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SITTING DAYS—2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 26, 27, 28</td>
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<td>March</td>
<td>1, 20, 21, 22, 26, 27, 28, 29</td>
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<td>May</td>
<td>8, 9, 10, 21, 22, 23, 24, 28, 29, 30, 31</td>
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<td>June</td>
<td>12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21</td>
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<td>August</td>
<td>7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16</td>
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<td>September</td>
<td>10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20</td>
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<td>October</td>
<td>15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 25</td>
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<td>November</td>
<td>12, 13, 14, 15, 26, 27, 28, 29</td>
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<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>3, 4, 5, 6</td>
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- **GOLD COAST**: 95.7 FM
- **MELBOURNE**: 1026 AM
- **ADELAIDE**: 972 AM
- **PERTH**: 585 AM
- **HOBART**: 747 AM
- **NORTHERN TASMANIA**: 92.5 FM
- **DARWIN**: 102.5 FM
FORTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—TENTH 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 Phillip Anthony Barresi, the Hon. Bronwyn Kathleen Bishop, Ms Ann Kathleen Corcoran, Mr Barry Wayne Haase, Mr Michael John Hatton, the Hon. Duncan James Colquhoun Kerr SC, Mr Harry Vernon Quick, the Hon. Bruce Craig Scott, Mr Patrick Damien Secker, 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—Mr Anthony Norman Albanese MP
Deputy Manager of Opposition Business—Mr Robert Francis McMullan 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
Chief Whip—Mrs Kay Elizabeth Hull MP
Whip—Mr Paul Christopher Neville MP

Australian Labor Party
Leader—Mr Kevin Michael Rudd MP
Deputy Leader—Ms Julia Eileen Gillard 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbott, Hon. Anthony John</td>
<td>Warringah, NSW</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adams, Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry</td>
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<td>Fitzgibbon, Joel Andrew</td>
<td>Hunter, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Members of the House of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forrest, John Alexander</td>
<td>Mallee, Vic</td>
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<td>Kalgoorlie, WA</td>
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<td>Hall, Jill Griffiths</td>
<td>Shortland, NSW</td>
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<td>Moreton, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<td>Cowper, NSW</td>
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<td>Wannon, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<td>Werriwa, NSW</td>
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<td>Hasluck, WA</td>
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<td>Charlton, NSW</td>
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<td>North Sydney, NSW</td>
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<td>LP</td>
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<td>Irwin, Julia Claire</td>
<td>Fowler, NSW</td>
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<td>Tangney, WA</td>
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<td>Ryan, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<td>Lindsay, NSW</td>
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<td>Denison, Tas</td>
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<td>Ballarat, Vic</td>
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<td>Bowman, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<td>Farrer, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
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<td>Jagajaga, Vic</td>
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<td>Gippsland, Vic</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Members of the House of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>ALP</td>
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<td>Wilkie, Kim William</td>
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<td>Wood, Jason Peter</td>
<td>La Trobe, Vic</td>
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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
HOY!WARM MINISTRY

Prime Minister

The Hon. John Winston Howard MP

Minister for Transport and Regional Services and Deputy Prime Minister

The Hon. Mark Anthony James Vaile MP

Treasurer

The Hon. Peter Howard Costello MP

Minister for Trade

The Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP

Minister for Defence

The Hon. Dr Brendan John Nelson MP

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, 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 Citizenship

The Hon. Kevin James Andrews MP

Minister for Education, Science and Training and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women’s Issues

The Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP

Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs

The Hon. Malcolm Thomas Brough MP

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. Joseph Benedict Hockey MP

Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate

Senator the Hon. Helen Lloyd Coonan

Minister for the Environment and Water Resources

The Hon. Malcolm Bligh Turnbull MP

Minister for Human Services

Senator the Hon. Christopher Martin Ellison

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

Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation and Manager of Government Business in the Senate
Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz

Minister for Small Business and Tourism
The Hon. Frances Esther Bailey MP

Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads
The Hon. James Eric Lloyd MP

Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer
The Hon. Peter Craig Dutton MP

Minister for Workforce Participation
The Hon. Dr Sharman Nancy Stone MP

Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence
The Hon. Bruce Frederick Billson MP

Special Minister of State
The Hon. Gary Roy Nairn MP

Minister for Ageing
The Hon. Christopher Maurice Pyne MP

Minister for Vocational and Further Education
The Hon. Andrew John Robb MP

Minister for the Arts and Sport
Senator the Hon. George Henry Brandis SC

Minister for Community Services
Senator the Hon. Nigel Gregory Scullion

Minister for Justice and Customs
Senator the Hon. David Albert Lloyd Johnston

Assistant Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
The Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP

Assistant Minister for the Environment and Water Resources
The Hon. John Kenneth Cobb MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister
The Hon. Anthony David Hawthorn Smith MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Transport and Regional Services
The Hon. De-Anne Margaret Kelly MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer
The Hon. Christopher John Pearce MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration
Senator the Hon. Richard Mansell Colbeck

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources
The Hon. Robert Charles Baldwin MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs
The Hon. Gregory Andrew Hunt MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
The Hon. Sussan Penelope Ley MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education, Science and Training
The Hon. Patrick Francis Farmer MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence
The Hon. Peter John Lindsay MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing
Senator the Hon. Brett John Mason
SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition

Kevin Michael Rudd MP

Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Shadow Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations and Shadow Minister for Social Inclusion

Julia Eileen Gillard MP

Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for National Development, Resources and Energy

Senator Christopher Vaughan Evans

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for Communications and Information Technology

Anthony Norman Albanese MP

Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Water and Manager of Opposition Business in the House

The Hon. Archibald Ronald Bevis MP

Shadow Minister for Homeland Security, Shadow Minister for Justice and Customs and Shadow Minister for Territories

Christopher Eyles Bowen MP

Shadow Assistant Treasurer and Shadow Minister for Revenue and Competition Policy

Anthony Stephen Burke MP

Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for National Development, Resources and Energy

Senator Stephen Michael Conroy

Shadow Minister for Industry and Shadow Minister for Innovation, Science and Research

Senator Kim John Carr

Shadow Minister for Trade and Shadow Minister for Regional Development

The Hon. Simon Findlay Crean MP

Shadow Minister for Service Economy, Small Business and Independent Contractors

Craig Anthony Emerson MP

Shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Shadow Minister for Urban Development and Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs

Laurence Donald Thomas Ferguson MP

Shadow Minister for Transport, Roads and Tourism

Martin John Ferguson MP

Shadow Minister for Defence

Joel Andrew Fitzgibbon MP

Shadow Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Heritage and Shadow Minister for the Arts

Peter Robert Garrett MP

Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, Shadow Minister for Defence Science and Personnel and Shadow Special Minister of State

Alan Peter Griffin MP

Shadow Attorney-General and Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate

Senator Joseph William Ludwig

Shadow Minister for Sport and Recreation, Shadow Minister for Health Promotion and Shadow Minister for Local Government

Senator Kate Alexandra Lundy

Shadow Minister for Families and Community Services and Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation

Jennifer Louise Macklin MP

Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs

Robert Bruce McClelland MP

Shadow Minister for Ageing, Disabilities and Carers

Senator Jan Elizabeth McLucas
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Position</th>
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<td>Shadow Minister for Federal/State Relations,</td>
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CONTENTS

THURSDAY, 13 SEPTEMBER

Chamber
Questions to the Speaker—
  Privilege ...................................................................................................................... 1
Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2007—
  First Reading .................................................................................................................. 2
  Second Reading ................................................................................................................. 2
National Health Security Bill 2007—
  First Reading .................................................................................................................. 3
  Second Reading ................................................................................................................. 3
Crimes Legislation Amendment (Child Sex Tourism Offences and Related Measures)
Bill 2007—
  First Reading .................................................................................................................. 5
  Second Reading ................................................................................................................. 5
Financial Sector Legislation Amendment (Review of Prudential Decisions) Bill 2007—
  First Reading .................................................................................................................. 7
  Second Reading ................................................................................................................. 7
Tax Laws Amendment (2007 Measures No. 6) Bill 2007—
  First Reading .................................................................................................................. 9
  Second Reading ................................................................................................................. 9
Committees—
  Public Works Committee—Approval of Work................................................................. 10
  Family and Human Services Committee—
    Report ................................................................................................................................. 10
    Report: Referral to Main Committee ............................................................................. 10
Northern Territory National Emergency Response Amendment (Alcohol) Bill 2007—
  Second Reading ................................................................................................................ 11
  Consideration in Detail ..................................................................................................... 35
  Third Reading ..................................................................................................................... 42
Committees—
  Selection Committee—Amended Report ........................................................................ 42
Quarantine Amendment (Commission of Inquiry) Bill 2007—
  Second Reading ................................................................................................................ 45
Ministerial Arrangements ................................................................................................. 73
Questions Without Notice—
  Iraq ......................................................................................................................................... 73
  Employment ......................................................................................................................... 73
  Education ............................................................................................................................. 74
  Economy ............................................................................................................................. 74
  Hospitals ............................................................................................................................. 76
Distinguished Visitors ....................................................................................................... 78
Questions Without Notice—
  Regional Australia ........................................................................................................... 78
  Hospitals ............................................................................................................................. 79
  Climate Change .................................................................................................................. 80
  Climate Change .................................................................................................................. 81
  Iraq ........................................................................................................................................ 82
  Liberal Party: Leadership ................................................................................................. 84
  Health ................................................................................................................................. 84
  Liberal Party: Leadership ................................................................................................. 86
CONTENTS—continued

Workplace Relations........................................................................................................... 86
Liberal Party: Leadership ................................................................................................. 87
Education............................................................................................................................ 88
Liberal Party: Leadership ................................................................................................. 89
Australian Technical Colleges .......................................................................................... 89
Liberal Party: Leadership ................................................................................................. 90
Questions to the Speaker—
  Questions in Writing........................................................................................................ 91
Nuclear Facility Referendum............................................................................................... 91
Mr Brian Walshe ................................................................................................................ .. 91
Documents ...................................................................................................................... .. 92
Matters of Public Importance—
  Australia’s Future ........................................................................................................... 92
Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2007—
  Report from Main Committee ....................................................................................... 106
  Third Reading.................................................................................................................. 106
Australian Postal Corporation Amendment (Quarantine Inspection and Other Measures) Bill 2007—
  Report from Main Committee ....................................................................................... 106
  Third Reading.................................................................................................................. 106
Maritime Legislation Amendment Bill 2007,
Sydney Harbour Federation Trust Amendment Bill 2007,
International Trade Integrity Bill 2007,
International Tax Agreements Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2007,
Financial Sector Legislation Amendment (Discretionary Mutual Funds and Direct
Offshore Foreign Insurers) Bill 2007,
Corporations (National Guarantee Fund Levies) Amendment Bill 2007,
Financial Sector Legislation Amendment (Simplifying Regulation and Review) Bill 2007,
Product Stewardship (Oil) Amendment Bill 2007 and
Building and Construction Industry Improvement Amendment (OHS) Bill 2007—
  Returned from the Senate ............................................................................................... 107
National Health Amendment (Pharmaceutical Benefits) Bill 2007—
  First Reading .................................................................................................................. 107
Offshore Petroleum Amendment (Miscellaneous Measures) Bill 2007—
  First Reading .................................................................................................................. 107
Adjournment—
  Port Kembla .................................................................................................................. 107
  Launceston General Hospital ......................................................................................... 108
  Prospect Electorate: Services ......................................................................................... 110
  East Coast Freight Corridor ......................................................................................... 111
  Coburg Solar Village .................................................................................................... 112
  Murray Valley ................................................................................................................. 114
Requests For Detailed Information—
  Parliament House Security .......................................................................................... 115
Notices ............................................................................................................................... 115
Main Committee
Statements by Members—
  Housing Affordability ................................................................................................. 117
  Local Government ......................................................................................................... 118
  Banks Electorate ............................................................................................................ 118
CONTENTS—continued

Parkinson’s Australia ........................................................................................................ 119
Ministerial Responsibility .................................................................................................. 120
Flinders Electorate: Environment ...................................................................................... 121
Member for Moreton ......................................................................................................... 122
Member for Moreton Roads ............................................................................................... 123
Member for Moreton Education ........................................................................................ 123
Member for Moreton Broadband ...................................................................................... 124
Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2007—
  Second Reading ............................................................................................................. 125
Australian Postal Corporation Amendment (Quarantine Inspection and Other Measures)
  Bill 2007—
    Second Reading .......................................................................................................... 137
Committees—
  Transport and Regional Services Committee—Report ............................................... 141
  Health and Ageing Committee—Report ....................................................................... 148
Adjournment—
  Member for Franklin .................................................................................................... 158
  Dental Health .................................................................................................................. 158
  Mrs Rachael Williams Mount Whaleback Mine .............................................................. 158
  Skills Shortages Mount Whaleback Mine .................................................................... 160
  Federal Election ............................................................................................................. 163
  Banks Electorate: Talent Advancement Program ......................................................... 164
  Local Government ........................................................................................................ 166
Questions In Writing
  Climate Change—(Question No. 5035) ................................................................. 168
  Defence: Stationery—(Question No. 5179) .............................................................. 170
  Lowe Electorate: Income Tested Fees—(Question No. 6152) ................................. 171
  Defence Materiel Organisation—(Question No. 6263) ............................................. 171
The SPEAKER (Hon. David Hawker) took the chair at 9 am and read prayers.

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

Privilege

The SPEAKER (9.01 am)—Yesterday the member for Grayndler raised as a matter of privilege remarks made by the member for Moreton in the House on 11 September about an Australian Federal Police investigation of three Liberal Party members of the House from Queensland. The ability of members to be able to raise in the House matters that are of concern to them in a frank way is fundamental. However, it is recognised that the freedom of speech which members enjoy in the House should be exercised carefully and in conformity with the rules of the House, particularly with regard to criticisms of the character and conduct of individuals. The House has a specific procedure that allows a person who has been referred to in a debate in the House to make a submission claiming that he or she has been adversely affected by the remarks and to seek a response to be incorporated in the parliamentary record.

Having made those general comments about the conduct of debate and the use of freedom of speech, I see no issue of privilege in the matter referred to by the member for Grayndler. I also note there is a responsibility on members to ensure that only serious matters are raised as matters of privilege and that there is not a misuse of this very important form of the House.

Mr Albanese—Mr Speaker, are you suggesting that an attack on the Australian Federal Police is—

The SPEAKER—I say to the member for Grayndler that if he wishes to raise questions, this is not the appropriate time.
ongoing concern that we have had an attack on the integrity of the Australian Federal Police and that that is, in my strong view, a matter of privilege and it should be, as a minimum, referred to the Privileges Committee for—

The SPEAKER—I say to the member for Grayndler that I have dealt with this issue and I have stated there is no prima facie case.

HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2007
First Reading
Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Abbott.
Bill read a first time.

Second Reading
Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Minister for Health and Ageing) (9.05 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2007 will amend the Private Health Insurance Act 2007 and the National Health Act 1953.

The amendments to the Private Health Insurance Act 2007 are technical in nature and remedy some unintended consequences. Currently, a broad offence provision may have the unintended effect of penalising insurers who are offering some types of insurance products—for example, accident or disability insurance offered by a general insurer, or insurance cover such as overseas students’ health cover offered by private health insurers. To ensure that no-one is unfairly affected, the bill will narrow this offence provision so that it only covers complying health insurance products that are subject to the private health insurance rebate. The narrowing of this offence provision will be retrospective to 1 April 2007 when the act commenced.

The act currently provides that all the operational rules of a private health insurer are subject to improper discrimination requirements. However, it was only intended that these requirements apply to the core business of private health insurers—that is, complying health insurance products. The bill will provide that the improper discrimination requirements only apply to complying health insurance products.

Private health insurers can offer insurance cover to overseas visitors. The act currently allows private health insurers to offer this cover as part of their core health insurance business. From 1 July 2008, overseas visitors’ health cover is to become a general insurance product, and as such will be able to be offered by both private health and general insurers. In the period from 1 April 2007 to 30 June 2008, these overseas visitors’ health products are subject to other requirements usually only intended to apply to the core business of private health insurers—the offering of complying health insurance products. A transitional provision in this bill provides that private health insurers offering overseas visitors’ health cover will not be subject to the requirements of complying health insurance products. This amendment is proposed so that overseas visitors’ health cover does not have to be offered as a complying health insurance product and there is no offence for not offering this insurance in such a form.

The government’s original intention was to make the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority the regulator for this cover from July 2008. After consultation with APRA and the Private Health Insurance Administration Council, the government has now decided that from July 2008 overseas visitors’ cover offered by private health insurers will be regulated as health related business by the Private Health Insurance Administration Council. Cover provided by general insurers
will be regulated as general insurance business by APRA. This parallel approach will remove the potential for regulatory overlap and minimise the compliance burdens on health insurers who now offer the service, while not preventing potential new providers from entering the market. The government will make this arrangement permanent at the next opportunity.

There are special provisions in the act for overseas students’ health cover. These provisions are to encourage private health insurers to enter into a deed with the Commonwealth to ensure that there are sufficient offerings of insurance to overseas students, and some other specified temporary visa holders. Since the act commenced on 1 April 2007, insurers offering overseas students’ and specified temporary visa holders’ health cover have been subject to the Australian Prudential Regulatory Authority and Financial Services Reform Act 2001 requirements. To allow time for private health insurers to become compliant with these new regulatory requirements, the bill provides a period of grace until 1 July 2008.

The amendments to the National Health Act 1953 relate to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. On 1 August 2007, legislation came into effect which implemented a very significant package of reforms to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. These reforms put in place structural changes to the pricing of medicines that enable the Australian community to achieve better value from medicines that are already listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, while delivering long-term savings to support future listings of cost-effective medicines.

This bill will correct an unintended narrowing of subsection 103(2A) that occurred during the drafting process of the National Health Amendment (Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme) Bill 2007. The consequence of this is that pharmacists are now unable to substitute between brands of different pharmaceutical items that are flagged as equivalent in the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme Schedule, a practice that was provided for prior to the amendments. Narrowing this provision was not the intention of the reform legislation and the bill will restore the original intention of this provision. The bill also makes a number of consequential amendments to the act as a result of the correction of that provision.

The amendments in this bill rectify this unintended narrowing of meaning. The bill is another part of the continuing job of careful government, and I commend it to the House.

Debate (on motion by Ms Plibersek) adjourned.

NATIONAL HEALTH SECURITY BILL 2007

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Abbott.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Minister for Health and Ageing) (9.10 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to introduce the National Health Security Bill 2007. This is an important bill that delivers on the government’s ongoing commitment to enhance Australia’s capability to protect the health of the nation and to respond to naturally occurring epidemics or to terrorist attacks involving chemical, biological and radiological agents.

Since the 2004-05 federal budget, when $1.6 million was committed over three years to develop national health security legislation, the government has worked cooperatively with all relevant organisations, states and territories to develop legislative founda-
tions for the exchange of health information between jurisdictions.

The government's efforts were provided added impetus in May 2005, when Australia agreed to adopt the International Health Regulations. The regulations aim to prevent, protect against, control and provide a public health response to the international spread of disease in ways which avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade.

The bill before us addresses both the government's budget objective and Australia's treaty commitments by formalising and enhancing existing voluntary arrangements for sharing information about communicable disease, releases of chemical, biological or radiological agents, and the occurrence of other public health events of national significance.

Where it may be necessary to share personal information, for example to trace interstate contacts of people affected by notifiable diseases, the bill has been drafted to 'authorise' rather than 'compel' the exchange of information. This approach reflects existing cooperative arrangements. The circumstances in which such information can be exchanged are clearly defined and a range of protections have been included in the bill to ensure appropriate care in the holding and use of personal information.

The bill also authorises government to meet international obligations by, for example, enabling the provision of personal information to the World Health Organisation to respond to public health emergencies of international concern.

Personal information will also be able to be exchanged with other countries, for example, to assist the repatriation of Australian victims of overseas mass casualty incidents. While Australia has an outstanding record of response to horrific events such as the Bali bombings, we can always do more to improve systems, communication and ultimately our capacity to repatriate and treat victims of such incidents.

In addition to formalising and enhancing the mechanisms for the exchange of health information, the bill also implements recommendations of the COAG Hazardous Biological Materials Review to establish a national regulatory scheme to minimise the security risks posed by security-sensitive biological agents. These include infectious agents, such as bacteria and viruses that can spread rapidly within a population, and toxins derived from animals, plants or microbial material.

Currently, there is no nationally consistent legislation that covers all facilities and entities that handle security-sensitive biological agents. Indeed, it is not possible to accurately identify those facilities and entities that handle security-sensitive biological agents, or their location. This legislation addresses this risk by providing for the registration of entities handling security-sensitive biological agents and the ongoing regulation and monitoring of those registered facilities. The bill also requires entities to comply with biosafety standards relating to, for example, storage and security requirements for personnel and transport.

The proposed approach to the regulation of entities handling security-sensitive biological agents has been developed in consultation with affected agencies and all states and territories through the COAG review process.

The government recognises that, if we are to achieve an appropriate balance between ensuring protection of the public and also minimising the impost on business, then all affected parties must continue to be closely involved in the implementation of the regulatory regime. The bill therefore provides for
an 18-month implementation period prior to the regulatory scheme coming into effect. This provides an opportunity for the government to work with the sector to ensure that there is minimal regulatory burden and to implement a supporting education and awareness campaign for the new scheme.

I should briefly note that this bill is the first of a number addressing national health security issues. As agreed by COAG at its April 2007 meeting, further consideration is currently being given to legislation to enable coordinated national responses to health emergencies and mass casualty situations. I understand that this work between jurisdictions is progressing well. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Ms Plibersek) adjourned.

CRIMES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (CHILD SEX TOURISM OFFENCES AND RELATED MEASURES) BILL 2007

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Ruddock

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr RUDDOCK (Berowra—Attorney-General) (9.15 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The bill which I present today is one that all members of the parliament should support. The aim of the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Child Sex Tourism Offences and Related Measures) Bill 2007 is to ensure that sexual crimes against children committed by Australians overseas are the subject of a comprehensive and up-to-date suite of Commonwealth offences.

Child sex tourism, as a global industry, is recognised by the United Nations as ‘one of the worst contemporary forms of slavery’. Child sex tourism is a serious problem in many less developed countries. Many of these countries lack effective laws or, where laws are in place, the ability or willingness to enforce them.

Unfortunately, Australians play a large part in the child sex industry overseas, particularly in Asian and Pacific Island countries. In 1994, the Crimes Act 1914 was amended to introduce a regime of offences that target those people who engage in this type of conduct or help others to do so. Since their introduction, there have been more than 20 prosecutions against these provisions with approximately 15 convictions.

Child sex tourism offences

The existing child sex tourism offences in the Crimes Act cover a variety of conduct by Australian citizens or residents overseas, including engaging in sexual intercourse with a child, inducing a child to have sexual intercourse with a third person and participating in acts of indecency other than sexual intercourse with a child. Other behaviour captured includes acts done in or outside Australia with the intention of benefiting from, or encouraging, any form of the above offences.

The bill relocates the existing offences, currently located in part IIIA of the Crimes Act, to chapter 8 of the Criminal Code. The provisions have been redrafted to reflect the approach taken in the code and current drafting practices.

New measures contained in the bill fill gaps in the current legislative regime and will enhance Australia’s existing child sex tourism regime by creating new grooming, procuring and preparatory offences. These offences are essentially preventative in nature. Their purpose is to give law enforcement agencies and prosecutors the mandate to take action before any child is harmed.
The new grooming and procuring offences are directed against people who are actively engaging with children in ways that will make them more likely to participate in sexual activity. Grooming can include a wide range of behaviour including conduct that encourages a child to believe they have romantic feelings for the adult or desensitising the child to the thought of engaging in sexual activity with the adult. Procuring a person to engage in sexual activity includes encouraging, enticing, recruiting or inducing (whether by threat, promises or otherwise) in relation to that activity. The procuring offences would apply, for example, where a person offered money to a child to engage in sexual acts or promised them some other form of benefit.

The bill will also add new preparatory offences to the child sex tourism regime. The offences are intended to capture a wide range of preparatory conduct that occurs with the intention of preparing or planning to commit an offence involving sexual conduct with a child overseas. Such conduct could include activities such as arranging travel and making a hotel reservation in a well known child sex tourism destination, so long as this behaviour can be linked to an intention to commit an offence against the child sex tourism regime.

The bill will also make changes to a number of penalties with the aim of ensuring consistency in penalties for like offences across the Criminal Code. As a result, offences involving:

- sexual intercourse with a child would carry a penalty of 17 years imprisonment
- sexual conduct with a child would carry a penalty of 15 years imprisonment
- procuring a child would carry a penalty of 15 years imprisonment, and
- grooming a child would carry a penalty of 12 years imprisonment.

**Offences involving child pornography material or child abuse material overseas**

The bill introduces new offences making it illegal for Australian citizens and residents to deal with child pornography or child abuse material while overseas. Behaviour relating to child pornography or child abuse material in Australia is currently outlawed by a comprehensive regime of Commonwealth, state and territory offences. The new offences will ensure that the same conduct by Australians overseas is also captured, and will complement the child sex tourism offences.

Under the new provisions, a person will be guilty of an offence if he or she possesses, controls, produces, distributes or obtains child pornography or child abuse material outside Australia. The person will be subject to a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment. This penalty is consistent with penalties in state and territory offences relating to similar conduct in Australia.

In line with the child sex tourism provisions, these new offences are intended to fill the gap where a foreign country either has no specific laws dealing with this behaviour or is unable or unwilling to prosecute persons who engage in such behaviour. They will prevent Australian citizens or residents from travelling overseas to collect, produce or distribute child pornography or child abuse material in countries where such material is not illegal or where laws are not enforced. Individuals will no longer be able to avoid prosecution for such behaviour.

Under the proposed scheme, legitimate dealings in such material—for example, for law enforcement purposes—would be protected.
Forfeiture

The bill inserts new provisions to provide for the forfeiture of child pornography and child abuse material and any article containing such material, such as a computer or CD ROM, used in the commission of specified sexual offences against children. The provisions provide for the making of a forfeiture order by a court, either, automatically upon a finding of guilt for a Commonwealth sex offence or on application by a constable or prosecutor, where the court is satisfied on the balance of probabilities that such an offence had been committed. Once forfeited, the material or article becomes the property of the Commonwealth and can be destroyed.

Conclusion

The Australian government is committed to protecting children from the threat of sexual abuse. The measures contained in the bill will result in a strengthened child sex tourism regime and send a strong message to Australians contemplating such behaviour overseas. The measures also complement the government’s current initiatives with respect to the protection of Indigenous children in the Northern Territory and the protection of Australian families online. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Ms Plibersek) adjourned.

FINANCIAL SECTOR LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (REVIEW OF PRUDENTIAL DECISIONS) BILL 2007

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Dutton.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr DUTTON (Dickson—Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer) (9.22 am)—I move: That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill introduces measures to enhance the mechanisms for reviewing prudential decisions under financial sector legislation. It builds on the government’s efforts to simplify regulation of the financial sector, while ensuring that the broader objectives of prudential regulation are met.

The report of the Taskforce on Reducing Regulatory Burdens on Business, Rethinking regulation, found that ‘Australia’s financial and corporate sectors, and the associated regulatory structures, are highly regarded internationally’ but that there was scope to improve the regulatory framework in some areas.

The government accepted all the recommendations in Rethinking regulation relevant to prudential regulation. However, there were a number of issues on which the government decided to undertake further public consultation and these have been included as measures in this bill.

The measures will ensure that the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (or APRA) is able to act decisively to address risks in the financial system, while ensuring that individuals and entities have appropriate recourse to review of the regulator’s decisions. In doing so, the measures also continue the government’s process of refining and updating the prudential acts to make them more consistent with each other and with related legislation, such as the Corporations Act 2001.

Court power of disqualification

Schedule 1 to this bill amends the Banking Act 1959, the Insurance Act 1973, the Life Insurance Act 1995, the Retirement Savings Accounts Act 1997 and the Superannuation Industry (Supervision) Act 1995 to introduce a court based process for the disqualification of individuals from responsible officer roles with APRA-regulated entities.
This measure will replace the current administrative approach to disqualification, involving a determination by APRA, with a court-based process similar to that followed by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission under the Corporations Act. A court-based process will improve the transparency of the disqualification regime.

The disqualification regime will apply to all responsible persons across all prudentially regulated industries. This measure will give the court the flexibility to specify relevant aspects of a disqualification, including the period of disqualification and the types of positions the disqualified person is banned from holding. The court would also have the power to vary or revoke a disqualification.

The Australian Taxation Office will retain the power to disqualify people in relation to self-managed superannuation funds, due to the different regulatory environment to that of the larger, APRA-regulated entities.

**Direction powers**

Schedule 2 to this bill amends the prudential acts to clarify APRA’s powers to issue directions to regulated entities to address prudential issues.

This measure will introduce a general and more consistent direction power into the prudential acts. It will consolidate APRA’s direction powers under each of the acts, reducing complexity and providing greater certainty as to the scope of APRA’s powers. It will also clarify the reviewability of APRA directions while ensuring that APRA is able to act decisively where financial interests or the stability of the financial system are at risk.

**Removal of ministerial consent**

Schedule 3 to this bill amends the prudential acts to remove the requirement for ministerial consent for certain APRA decisions which do not involve broader policy issues.

These measures implement the government’s response to recommendation 22 of the HIH Royal Commission report, to remove ministerial consent from APRA decisions where these did not involve wider policy issues and enhance the operational independence of the regulator. The measures will also be consistent with the recommendation of the IMF in its *Financial system stability assessment of Australia* to establish clearly the independence of APRA.

Certain ministerial powers under these acts are to be retained, such as in relation to decisions where ministerial involvement is considered to be a more appropriate review mechanism than the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. These relate to national interest matters and where broader policy considerations are involved.

**Review of decisions**

Schedule 4 to this bill amends the prudential acts to expand the availability of merits review for decisions by APRA and the ATO.

These measures implement the government’s response to recommendation 5.7 of *Rethinking regulation* and recommendation 23 of the HIH Royal Commission report with respect to ensuring that APRA administrative decisions are subject to administrative review on their merits. These measures have been developed consistent with guidelines established by the Administrative Review Council.

In applying merits review to the regulator’s decisions, the government is also aiming to ensure that merits review does not unintentionally constrain the regulator from taking prompt and decisive action to deal with prudential concerns. This is consistent with a recommendation by the IMF in its *Financial system stability assessment of Australia*.

In particular, certain directions issued by APRA would be subject to merits review.
unless they are given on a limited set of prescribed grounds.

Merits review is to be available to all decisions which affect natural persons and to administrative decisions which affect a particular person.

The measures will improve the transparency and accountability of APRA and the ATO in their decision-making.

Conclusion

The measures in this bill ensure that APRA has appropriate independence and accountability. They also ensure, where the prudential acts are being altered to provide greater independence or accountability, that APRA's ability to undertake its functions as prudential regulator is maintained.

There is support within the industry for these measures. The measures have been subject to extensive consultation through the release of a proposals paper and a further detailed consultation paper. The government has listened to the views of the industry and, as a result of the consultation process, revisions were made to the detail of the proposals to provide greater certainty and clarity in regulation for business.

Full details of the amendments are contained in the explanatory memorandum. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate (on motion by Ms Plibersek) adjourned.

TAX LAWS AMENDMENT (2007 MEASURES No. 6) BILL 2007

First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Dutton.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr DUTTON (Dickson—Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer) (9.29 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill makes numerous improvements to Australia’s tax laws.

Schedule 1 provides a concession for the costs of establishing a carbon sink forest. This measure will encourage the establishment of carbon sink forests and, in turn, make an important contribution to carbon sequestration and deliver natural resource management benefits. Establishment costs will be immediately deductible for trees established in carbon sink forests in the 2007-08 to 2011-12 income years inclusive. After this initial period, establishment costs will be deductible over 14 years and 105 days at a rate of seven per cent per annum.

To be eligible for the deduction, the taxpayer must be carrying on a business and the carbon sink forest must meet environmental and natural resource management guidelines.

Separately to this bill, it is important to highlight that the government is developing standards for robust and transparent offsets to be accredited for use in the Australian emissions trading system. A discussion paper on incentives for abatement, including carbon offsets, will be issued in September 2007.

Schedule 2 provides tax-free grants under the Tobacco Growers Adjustment Assistance program 2006 to tobacco growers who undertake to exit all agricultural enterprises for at least five years. The grants are being paid following the loss of a market in Australia for domestically grown tobacco. This measure assists tobacco growers to adjust to the fundamental change in their market and to develop alternative businesses.

Schedule 3 amends the list of deductible gift recipients in the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997. Deductible gift recipient status will assist the listed organisations to attract public support for their worthy activities.
Schedule 4 makes minor technical amendments to the early withdrawal provisions to the farm management deposits scheme. The changes will align the tax law with the current practice for declaring either all primary producers in a geographical area, or specified primary producers within a geographical area, to be in exceptional circumstances. This amendment will improve the farm management deposit scheme by ensuring that all primary producers, who are eligible for early withdrawal due to exceptional circumstances, will retain the tax benefits.

Full details of the measures in this bill are contained in the explanatory memorandum.

Debate (on motion by Ms Plibersek) adjourned.

COMMITTEES
Public Works Committee
Approval of Work

Mr LINDSAY (Herbert—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence) (9.32 am)—I move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, it is expedient to carry out the following proposed work which was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works and on which the committee has duly reported to Parliament: Fit-out of new leased premises for the Australian Customs Service, Brisbane, Queensland.

The Australian Customs Service is seeking to relocate from its existing Brisbane headquarters building shortly before the end of its current lease that expires on 30 June 2009. The Australian Customs Service proposes to undertake a fit-out, at a cost of $15.84 million, inclusive of GST, of new leased premises at The Circuit, Brisbane Airport, Queensland. In its report, the Public Works Committee has recommended that the proposed works should proceed. Subject to parliamentary approval, the building is planned to commence in October 2007 with completion in December 2008. The fit-out procurement process could begin during the period September to November 2008. The Australian Customs Service anticipates occupying the building from January 2009 to complete the fit-out and will then occupy the building progressively from May 2009.

I would like to thank my DLO, Kris Mitchell, for her help in preparing this and speeding this through the parliament and, on behalf of the government, I would like to thank the committee for its support. I commend the motion to the House.

Question agreed to.

Family and Human Services Committee
Report

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (9.34 am)—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, I present the committee’s report, incorporating a dissenting report, entitled The winnable war on drugs: the impact of illicit drug use on families, together with the minutes of proceedings.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)—Does the member for Mackellar wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a future occasion?

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (9.34 am)—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.

Report: Referral to Main Committee

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (9.35 am)—I move:
That the order of the day be referred to the Main Committee for debate.

Question agreed to.

NORTHERN TERRITORY NATIONAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE AMENDMENT (ALCOHOL) BILL 2007

Consideration resumed from 12 September.

Explanatory memorandum presented by Mr Brough.

Second Reading

Mr BROUGH (Longman—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs) (9.35 am)—I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill makes minor amendments to consolidate the alcohol measures that are a key part of the government’s recent legislation to protect Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory.

These adjustments will make the alcohol provisions as practical as possible, particularly for people in the industry working with the government in this vital area.

First, the trigger for licensees seeking and recording details of takeaway alcohol sales (currently a sale of 1,350 millilitres of pure alcohol) will be replaced with a trigger of a quantity of alcohol with a purchase price of $100 or more (including GST), or a quantity of either cask or flagon wine that exceeds five litres. The change was put forward by the liquor industry to simplify the way the threshold was calculated.

The new formulation will still capture the vast majority of larger purchases over 1,350 millilitres, but will be quicker and easier for takeaway staff to apply, and easier for customers to understand.

The intent and effect is the same—stemming the flow of alcohol into remote Aboriginal communities by tracking large purchases to help us locate and prosecute grog runners.

Second, the bill will allow more flexibility for liquor licensees required to store records of takeaway alcohol sales. The legislation currently requires a licensee to keep these records for at least three years, and produce them to an inspector upon demand made on or at the licensed premises.

As a practical solution to a simple onsite storage problem for some licensees, it will now be possible for a licensee to store these records at a location directed by the Northern Territory Licensing Commission and still be considered to meet their obligations under the legislation.

Third, the bill will add new defences to an offence applying under the alcohol bans. Visitors to national and Northern Territory parks will be able to take alcohol into a prescribed area in the park if it is to be consumed in a responsible way as part of recreational activities undertaken with a tourist operator, consistent with any management plan or similar document that may be in place for the park.

The bill also provides some incentives for communities to work towards their own sustainable alcohol management plans. It will allow the alcohol measures to be “turned off” in relation to a particular prescribed area or part thereof. For example, if a particular community demonstrates that it has developed appropriate alcohol management measures, and is winning the battle with alcohol, it may be desirable to stop applying the alcohol bans in that area. The Commonwealth minister would make that decision after seeking advice from the Northern Territory emergency response taskforce.
These consolidation measures have been developed in consultation and in conjunction with industry and demonstrate our willingness to make adjustments while ensuring that the intent of the legislation, which is to protect these communities from violence, can be realised. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga) (9.39 am)—Federal Labor gave bipartisan support for measures to tackle child abuse in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory when they were announced in late June. Our in-principle support was given because of the chronicle of abuse that Pat Anderson and Rex Wild detailed in their report into the protection of Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory from sexual abuse. We knew that this compelled action, as did the litany of reports that preceded the Little children are sacred report. We believe that lamenting that action should have been taken sooner did not lessen the imperative to act now and nor is the reality that child abuse occurs in all communities a reason to sit on our hands in the face of this report.

Over the last decade, all sides of politics have failed to ensure children’s safety in Aboriginal communities. As I said before, in considering our response to the intervention, Labor articulated a simple test for assessing government proposals: will it improve the safety and security of our children in a practical way? We applied that test to the last legislative package and decided on balance to give our support. We noted after consideration of the details of those bills that they were deficient in many ways, so the opposition moved several amendments to strengthen the legislation. We moved amendments to make sure that just terms compensation is paid in instances of land acquisition; to enable access for traditional purposes to land acquired through the five-year township leasing arrangements; to protect children by retaining and strengthening the land permit system in the Northern Territory; to allow journalists and government agents such as doctors to enter Indigenous communities without permits; to introduce the capacity to review aspects of the legislation after 12 months, including the effectiveness of the township leases and the quarantining of welfare payments, which was specific to the Northern Territory; and, finally and very importantly, to clarify that these changes in the intervention are special measures under the Racial Discrimination Act and we sought to delete the exclusions of the Racial Discrimination Act. Unfortunately, the government did not accept any of these amendments and did not see any of them as useful to the legislation.

Just a few weeks later, we are now in the next sitting of the parliament and the government is treating the public and the opposition in the same arrogant way that it did with the first package of legislation. It is rushing the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Amendment (Alcohol) Bill 2007 into the parliament with no time for proper consideration. Despite these incredibly short time frames, the opposition has, once again, applied the same test as to whether or not these amendments will help in a practical way to protect children from abuse. The amendments before us today are aimed at stopping sly grog runners—at stopping the flow of alcohol into communities—which is, as we know, critical to protecting children from alcohol-fuelled abuse. In this task of protecting children, the government has our support so we will support this bill. However, at this point I move the following second reading amendment:

That all words after “That” be omitted with a view to substituting the following words: “whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading, the House notes that:”
(1) the Little Children Are Sacred report highlighted the link between alcohol and child sexual abuse;
(2) measures must target the supply of alcohol, especially by grog runners, and do so in a way that is workable and effective;
(3) supply measures should not be arbitrary, nor penalise those who consume alcohol responsibly and they should not place unnecessary burdens on either retailers or consumers;
(4) measures dealing with consumption of alcohol in parks should not penalise responsible visitors who are there for legitimate recreational or tourism purposes;
(5) Commonwealth measures should work in conjunction with local community alcohol management plans including those declaring dry areas;
(6) the further development of agreed supply side measures with the Northern Territory Government, communities and the liquor industry in the Northern Territory are vital to reducing alcohol consumption and addressing alcohol abuse; and
(7) improved access to rehabilitation services is necessary to help individuals to overcome alcohol abuse".

We hold reservations about the workability of the provisions before us today. The reason we have the bill in front of us today is that a number of the changes that the government sought to introduce in the intervention just a month or so ago have already been found to be unworkable. We continue to have concerns about workability and in essence that is what our second reading amendment addresses.

We strongly supported the measures in the intervention legislation, designed to stop the rivers of grog flowing into and around Aboriginal communities. We know that the scourge of grog is well documented. There have been so many inquiries conducted into family violence and child abuse that consistently identify alcohol as a major contributing factor to family violence. The Anderson-Wild report, for example, noted:

... there has been inadequate restriction of the ‘sly grog’ trade, where alcohol is brought in illegally to Indigenous communities by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, exacerbating the alcohol problem, and consequently violence in the communities ...

The report recommended:

That, as a matter of urgency, the government makes greater efforts to reduce access to takeaway liquor in the Northern Territory, enhance the responsible use of takeaway liquor, restrict the flow of alcohol into Aboriginal communities and support Aboriginal community efforts to deal with issues relating to alcohol.

Alcohol can facilitate or incite violence by providing a socially acceptable excuse for negative behaviour. It can also, and does, act as a disinhibitor, allowing people to do things that they would not normally do when sober. Grog cultures can and do develop a force of their own, perpetuating disastrous cycles for communities. Alcohol control is critical to achieving community stability. Many Aboriginal communities recognise this and have taken action in the past to declare their towns dry, but it is very clear from experience that these are not easy solutions.

