 tonnes to bolster its strategic reserves. (b) The UN Special Envoy’s Report on Operation Murambatsvina put the figure of those directly affected by the crackdown on the urban poor at 650,000 to 700,000; and the total, including directly and indirectly affected, at 2.4 million.


Papua New Guinea
(Question No. 1954)

Mr Kelvin Thomson asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs, in writing, on 9 August 2005:

(1) Is any Australian aid to Papua New Guinea used to try to prevent illegal and destructive logging practices in Papua New Guinea.
(2) Is the Government considering any measures involving the use of Australian aid to combat corruption, human rights abuses and environmental destruction occurring as a result of illegal logging in Papua New Guinea.

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

(1) Yes. The Australian Government recognises the importance of forests and good forestry practices and considers illegal logging a significant issue with regard to sustainable forest management. The Australian Government places a high priority on improving government accountability and transparency in Papua New Guinea and has repeatedly highlighted the need for the Government of PNG to tackle corruption in all sectors, including forestry. In this respect the Australian Government has consistently called for the Government of PNG to ensure that its forestry legislation and procedures, which take into account environmental and landowner concerns, are adhered to in the forestry sector.

The management of PNG’s forests is ultimately a matter for the Government of PNG. Since 1990 the Australian Government has been engaged in reform of the PNG forestry sector through the Australian aid program. In recent years, Australia has scaled down its direct support to PNG’s forestry sector due to concerns about poor governance and because our support for reform of the sector to date has had limited success. Current support includes targeted placement of five technical advisers in the National Forestry Authority, the key agency involved in implementing forestry reforms.

(2) Yes. Through the Australian Government’s program of development assistance to Papua New Guinea a high priority is given to supporting the efforts of the PNG Government to improve governance and tackle corruption, including support for improved management of public expenditure, transparency of budget processes, revenue collection and sound expenditure decisions. In principle agreement has been reached for a revised Enhanced Cooperation Program to help the Papua New Guinea Government fulfil its objective of addressing the issue of corruption.

In the Law and Justice Sector, support is being provided to a range of anti-corruption initiatives through the Ombudsman Commission, the National Anti Corruption Alliance, and the PNG Public Prosecutor’s office, with a view to increasing rates of prosecution where corruption is alleged. Australia also provides assistance to the Public Accounts Committee and other transparency initiatives.

In addition, Australia is providing support to civil society organisations, including the PNG chapter of Transparency International, and the media, to build demand for good governance and to lower levels of tolerance for corruption.

The Australian Government is currently developing a new country strategy for assistance to PNG. Corruption, including in the logging industry, is being considered carefully in that context.

Google Earth Web Site
(Question No. 2038)

Mrs Elliot asked the Minister representing the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 11 August 2005:

(1) Is the Minister aware that the Google Earth website displays detailed satellite images of sensitive military and other infrastructure sites like airports, major roads and waterways.

(2) What action is the Government taking to ensure that the security of these sites is not compromised by the detailed images displayed on this website.

Mrs De-Anne Kelly—The Minister for Defence has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:
(1) Yes, I am aware that the Internet has proliferated freely available imagery, and some of that covers Defence establishments and other infrastructure.

(2) It is inappropriate to comment on details of security procedures. The capabilities of imaging devices are known to Australian Government agencies and appropriate measures are taken to manage those capabilities.

Mr Aden Ridgeway
(Question No. 2042)

Mr Martin Ferguson asked the Minister for Small Business and Tourism, in writing, on 11 August 2005:

(1) What was the recruitment process resulting in the appointment of former Australian Democrats Senator, Mr Aden Ridgeway, to head Indigenous Tourism.

(2) How many people were considered for the job, who was included on the interview panel, and who made the final appointment.

(3) What are the terms and conditions of Mr Ridgeway’s employment, including his part-time hours of duty.

Fran Bailey—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) Mr Aden Ridgeway was appointed by the Minister for Small Business and Tourism, the Hon Fran Bailey MP as Executive Chair of Indigenous Tourism Australia on 26 June 2005.

(2) As noted above, the appointment of Mr Aden Ridgeway was a Ministerial appointment.

(3) Mr Ridgeway is not an employee of Tourism Australia and has been engaged under contract.

Road Funding
(Question No. 2052)

Mr Jenkins asked the Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, in writing, on 16 August 2005:

What projects were funded during (a) 2004 and (b) 2005 in the electoral division of Scullin under the (i) Roads to Recovery, (ii) Roads of National Importance, and (iii) Blackspot Program.

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

Roads to Recovery allocations are based on the recommendations of the State and NT Local Government Grants Commissions for the roads component of Financial Assistance Grants. All Roads to Recovery payments are made to Local Government Authorities (LGAs). Consistent with this, the Department holds Roads to Recovery data by LGA and not by electorate.