I am sad to say that this experience has been brought home again to all of us around Australia today. Just two months after the national intervention into the Northern Territory, we are seeing one small community in the Northern Territory—and this is just one reported today; I fear that there are many others—demonstrating the terrible suffering that is going on. A report in today’s Australian reveals what is happening on the ground in Titjikala, a community which I visited just in July. The article is headed ‘Lack of police fuels grog violence’. Here we are two months after the intervention and Titjikala has no police—there is no police presence in Titjikala; the police are located some time
away from that small community. As the article in the *Australian* today says:

In an unintended result of the Howard intervention in indigenous affairs, violence and alcohol abuse has been imported to the few aboriginal communities without police.

Titjikala, 120 km south of Alice Springs—
I think the member for Lingiari will tell me it is south-east—
has become the drinking centre of central Australia—
this is one of the effects of what is going on—
and the crime statistics of the past three weeks—
and we’re not talking about the past 10 years; we’re talking about the past three weeks—
have been dominated by violent acts from drunken visitors.

Centrelink was forced to remove its staff last week, and a senior woman artist was stabbed in the head, although the injuries were not life-threatening.

Obviously, that her injuries were not life-threatening is something we are very glad about. The article goes on:

The week before, the community’s nursing staff was attacked and a group of drunken women rolled their car, seriously injuring one of them.

Community chairwoman Lena Campbell said residents were living in a drunken tinderbox.

‘Other communities have police and we don’t, and we have more visitors out here,’ she said.

‘They know where to come and celebrate because we don’t have police.’

Because Titjikala is on less than 2sq km of land, unlike other communities with large alcohol exclusion areas, people can drink legally close to the community.

The article goes on to say that grog fuelled weekends disrupt children’s sleep and cause poor school attendance, and that what the community wants is a permanent police presence. Of course, that is what this government has promised to these communities. Yet, again, we have a demonstration that that is not being delivered. The Titjikala council’s chief executive officer, Harry Scott, told the *Australian*:

‘When the police are present, and stay overnight, everything quietens down. When the police leave, the cars are driving out behind them to purchase more grog’...

Stopping alcohol abuse and related violence needs a police presence as well as alcohol controls. And another area which has received far too little attention as part of this intervention is that we need significant investment in rehabilitation services.

The Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act, passed by the parliament just a month ago, set out a new liquor licensing regime for the Territory. The act created new offences with harsher penalties aimed at sly grog runners and new restrictions on takeaway sales of alcohol. The amendments presented here today change these new arrangements in several ways. Specifically, the bill changes the 1,350 millilitre trigger for seeking and recording details in relation to takeaway alcohol, and sets a new trigger of purchases of over $100 or the sale of wine exceeding five litres in a single container or two or more two-litre containers. The government have recognised that their previous position was unworkable. Requirements for storage of records of takeaway purchases are changed in this bill, so that the records can be stored at the direction of the licensing commission, with the implication being that the commission can regularly collect and store the records on the licensee’s behalf. Previously, the licensee had to store the records themselves.

The bill provides certain exemptions to the alcohol offences in relation to tourism operations in national parks, Northern Territory parks and other areas declared by the
Commonwealth minister. There is now a defence if a person is engaged in recreational activities in a park that have been organised by a person in the tourist industry and that are consistent with any park management plan and the person is behaving in a responsible manner. The bill also provides that the alcohol measures can be determined not to apply in a particular area if warranted—for example, where comprehensive and effective alcohol management measures are implemented—and the bill makes clear that no past or future Northern Territory legislation undermines the emergency response alcohol measures.

The change from the volumetric alcohol measure to a dollar-value purchase, with an exception for wine casks, does make practical sense, because the potential problems of the government’s original proposal were highlighted almost immediately as unworkable. A submission to the Senate inquiry on the intervention from Woolworths expressed concern about the difficulty involved in calculating the volume of alcoholic beverages which equates to 1,350 millilitres of pure alcohol. The government members’ report from the inquiry noted this problem and recommended explanatory material to assist people to understand what is meant in practical terms by the phrase ‘a quantity of alcohol greater than 1,350 millilitres’.

Clearly, the government felt that, for the measures to succeed in stopping bulk purchasing of takeaway alcohol by problem drinkers and by grog runners, change was needed. Controls are absolutely meaningless unless they can be effectively administered. The proposed changes certainly make more sense than the completely unworkable 1,350 millilitres alcohol trigger that the government advocated just three weeks ago. Nevertheless, we remain concerned that the package of alcohol restriction measures will not work. We are concerned that we still have a number of measures that are unworkable and so we will be very carefully monitoring the impact of these changes. One hundred dollars in a single transaction is still a considerable sum of money, and multiple transactions at different outlets could get around this measure.

The NPY Women’s Council told the Senate inquiry that the availability of alcohol through outlets in Indigenous communities was only part of the problem. The supply of alcohol from the major towns in the Northern Territory also, of course, presents a significant issue. So the opposition certainly hopes that these measures will help to stop the sly grog runners but, as I said, we remain concerned about their workability.

The submission to the inquiry from the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation noted that the ready availability of alcohol in centres located close to Indigenous communities can undermine the effectiveness of prohibition measures and, to quote their submission: The majority of illegal drugs and alcohol are brought in by road during the dry season. By opening the roads and townships, there is significant evidence to suggest that these problems will be exacerbated. Another impact of prohibition experienced by Maningrida was an outmigration of residents to Darwin. This had the effect of significantly disrupting local employment outcomes, family structures and also resulted in a number of alcohol related deaths in Darwin.

So we do remain concerned that a number of elements of the emergency response will undermine attempts at stopping sly groggers. In particular, as I noted when I spoke on the main legislation a few weeks ago, Labor was concerned, and remains concerned, that removing the permit system will increase the capacity for sly grog runners to enter communities.

In their submission to the Senate inquiry, the Police Federation of Australia said that:
Operational police on the ground in the Northern Territory believe that the permit system is a useful tool in policing the communities, particularly in policing alcohol and drug-related crime. It would be most unfortunate if by opening up the permit system in the larger public townships and the connecting road corridors as the Government intends, law enforcement efforts to address the ‘rivers of grog’, the distribution of pornography, and the drug running and petrol sniffing were made more difficult.

That is why Labor opposed the removal of the permit system in towns and roads in Aboriginal communities, because removing the permit system will make it harder to continue the task of protecting children.

The tourism industry in the Northern Territory does have the capacity to benefit local Aboriginal communities by being a very important catalyst for greater economic development. However, concern has been expressed that the alcohol controls could have adverse consequences for the tourism industry. The Northern Territory government has said that the restrictions will have a great impact on the Territory’s tourism industry, and that the measures were not addressing the intent of the legislation—dealing with problem drinkers. The Commonwealth government’s intervention into Aboriginal communities has targeted the supply of alcohol through sly grog runners, and this is what has Labor’s very strong support.

If we are successful at the coming election, Labor will work closely with the Northern Territory government to review the impact of these laws to make sure that they are effective in delivering the outcomes for which they were intended. We will also work with the Northern Territory government to review the impact of takeaway outlet hours and locations on problem drinking in many parts of the Territory. The Northern Territory government’s response to the Anderson-Wild report includes: recruiting additional alcohol compliance inspectors and court clinicians; implementing a licensing identification system across the Territory; implementing regional alcohol management strategies; and implementing an alcohol education program.

In addition to addressing alcohol supply, as I said before, more needs to be done on the demand side, such as alcohol rehabilitation and diversionary programs, particularly for young people. Sobering-up shelters are a safe and appropriate accommodation option for people when they are drunk. They reduce the immediate risk of harm, both to the people who are drunk and to others. Shelters can also help to mediate the impact of public drinking on families and the local community. There are about 20,000 admissions to sobering-up shelters in the Northern Territory each year, and there is significant demand for expansion.

In relation to alcohol rehabilitation, existing services need their capacity increased to cater for the many clients who need access to rehabilitation. They need to be open for more hours, including into the night. They must also have access to specialist drug and alcohol counsellors. Alcohol abuse is often a group activity and many of these rehabilitation services need to be conducted in family or peer groups to make them effective, not just with the individual alone.

We also know that halfway houses can help people after the rehabilitation phase to integrate back into normal life with stable work and a healthy place to live. These homes should work with peers and aim to replace group drinking culture with a culture of work and self-respect. To be effective, rehabilitation programs do need to be linked to transitional aftercare. It is counterproductive to have environments without activities for those completing rehabilitation.

The Katherine City Council told the Senate inquiry:
There are no activities there for those people, and when they are released from rehabilitation they are dumped in the main street of Katherine, where there are four liquor outlets.

This was a very succinct way of demonstrating the critical importance of rehabilitation and treatment services and then the follow-up activities that are needed. We also require rehabilitation programs for offenders of alcohol related crime. In 2005-06, 71 per cent of the total prison intake in the Territory was alcohol related, and a vast majority of those people were Aboriginal. Yet there is a clear absence of prison based and post-release programs to direct these individuals into training and work—and not back into alcohol. When they are released from prison, unfortunately many of these people fall back into their bad drinking habits.

Positive youth programs are another essential component to directing young people away from grog and drugs. Of course, that means we need to be able to offer them active and healthy alternatives. Youth diversionary programs were vital to the success of the petrol-sniffing program. We have seen the introduction of Opal, which has been very helpful, but the additional youth programs that have helped those addicted to petrol sniffing have helped those young people turn their lives around. The same applies to alcohol. Programs that reinforce positive culture are a particularly powerful way to re-engage at-risk youth and connect them to training and employment.

In the appropriations for the national intervention in the Northern Territory, the Commonwealth committed $16.2 million to child care, early childhood services and alcohol diversionary programs to support young people aged between 12 and 18 living in remote communities. Unfortunately, though, we have had a very low level of detail provided about the programs being rolled out. For example, we do not know and the public does not know how much of this money will be spent on alcohol diversionary programs. It would be very helpful if the minister could let people know how much will be spent specifically on alcohol diversionary programs as part of the intervention. It is very important for the success of the intervention.

In June 2006, during the Intergovernmental Summit on Family Violence in Indigenous Communities, the Commonwealth government committed $49.3 million for drug and alcohol services in regional and remote Indigenous communities across three states and the Northern Territory. Once again, we do not know how much of this money has been allocated to the Northern Territory. It would be helpful for that to be publicly known. We understand that this money, even though it was committed in 2006, was not released by the Commonwealth until August 2007. Once again I would ask the minister to let the parliament and the public know how much of this $49 million has now been spent. The delay is absolutely unacceptable, particularly when you look at the horrific circumstances happening in just one small community like Titjikala. We need this funding to be allocated urgently. We need additional police, additional rehabilitation services and youth programs to address the horrific level of alcohol abuse and violence that is still taking place.

Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory need a long-term commitment to their future from all levels of government and all sides of politics. So far, unfortunately, we have only seen the government commit funding to the Northern Territory emergency measures for one year. The Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs told the Senate inquiry that there is simply no money for any programs beyond the end of June next year. We do not know if that remains the case—whether all
of these things that are about to be started will in fact end in June next year or whether the government does intend to make a long-term commitment. What Aboriginal children and their parents and extended families deserve to know is: what is the long-term commitment to their children’s education, to their health, to their safety, to alcohol treatment and control services and to police? What is the long-term commitment to additional police in the Northern Territory beyond June next year?

We on this side of the parliament have a long-term commitment to improving the lives of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory and in other parts of Australia. There is no question that tackling the alcohol problem is a necessary initial step, but it is going to be an ongoing challenge; it is not going to be fixed by June next year. Much more is necessary. The Anderson-Wild report said that the cycle of alcohol dependency, of having the pursuit of alcohol as the reason for living, has to be broken. That is just so true. A resident in a western Top End community told the Anderson-Wild inquiry:

At present people are living to pursue grog so they can forget why they are living.

We need to give people more. We need to rebuild the social and economic infrastructure in Aboriginal communities, to change destructive behaviour and provide positive pathways. It is dehumanising for Indigenous people to be talked about as just a problem, instead of recognising their strengths. There are many Indigenous people in the Northern Territory and in other parts of Australia who are taking control of their lives and their communities. We see great strengths in many communities—in the arts, in schools, in sport and local businesses. We know that there are many resilient people who know that change is achievable.

That is why on this side of the parliament we do stand looking forward, wanting to work with Indigenous people to turn the fresh ideas that we have and that they have into real change and, in particular, economic development. Each and every one of us has to take responsibility for improving the lives of Indigenous Australians—to close the shocking health gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, to provide the economic services to give children a real start in life and, most importantly in my view, to deliver employment and economic development. All of these things are necessary to enable Indigenous children to grow up safe, healthy and happy.

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

Mr Snowdon—I second the amendment and reserve my right to speak.

Mr TOLLNER (Solomon) (10.08 am)—I am pleased to speak today to the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Amendment (Alcohol) Bill 2007 because it addresses one of the central causes of violence in Aboriginal communities—alcohol abuse. Let me, for a moment, put the bill into context. On 21 June this year the Prime Minister and the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs announced national emergency measures to protect Aboriginal children in the Territory from abuse and give them a better and safer future. These measures are being introduced in response to the national emergency confronting the welfare of Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory. The immediate nature of the response reflects the first recommendation of the Little children are sacred report from the NT Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse. The report recommended that Aboriginal child sexual abuse in the Northern Territory be designated as an issue of urgent
national significance by both the Australian and Northern Territory governments.

The report made it clear that child abuse in the Territory’s Aboriginal community was at crisis levels. The Australian government announced immediate, broad-ranging measures to protect children, stabilise communities, normalise services and infrastructure and provide longer term support to build better communities. Central to this strategy are the new alcohol restrictions which will come into effect in the Northern Territory this Saturday, 15 September. They are part of the federal government’s response to child abuse in Aboriginal communities. But we are not imposing blanket bans across the Territory. Our approach is both focused and measured. The government has legislated to ban alcohol in prescribed areas of the Territory—on freehold land held by a land trust under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976, community living areas, in all town camps and other designated areas. It will restrict the amount of alcohol brought into communities through new requirements for takeaway sales across the Top End and in Central Australia. These measures are essential if we are to stem the flow of alcohol that has been destroying Aboriginal communities and putting children at risk.

The bill before us today makes amendments to consolidate the alcohol measures in the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act. The bill changes the 1,350-millilitre trigger for seeking and recording details in relation to takeaway alcohol sales to reduce the complexity of that provision. It makes changes to clarify the storage of records of takeaway purchases. It provides certain exceptions to the alcohol offences in relation to tourism operations in parks and other areas if declared. It provides for the alcohol measures to be determined not to apply in a particular area if warranted, for example, where comprehensive and effective local alcohol management measures are implemented. And it makes it clear that no past or future Northern Territory legislation undermines the emergency response alcohol measures.

Under the new legislation, there will be penalties for anyone possessing, transporting or drinking alcohol in these areas, and heavier penalties if people are found to be running alcohol into these places. Fines imposed can range from $1,100 for personal infringements and up to $74,000 for trafficking. The new measures for alcohol takeaways across the Territory will not unduly inconvenience Territorians going about their business or engaging in leisure activities. They are aimed squarely at the grog runners who are profiting from the misery they inflict on Aboriginal communities.

We are not throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The bill reflects the recent discussions the federal government has had with the tourism and liquor industries and the concerns they expressed about the alcohol measures. On this note I would particularly like to thank Mick Burns and Doug Sallis of the Northern Territory Australian Hotels Association for the counsel they provided to me and for their assistance in refining this legislation.

The provisions of the bill do not apply if you drink, possess or transport alcohol while engaged in a recreational activity with a tourist operator in a national park or Northern Territory park, although special arrangements will be put in place at Uluru. Nor do the provisions affect people who are travelling through a prescribed area to a destination outside that area and who have unopened alcohol with them. But anyone who buys large amounts of takeaway alcohol will need to show photo identification, have their addresses recorded and declare where the alcohol will be consumed. While this may be
inconvenient at times, it will assist the authorities to track down and prosecute grog runners. This will involve purchases of $100 or more or if more than five litres of cask or flagon wine is purchased.

The bill reflects some of these community concerns, and the changes made will make the law less complex and easier to understand while at the same time protecting children. The bill will help turn off the ‘rivers of grog’ that are destroying so many Aboriginal communities in the Territory. Alcohol abuse was identified as a major problem in the Little children are sacred report, where it was described as the ‘gravest and fastest growing threat to the safety of Aboriginal children’.

Under this bill some licensed premises or clubs in communities will be allowed to operate but only if they have strict local alcohol management rules and do not allow takeaways. In the prescribed areas covered by the emergency response, people will be banned from having, selling, transporting and drinking alcohol. But the toughest penalties are imposed on those selling alcohol. A licensee faces a maximum fine of $37,400 while employees of the licensee face a maximum fine of $6,600 for noncompliance with these new laws.

Of course, we should recognise that our long-term goal is to teach people to live responsibly with alcohol. Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory should be treated the same as all Australians, and eventually that needs to happen. An important thing to remember is that the current legislation allows the minister to terminate the measures at any time. It is expected that measures may only be in place for some six months, subject to review. But they are there to help stabilise communities and give them a chance to recover.

Drug and alcohol teams will operate in regional centres across the Northern Territory to respond to community need as the alcohol bans are enforced. They will help with alcohol withdrawal, family support and linkages to healthcare services. I commend the work of the police, nurses, doctors and administrators, and that of the task force, but the job ahead—breaking the nexus between alcohol abuse, violence and the sexual abuse of Aboriginal children in communities—will not be easy. The Australian government is spending $587 million this financial year as part of the emergency response to protect Indigenous children in the Territory. It is a huge task.

In relation to safety and security for children in the Territory, between 2001-02 and 2005-06 there was a 78 per cent increase in the number of notifications of abuse or neglect received by the Northern Territory Family and Children’s Services program, with an average growth in notifications of 14 per cent per year. Indigenous children in the Territory are 4.8 times more likely than non-Indigenous children to be the subject of a substantiation report, but the Anderson-Wild inquiry stated that sexual abuse of Aboriginal children is common, widespread and grossly underreported. Following intervention, a critical factor in underreporting will be addressed. Police officers are now visible and accessible in many remote Aboriginal communities. Child sex abuse is a crime and perpetrators must be punished with the full force of the law.

The many inquiries that have been conducted into family violence and child abuse consistently identify alcohol as a major contributing factor to family violence. Grog cultures develop a force of their own, producing disastrous cycles for communities. Alcohol control is critical to achieving community stability. Many Aboriginal communities recognise this and have taken action in the past to declare their own towns dry. There are no easy solutions. The measures in this bill will help to stop grog abuse and will particularly
target the grog runners with new tough penalties.

The link between adequate housing and child safety has also been comprehensively made. Overcrowded housing is linked directly to children’s exposure to sexualised behaviour, family violence and vulnerability to abuse. The government’s intervention plan to reform housing arrangements by establishing market based rents for public housing with normalised tenancy requirements is welcome. It will improve infrastructure in communities and the level of available housing stock.

One of the critical issues in the Anderson-Wild report was the need to make sure that children go to school to guarantee both their safety and their future education. This, of course, is being addressed by the government. The federal intervention in Aboriginal communities and the supporting legislation will improve the safety and the security of Indigenous children in the Territory in a practical way. I commend the bill to the House because it directly makes the link between alcohol abuse and the protection of Indigenous children. It will further promote community safety and enable Aboriginal children the chance to grow up happy and healthy. This is what we want for our children, and we want nothing less for Indigenous children.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (10.19 am)—I am pleased to be able to contribute to this debate today and support the comments which have been made by the member for Jagajaga, the shadow spokesperson for these matters. I think it is worth reminding ourselves of what the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Amendment (Alcohol) Bill 2007 is about. It will amend the alcohol measures in the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007, a copy of which I sought this morning to remind myself of the complexity of some of it. It changes the 1,350 millilitre trigger for seeking and recording details in relation to takeaway alcohol sales to reduce the complexity of the provision—it makes it a $100 sale at the door; it makes changes to clarify the storage of records of takeaway purchases; it provides certain exemptions to the alcohol offences in relation to tourism operations in parks and other areas, if they are declared; it provides for the alcohol measures to be determined not to apply in a particular area, if warranted—for example, where comprehensive and effective local alcohol management measures are implemented; and it makes it clear that no past or future Northern Territory legislation undermines the emergency response alcohol measures.

As you would no doubt be aware, Mr Deputy Speaker—or, if you are not aware of it personally, you would imagine—this subject is cause for great discussion around the dinner tables in the Northern Territory. There is no doubt at all about the linkage between alcohol abuse, family violence and child abuse. There is no debate about that matter and no debate about the need to reduce alcohol consumption levels in the Northern Territory and in particular to provide rehabilitation and education programs for those people who are dependent upon alcohol. These matters are clear.

There has been a lot of debate in the Northern Territory over recent months about innovation and initiatives developed at a local level to address the issue of alcohol consumption. Alcohol management plans have been developed. The Groote Eylandt management plan has been spoken about in this parliament previously. The community came to a view about how alcohol should be treated within the community and they decided on developing a card system so that, if you were to purchase and consume alcohol in the community on Groote Eylandt, you
would require a permit. That permit was reflected in an application and, once you received approval, you were given a card. If you abused that card by supplying alcohol or sharing alcohol with a non-cardholder, you lost the card. Some might say that is a severe attitude, but it was developed by the local community in response to their concerns about alcohol abuse, family violence and crime. It has had a dramatic impact on reducing levels of family violence and crime on Groote Eylandt.

More recently, we have had the development of dry areas across the Northern Territory. Alice Springs is now declared a dry town as a result of dry area legislation being introduced by the Northern Territory parliament. There are some exempt areas at which people are able to consume alcohol for recreational purposes—for example, having a picnic with their family. That appears to work. Now we have proposals in the legislation which was previously introduced and which will come into effect on the 15 September 2007 for dry areas across the Northern Territory, including those already enumerated by the member for Jagajaga and the member for Solomon.

We need to understand that there are implications. The member for Jagajaga spoke about the situation at Titjikala. I am not certain about this, but I have had discussions with people over the recent week about the impact of the dry area legislation on Alice Springs once it has been declared dry. What we have seen, and it is apparent to all, is less visibility of people who are drinkers in the town area—a significant reduction in the number of problem drinkers. The problem is that we are not quite sure where they have gone. It might well be that we have part of the answer at Titjikala. As a result of the dry area legislation, people have relocated to drink in another place and, in this set of circumstances, they have chosen Titjikala. So while they have effectively been forced out of Alice Springs as drinkers, they have found another location which is unacceptable to the general community—and unacceptable to the community of Titjikala, I point out—nevertheless, it appears that they are there. We are not certain yet as to the implications it has had on the town camps in Alice Springs, such as whether there has been a higher incidence of violence or violent behaviour in the town camps as a result of the town area being declared dry. We will see the results of that emerge over the next period of time.

Last week I attended a hearing at the Katherine courthouse. The hearing was of the Northern Territory Liquor Commission about a proposal to declare the Katherine community dry. This hearing, as you would expect, received a lot of attention in Katherine. I went to the hearing for an hour or so in the morning and at that the hearing there were in excess of 100 people, a number of whom made contributions in the discussion with the Liquor Commission. We should not underestimate the feeling there is in the community about some of the measures which have either been introduced or proposed to be introduced by both the Northern Territory government and the Commonwealth government in response to the Little children are sacred report. We should not underestimate the impact, and nor should we underestimate the contention that has arisen as a result of the mooted proposals and the proposals which have been introduced, and indeed the proposals that we are debating here this morning.

We need to understand what the implications are. I go back to the point: there is absolutely no doubt in the world about the connection between the excessive use of alcohol and child abuse or indeed family violence more generally, especially the abuse of women. There is no doubt about that. We do
need to find ways of limiting both the demand for alcohol through education and rehabilitation programs and the supply of alcohol. That is not a question. A little later I will come to a discussion about some supply-side measures for dealing with alcohol consumption. It is also important that we acknowledge that the bulk of the community drink responsibly. Whilst the amendments in this legislation are in part targeted towards grog runners—I have no truck for grog runners; I do not know any reasonable person who has truck for grog runners—I have to say that I am not certain that the proposals that have been put forward here, and that we are debating this morning, will be effective.

Let me make some observations. What we are being asked to do here is agree to legislation which will limit the amount of alcohol an individual person can purchase, as a takeaway item, in any single transaction at a liquor outlet to $100. Let us assume, for the purposes of discussion, that I am of a mind to buy 25 cartons of grog. How would I go about that in a city like Darwin? Fairly easily, really; I would just go to half a dozen different liquor outlets, or perhaps 10 different liquor outlets, and buy a couple of cartons at each. Not hard. Or, if I live over near the Western Australian border, I might just go into Kununurra and buy a truckload of grog and bring it across the border into the Northern Territory. Or, if I live near Camooweal on the eastern side of the Northern Territory, or if I live on the southern border of the Northern Territory, I might do a similar thing. There is nothing in this legislation which prevents people importing alcohol in substantial quantities from across the border in Western Australia, Queensland or South Australia—nothing. I just do not think it is workable. If we could find a way to absolutely guarantee that this was going to hit grog runners, I would say ‘Whooppee’. I suspect this legislation will not guarantee that, because there are so many ways you can get around it.

On the other hand, under this legislation—and this is a significant point of contention—people going about their everyday business, who may want to have a family barbecue or get-together with a dozen or so people and who go to a liquor outlet to purchase three cartons of beer or a couple of cartons of beer and half a dozen bottles of wine will have to have their names recorded and identify where they are going to drink that alcohol. Most people will say, ‘All right, I’m happy to do that.’ But you have to ask, I think, where the balance is. What evidence is there that the measures being proposed will actually have the outcome they are designed to achieve? Frankly and unfortunately, I do not think there is much evidence. I am concerned about the workability of this element of the proposals. I have no compunction at all in agreeing at all in agreeing with the intention—that is, to stop large quantities of grog flowing into Aboriginal communities. That has my absolute, 100 per cent support. But these proposals will have an unfortunate side effect upon the general population. Some people may say, like me, ‘I’m happy to proceed down this course.’ But I can imagine circumstances where people who are ill-informed or do not understand what is happening could become very abusive if they front up to a liquor outlet, try to purchase a quantity of alcohol in excess of $100 and are told by the person at the counter, ‘You’re now required to provide me with your details and we’ll put them on record for a number of years.’ I can well imagine it. The sets of circumstances that could arise as a result of this need to be properly understood.

I am absolutely sympathetic to the view that we have to restrict alcohol into Aboriginal communities. I am just not certain that the proposals in the original legislation or as they are amended here will achieve that re-
result. They will have unintended and, I think, unfortunate consequences on the broader population. I ask the minister to respond when he comes in to sum up. How does he expect to manage this if, let us say, a liquor outlet changes shifts at midday, four o'clock in the afternoon or six o'clock—it does not matter—and I walk into that liquor outlet in the morning and spend my $99.50c worth on alcohol and in the afternoon front up and spend another $99.90 on alcohol? The legislation stipulates single transactions, not multiple transactions. It does not ask for the monitoring of an individual’s purchase of alcohol over the period of a week or a day. It does not connect alcohol outlets. We are not talking about a smart card system where if you put the card down when you buy your alcohol it is recorded against the card and if you go next door to purchase another quantity of alcohol it is recorded against the same card so you have an absolute record of individual purchases. We do not have that here. I think that needs to be investigated as a potential way of dealing with the issue.

Another issue arises out of the question of who can consume alcohol in national parks or other prescribed areas under the legislation. Imagine you are a traveller—let us say you are a grey nomad, and there are a few of us about that vintage in this place—carting a caravan up the Stuart Highway and you decide to go into Nitmiluk National Park, which is Aboriginal land, or Twin Falls at Kakadu National Park. Right next to you there is a tour bus with a whole lot of people. They have the tablecloths out and they are having a sunset dinner with a bottle of champagne and a couple of reds. Under this legislation, you are not allowed to drink even though the purposes for which you are in that park are exactly the same as for those in an organised tour group. As an individual you are not allowed to have alcohol there. That is counterproductive.

There is another unintended consequence of this legislation. People who live in Darwin and fish on the Daly River often take a few beers. If you fish on the Daly River you will not be allowed to take alcohol, because the beds and banks of the Daly River are Aboriginal land. You will not be able to transmit alcohol across that land. If you are fishing on that river you will not be able to consume alcohol. That will happen across a large part of the Northern Territory. It means daytrippers out of Darwin who might go to one of these national parks with their family or friends to show them the sights of the Northern Territory will not be able to share a glass of wine at the camp site, because they are not on an organised tour.

One needs not to underestimate the impact this will have on the Northern Territory community or the implications it has for the Northern Territory tourism industry. I say to the minister again: I understand the intention of legislation, but it would be so simple to amend it to ensure that no-one who was there responsibly undertaking recreational tourism activities in a bona fide way would be penalised. This legislation penalises all of those people who are not on organised tours. That is not, I am sure, what the minister intends. If he does intend it, he should tell us about it. If he does intend it, the community needs to know about it. But I am sure that that is not what he intends. I say to him that it is not too late to amend this legislation further to ensure that the unintended consequences we have now identified in fact do not materialise. These are legitimate questions to be asked by the community. Again I stress that I do not know of an individual who does not believe that it is important that we hit the supply of alcohol in Aboriginal communities.

I now turn to some of those supply-side questions and point out the tremendous work that needs to be done. The Northern Territory, for all people, has the highest rate of
alcohol consumption per capita in Australia: 15 litres of pure alcohol per person per year, which is 1,300 green cans per adult, as opposed to the national average, which is nine litres or 800 green cans. I do not know how many of you here in the chamber or in the galleries would consume 800 cans a year, but I am sure that I do not. Whoever is drinking our share is drinking a hell of a lot of alcohol. That is the problem. We have to find the problem drinkers and address their needs.

Across the Northern Territory, there are major regional variations. In the Katherine region, they doubled the national average in 2002 and 2003—doubled! They were consuming 1,600 green cans per head. I know a lot of people in Katherine. I do not know any who would consume that amount of alcohol, but someone clearly is. In terms of drinking patterns, 84 per cent of non-Aboriginal people have used alcohol, and 62 per cent of Aboriginal people are current drinkers compared with 72 per cent of non-Aboriginal people. We need to address the supply side. We need innovative proposals that will reduce the amount of alcohol that is sold, perhaps by restricting the sale of alcohol and the opening times of liquor outlets. There are a lot of ways in which we can do this. We ask—and our amendment reflects this—that the Commonwealth government work in conjunction with the Northern Territory government, the Northern Territory community and liquor retailers to address these issues in a constructive way. (Time expired)

Dr LAWRENCE (Fremantle) (10.39 am)—Thank you, Mr Speaker, for occupying the chair at this moment. I appreciate that gesture. I first of all want to thank my constituents, the inimitable people of Fremantle. They are big-hearted, engaged, progressive, hardworking, creative and sometimes bolshie. They are wonderful people whom I have had the honour to represent. I want to convey my best wishes to Melissa Parke for the coming election. She has been preselected by the ALP. She is a fine young woman who, if she is successful, will serve the electorate and this parliament with distinction. I want to thank my family, who joined me on the rollercoaster ride that has been my political career. I especially want to thank my son, David. He has had to bear the slings and arrows of my fate while negotiating the journey to adulthood. He is a wonderful young man and I am very proud of him.

I also thank my supporters, especially the many kind people who backed and assisted me in meeting the substantial legal expenses forced on me by the Marks royal commission and the subsequent trial. It was a commission that I think everybody understands was borne of political malice and with the connivance of the Prime Minister, using what we now see as his classic modus operandi. He admitted that he had discussed setting up the commission with the Premier of the day, Richard Court, but refused to answer direct questions on whether he had actually urged Mr Court to set up the royal commission, something which I know from other sources that he did.

I want to thank my colleagues too, some of whom I have got to know better than others. I admire them all for their serious-minded dedication to improving the lives of Australians, something that is often not appreciated of members of parliament. I want to thank the members of the Australian Labor Party who have placed their confidence in me in the various positions that I have been privileged to occupy. I want to thank my staff, both past and present. They are loyal, hardworking, smart and resilient; a couple of them are in the gallery today. Lorena Di Sabato, Zita Pal, Josh Wilson, Helen Mills and Monica Jane are currently on my staff, and I know that they will continue to serve very well. Of course, this is an opportunity to thank the parliamentary and support staff
who, very efficiently and effectively, ensure the smooth running of the parliament. I am grateful for that, although I think it is emblematic of this government that too much money is spent on security and not enough is spent on the library.

I am retiring not because I have lost interest in policy but because I desire to engage in the community in a different way. I hope I can continue to make a contribution to Australian life. Although I have been in politics for 21 years, I guess I have always believed that politics is not a career or a lifetime occupation; it is a privilege of representation.

You could not expect from me a dispassionate assessment of the Howard-Costello government’s achievements and flaws, but I know that my concerns—which I will enunciate—are shared by a great many Australians. I part company with them and with their views at an early stage of any political debate. I disagree with them not only about how to respond to the challenges we face as a nation but even about what those challenges are. I do not, for example, share the Prime Minister’s image of the ideal Australian—his Australian everyman with a cricket bat and Gallipoli nostalgia. It may be a useful political device but, apart from the fact that it excludes women, it hardly embodies the creativity, energy and vision needed for our times. It is a complacent and limited view of us.

I have been horrified over the time that we have been in opposition and the Howard-Costello government have occupied the opposite benches that they so blithely involved us in the illegal invasion of Iraq, sanctioning the deaths of many thousands of innocent bystanders. Over four years ago, the government joined with the United States and sent our soldiers to invade Iraq. They made a fateful decision while many of us said that they should desist. A lot of Australians protested, multitudes marched and the majority of us made our opposition clear. But we were ignored and derided by the government and their supporters, and the Howard government took us to war. I ask today: whose position has been vindicated? It gives me no pleasure to say it and some, like my mother, would say it is not polite, but we told you so. There is no joy in restating the many forthright and prescient warnings that the Bush administration was about to unleash a whirlwind of destruction, but it must be said since the government have not and apparently will not acknowledge that they were gravely mistaken.

As many anticipated, Iraq is at a stalemate. The war has not yet ended and it shows no sign of diminishing in intensity. The PM’s ‘months not years’ promise looks as foolish as Bush’s ‘mission accomplished’. Tens, perhaps hundreds, of thousands have died, and the cycle of revenge killings has escalated. Bloody suicide bombings are daily events. More than a million people have been displaced within in Iraq, and double that number have fled to neighbouring countries. Ethnic strife is rampant. Children die in droves from preventable diseases, as basic services have been reduced to a primitive state. There are reports today of an outbreak of cholera which has already killed 10 people. The US’s own agencies agree that regional instability is worse and Iraq is now spawning a new generation of Islamic radicalism. As we told the Prime Minister at the time, war is not a solution. I say to the Prime Minister, his cabinet and his members today: you were wrong—appallingly, brutally wrong.

I have been dismayed, too, that on so many fronts the Howard-Costello government capriciously withdrew our support for good international citizenship; that they engineered and justified the brutal treatment of asylum seekers, including little children, and
washed their hands of the deaths of over 300 people on the SIEVX; that they surreptitiously endorsed the Hanson agenda; and, I have to say, continue, as one editorial put it, ‘to hector minorities for political gain’. The Howard-Costello government knew which buttons to push and had no compunction about pushing them, despite the potentially damaging consequences to our social fabric. I have disagreed with the government too when they have systematically singled out Indigenous people for ‘special treatment’ to pressure them to assimilate into the mainstream. We have just witnessed in the Northern Territory and indeed have been debating another ‘instant solution’ devised without reference to Indigenous people and without enlisting their engagement. They are to be the objects of policy again rather than its subjects; their agency is denied.

Like many Australians, I have objected to the Howard-Costello government habitually construing disadvantage as resulting from individual moral failing and acting accordingly; that they have been relentless in their attacks on organised labour, so important to protecting the wellbeing of Australian workers; that they have systematically bullied critics into submission, narrowing the sources of advice to government, stacking boards and committees with fellow travellers, politicising the public service and misleading the public on so many occasions that we have lost count; that they have dramatically shifted the provision of health, education and social services toward private consumption and undermined the core of our egalitarianism; that they continue to pay lip service to the very real threats posed by global warming; and that, frankly, they could not give a stuff about the cultural life of the nation.

Reciting the full catalogue of my disaffection would be tedious, but I mentioned those things to give some sense of the scope of my disagreement with the Howard-Costello regime. Since I have a number of colleagues here today—and I thank them for attending—I will now proffer some gratuitous advice to my colleagues who remain and who I hope will be on the government benches after the next election. After a decade of conservative government, there is much to be done. First of all, we need to broaden our horizons about what is possible for our people. It is rare to hear this Prime Minister talk of anything but the state of the economy. He seems to think that Australians are only interested in stuff. I argue that we need a better balance between material goals and the quality of people’s lives. The economy is not all that matters in people’s lives.

Surely, we need a strong economy. But we also need a strong intellectual and creative life. We need the time and capacity to enjoy family, friends and recreation. We need to ensure the protection of and enjoyment of our natural environment. We need active engagement of all community members in the development of that community and the enjoyment of our cultural life and heritage. We should remember too, as the unlikely George Soros has warned, that an open society can be threatened by excessive individualism. He said:

Too much competition and too little cooperation can cause intolerable inequities and instability—

And I agree. The contemporary position of many governments, including this one, is that Adam Smith’s ‘invisible hand’ should be allowed almost unfettered operation to allocate goods and services in our community, including health and education. What that view of the world fails to understand is that Adam Smith himself was a very strong proponent of the need for institutional controls and the insertion of humane values into the operation of the economy, because he recognised the limitations of market forces. The marketplace, competition, efficiency—such
concepts underestimate the necessary human dimension to our lives. We continue to allow this agenda to dominate our policies at the cost of our humanity, our inventiveness and equality in our society.

Hopefully you will have the opportunity to rethink what constitutes ‘the good life’. I think that is overdue in a world on a fast track to self-inflicted ill health and planet-wide damage to forests, oceans, biodiversity, and other natural resources. It is fair to say that we are consuming the resources of this planet at a pace that far outweighs the planet’s ability to renew them and absorb the resultant wastes. Extraordinary energy and creativity will be required to halt and reverse environmental damage in this country, let alone in other parts of the world, and to make that contribution to the reduction in greenhouse gases. I think it requires no less a change than thinking about the meaning of progress and possibilities for the future. Denial and delay, which we have seen from this government, are simply no longer tolerable. There is a growing awareness amongst Australians that many of our practices are not sustainable: the degradation and loss of soils, air and water pollution, deforestation and global warming, depletion of our resource base and reduction in biodiversity. We need urgently to satisfy our needs, and perhaps to redefine them, with less impact on the earth’s natural environment.

It is clear to anyone who looks that the current pattern of energy use is not sustainable: the degradation and loss of soils, air and water pollution, deforestation and global warming, depletion of our resource base and reduction in biodiversity. We need urgently to satisfy our needs, and perhaps to redefine them, with less impact on the earth’s natural environment.

so perhaps it is understandable—although it is not forgivable—that many have concluded that the task is well nigh impossible and they would rather bury their heads in the sand. The current government certainly behave as if they hope these problems would go away. As Ian Lowe has said: ‘We need to recognise that our society is totally contained within natural ecological systems. There’s no prospect of mass migration to another part of the cosmos if we make a mess of this planet, or a rescue by friendly aliens. We really should be behaving as if we intend to be permanent inhabitants of the earth, rather than temporary visitors with a mission to loot, rape and pillage.’

I am confident that a future Labor government will be a more compassionate administration and will help shape a more compassionate society. The Howard-Costello legacy is dangerous: you get what you deserve and deserve what you get. It is mean-minded and narrow and refuses to acknowledge the role that chance plays in all of our lives or to look at the benefits that are conferred by privilege or the barriers that are confronted by the marginalised. I know that a future Labor government will abandon the routinely punitive response to disadvantage that we have seen. I look forward, too, to a reduced emphasis on fear, threats and coercion which, I have to say in my view, was exemplified in the excessive security response and cost that we saw at APEC.

As the Chasers demonstrated, at one level it was an hilarious overreaction, although at great cost, and I think it made Australia a paranoid laughing stock in parts of the world. I am very keen to see in the future a reverse of the creeping authoritarianism which has been evident in policy, legislation and media commentary in this country. There has been an increasing tendency for our political climate to be dominated by those threats, by insecurity and division, for dis-
sent to be depicted as un-Australian, for the range of opinions shaping government policy to be circumscribed and for public access to information about government actions to be limited. If coercion is to be the underpinning value in public policy, it is inevitable that it will fail.

I hope too—I am confident indeed—that a future Labor government will recognise that imposing policy from outside hardens resistance to it. It is always inferior to encouragement and engagement. Note the comments by Chris Sarra, whose success in the Cherbourg community has been regarded as best practice in Aboriginal education. He said that the federal government’s intervention in the Northern Territory and the punitive response to truancy would reinforce the idea of Aboriginal children as pitiable. He said that we should instead encourage children to be proud and strong, to ensure that schools are places that engage and interest them, that challenge teachers. As he said:

If the teacher believes the child will learn, then the child will learn.

I know too that, under a future Labor government, there will be a renewed commitment to a much more muscular form of egalitarianism in education and health in particular, reducing the gaps, intervening early, making major reforms to Medicare, which are needed if it is to be sustained as a genuinely universal system where quality health care is delivered to everyone regardless of means. Similarly in education: it is a great shame in this country that the educational gap due to socioeconomic status is amongst the widest in the OECD. That represents a terrible waste of talent. It also sells young people short. I think it is important, too, to remember that education is not just about employability. We need a wider set of objectives; we need to advance the expansive development of intellectual powers that go beyond the acquisition of fact and bare proficiency at skills that the labour market requires. We should view education as a public good which benefits everyone by adding skills and knowledge, which improve our society as well as the economy. If we have a well-educated, well-informed, highly trained population our collective benefits are immeasurable. Perhaps that is one reason why the concrete thinkers amongst politicians often fail to take account of them—they cannot run the ruler over them.

Labor will need a specific remedial focus on those who have either been ignored or received the blunt end of the government’s policies. Policy to assist Indigenous Australians in particular should receive the highest priority. The shameful neglect of people with disabilities and their families should be reversed. Assistance and rehabilitation of refugees damaged by incarceration will be needed, as will support rather than coercion of single parents attempting to improve their capacity to support themselves and their children. I would argue too that we need—and I hope Labor will adopt—a comprehensive program of parliamentary and electoral reform. We certainly need a greater engagement of the community in the process and less cynicism.

Finally, I know that a Rudd Labor government will renew our commitment to be good international citizens, to work energetically to reduce the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the use of violence to solve conflicts and to embark on a more than token commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, particularly the amelioration of poverty, especially in our region. I know, too, that Labor will resolve never again to have an Australian government engage in illegal, pre-emptive strikes as in Iraq, remembering that it is always better to prevent deadly conflict than deal with its consequences. Good luck!
Mr WINDSOR (New England) (10.57 am)—Before I speak on the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Amendment (Alcohol) Bill 2007, I would like to congratulate the member for Fremantle on her contribution to public life in Western Australia and in the national parliament. I have not had a great deal of personal contact with the member for Fremantle, but I have been a member of the people with disabilities committee that she has co-chaired, and I do thank her and wish her well in her future life.

I was not going to speak on this amending bill, but I listened quite closely to the member for Lingiari and I thought his contribution on the practical application of this legislation to be something that we should all take some notice of. I will highlight in a moment some of those issues that the member for Lingiari raised. Most of us in this parliament do not come from the Northern Territory, and this legislation is about particularly the Aboriginal communities but also others in the Northern Territory and the service, provision and supply of alcohol to those people within the boundaries of the Northern Territory.

Over the last 15 to 20 years I have spent my holidays in inland Australia and, as a consequence, I have travelled many dusty tracks and visited many Aboriginal communities and other communities and beautiful spots that inland Australia presents. So I have probably a little bit of a snapshot. I would not pretend to have the knowledge of the member for Lingiari or others in the parliament, but being a traveller, in a sense, and stopping in some of those communities from time to time and enjoying the beauty of the outback one gets to see a variety of pictures of some of the towns and some of the town camps and communities.

I did not support the original legislation; I believed there were many flaws in it. Part of the reason I did not support it was that I think it puts all Aboriginal people in a particular box. As the member for Lingiari and others in this chamber would recognise, there are many good Aboriginal communities. There are many communities that, of their own volition, have been dry for many years. There are many communities that still have respect for their elders and for the way in which their systems have evolved. They will never be like us—and in my view they should not aim to be like us if they do not want to. I have seen a number of those communities. I have stayed in communities where I have been the only one with grog, and they have quite rightly asked that that alcohol not be brought out of our vehicles; I understand that. I have seen some of those communities where the rivers of grog, as the minister describes it in his speech, are atrocious and the related problems of sexual abuse, pornography, violence et cetera have been on display for all to see.

This bill addresses what we are seeing in those communities. In my view, the original legislation did not address the real problem. The real problem is that a percentage of our population—and the Northern Territory is a good example—are disaffected, essentially downtrodden and despairing. I think if any citizen—black, white or brindle—is in a position where they feel they are not regarded, are not part of the community, are not part of any societal development and are made to feel as if they are part of the problem, obviously they will despair and alcohol, drugs and other activities will become part of the mainstream in some of those people’s lives.

I return to the member for Lingiari’s comments. The minister may not have heard what he had to say. He made some very important points with regard to the legislation—the supply of alcohol and the border issues. I have been to some of those towns: Camooweal; one he did not mention—Urandangi, just over the border; on the other side, Kununurra and various places. I re-
member during the original debate the minister talked about some of the communities in the north of Western Australia where massive amounts of alcohol were being transported, and a whole range of sexual and other problems were being fuelled by alcohol. Truckloads of the stuff are being peddled around the place.

The member for Lingiari said—and I agree with him—that this bill will not stop that. It will go on because the Northern Territory is still in Australia, and there will be a market in terms of the rivers of grog. One would like to think that it would have an effect, but I think we will reflect on this in five years time and see that it had no effect. It was essentially a response that we had to have to follow up on the original response so that those of use who do not live there could feel better for attempting to do something about this problem.

What can we do about the problem? We have done nothing for many decades. We are attempting to do something in the parliament now, in the eyes of some. Many good things have been happening in parts of the Northern Territory. The minister would be aware that economic development could occur within some of the areas where people live. I have mentioned to him privately, and I have raised it in this place, that water resources in parts of the Northern Territory—the groundwater resources—could be developed; they have been developed at Ti Tree, Aileron and in other communities south of Tennant Creek.

One of the great problems in the Northern Territory—and I had meetings there in July with various people—with economic development is that if you or your community are not into the Aboriginal art game or you are not near a mine you have to go somewhere else to get work. If you do not want to go away you become quite despairing in terms of your outlook, if economic activity is not available. But there are vast areas where water resources could be developed. I am pleased that the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources is in the chamber today because it is something the government should be having a much closer look at and encouraging. There are schemes afoot—and the minister would be aware of them—to develop some of these resources in communities to give these people some hope. Sure, it will take time and there has to be a change of attitude, because some family members may not have worked. There might a chain of unemployment in communities because they have not had opportunities and did not want to go somewhere else to work. It will take time, but if we are serious about addressing the issue we have to walk the walk and take the time.

The member for Lingiari spoke about the supply issues in this particular piece of legislation. He spoke about the national park issues, the grey nomads. I reflected in my office to one of my staffers: ‘He’s not a grey nomad; he’s a desert head’—as I would be too. But there is a problem, and it will cause angst. The $99.90 issue will cause angst. Essentially, I see this piece of legislation—and I will be condemned for it; it does not particularly worry me—in not such a different light as the Murray-Darling legislation. Someone dreamt up an idea and thought, ‘We’ve got to do something, so let’s go down this path.’ But we are not addressing the very real issue that is causing a lot of these problems in either the substantive legislation or this amendment.

We have not engaged with the people who have wanted to engage and we have not engaged with the people who have been doing a lot of good. There are a lot of good people working out there and the minister would know about them—they are black, white and brindle. These people have been working in good programs. There are people in Alice...
Springs who, for a number of years now, have had young girls come in from various communities with their grandmother or an older woman from the community to assist with their education. When I was there I was told that the Commonwealth was cutting back on the funding of the program—a successful program that has been in place and helping people for years—but perhaps that has been reversed since then.

People know of the problem and have tried to address it. Nothing has really been achieved in the last few months. I do not think that this excuses any of us; I think we are all guilty. Not many of us live there but we produce an essentially city-centric piece of legislation that looks good because we probably will not go there—unless we are a grey nomad in a national park and we are going to be treated differently from a group of other grey nomads on a tourist bus! Maybe then people will pay some attention.

I will not take up all of my time. Earlier on I did not even realise that I was on the speaking list. The points made by the member for Lingiari about the legislation are very real. When the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs replies, I would like him to address them. I do not think anybody is being blamed for trying to do something. Unless some of these issues are addressed this amending bill will fail to deliver on the indicated promises, which is the reason for it being introduced. If you extend the circumstance, why not ban alcohol in Australia? We know that will not work. Mr Brough—it is linked.

Mr WINDSOR—I am pleased that you have responded. I think that is very important. I know the minister is eager to respond and allay some of the fears that I and some others in this chamber have.

Mr BROUGH (Longman—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs) (11.11 am)—I have achieved something; I got the member for New England to sit down. I challenge the members for New England and Lingiari: if you do not think that this will work and you are going to get a pallet load of grog and put it in the back of the ute and whiz across the border from Kununurra, Mount Isa or Camooweal, feel free. There is a $75,000 fine and potentially a year in jail. The big difference is that up until now there have not been any police there—you are right in that respect. But now there are. The Commonwealth has committed 66 police. If you think about the size of the area, this is for the first time real policing and real engagement. As you know, there have been grog bans in many of these communities but they have been a pointless activity.

I will give you an example of what happened only about a week ago. A small community in the Central Desert had police for the first time. They were from the Australian Federal Police. They did their changeover in Alice Springs and the night they were out people came into that town and were allegedly selling alcohol at $50 a six-pack. That is good money if you can get it. What was described as a riot occurred, but let us call it an all-night running brawl. A woman who tried
to stop it was injured. Others were beaten up. These are very serious allegations. The difference is that more police in the communities gives people safety. It means that when you apply laws—such that we have—they mean something because you can enforce them. The member for Lingiari made a suggestion about buying a truckload of alcohol and bringing it across the border from Kununurra in Western Australia. I am not suggesting for a moment that he would do it, but take the challenge: the risk now is $75,000 and potentially 18 months in prison, and I want the people to be there to police that. We have also invested in sniffer dog teams, which have made more interdictions for drugs, alcohol and petrol throughout the top end of South Australia, Western Australia and the NT. They are making people safe.

I take your point about prohibition around Australia. I would be in all sorts of trouble if we banned alcohol everywhere on a personal level. You said that it does not work, but we have the proof that it does work. In Far North Queensland, former Premier Beattie brought in the alcohol management program. It was flawed for the very reason you mentioned—you can go into Cairns and get not a carton but literally a pallet and bring it back, and it does happen. If you look at evidence of the number of hospitalisations and incidents of domestic violence, you will see that they have dropped dramatically. We have used the experience up there and we have built on it.

I do take the point—and I have asked this of the Premier of Western Australia—about listening to the women of the east Kimberley, who have pleaded for there to be alcohol management programs. I know that other members such as the Deputy Speaker, Mr Jenkins, know of the damage that alcohol has done in the far north of New South Wales. It is not isolated to the Territory. The difference is that I as the minister and we as the Commonwealth have the capacity to make laws for the Territory—and we will—in the interests of those people.

Why do I know this has the support on the ground? Because the women in particular have told me and told me, and they have told Magistrate Dr Sue Gordon, who chairs our task force. They have said that there are two things that they want more than anything else that will help with child abuse, child neglect, physical violence and domestic violence and destruction—that is, more police in communities and alcohol out of communities, though not just alcohol but it is the big one.

The reason we have this clean-up bill, if you like—and we have no qualms about calling it that—is that we need industry to work with us on this. The industry came to me and said that a young woman or young man at a checkout at Woolworths in Darwin who can sell alcohol has to calculate what is 1,350 millilitres of alcohol in the quantity of alcohol that someone has bought. As we all know, the alcohol in wine can vary from six per cent to 14 per cent alcohol, beers are all over the place and then there are the mixer drinks and the spirits. One thing is that those people would have had to stand there for ages working it out; the other thing, more than anything else, is that they were worried—not about the impost on them—about inadvertently being in breach of the law. So we have come up with something that is simpler.

I think the member for Lingiari made this point: what is stopping someone going in at 9 o’clock in the morning and getting $100 or $99 worth and another lot in the afternoon? There is nothing stopping them from doing that, but this is a further restriction. What people have forgotten is that this has not been put in in isolation. What will reduce the amount of money that can be consumed on drugs, alcohol and gambling, above all else,
are the welfare reform measures. Instead of someone receiving, in round figures, $1,000 in welfare payments and transfer payments from the Commonwealth because they have four kids, now they will receive half of that amount in cash and half in what the Australian public understands to be food stamps—in other words, they cannot buy alcohol with it; it cannot happen. We will reduce the amount of money they receive, then there are practical measures in place to further do that and then there are penalties in place, and we will enforce the penalties. If you want to go and sell grog into an NT community, you will be found and you will cop big penalties. That has to underpin this.

The member for Jagajaga, the opposition spokesman on Indigenous affairs, referred to an article in today’s Australian about Titjikala and how they want police there. I could not agree with her more. I would like to be in the position to actually be responsible, in some respects—and I guess this is selfish on my behalf because I have no experience in the field—for the deployment of police. But I am not. Who has the responsibility for the deployment of the police? The Northern Territory Police Commissioner, under the auspices of the Northern Territory Police Minister, who is the Chief Minister. As these women out in Titjikala have said, ‘We have been demanding since 2000 that we need police.’ That is the typical cry we hear. We are giving them more resources, 66 more police—funded by the Howard government because we are trying to do something.

For once, though, the Australian—and I applaud them at the Australian—are out there actually listening to people and reporting it to the Australian public. They are saying to the Australian public: ‘Indigenous people are crying out to have this stopped. Children are unable to sleep at night because of the drunken parties.’ Why don’t they go to school? It is pretty obvious. This did not just happen in Titjikala in the past; this has happened in community after community because of the rivers of grog. We have not stopped the rivers of grog yet. We are in the early phases of stopping the rivers of grog and the drugs and the excessive gambling in a way that will ensure children can get decent food, decent hygiene, decent education and have a chance in life.

The member for Jagajaga also asked a couple of pertinent questions regarding alcohol diversionary programs. In the package that we have put together there is $11.4 million in 2007-08 for mobile outreach teams, rehabilitation and detox, and assistance response. Can I remind her what her Labor colleagues did in the Northern Territory when they banned alcohol in the town camps—and I applaud that. When asked by the opposition up there, ‘What additional detox resources will you bring to bear to help the members of the town camps get over alcohol?’, there was none. ‘How many additional police?’ Zero, none. I think that says it all and it brings home what the member for New England is saying. You do need to have resources. You do need to make these enforceable.

What we have attempted to do is to make the spirit of what we are trying to achieve more workable by having the hotel industry and the retail industry working with us. And we have recognised those people who call themselves grey nomads. I think the member for New England actually is very generous calling himself a grey nomad. He is probably more of a wannabe—and that includes the member for Lingiari; and I am trying to join them both. Grey nomads who want to have a champagne or a beer as they watch the sunset over Uluru are doing a great Australian thing—good on them. The difference is that we would hope that they do not have the same problems with domestic violence, child abuse or the troubles that come with alcohol.
abuse. There is one thing that people lament when they go to Uluru. They want to actually immerse themselves in Australia’s Indigenous culture. They lament, both Australians and non-Australians, ‘Where are all the Aboriginal people working here whom we can meet and engage with?’ I can assure you they are not going to be sitting next to a bunch of grey nomads sitting outside a caravan or a bus going, ‘Hey, let’s have a few beers together.’ That is not the issue, it really is not.

What we do not need is to put ridiculous and unnecessary barriers in the way of good Australians, who may be in retirement or who may be young families. What they are doing is adding to the economy out there. They are providing job opportunities. We hope that the first few people of Mutitjulu who have been taken up will become a flood and that they will actually start working there. That can only happen if we give those tourists a really good experience. I think that the most fulfilling thing for tourists, both domestic and international, when going to places like Uluru or Jabiluka would be for them to be able to say: ‘I met Australia’s first people and I was impressed. I learnt something about their culture. I feel enriched from the experience.’ They do not get that today.

There is almost a separation. Part of it is because some of the people hidden behind fences there do not want others to see the way they live, and they desperately want to change the way they live. That is what the women of Mutitjulu have told me.

Some of the comments that have been made here today are well founded. This is a really difficult issue. If it were not, others would have done something more about it before. I can guarantee the member for New England that if I am re-elected and I am still in this position in two, three or four years time, you will see—‘you might see’; I will guarantee; I put my own reputation on it—major improvements in the quality of life and the cleanliness and hygiene of the conditions in which the children are living and you will see less domestic violence, less alcohol consumption and more opportunities. They will have a belief in their own culture, the richness of that culture, in finding it for the first time. They will be able to say, ‘We can do something for ourselves and we are no longer dependent on passive welfare, which has destroyed us.’ They are our aspirations and I am not going to rest until we fix it. I commend the bill to the House, and I thank those members who have contributed to the debate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Haase)— The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this the honourable member for Jagajaga has moved as an amendment that all words after ‘That’ be omitted with a view to substituting other words. The immediate question is that the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

Question agreed to.

Original question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Consideration in Detail

Bill—by leave—taken as a whole.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (11.23 am)— Minister, I want to get a bit of clarification on particularly proposed sections 12(3A)(b) and 12(5A)(b). They go to the question of who is allowed to drink in a national park. In your summing up contribution to the second reading debate you implied that grey nomads and other individual tourists who were in national parks participating in legitimate recreational and tourism activities would be able to consume alcohol. That is not the way I read the legislation.
Mr BROUGH (Longman—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs) (11.24 am)—What we want to do here—and the member for Lingiari would be very familiar with the sunset strip—is be able to excise those specific areas for very specific purposes, not whole national parks.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (11.24 am)—Let me just clarify that. So in the context of Uluru or Kakadu, where there are camping grounds, and in the context of Nitmiluk—

Mr BROUGH—Just Uluru.

Mr SNOWDON—It is very important that we clarify this because it is an issue of some concern for the community generally. I take it now that you are saying to us that the only prescribed area for this purpose will be the sunset viewing area at Uluru.

Mr BROUGH—Let me just clarify something. Specifically here people have put good points to us for other specific designated areas. When I redid these amendments I was very keen to ensure that we did not do a carte blanche thing—for example, people going across Aboriginal land to put their boat in and suddenly it is a bit of a free-for-all. No, this applies to specific locations. There has to be a real purpose—tourism or whatever—and there has to be a strong case put through the task force and then it can be agreed to. Specifically in this bill is Uluru.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (11.25 am)—I am not trying to be contentious, Minister—

Mr BROUGH (Longman—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs) (11.25 am)—Sorry, let me just clarify something. Uluru is not in the bill; the bill allows me to do that through regulations. I just wanted to clarify that.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (11.26 am)—I appreciate that, but I need to be able to give a message to the constituents of Lingiari and travellers coming into the Northern Territory. Before these measures come into force on 15 September, they can go to a spot at Twin Falls, say, in Kakadu and camp and drink alcohol at night—with their meal or whatever. Will they be able to continue to do that, yes or no?

Mr BROUGH—Sorry, let me just clarify something. Uluru is not in the bill; the bill allows me to do that through regulations. I just wanted to clarify that.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (11.26 am)—I do not have before me the geographical areas you are referring to and I do not know what the land tenure is and those sorts of things—

Mr Snowdon interjecting—

Mr BROUGH—To facilitate the House, and this is in goodwill—we disagree on many things, but on this we do not—the whole idea behind these amendments is to ensure these things are functional and that we do not disadvantage people who it has no impact upon. So, if you have specific locations, I am happy to deal with those. If you wish to deal with them through the parliament, that is your prerogative. I am happy to have them and then give you direct answers and, as we have got the facility in this bill, excuse those as is necessary.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (11.27 am)—Minister, I understand what you are trying to do here, but at the moment as this legislation reads, people travelling into prescribed areas—that is, national parks on Aboriginal land—will not be able to consume alcohol unless they get an exemption, as you have described.
Mr BROUGH (Longman—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs) (11.28 am)—If you are with an organised tour group, you can. But you are referring to caravanners, aren’t you?

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (11.28 am)—In excess of 400,000 people visit Uluru each year. I do not know what proportion—probably 80 per cent—are on organised tours. Similarly, there are daytrippers from Darwin who may be fishing in Kakadu. There are real questions about whether, as a result of this legislation, they can drink on the rivers within Kakadu.

Mr BROUGH (Longman—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs) (11.28 am)—There are two things. No, people cannot just wander around drinking at fishing holes, which you mentioned, et cetera. There is an impost upon all Australians to try to deal with this issue, in the same way as you have some constraint if you purchase more than $100 worth of alcohol—you are being asked to write down where it is that that alcohol is going et cetera.

You mentioned Uluru. Obviously, it is not an issue if people are camping in the camping grounds of Uluru, which are privately owned. And it is not an issue in the excised area. If there are other specific localities, then the bill allows us to put them into the regulations. But daytrippers and others who are not supervised in some sort of a tour group—and I take your point that there are lots of these people—will not be able to take alcohol on the river when fishing and consume that alcohol on Aboriginal land in national parks.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (11.30 am)—I want to make sure that I absolutely understand this. I am sure I now do get the picture. I have lived in the Northern Territory for 30 years. Historically I have been able to visit and go camping with friends in parts of Kakadu and have stayed for a weekend and had a few beers. This is not selling or moving alcohol. But under these proposals that will no longer be possible?

Mr BROUGH (Longman—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs) (11.30 am)—During the emergency phase or during this first phase, it is absolutely true that people will not just be able to wander anywhere, plonk down anywhere and camp and drink alcohol. That, we understand, will be an impediment to what some people are currently doing. But it is in the interests of us all trying to fix the most insidious problem that faces Indigenous people and that leads to much of the violence and much of the abuse. These restrictions are not ongoing. Areas will be lifted because there are good, solid, ongoing alcohol management programs and their enforcement—and I think that is the key issue; the enforcement of them. Clearly the sooner that can be achieved, whether it be in Kakadu or anywhere else, the better, as that would be to everyone’s benefit. That is what we are aiming to achieve.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (11.31 am)—Minister, you mentioned the issue of fishing. I assume you were referring to the Daly River?

Mr Brough—Yes, I was.

Mr SNOWDON—There are a lot of other rivers, obviously, where people fish. So you are saying, are you, that there will be an exemption for the purposes of recreational fishers on the Daly River—that they will be able to traverse Aboriginal land with alcohol if they are going fishing on the Daly River?
Mr BROUGH (Longman—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs) (11.31 am)—Yes, but at specific locations and not carte blanche all the way along to allow anything. I am sure that you would understand that there are only certain areas they put in anyway. That is not exclusively for the Daly River. But if you were to just say, ‘Oh well, if you are a recreational fisherman, you can just go across Aboriginal land, take whatever grog you like, put down and put it in,’ you are going to leave yourself wide open. So, again, we are looking for specific grid references, if you will, which will allow that to occur. The provision is there for those to be nominated as required.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (11.32 am)—Minister, this morning, in the Northern Territory News—I had it sent down to me—this double-page ad appeared.

Mr Brough—Do you want me to have a look?

Mr SNOWDON—Yes. It is just telling people what is going on. The bit I am interested in is the map—which you cannot read out. It depicts the prescribed areas, as I understand it. Across the Northern Territory there are a very large number of parks, either Territory parks, which are now, as result of successful negotiations with Aboriginal people about the future of parks, to become Aboriginal land if they are not already Aboriginal land. A lot of those parks are places where weekend trippers already attend and it is currently legal, because those parks are not yet Aboriginal land, for them to consume alcohol there. But if you schedule any of that land for the purposes of it being Aboriginal land to actually finalise the agreements between the Northern Territory government and Aboriginal people about those parks and their management, they will no longer be able to consume alcohol at those camp places, as I understand it.

Mr BROUGH (Longman—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs) (11.34 am)—There are two things, remembering how long that is going to take. That is ongoing and one would hope that we would have dealt with this serious issue and would have moved on to the next phase, so it would not apply. But the general point of what you are saying is correct. In the interests of people in the Northern Territory who have been regularly visiting point A, they can ring the number down the bottom and describe where it is and who it is, and people will be able to give them specific advice.

We are asking for the cooperation of Territorians and Australians everywhere—in the way that 400-plus people and doctors have volunteered to help. We are also asking for Territorians, without destroying their lifestyle, to say, ‘Can I make a contribution here to make this work and in doing so help people?’ The short answer is that the theory of what you say is right, but the reality is that it is not about to happen in a short time, and let’s hope that we have dealt with these issues in a fundamental way that would not require that to impact upon people.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (11.35 am)—I want to thank the minister for his participation in this discussion. I commend you for your interest in looking at a list of places. I think that is a terrific idea. Rather than me give you a list, I think it would be smart for us to invite the Northern Territory government and the tourism operators to talk to you about a list, because they will know what the most used areas are. I was this morning speaking to someone in the Northern Territory who referred to an Aboriginal person who owns Aboriginal land—he is an owner.
of Aboriginal land—who runs a tourism operation or alternatively goes fishing on his own. Under these laws he will no longer be able to go to a camp spot on his own country and consume alcohol. That is right, isn’t it? I assume it is. I will just come back to my point. Is it possible that there will be an arrangement by which, through your delegation powers in the legislation, you might delegate to an officer the capacity to issue permits on a regular basis for short periods for people to consume alcohol at a camp spot?

Mr BROUGH (Longman—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs) (11.36 am)—I will mention two things. We have a very comprehensive communications strategy for tourism concerning both day trippers and longer term tourist operators and individuals—the grey nomads that we have spoken a lot about today—to help facilitate them. This month, in conjunction with the Northern Territory, we are reviewing the many thousands of individual licences that people hold. As you would be aware, many of these places are dry now and the exceptions are people who hold licences. So we will be reviewing those, and we have the capacity to provide additional licences. I should not fall into the trap—I do not mean that in a negative sense—that is not about ruling someone in or out when I do not know their specific circumstances. A person may well be able to go and do that on his land, wherever it is, because it may not be part of the prescribed lands. But we are here to help them not break the law, too, and to facilitate what is good commerce. That is the whole issue in the bill. The things you raise are the very reasons why we are being as flexible as we can without undermining our principles.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (11.38 am)—I understand the intent of where you are coming from and I appreciate that.

Mr BROUGH (Longman—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs) (11.38 am)—Can I clarify a point. We were and are working with the hotels and retailers associations and the tourism industry on alcohol management, so we would be only too delighted to work with people who want to provide that information and with you. If there is some particular information that we can provide, we would be only too happy to do that. This is about trying to make it work.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (11.38 am)—I appreciate that. I am exploring these issues because they will be contentious for people who live in the suburbs of Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. The people who access land for recreational purposes are going to be very concerned about the potential implications for them and their ability to be able to do things they have historically done. That is why I am asking you these questions. Any way in which you can give them guarantees, or at least satisfaction, that their concerns either are inappropriate or can be met—and it will be reasonable for you to tell them where they cannot be met—would be useful. Whilst not wanting to step into the shoes of the Northern Territory Liquor Commission, it seems to me there may be mechanisms whereby you could deal with those issues.

The second thing I want to briefly talk about is this: I understand the intent of the $100 limit. Quite honestly, I suspect it will not be very effective, not because I do not want it to be effective but simply because it seems to me there are many ways around it. But, leaving that aside, have you or your department given any thought to using elec-
tronic card systems so that you can gauge and track alcohol purchases over time as opposed to having someone’s name listed on a file?

Mr BROUGH (Longman—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs) (11.40 am)—Yes, we have been discussing that with the Territory government—the Territory government are doing that. We are working with them and we are very supportive of them doing that, particularly with respect to people who have been involved with the courts and who have alcohol problems. Clearly, stemming that tide, turning that tide back, would be a massive step forward. So, yes, in short, we are happy to continue our discussions on the work that they are undertaking.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (11.41 am)—Because we are talking about the initial phase of the emergency, is it your intention to review these aspects of the legislation in short order—in other words, in six months or so? I take your sincerity about this matter, but I am sure you will understand, as I understand, that people will be affronted by this and will find it very difficult to deal with, not because it is difficult to deal with but because of their attitude to life and the way they deal with things. I am wondering whether you are going to review the process to see whether it has had any real impact and what other supply side measures you might be discussing with the Northern Territory government and the liquor industry to address consumption levels generally, as opposed to the grog runners who might be purchasing large quantities of alcohol.

Mr BROUGH (Longman—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs) (11.42 am)—I think the situation that occurred at Imanpa the other night was probably instructive. I mentioned it in my earlier speech. The police were out of town for one night and people were selling six-packs of beer for $50. Extraordinary! And I know that someone was sent on a grog run to Alice Springs. So they have two choices in this instance: do they hang around town or do they get out? How do they get the amount of alcohol? If we can help reduce that, so much the better. To your direct point: this is a moving feast. Part of what we have allowed here has been on the advice of the task force, Major General Dave Chalmers and Dr Sue Gordon, to remove the restrictions in localities where it is quickly established that there is a solid foundation to go forward. We have gone with $100, as opposed to 1,350 millilitres, in consultation with various parts of the industry in the Territory, and we will continue to do that. What we will not do is undermine what we have to achieve. I fully accept what you say, that there will be some Territorians who say, ‘Blow me; I have never done anything wrong and I have to put up with this because somebody else has done something wrong.’ We want to minimise that, but I will not run away from the fact that—notwithstanding there will be some inconvenience, unintended as it may be, to a small number of people—we want a limit for as short a period of time as possible, but not say that the destruction that is occurring to other Australians is of lesser importance. We are asking people to participate.

It is a difficult message for some who do not really want to hear that, but it is one of the things you have to do if you are serious about trying to deal with it. I guess it is one of the reasons people have said in the past that it cannot be done. The member for New England mentioned a reason earlier—that you could bring it in from here and you can do that. Laws are laws and they are only as
good as their enforceability and the agencies to do that, and there will always be those who try and circumvent them for their own purposes. I am not pretending for one moment that this is perfect; nothing here is perfect. The Queensland government has tried hard—it has had a big impact—but you find it then plateaus and you need to be doing different things.

I think the point the member for Lingiari is alluding to is crucial. Ultimately, reducing the amount of alcohol that people wish to consume—changing behaviour—is absolutely essential. You do not get to that point straight up; you have to do some things to forcibly prevent it. You implement substance abuse programs and get people engaged in things that are important in life, rather than thinking the only thing that is important is waiting for the bottle shop to open. That is what we really have to avoid.

Mr SNOWDON (Lingiari) (11.45 am)—I will finish on this point. In terms of the supply side measures, are you looking at any prospect of levies on alcohol? The reason I ask that question is that the research tells us that price and the type of alcohol are primary determining factors in alcohol consumption. If you increase the price of certain types of alcohol, you can drastically reduce alcohol consumption overall. If you limit certain products on the market—for example, two-litre cask wine—you can have a dramatic impact on the overall consumption of alcohol as well. I wonder whether or not you are looking at that, because there was a cask wine levy that applied in the Northern Territory. It was very useful in providing resources for remedial measures while, at the same time, increasing the price of alcohol so that the demand for certain products and the consumption levels of those products fell, and people were healthier as a result. That was overturned. There was a constitutional challenge because it was seen that the Northern Territory could not apply such a levy because it was a tax, but it is a levy which the Commonwealth could apply. The other way of doing it, of course, is to have a volumetric tax on alcohol. I have tried to push that around this place for a number of years. No-one takes me too seriously because the wine industry would go berserk, but there are other ways of doing it. An industry levy of some description might be useful.

Mr BROUGH (Longman—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs) (11.47 am)—Regarding the price controls on alcohol, I am advised that there is currently a joint Australian government-NT government working group. You are probably aware of it; it is lead by Minister Pyne, the Minister for Ageing. They have been considering the evidence of what works when dealing with alcohol issues. They have been conducting a feasibility study on floor prices on wholesale alcohol across the Territory. We are looking to the findings of the group before making any decisions on pricing controls. The group is also reviewing the current alcohol restrictions that have been in place in Alice Springs since September 2006 to ensure that future planning is underpinned by this. It has been going for six months. I understand that they are reconvening soon to consider the next steps.

As a final note, we are here because we do not believe the Territory government had the right laws in place. When I announced these measures with the Prime Minister, right at the start we said, ‘We are doing this until such time as the Territory government not only has appropriate laws but can demonstrate the enforceability of those laws.’ If the Territory government were to come to us with levies or whatever else then clearly we would consider that on its merits. I look forward to receiving this advice from Minister...
Pyne and the NT and Australian government joint working group, which will hopefully do it. I thank everyone for their contributions.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BK Bishop)—The question is that the bill be agreed to.

Question agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr BROUGH (Longman—Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs) (11.49 am)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

COMMITTEES

Selection Committee

Amended Report

Mr CAUSLEY (Page) (11.49 am)—I present the amended report of the Selection Committee relating to the program of private members' business on Monday, 17 September 2007. Copies of the report have been circulated to honourable members in the chamber.


The report read as follows—

Report relating to the consideration of committee and delegation reports and private Members' business on Monday, 17 September 2007

Pursuant to standing order 222, the Selection Committee has determined the order of precedence and times to be allotted for consideration of committee and delegation reports and private Members' business on Monday, 17 September 2007. The order of precedence and the allotments of time determined by the Committee are as follows:

COMMITTEE AND DELEGATION REPORTS

Presentation and statements

1 DELEGATION TO CANADA AND GERMANY

Canada and Germany, Report of the Australian Parliamentary Delegation (14 to 28 April 2007)

The Committee determined that statements on the report may be made, all statements to conclude by 12:40 pm

Speech time limits

Each Member 5 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 5 mins]

2 STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

Sustainability for survival: creating a climate for change: Inquiry into a sustainability charter

The Committee determined that statements on the report may be made, all statements to conclude by 12:50 pm

Speech time limits

Each Member 5 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 5 mins]

3 PROCEDURE COMMITTEE

Making a difference: Petitioning the House of Representatives

The Committee determined that statements on the report may be made, all statements to conclude by 1:00 pm

Speech time limits

Each Member 5 minutes.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 5 mins]

4 STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMICS, FINANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION


The Committee determined that statements on the report may be made, all statements to conclude by 1:10 pm

Speech time limits
Each Member 5 minutes.
[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 5 mins]

5 STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMICS, FINANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
Home Loan Lending – Inquiry into home loan lending practices and the processes used to deal with people in financial difficulty
The Committee determined that statements on the report may be made, all statements to conclude by 1:20 pm
Speech time limits
Each Member 5 minutes.
[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 5 mins]

6 JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL MATTERS
Review of certain aspects of the administration of the Australian Electoral Commission
The Committee determined that statements on the report may be made, all statements to conclude by 1:30 pm
Speech time limits
Each Member 5 minutes.
[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 2 x 5 mins]

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS
Order of precedence
Notices
1 Ms K. M. Ellis: To present a Bill for an Act to amend the definition of a low-impact facility under the Telecommunications Act 1997, and for related purposes. (Telecommunications (Amendment) Bill 2007) (Notice given 16 August 2007)

2 Mrs May: To move—That the House:
(1) recognises that:
(a) high blood pressure is a major risk factor for coronary heart disease, stroke, heart failure, peripheral vascular disease and renal failure;
(b) cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death and disability in Australia, claiming the lives of 50,294 people in 2002, or 38 per cent of all deaths;
(c) around 3.67 million Australians are affected by heart, stroke and vascular diseases;
(d) 1.10 million Australians are disabled long-term by heart, stroke and vascular diseases;
(e) the prevalence of heart, stroke and vascular conditions increased by 18.2 per cent over the last decade; and
(f) the total burden of heart, stroke and vascular diseases is expected to increase over the coming decades;
(2) also recognises that:
(a) salt appears to be the necessary cause of high blood pressure; and
(b) controlling one’s salt intake plays a big role in controlling one’s blood pressure, which in turn reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease;
(3) calls on the Australian Government to:
(a) educate the Australian people on the dangers of a high salt diet; and
(b) follow the United Kingdom’s example and label food with green lights, which identify at a glance the best foods on the market for salt content; and
(4) on a bipartisan level, encourage Australians to reduce their salt intake and maintain a healthy lifestyle. (Notice given 26 February 2007)

Time allotted remaining private Members’ business time prior to 1.45 pm
Speech time limits
Mover of motion remaining private Members’ business time prior to 1.45 pm

The Committee determined that consideration of this matter should continue on a future day.

3 Ms Owens: To move—That the House:
(1) notes:
(a) that Australia has the reported highest rate of mesothelioma in the world;
(b) that there has been a four to five-fold increase in the rate of mesothelioma since the early 1980s and that it is estimated that this rate will continue to increase for the next five to ten years;

(c) the chemotherapy agent Alimta is the only treatment registered for use in mesothelioma, and in combination with Cisplatin, represents the ‘gold standard’ for mesothelioma treatment in Australia;

(d) treatment by Alimta can significantly increase a patient’s survival time as well as improve a patient’s quality of life in its final stages;

(e) Alimta is listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) for persons who have contracted lung cancer for smoking, but is not approved for patients with mesothelioma;

(f) access to Alimta for mesothelioma patients is currently inequitable across Australia, with some States and companies providing various schemes to compensate victims of asbestos exposure and some patients having to pay for Alimta privately at great expense; and

(g) the UK National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence recently approved the use of Alimta in the treatment of mesothelioma sufferers and the governments of France, Sweden and Japan subsidise the drug for sufferers in those countries; and

(2) calls on the Government to take all necessary action to support the inclusion of Alimta on the PBS for the treatment of all mesothelioma sufferers. (Notice given 11 September 2007.)

The Committee determined that consideration of this matter should continue on a future day.

4 Mrs Mirabella: To move—That the House:

(1) notes that:

(a) Palestinian terrorists infiltrated Israel’s sovereign border from the Gaza Strip on 25 June 2006, attacked an army post inside Israel’s sovereign territory and kidnapped Corporal Gilad Shalit into Gaza;

(b) on 12 July 2006—in a similar aggressive cross-border attack from southern Lebanon—Hizbollah terrorists infiltrated sovereign Israeli territory and kidnapped Israeli Defence Force Reservists Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev;

(c) there is no territorial dispute between Israel and Lebanon, since Israel withdrew from her security zone in May 2000, under the supervision of the United Nations; and

(d) these young soldiers were serving their active duty within Israel’s borders and now, for more than nine months, have been denied their basic human rights; and

(2) urges the Government to exert pressure on the terrorist organisations, their supporters and financial backers in the Gaza Strip and southern Lebanon, so that the missing soldiers are returned unharmed to their families and the country of Israel. (Notice given 10 May 2007)

Time allotted remaining private Members’ business time.

Speech time limits

Mover of motion 5 minutes.

First Opposition Member speaking 5 minutes.

Other Members 5 minutes each.

[Minimum number of proposed Members speaking = 6 x 5 mins]
QUARANTINE AMENDMENT
(COMMISSION OF INQUIRY)
BILL 2007
Second Reading

Debate resumed from 12 September, on motion by Mr McGauran:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr CREAN (Hotham) (11.50 am)—The Quarantine Amendment (Commission of Inquiry) Bill 2007 is an important piece of legislation. Essentially, it makes provision for an inquiry into the devastating outbreak of equine influenza that is currently having such a huge impact on every aspect of horse related activity, particularly in New South Wales and Queensland. We have been exposed to pictures and images of that devastation—deserted racetracks and reports of threats to the Spring Carnival—but the impact does not go just to the horseracing industry. Our $1 billion equestrian industry has also been affected. This industry has 70,000 horses registered nationally, including our Olympic team horses, a third of whom are now in quarantine. We cannot forget the thousands of recreational riders who are now unable to take part in their favourite leisure activities, including many children who look forward to the pony club at the weekend.

In terms of the economic impact, though, it is the racing industry that is bearing the greatest burden. This is a big industry in this nation. It provides a livelihood for many thousands of Australians. According to the Australian Racing Board, this industry was projected, before the equine influenza outbreak, to have a direct economic impact of $41 billion on the Australian economy over the next five years.

The industry contributes approximately $1.6 billion to federal and state coffers each year. It provides 77,000 full-time equivalent jobs; including over 1,200 jockeys, 1,000 veterinarians and 750 farriers. Over 50 percent of those jobs are in the states worst affected by the influenza outbreak, New South Wales and Queensland: close to 25,000 jobs in New South Wales and almost 16,000 jobs in Queensland.

Horses provide a livelihood to many Australians and are an important part of the recreational activities of many more. So it is little wonder that the news of 25 August 2007 that a case of equine influenza had been confirmed at the Eastern Creek quarantine facility rang alarm bells among horse lovers, horse owners and everyone employed in the industry. It is a serious disease and in worst cases can result in the death of horses. In fact, the first reported death occurred only last week.

The outbreak initially resulted in a national lockdown of all horse movements and the lockdown continues in both New South Wales and Queensland. The Australian public and especially the horse fraternity need to know, in fact deserve to know, exactly how this disease entered the country and how it spread. We need to know how Australia’s quarantine barriers were breached. We need to know what changes, if any, need to be made to our quarantine arrangements to ensure that it does not happen again.

Labor believes that a truly comprehensive inquiry is needed to determine exactly how this disease came into the country and if any person or agency has failed in their duty under the existing laws. We also need clear recommendations for the future to ensure that our quarantine arrangements are world’s best practice in keeping Australia free of exotic diseases such as equine influenza. Labor support the general thrust of this piece of legislation but we believe it can be improved. At the end of the second reading, I will be moving amendments to the bill that will ensure that we get the truly comprehensive inquiry that is much needed. We will
also be ensuring that when the commissioner completes his report it is tabled in this parliament.

If Labor’s amendments are successful, any interested Australian will be able to read the report and the parliament will be able to develop a response. I note that the minister has said that he supports an open process and a comprehensive inquiry. Through the amendments that we propose, Labor will be giving the minister an opportunity to show all horse owners and horse lovers that he really means it. So I invite the minister and those opposite to show that, in this case, they demonstrate real support for openness in government by supporting our amendments.