The question seeks information on a calendar year basis but the Department’s systems hold it on a financial year basis.

Under Roads to Recovery, councils decide the projects to be funded.

(i) Roads to Recovery

The electorate of Scullin contains parts of three LGAs. These councils overlap into other electorates. The total funding provided to the councils in Scullin (listed below) may also cover projects in the adjacent electorates. Lists of projects funded under Roads to Recovery in each of the councils in the electorate of Scullin have been provided to the member’s office.
The funding provided was:

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<tr>
<th>Council</th>
<th>2003-04</th>
<th>2004-05</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>784,496</td>
<td>795,166</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nillumbik</td>
<td>436,432</td>
<td>494,185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whittlesea</td>
<td>610,744</td>
<td>661,648</td>
</tr>
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</table>

(ii) Roads of National Importance
There are no designated Roads of National Importance in this electorate.

(iii) Black Spots

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Council</th>
<th>Project location</th>
<th>Project type</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-05 - Nil</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>Whittlesea – Wedge Street – Howard Street, Epping</td>
<td>Construct roundabout</td>
<td>$337,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Disability Support Pension**

(Question No. 2059)

*Mr Jenkins* asked the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, in writing, on 16 August 2005:

How many disability support pension recipients reside in (a) Victoria and the postcode area (b) 3074, (c) 3075, (d) 3076, (e) 3082, (f) 3083, (g) 3087, (h) 3088, (i) 3089, (j) 3090, (k) 3091, and (l) 3752.

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

The number of recipients on Disability Support Pension (DSP) in Victoria at June 2005 was 168,715.

The number of recipients on DSP by selected postcodes at June 2005 is listed in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Postcode</th>
<th>DSP recipients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3074</td>
<td>1622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3075</td>
<td>1398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3076</td>
<td>804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3082</td>
<td>1038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3083</td>
<td>971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3087</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3088</td>
<td>562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3089</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3090</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3091</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3752</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
All data supplied is point in time data. This means that the data is reflective of the point in time when the snapshot was taken. All snapshot data is taken at a particular fortnight within a particular month or quarter depending on the data source.
Australia Council  
(Question No. 2064)

Mr Jenkins asked Minister representing the Minister for the Arts and Sport, in writing, on 16 August 2005:

What projects did the Australia Council fund in the Melbourne metropolitan area in (a) 2004-2005 and (b) 2005-2006 and what was the (i) expenditure on, (ii) location of, and (iii) purpose of, each project.

Mr McGauran—The Minister for the Arts and Sport has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

The Australia Council has provided a summary of projects it funded in 24 Federal electorates covering the Melbourne metropolitan area during 2004-05 and from 1 July 2005 to 16 August 2005. Projects funded were for the purpose of supporting and promoting art forms such as literature, visual arts and craft, music, dance, theatre and indigenous art, music and dance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOCATION (Federal Electorate)</th>
<th>2004-05 No of projects</th>
<th>Total Expenditure</th>
<th>1 July 2005 to 16 August 2005 No of projects</th>
<th>Total Expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Batman</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>$806,879</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>$127,805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$45,780</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$35,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$2,500</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chisholm</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>$89,720</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deakin</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$52,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunkley</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$38,050</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gellibrand</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>$430,506</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$152,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldstein</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>$181,552</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higgins</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>$295,178</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>$113,617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotham</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$35,800</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaacs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jagajaga</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$80,500</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kooyong</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>$99,590</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$68,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Trobe</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>$89,332</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$45,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maribyrnong</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$5,900</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>$7,219,595</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>$799,178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne Ports</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>$21,915,746</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>$365,702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menzies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$5,920</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scullin</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$40,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willis</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>$205,703</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>$31,655,251</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>$1,756,387</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Guiding Organisations of Australia  
(Question No. 2113)

Mr Martin Ferguson asked the Minister for Small Business and Tourism, in writing, on 18 August 2005:

(1) What is the nature of the grant given to the Guiding Organisations of Australia (GOA) to develop and implement a national tour guide accreditation framework.

(2) What was the process that the department used to select GOA to undertake this work.

(3) Which other organisations were considered for the project.
What is the timeline for finalisation of the framework and its implementation.

Fran Bailey—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) and (2) The Tourism White Paper identified the importance of voluntary national tourism accreditation in Australia. GOA made representations to the Australian Government for assistance to develop a national tour guide accreditation framework. GOA is the peak tour guiding organisation in Australia representing a number of tour guiding organisations, and was considered to be best placed to develop and implement a national tour guide framework.

(3) See response to Question 2.

(4) Project completion of the framework is scheduled for 30 April 2006.