Unfortunately, the government’s past record gives us no confidence that it is really committed to a transparent and comprehensive inquiry. We need look no further than the inquiry set up by the Prime Minister for the wheat for weapons scandal. Right from the start, in that case, the government was determined to erect a firewall between itself and any fallout from the inquiry in relation to implications for government ministers. It cleverly constructed the terms of reference to effectively constrain Commissioner Cole from delving too deeply into the role of ministers in that scandal. When it came to apportioning the blame, the finger was pointed at certain AWB employees and a number of bureaucratic failings. It was not allowed to look at how the government ignored countless indications that there was a problem.

I am not suggesting for one moment that the agriculture minister or his colleagues are directly to blame for the entry of equine influenza into Australia. What I am saying is that the commission should not be constrained in any way from following the trail of evidence—wherever it leads. That is why I was more than a little disturbed to read the words ‘all or any of’ in clause 66AY(1)(a) of the bill. These are the words that in effect give guidance to how the terms of reference will be constructed. The words ‘all or any of’ appear above the three listed matters. We are backed up on this by the Parliamentary Library, which advises that the effect of these words would be to allow considerable flexibility in the drafting of the terms of reference. I might have done the Parliamentary Library some disservice in saying that, but we certainly have advice to the effect that the words would allow considerable flexibility in the construct of the terms of reference. I hope that the minister is able to answer on this point, but we simply go on the past performance of this government. You can be sure that it will use every possible piece of wriggle room available to squirm its way around potentially difficult situations, particularly if it is implicated. The amendments that we are proposing will tighten up the legislation and leave less wriggle room for a government that intends to avoid the finger of blame, should the evidence point in that direction.

The first matter for consideration in 66AY(1)(a) simply talks about the outbreak of equine influenza. We believe the terms of reference should contain outbreak and spread, because it should not be confined to simply what has happened at Eastern Creek and how the disease got there. We believe the spread of the disease should also apply to the second matter: quarantine requirements and practices relating to the outbreak.

We are told by the Parliamentary Library—and on this occasion I do report it—that nothing in the legislation would actually require the minister to table the report once he receives it. Given this government’s obsession with secrecy, with its terrible record on accountability in this place when it comes to covering up its mistakes, we have no confidence that the report will ever be released. How many times has the government refused
to release something that it has commissioned an inquiry into? We want to make sure that in this case transparency is available. An amendment I will propose later will require the minister to table the commission’s report in this parliament within five days of it being handed to him. We do not want a cover-up. We do not want selective parts of the report released. We want the whole document on the table and the ability for the parliament to consider it. If those opposite really believe in transparent government and accountability for their actions, I would urge them to support the amendments that I will move at the appropriate time.

I also note in passing that this bill is being done as an amendment to the Quarantine Act and not as a separate piece of legislation simply establishing the commission of inquiry. The minister argues that the inquiry is being set up under the Quarantine Act because it will make it easier to provide the commission with better access to assistance from quarantine officers and to records held by AQIS. The minister says that by using this process the commissioner will be able to build on investigative work already being done by quarantine authorities and will not have to start from scratch. We have not been able, in the time constraints around which we have to debate this bill—after all, we only saw it yesterday, and we are expected to debate it today—

Mr Murphy—What a disgrace.

Mr CREAN—It is a disgrace. This outbreak occurred over four weeks ago. Whilst the parliament has not been sitting, there is no reason why there could not have been an exposure draft or a bill circulated, consultation with the industry about the terms of reference, and an explanation of why it needs to be done in this particular form. I am not going to take issue with it. We have to accept the minister at his word. But had we had more time I think it would have been an interesting exercise to understand why it was being done as part of the Quarantine Act.

The inquiry being set up under this bill would potentially make important recommendations about the future of Australia’s quarantine arrangements. We are only debating this matter because there has been a serious breach of an existing quarantine arrangement that poses a serious threat to an industry that touches most people’s lives. The reality is that it is not the only circumstance of breach—it is only the latest of a number of significant quarantine problems that have occurred under this government’s watch. In the last few years we have had white spot disease in prawns in Darwin Harbour, black sigatoka in bananas in Tully, fire ants in Brisbane, citrus canker in Emerald and sugarcane smut in Queensland and New South Wales. Who can forget that Senator Bill Heffernan had his Christmas dinner spoilt after he found a carton of Brazilian beef dumped at the Wagga tip, at a time when Brazil was most certainly not free of foot-and-mouth disease. Whilst this is not an exhaustive list, it is a very demonstrative list. These are examples of breaches we know about. It is a list that has led to considerable disquiet in sections of industry, particularly in our great agricultural industries, about the effectiveness of our quarantine arrangements.

That disquiet last year led members of the New South Wales Farmers Association, at their annual general meeting, to vote unanimously for a comprehensive inquiry into Australia’s quarantine arrangements. This followed a review of Australia’s quarantine commission by the association, conducted by respected Sydney barrister Tom Brennan. Mr Brennan found that there are structural flaws in our quarantine arrangements. Unfortunately, the Howard government chose to ignore the advice of the New South Wales
Farmers Association and the Brennan report. Labor did not ignore the call, though, because we share concerns about the management of our quarantine system under this government. We have committed to establishing a comprehensive inquiry into all aspects of quarantine should we be successful at the coming election.

Part of the amendment I will be proposing later seeks to go to the question of how our procedures stack up against international best practice and whether they have in fact been followed. That is not in the terms of reference. I think it is an important term of reference. We believe it would provide a very sensible base on which to build the inquiry that we would hope to implement should we be elected to government. If the terms of reference are not altered, if the minister chooses to write them down even further, we still believe there will be some useful work that Commissioner Callinan will undertake, but we hope that the opportunity is there to look comprehensively at this issue so that we get it right.

The reality is that it is now more than 11 years since the last effective review into our quarantine system was undertaken. Eleven years ago it was a Labor government that did it. Former minister Bob Collins commissioned Malcolm Nairn to do that major review. For Labor and its primary industries ministers, quarantine was a priority. It was not just the reforms that Bob Collins initiated. John Kerin initiated some and so did I, when I held the portfolio. But the government, as usual, dropped the ball in this vital area.

The government has made a habit of ignoring warnings about quarantine, including at least one that directly related to equine quarantine arrangements. On 24 September 2004, the Australian Racing Board wrote to the former agriculture minister, Mr Truss, warning about quarantine risks associated with inspection protocols for imported horses. The letter from the board said, in relation to equine influenza:

If equine influenza gained entry into Australia, it would close down racing and other events for several months—

*Mrs Murphy interjecting—*

*Mrs CREAN—*Well, it has happened; it is prophetic. The letter continued:

... with catastrophic economic consequences. A quarantine breakdown is the only way Australia will be exposed to this exotic disease. How much better off would we have been had the government heeded those words? But they were not heeded. We now have confirmed cases of this influenza in many locations. Warnings were ignored, and Australian communities, particularly rural and regional communities, are paying a huge price. Communities where equine influenza has been confirmed include Aberdeen, Berry, Gloucester, Maitland, Moree, Muswellbrook, Parkes, Raymond Terrace and Scone in New South Wales, and Warwick, Minden, Rosewood, Brookfield, Tamborine and Goondiwindi in Queensland.

Those closures affect the people in those communities. They are suffering real financial hardship as a result of this failure on the government’s watch. While the people involved in racing and other horse related activities in New South Wales are the ones that bear the brunt of the impact, the impact goes a long way beyond that. Because of revenue sharing arrangements within the racing industry, and because racing is closed down in New South Wales and Queensland, it impacts upon the states that still undertake race meetings. Many horse events have been cancelled around the country, even in states not subject to complete lockdown.

But there is an impact on the revenues of organisations that run other important events.
The Melbourne and Geelong shows, which will take place in the next fortnight, for the first time will be without horses. There will be no horses, no show jumping, no Clydesdale teams. I acknowledge that the government has provided some assistance for a number of those affected by the outbreak. We support that assistance package, but we are asking the government to look more closely at the needs of communities and individuals beyond those that they have already compensated and to work closely with the industry.

Labor has consulted with industry and has listened to their concerns. This is an interesting fact: my home state of Victoria has a huge racing industry. In Victoria each year, there is a $3.8 billion gaming turnover. Half of that revenue in Victoria comes from Victorians betting on interstate races. If those interstate races are not happening, the betting does not happen and the revenue is down. Yet there has been no compensation for Victoria or the other states affected by it. That is a huge component in the context of Victoria. I do not know what the proportions are in the other states but I would expect they would be very large. Racing Victoria believe it will cost them up to $25 million this year. With racing shut down in New South Wales and Queensland, half of the main revenue stream for Victoria has disappeared.

So the government does have a clear responsibility. I would like to know from the minister who he has consulted with beyond New South Wales and Queensland—the ones that have been closed down—what those consultations have involved and why consideration has not been given to compensation for the other affected states. We urge the minister to not only address that question when he responds but also to actively engage himself in those sorts of discussions, as we have.

As I said before, it is absolutely vital that the inquiry finds out exactly how our quarantine defences were breached and how the influenza was able to spread. Yesterday, I asked a number of questions of the Prime Minister and the agriculture minister that were based on information provided to Labor by a number of Australians who have been concerned about the way in which the government has handled this matter. I asked the Prime Minister whether the government had received any warnings about the adequacy of its quarantine regime in preventing this equine influenza spread. He said he would check.

I know the Prime Minister has been a bit preoccupied over the last week, and one can excuse him somewhat because of the sorts of problems his own colleagues have been inflicting upon him—talking behind his back, withdrawing support, telling him he should go, and he then ignoring them. I can understand that in the last week—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BK Bishop)—I think the honourable member should return to the bill.

Mr CREAN—I am completely on the bill. This outbreak has been going on since last month. Why wouldn't the Prime Minister, with this major impact on the racing industry, have made a point of bringing himself up to date so that he could have answered a simple question as to whether he was satisfied about the adequacy of the arrangements? It was not good enough for him simply to say he would look at it. He still has not come back and answered the point. A Prime Minister on top of his game, a Prime Minister committed fully to the future of this country, instead of quitting halfway through the next term, were he to be re-elected, in those circumstances would have been across this matter that affects so many people, yet he was not. We know that the government
was warned; we know that from the letter that I quoted from before—

Mr Hunt—This is a witch-hunt.

Mr CREAN—from the Australian Racing Board, Minister; they wrote to the government and warned about this in 2004. If you had been listening intently before, you would know that I gave the specific quote. They were prophetic words; they talked about the disastrous consequences of the closing down of the racing industry, and it has happened. It has happened because you ignored the warnings. That is what this inquiry has to get to the bottom of—how it is that such a significant warning was ignored and, more importantly, what procedures were in place that allowed the outbreak to occur.

Was there only one warning? That is what we would have liked the Prime Minister to have told us. I would have thought that now that that letter is in the public domain the Prime Minister would have said: ‘Yes, we did get a warning from there. That is why we have set up a royal commission.’ Did he have any other warnings? I do not know. But we are entitled to have him tell this House. We are entitled to an answer.

I also asked the agriculture minister— not just the Prime Minister—about reports that horse handlers at the Eastern Creek quarantine facility regularly go from that facility to a nearby tavern for dinner without removing their gear or showering. That is a circumstance in breach of one of the most fundamental quarantine requirements. The minister still has not answered that question. What has the government got to hide? We are entitled to ask in the parliament about this very vital area. Why can the minister not answer?

We know that the government moved to tighten quarantine arrangements and procedures at Eastern Creek 10 days ago, so obviously the procedures were deficient. But why can he not tell us the answer to a simple question? This was a full month after a batch of horses arrived from Japan. It was more than two weeks after equine influenza was reported in Japan and a fortnight after 17 August, the day that a number of horses from Eastern Creek fell ill and testing for equine influenza was done. Given all of those facts, I find it disturbing that the minister was unable or unwilling to answer. I see him in the chamber now and I hope that he is—

Mr McGauran—Ask again today; I want to talk about Reins of Fire!

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Hotham has the call.

Mr CREAN—I think the minister has gone troppo, Mr Speaker.

Mr McGauran interjecting—

Mr CREAN—I think the minister has got a dose of this influenza himself. He seems to be having—

Mr Murphy—I think the minister should be put down!

Mr CREAN—I think the minister has got a dose of this influenza himself. He seems to be having—

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Mr McGauran interjecting—

Mr CREAN—I think the minister has got a dose of this influenza himself. He seems to be having—

Mr Murphy—I think the minister should be put down!

Mr CREAN—The minister should be put down! I thank the member for Lowe. Labor has been informed that there were a number of anomalies regarding the quarantine arrangements for the importation of horses that I talked of yesterday. The facts of this case are that on 4 November 2005 three horses were brought from France to the Spotswood quarantine station in Melbourne. Two weeks later, they were released from quarantine and appeared in events in Sydney and Newcastle. The information provided to Labor was that the importation was outside the normal allowable period but that the minister had intervened to stretch the definition of what constitutes the low-risk period.

Mr McGauran interjecting—

Mr CREAN—That is our advice. In fact, as a result of the minister’s intervention, AQIS officers were so concerned about the risk posed by these horses that they put in
place a number of extraordinary procedures, including sealing the vehicle the horses were transported in and inspecting the venues of the shows. Again, the minister did not answer my question but came into the House later in the day to provide an answer of sorts. In my view, the minister still has not answered the central charge that he intervened to extend the boundaries of the normal allowable period to allow those horses to be released from quarantine. Instead, he concentrated on a number of peripheral issues and sought to make a joke of it.

Mr McGauran—No, I didn’t even know they were there!

Mr CREAN—He is still carrying on in a stupid way now. I acknowledge that the horses involved were show horses, not racehorses, and that Reins of Fire is the name of a troupe of horses and not the name of an individual horse. But these minor details do not answer the central facts of the case. Those issues, which I have talked of before, go to the core of what we are asking the minister about, and we want a full explanation. He still has not answered the central issues in this case. He still owes a response to the parliament and, in fact, Labor have been made aware of a number of other concerns about this particular importation and we will be vigorously pursuing these issues.

The new charge that I make today goes to the risk in relation to equine influenza from horses from different places that are co-mingled. Between 17 and 20 August this year, two horses from Ireland and one from the US were stabled close to a horse imported from Japan in breach of procedures actively developed by the Commonwealth and state quarantine experts. I ask the minister: can he confirm that these three horses subsequently presented with equine influenza symptoms? When did the minister first become aware of this high-risk practice and what actions did he take? This is a minister who has a lot of questions to answer. Instead of chortling from the sidelines, let him give a full explanation in this place, and let him be prepared to adopt the amendments that we are proposing that will strengthen the guidelines to get to the bottom of their—(Time expired)

Mr CAUSLEY (Page) (12.20 pm)—Mr Speaker, if the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry keeps interjecting, I might put him out under standing order 94(a)! I apologise as, from the beginning of my speech, I will be breaching standing order 76, under which members are required to address the question before the chair—the Quarantine Amendment (Commission of Inquiry) Bill 2007. But I think, in the circumstances, as an ageing member who has decided to retire, we are often given some privileges. I dare say that I will not take too many privileges but, certainly, I will range across a few issues.

As a young boy growing up on the Clarence River, I never envisaged that I would be involved in politics. I certainly did not come from a family that was actively involved in politics; I did not mix in circles that were actively involved in politics. I certainly did not belong to a trade union organisation to become involved in politics, but I was a trade unionist. I had earned a scholarship through my school to do a university degree. I gave that away and went cane cutting. Of course, one of the obligations in those days was to have a ticket before signing on. I can tell you that the union were quite smart because they used to renew the ticket in November, so they got two in the first year.

It gave me some grounding, I suppose, in the area that I love most—agriculture. I did become involved in the sugar industry and the politics of the sugar industry. I spent
probably nearly 20 years in sugar industry politics before being convinced to stand as a member of the state parliament. The then leader of The Nationals in New South Wales, who was Mr Leon Punch—a fiery, gingery character—was begging me to enter politics for some time. I had a young family and I did not feel disposed to getting involved because I knew that the lifestyle was fairly onerous. Nevertheless, he insisted. I remember saying to him once, ‘Leon, if I ever go to the state parliament, you and I will clash,’ and he said to me, ‘Well, let’s try it.’ Eventually I did decide that I would put my name forward to stand for The Nationals for the seat of Clarence, which is a state seat in New South Wales. I was never the favoured son of The Nationals. I dare say that is understandable; I have always called a spade a spade and I have always been outspoken. Even at my preselection, the hierarchy of the party did not really favour me. Nevertheless, I had done the groundwork and I won the preselection. I was told by people around the electorate when I was doorknocking that if they had selected the other candidate they probably would not have won the seat. I took that as a compliment.

I have stood on several occasions for both state and federal seats, and I have won seven elections. The Australian Labor Party have fought me tooth and nail on every occasion, I can assure you. Nevertheless, they have never prevailed. I have never been defeated in an election, and I have to thank the people of Clarence and of Page, the people of that North Coast area, who have put their faith in me. I am not the usual politician. I certainly do not go out there to gain favours. I am not one of those populists who go out and say all the popular things. I certainly take the attitude—and I like to think that people who deal with me are the same—that, if I am upfront with someone, they may not agree with me but at least they respect my position. I have never wavered from that. I think that is one of the reasons I have always been elected. They may not like me but they certainly know where I stand. No-one will ever die wondering where I stand on certain issues. I think that is a very important point.

Bills before the House today, particularly the greenhouse bill, I think are very relevant to a number of portfolios I held in New South Wales. I was probably the longest serving Minister for Water Resources—that is the irrigation area, not city water. I was also the minister for forests, the minister for lands and western lands. I was the Chief Secretary (NSW). I did all the groundwork for the casino in Sydney—not that I supported it, but the Premier wanted it. So I did all the groundwork there. I was Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries. I had a number of portfolios in New South Wales, and they really do relate to some of the issues and the bills being debated today, particularly the greenhouse bill. Forestry and water resources—those types of areas—are intimately tied to that debate and the legislation we are talking about at the present time.

A number of things in politics disappoint me, but one in particular, and it is to do not just with this chamber but with the way politics is debated around the countryside. In many ways I believe that our democracy has been taken over by the fact that the minority is always heard too much these days. The minority goes out there and controls the media with some hysterical headline. There is never the research done to see whether in fact that headline is correct, and often it is not. Often it is an exaggeration. Because of this country’s demography, where most of the politicians are going to come from the capital cities, particularly Sydney and Melbourne, the debate is controlled through the media by these minority groups and the effects are on the country. I do not think we look closely enough at the effects of some of
I am very proud of what I did in the irrigation industry in New South Wales. I think that is still respected in that state. It was a feudal system when I took it over in 1988. Growers were restricted to 80 acres. They were not allowed to grow what they wanted to grow. They were restricted to about 20 acres of grapes. We would never have this great wine industry we have in Australia if that regulation had not been broken down—and it had to be done. Mind you, the people involved did not agree with it at the time, but if you went back down there today I am sure they would say, ‘We do not want to go back to that.’

In the debate today on the Murray-Darling, I do not believe the true facts are being discussed. This is a very dry continent. If you go back through the European history, and prehistory if you want to go back and have a look at some of the research in universities, it has always been a very dry continent. There is evidence of 20-year droughts, which we have not seen in European settlement. We have to take into consideration those historic facts. When we start to talk about allocation of resources, I think the country has to come first; the citizens have to be considered. To say that the environment in these areas comes first is ignoring the history. There is plenty of evidence that the Murray dried up and there is plenty of evidence that the Darling dried up in the past, and when you have a situation like we have today, where we are in the middle of a 10-year drought, then the communities and the industries on those river systems have particularly to be taken into consideration. I do not think that is being done. There are many exaggerations. In fact, I am losing faith in the CSIRO. Quite frankly, I see some exaggerations there. I do not know whether it is because of ambit claims for resources, but I think they have gone away from their scientific base and they are not giving good advice. The area of land management relates to the forestry area and is more to do with the state than it is to do with the federal government, although I chaired the Standing Committee on Environment and Heritage of this parliament which went into the management of catchments—and forestry has a lot to do with the management of catchments.

Again, we are forgetting and ignoring the management and the history of management of these resources in Australia. Again, it is because of the exaggeration that we are hearing from the environmental movement. If you listen to them, the last tree is falling tomorrow morning. The greatest scar on the environment, if you want to talk about it, is Sydney. We never hear too much about that. But when we look at the resources around the country, because of the legislation that has gone through parliaments, we are now setting up for a disaster. We are not managing the common areas of this country. In the past we had a large forest industry that protected special areas—and I did a lot of work with the late Peter Cook when he was the minister for resources in the Hawke government. We set up a plan to manage forestry, to look after the special areas of forestry but also to maintain working forests. That is where people, through their governments, get the money to maintain those areas. At the present time, we are locking all the industries out of these areas, including the grazing industry that used to maintain many of the leases, and saying to taxpayers, ‘Somehow you’re going to have to find the money to manage these areas and we aren’t.’ Who was it that was foremost in opposing the agreement that Nick Greiner and Bob Hawke signed about the management of forests that Peter Cook and I put together? It was the ACF chairman, now the member for Kingsford Smith.
We have out of control fires that destroy flora and fauna because hot fires do. The Aborigines had more sense. They had fires for different reasons. They used fire for hunting and for their food resources but, over tens of thousands of years, they changed the species of this country and these species all rely on a slow fire. They kept fires burning most of the time across the landscape. We have ignored that and are saying, ‘Lock all these areas up.’ Then we get a build-up of fuel and, with lightning strikes, or in some cases arson, we have huge fires. They will destroy species—plants, animals, birds. Once you get a crown fire—it goes across the top of the forest; forget the koalas because they go up a tree to escape from fire—you destroy all of that. We have lost the plot in the management of the crown resources of this country. I hope that our grandchildren will one day realise what a mess we have made of this. I believe there are going to be some horrific stories in the future with this build-up of fuel, including around Sydney. We have seen bad fires in the past around Sydney and we will see them again if we do not get control of this fuel.

In 20 minutes you cannot roam over a lot of areas; I have got a lot to say. As I said, I was never the favoured son of The Nationals. I recall that when Wal Murray retired there was a ballot for the leadership in New South Wales. Several members—nine members of the party—came along to me. I was not putting my name forward as leader, but they came and said, ‘We want you to be the leader of the party in New South Wales.’ I said to them: ‘I’ll do that but you’ve got to understand I’ll make no promises. That’s not my way. I might have to make decisions as a leader that some of you mightn’t like from time to time and I won’t owe anyone anything.’ The hierarchy of the party did not like that too much. They spent a lot of time, I can tell you, trying to work out how to beat me. They knew that if we went the usual route for electing a leader—the simple method of preferential voting with several candidates—I only had to pick up two votes and I was the leader. So what did they do? They spent nights calculating how to beat this and even got to the stage where they asked the leader to change the rules at the meeting to have exhaustive preferential voting. So I finished up with four nines. I got nine, nine, nine, nine. It was quite interesting that that was the extent they went to.

I was not supposed to be a minister. I had been a shadow minister and did a lot of work with the irrigation industry. I spent hours negotiating with them and I always negotiated on any changes that we made. I was not supposed to be a minister because Nick Greiner decided he did not want me. Wal Murray was the leader and he had the right to say who would be a minister. It was Mattie Singleton, the member for Coffs Harbour, that reminded my leader that if I had not voted for him in the first place he would not be the leader. Nick Greiner wanted Robert Webster instead of me. Of course, Robert Webster was a Liberal in sheep’s clothing. Later on when he left the parliament he joined the religion, and so that was proven to be correct.

Once we lost government—it was a bitter-sweet pill to lose—I was going to retire; I was going to go back to my business, as I had plenty to do there. Paul Keating was the Prime Minister down here, and everyone was desperate to get rid of him. The leader of the party at that time, Tim Fischer, strongly encouraged me to come down to Canberra with my experience. He stood up in front of 200 people in Lismore and said, ‘Send this guy to Canberra and he’ll be a minister.’ Of course, that has long been forgotten—not even a parliamentary secretary. I think that that is probably indicative of what politics is about.
Over the period I have had some great support. I have to mention my wife because she has done as much in politics as I have. ‘You got two for the price of one’, I often said. When I was a minister, she went around the electorate looking after the traps. I am sure she is very highly respected in the electorate, and I know that she probably gained as many votes as I gained myself, so I thank her very much. My daughter Marcelle is sitting up there with my wife; thank you very much for the support.

I have had marvellous staff. I started off with Noela Powell. She was my only staff at that time. Bernadette started with me and is now working with me again—she has changed names; she got married. Debbie Newton also worked with me. I had several ministerial staff, as you would know. They were all very good staff; I was very pleased with the staff I had.

Of course, I now have a number of staff because we all have a lot more staff these days. I have Liz Cockle, Bernadette is back with me, Tink O’Keefe, Kerry, who fills in, and Graeme Orams, who worked for me for some time. I then became the Deputy Speaker of this place. I have worked with you, Mr Speaker, and I have worked with your predecessor. We have had a great relationship and I thank you for that. It is an honour to be the Deputy Speaker of this House, although I have to say that I would have preferred to be a minister. Nevertheless, it is a great honour. I have tried to uphold the chair. I think that sometimes my colleagues believe that I have been a bit too tough, but I had a compliment one day when the opposition said to me, ‘Well, we think you are fair because you are just as tough on them.’

I have a great deal of respect for this House. The institution itself is an extraordinary one. There is nothing in the world like the democracy we have in Australia and we need to fight for it. This is the members’ House; the government might have the numbers to control it but it is the members’ House. The members have a right to speak. I believe that the most important standing order is the one that grants the right to speak in silence. I have tried to enforce that order. I see that the Opposition Whip is in the chamber. I am pleased to say that I was the chairman of the selection committee that decided how private members’ business would be dealt with. We adopted an attitude very early on in my time that this was a house of free speech and we would not argue over subjects that we wanted to discuss. They might be sensitive at times and they might be hard, but this was a house of free speech and people had a right to put forward their views.

I also want to thank the clerks. They are, beyond doubt, some of the best anywhere—Ian Harris and Bernard in particular. I have worked very closely with Peter Mason in the selection committee. I have had a lot to do with Robyn Webber because she is the Clerk of Committees. I thank those people for all the support they have given me. I also thank the staff of the parliament. They are always very courteous.

You make some very good friends here mostly on the other side, I might say. There is a lovely story about Maggie Thatcher that could be told about that. I will mention the honourable member for Reid because he and I went into the state parliament on the same day. His father was the Deputy Premier at the time.

Most importantly, I will mention my clerk—the inimitable Kim McInnes, the Deputy Speakers Clerk.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

Mr CAUSLEY—Life is never dull when you are around Kim. She does a great job and I think that most members she has worked with in the parliament would accept
that. And of course there is Sharon Davidson, who started with me—she was my press secretary at the time. Kim would dearly love to stay on. She is a bit angry with me for retiring, but we also have to win an election. The member for Lowe might disagree with the fact that we should continue in government. I know that Kim enjoys the job and she will miss it if the vagaries of politics mean that we both have to leave.

I thank all the members for their friendship over the years; I have really enjoyed it. It is a special club and I thank you very much.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (12.41 pm)—I would like to extend my congratulations to the Deputy Speaker and member for Page for the public work that he has done over many years. I notice that the member for Hume, Alby Schultz, is also in the chamber today. I was in the state parliament when the member for Page was a minister in that government. In fact, it was my vote that allowed that government to continue, in a sense, in a hung parliament. I have always appreciated the wisdom that the member for Page has had, both in the state parliament and in this place. It is a great tragedy that the expertise, particularly in the natural resource area, that the member for Page obviously had at the state level as a minister did not transfer through to a key position in the current parliament. In my view, he was one of the few country ministers who was prepared to stand up on key issues of importance in New South Wales. I do have one derogatory comment to make about him: in 16 years in politics I have only been thrown out of the parliament once and it was the member for Page as Deputy Speaker who shut me down and put me out! Even though I was not happy with it on the particular occasion, I understand the rules and he was playing by them. In that sense, his actions were quite correct on that occasion. I wish him and his family well for the future. Thank you, Mr Speaker, for your indulgence in allowing me to make these remarks.

The Quarantine Amendment (Commission of Inquiry) Bill 2007 is of extreme interest to me because the New England area is one of the areas that are very badly affected by equine influenza. The sportsground at the small community of Moonbi is in lockdown as we speak. There are 38 horses in quarantine. Most of those individual animals are away from their homes as they had travelled to an event there a few weeks ago. I thank the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, who is not here at the moment, and his senior staff as well, for their attention to some of the concerns that those people raised. They were very quick to recognise some of the problems not only in Moonbi but in other areas as well. As this issue gains momentum much more will need to be done by governments at both the state and the federal level. There are 38 horses in lockdown and there are other outbreaks of equine influenza across the electorate. We believe that the Moonbi infection came from horses that had previously been at Maitland, and I think there is a linkage back to Eastern Creek, where those Maitland horses came from.

A member of my staff, Graham Nuttall, and I have been out to Moonbi on a number of occasions to assist with a whole range of issues such as enabling mobile telephone services to be relayed, accommodation arrangements, feed provision for horses and stabling of horses et cetera. I would like to pay credit, if I could, to the people who have been out there helping the horses that are in lockdown and their owners. Some of those horses are very valuable and their owners quite obviously want to stay with them as much as they can and look after them. In particular, I thank a senior person in the De-
partment of Primary Industries, Arnold Turner. Arnold has been in charge of pro-
ceedings out there. It has not always been easy for him and no doubt that will be also
the case over the next few weeks and months. Various emergency services have
been assisting as well. Obviously, there are lockdown provisions and various criteria that
have to be dealt with in terms of people en-
tering and leaving the premises. The Rural
Lands Protection Boards have done an out-
standing job.

One thing this outbreak has highlighted is
the run down of personnel in the Department
of Primary Industries at a state level. There
has been a constant rush to privatise some
functions and get them out into private in-
dustry. I think we are now starting to see that
we do need some form of bureaucracy, in a
sense, if these sorts of outbreaks occur. There
is also the issue of the number of staff in-
volved with the Rural Lands Protection
Boards. I know that is a state issue, but I
think it is important in this matter that we
look at the staffing levels of the Rural Lands
Protection Boards. Currently, we have a wild
dog problem about 100 kilometres from
Moonbi, we have the Moonbi problem and
we have a range of other problems relating to
drought and the movement of stock et cetera.
The rural lands protection people are doing
an extraordinary amount of work and this
shows that recent calls to reduce the number
of people working for the Rural Lands Pro-
tection Boards should be revisited. As I said,
there are other outbreaks in the New England
and north-west area that have been well
documented.

We should be learning from these prob-
lems. Equine influenza is going to cost a lot
of money and it is going to harm a lot of
people, but it is nowhere near as deadly or as
costly on a national scale as an outbreak of
foot-and-mouth disease. I think there is an enormous amount
that we have to learn. I understand the moti-
vation for this response—and I am not being
critical of the people at the time; I just
praised the Department of Primary Industries
people working on the ground at Moonbi, for
instance. Essentially, this is a national disas-
ter. We have never had this disease before. At
one stage, they were advertising on the radio
for caravans to be provided to accommodate
people who were in lockdown with their
horses. I do not think that is an adequate re-
sponse from a state based department to an
outbreak of a major disease that we have not
seen before in Australia. People had to ad-
vertise for charity to accommodate people
who had travelled to Moonbi and found their
horses were infected, through no fault of
their own, and then had to stay there with
them. I am not denigrating the community
who volunteered caravans et cetera to ac-
commodate these people, but I do not think
that is an appropriate response mode for a
huge breakdown in biosecurity. I think that is
something we have to address. We do not
have a trigger mechanism and a plan for a
major outbreak such as equine influenza or
foot-and-mouth disease, and I think we really
need to do some homework on the sorts of
things that actually happen on the ground
when these things start to occur.

There have been some who have been
critical of the way in which the Department
of Primary Industries reacted on the ground
at the time of the outbreak. As I understand
it, horses had come from Maitland, some had
gone to Narrabri and some had gone to
Moonbi. Moonbi was locked down, but peo-
ple from Narrabri were allowed to proceed
home. From that decision, where the Nar-
rabri horse event was deemed to be less risky
than the Moonbi one, the horses were al-
lowed to proceed to other destinations and an
outbreak of the disease resulted in other places where they travelled to. There was a degree of inconsistency as to the treatment and the seriousness of the outbreak when it first occurred.

The bill before the House is essentially about inquiring into the outbreak of this disease. Where did it come from? Were there breaches of biosecurity? If so, who, where and why? Those are the sorts of issues involved, and I support the government in pursuing that agenda. I also support the member for Holt’s comment this morning in his address, where he said that it should inquire not only into the outbreak and where the breach of biosecurity occurred but also into the spread. I say that not in terms of headhunting people as to whether the right decision was made at Narrabri but in terms of how we can learn from this and respond on the ground to the challenges if similar outbreaks occur in the future. There will be breaches—there is no doubt about that—but I do not think that our response mechanism has been adequate to date.

The inquiry has to be transparent; otherwise, it is a waste of time. We have all had problems with AQIS and biosecurity. It is no good having an inquiry that is about internal navel gazing and trying to protect people from within the system. It is no good having an inquiry where only the minister and members of the cabinet are privy to the information. As a nation, we have to learn from this. The handling of this has not been good. Maybe accidents do occur and these sorts of breaches of biosecurity come with them, but we have to learn as much as we can.

Back on 4 August, before the outbreak occurred, a constituent in my electorate wrote to the minister, Peter McGauran, alerting him that a motion had been proposed and carried at the July conference of the New South Wales Farmers Association. The resolution in the letter conveyed to the minister stated:

That the Association strongly oppose any relocation or privatisation of the Eastern Creek Quarantine Centre without thorough consultation and input of stakeholders needs, namely the horse industry.

The lady who wrote this letter, Judy Marheine—and I relayed this to the minister—is a constituent of mine. She is very involved in the horse industry and is affected quite dramatically by the outbreak of EI at the moment. But there have been a number of warning signs out there. I think the minister should go back through the correspondence and have a close look at some of the messages that were being sent, such as the one a few years back—I cannot remember the exact date—from the New South Wales Apiculturists Association. The member for Hume is the chairman of the Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry—and he is doing a good job—which is currently looking at the honey bee industry and its various problems. A few years back, the Apiculturists Association asked the same minister for an inquiry into a biosecurity breakdown regarding the small hive beetle incursion in their industry. It was deemed to not be of sufficient importance to have an inquiry. The question they are quite legitimately raising now is this: if equine influenza and the effect that it will have on the industry—and I do not think many horses will actually die from that disease, though it will have massive economic and social implications—it is important enough for an inquiry, why was a similar breach of biosecurity in the honey bee industry virtually brushed over? Again, I think we have to tighten up on the provisions regarding biosecurity, irrespective of which industry it is and the perception of that industry’s importance.

The Glen Innes Examiner, a newspaper in my electorate, highlights that fact with the
headline ‘Horse flu has lessons for us all’. It goes through some of the issues on the ground with the Department of Primary Industries and the decision making processes. I would urge people who are interested in this issue to have a very close look at that as well. Some of the issues that have also been raised relate to how we now deal with equine influenza. I have relayed some of these issues through to the minister’s office and I thank him for his attention to them. We are going to have an inquiry into how it happened, but people on the ground want decisions and an idea of where all of this is going in relation to not only compensation and those issues but also controlling the disease. Do we just stay in a lockdown situation, as some suggest? I do not know the answer to these questions.

A number of veterinary surgeons in my electorate and others in the equine industry are starting to urge that vaccinations be looked at as a possibility. I do not like to verbal the minister, but I think that early on he made some indication on one of the radio programs that vaccination would not be considered. A side inquiry or a departmental inquiry should really have a very close look at some of those issues. Some of the veterinary people have a very high level of knowledge. Dr John Peatfield, from my electorate, for instance, has an enormous amount of knowledge about the equine industry in not only New England but also the major racing centres. Some of these people are making suggestions regarding vaccination and I have not heard a good argument as to why we should not have a very close look at it. It does not mean that we have to do it, but we have to have a closer look than just a cursory brush-off of the issue. We have to have a logical reason not to do it. Other countries in the world are doing it and, if this disease is here, maybe we have to look at ways of control-

ling it in a domestic situation rather than just hoping it will all go away.

Another side issue that I wish to raise—and the member for Hume has again been involved with some of these issues—is that if this were an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, irrespective of the problems we have had at the state and Commonwealth levels in reacting to the problem, what would we do? What can we do to put better plans in place to prevent diseases from spreading? The member for Page raised this issue a moment ago; it was not directly in the terms that I am raising it, but it is the same issue. He was talking about management issues in national parks. We have something like 30 million wild pigs in this nation now. People talk about it all the time: ‘We have more pigs than people.’ We have a vast chain of national parks down the Great Dividing Range from Queensland, through New South Wales and into Victoria. We currently have a wild dog problem. But if this were an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, that spine of protected lands—unmanaged lands, in a sense—would provide the ideal channel for the eastern part of Australia to be infected with footand-mouth disease.

What can we do? I do not think we are going to reverse the process. We will have a chain of national parks—and people will argue the pluses and minuses of that—but what can we do to avoid the problem coming out of those areas? The only answer—assuming that we are not going to get some sort of control of the wild pig, which we have not done yet—is to stop those animals from coming out of those areas. To do that you have to have proper exclusion fencing. People will say—shock, horror!—that it will cost an enormous amount of money. It is costing the people who happen to be neighbours of those properties enormous amounts at the moment—and this is the point I think the member for Page was raising. In
my electorate, for instance, people have moved out of the production of sheep because they cannot afford to stay there because of the wild dogs. There are wild brumbies in that country as well, so EI could spread through that area as well. I would urge that we attempt to learn from this in a number of ways. There are particular high-risk areas for the spreading of some diseases. In the case of the wild pig population, maybe we should have a much more serious look at exclusion fencing—managed exclusion fencing rather than just the provision of materials.

Mr SCHULTZ (Hume) (1.01 pm)—I rise to express my full support for the Quarantine Amendment (Commission of Inquiry) Bill 2007. I do so in the hope that the people affected by this dramatic impact on the horse-racing industry, in Queensland and New South Wales in particular, will understand that the inquiry has been brought about because of the problems associated with people sometimes making emotive statements—in many instances justifiably so—about why equine influenza has spread as it has and, more importantly, the problems associated with what appear to be some shortfalls in the Eastern Creek quarantine facility. Having said that, I have to say that the Australian government, through the minister, is committed to getting to the bottom of how this outbreak of equine influenza has occurred in Australia. We have to ensure that there is a full and independent inquiry which will be empowered by this legislation, and it needs to be formally commenced as quickly as possible. As I understand it from discussions I have had in this place today with people in the harness industry, we now have 4,600 horses infected and the number is rising. So it is a very critical issue.

As all members are aware, the government intends to appoint the Hon. Ian Callinan AC as commissioner under these amendments. A jurist of the higher order with a good working knowledge of the horse industry, Mr Callinan is eminently qualified for this role and ideally placed to conduct a thorough inquiry into this outbreak. Through these amendments, Mr Callinan will be provided with all the necessary powers and protections of a royal commission. We will also have access to all of the relevant quarantine-specific powers that are already contained in the Quarantine Act 1902. The commissioner will have the power to hold public hearings, compel witnesses and documents, direct quarantine officers to assist his investigation, and direct his own independent investigators.

The effects of the outbreak of equine influenza have been felt across the horse-related industries and, in New South Wales alone, thousands of people have been affected by the outbreak. The Australian government is providing much-needed assistance to those people and businesses that have been directly affected. That is in stark contrast, unfortunately, with the New South Wales and Queensland governments, which have obtained considerable revenue from the industry but have sat on their hands in terms of making a financial contribution to ease the burden that is being placed more and more each day on the shoulders of the people who rely on the industry for employment and, more importantly, those industries that support the equine industry and employ people across the country.

It is also essential that these amendments are made as quickly as possible so that Mr Callinan can officially commence his comprehensive independent inquiry. When I got up to speak about my support for this amendment, I made reference to the recriminations in the public arena about why equine influenza got out into the wider community. I listened very intently to the comments by the honourable member for New England, who just made the point that there is generally a
very serious concern in the community about the need for the government to ensure that the Eastern Creek quarantine facility remains—in relation to not only the problems associated with the equine industry but, more importantly, the problems associated with biosecurity. He quite rightly pointed out that the inquiries I have chaired in relation to feral animals and honey bees have reinforced the reality that we need not only to keep the facility but also to enhance the procedures and equipment in it to ensure that we have the maximum amount of protection.

This outbreak of equine influenza has certainly had disastrous consequences, not only for the racing industry but also for small businesses that are reliant on the industry. The Australian economy relies heavily on the racing industry, and the financial impact will continue to be felt not only by the racing and breeding industry but also by transport companies, the hospitality industry, the fashion industry and event promoters. In rural and regional Australia, many farming communities who were already suffering from the devastating effects of Australia’s worst drought on record have now been dealt a double blow with the outbreak of the equine flu. In the electorate of Hume, as an example, horse-and-carriage owners, who are employed at events such as weddings, harness makers and riding schools are just a few of the smaller businesses that have been affected by this devastating outbreak. I might add that the numbers of people affected by the outbreak are increasing on a daily basis. It is for this reason that a thorough inquiry into the causes of the outbreak must take place as soon as possible.

A lot of information about the outbreak of the equine flu has not filtered down to the grassroots level, to local communities. It is important that we gather the thoughts and feelings of the people in the sport and leisure horse industry to ensure they have a collective voice in this crisis. That is already being done here today. As I mentioned, I had some people from the harness racing community in the city of Goulburn, in the Hume electorate, come in to see me today. That group consisted of trainers, owners and a vet and, after listening to them, I made a quick appointment for them to talk to Minister McGauran—who, incidentally, has been flat out listening to groups such as this one from the Hume electorate, and I commend him for that.

It is all right for those on the other side of the chamber to play politics with this issue and to make derogatory and inflammatory comments on what the government is doing to address this outbreak, but I take exception to the member for Hotham’s backhanded insult in terms of whether the government will be open and transparent with the outcome and the findings of the Callinan inquiry into the equine influenza problem. Of course the government is going to be open and transparent because the outcome of this inquiry, and the report that will finally come from Commissioner Callinan, will be very important not only to the equine industry and the future wellbeing of this country’s export industry but also to our economy.

The inquiry is also very important because it is an absolutely significant inquiry into an issue that centres on biosecurity, and thus on all diseases that are likely to make incursions into this country. That is one of the reasons why I mentioned the honey bee industry inquiry, and it is one of the reasons why I think the member for New England mentioned the issue of feral pigs. We have massive problems in this country and, rather than play politics with them, we all have to work together to ensure that we fix the problems. We must do something more positive about addressing the potential threats within our own
borders, in terms of the threats of those sorts of issues to our native flora and fauna, than playing political buck-passing at a state, territory and federal level. We need to think more nationally and more internationally in terms of the threats that are around and the problems they could cause.

Let us hope that this inquiry identifies the source of the equine influenza outbreak in this country. More importantly, let us hope that it also makes the appropriate recommendations to ensure that, if any weaknesses are found in the system—and I am not suggesting there are weaknesses—we plug those holes as quickly and as professionally as we can.

This inquiry will help ease the fears of many horse owners and breeders who are concerned that another outbreak is possible. Everyone who has been involved or affected has the right to know the causes and consequences of this outbreak so that the federal government can ensure it never ever occurs again. Whether another outbreak is to be prevented by vaccination or by other means remains undecided, but I know there are significant numbers of people within the industry—and that certainly includes those constituents I saw today—who are talking about the blinkered approach of, to take an example, the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries in relation to the vaccination process.

All government departments and all levels of government have to understand that they have to listen to the people out there who are at the coalface of industries such as the equine industry in this country, and they have to ensure that they make a calculated, sensible judgement on the actions that they recommend the ministers of the Crown take. If they do not do that, then all of the concerns that have been raised and all of the issues that have been taken up and acted upon will amount to nothing. Equine influenza has already, as I have said previously, ravaged the livelihoods of many Australians. It may come again because of human error, especially in these days of international travel and the global horse economy, and we must do our utmost to ensure it does not occur again.

To return to the inquiry: the inquiry can utilise, as I understand it, through the amendments, the expertise of the assigned quarantine officers, with no possibility of conflicting directions. I refer to the minister’s second reading speech on the issue, where he said this:

The Director of Quarantine will make a decision in relation to this matter as soon as the needs of the commissioner are known. However, it is quite likely that officers who have already been working on internal investigations into the outbreak will be assigned to the commission of inquiry, to avoid delays and unnecessary duplication of work.

The bill also allows for independent people engaged by the Commonwealth to assist the inquiry to be vested with relevant powers under the Quarantine Act. For instance, the Director of Quarantine could determine that an independent investigator assisting the commissioner could exercise search powers usually reserved for quarantine officers under the Quarantine Act. This will further provide the complete independence of the commission of inquiry.

I could not agree with the minister more. It is easy to sit back and be critical of the process undertaken by a minister in a very difficult situation. It is true that I do not always agree with the actions of the minister or the time in which he acts on things, but I have to say in this House and put on the public record that there has been no person more concerned and worried about the future contribution of the equine industry than Minister McGauran. I was very pleased that, after thinking about the problem and making a phone call to the Prime Minister’s office, who then spoke to
the minister and relayed my thoughts and those of my parliamentary colleagues on this side of the House on how we should expand the assistance package to assist those people who are affected in their employment by this equine influenza outbreak, the minister announced a significant package to assist people. You can be assured that I, as a member of this government, will be encouraging people to take advantage of that assistance.

I look forward to the outcome of the inquiry by former Justice Callinan. I know that, given that eminent Australian’s contribution to the justice system over the years, he will be a formidable commissioner in this process and that he will present a report to the government that will be unbiased, open and frank in its outcomes as a result of his investigation into the equine influenza problem. I thank the House for the opportunity to make a contribution today.

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (1.17 pm)—While members of the government fight over the spoils of government this week, the horse industry in Australia remains in absolute crisis. Together the thoroughbred and racing industries constitute the nation’s third largest sector. In New South Wales alone, the thoroughbred industry’s contribution to the economy is valued at around $4.2 billion. In the same state, some 50,000 people are employed by the thoroughbred and racing industries. No area in Australia is hurting more than the Hunter Valley. The impact there has been devastating and therefore people will not be surprised to hear me speaking on this important bill, the Quarantine Amendment (Commission of Inquiry) Bill 2007, this afternoon.

The Hunter, particularly the Upper Hunter, boasts some of the world’s best known thoroughbred horse studs: Arrowfield, Baramul, Coolmore, Byerley, Darley, Emirates, Kio- Ora, Sweetenham, Woodlands, Vinery and many others. It is not just the studs being affected, though; it is also the small breeders, the tourism industry, the racing industry, the saleyards, horse sports, the farriers, the veterinarians, the horse dentists, the barrier attendants, the transport owners and drivers—they are particularly facing huge debts but are without income at the moment—trainers, caterers; and the list goes on and on. The town of Scone proudly boasts of being the horse capital of Australia. It is entitled to. It is home to the Australian Stock Horse Society and boasts horse studs which collectively produce billions of dollars worth of foals each year. It is also home to an equine research centre, a TAFE campus which specialises in equine studies, Olympic quality polo grounds and probably the best racetrack in regional New South Wales. Each year, the Scone Horse Festival brings thousands of people to the area. We give thanks that at least the flu outbreak occurred after the May festival. Imagine the immediate economic impact the cancellation of that special event would have had on the Upper Hunter shire. The Mayor of the Upper Hunter Shire, Barry Rose, reminded me yesterday that there is not one business in Scone that is not affected by this horse flu crisis. Of course, a business does not have to be directly involved in the horse industry to be affected. When incomes are down, consumer spending goes down and every business in the area has been caught up in the crisis.

The crisis in the Hunter is not confined to the Upper Hunter. Race meetings everywhere have been put on hold. The racing industry is hurting very badly—just ask the Newcastle Jockey Club, which of course extends its operations to the Cessnock racecourse in my own home town, or high-profile trainers such as Paul Perry and Kris Lees or owners such as my mate Jeremy Sylvester. Breeders also exist in the lower parts of the valley, as do trainers, farriers,
vets, transport operators, saleyards and all those classifications and occupations that I have already mentioned. The *Maitland Mercury* reminded us today that the horse sale of the Maitland Saleyards, which occurs on the second Thursday of each month, has been cancelled for the first time in 200 years. It has survived floods, droughts, the depression of the thirties and labour shortages during the Second World War. You name it and it has survived it, but it has not been able to survive this horse flu crisis.

On Sunday, August 26 I was travelling to watch my beloved Cessnock rugby league team play in the preliminary final at Newcastle’s No. 1 sportsground. Unfortunately they were defeated by Lakes United, but that is another story. On the way down I took a phone call from a Cessnock resident by the name of Sue Simmonds. Sue and her husband had travelled to Moonbi, just outside Tamworth—and I heard the member for New England make reference to the crisis there—to watch their granddaughter participate in a horse sport event. Sue’s family, along with many others, found themselves stuck in Moonbi because their horses had been quarantined. They were among the lucky ones: they had their own caravan and were able to accommodate themselves. But many other families faced hefty accommodation costs and the food costs which went with being stuck in that town. I mention this story to point out to members of this place how broad the impact of this horse flu crisis is. I know that many members who do not represent constituencies which are directly affected would not have a real and proper understanding of how broad the effect of this is. It goes all the way from the top studs of the horse-racing industry right down to the family who has a member participating in horse sports of some sort or another.

What can I say about the racing industry? It is an industry which pumps around $70 million annually into the Commonwealth’s coffers via the GST. It is an industry which contributes more than $200 million to the New South Wales Treasury each year. I spoke to a high-profile New South Wales trainer this morning. He, like many others, is frustrated that horse vaccination and an easing of the horse movement restrictions have not occurred before now. I am very pleased that the Thoroughbred Breeders New South Wales Association and the New South Wales government appear close to an agreement on the easing of horse movement restrictions. The introduction of a so-called ‘purple zone’ will be good news for the Hunter. It should be accompanied by a Commonwealth government subsidised vaccination program.

Unfortunately, the Hunter faces the inevitability of total infection. On that basis the restriction on movement within the Hunter region seems to have served very little purpose. Businesses in the Hunter urgently need those restrictions lifted. I know it is a complicated matter and I know there are both pros and cons, but the current circumstance cannot go on any longer. The situation without the movement ban could surely not be any worse than it is with it. I know that there is an issue with vaccination, and again there are no simple answers here. I know that it has the potential to complicate the timing of Australia’s all clear on equine flu. So I will let the experts decide. But I do call upon decision makers to err on the side of vaccination. That is certainly what people in my electorate are telling me is needed, including vets in my electorate whom I have spoken with.

On 12 March this year the Prime Minister came into this place at question time and sought, on indulgence, to make a statement. That statement was about a couple of disasters, one of them being the then recent storms and floods in the Hunter region and on the Central Coast. It was an appropriate
thing to do and I know the residents of the Hunter appreciated it very much. The day before, the Governor-General came to the Hunter, toured some of the affected areas and spoke to some of the various emergency services groups and volunteers. I accompanied him on that short tour. The Prime Minister also came to Maitland and did something similar. Again, that was something I appreciated and something that I know the residents of the Hunter appreciated. It was the right and appropriate thing to do.

It just astounds me that, in stark contrast, we have seen no such recognition in this place of the disaster we are talking about this afternoon. I know there is not the same visual impact. You cannot see horse flu. We do not have our eye on the cash flow books of the many businesses which are being affected or the family budget of those families who have been affected through involvement in horse sports or because someone in the family works within the industry. We do not get that visual impact. It is true that, thankfully, no-one has lost their life as a result of equine flu. That is not likely, of course. Lives were lost in the floods. So I am not comparing the two in that sense. But this is very big, and I am surprised that there has not been greater recognition in this place. We are only finally talking about it today because the government has moved forward with the legislation required to establish the inquiry. There has been no prime ministerial statement, as we saw on other occasions. The economic and social impact of this absolutely warrants that contribution from the Prime Minister, other senior government members and indeed members of this House generally—some of whom I suspect are affected by this outbreak and do not even realise it.

I was particularly surprised to see that on the speakers list for this bill there are only six speakers listed out of some 150 members of the House of Representatives. Even more extraordinarily, four of the speakers listed came from this side of the House and only two from the government side—and one was a valedictory from the member for Page. We will count him in there and give them the benefit of the doubt. I think that is extraordinary given the scope and the impact of the issue which is before us today. Where is the member for Paterson? I have outlined for the House the extent of the impact of this crisis on the Hunter region, including those areas represented by the member for Paterson at the moment and those areas which will be represented by the member for Paterson in addition after the next federal election, if he is still here, when the boundaries will have changed. I should point out that there is some doubt about whether he will still be here; that remains, of course, to be seen.

It is well recorded that in a sense this outbreak had its beginnings in Maitland. It would have been appropriate for the member for Paterson to be in here extending his sympathy to those affected, demonstrating that he understands the impact of the outbreak on the region and committing himself to getting in here and doing something about it. I am sure that, like me, he welcomes the royal commission. I hope that, like me, he fears that the terms of reference are not sufficiently broad. We need terms of reference that get to the bottom of where this all began and that ensure we put in place new processes so that this can never happen again.

The original $4 million offered by the government was an insult to industry and to the communities affected. The $110 million package which followed is much more welcome, but I suspect it will still not scratch the surface. I made the point earlier that $70 million per year goes into the Commonwealth’s coffers as a result of the GST, so they will get more than half of the money back in one financial year. This remains a very, very
modest contribution from the Commonwealth government. I urge them to take another look at it, to continue to monitor the impact of the outbreak and to consider additional financial assistance where it is required. Giving back just half of what the industry is already giving to the government is not sufficient to cover the impact.

The member for Paterson should be in here acknowledging the impact on his constituents, recognising their need and talking about the terms of reference. We want to know whether Bob Baldwin thinks these terms of reference are sufficiently broad to cover every aspect of the source, and he should be in here fighting for more money for those of his constituents who have been affected. It is not too late. The opposition will be happy to facilitate an opportunity for the member for Paterson to speak. I will talk to the Opposition Whip. I am sure that we will be more than happy to facilitate an opportunity for the member for Paterson to participate in this debate on the Quarantine Amendment (Commission of Inquiry) Bill 2007, show that he has some compassion for his constituents and show that he is prepared to get up and fight for the people he represents in this place. Surely he also, like me, has some concerns about the extent to which the government has cut back funding in AQIS, the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service, the extent to which they have outsourced much of the work in that organisation and whether or not that has in some way, even if only in a small way, led to the procedures breaking down so badly that we find ourselves in these circumstances today. Again, I invite the member for Paterson to come in here and have his say. We will facilitate that process.

Finally, I want to acknowledge and thank the many organisations who are working so hard to minimise the impact of the crisis—organisations like Thoroughbred Breeders Australia, Racing NSW and the New South Wales government. I am sure the New South Wales government has not got everything right but I know Minister Ian Macdonald is working very hard and consulting very broadly and widely with those who are affected. I also acknowledge the individuals involved. They are numerous—too many to name. I have had contact with many of them, of course, in the Hunter Valley and I have had phone calls from Sydney based people, particularly those who are associated with Royal Randwick, who I know are going beyond the call of duty. That is sometimes out of a bit of self-interest; we understand that. But it is also in the interest of the industry, in this case the racing industry.

Amongst those individuals, I want to single out one very special group, and that is the veterinarians who have been affected by the crisis. It is a bit counterintuitive. People are saying to me, ‘Why is it that when we have an outbreak of horse flu the vets have less work than ever before?’ I do not have time to go into all the detail, but it is obvious that there are movement restrictions which make it very hard for veterinarians to do their normal work. You cannot, for example, go to one stud and then move on to another, for fear of human transportation of the virus. If you go to a stud, you have to stay on that stud or go through all the procedures involved, such as washing down, changing clothes et cetera, to ensure that infection is not an issue.

Some of the vet hospitals in the Upper Hunter have been able to dedicate a vet to a particular stud, which is very generous of them because it certainly does not deliver the most efficient returns to their businesses. They are doing a sterling job. Like medical doctors, they are going beyond the call of duty, not just looking at their own financial circumstances but doing what they can to ease the burden on the people of the Hunter.
The issue is very large in the Hunter region, in particular the Upper Hunter, and I trust that the royal commission we are establishing today will get to the bottom of the source and its causes to ensure that this is not only the first but the last time we have to deal with this issue in this country.

I know that much latitude has been given during this debate to allow members to make their valedictory speeches, and I have just heard part of what the member for Page, Mr Ian Causley, had to say. The member for Page is one of the real characters of this place. There are too few of them these days, in my view. I have enjoyed a bit of banter with the Deputy Speaker over the course of the years, and he has thrown me out of this place a couple of times too—usually unjustifiably, of course! I know you would never do such a thing to me, Madam Deputy Speaker Corcoran, unless it was warranted. I would expect you to do so if it were warranted, but usually in the case of the Deputy Speaker it was not warranted. I served on the House primary industries committee with Ian Causley when we both came here as part of the class of ’96. I think the Assistant Minister for Immigration and Citizenship at the table was also a member of the class of ’96.

Ms Gambaro—Yes.

Mr FITZGIBBON—I spent some social time with Ian as well as time on the committee and I always enjoyed his company. I did not always agree with what he had to say, but that is to be expected.

I extend my very best to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to all the others who are leaving this place. We have heard a couple of valedictory speeches over the course of the last couple of weeks. We thought this would be our last opportunity. Maybe there is a little bit of time left yet—we shall wait and see. I particularly acknowledge Kim Beazley, who has been a great servant of this place and of the Labor Party, and my friends Rod Sawford, Carmen Lawrence, Michael Hatton, Gavan O’Connor, Bob Sercombe and you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I also want to acknowledge Harry Quick, the member for Franklin. He has had a difficult time with the Labor Party recently, but he has made a significant contribution both to the Labor Party and to this place over many years. It would be remiss of me not to mention Harry, who, as I said, has had some issues with the party in recent times but is basically a good bloke. I remember a great story about Harry Quick, who once travelled to Gallipoli and had an emotional experience in remembering his father’s role in that campaign. To all those members, and to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, we wish you the very best for the future and we thank you for your contribution. (Time expired)

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR (Gorton) (1.38 pm)—I concur with the comments made by the member for Hunter with respect to the Quarantine Amendment (Commission of Inquiry) Bill 2007 problems of the equine flu and the failure of the government to respond and attend to the matter properly. I am from Victoria. The great concern that we have is that at the moment we are attempting to prevent the virus entering the state, which could potentially devastate the spring carnival, a carnival that I am very much a patron of, as is the member for Lowe and other members. Indeed, the Victorian community are great patrons of the racing carnival in Melbourne in October and November. I know the state government is doing everything it can to prevent the state from being affected. I think it is important, as the member for Hunter indicated, that the government attend to some of the concerns—and to this point I do not think there has been an adequate response.
Yesterday I heard the minister responsible, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, seeking to provide an answer to questions raised by the member for Hotham. I do not believe those answers will satisfy the House, the racing industry or those parties adversely affected by this awful outbreak. It is important that the government attend to the concerns in the industry and stop attending to its own internal conflict and obsessions about its leadership. I therefore concur with the member for Hunter and other members on this side who have raised concerns about the failure by the government to properly respond to this problem in the racing industry.

Mr MURPHY (Lowe) (1.40 pm)—I strongly support the contribution just made by my colleague and good friend the member for Gorton on the Quarantine Amendment (Commission of Inquiry) Bill 2007. I also strongly support the amendment moved by my other good friend and colleague the shadow minister for trade and regional development, the Hon. Simon Crean, the member for Hotham.

While the Howard government dithered during the initial outbreak of the equine influenza epidemic around Australia, Labor has consistently called for an independent inquiry into how the disease was introduced, whether quarantine procedures are adequate and whether there has been a breach of quarantine procedures and protocols. From this perspective, I am broadly supportive of the bill but particularly of Simon Crean’s amendment. It is ludicrous that it took so long and so much arm-twisting to compel the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to launch this independent inquiry into what is such an obvious breach of Australia’s biosecurity regime. In light of the scale of the breach involved on this occasion, one can only wonder what level of quarantine breakdown would be required before the Howard government initiated an inquiry of its own volition rather than being pushed into the one that we have now with Commissioner Callinan. Surely Australians have a right to expect that quarantine procedures are being administered effectively by their government rather than with the indolence, complacency and lethargy that it has demonstrated on this occasion.

Such was the level of lethargy in the minister’s response to this outbreak that many Australians would be entitled to ask whether he too was suffering some form of influenza. Australians have a right to expect that, in the event of a quarantine failure, the government will act decisively to find out why it happened and how it can prevent a repetition. Unfortunately, after 11 years in government it is clear that the complacency, indolence and lethargy that I mentioned have submerged the Howard government, putting biosecurity enforcement at great risk.

It is obvious that the minister needs all the help he can get when it comes to identifying flaws in Australia’s quarantine procedures or failures in their application. Rather than being forced into an independent inquiry, the minister should have initiated one immediately—but he chose not to. The consequences were painfully obvious to all Australians and particularly those whose livelihoods depend on the racing industry. We all had to endure the unedifying sight of the minister responding on the run and contradicting himself as he went. We know some members of the Howard government are masters of projection and we saw new heights reached on this occasion with this crisis. On 24 August 2007, the minister stated:

It is likely that the infection has originated from another horse in quarantine that has contracted the disease but has not shown any clinical signs of it.
Then, three days later, on 27 August, the blame shifted when the minister indicated that ‘the Maitland event may be the source of the outbreak’. In a sign of defiance, the minister proclaimed on the following day, 28 August:

... there has been no breach of the impenetrable quarantine barriers at Eastern Creek ...

I will come back to the folly of that statement later in this debate. Finally, on 31 August, another three days later, the minister saw the light and questioned his own quarantine regime, when he stated:

We want to identify what went wrong so it can never happen again and so we can repair the breach.

He said:

It’s going to be human error, there’s no question, but were the quarantine procedures adequate?

It is clear that the Howard government has felt for several years that quarantine procedures were adequate, despite several legitimate concerns raised to the contrary.

During the course of the Callinan commission, we will no doubt hear of the prophetic warnings about equine influenza which were raised in years gone by. One of these warnings came from a very unlikely source, a former Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Hon. Mark Vaile. In a press statement the then minister stated:

The horse ... facilities at Eastern Creek have served Australia well for over 20 years and Australia remains one of the few countries in the world, which have never had an outbreak of equine influenza.

Now here is the clincher:

An outbreak of equine influenza would cause massive disruption to Australian horse racing and would be expensive to contain.

Indeed. Another former Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Hon. Warren Truss, had this to say:

We have a thriving, five billion dollar horse industry that deserves to be protected by the most stringent quarantine controls.

If only both those ministers had taken their own advice.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you know we are an island continent. For this influenza strain to get into Australia there must have been a breach of what Minister Truss labelled ‘stringent quarantine controls’. As Minister Vaile foreshadowed, this outbreak of equine influenza has caused massive disruption to Australian horseracing and it will be difficult to contain, and the effects have been debilitating. In New South Wales alone, 1,300 horses on 146 properties have tested positive to equine influenza. So much for Australia’s so-called ‘stringent quarantine controls’.

In an excellent article by Fiona Carruthers titled ‘The human pain from horse flu’, published in the *Australian Financial Review* on 1 September 2007, the human toll of equine influenza was very accurately described. The horseracing industry is worth $8 billion a year to gross domestic product, and it is not hard to see why. Ms Carruthers accurately identifies the forgotten victims of equine influenza, be they children’s riding teachers, trainers, strappers, grooms, university students with part-time track jobs, promotional staff, barrier attendants, track workers, maintenance staff, hospitality workers and cleaners. And that is not to mention the truck drivers, veterinarians, horse chiropractors, hairdressers and lingerie and fashion shops that have lost enormous amounts of trade through this crisis.

Mr Deputy Speaker, you know and everyone in this House knows that the horseracing industry employs many Australians. It is a huge industry. No doubt the list of those impacted on by this equine influenza crisis outbreak could go on and on. The racing industry sustains 77,000 full-time equivalent jobs.
The Sydney Turf Club and the Australian Jockey Club, of which I am a proud member, employ up to 1,000 casuals between them on big race days. As this crisis draws out, more and more families will wonder where they will find the additional money to pay the mortgage, feed the kids and pay the other bills. All this could seemingly have been prevented if someone—anyone—in the Howard government had taken heed of the warnings presented to them.

It will not be difficult for Commissioner Callinan to spot flaws in Australia’s quarantine system. The commissioner need only scratch the surface to find them. Many concerns have already been raised, as referred to by the member for Gorton in his contribution about lax quarantine procedures at the federal government’s Eastern Creek quarantine facility. The AUSVETPLAN disease strategy for the control and eradication of equine influenza highlights the importance of making horse handlers aware of the risks of transmission of the virus by mechanical means. AUSVETPLAN also states that personnel handling horses in quarantine stations must shower before leaving the station to minimise the risk of transmission. This is for very good reason, as the virus can be spread on clothing or equipment.

Despite this, there is a considerable body of opinion and evidence which shows that pathetic quarantine arrangements existed at Eastern Creek quarantine station. A stallion groom formerly employed by a leading United States stud has stated that he, as well as others, was allowed to come and go from Eastern Creek without changing clothes, washing or showering. The groom was also witness to people unloading horses from trucks at the quarantine station and leaving without washing themselves or their trucks. These are not isolated claims.

On Saturday, 8 September 2007, Mr Alan Frogley, a very respected veterinarian, told Radio 2SM that he went to look at a horse at Eastern Creek, expecting to go through rigorous biosecurity procedures. Like many of us, Mr Frogley must have been duped by the former minister’s claims that Eastern Creek has the most stringent quarantine controls. To the contrary, Mr Frogley advises that he ‘breezed in as if it were just another stable’.

So I ask today, on behalf of the industry: where are these so-called stringent quarantine controls? The minister should immediately answer my questions Nos 6310, 6311, 6312 and 6313, which I placed on yesterday’s Notice Paper. I am still awaiting an answer. Perhaps I should not be asking where the stringent controls are. Given the examples I have just mentioned, a more pertinent question would be: are there any quarantine controls at all?

We must remember that this has all taken place against a background of AUSVETPLAN warnings that equine influenza could potentially be introduced to Australia by imported horses if quarantine procedures were inadequate. The quarantine failures I have mentioned all took place against a backdrop of an equine influenza outbreak in Japan and horses arriving in Australia from Japan at around the same time.

Rather than stepped-up quarantine precautions at Eastern Creek quarantine facility as a result, we now know that people have been walking in and out of the facility without showering, scrubbing down trucks and changing their clothes. So I ask again on behalf of the racing industry: what is going on at Eastern Creek? It is no wonder that leading trainer John O’Shea from Randwick said:

You don’t have to be a rocket scientist to work out that there is the introduction of this virus into Eastern Creek and now the same virus is in the general population
... there is no doubting that it’s come from Eastern Creek.

John O’Shea is a much respected trainer at Randwick. It may not take a rocket scientist to work that out, but the minister still has his doubts. While the minister already has a lot to answer for, the scandal does not end there for the government. It is now common knowledge that concerns were raised about Australia’s quarantine system as far back as 2004. It would seem that quarantine standards have been slipping for some time under the Howard government.

Mr McArthur interjecting—

Mr MURPHY—And I know that the member for Corangamite would understand this very well in his electorate. In 2004 and 2005 the former Australian Racing Board Chairman, Mr Andrew Ramsden, warned then Minister Truss that a ‘quarantine breakdown’ would be the only way equine influenza could enter Australia, potentially causing ‘catastrophic economic consequences’. At the time, the ARB’s concerns included the quarantine risks from the use of private vets to inspect imported horses at the expense of the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service. The ARB cited an example in South Africa where private vets had played a prominent role in a quarantine breakdown, and there was an outbreak in 2003. The government dismissed those concerns and, in a perfunctory fashion that many stakeholders have become accustomed to, the government suggested all imported horses would be under the ‘direct control of an AQIS veterinarian’. Whether this has actually been the case is unknown.

Mr McArthur—Have you ever seen a racehorse in your life?

Mr MURPHY—I certainly have. You were not listening. I am a proud member of the Australian Jockey Club. I know more about the racing industry than you do, member for Corangamite—with great respect. The minister must immediately answer whether any private vets paid for by importers inspected imported horses without an AQIS vet present. If the minister will not answer that, the terms of reference of this inquiry must be broad enough to allow Commissioner Callinan to do so. Indeed, this inquiry’s terms of reference are far too restricted, and that was very adequately pointed out by the member for Hotham and shadow minister for trade and regional development when he foreshadowed his amendment, and that is why I am supporting his amendment.

By God, if there is a change of government, which we are all aching for on this side of the House and across Australia—whenever the election is called; perhaps the Prime Minister might tell us that today—we in government will move that amendment to really get to the root causes of this terrible crisis of equine influenza. Like the tricky terms of reference that we had in relation to the wheat for weapons scandal, this inquiry is designed to shield the government from criticism. We all know that.

I note with great interest that the terms of reference within this bill do not include an investigation into the culpability of Howard government ministers. This is consistent with the pattern of this government—again, crafty terms of reference may allow senior ministers to escape scrutiny. They never want to know anything. Remember children overboard? Weapons of mass destruction? Wheat bribes to Saddam Hussein? They never knew anything. In the best of Christian charity we can forgive them and say they are not lying; but Australia will not forgive them for their incompetence. If they are not lying about any of these things and if they are not covering up then, okay, we will forgive them for that
but we will not forgive them for their incompetence.

Surely we deserve some answers in relation to this crisis. What action has been undertaken in the last three years that the Australian Racing Board’s letter has been in existence? We are all entitled to know that. This inquiry should investigate any instances in which concerns have been expressed to the government ministers by the horseracing industry about the integrity of the quarantine system.

_Mr Fitzgibbon interjecting—_

_Mr MURPHY_—The member for Hunter and shadow minister for defence made a valuable and lasting contribution to this debate. He has a very important horseracing industry based in Broadmeadows in his electorate. He understands it clearly. This inquiry should investigate any instances in which concerns have been expressed to government ministers by the horseracing industry about the integrity of our quarantine system, because clearly it is in grave doubt today—and the member for Corangamite knows that too. More importantly, this inquiry should have the power to carefully scrutinise the adequacy of the responses provided to those expressions of concerns.

_Mr Fitzgibbon_—Where is the member for Paterson?

_Mr MURPHY_—That is a very good question, member for Hunter, because I notice that when you made your contribution you invited him to come into this chamber and make a statement. While we are fortunate that our geographic isolation provides a natural defence against exotic diseases, keeping threats away from our borders requires eternal vigilance on the part of the minister. That is why we are going to move Simon Crean’s amendment when we get into government. That is why it is so important to do it. We are entitled to have serious concerns about the Howard government’s lack of vigilance with respect to quarantine procedures. Scientists have claimed that at least three deadly contagious bird diseases have bypassed Australian quarantine controls. Other exotic diseases which have been reported in Australia on the Howard government’s watch include fire ants in 2001, small hive beetle in 2002, citrus canker in 2004 and sugarcane smut in 2006. What a record! Now we can add equine influenza in 2007.

Oh, here is my good friend the Prime Minister, right on queue, coming into the House.

_Mr Howard_—I have come in to hear you!

_Mr MURPHY_—I know you have. I have been begging you to tell me when the election is going to be held and you have not answered my question. I will give you some friendly advice about when not to have the election. All right? We have been talking about equine influenza; I suggest on Sunday you go out to the Governor-General’s and have a quiet cup of tea—

_Mr Howard_—Go where?

_Mr MURPHY_—Out to see the Governor-General, and call an election for either 20 or 27 October, because the last thing you would want to do is sully the Melbourne Cup racing carnival. It opens on Saturday, 3 November, as the member for Higgins knows, and goes through to Saturday—

_Mr Costello_—Derby Day!

_Mr MURPHY_—Derby Day. The Melbourne Cup is on 6 November, Oaks Day is on 8 November and then you have the ‘family day’ on 10 November. You do not want to sully the Melbourne Cup carnival by having a politician get in the way of punters around Australia analysing the form guide or interrupting the commentary on television.

_Mr Costello_—Give us a tip.
Mr MURPHY—I have not got a tip at this stage.

Mr McGauran—You know nothing about horses!

Mr MURPHY—I know a lot more than you know about horses, and I am telling the Prime Minister not to have the election on 3 November or 10 November.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 2.00 pm, the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 97. The debate may be resumed at a later hour and the member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mr HOWARD (Bennelong—Prime Minister) (2.00 pm)—I inform the House that the Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads is ill and will be absent from question time today. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services will answer questions on his behalf.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Iraq

Mr RUDD (2.00 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. If the Prime Minister wins the next election, will he withdraw Australian combat forces from Iraq before he retires?

Mr HOWARD—The policy of the government has always been that our forces will remain in Iraq according to the rights and interests of the Iraqi people and the interests of this nation and not according to the personal interests of an individual.

Employment

Mr HENRY (2.01 pm)—My question is addressed to the Prime Minister. Would the Prime Minister outline to the House how Australian families benefit from low unemployment? Is the Prime Minister aware of policies that will increase unemployment?

Mr HOWARD—I thank the member for Hasluck for his question. The member for Hasluck and his Labor opponent in the forthcoming election really present a microcosm of what the policy debate is all about. The member for Hasluck employed people when he was in business before he came into this parliament. He was an extremely successful small business man. He was somebody who actually worked hard to give people jobs. His Labor opponent is a former trade union official. Need I say any more? She is committed to a policy which will result in higher unemployment. My colleague from Hasluck lived a life before he came into this parliament that actually gave jobs to people and reduced unemployment.

I might remind the House that in 1996 the unemployment rate in Hasluck was 7.4 per cent. In March of this year it had fallen to a mere 3.1 per cent. I might also inform the House that figures that came out today on the long-term unemployment levels in this country show that in the time that this government has been in office the level of long-term unemployment has fallen by 66.3 per cent. It was in excess of 330,000 in 1996. It is now a bare 66,700. But it can get lower and we can have in reality in this country a full-employment society. When I talk about a full-employment society I talk about one where every person who wants a job and is able to have a job, gets the job, but also a society where not only do they get the job but they get the job of their choice. We have it within our grasp if we do the right thing economically over the years ahead to create a genuine full-employment society in Australia. We will not create it if we wind back industrial relations reform. We will not create it by driving up unemployment, which would be the result of Labor’s policies. The long-term unemployment list would begin to climb again, because Labor’s returning of the unfair dismissal laws would result in unem-
Employment rising once again because small business would be intimidated out of taking on the staff that they plainly have been doing over the last 16 months when the new industrial relations laws have been in operation.

So I say in reply to the member for Hasluck that the greatest human dividend of good economic policy is reduced unemployment. The greatest goal any government can have is to create a society where people have the jobs not only that they are able to do but the jobs that they want—-that we have a society where every Australian who wants to work and can work is able to get a job and is able to get a job of their choice. That is the society that we want. It is a society that could never be achieved under the Australian Labor Party.

Education

Mr Rudd (2.05 pm)—My question is again to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to Labor’s $450 million plan to give all Australian four-year-olds 15 hours of preschool education a week for 40 weeks a year delivered by a qualified teacher. Will the Prime Minister detail his plan for the future of Australian four-year-olds?

Mr Howard—I think the first and most important thing that we can do for the four-year-olds of this country is to make sure their parents have a job. That is the most important thing we can do and that is the best policy any government can offer—to ensure that every child in this country grows up in a household where their parents are in work. I am very proud of the fact that the number of jobless households in Australia has declined markedly during the time that this government has been in office and I am distressed at the prospect that, under Labor’s high-unemployment policy, the number of jobless households would rise yet again.

Economy

Mr Tollner (2.06 pm)—My question is addressed to our first-class Treasurer. Would the Treasurer inform the House of results of the latest assessment of the Australian economy by the International Monetary Fund? What does this report say about the government’s economic and financial management?

Mr Costello—My answer is addressed to our first-class member for Solomon and, I think I can say, the best member that Solomon has ever had in the history of Australia.

Mr Martin Ferguson—We have only had one.

Mr Costello—I am glad the member for Batman understood what I was saying. He is really on top of his game today. There are some union officials that are really quick. Today the International Monetary Fund released its annual assessment of the Australian economy. The IMF does a report on every one of the members of the IMF—some 150 to 160 nations around the world—on an annual basis. This is done by the independent IMF, which is Washington based and is the premier economic institution of the world.

The report which was released in relation to Australia notes that we are now in our 15th year of continuous economic growth, this government having presided over nearly 12 of those years. That growth is strong at about four per cent and inflation is low at about 2½ per cent. This is what the IMF said in its report today. I ask the House to listen to this quote of the IMF:

[Executive directors] commended Australian authorities for their “exemplary” macroeconomic management, which is widely recognised as being at the forefront of international best practice.

That is not me, that is not the Prime Minister, that is not the Liberal Party—that is the IMF, which describes Australia’s economic man-
agement as ‘at the forefront of international best practice’. The IMF noted that we have improved our fiscal sustainability by accumulating surpluses, eliminating net debt and establishing the Future Fund to provide for future liabilities. If Labor had had its way we would never have been able to do that. Labor opposed balancing the budget; Labor opposed paying off debt; Labor opposed making sure that the Future Fund was locked up for future generations of Australians.

There is only one area that the IMF raised for concern in relation to the fiscal situation in Australia. Bear in mind that this is not me and it is not the Australian Treasury. It is the Washington based IMF. The IMF sounded a note of caution in this international report on Australia in relation to spending by state governments. This is what the IMF said:

Another stimulus that raises concern comes from the States. The States are collectively forecasting a fiscal deficit of around ½ percent of GDP in 2007/08. This constitutes a reversal of the surplus position that the States have been in until 2005/06.

The catch up in infrastructure spending comes at a time when there is already strong competition for human and capital resources from the private sector. As a result, this is putting more pressure on resources and could begin to bid up prices. That is what the IMF said. The point that the IMF is making is that when you have a huge investment surge going on in this country—an investment surge that is being led by the private sector—for a level of government to come in, to run a deficit and to put pressure on that capacity could have an effect on prices.

As I have said in this House before, there is nothing wrong with building infrastructure. The Australian government is engaged in the biggest infrastructure program in Australian history. What we do is fund our infrastructure program and add to savings with a surplus. What the states do is they do not fund their infrastructure program and they borrow savings, running deficits.

If the Australian Labor Party were courageous and really wanted to show that it understood economic policy, it would take the opportunity to condemn those Labor state governments, who have moved their budgets from surpluses into deficits. If Mr Rudd, the Leader of the Opposition, wanted to show that he had the bottle to stand up to a state premier, he would come right out and make it entirely clear—

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Treasurer will resume his seat. Members should be aware when the Speaker stands there will be silence or I will deal immediately with them.

Mr Swan—What about him?

The SPEAKER—The member for Lilley will remove himself under standing order 94(a).

The member for Lilley then left the chamber.

Mr COSTELLO—If the Leader of the Opposition wanted to show any bottle whatsoever on economic policy, he would have the guts to stand up and say to the state premiers of Australia that it is against Australian interests in running a deficit—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Treasurer will resume his seat.

Mr Albanese—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I ask the Treasurer to do what he is good at and withdraw and retreat. That is what you are good at. Do it again and withdraw that remark.

The SPEAKER—The member will resume his seat. The Treasurer is in order.

Mr COSTELLO—Let me make it entirely clear. It is in Australia’s interests that
both levels of government work together at a time like this to fund their budgets. If this Leader of the Opposition wants to pretend he is an economic conservative, he ought to take the decision, stand up to those state premiers and make it clear that he can take them on and stand up for Australia’s interests.

Hospitals

Mr Rudd (2.14 pm)—My question is again to the Prime Minister. I refer to his failure to outline any plan for the future education needs of Australian preschoolers in response to the previous question. I refer now, Prime Minister, to Labor’s $2 billion national health and hospital reform plan dealing with the future challenges of the ageing population, the growing burden of chronic disease and ending the blame game between Canberra and the states. Prime Minister, apart from taking over one hospital in one seat in one state, what is the Prime Minister’s plan?

Mr Howard—Let me deal first of all with Labor’s alleged plan. At no stage has the Leader of the Opposition outlined to the Australian people what the funding arrangements might be. It remains the case that, if the Commonwealth takes over every public hospital in this country, there will need to be a massive realignment of Commonwealth-state financials. You are looking at 40 per cent of the money that flows from the Commonwealth to the states and, if the Leader of the Opposition is to have any credibility on this policy, he has to either tell the states that he will take that money away from them or tell the Australian people that, in government, he would unite with state Labor premiers to increase the level of the goods and services tax.

Mr Adams interjecting—

The Speaker—The member for Lyons is warned!

Mr Howard—That is the choice that the Leader of the Opposition has to face. He pretends that he has a policy.

Mr Wilkie interjecting—

The Speaker—The member for Swan is warned too!

Mr Howard—it is no more than a flimsy press release. You cannot have a credible policy unless you explain to the Australian people how it will be funded. If you raise the possibility of taking over public hospitals, you have to tell the Australian people how you are going to fund that takeover. Are you going to take the money back from the states or are you going to increase the GST? You have a choice. I would say to those who sit opposite—

Mrs Irwin interjecting—

The Speaker—The member for Fowler is warned!

Mr McMullan—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point or order. The question was designed to find out what the Prime Minister’s plan is.

The Speaker—The member will resume his seat. That is not a point of order.

Mr Howard—the Leader of the Opposition prefaced his question by reference to Labor’s policy—

Ms Roxon interjecting—

The Speaker—The member for Gellibrand is warned!

Mr Howard—and I said that I would first deal with Labor’s policy and then I would deal with the government’s. The question I put, rhetorically, to the Leader of the Opposition is: if you are going to take over 762 public hospitals, you have to explain to the Australian public how you are going to fund that takeover. Either you must take billions of dollars away from the states—and I know that you would not have the guts to take a penny away from a state Labor Pre-
mier—or, alternatively, you should concede that, in government, you might unite with Labor premiers to increase the level of the GST. It has been calculated that you would need a 40 per cent rise in the GST in order to fund this takeover. The Leader of the Opposition cannot slide away from public scrutiny on this policy. It is not enough—

Ms Owens interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Parramatta will remove herself under standing order 94(a).

The member for Parramatta then left the chamber.

Mr HOWARD—The Leader of the Opposition asked me about government health policy. Let me start by invoking the words of my friend and colleague the Minister for Health and Ageing: the Howard government is the best friend that Medicare has ever had. Under this government’s changes to bulk-billing arrangements—and I remember when those who sat opposite only talked about bulk-billing levels; it was their constant mantra that bulk-billing has fallen under this government—the truth is that, for people over the age of 65, for children under the age of 16 and for people living in remote and regional areas of Australia, bulk-billing levels are higher than they have ever been since the introduction of Medicare.

I then move from bulk-billing to the Medicare safety net. The Medicare safety net is going to be abolished by the Labor Party. The Medicare safety net guarantees that, for average families, after your out-of-pocket expenses go beyond $500 a year, you get an 80 per cent refund under Medicare. That was a policy that we introduced. It was a policy that was voted against by the Labor Party. It is a policy that they are still pledged to repeal. The Leader of the Opposition asked me about our policies. I am very, very happy to go on. That is our policy. Our policy is to keep the safety net; Labor’s policy is to abolish the safety net. Our policy is to drive bulk-billing levels in the areas I have mentioned to record highs; Labor is now left silent on the issue of bulk-billing. We have continued to maintain a world-class pharmaceutical benefits scheme. We have invested more money, year after year, in medical research in this country. I am proud of the medical research credentials of this government.

Mr McMullan interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Fraser is warned!

Mr HOWARD—We put $486 million in the 2007-08 budget on top of the $905 million in the 2006-07 budget. We provided an additional $380 million for dental services under Medicare in the last budget. We are contributing in many areas in cooperation with the states. For example, we have established the National Health Call Centre Network. We have provided $94 million a year for after-hours care, supporting over 160 after-hours GP practices, and substantially increased the Medicare rebate for GP attendances after hours. We have funded over 20 co-located general practice after-hours clinics. And, of course, importantly—

Mr Wilkie interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Swan has been warned. He continues to interject. He will remove himself under standing order 94(a).

The member for Swan then left the chamber.

Mr HOWARD—Perhaps as significant as any of the policies that we have introduced and that we are guaranteed to maintain is, of course, the private health insurance rebate. One of the first things the Leader of the Opposition did when he entered the parliament after the 1998 election was to vote against the private health insurance rebate. The elec-
tion was held in October 1998. The introduction of the 30 per cent rebate was part of our election policy, and it was passed through the parliament, only with the help of the then Senator Brian Harradine. The Labor Party, including the newly elected member for Griffith—virtually his first act in this parliament—voted against tax help for private health insurance.

Ms Roxon—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Prime Minister has been going for 10 minutes and has not told us what his hospital plan is for the future.

The SPEAKER—The member will resume her seat. That is not a point of order. I remind the member for Gellibrand that she already has a warning.

Mr HOWARD—I just remind the House that the first significant vote in which the Leader of the Opposition participated was to vote against the introduction of the private health insurance rebate. He did it within weeks of being elected to parliament. Of course, he was to exceed himself some months later when he voted against the tax package and declared that we were approaching a day of fundamental injustice—fundamental injustice day. Could I just say to the Leader of the Opposition: if he would like to ask me another question on health, I would be delighted to continue outlining the government’s record.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (2.23 pm)—I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon the Hon. Chris Gallus, a former parliamentary secretary and member of this House. Also present we have Christian Zahra, a former member of this House. On behalf of the House, I extend a very warm welcome to both of them.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE
Regional Australia

Mr FAWCETT (2.24 pm)—My question is addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services. Would the Deputy Prime Minister update the House on the response to the government’s plan to secure a future for regional Australia? Are there any alternative approaches to regional policy? What is the government’s response?

Mr VAILE—I thank the member for Wakefield for his question and recognise that, in his former life before becoming a member of the federal parliament, as a member of the Australian Defence Force he has had the opportunity of travelling around many regions across Australia and experiencing life outside of the capital cities, which is in stark contrast to his Labor opponent in the upcoming election, whose main claim to fame is as an official from the SDA union.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr VAILE—I do not know; you tell me. The member for Wakefield at least has real-life experiences, out there in the real world, that he brings into this parliament as the member representing a constituency in South Australia. I thank the member for his question. He asks about the policies that the coalition government has put in place to help strengthen the economic and social fabric in regional Australia. I added to those policies yesterday when I announced the $200 million Growing Regions program, which was put in place to help those growing regions across Australia deal with the demands of rapid population growth in many parts of Australia. Of course, that has been significantly welcomed across regional Australia. It goes along with the broad suite of policies that are part of our plan in strengthening regional Australia.
The Treasurer earlier referred to the largest investment in land transport in Australia’s history that we are currently in the middle of—a $38 billion investment over 10 years in road and rail infrastructure. A lot of that is strengthening regional economies. There are our health programs, which are encouraging more doctors in rural areas. And there is almost $1 billion to improve broadband services, under Australia Connected, across Australia. These are things that are happening, not things that are out there in the ether and being promised by the Australian Labor Party.

Regional communities recognise the need and they appreciate the response of the coalition government, particularly with this particular policy focusing on growing regions. It was interesting: I saw a press release, and it was not from the member for Hotham; it was from the National Sea Change Taskforce—it came out yesterday—led by Councillor Joe Natoli. He said: ‘It is clear the Deputy Prime Minister, who represents a coastal electorate, understands the sort of pressure this growth has on coastal communities, and we are delighted with the initiative he has announced today.’ So regional communities do appreciate what we are doing. They do appreciate that it is targeted help. They also know that all the Labor Party can do is criticise these programs. If you want to know what Labor in government would do federally, you only have to look at what they do in government at a state level.

Look at state Labor governments and what they do to regional Australia. In New South Wales, Labor have closed nearly half of all country maternity units. In Victoria, they are draining much needed water out of the Goulburn Valley to get it down to Melbourne because they have not planned for and invested in infrastructure in Melbourne. In Queensland, the federal government has had to step in and protect the democratic rights of local authorities, where the Queensland government wants to wipe out local government with tactics that former Premier Beattie introduced. There is a challenge to the new Premier, Anna Bligh, in Queensland: reverse this decision and let the people of Queensland have a say.

We go back a bit beyond that to the Goss-Rudd team in the last Labor government in Queensland. What did the Goss-Rudd team do in Queensland? They cut 600 jobs in the department of primary industries and shut down four regional DPI offices; they closed 13 regional railway lines and three rail workshops—457 jobs were lost in that one move; they shut down small country schools and cut 403 teaching positions. If the people of Australia want to know what a Rudd led Labor government will do in power in Canberra, they only have to look at what state Labor does and what state Labor did when the opposition leader was in charge of the reins in Queensland.

Hospitals

Mr Rudd (2.29 pm)—My question is again to the Prime Minister. I refer to my three previous questions to the Prime Minister, asking him to outline his future plans on Iraq, preschools and hospitals. I refer specifically to my previous question, which asked the PM: apart from taking over one hospital in one seat in one state, what is his plan for the future of all the nation’s hospitals? Given that the Prime Minister’s previous and very long answer did not mention his future plans for hospitals once, would he do so now?

Mr Howard—I feel duly rebuked! The difference between the Leader of the Opposition and the policy he enunciates in relation to hospitals is to be found not only in relation to the things that I have mentioned but also in relation to the determination of this government through the measures that it has al-
ready introduced and will continue into the future, measures that are designed to deal with some of the issues of bed blocking, measures that are designed to take the load off the emergency departments by introducing more after-hours services, measures which are designed to provide the co-location of GP clinics with public hospitals, measures which are designed to ensure that by having a strong private hospital system you take the load off the public hospital system. The great problem that the Leader of the Opposition has is the inherent contradiction in that, in having opposed the development of a strong private hospital system, he in effect has placed much greater pressure on the public hospital system of this country.

Our view is that if you promise the Australian people that you will take over public hospitals you have an obligation to explain how you are going to fund that takeover. The Leader of the Opposition so far has failed to tell the Australian people how, if he does take over public hospitals, he will fund that takeover. Will he take money from the states? Will he stand up to the state Labor premiers? Or will he, as we believe, in government join with state Labor premiers to increase the GST?

Ms Roxon—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. We still do not know what his plan is.

The SPEAKER—The member will resume her seat. I have been listening carefully to the Prime Minister. He was asked a question about hospitals. He is entirely in order. If the member continues to take frivolous points of order, I will deal with her.

Mr Howard—Let me say very directly to the member for Gellibrand: our plan is to keep the GST at 10 per cent. That is our plan. We do not intend to increase the GST by 40 per cent to fund a takeover of public hospitals.

Climate Change

Mr Harsuyker (2.32 pm)—My question is addressed to Australia’s greatest Treasurer. Would the Treasurer inform the House about practical steps the government is taking to address the issue of climate change while keeping our economy strong?

Mr Costello—I thank the honourable member for Cowper, Australia’s greatest member for Cowper. I understand he is under attack from another trade union official at the next election.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The level of interjections is far too high.

Mr Costello—It is a fair bet, if you are asked who your local Labor candidate is, that it is a union official. I think there is about a 70 per cent chance that it is a union official. I will chance my arm here and say there is a union official running for Labor in Cowper. Is that right?

Government members—Yes.

Mr Costello—Surprise, surprise! One of the measures which the government has just introduced to this parliament is a very practical measure to respond to the challenge of climate change and to ensure that we have appropriate incentives, particularly through our tax system, to respond to those issues which will reduce carbon emissions and also contribute to the greening of our country and improve our environment. Australia has a wonderful but fragile environment. We are one of the hottest and driest continents on earth. As a result of that we all have an interest in forestation. We all have an interest in encouraging the plantation industry in a way which will deal with those issues and deal with carbon emissions.

This morning the government introduced legislation into parliament which will allow a full tax deduction to carbon sink forest op-
operators for the cost of establishing trees in a qualifying carbon sink forest. This is full deductability. Those people who are planting in a recognised qualifying carbon sink forest will be able to deduct the full cost of that and expense it in full. As a consequence of that, we believe that there will be many operators who will take the opportunity to plant trees, including planting trees in agricultural areas, where farmers will be able to make land available, maybe even in between crops, and get a payment for their land, which will be matched by the tax deduction of those that are planting the qualifying trees.

This is a kick-start for carbon sink forests. It is intended by the government that this will apply until 2012-13, when the immediate deduction will be replaced with a write-off under the general horticultural plant provisions. To qualify for this tax deductability, operators will have to comply with environmental and natural resource management guidelines.

This is a practical response to the issue of climate change. This is an important measure which will be consistent with a growing economy. This will put in place an opportunity for investors to do their bit. These are the kinds of initiatives which are important to front up to the future challenges of climate change and the environment, and this is the government that is putting them into place.

**Climate Change**

**Mr RUDD** (2.36 pm)—My question is again to the Prime Minister. I refer to Labor’s comprehensive plan to tackle climate change, which includes ratifying the Kyoto protocol—

*Government members interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER**—Order! Members on my right! The Leader of the Opposition has the call and he will begin his question again.

**Mr RUDD**—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to Labor’s comprehensive plan to tackle climate change, which includes ratifying the Kyoto protocol—

**Mr Hunt**—Is this the one you outlined to George Bush?

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Flinders is warned!

**Mr RUDD**—cutting Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions by 60 per cent by 2050 and substantially increasing—

*Government members interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER**—Order! Members on my right! The Leader of the Opposition has the call and he will begin his question again.

**Mr HOWARD**—The Leader of the Opposition has asked me a question about a policy that he says is the great moral challenge of the age, but he almost forgot to mention it when he saw the most powerful man in the world in Sydney last week. He totally forgot to mention it. It is a measure of the leader’s moral fervour on these matters that it is not on the agenda for such an important meeting.

I say in reply to the Leader of the Opposition that we are very proud of the balanced approach we have to climate change. We believe in tackling climate change without undermining the strength of the Australian economy. With respect to the Sydney declaration—and I know the Leader of the Opposition was rather disappointed—

*Mr Garrett interjecting—*
The SPEAKER—The member for Kingsford Smith!

Mr HOWARD—that it was achieved last week—for the first time it united the United States, China and Russia, the three greatest emitters in the world, in a commitment to an aspirational target for a reduction in greenhouse gases. It does represent a new international consensus on climate change. If the world can agree on a common emissions goal, with all countries contributing, reflecting their own capacities, then indeed there is some hope for a balanced approach.

I remind the Leader of the Opposition, with his references to 11½ years, of the $2 billion to $3 billion that the government has committed to various measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. I remind him that the emissions trading system to which the government is committed is a world’s best in terms of an emissions trading system. It has more comprehensive coverage. It covers some 70 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions—

Mr Garrett—The non-existent trading system!

The SPEAKER—The member for Kingsford Smith is warned!

Mr HOWARD—which is vastly higher than the European and other models long championed by the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Kingsford Smith. So I would say in reply to the Leader of the Opposition that I do not regard his plan as comprehensive. He is so ashamed of it or lacks fervour and commitment to it that he does not mention it when he meets the President of the United States. It is such a moral crusade for the Leader of the Opposition that he did not mention it in the most important meeting he had last week. It is a measure of the way in which the performance of the Leader of the Opposition in these matters falls a long way short of his rhetoric. I think the government’s approach to climate change, which balances the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions with the overwhelming need to preserve the strength of the Australian economy, is the approach that is right for Australia’s future and an approach that the great majority of Australians will support.

Iraq

Mr JULL (2.40 pm)—My question is directed to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. What is the government’s present approach to the political situation in Iraq? What alternative approaches are being promoted?

Mr DOWNER—First, can I thank the honourable member for Fadden for his question. This will be, for certain, one of the last questions, if not the last question, that he asks in the House of Representatives. I know we on this side of the House, and no doubt many on the other side, believe he has been a great member of parliament. He will be very much missed. I know in the electorate of Fadden the Labor Party has put up a candidate who is an official for the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union. Imagine asking the people of Fadden to put a union hack in place of a great man like Jolly!

Let me make this pretty clear: the government of Australia supports a democratic Iraq, an Iraq free from dictatorship and an Iraq free from terrorists. But this requires hard work. As the US Ambassador to Iraq, Ambassador Crocker, has said, the process will not be quick. It requires security. General Petraeus has said that political progress will take place only if security exists, which of course is the whole point of the surge. I would say that it is encouraging that the surge has been working and that some of the political signs, albeit rather early signs, are more positive than has been the case for a long time.
The honourable member asked whether there were any alternative views. I think it is well known that the opposition policy is to abandon Iraq. I noticed, going through the records, that the Leader of the Opposition said on the Sunday program on 18 August: ‘Labor has argued consistently against the surge.’ The member for Barton, who is the shadow minister, has often said that the surge was a mistake and has been opposed to the surge.

Let me make this clear about the surge: since December 2006, there has been a 45 per cent decline in civilian deaths and a 55 per cent decline in sectarian deaths, and al-Anbar province, which was a hotbed of al-Qaeda, has been cleared of al-Qaeda. Those things have been achieved because of the surge—a surge which was completely opposed by the Leader of the Opposition, which, if I may say so, says something about his judgement.

The Labor Party also argues that troops should be withdrawn from Iraq and that if foreign troops were withdrawn from Iraq there would be political progress. Somehow this is the way to achieve some kind of political reconciliation in Iraq—to rip out from underneath the people of Iraq their security. Very few people who know anything about the issues think that makes even the slightest sense. That is simply a policy built on the back of some opinion polling which has been worked by Hawker Britton. It is nothing else.

Let me tell the House what Ambassador Crocker, who I suspect knows more about this issue than the Leader of the Opposition or the member for Barton, said to the US congress on 11 September, in response to a question which happened to be about Labor’s policy—that is, whether withdrawing the troops would increase political pressure for reconciliation. Ambassador Crocker said:

I think we have to be very careful with that, frankly, and I’d be concerned at an approach that says we’re going to start pulling out troops regardless of the objective conditions on the ground. And what might happen in consequence of that could actually push the Iraqis in the wrong direction, to make them less likely to compromise rather than more likely.

The fact is that the Labor Party have never shared the government’s position. Our position is that we support democracy in Iraq. Labor were happy to allow Iraq to remain a dictatorship. After all, they tried to raise half a million dollars for their 1975 election campaign from that dictatorship. Do not let anybody forget the Blues Point Tower meeting between Gough Whitlam, a great Labor hero, and Ba’ath Socialist Party officials from Iraq—a great affiliation under the socialist international flag, no doubt.

Mr Tanner interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Melbourne is warned!

Mr DOWNER—The Labor Party seems to think that the terrorists can just hack it out in Iraq and establish a base there and that that does not matter. At the end of the day, that matters to our national security. For terrorists to succeed in Iraq is for terrorism to win internationally. That, in turn, undermines our own national security. This government is not about populism; it is about standing up for our national security.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr DOWNER—The trade union officials on the frontbench laugh, even though they know they have a leader who is totally driven by opinion polls. Probably, intellectually, there are few people on the Labor side who think we are wrong, but all of them have decided to adopt a narrow, populist approach which will reduce our national security and not enhance it.
Liberal Party: Leadership

Mr ALBANESE (2.46 pm)—My question is addressed to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister confirm that part of the Liberal Party’s current political fix is an agreement that he make a public statement saying that, if he wins the next election, he will retire during the next term?

Mr HOWARD—In listening to this question and the last answer given by the foreign minister, I thought to myself: what is it about the member for North Sydney’s electorate? It has the Blues Point Tower on McMahon’s Point, which was the location of the infamous deal that was meant to raise half a million dollars for Gough Whitlam’s campaign from the Ba’ath Socialist Party, and it has another residence that people are very familiar with—namely, Kirribilli House. It should be remembered that in 1989 a secret deal was made—

Mr Albanese—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. This is about this century—

The SPEAKER—The member for Grayndler will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has barely begun to answer the question. He is entirely in order. If there are frivolous points of order, I will take action.

Mr HOWARD—I am very happy to remind those who sit opposite, given the question that has been asked of me and its implications, that in 1989 a secret deal was made by my two immediate predecessors in this great office. As a result of that deal, those two men lived a lie through the whole of the 1990 election campaign. It ill behoves anybody in the Australian Labor Party to start lecturing me or the Treasurer and Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party. Let me make it clear: there are no secret deals. We will not be living any lie like Bob Hawke and Paul Keating did. We will level with the Australian people, as I did last night when I made it very plain that if the people of Australia are kind enough to return me and my government at the next election—

Mr Adams interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Lyons has been warned. He continues to interject. He will remove himself under standing order 94(a).

Ms Vanvakinou interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Calwell is warned!

Mr HOWARD—Unlike Bob Hawke and Paul Keating, John Howard and Peter Costello will not be living any lie through the next election campaign.

Health

Miss JACKIE KELLY (2.50 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. Would the minister advise the House how the Howard government is helping Australian families access after-hours GP services? Is the minister aware of any alternative policies for GPs, and what is the government’s response?

Mr ABBOTT—I thank the member for Lindsay for her question. As every parent in this House knows, when your child is sick in the middle of the night, you want health care straight away. You do not want to have to wait until the doctor’s surgery opens at eight o’clock the following morning. I can inform the House that, thanks to the indefatigable work of three great local members of parliament—the member for Lindsay, the member for Macquarie and the member for Greenway—450,000 people in Western Sydney will soon have access to after-hours house calls from a GP. That is more evidence that the Howard government solves problems. It does not talk about these issues; it solves
them. This is further proof that the Howard government is truly the best friend that Medicare has ever had.

I have been asked about alternative policies. Labor have just committed $220 million of their $2 billion public hospital power grab towards a series of what they call ‘GP super clinics’. This $2 billion that they are always referring to is actually just half a million dollars a year. That is less than two per cent of the cost of running public hospitals, which is about the same as the efficiency dividend that some state governments rip out of public hospitals. They are already raiding their own piggy bank. Not only did they raid it for this $220 million for GP clinics, but just the other day they raided it for PET scanning in Newcastle. Pretty soon, there will be absolutely none of it left.

The point about their latest policy on GPs is that there are a lot of words but no real detail on precisely what extra services are going to be delivered. Here are some perfectly reasonable questions for the Leader of the Opposition and his health spokesman.

Who will own and run these new GP clinics? How will these new GP clinics treat chronic disease differently? Will they be able to charge a fee for service in a way which is central to the operation of Medicare? Most importantly, will these clinics further strip medical services from small rural, regional and remote communities? Unless Labor can spell out the details of this so-called policy, it is not a policy; it is just a PR stunt. Unless Labor can spell out the details of this so-called policy, it is not a policy; it is just a PR stunt. Unless Labor can spell out the details of this so-called policy, it is not a policy; it is just a PR stunt. Unless Labor can spell out the details of this so-called policy, it is not a policy; it is just a PR stunt. Unless Labor can spell out the details of this so-called policy, it is not a policy; it is just a PR stunt. Unless Labor can spell out the details of this so-called policy, it is not a policy; it is just a PR stunt. Unless Labor can spell out the details of this so-called policy, it is not a policy; it is just a PR stunt. Unless Labor can spell out the details of this so-called policy, it is not a policy; it is just a PR stunt.

That is what Labor MPs think of the shadow minister and their leader.

Mr ABBOTT—I am disappointed that the member for Gellibrand is leaving, because I was about to tell her what her colleagues really think of her. I am quoting Gerard McManus. He said:

One Labor MP suggested that the launch was a setback—

Ms Roxon interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will resume his seat.

Ms Roxon interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I have warned the member for Gellibrand. She continues to interject even when I have asked the minister to resume his seat. She will leave under standing order 94(a).

The member for Gellibrand then left the chamber.

Mr ABBOTT—I am disappointed that the member for Gellibrand is leaving, because I was about to tell her what her colleagues really think of her. I am quoting Gerard McManus. He said:

One Labor MP suggested that the launch was a setback for Mr Roxon, who was made to look like a barrel girl standing beside game show host Rudd.

That is what Labor MPs think of the shadow minister and their leader.

Ms Bird interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Cunningham is warned!

Mr ABBOTT—Health is not a political game. It is about real patients—

Ms Bird interjecting—
The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will resume his seat. The member for Cunningham was warned. She continued to interject. She will leave under standing order 94(a).

The member for Cunningham then left the chamber.

Ms Vamvakinou interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Calwell has also been warned, so she can remove herself under standing order 94(a) too.

The member for Calwell then left the chamber.

Mr ABBOTT—I am just quoting a very respected journalist, Gerard McManus, who said one Labor MP suggested that the whole launch had made Ms Roxon ‘look like a barrel girl standing beside game show host Rudd’. If this is ‘disgraceful’, as members opposite are now suggesting, they should have a leak inquiry; they should find out which of their number said this to Gerard McManus. Let me repeat that health is too important to be treated like a political game by members opposite. Health is about real patients who need real services. Until Labor can come up with the real details of their policy, it is clear that they just cannot be trusted with the health care of the Australian people.

Liberal Party: Leadership

Mr ALBANESE (2.57 pm)—My question is again to the Prime Minister, and I again ask the question that he refused to answer previously. Will the Prime Minister confirm that part of the Liberal Party’s current political fix is an agreement that he make a public statement that, if he wins the next election—

Mr Secker interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Barker is warned!

Mr ALBANESE—he will retire during the next term?

Mr HOWARD—I would have thought the answer that I gave was clear. For the benefit of the member for Grayndler, the answer is no, and I was contrasting our candour with the deceit and lies of my two predecessors.

Workplace Relations

Mr McARTHRU (2.58 pm)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations. Would the minister inform the House how the government’s employment and workplace policies are helping the long-term unemployed find work? Is the minister aware of any threats to this contribution?

Mr Melham—Bradman got a duck in his last innings, Joe—bad analogy!

Mr HOCKEY—He averaged 72 in his last test series, Daryl—better than anyone else! I thank the member for Corangamite for his question and note that he was a farmer before coming into this place. I bet he has a union official running against him on behalf of the Labor Party. Is that right? I bet that union official does not even live in his seat—just like North Sydney, where the Labor candidate does not live in the seat. It is true that the government remains absolutely committed to putting in place policies that help to deliver higher real wages, more jobs and fewer strikes. The government is committed to the goal that every Australian who wants to get a job can get a job, because that is what full employment is. It is amazing that we are the only government—certainly in the last 33 years and perhaps even since that Blues Point Tower deal—that could ever talk about full employment. Policies such as workplace relations reform and Welfare to Work have helped to deliver the infrastructure that has allowed business to employ
more people and head towards full employment.

The fact of the matter is that Australia is running out of workers. We are not replacing ourselves as a nation. Our birthrate is not high enough to replace ourselves, so we need to have policies that are innovative—and even, some would say, courageous—that actually encourage people to get into work and to get off welfare. There are only three places you can get the workers of tomorrow: firstly, you can have more children—

Mr Costello—Have one for the country.

Mr HOCKEY—Have one for mum, one for dad and one for Australia. The $5,000 baby bonus is a great incentive to do that.

Mr Howard—You still have one to go, Joe.

Mr HOCKEY—That is right; I have one more to go. I do not have much say in it, unfortunately. Secondly, we can massively increase immigration. We do not agree with that. We actually think we have the immigration levels about right. The third area where we can get the workers is to get some of those two million Australians who are on welfare and not working into work. They are of working age. We have to try to access that pool. This government had the courage to introduce Welfare to Work initiatives that moved people from welfare into work. Of course the Labor Party opposed it all the way and said that we were heartless. The bottom line is that having a 4.3 per cent unemployment rate and having higher real wages is not heartless; it is actually the greatest form of welfare you could possibly deliver.

Today I am releasing a report entitled Building stronger families: the benefits of moving from welfare to work. It gives a snapshot of the success of the initiative. Why do we undertake these policies? It is because we are about the future welfare of the Australian people. We are about helping Australians to have more jobs and higher real wages. Of course when the Labor Party released its workplace relations policy it did not say anything about jobs. It did not say anything about higher real wages. It did not say anything about economic prosperity. It was just a deal between the union bosses, who make up 70 per cent of the Labor frontbench—and others are coming in like Combet, Shorten and Dougie Cameron—and the Labor Party. That sort of deal is bad for Australian workers and it is bad for Australian families. If you ever want to think carefully about what the implications will be of electing a Rudd Labor government then look no further than the fact that 70 per cent of his frontbench are former union officials. Does anyone really believe for a second that in government he would have the courage to stand up to his entire frontbench and a union movement that is spending millions of dollars to get him elected? Does anyone believe that for a second? No. The reason is that the Labor Party will always put the jobs of the union bosses ahead of the jobs of Australian working families.

Liberal Party: Leadership

Mr ALBANESE (3.03 pm)—My question is addressed to the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources. I refer to the minister’s answers to my question in the House yesterday regarding the Liberal Party leadership. If and when the Prime Minister retires, will the minister be a candidate for the leadership of the Liberal Party?

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Standing order 98(c) says that a question not on a matter associated with his business is out of order.

The SPEAKER—The member for Mackellar raises a valid point of order. The question is out of order. Does the member for Grayndler wish to rephrase that question?
Mr ALBANESE—Mr Speaker, I wish to refer to the standing orders which refer to—

The SPEAKER—The member for Grayndler will resume his seat. The member for Grayndler is aware that I have ruled that question out of order.

Mr ALBANESE—Does the minister want to answer it?

The SPEAKER—The question is out of order.

Mr ALBANESE—What can be more within the minister’s responsibilities than whether he is going to—

The SPEAKER—The member will resume his seat. As he is well aware, that is a question on a party matter.

Mr McMullan—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I ask you to reflect on that ruling. You have now created the situation—

The SPEAKER—The member—

Mr McMullan—With respect, Mr Speaker, I am entitled to make my point.

The SPEAKER—The member for Fraser would be well aware that if he wishes to raise questions with the Speaker then he will do so at the appropriate time.

Mr McMullan—Mr Speaker, I am not raising a question; I am raising a point of order. The implication of your ruling is that this is the only place in Australia where that question cannot be asked. How can that be what the standing orders—

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

Education

Mr BARTLETT (3.05 pm)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Education, Science and Training. Would the minister update the House on how the Australian government is supporting teachers in our schools? Are there any alternative approaches and what is the government’s response?

Ms JULIE BISHOP—I thank the member for Macquarie for his question and acknowledge his deep interest in and commitment to education in his electorate. This government believes that quality education is directly linked to quality teaching. That is why we have invested over $100 million to establish Australian government summer schools for teachers. Over the four years 4,000 teachers will have the opportunity to undertake a high-quality professional learning experience in five summer schools that will be established across Australia. They will be in maths, science, English, literacy and numeracy, and Australian history. Today I announced the successful university consortia that will hold these summer schools, the first beginning in January next year.

What is the Labor Party’s response to this initiative that is so welcomed by the education sector and by individual teachers? The Labor Party will close down these summer schools. They will deny 4,000 teachers the opportunity to undertake a high-quality professional learning experience in five summer schools that will be established across Australia. They will be in maths, science, English, literacy and numeracy, and Australian history. Today I announced the successful university consortia that will hold these summer schools, the first beginning in January next year.

But the unions are now using children as young as six years old to carry their propaganda. Over the last two days unions in New South Wales have been forcing young children to carry home this pamphlet, which contains lies, to their parents—and parents are outraged. And what was the response of
the Labor government in New South Wales? The Labor Minister for Education and Training, a former union official, did not have the courage to stand up for the parents against the union, so he sent his Director-General of Education out to tell them to stop. The unions defied the instruction—they ignored him—and they continued their tactics. Talkback radio and members of parliament have been swamped with calls from outraged parents complaining about their children being exploited by union members. One parent complained that a six-year-old girl in year 1 at Cherrybrook Public School was given a leaflet by the acting deputy principal and told that she had to take it home to give to her parents. Children in a class at Normanhurst Public School were instructed to boo at any mention of our Prime Minister, John Howard, or the coalition government.

These sorts of tactics are taking place at Oakhill Drive primary school. Similar tactics are taking place across New South Wales—Oakhill Drive primary school, Cobbitty primary school, Macksville primary school, Braddock Public Primary School; primary schools across New South Wales—and parents are outraged. And what has been the response of federal Labor? What has been the response of the ex-union officials sitting on the front bench? The deafening silence that we have come to expect from people who owe their very existence in this place to the patronage of the unions. The Labor Party does not have the courage to stand up for parents. The Labor Party does not have the courage to stand up against the unions. The unions own every single one of them lock, stock and barrel.

**Liberal Party: Leadership**

**Mr McMULLAN** (3.09 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Is it not the case that a majority of his cabinet ministers including the Treasurer, the foreign minister, the defence minister, the environment minister, the education minister, the workplace relations minister and the family and community services minister believe that it is not in the Liberal Party’s interests that the Prime Minister stay in this position?

**Mr HOWARD**—No.

**Australian Technical Colleges**

**Mr RICHARDSON** (3.10 pm)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Vocational and Further Education. Would the minister outline to the House the progress of the government’s Australian technical colleges? Are there any alternative plans and what is the government’s response?

**Mr ROBB**—I thank the member for Kingston for his question. He has been a powerhouse in making the technical college in his area a great success. In raising the status of the trades and technical training, the Australian technical colleges are already an unqualified success. When you go and meet the young people at these colleges, time and again they tell you that for the first time in their lives they feel motivated, they feel understood and they feel valued. We are restoring with these Australian technical colleges a great sense of pride and confidence in these young people. And it is resonating in local communities. Over the last few weeks hundreds of parents and prospective students have attended information nights at individual colleges around the country. Even parents of primary age students are approaching colleges around the country seeking to book their kids into years 11 and 12 at technical colleges some six or eight years hence.

Yet the members opposite continue to denigrate these colleges for their own selfish political purposes. To make matters worse, the opposition is promoting a totally inadequate alternative. Labor promised between $500,000 and $1.5 million to all of the 2,650 academic secondary schools around Austra-
lia to set up so-called trade centres in all of these Australian secondary colleges. This is a policy that is being ridiculed in education circles—and for good reasons. About four weeks ago I reopened a renovated toilet block in a local primary school in my electorate. It is a small primary school and the renovation of this small toilet block—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**Mr ROBB**—You might laugh—they were worried about the health of their kids. This was not funded by the Labor Party; this was funded by the Australian government and the parents because the Labor government did not do anything about the health of these young kids. This renovation for a very small primary school cost $200,000. My point is that it highlights the total inadequacy of $500,000—or, for that matter, $1.5 million—to create a trade centre in every secondary school in the country. That sort of money will not touch the sides—it is a total con. It will see no more than an oven or a lathe in a classroom down the back end of every secondary school. More disturbingly, it will serve only to further perpetuate in every secondary college the second-class view of a trade career. Can’t you see it now—every Wednesday afternoon the kids who are not up with it academically will go down the back and do some cooking. That is all you will achieve with this. You will perpetuate what you have been doing for 20 years—talking down the trades. It will do nothing to raise the status of the trades.

The Leader of the Opposition, your leader, knows this and he is becoming increasingly embarrassed by it—so much so that he is starting to fudge this policy. Just last week the Leader of the Opposition said to a gathering at Geelong:

*Here in Corangamite—an electorate very well served by the local member, I might add—*

there are 13 secondary schools … That means 13 times $1.5 million to come to this community to make sure that we’ve got these trades training centres.

He went on:

*Corio next door, some 20 secondary schools …*

That, he said, is 20 times $1.5 million. What the Leader of the Opposition is now saying is that every school across the country will get $1.5 million. But that is not Labor’s policy. Under Labor’s policy, only one-third of all the schools get $1.5 million, one-third get $1 million and one-third get $500,000. So we saw emerge last week just a little matter of a $1.5 billion gap in Labor’s costings. I know that maths is not Labor’s strong point, but this was not a simple mathematical oversight. The Leader of the Opposition has been selling this policy all over the country since the budget. In fact, apart from IR, which has been an absolute debacle for them, this has been the only policy where they have released any detail. And he has been selling it for months. If he does not know the detail, I’ll go he. He knew what he was doing when he misrepresented his own embarrassing policy. He did not want to be ridiculed, so he told his audience what he thought they would prefer to hear. This was deception plain and simple. Mark my words: under pressure, the Leader of the Opposition reverts to type.

**Liberal Party: Leadership**

**Mr SWAN** (3.17 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Can the Prime Minister confirm that he has endorsed, without qualification, the Treasurer to replace him as leader of the Liberal Party if and when he retires after the next election?

**Mr HOWARD**—What I have said is that when I do, well into the next term if we are re-elected—and can I make the observation that we have had five questions about one job, not five questions about millions of jobs,
and quite honestly I think that the Australian people are more interested in jobs for their children than they are in whether Kevin Rudd or John Howard occupies the Prime Ministership; it behoves everybody in this parliament to understand that we are here to serve the Australian people, not to serve our own personal egos, and there is a complete obsession—

Mr Swan—Mr Speaker—

Mr HOWARD—Here’s the humble member for Lilley.

Mr Swan—a point of order on relevance: I ask the Prime Minister—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Lilley will resume his seat. The answer is entirely in order.

Mr HOWARD—It is very clear. When I cease to be the leader of the Liberal Party it would be my expectation, and my belief, that I should be succeeded by the deputy leader and Treasurer, Peter Costello. But I have also acknowledged that that is not my gift; it is the gift of the federal parliamentary Liberal Party—as, indeed, the position I hold was not the gift of my predecessor; it was the gift of the federal parliamentary Liberal Party. I will add one thing. I remind those who sit opposite: we will not live the lie of 1990. Let it always be remembered that my two predecessors entered into a secret conclave and they lived a lie to the Australian people through the entirety of the 1990 election campaign. And it will ever be to the shame of the Australian Labor Party that they were part of that miserable deception and that miserable conspiracy.

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

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

Questions in Writing

Ms BURKE (3.19 pm)—I seek your assistance under standing order 105(b) in relation to questions that have been placed on the Notice Paper for more than 60 days. Given the vast number of questions awaiting an answer, six pages in all, I table a list of unanswered questions in writing for you to follow up and I ask that you incorporate the list in Hansard. I ask that you write to the relevant ministers and seek an explanation for the delay in replying to these questions.

The SPEAKER—I thank the member for Chisholm and I will follow up her request.

NUCLEAR FACILITY REFERENDUM

The SPEAKER (3.20 pm)—I present a letter from the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory forwarding a copy of a resolution of the assembly related to a nuclear facility referendum.

MR BRIAN WALSHE

The SPEAKER (3.20 pm)—As members would be aware, one of our longest serving staff members, Brian Walshe, is retiring after 27 years. Brian is known by most around here as the guru or the grandfather of chamber attendants and as a perfect gentleman. Brian commenced work at Old Parliament House in 1980 and then moved to the new Parliament House in 1988. Brian retired from full-time employment with the parliament in 1999 but has continued as a part-time attendant since that time. As a messengerial attendant, Brian has undertaken the full gamut of attendant tasks as well as supervising the operation of the chamber and has done so very successfully.

Brian will be missed greatly by all and he will finish with us at the end of the parliament. Thank you, Brian, you will be greatly missed. On behalf of all members, I wish you, your wife, Joan, and your family, who are in the gallery, all the best.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

Mr HOWARD (Bennelong—Prime Minister) (3.21 pm)—As somebody who has
been in the parliament for the entire time that Brian has, commencing in the old House in 1974, I warmly endorse everything that you have said, Mr Speaker. Brian Walshe is an exemplar of politeness and civility. He is very courteous; he is helpful. He always makes you feel that nothing is a problem in assisting you, and I really do admire him as an example of those thoroughly decent men and women who help to make this place work. They do their job no matter what the circumstances. They are polite to both sides of the House, whatever their own personal views may be, and I cannot endorse more strongly how much I have enjoyed working with Brian and how I have admired his gentlemanly nature. He is a reminder to all of us that manners still count in the modern age and declining levels of civility are to be abhorred. He is a gentle reminder of an approach to life that is just so courteous and friendly and polite that we should treasure it. I send to him and his family my very warm good wishes for his retirement.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Leader of the Opposition) (3.23 pm)—Mr Speaker, I join with what you and the Prime Minister have said about Brian Walshe. In the period that I have been in this place, his friendship, courtesy, civility and just plain helpfulness with assisting members and others around this building is without parallel. On behalf of members of the parliamentary Labor Party, Brian, you are going to be very much missed in this place. You are regarded on our side of the House and, I am sure, by government members as someone who will never say that any request we put is too hard or difficult to manage. You have always been exceptionally kind in your response to such requests. Leaving aside your own problems in being a Collingwood supporter, we join with the Prime Minister in wishing you and your family all the best in your retirement.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

DOCUMENTS

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (3.24 pm)—Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings and I move:

That the House take note of the following documents:
Australian Communications and Media Authority—Report—Local content levels investigation—June 2007.

Debate (on motion by Mr Albanese) adjourned.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Australia’s Future

The SPEAKER—I have received a letter from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The Government’s failure to properly plan for Australia’s challenges due to its focus on its own internal political fixes rather than the nation’s future.

I call upon those members who approve of the proposed discussion to rise in their places.
More than the number of members required by the standing orders having risen in their places—

Ms GILLARD (Lalor) (3.25 pm)—Since 2004 the Howard government has changed. It has stopped governing for Australian working families and it has started governing for itself. Prior to 2004 you could have said that there are some things this government could have been proud of—its resolute response in East Timor in helping to create peace and its brave reaction to the Port Arthur gun massacre and the introduction of gun controls. They were things that this government did in the nation’s interest.

But, since 2004, the government has stopped governing in the interests of the nation; it has turned inwards. Now, of course, we know the days of government ministers are spent plotting and planning against each other. They spend their days eyeing each other’s jobs rather than worrying about fairness at work for Australian working families. They spend their days eating canapes at Liberal Party fundraisers at Kirribilli rather than worrying about the cost pressures on Australian working families. They spend their nights making secret deals in hotel rooms rather than working on the policies for the future of this nation.

As well as turning inwards and cannibalising itself, the government has been swept away with its own ideological obsession—radical labour market reform. This, of course, has delivered the extreme Work Choices laws of this government and ensured that those laws have hurt Australian working families. It is undeniable that those laws have hurt Australian working families. People have had basic pay and conditions stripped away from them, with overtime and penalty rates gone. A new study released today by the University of Sydney shows, for workers in areas like retail and hospitality, these laws have brought up to a 30 per cent reduction in income. There is an ideological obsession possessing this government as it moves towards extreme laws.

Today I want to track the inward turning of this government—its increasing and unhealthy obsession with itself rather than with the interests of Australian working families. Increasingly, this government has become like a soap opera. I am a bit of a fan of soap operas—I am a very regular watcher of The Bill. You become very familiar with the characters and you follow the plot lines, but, as much as I love The Bill, like most devotees of soap operas I would have to say: if you watch long enough, the same old plot lines come around again, don’t they? If you watch long enough you see them all again. So it is with the Howard government: the plot line now just repeats and repeats—disunity, instability and leadership crisis followed by patch-up deal, and then the cycle starts again.

If we count out what has happened in the life of this government since 2004, let us see how many times that plot line has repeated. We had ‘Walletgate’—the leadership crisis sparked by a more than decade old note in Mr McLachlan’s wallet. Walletgate came to the attention of the Australian people when journalist Glenn Milne wrote about a secret meeting that took place in 1994, where Howard undertook to serve only two terms as Prime Minister. The note said it was an ‘undertaking’. It said that Mr Howard had used words to the effect: ‘I can’t guarantee this to you, Peter, but my intention is not to hang around forever. If I win I will serve two terms and then hand over to you.’ Do we remember Walletgate? And don’t those words sound very familiar in the context of the patch-up deal we saw on the 7.30 Report last night: ‘It is going to be all right, Peter; I am going to retire, I am going to hand over to you.’

CHAMBER
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)—The member for Lalor will refer to members by their seat or their portfolio.

Ms GILLARD—We know that Walletgate sparked instability and a leadership crisis, and then there was the patch-up job. But Walletgate was followed by more. It was followed by Biographygate. When the Prime Minister’s most recent biography came out, there it was on display for all to see—what the Treasurer actually thinks about the Prime Minister’s ability to govern finances, about his ability to add up money and work hard at government finances and about the Prime Minister’s tawdry track record as Treasurer of this nation, delivering 22 per cent interest rates.

If Biographygate and Walletgate were not bad enough, there has been more. There has been Waters Edgegate—the scandal that beset the government very recently when a conversation between the Treasurer and a number of journalists was revealed for all to see. Let us remember that at the Waters Edge restaurant the Treasurer said that, in relation to this parliamentary term, he had set a mid-term deadline for the Prime Minister to hand over the leadership and that he was prepared to go to the backbench and carp at the Prime Minister’s leadership from the backbench and destroy it until he won the leadership. And he had said that the Prime Minister could not win but he could.

When these things were revealed for all to see in the newspapers and on television screens, the Treasurer did not come to the dispatch box to deny that he had said these things; he engaged in an arcane debate about whether these matters were on or off the record. He was not able to say that they were not said; he just had to try to hide behind a fudge as to whether they were on or off the record. How absurd is this that he could plot and plan to destroy and tear down the Prime Minister and when confronted with the allegations publicly just say, ‘I thought that was off the record.’ That was the defence.

Then of course we see patched together a new leadership round at the end of the week that was. This is the granddaddy of them all when it comes to leadership instability in the Howard government, and perhaps it is very relevant that it all happened in the Quay Grand Hotel inner suite. What we know about this round of leadership instability is its difference from earlier rounds. Earlier rounds were caused by a restless Treasurer getting out there and saying, ‘Look at me; pick me.’ He was a restless Treasurer who would start it but never have the gumption to finish it. This time, this leadership instability, this round, has been caused differently. It has been caused because a majority of the cabinet walked away from the Prime Minister. Let us look at how the meeting in the Quay Grand Hotel suite came about, and its implications for Australian politics.

On 7 September—last Friday—there were statements in the newspapers to the following effect. This from a government backbencher: ‘It’s getting to the point where it would be better if he’—the Prime Minister—’stepped aside.’ This from a minister: ‘The public thinks that we have been here too long and that John Howard is too old.’ A Liberal source: ‘No-one believes in the party that he’—the Prime Minister—’can turn it around.’ Of course, when these things happened and they were in the newspapers, the Treasurer was silent.

Then we know that last Friday the Minister for Foreign Affairs advised Mr Howard, the Prime Minister, of the outcome of a meeting he had held in Sydney the night before to canvass the views of senior ministers. He met with the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, the Minister for the Environment and Heritage,
the Minister for Defence, the Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources and the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations—the list went on. They were the most senior people in the government and he met them in a hotel suite trying to cast around and work out what to say back to the Prime Minister about his future. The message went back that the majority wanted him gone. That message was received by the Prime Minister last Friday following the meeting in the hotel suite on the Thursday.

And then by Saturday in the newspapers we were reading things like these. There is the statement by an unnamed minister who said in respect of a colleague’s observation that the Prime Minister was, like Hitler in 1945, in a state of delusion, trying to deny the Russians were on the outskirts of Berlin, ‘On the outskirts? They are already at the Reichstag!’ And then another unnamed minister said that the view was crystallising inside the party that he has to go—the Prime Minister has to go. As this instability is in the newspapers, the Treasurer is silent.

It goes on. We know that on 9 September a senior minister said—because it was recorded in the Sydney Morning Herald the next day—that from a personal standpoint it would be better for the Prime Minister to leave now in a dignified fashion to spare himself a defeat. But he said that from the party’s perspective maybe the Prime Minister should stay because the government would only do worse under Costello. Then of course the Treasurer remained silent.

Then on Monday we had the Prime Minister do an interview saying that he expected to lead the party to the next election. We had the Minister for Health and Ageing at the table today and then appearing on Lateline trying desperately to shore up the leadership of the Prime Minister—one of the last remaining loyalists as the majority walk away from the Prime Minister. We know that on 10 September the Treasurer, through a source close to him, let it be known that he was willing to accept the leadership should the Prime Minister resign, but he had no intention of forcing the issue. We know that Mr Howard was letting it be known that he thought that he was the only person who could win. We know that one of the Prime Minister’s supporters said that the problem for Mr Costello was that he and his supporters did not have the guts to grab the leadership now. We know that supporters of the Treasurer were there saying that it was only the Treasurer who could take the party forward. We know there was a marginal seat MP who said: ‘If he did it and handed over to the Treasurer it could work but he has to do it now. I don’t think he will; we’ll all go down with him.’ As these things are in Australian newspapers for everybody to read, the Treasurer remains silent.

This government is asking you to believe that, after the crisis of Tuesday, when it was revealed through Sky News that the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources have been saying to Howard that he has lost the support of the key others in the government, after a party room meeting on the Wednesday, it is now an episode of happy families—that they are all back together, that they are all members of the team, that all of these statements did not happen and that all of this disunity did not occur. Really! Watching this government as it turns inwards and cannibalises its own, we know that the following things remain true today: no matter what episode of happy families in the ongoing soap opera of this government it is trying to have us believe, the majority of the cabinet do not support the Prime Minister continuing. That is true. The Minister for the Environment and Water Resources wants the leadership of the

CHAMBER
Liberal Party and he is biding his time in the hope that he can get it. That is true.

Last night the Prime Minister went on the 7.30 Report—not with a grand plan about the future of his party and certainly not with a grand plan about the future of the nation, but with a cobbled together line about the Treasurer, to try and get him through the media cycle. And what does this cobbled together line about retirement mean? It means that, if the Prime Minister is re-elected, he will retire during the next period of the parliament. But it does not mean that the Treasurer will be the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister made that absolutely clear at the dispatch box today. He has given the Treasurer his usual sword of commitment, which is no commitment at all. So it could be anybody. It could be the Minister for Health and Ageing. Stranger things have happened—not much stranger. So the Prime Minister is saying to the Australian people, ‘I’m going if I am re-elected. It suits me to pretend that it is going to be the Treasurer, but really it could be anyone.’ That is where we have got to.

We know from today’s newspapers that it is not really over because there are key members of this government who are waiting for the next poll results and they are letting it be known loud and clear that, if the poll is not good, it is all back on. This is not an episode of happy families; this is moving from being a soap opera to a horror movie. And the problem for the Prime Minister and this government is that it is ultimately not them who pay the price of this instability; it is Australian families. They cease to govern, they cease to deliver, they cease to develop plans for the future—and it is Australian working families who pay that price.

There was not a minister today who answered a question who had half a clue or half an idea about the future of this nation. They have their scare campaign and their horror show, pretending to be happy families—and that is all they have left. Now, of course, we will hear the usual negative tirade from the Minister for Health and Ageing, but we will not hear a future plan for this nation because he does not have one, the Prime Minister does not have one and this government does not have one. (Time expired)

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Minister for Health and Ageing) (3.40 pm)—The tragedy of this opposition is that all they think about is politics. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition has spent her whole day preparing the typescript from which she has just read. It was so poor that many of her own colleagues were talking amongst themselves or reading papers.

Mr Crean—Where are yours?

Mr ABBOTT—My colleagues have a country to run.

Ms Gillard—You should try doing it.

Mr ABBOTT—That is what we are constantly doing. We are running the country while members opposite are striking poses—

Opposition members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)—Order! There may be some members who want to join the list of members that have already been thrown out.

Mr ABBOTT—I do not deny for a second that there were a few tensions inside the government last week. There are tensions inside the opposition all the time. There are tensions inside political parties all the time. Political parties bring together a whole lot of tough, ambitious people with strong ideas for the future of their country. It would be amazing if, from time to time, there were not some tensions inside political parties, including this government. This government has always demonstrated that it can deal with them. Whatever tensions there might be inside this government, they have never
stopped us from delivering extremely good and effective government for the people of Australia.

This MPI alleged ‘the government’s failure to properly plan for Australia’s challenges’. This government does not just plan for challenges; we actually meet them. There have been many challenges that this country has faced over the last 11 years. We have met them all and, through that process, real wages have grown by 20 per cent, real net wealth per head of Australians has doubled and there are two million more jobs. The reason that we have had these good results is that this government is always fixing problems—not in accordance with some ideological grand plan, but in accordance with decent values that resonate with the traditional values of the Australian people. We are a pragmatic problem-solving government, and because we have solved the problems of the day, we have built a great future for the Australian people. Let me say this: you cannot meet any challenges at all without a strong economy. That is why this government is best placed to meet the challenges of the future. You can rely upon this government to consistently deliver the strong economy on which everything else ultimately depends.

Members opposite can talk all they like about their plan for four-year-olds’ preschool or their plan to take over 750 public hospitals in one fell swoop. They can talk all they like about these things but, if you do not have the economic base, you cannot afford to do them. The first thing that members opposite would do, if they ever got to be the government of this country, would be to devastate our economy by sending the union bosses through the businesses of this country on day one of a Labor government coming to office.

Last week and last weekend, at a time when this government, according to the member for Lalor, was consumed, fixated and obsessed with its own alleged internal problems, at a time when this government was supposedly paralysed by self-doubt and fear, we were actually conducting the most successful and most important international meeting ever to take place in this country—a meeting of international historic significance. Quite apart from the fact that the Prime Minister personally negotiated, for the first time ever, a commitment from America, Russia and China to be part of an international scheme to limit and then reduce global emissions, he was also finalising a $45 billion gas deal with China, which means continued strength for the resources sector and, ultimately, continued prosperity for the Australian people. That deal would not survive any regime which increased industrial dispute and immediately made the workers in that super efficient energy sector subject to the inefficiencies and rigidities of the old award system. That $45 billion deal is hostage to the industrial relations policy of the alternative government of this country.

Members opposite suggest that economic management somehow does not matter anymore, that the economy is on autopilot and that it all happens by some process of automaticity. The instant they try to implement their industrial policy, the whole prosperity of this country, which they seem to take for granted, would be put at risk. As well as the $45 billion gas deal with China there was the $1 billion uranium deal with Russia, and members opposite seem to think that these things happen by accident. I tell you what: they do not happen by opposing these sorts of deals, and one of the many oddities about the position adopted by members opposite on this particular issue is that they support selling uranium to Russia but not, for some reason, to India, notwithstanding the fact that India has been a strong ally of good causes in recent times.
The problem with members opposite is that they talk about policies and talk about plans but they think that a headline is a substitute for serious work on making a difference for the future of this country. Let us dwell for a moment on a so-called policy which founded two questions to the Prime Minister today, and that is Labor’s $2 billion power grab for public hospitals. Public hospitals are not something with which to trifle. This is not a trivial issue. This is not something that can be dreamt up in an afternoon and dealt with by press release, and yet members opposite claim to have a plan for taking over not one, not two but 750 public hospitals in this country based on an unbelievably shallow 27-page document put out a couple of weeks ago. To deal with 750 public hospitals, their property, their staff, their programs and their patients in 27 pages is not just bizarre; it verges on fraud. It is intellectual and political fraud that members opposite are trying to perpetrate on the people of Australia.

We saw a clear tactic in question time today from members opposite standing up and claiming to have some gee whiz, you-beaut, brand-spanking-new policy on all sorts of issues and then asking the government, ‘What’s yours?’ Just because members opposite practise ‘me too’ on important policy issues is no reason for this government to practice ‘me too’, because our policies are serious. They are detailed, they are sustainable and they are not dreamt up on a long flight or on the back of an envelope on a short flight between Sydney and Canberra. On very substantial issues such as the intervention in the Northern Territory, which is a once in a generation chance to make a difference for the Indigenous people of Australia, and the $10 billion water initiative, which is a once in a generation chance to really do something about Australia’s most important natural resource, this government has done the hard work. What do members opposite say? They just say, ‘Me too.’ We had the finest and most acclaimed budget in Australia’s recent history, and what did members opposite say? ‘The government’s budget was actually our budget.’

What a bunch of political phoneys. What a bunch of deluded, would-be political impersonators. This idea that members opposite, riddled as they are with union officials and wedded as they are to old-fashioned notions of government intervention and state control, can somehow reproduce the policies of the Howard government and be trusted to resist the excesses of political correctness, which they all slavishly subscribe to, is absolute and utter nonsense. They talk today about political fixes—really and truly, the past masters of Tammany Hall, members opposite, talking to us about political fixes! As the Prime Minister said in this parliament today: what about the fix between Hawke and Keating at Kirribilli House, the lie on which the 1990 election campaign was based? What about the fix between Beattie and Bligh, the lie on which the last Queensland election campaign was based? What about the fix between Bracks and Brumby, the lie on which the last Victorian election campaign was based? These people have no shame.

What you have seen over the last 24 hours from this government is exemplary candour and honesty. We do not talk about these things after elections, when it is too late; we talk about these things before elections, when the Australian people can make their judgement, knowing what they will get if they vote for this government. That is the basic difference between members on this side of the House and members on the other side of the House: if you vote for this government, you know what you get; you do not know, listening to members opposite, whether you are going to get an economic conservative, an old-fashioned Christian so-
cialist, the ex-executive officer of the Socialist Forum or a vehicle for the transition of communists into the Australian Labor Party. The fact of the matter is that these people do not know what they stand for. They tell you, at the moment, that they stand for many of the policies of the Howard government—policies that they could never deliver if they tried but that we all know they just do not believe in and would never even try to deliver were they in government.

Talking about fixes, just what is the fix between the member for Griffith and the member for Lalor? What deals did they do? What policy arrangements were entered into between them? We know, because the former member for Werriwa told us, that the relationship between them is absolutely poisonous. We know that their huge clash of ego and titanic ambition has previously made them bitter enemies. We know that the member for Griffith would never have become the leader of the Labor Party without the reluctant support of the member for Lalor. What was the price of that deal? Members opposite come in here talking about fixes. They should be honest with us. Talking about fixes, how did they get Kevin Harkins to withdraw as candidate for Franklin? What is the fix for the member for Brand, for him to go quietly? He is now telling everyone that he is going to be the ambassador to Washington. Please confirm that.

Mr Albanese—Tony, that is not true.

Mr Abbott—Well, it has been reported and, if the reports are false, someone should stand up in this House and say so. What was the fix between the member for Cowan and the member for Griffith, when the member for Cowan could have shot the member for Griffith about the fibs he told in respect of his dealings with Brian Burke? Thank God for Alan Ramsey, I think, because at least sometimes he is starting to probe behind the smiling facade of the fakes and the phoneys who sit opposite in this parliament right now.

Mr Albanese (Grayndler) (3.55 pm)—This is a government that is out of touch, out of ideas and out of time. This is a government that is at war with itself. The Minister for Health and Ageing made an extraordinary contribution to this debate. He stated that the government had shown ‘exemplary candour and honesty’ when it comes to dealing with the leadership chaos that has engulfed the government. This is a government that is no longer governing the country, because it cannot govern itself.

On Monday night, just two days ago, the health minister said this: ‘Dumping Howard would be like jumping out of the frying pan into the fire.’ That was the health minister’s position just two days ago, and yet this morning there has been a conversion on the road to Damascus. The health minister said, about the Treasurer assuming the leadership of the Liberal Party: ‘What you’ll get in the future is the same kind of values and the same kind of policies that you’ve had in the past.’ Well, they cannot have it both ways. On the one hand they are trying to say, somehow, that this is about renewal down the track. What we know is that this is a grubby deal to get them through this week’s parliament. We know that this feud has been going for 11 years. We know this because members of the government have told us.

Remember ‘walletgate’—Ian McLachlan’s meeting record of the meeting on 5 December 1994, in which he said:

Meeting. Monday, December 1994. Undertaking given by JH at a meeting late PM in PC’s room that if AD resigned and Howard became PM then 1½ terms would be enough and he would hand over to PC. I McL.
Chamber

reneging on that clear commitment to the Treasurer, he made it public. Did the Treasurer deny it? No, he did not; he confirmed it. Indeed, he said the following at a doorstop on 11 July last year:

My parents always told me, if you have done nothing wrong you have got nothing to fear by telling the truth, and I told the truth. Now the public was entitled to know it and I have told the truth.

It is important that the truth is told not just about the past but also about the future. Today, I asked the Prime Minister twice: was there an agreement as part of the political fix to get through the caucus meeting yesterday morning that the Prime Minister would go onto TV and publicly say the ‘r’ word—publicly state that he would resign during the next term? And the Prime Minister fudged it, just as the Prime Minister fudged whether there was a deal to actually commit his support to the Prime Minister after that occurs, if the government is re-elected.

We have a Prime Minister who is standing for an election and saying he will talk about the future, when he has no vision and does not intend to be around in the future. And we do not actually know who will be the Prime Minister of Australia on 1 January 2010 if this government is re-elected. We do not know because it is a government at war with itself. We know that the Prime Minister wants a gold watch election. He wants a lap of honour, not for what he can do for the country but so that he can block the person who he has hated so vehemently for 11 long years, as he has stood there and frustrated him. The Treasurer today actually had the hide to talk about ticker. It is absolutely extraordinary. He had an opportunity this week. All he had to do was hold a press conference and say, ‘I’m running on Wednesday.’ The prize was there. But he failed to have the bottle to step up to the mark, as he has every single time.

This is a government in trouble. It is in trouble because it has no vision for the future. With the Prime Minister’s rhetoric, you would think he would have come in here today prepared with the vision. We gave him the opportunity. We asked him what his program was for early childhood education, in response to Kevin Rudd’s education revolution. He spoke for 10 minutes and said nothing about the future. We asked him about health and hospitals. Again, he said nothing about the future. And we asked him about the great challenge of climate change. His only plan is to have a $23 million advertising campaign to be launched this weekend—the taxpayer funded advertising campaign they stood at the dispatch box and said did not exist.

The most extraordinary statement of the health minister’s was when he said that none of his colleagues were here to back him up because they have a country to run. The problem is that they are no longer running the country. They are no longer concerned about the long-term policy interests and challenges for the nation; it is all about short-term political fixes. It is no longer about the future of Australia; it is about the immediate concerns of themselves. It is no longer about leadership; it is about weakness. It is no longer about a clear direction for the nation, because they simply do not have one. After 11 years, no-one knows what they stand for. They do not have an agenda for post the next election, because they have given up on the national interest. It is all about the party interest.

We have had this extraordinary situation whereby the Prime Minister has said to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, ‘Go away and sound out what my colleagues are thinking in the cabinet.’ So the foreign minister convened a meeting during APEC. When they were supposed to be concerned about this most important meeting held in Australia,
what were they doing? They were talking about themselves, having a meeting in the foreign minister’s room with the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, the Minister for Justice and Customs, the Minister for Defence and the Minister for Education, Science and Training, amongst others. What did they decide? They decided they wanted the Prime Minister to go. They decided that time was up. So they went and gave the Prime Minister the message, and the Prime Minister said: ‘Only joking. I’ve consulted with my family. They want me to stay. Forget about what you want or what the country wants.’ We gave the Prime Minister an opportunity: if you forget about what your own cabinet and your own caucus colleagues who do not want you there think, how about giving the Australian public a right to decide? At this time three years ago we were in the middle of an election campaign.

Over there they are so distracted from the future. There is no issue more important than climate change and water. We saw an extraordinary performance from the environment minister yesterday. This is a bloke who has been telling people in Sydney that he would be the Prime Minister by the end of the week. That is what has been going on: an attempt to come through the middle of two people, the Prime Minister and the Treasurer, who cannot stand each other. He had three attempts and could not get it right, and today he could not come to the dispatch box to say that he would not be a candidate. He did not have the ticker or the judgement to come to the dispatch box and say that he would not be a candidate. This next election will be a clear decision between a united Labor Party with a vision for the future under the leadership of Kevin Rudd and a disunited Howard Liberal-National Party coalition government at war with each other, with no vision for the future and with no idea, even, of who will be leading them during the term if they are elected. (Time expired)

Mr CIOBO (Moncrieff) (4.06 pm)—I listened to those contributions by the member for Grayndler and, prior to him, the member for Lalor—it would have been a lot better had the member for Grayndler stuck to the written script that he had in front of him. One thing that becomes increasingly clear with the Labor opposition is that you very much have the B team. It is a little bit like a show off Broadway: you have the one star attraction. The one star attraction that the Labor Party has is the member for Griffith, the Leader of the Opposition. But, like a show off Broadway, that one star is not enough to prop up the balance of the cast. We see evidence here today of the absolute mediocrity of the balance of the Labor Party cast when it comes to this show.

We have heard over the last little while this theme that the Labor Party are picking up. You can sense the excitement of the Labor Party: they are ahead in the polls and they know it, and the Labor Party are absolutely excited at the prospect of taking the reins of government. We on this side of the chamber intend to fight the entire way to polling day. Nonetheless, we know that the Leader of the Opposition is roaming around Australia telling people that he will be Prime Minister after the election. We know that Labor Party members believe they will be in government after the election, and they are all crowing about it.

What we are picking up on is this theme from the Australian Labor Party that it is time for a change. It is not that their policies are superior, it is not that the Labor Party offers a better alternative vision for the future of our country; the key theme that comes from the Australian Labor Party is
that it is time for a change. I am reminded of one of the Prime Minister’s favourite artists, Bob Dylan. I know that the Prime Minister has previously said that he does not perhaps share Bob Dylan’s view of politics but he does enjoy his music and he is one of his favourite artists. Bob Dylan, of course, is renowned for his song *The Times They Are A-Changin’.*

Like the off-Broadway production that is the Australian Labor Party, it was interesting recently to note that Bob Dylan had a musical. The name of that musical was *The Times They Are A-Changin’.* It was an off-Broadway musical but they hoped that, with that one star attraction of Bob Dylan, they would be able to get the crowd numbers in. Unfortunately, that musical closed after only 28 performances, and the investors lost $10 million. That is what we have got with the Australian Labor Party: the one star up the front trying to urge the people to roll up, but the rest of the team lets the side down. The consequence for the Australian people, as with the Dylan musical which was a failure after only a month, won’t be that they lose $10 million should the Australian Labor Party be elected but that they will lose billions and billions of dollars should the Australian Labor Party be elected.

Although they will stand up and propose matters like the one we are debating, and they will run the notion that this is a government that is more introspective than it is concerned with the future of Australia, the fact is that that rhetoric does not match the facts. What is very clear is that this government has been exceptionally up-front. This Prime Minister has been exceptionally up-front. The Labor Party will try to portray it as something to the contrary; the member for Grayndler can say that the Treasurer and the Prime Minister have been at each other’s throats for 11 years and how bad this is for Australia, but the facts do not support it. The evidence makes a mockery of that very contention, because what is very clear is that the Prime Minister and the Treasurer work together as one of the most effective teams that this country has ever seen.

The consequence of that leadership provided by the Prime Minister and the Treasurer has been to pay off $96 billion of Labor debt, to bring our unemployment rate down to 32-year record lows and to provide vision and leadership for this country in terms of the environment, workplace relations, economic growth and all the key indicators on education and health—a leadership that this country was starved of when the Labor Party was in power. So the mockery that can be made of the member for Grayndler is very clear.

The member for Lalor, a former lawyer, comes into the chamber and makes comments—and we heard some of the remarks made by the member for Lalor when she tried to phrase things in a particular way. It reminded me that it is an old barrister’s trick to pose the question: ‘When did you stop bashing your wife?’ I could not help thinking that we saw a little bit of that from the member for Lalor, because the member for Lalor stood up and asked: ‘While all these discussions were going on, where was the Treasurer?’ ‘Where were the Treasurer’s comments?’ By the same token, the people of Australia know that had the Treasurer actually said anything, rather than focusing on the task at hand of running the country—as indeed he was; as, too, was the Prime Minister—the Labor Party would have been saying, ‘Instead of doing his job, the Treasurer was focused on the internal politics.’ Damned if they do, damned if they don’t.

I say to the member for Lalor: you need to be a little cleverer than that, because we are well aware of the way that the Labor Party tries to manipulate, mould, distort and twist
the truth, and we can see straight through it. And the Australian people can see straight through it. More importantly, I have every confidence that the Australian people can see straight through the Labor Party. Sure, there is the attraction of the Leader of the Opposition at the moment, but the fact remains that the men and women who make up that front bench, the men and women who make up a possible future ministry should the Labor Party be elected, are nothing but a bunch of trade union hacks who are making policy on the run on the basis of what is good for the trade union movement. That is the reality, and it is not consistent at all with the allegations that the Labor Party tries to make.

Let us put to proof what the Labor Party have been saying. They say this is a government that is so internally focused that it has lost sight of the big picture. They say that this is a government that over the last week has been so introspective that it has lost sight of the big picture. What is the reality? This government just hosted APEC. Our Prime Minister just announced a new declaration in Sydney on climate change, which the member for Grayndler himself admitted is the most important issue. This government has got unemployment down to a 32-year low. This government is running the miracle economy of the world, according to the Economist magazine. This government has paid off $96 billion of Labor Party debt. That does not sound like a government that is in crisis. That does not sound like a government that has lost sight of the future. This is a government that has put over $2 billion into the Higher Education Endowment Fund to make sure there is record revenue flowing to Australia’s universities in the future. This government has put $2 billion into a Medicare fund to ensure that we have funding for our hospitals in the future. This government is planning for the future and not looking 12 years behind us, which the Labor Party is doing with their industrial relations policy.

I say to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I say to the Australian Labor Party: it is time they turned around and faced the future and stopped hiding behind the Leader of the Opposition because they know he is the only one who can make up for the deficiencies that the Australian Labor Party has across the balance of the front bench. Trade union hacks will never stand up when it comes to good policy against the kinds of policies that this government not only has implemented in the past but will be implementing in the future. That is our track record, that is our plan for the future and that is the reason why the Australian people know that the Labor Party is a fabricated con and they will not accept them.

They are a little bit like the Spice Girls. We have a ‘Scary Spice’ in the member for Grayndler. Mr Albanese is definitely ‘Scary Spice’. We have a ‘Ginger Spice’ with the member for Lalor, Julia Gillard. ‘Posh Spice’ would surely have to go to the member for Lilley, Wayne Swan. I struggled a little bit with ‘Sporty Spice’. I had to settle for Dick Adams, the member for Lyons, because I figured that is about as accurate as it gets in the Labor Party. Of course, we have a ‘Baby Spice’ in the form of the Leader of the Opposition. That is the substance of the Australian Labor Party. They are a group manufactured on the basis of what the trade union movement thinks is best for this country. It will not last; it is time that we shine a light on the frontbench team of the Australian Labor Party, expose the union hacks for what they are and, more importantly, shine a light straight through the rhetoric we have heard from the Australian Labor Party and focus on performance. This government hosted APEC. This government got the Sydney declaration. This government has performed for all Australians, and we have a plan to keep doing
that in the future. The Australian Labor Party do not have a plan. All they have is a ‘me too’ response whenever we announce anything and the simple fact is that, if you look at Labor’s performance at a state level, such as in my state of Queensland, you will see that they cannot live up to their rhetoric. (Time expired)

Mr KERR (Denison) (4.16 pm)—The Minister for Health and Ageing concluded his remarks by saying that the government over the last few days had been displaying ‘exemplary candour and honesty’ and the public would be able to vote knowing what they would get—more of the same. We will get more of the same, but what is that saying? It is not a fantasy of the Labor opposition. Jennifer Hewett in the Australian today gave us more of the same. She described what occurred in the House yesterday.

Howard sat down and Costello then stared straight ahead, stern-faced. No comments passed between them. There was no need. Their mutual passionate hatred and Costello’s obvious and outraged sense of betrayal echo far more loudly than any words either man uttered in public yesterday.

Yesterday I also spoke on the MPI and I made a maritime analogy to the great story of Moby Dick and the captain with his fiery eyes ablaze chasing the mad illusion that had sustained him for so long. Nautical allusions abound, because today we have a headline describing, instead of a noble captain going down with the ship, a tarnished Prime Minister jumping ship. This Prime Minister is quite content to leave his crew chained to the rails on the rotting hulk going down in the becalmed seas in which the government is now stranded.

The reality is that the Prime Minister does not trust his cabinet, and cabinet does not trust the Prime Minister. You know what? They are both absolutely right. For once I can agree with both the Prime Minister and the cabinet. They are each equally untrustworthy. This government have now gone beyond the analogy to Weekend at Bernie’s, with the Liberal Party carting around the corpse of the Prime Minister with sunglasses on pretending there is still political life in the body, to more or less an episode of Monty Python, with the public watching the government striving to pretend that the parrot is not dead but that it is really alive. In fact, they actually want you to vote for the parrot. This is an extraordinary situation. The Prime Minister put forward his own obituary and death notice last night on the 7.30 Report, but he still wants the public to vote for him, to vote for the political corpse.

We have the extraordinary situation where the Prime Minister sent out his emissary, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, to seek the views of his cabinet, got those views and then said, ‘I’m terribly sorry, but cabinet has been overruled by Janette.’ That is an extraordinary situation. Terry McCrann, not the Labor Party, said:

Janette’s ruling the roost—and that’s untenable.

What was really to be expected? With apologies to Kim Beazley, who used the analogy last evening, it is a bit like Stalin sending out Molotov to ask the opinion of the commissars about how he is going. The Liberal frontbench have not realised what happens in that circumstance if you give an honest answer. In their case, they have simply been ignored and trampled over as irrelevant to the decision-making process, but in Stalin’s time you were shot. The real answer that John Howard needed to come back was, ‘We are doing excellently well. We are nearly 20 per cent behind in the polls and the public thinks that our Work Choices legislation is a crock, but, Prime Minister, you are doing exceedingly well.’ That was the answer that was needed and, when it was not given, the Prime Minister supplied it for himself. He put the medals on himself. Listen to his per-
formance in question time today. The question from the member for Cowper was addressed to ‘the greatest ever Australian Treasurer’, and the response was to ‘the greatest ever member for Cowper’. The member for Moncrieff was talking about the ‘miracle economy of the world’. They are all pinning—(Time expired)

Mr CAUSLEY (Page) (4.21 pm)—That was a pathetic effort from somebody who was carried as a carcass up to the backbench some time ago now. I want to talk a little bit about the media to start with and then I want to get back on to policy. I have a good reason for doing this. When I see stories in the media that refer to a supposed backbencher or a senior minister or whatever, I believe that to be code for a manufactured story. If they cannot name people, I do not believe what is in the story.

Why do I say that? I will give you a number of reasons. I have been in politics for 23½ years and I can give you a number of reasons, even ones since I have been down here. There was a story manufactured by Sue Dunleavy about some comments that were made to the member for Gellibrand. That was an absolutely manufactured story and the paper had to apologise.

Back when I was a member of the New South Wales parliament, the Sydney Morning Herald ran a story in Spectrum called ‘In the Nationals’ interest’. It was two pages of fraud against the Nationals. That cost them hundreds of thousands of dollars in court because they did no background on it, they did not do their homework and they did not even have the ethics to ask me my side of the story. I will give you another example while I am at it. Quentin Dempster, David Margan and Murray Hogarth—Murray Hogarth, by the way, was the reporter on the Sydney Morning Herald story—did an item on the 7.30 Report about the redevelopment of the Ryan Hotel in Lismore. All they did was crawl around the pubs and get the pub gossip and run a story on it. They did not come near me or the respected mayor of the city. All I can say is that they were lucky I was busy with the Sydney Morning Herald, or they would have copped the same. There are no ethics and they do not do their homework.

Let us talk about some policies. The member for Grayndler talked about policies. The member for Grayndler and the member for Kingsford Smith are fanatical ideologues. The member for Griffith, the Leader of the Opposition, is running around to the businesses of Australia saying: ‘Don’t worry, we’ve got control of this. There won’t be any problems with our environment policy; it won’t affect industry.’ But the member for Hunter, who comes from an area where we have an aluminium smelter, has not told them the price of electricity will go up three times. The member for Richmond has not told her electorate that, if they are going to go to wind power, there will be windmills all over St Helena in her electorate. That is the policy.

If the member for Griffith thinks he is going to control ideologues like the member for Grayndler and the member for Kingsford Smith, I have got news for him. I know them both. I know the member for Kingsford Smith from a long way back—when he was head of the ACF and I was a minister in the New South Wales government. These are situations that are going to put a lot of pressure on the Leader of the Opposition. He cannot resist it. He cannot win that. He is weak. We have seen that whenever real pressure has come on. He is weak and he cannot control it. So that is what the Australian people have to look at very carefully.

We talk about the fact that the Prime Minister might be retiring. He has been honest enough to say that he probably will not con-
continue right through the next term— unlike a lot of other people—and we have the prospect of the member for Higgins, the Treasurer, as Prime Minister. I put it to you, Mr Deputy Speaker Somlyay, that the prospect of having the member for Higgins as Prime Minister is a long way in front of the prospect of having the member for Lalor, the deputy leader on the other side, as Prime Minister. I think the Australian people would be terrified if they knew there was a prospect that, in the faction fighting that will occur within the Labor Party if they ever get into government—and most certainly if they lose the election—that the member for Lalor might be the leader of the Labor Party. It is a terrifying thought. That is the sort of thing we have to look at. We have to look at who these members along the front bench are and what they represent. I think that is fairly clear.

Let us have a close look at the member for Hunter. He claims that he represents the mining industry and the Hunter Valley. The mining industry and the Hunter Valley are going to be under extreme pressure from the policies of the Labor Party. Again, the people of Australia have not been told that if they do go to clean coal technology it is twice as expensive as the coal we have at the present time. Do you think the people of Australia are prepared to pay two or three times the price for electricity? Do you think the people of Australia are prepared to have a carbon tax on petrol which will increase the price of petrol by 7c a litre? These are the issues that must be addressed.  

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. AM Somlyay)—Order! The discussion is now concluded.

SUPERANNUATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2007

Report from Main Committee

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

Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.

Bill agreed to.

Third Reading

Dr STONE (Murray—Minister for Workforce Participation) (4.27 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

AUSTRALIAN POSTAL CORPORATION AMENDMENT (QUARANTINE INSPECTION AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2007

Report from Main Committee

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

Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.

Bill agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr NAIRN (Eden-Monaro—Special Minister of State) (4.28 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.
MARITIME LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2007

SYDNEY HARBOUR FEDERATION TRUST AMENDMENT BILL 2007

INTERNATIONAL TRADE INTEGRITY BILL 2007

INTERNATIONAL TAX AGREEMENTS AMENDMENT BILL (No. 2) 2007

FINANCIAL SECTOR LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (DISCRETIONARY MUTUAL FUNDS AND DIRECT OFFSHORE FOREIGN INSURERS) BILL 2007

CORPORATIONS (NATIONAL GUARANTEE FUND LEVIES) AMENDMENT BILL 2007

FINANCIAL SECTOR LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (SIMPLIFYING REGULATION AND REVIEW) BILL 2007

PRODUCT STEWARDSHIP (OIL) AMENDMENT BILL 2007

BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY IMPROVEMENT AMENDMENT (OHS) BILL 2007

Returned from the Senate

Message received from the Senate returning the bills without amendment or request.

NATIONAL HEALTH AMENDMENT (PHARMACEUTICAL BENEFITS) BILL 2007

First Reading

Bill received from the Senate, and read a first time.

Ordered that the second reading be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

OFFSHORE PETROLEUM AMENDMENT (MISCELLANEOUS MEASURES) BILL 2007

First Reading

Bill received from the Senate, and read a first time.

Ordered that the second reading be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 4.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Port Kembla

Ms GEORGE (Throsby) (4.30 pm)—The port at Port Kembla in the electorate of Throsby is a crucial feature of our regional economy and a vital link for our coal and steel industries. In 2005-06 the port handled almost 26 million tonnes of cargo. Under the New South Wales ports growth plan our local port is preparing for new roles, in particular the transfer of motor vehicle imports from Sydney. The planned expansion has had great support and investment from the state government of New South Wales, who have invested in new berths and new cargo facilities. We see this as a great regional opportunity for businesses to grow—and with that we hope there will be a commensurate growth in employment opportunities, particularly for the young people of Illawarra given that the unemployment rate continues to hover around 40 per cent for teenagers seeking full-time employment.

The planned expansion will not only substantially increase capacity but also inevitably place pressure on existing road and rail infrastructure. In this context the debate about the completion of the Maldon-Dombarton rail link has been revisited, most recently by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services in its very significant The
great freight task report. In evidence before the committee cogent arguments were put in support of the completion of this freight rail link. I am particularly indebted to my colleague Sharon Bird for her work to ensure that the rail link was encompassed by the recommendations that were made by the committee, in particular the recommendation to establish a critical port infrastructure fund. The member for Cunningham knows the importance of this issue to our region, and I am delighted that she had the opportunity to progress that issue on behalf of all who live and work in our region.

While work started on the rail line 20 years ago it was never completed. It was argued at the time that the economics may have been marginal and that it would have had to rely exclusively on the coal industry. Today the outlook is quite different. With the transfer of vehicle imports from Port Jackson to Port Kembla and continuing growth in international shipping it is certainly time to review and consider the merits of completing the rail line. Recently the shadow minister for regional development, Simon Crean, came to the Illawarra and we had a roundtable discussion with the major stakeholders locally. The one issue that really got everybody’s attention was the Maldon-Dombarton railway. I believe that the business case for the completion of the Maldon-Dombarton freight rail line will no longer rely just on the coal industry. The $140 million expansion of Port Kembla means that there will be opportunities to move vehicles and container cargo from the Sydney basin to Wollongong.

It is estimated that throughput at Port Kembla into the future will include up to 250,000 cars annually, up to 50,000 containers and 125,000 tonnes of break bulk cargos. Fifty per cent of cars imported will go from the wharf at Port Kembla to Minto or Ingleburn in south-west Sydney for predelivery inspection. With south-west Sydney rapidly developing into a major industrial and freight distribution centre it would certainly benefit from a completed Maldon-Dombarton rail link. This would not only reduce congestion but also reduce delays and costs on road. Modern road infrastructure like the M7 and inland ports like those at Enfield and Moorebank are critical to south-west Sydney’s future economic development and its job creation potential. In that regard I think there is much to merit the completion of this rail link, in particular for the electorate of my colleague the member for Werriwa. I hope that we will soon see the return of a Labor member in the electorate of Macarthur.

Modern, efficient infrastructure is critical to establishing a seamless intermodal freight network that links all the region’s ports, including Port Kembla. We know that modern infrastructure will improve transport productivity and ease urban congestion. I commend the recent decision by our shadow minister for transport and roads to provide funding of $300,000 to the Port Kembla Port Corporation to commission a prefeasibility study into completing this important freight rail line. I think this decision shows that Labor is committed to regional economic development and has a vision for the future that complements the state government’s—(Time expired)

Launceston General Hospital

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON (Bass) (4.35 pm)—With all of the theatrics of parliament this week there is one thing which I have been working on and have been raising in this place now for many months that I want to raise again here tonight—that is, the state of our health system in Tasmania and specifically, insofar as it concerns my constituents, the Launceston General Hospital. I speak tonight, as I have done so often, to an almost empty chamber. I look with disgust on those opposite who remain silent, who
say nothing and who will never take the opportunity to exert any influence on their state Labor mates to overcome the enormous difficulties which are presenting huge challenges to families and individuals in my electorate of Bass. Today the Examiner newspaper took the unusual but quite justified step of opening by saying:

The State Government has lost control of the Tasmanian public health system and it only has itself to blame.

This issue is so deep and so complex it cannot possibly be canvassed in the few minutes available to me. But I will say that the state Labor government has every opportunity to address the challenges. I admit these are significant and difficult but the government has every opportunity to do so. It ought to implement reforms that make our health system more efficient and more cost effective. Why is it that the only reforms that this government is prepared to countenance are reforms at the clinical end? Why is it that Minister Lara Giddings refuses to reform her own department, her own bureaucracy? Why is it that the Premier of Tasmania—his government, the cabinet—refuses to reform his own budget and to give priority to what is the No. 1 concern for people in Northern Tasmania?

There are problems throughout every health system in this country and that is to be expected. But in Tasmania the significant problems that we are facing today can be addressed if hospitals are properly funded. The Launceston General Hospital is being deliberately underfunded. The hospital is not over budget; it has been deliberately underfunded. The only explanation for this is that the Tasmanian government wish to downgrade the Launceston General Hospital by starving it. By cascading debt year by year the LGH will be forced to make decisions about cutting clinical care for my constituents and families in the electorate of Bass. The people of Northern Tasmania are not stupid; they gathered in numbers of 5,000 or 6,000 just two weeks ago to demand that this Labor state government properly fund the hospital. We know they have the money. But they will not do it.

Mr Hartsuyker—They’ve got the GST.

Mr MICHAEL FERGUSON—They’ve got the GST but they also have a plan to build a new hospital in Hobart. It is not costed, but it is a plan nonetheless and we know that they are desperately scrambling to find the funds to pay for it. The Howard government is currently making an intervention into health services in north-western Tasmania—although not in my electorate. Relieving the Tasmanian government of the duty to fund the Mersey Hospital releases immediately at least $40 million per annum, which the state government can now spend on other hospitals.

I am about to make a very important statement. On 1 September the state health minister said to the LGH rally, in recognition of the savings to be made from the Mersey, that not one dollar would be going to the south. On Tuesday of this week the minister broke that promise. Of the $40 million, she has allocated just $4 million to Burnie, just $8 million to the LGH and $8 million to the Royal Hobart Hospital. First of all, an admission that all of the hospitals are underfunded puts the lie to the claim that the hospital system was properly funded and, secondly, it puts the lie to the claim that the funds would be preserved in the north where they are most needed. This minister is incompetent and has been dishonest. It concerns me greatly and I will not give up this fight. As the Examiner editorial correctly says:

It is absolute nonsense for Treasurer Michael Aird to blame the Federal Government ...

It would also be unacceptable for the State Government to be funding a new hospital in
Hobart through cutbacks in services elsewhere in the State.

I thank the House.

**Prospect Electorate: Services**

Mr BOWEN (Prospect) (4.40 pm)—Tonight I would like to talk about a relatively new suburb in my electorate called Pemulwuy. It is a lovely suburb but it does face certain infrastructure issues, which I would like to talk about today. Firstly, a couple of constituents from Pemulwuy approached me recently to complain that they were not able to access broadband, so I thought I would see just how much of a problem this was and I conducted a survey in the electorate. The response was quite overwhelming. Very quickly, I had survey forms flooding into my office. This is a snapshot of the responses from the Pemulwuy broadband survey:

**Upgrading—**

- to ADSL—
  - is near impossible and my system is so slow and inefficient it is has almost useless.
- Poor wireless reception.
- Don’t know why Telstra is not able to install any cable in the new area.
- ... no room on the exchange.
- Zero signal strength from my unwired modem rendering my internet connection non-existent!
- It’s very frustrating—
- the constituents told me—
  - not being able to upgrade to ADSL+2 especially as I live in a new residential development.
- ... no ports are available at Pendle Hill substation.
- ADSL2+ Not Available! Cable Not Available!

This is very strong feedback from the residents of Pemulwuy. They are frustrated that, in one of the newest suburbs in Sydney where houses are still being built, broadband is simply not available. I have written to Telstra requesting an urgent meeting to discuss the installation of broadband in Pemulwuy. I must say I have dealt with Telstra on these issues in the past and I have always found them to be accommodating and helpful.

We previously had the issue where Cecil Park, Mount Vernon and Horsley Park did not have broadband access and, after a community campaign, surveys organised by my office and petitions, we convinced Telstra to install broadband in Horsley Park and Cecil Park, and it is working very successfully. So I hope that we can have a very similar outcome in Pemulwuy. It is certainly very important for students, as we all know, but also for small businesses. If you are trying to operate a small business from home, it is impossible without broadband, and there are many people in Pemulwuy trying to do just that. So this will be an urgent priority for me and I hope that we are able to get some results from Telstra.

Also on the issue of Pemulwuy, we were recently successful in getting a postbox installed at Pemulwuy Marketplace, Pemulwuy shopping centre. I thank Australia Post, as I have done in the House in the past, for that. Recently I was out at Pemulwuy shopping centre and at a mobile office at Greystanes shopping centre. The people of Pemulwuy would prefer a post office to a postbox, as grateful as they are for the postbox. In fact, they presented me with 5,000 signatures on a petition calling for a post office at Pemulwuy, which I have sent to the Leader of the House for him to present in the House.

I do recognise that Australia Post have a lot of demand for post offices and they are not able to build them everywhere they are required. I do recognise that we have an excellent post office at Greystanes. In fact, it won the award for the best post office in New South Wales. I am sorry to report this to the member for Throsby, but the best post office in New South Wales is in Prospect. We do not want to do anything to affect the viability of that post office but, as the popula-
tion of Pemulwuy grows, clearly there will be a case for a post office at Pemulwuy. I will continue to lobby Australia Post for that; it is an essential service in many respects. I know that Australia Post are a commercial operation and they must make a return to the government and operate under commercial guidelines; however, the people of Pemulwuy are correct when they ask for a post office.

While I am on Greystanes, I will raise one other issue. I tend not to raise non-federal issues in the House, although I know that members opposite always raise non-federal issues, but I do from time to time when there is an issue that is important, such as AGL and the extension of gas through Greystanes, in particular to Kootingal Street. The Kootingal Street residents have asked me to help them in their campaign, and I have written a letter of support to AGL. AGL have said that if the residents want gas connected it will cost them $30,000, which is a lot of money for people who want gas connected. One of the great ironies of my electorate is that just at the end of my street and through Greystanes we have the Perth to Sydney gas pipeline, but many parts of the electorate cannot access gas. I recognise that AGL are a private company and that they have to turn a profit, but I take the opportunity of putting on the record for the House the concerns of the people of Kootingal Street and surrounding streets with regard to the gas connection and my support for them in finding a sensible and appropriate way to have that gas connected. Of course, I will continue to lobby particularly strongly for broadband at Pemulwuy and for the post office at Pemulwuy. (Time expired)

East Coast Freight Corridor

Mr HARTSUUKER (Cowper) (4.46 pm)—I rise in this adjournment debate to speak on the very important issue of the east coast freight corridor between Sydney and Brisbane, in particular the Pacific Highway. Residents who live along the Pacific Highway are constantly faced with the ever-increasing level of traffic. Also, the Pacific Highway is of great concern with regard to safety in those areas where the highway is not currently duplicated. It is of great concern to the people of my electorate that the duplication of the Pacific Highway to dual carriageway status be done at the earliest possible opportunity. Sadly, the New South Wales state government and the RTA have been dragging their feet with regard to progress on the Pacific Highway.

I welcome the announcement in the budget of Auslink 2 and the substantial increase in infrastructure spending and I have been lobbying very hard for part of that funding to be dedicated to the acceleration of the upgrade of the Pacific Highway. One cannot just upgrade highways of themselves. It is vitally important that we look at the total transport task, as is the case under Auslink, and at the ways in which we can reduce pressure on the Pacific Highway. The federal government has focused very heavily on rail, spending in the order of $500 million to upgrade the east coast rail line—including upgrading signalling, reducing gradients, replacing sleepers and extending passing loops—reducing the travel time for freight between Sydney and Brisbane by about four hours. It is a commendable achievement aimed at moving the amount of freight going by road onto rail so that rail bears its fair share of the total transport task. It is very important that the federal government has taken that on because unfortunately, under the management of the state government, our rail system has been allowed basically to fall into a state of disrepair. It is pleasing to the people who live along the Pacific Highway to see this very substantial shift in the commitment to rail. We are working towards
moving 120,000 containers off road and onto rail by the year 2011.

This is not going to solve the problem completely. The upgrade of the Sydney-Brisbane rail corridor will not solve the problem. That is why I was delighted to see the feasibility study for the western rail link between Melbourne and Queensland, which would transport from Melbourne direct to Brisbane much more of the freight that normally would be destined for transport by road. It is a tremendous idea, and I am pleased to see that the federal government is undertaking a scoping study to see if we can get even more freight onto rail. It is anticipated that such a rail link would handle about 75 per cent of the freight that would need to travel between Melbourne and Brisbane. It would avoid the rail congestion that exists in travelling through Sydney, which would certainly be welcomed by other users of the rail network.

No matter how successful we are in relation to rail, road is always going to carry a huge proportion of the transport task. I was recently speaking with the chairman of the regional chambers of commerce in my electorate, Mr Peter Lubans, about the prospect of a study looking at an alternative road alignment to the Pacific Highway, west of the existing alignment, which could perhaps relieve some of the pressure on the Pacific Highway. I have discussed with staff of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services, Mark Vaile, the possibility of the federal government undertaking a study into an alternative alignment which could perhaps relieve some of the pressure for the freight that we cannot get off road and onto rail—the freight that still needs to travel the Pacific Highway.

The rapid economic growth in this country is producing more and more freight traffic. If we can move that off the Pacific Highway onto rail or by an alternative corridor, I know that that would be welcomed by the constituents in my electorate. The former Minister for Transport and Regional Services has written to the Minister for Roads in the New South Wales parliament, Eric Roozendaal, with regard to the prospect of looking for an alternative alignment around Coffs Harbour to handle long-term growth in the traffic task. Unfortunately, Mr Roozendaal is yet to respond to that letter. After an extended period, we are still waiting to hear from Mr Roozendaal. Be that the case, I have been encouraging the federal government to look at an alternative corridor, a way of relieving pressure on the Pacific Highway and a measure which would certainly be welcomed by members of my electorate. We want safer roads and we want them as quickly as possible. The New South Wales RTA needs to move far more quickly in the upgrade of the Pacific Highway. (Time expired)

Coburg Solar Village

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (4.51 pm)—Since it came to power, the federal government have done nothing of any consequence in the electorate of Wills. When I complain about this, they say, ‘This is because your area does not apply for anything.’ That is absolute nonsense, and I want to put before the House one application which I believe is particularly meritorious and which the government have rejected.

The Moreland Energy Foundation brought together a consortium of partners to lodge a strong application under the Solar Cities program. The application is known as the Coburg Solar Village. The Moreland Energy Foundation was the first and, I believe, still the only organisation in Australia dedicated solely to reducing energy consumption within a local community. The Coburg Solar Village would result in a concentration of solar photovoltaic, solar thermal, energy efficiency, load management and cost-
reflective pricing in one of the most culturally and socially diverse municipalities in Australia.

The complete Coburg Solar Village project will cost $10.2 million to deliver, $4.9 million of which—less than half—is being requested of the Solar Cities program. The consortium will contribute $5.4 million of resources to the project, including substantial contributions from the energy retailers Origin Energy and AGL. The Victorian government would contribute up to $1.8 million to the project, demonstrating a real commitment to the Coburg Solar Village project.

This project is a terrific opportunity to show how renewable energy generation and energy efficiency can be placed on a sustainable economic footing. By combining solar photovoltaic generation with gas cogeneration within a significant urban redevelopment site, the project utilises the financial and technical suitability of gas cogeneration to meet baseload elasticity and heat requirements and absorbs PV capital cost, generation capacity and intermittency issues. The project utilises PV at scale to effectively schedule generation to contribute to peak demand and supplement on-site electricity services.

The Coburg Solar Village would install over 20 kilowatts of solar photovoltaic capacity in its first year. The Pentridge Village development site would host a 50-kilowatt PV array integrated with a 300-kilowatt gas fired cogeneration plant. Solar panels would adorn public walkways and recreation areas. The combined generation system would provide electricity for residential apartments, commercial operations and body corporate services. The heat load would be used for space heating and absorption cooling, swimming pool heating, supermarket refrigeration and hot water supply. The Coburg Solar Village also would recruit 100 households and businesses to install solar photovoltaic systems.

The Moreland Energy Foundation has an outstanding track record in achieving community take-up of energy efficiency and emission reduction programs. One would have thought that this government, which claims to be interested in practical measures to tackle greenhouse gases, would jump at the chance to fund this program. But, sadly, it has not. It has chosen to fund Solar Cities projects in areas of more strategic political significance for it. It has no interest in the electorate of Wills or in the cities of Moreland and Moonee Valley. Indeed, it has botched the whole Solace Cities program. I have spoken to proponents of the program in other cities and they are deeply unimpressed with the two-year delay and the way in which they have been mucked around throughout the entire process.

The federal government’s utter lack of interest in Wills stands in stark contrast to the state government. By way of example, the Victorian Labor government established the Victorian Space Science Education Centre at Strathmore Secondary College, located in the electorate of Wills. I pay tribute to the former education minister, Mary Delahunty, for her far-sightedness in doing this and also to the centre’s founder and director, Michael Pakakis. I was delighted to see that, a few weeks ago, Michael Pakakis and co-founder Phillip Spencer were acknowledged for their commitment to science education by La Trobe University when they were awarded the Dean’s Medal for Outstanding Service to Science and Engineering.

The centre is going from strength to strength. In August it also held an engineering and science careers expo in collaboration with Engineers Australia’s National Committee for Space Science. They had representatives from industry such as Boeing and
Hawker de Havilland and representatives from universities and TAFE colleges discussing courses with students, discussing their work and talking about their experiences of studying and working in a scientific field.

This is a sensational initiative—forward looking and thinking about our planet, just like the Coburg Solar Village. I urge the federal government to reconsider its rejection of the solar village. *(Time expired)*

**Murray Valley**

Mr FORREST (Mallee) (4.56 pm)—I wish to argue that the House ought not adjourn until it has had an opportunity to be apprised of the dire circumstances confronting Murray Valley irrigators, especially those on the Victorian side in my federal electorate of Mallee. My region of the world, like most of Australia, is now in its sixth year of depressed rainfall and severe drought. In fact, the entire federal division of Mallee has been declared in exceptional circumstances now for its third year and some areas are in their fourth year.

We have never been confronted with this situation before, particularly on the Victorian side, where substantial reductions in licence allocations mean they are just not available. My table grape growers, citrus growers, dried fruit growers, olive growers and vegetable growers—every single one of them—are going to be diabolically affected because it all comes to a head for Victoria this year. Because Victoria is one of those states that has had the best water security allocations, we have been able to defer the pain that has occurred in New South Wales and South Australia to some extent, but this year it comes home to roost.

Last week I urged the Victorian government to get the bad news out there. It is estimated that only 20 per cent of licences can possibly be allocated to landholders because of the absence of winter rainfall, winter snowfall and spring rain. These are diabolical circumstances. My growers are beside themselves and clearly governments are going to have to stand behind these important wealth-creating industries along the Murray Valley because the social fabric and the whole employment system will be affected. Employment is provided on a four-to-one basis through the agricultural and horticultural pursuits that go on along the Murray Valley.

On Monday night, Sunraysia growers are going to have a public meeting. I guess they probably think they have to do that to get government attention. I hope that before that meeting the Victorian government will announce what the allocation is going to be. To their credit they have been waiting to see a best-case scenario. We may have got spring rain, but clearly that is not going to happen. The weather experts tell me that there is a rainfall system coming across, but we have become used to these large systems having forgotten how to rain. It is not going to provide anywhere near enough water to make those allocations anywhere near realistic.

For table grape growers and citrus growers this means that they have to make very painful decisions about which of their 100 acres they are going to excise and not irrigate and let their trees, vines or whatever they are producing die. The repercussion in years ahead will be that they will struggle to re-establish. They are going to need some government support, certainly at the state level and certainly at the federal level—and I am very appreciative of the discussions that the federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is engaging in now to put a safety net under these important wealth creators for the Murray Valley.

The Murray River has run dry in our history before. We know and understand that, but it has been in periods when the nation's
population was at six and seven million. Today it is over 20 million and the pressure on our water systems can no longer cope with shortages. I suppose it reflects poorly on us as parlaments that we have not invested in storage infrastructure. We have a storage upstream of the Hume Weir at Murray Gates which is begging to be constructed. It is in prime, pristine national park country, that is true, but surely the wealth creators of the Murray Valley ought to come first and we ought to tackle the environmental challenges of constructing that Murray Gates dam.

I have also spent the last seven years advocating some solutions. What has happened this year is not new. Blind Freddy could see it happening and we were constantly being warned by our scientific community. The concept of precipitation enhancement around the world is mainstream science, and I am grateful at last, through constant nagging, to have an expert panel of scientists now established in Australia, headed up by Professor Roger Stone, who is the Professor of Climatology and Water Resources at the University of Southern Queensland. That is supported by other scientists and some funding from the Queensland government to establish a project across south-east Queensland. It is now time for other states to follow New South Wales, which approved a project over the Snowy Mountains three years ago. It is now time for Victoria to follow suit.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being approximately 5 pm, the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 5.01 pm

REQUESTS FOR DETAILED INFORMATION

Parliament House Security

Mr Bevis asked the Speaker, in writing, on 7 August 2007:

In respect of electronic detection units at Parliament House that scan for traces of bomb-making materials:

(a) how many units are there;
(b) what make and model is each unit;
(c) where is each unit located;
(d) when was each unit purchased and at what price;
(e) how often is each unit calibrated and by whom;
(f) how many staff are currently trained to operate the units;
(g) how often are staff given refresher courses in the operation of the units;
(h) how many days in the last year was each unit used; and
(i) if the units are not operated regularly, why not.

The SPEAKER—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
Consistent with policy, the Presiding Officers are not prepared to provide specific information on security devices maintained at Parliament House but would be happy for relevant officers to provide a confidential briefing to an honourable member or senator if he or she makes a written request to the Speaker or the President, as applicable.

NOTICES

The following notice was given:

Ms Livermore to move:
That the House:

(1) recognises the importance of the coal industry to the Australian economy;
(2) notes that coal exports are Australia’s largest export industry and accounted for $24.5 billion in 2005-06;
(3) understands that the coal industry is a highly significant employer in regional Australia;
(4) notes that the Bowen Basin in Central Queensland produces 85 per cent of Queensland’s total coal output and is vitally important to the economy of Central Queensland;
(5) asserts that the Australian Labor Party supports the coal industry and its subsequent benefits to the Australian economy; and
(6) recognises that Labor’s plans on climate change and clean coal are directed at protecting the coal industry and the jobs within this industry, while mitigating the effects of man-made climate change.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley) took the chair at 9.30 am.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Housing Affordability

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (9.30 am)—New figures from the Supreme Court of New South Wales on mortgage repossession orders have recently become available under freedom of information, and they are cause for considerable alarm. They reflect a trend in my electorate that many people are feeling less secure—there is less job security and there are rising costs, rising interest rates and high levels of personal debt. Eleven years after John Howard claimed that he wanted Australians to be relaxed and comfortable and just a few months after his insulting statement that working families have never been better off, we have rising levels of insecurity. And now we have proof that their concerns are founded in reality—rising rates of mortgage repossessions.

In Parramatta we had as many mortgage repossessions in the first half of 2007 as we did for the whole of 2006. In Wentworthville in the first half of this year that they reached the same level that they did for the whole of 2006. In Northmead the writs of possession issued in the first half of this year were double what they were for the whole of last year. In Blacktown, one of the worst suburbs affected, repossessions from January to July of this year have already reached the alarmingly high figure of 41, which is well on the way to the 48 writs of possession issued in 2006. These figures do not take into account the number of people who sell their home to avoid it being repossessed.

We on this side of the House have positively nagged the government, trying to convince them that, in spite of their view that working families have never been better off, many families are struggling, as are singles, pensioners, sole parents, people on disability pensions and working people generally. Rising interest rates, steep rent increases, higher petrol prices, rising grocery prices, rising childcare fees and workplace insecurity caused by the extreme and unfair Work Choices are all taking their toll on working families and individuals in Western Sydney.

The Prime Minister, John Howard, has simply stopped listening to Australian families and the many community organisations that have begged for more support for affordable housing. He did not even notice the mounting financial pressures people are facing when he claimed that Australian working families have never been better off. Now, with an election looming, the Prime Minister has rediscovered the need to plan for the future. How can the Prime Minister look to the future when he does not even see the present for individuals and families living in Western Sydney?

Here is the proof of what any member in this House would know if they spent any time at all out in the community: repossessions are at double the rate they were last year in many of the suburbs around Parramatta and Blacktown, rents are going through the roof and working people and working families are doing it tough in Western Sydney. They need a government that will act. A Rudd Labor government will work on housing affordability. Kevin Rudd and Labor have a real plan. The people of Western Sydney need action and they need a government that actually notices the problem.
Local Government

Ms GAMBARO (Petrie—Assistant Minister for Immigration and Citizenship) (9.33 am)—Things have certainly changed since I stood in this House to voice my disgust at Labor’s blatant disregard for Queensland local communities through its forced amalgamations. The way has been cleared for the people of Redcliffe in my electorate to record their opposition to the loss of identity and local voice in the merger that has occurred with the Pine Rivers and Caboolture councils. Of course, it has taken the intervention of the Howard government to take a stand against this attack on local democracy. We gave people back their vote and their voice, in this terrible attack by Labor, and there was nothing but support from their federal colleagues. It was also we who stared down the Queensland government’s draconian threat to sack councils that gave people their say—a ridiculous circumstance that Queenslanders should never have imposed on them. With the way forward cleared, the Redcliffe City Council has now taken up the opportunity to pursue a vote, and that will be a red-letter day.

The other change has been the sudden departure of Peter Beattie, the main architect in this grab for power—the man who believed that he could rule for 100 years, who has the personal responsibility for all of these years of stuff-ups and who has left this terrible mess and plenty of other messes for someone else to clean up. I wish Anna Bligh well but, if she really wants to make her mark as Premier, she should wind back these terrible experiments called amalgamation. I join John Howard in calling for Anna Bligh’s first action in becoming Premier to be the repeal of the amalgamation laws. The existing boundaries should be retained for the planned March elections. This is the only appropriate course of action for the people of Redcliffe and the people of Queensland. Ploughing on against the wishes of the people will only show how undemocratic Labor is and that it never changes its spots, just like a leopard.

I say that because Labor’s form is predictable, in that it will cave in to the demands of unions on almost every single issue. This process has been driven to give unions more access to their local government employment sector to prop up their flagging membership. Labor has given its union mates a third of the seats on the transitional committees—that is right, 30 per cent of the transitional committees is made up of unionists.

The Labor candidate standing against me is, not surprisingly, an AWU unionist. She claims to have a Redcliffe background, but she does not get this issue. ‘People raise it with me, but not in the context that it is my fault and I should do something about it,’ she said to the Australian last month. Well, plenty of people having raised it with me, I have decided that I will find a way forward, and that are what being a member of parliament is all about. (Time expired)

Banks Electorate

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (9.36 am)—The seat of Banks was created in 1949. The forthcoming election will be the 24th election where electors have had an opportunity to register a vote. I first campaigned in 1974 when I joined the Labor Party, so this will be the 14th campaign I have been involved in. It will be the seventh that I have contested for the Labor Party. The seat is not an easy seat. In difficult times there have been some very close results. At the last election I managed to win with a majority of one per cent. After the redistribution it is now 3.2 per cent.

MAIN COMMITTEE
So I find it extraordinary that at this point in time the Liberal Party have yet to select a candidate against me. Apparently that is a phenomenon in eight other seats in New South Wales. That is treating their Liberal supporters in Banks with contempt. Normally you get into the field and you fly the flag on behalf of your party. Personally, I am relaxed because I regard it as an endorsement that a party that spent $300,000 at the last election and were confident that they could win are, as yet, not able to field a candidate against me. I have certainly put a lot of effort in over the years, and that effort has paid off. I think it is fair to say that polling shows that, but for incumbency, the seat might have changed hands. But this performance by the Liberal Party will be remembered by locals, and they will be held in contempt for it.

I saw the performance of the Prime Minister last night where he pleaded for another term because he had more things to do and he set a time limit on when he would go—something that I call ‘the High Court option’, that he would leave at 70, because now, with the constitutional change, High Court judges retire at 70. He did not quite say ‘70’; he said ‘well into the next term’.

Mr Deputy Speaker Causley, you are a countryman and you know that when you have a wounded animal you put it out of its misery. You do not allow it to continue, because it can inflict suffering on those around it. This Prime Minister does not want to leave, but could you imagine what he would be like if he were elected again for the next two years? He did not tell us about Work Choices before the last election. What is he going to do after the next election, if he is elected, in relation to add-ons to Work Choices and a whole range of other things—the ‘never, ever’ man? He tells us that he made this pronouncement last night because he believes in honesty and being fair dinkum with the Australian electorate. He was not fair dinkum on the GST when he said ‘never, ever’. He was not up-front with the electorate in relation to Work Choices. In relation to ‘children overboard’ he was not fair dinkum in telling the electorate what had actually happened, and there is a litany of other matters in which he was not fair dinkum. When you combine those factors, I think the electors of Banks will do one thing: they will help return a thumping majority for a Labor candidate and for a Labor government.

(Time expired)

**Parkinson’s Australia**

**Mrs GASH** (Gilmore) (9.39 am)—Last month during the last sitting week I was privileged to sponsor a breakfast meeting on behalf of Parkinson’s Australia. This year Parkinson’s Australia has taken the initiative in promoting itself more vigorously than in previous years, and I like to think that some of this enthusiasm has flowed from the fact that three years ago we set up a parliamentary Parkinson’s support group. It has been an invaluable exercise in raising awareness of the blight of Parkinson’s, which is an incurable disease affecting younger and younger persons. I really did not appreciate how insidious this disease is, how prevalent it is or the chance that each and every one of us could be exposed to it in the future—either directly or indirectly—especially as we get older. But it is not something that Parkinson’s Australia can do alone, and they came to us for assistance.

The purpose of the breakfast was twofold: firstly, to expose as many parliamentarians as possible to the existence and activities of Parkinson’s Australia and, secondly, to present to the Minister for Health and Ageing a report by Access Economics that was commissioned by Parkinson’s Australia. The report is titled *Living with Parkinson’s disease: challenges and positive steps for the future*. If any member would like a copy, just let me know. I thank the
minister for health, my colleague Tony Abbott, for coming along to receive the report on behalf of the Australian government.

In 2005 over 54,700 persons were diagnosed with Parkinson’s; 28,100 were male and 26,600 were female. According to the report, the prevalence of the disease is expected to grow by about 15 per cent over the next five years, in part due to demographic ageing. In economic terms, the cost of this disease was estimated to be in the order of $6.8 billion in 2005 alone. In human and emotional terms, the cost is considerably higher, as anyone caring for someone with Parkinson’s will tell you. I found being confronted with the realities of the disease quite an emotional experience. Several months previously, our group was briefed by two neurologists retained by Parkinson’s Australia: Dr Andrew Hughes, Consultant Neurologist at Austin Health in Victoria, and Dr John O’Sullivan, Consultant Neurologist at Royal Brisbane and Women’s Hospital. Their presentation, particularly the video they screened of a sufferer in the advanced stages of the disease, had a huge impact on me. I commend that footage to you, because if you have no sense of connection right now you certainly will after you have seen it. It is that compelling.

I would like to thank the CEO of Parkinson’s Australia, Norman Marshall, who was appointed this year and whom I am happy to describe as an ardent advocate for the cause. He is highly assisted by Jason Thomas of the consultancy firm Sinclair Thomas, who have taken on the running of this campaign on behalf of Parkinson’s Australia. I believe that under their hand Parkinson’s Australia and the repercussions of the disease will become more visible in the years to come. The breakfast was attended by a number of eminent persons, as well as individuals who had contracted the disease, although I was rather disappointed not to see more parliamentary colleagues from both sides of the chamber. In saying that, I thank my colleagues Teresa Gambaro from Petrie and Kerry Bartlett from Macquarie for being there. More needs to be done, and we in this House are best placed to facilitate change in an effort to ease the misery. I commend the Parkinson’s Australia and Access Economics report to you and urge other members to make contact with the Parkinson’s Australia people to discover how they can help. (Time expired)

Ministerial Responsibility

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (9.42 am)—This government came to power amid much fanfare about improving ministerial standards and accountability. But, after the Prime Minister’s ministerial code of conduct claimed ministerial scalps by the bucketload in its first 18 months of operation, the Prime Minister declared it not a death sentence and it has been all downhill from there. There was no ministerial responsibility taken for the debacle over weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. The absolute low point was this: there was no ministerial, or indeed any, responsibility taken for the AWB scandal. The Minister for Foreign Affairs minister and other ministers ignored dozens of warnings and permitted an Australian company with a legislated monopoly on wheat exports to pay $300 million in kickbacks to Saddam Hussein. We had the Cole inquiry into this scandal and the government hid behind this inquiry, refusing to answer questions in the House of Representatives or Senate estimates committees on the grounds that an inquiry was taking place. But what has become of the inquiry? Nothing. The AWB’s export monopoly remains in place, with the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry continuing to veto applications from any other company wanting to export wheat. What on earth has happened to the criminal charges the Cole inquiry recommended be laid

MAIN COMMITTEE
against senior AWB personnel? The Attorney-General is just sitting on this matter. I have heard that people who would expect to be witnesses in the AWB scandal trials have not even been contacted by police. It is nearly a year since the release of the Cole report. What on earth is going on? Now the equine flu virus has got into Australia as a result of the breakdown in our quarantine arrangements. Just as in the AWB scandal, the government has set up an inquiry to be carried out by one of its favourite sons and is now hiding behind it.

What can be done about such lamentable standards of public accountability? The good news is that the Australasian Study of Parliament Group Accountability Working Party has produced an excellent report, titled Be honest, minister! The report is the work of former Victorian MPs Ken Coghill and Race Mathews from the Labor side and Alan Hunt—a great former member—and Victor Perton from the Liberal side, as well as distinguished academics and public accountability experts.

I do not have time to do justice to its many recommendations, but I do recommend it to anyone interested in lifting the low standards of public accountability which now apply in Australia. Its recommendations include making federal ministers’ staff and advisers answerable to parliamentary committees, as state ministers’ staff can be compelled to do, to stop ministers hiding behind their staff. They propose a simple, innovative and effective form of electronic registration and disclosure of lobbying to deal with this murky area of special access by vested interests to federal ministers—access which is often invisible—and they propose the reform of freedom of information legislation to restore the original intent that information not be withheld except on very limited public interest grounds, such as where national security is genuinely at risk. (Time expired)

**Flinders Electorate: Environment**

Mr HUNT (Flinders—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs) (9.45 am)—I want to raise the role of the public in two important environmental issues within my electorate of Flinders. The first is in relation to the Mornington Peninsula and in particular the proposal by the state government, which is supporting a bitumen plant at Crib Point. This is a proposal which has problems. Firstly, it would be a bitumen plant with all of the incumbent problems within a residential area. Technically, it is defined as port land; in reality, it would be surrounded by residential housing and a community who rely on that area as their home. Secondly, it would bring large, B-double trucks through the middle of Crib Point, through the middle of Hastings and potentially through Tyabb. It would have an impact on Bittern and all of those communities. So that proposal, as it stands, is unacceptable. There is a forthcoming public protest and I urge everybody who has strong views on this issue to oppose this plant. It would also destroy the proposal for the Otama submarine, which would be a wonderful outcome for Crib Point. My position is very clear: tourism, not a bitumen plant; tourism, not bitumen trucks at Crib Point, Hastings, Bittern and Tyabb. There should be a plebiscite if the state is determined to proceed with this process. I repeat: there should be a public plebiscite.

I want to take that same principle and apply it to the proposal that the state has for a desalination plant near the towns of Kilcunda and Dalyston—again within my electorate. Although technically the plant would be just outside the electorate, these two towns will be affected directly and absolutely. There is, of course, a need for secure water supplies. The first priority must be to clean up the Gunnamatta Outfall, recycle that water and end the practice of dumping 400 million litres a day, or 150 billion litres a year, of waste sewage just off our coast. If
that is done, then that will provide an extraordinary leap forward, which may well take away
the need for a desalination plant. No matter what, the community must have a say. I challenge
the Victorian government to give the community a say through a binding community plebi-
scite for the desalination plant as well as for the Crib Point plant. We have already made that
commitment, and that is the beauty of it, but there is no commitment from the state to allow
for a binding plebiscite to stop the Crib Point plant and give the people of Dalyston, Kilcunda
and Bass Coast an opportunity to determine their own future.

Ms Hall interjecting—

Mr HUNT—That is the point. We have made the commitment, whereas you guys are not
allowing the community a say. (Time expired)

Member for Moreton

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (9.49 am)—There has been a great deal of reporting this morning
of the Prime Minister’s decision to cut and run from the prime ministership if he retains his
seat and his government, come the next election. But there has not been much coverage of the
Prime Minister’s failure to defend the integrity of the AFP having regard to the scurrilous use
of parliamentary privilege by the member for Moreton earlier this week.

On Tuesday, the member for Moreton, in what I am confident will be one of his last contri-
butions in this place, launched a series of attacks on the AFP, claiming that he was a victim of
a high-level conspiracy and questioning the motives and independence of the AFP. The mem-
ber for Moreton said:

... political strings are permeating even through the highest levels of law enforcement such as the Aus-
tralian Federal Police ...

Yesterday in question time, when asked about these attacks, the Prime Minister, obviously
more concerned about the numbers in the Liberal party room than about the integrity of the
AFP, did not utter one word of support for those police officers under attack. Rather than de-
defending the good name and integrity of the AFP, the Prime Minister decided to defend the
member for Moreton.

The Prime Minister should not tolerate such attacks under parliamentary privilege. Police
are in a unique position. They are subject to an oath of office. The oath grants police enor-
mous powers and places particularly great responsibilities on these officers. It is a great per-
sonal responsibility that is at the heart of their profession, and it is a personal responsibility
coupled with a deep personal commitment that distinguishes police officers from other mem-
bers of the community in many respects. A failure to defend their integrity—integrity that is at
the very core of the profession of a sworn police officer—is nothing short of a personal attack
on every serving police officer, be they state or federal.

As anyone who has had any involvement with or any knowledge of the AFP would know,
there are proper channels through which allegations such as those raised by the member for
Moreton could be followed up and investigated. After all, the Australian Commission for Law
Enforcement Integrity has recently begun operating under this government. That process is
available to the member for Moreton, but he did not seek to avail himself of it. He sought to
make a personal and scurrilous attack on the good name of police officers, using parliamen-
tary privilege. Police officers and their families deserve better than a Prime Minister and a
government that fail to defend their integrity. (Time expired)
Member for Moreton

Roads

Mr LINDSAY (Herbert—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence) (9.52 am)—The problem with the argument of the member for Werriwa is that many AFP officers think that what the member for Moreton said is dead on the money. The member for Moreton has been denied natural justice in this matter, and that is a real shame. Week after week in the newspapers, he has been called the ‘disgraced member for Moreton’, and now we find he has no charges to answer. I certainly feel the way the member for Moreton and many AFP officers feel, in that it took six months to conclude a relatively simple investigation. I think that is the flaw in the argument of the member for Werriwa.

I need to speak in the parliament about roads. In my electorate in Townsville, roads are a very significant issue, and I am pleased to report to the community that the Townsville ring road, which I promised at the last election, is well underway. It is a new, high-speed motorway that will link the northern beaches through to James Cook University, the hospital and Lavarack Barracks. It will cut travel times by up to 20 minutes. When it opens, the community will be delighted. It will be open within about 12 months.

Mr Slipper—And all as a result of your good representation.

Mr LINDSAY—Well, it was my proposal. I won the money at the last election, we are building it and the community will understand that that is the way it should go. We are about to start work on the four-laning of the Bruce Highway, between the Woodlands Shopping Centre and Veales Road. That will take away the deathtrap intersection with the Mount Low Parkway. The people of Bushland Beach will be very pleased.

Looking ahead, we want to start work on the port access road. That is a $190 million project which will be funded by state and federal governments on a fifty-fifty basis. It is something that is timely, having regard to growth in the Townsville port and the Townsville region. I am determined to make sure that that project gets the green light and goes ahead.

I would also like to draw the parliament’s attention to my commitment to build a super-highway south of Townsville, from the Cluden turn-off through to Vantassel Road. We will four-lane that section. That section right now is overloaded. The number of vehicles it services a day warrants four-laning. It will also be a flood mitigation project because the highway gets cut in times of heavy rainfall at that location. That is a $110 million project, and I intend to deliver that to the electorate, along with a number of other road projects that are very important to the people of Townsville and Thuringowa. I look forward to making those final commitments in due course, as we approach the coming election.

Education

Mr GIBBONS (Bendigo) (9.55 am)—I want to use this opportunity to refer to the consequences that the Howard government’s education policies have had for my electorate of Bendigo. This week the Minister for Education, Science and Training announced an additional 605 Commonwealth funded places for Victorian universities. This is a welcome move, but one that goes no way to rectifying the damage the Howard government has inflicted on tertiary education in this country. The major tertiary institution in Bendigo, La Trobe University, was not in a position to even apply for any additional places, because it could not be confident that those places would be filled by prospective students. This is an appalling state of
affairs. We are in the middle of the biggest skills crisis this country has ever seen—a crisis that is holding back economic growth and reducing the quality of life for regional Australians. La Trobe University’s predicament is a direct result of the 11 years of neglect and underfunding by the Howard government.

Since 1996, annual Commonwealth funding for universities has fallen by a third, from 0.9 per cent of GDP to about 0.6 per cent today. Commonwealth grants to universities have decreased from 57 per cent of total government revenue in 1996 to 41 per cent in 2004. The Howard government slashed $5 billion from university funding between 1996 and 2002. La Trobe University alone had $227 million effectively cut from its Commonwealth funding. The reason why regional students are not even applying for the current available places is that the cost of university education under the Howard government is spiralling out of reach. Recent surveys by the Age newspaper found that one in six regional students who won university places are choosing not to enrol, compared to one in 15 in Melbourne. The survey found that regional students were put off by the high costs and prospects of having to leave home to pursue those studies. The currently depressed rural economy makes it more difficult for regional students and their families to meet these costs.

It is scandalous that the Howard government has allowed this situation to happen at a time when increased skills and qualifications are vital to Australia’s economic prosperity. It has been more interested in forcing its ideologically driven industrial relations policies on unwilling universities and destroying the student union movement than it has been in improving educational outcomes. The rocketing cost of higher education is making second-class citizens of regional students, and the government appears completely oblivious to the expensive but unfair tertiary education system that it has created.

If the Howard government is re-elected, the costs of going to university will only increase. Labor believes more can and must be done to reduce the costs of tertiary education for regional students. Labor’s comprehensive education revolution will bring equality of opportunity back into university education. It will once again put a tertiary education within the reach of those regional students who are bright enough to earn a place at university. In 1999 the Prime Minister said, ‘There will be no $100,000 university fees under this government,’ but now we have more than 100 degrees in public universities that cost over $100,000. The Howard government broke its promise on full fee paying degrees. It is now out of touch with the expensive and unfair system that it has created.

Broadband

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher) (9.58 am)—Not only is the current government of Australia a government for metropolitan areas; it also recognises the importance to Australia of rural, remote and regional areas. The $113 million Clever Networks program, which is part of the $1.1 billion Connect Australia package, is enabling the roll-out of broadband infrastructure and innovative services to the regional and more remote parts of Australia.

I was particularly pleased that recently on the Sunshine Coast we had a visit from the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, the Hon. Helen Coonan. She announced funding of $2.9 million for the Maroochy Shire Council to facilitate business innovation and productivity and to increase service delivery options. There will also be a contribution made by Allegro Networks, the University of the Sunshine Coast and the Maroochy Shire Council totalling $3.4 million. This means that the quality of technology on the Sun-
shine Coast will substantially improve. It means that, with this sort of broadband on the Sunshine Coast at metropolitan prices, there will be tremendous benefits to a whole range of organisations, including those in the health, research, small business and education sectors. Interestingly enough, the project will use a mix of optical fibre cable. It is a wonderful project.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Barresi)—Order! In accordance with standing order 193, the time for members’ statements has concluded.

SUPERANNUATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2007
Second Reading

Debate resumed from 21 June, on motion by Mr Nairn:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr BOWEN (Prospect) (10.00 am)—The purpose of the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2007 is to make changes to the Australian government civilian and military superannuation schemes. Labor supports this bill, but our concern is not about what is in it; it is about what is not. From 1 July 2008 this bill will remove the requirement for contributory members of the Commonwealth Superannuation Scheme, or the CSS, to make member contributions to the CSS, thereby making all member contributions voluntary and providing members with the same flexibility and incentives to contribute to superannuation that are available to the broader community.

It also allows, from 1 July 2008, eligible members of the Public Sector Superannuation Scheme, or PSS, to elect to leave that scheme to join another superannuation arrangement for the payment of future contributions, which will allow eligible members the flexibility for future contributions that is already available to most of the Australian workforce. From 1 January 2008 it enables members of the CSS to obtain early release of their funded account balances on severe financial hardship and compassionate grounds.

It provides from 1 January 2008 for the prospective restoration of previously cancelled spouse pensions. It makes consequential and technical amendments and ensures that the entitlement to benefits in the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Act 1973, or the DFRDB Act, relating to post-retirement marriages is consistent with the treatment in civilian schemes. Finally, it addresses an anomaly in the treatment of the benefits payable in that act upon marriage breakdown.

A hearing was conducted by the Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration on the act, which I will be referring to later. The Superannuation Act 1976 includes a requirement for contributory members of the CSS to pay basic member contributions of five per cent of their salary for superannuation purposes. This bill includes amendments to the CSS Act that will remove the requirement and allow CSS contributors to elect, on or after 1 July 2008, to cease making member contributions. Amendments to the Superannuation Act 1990 are not required as the necessary changes for the PSS will be made by the APSS amending deed.

The PSS Act provides eligibility requirements for membership of the PSS and generally only allows members to cease contributing on leaving employment or retirement. The bill includes amendments to that act that would allow eligible PSS members to elect to cease membership of the scheme, preserve their accumulated PSS benefit and have their future em-
ployer contributions paid to an accumulation scheme, thereby having access to the government’s broader fund arrangements. These changes will commence on 1 July 2008.

The bill also amends the Superannuation Act 2005 to allow eligible PSS members who have elected to join the Public Sector Superannuation Accumulation Plan, or the PSSAP, to become members of that plan. Whilst Labor is supportive, I must say, frankly, individuals who elect to reduce contributions will be disadvantaging themselves and should carefully consider such action, particularly seeking advice from the fund or other financial advice about the financial detriment of doing so.

The bill contains amendments to the CSS Act that will, from 1 January 2008, enable CSS members to obtain early release of their funded account balances on severe financial hardship or compassionate grounds to the extent allowed under the regulatory framework established under the Superannuation Industry (Supervision) Act 1993. The bill will enable the positive restoration of pensions for persons who have previously had their spouse pensions cancelled upon remarriage. Prior to 1976 in the Superannuation Act 1922 civilian scheme and 1997 in the Defence Force Retirement Benefits Act 1948 and the DFRDB Act, spouse pensions were cancelled on remarriage.

Cancellation never applied in the PSS, CSS or military superannuation scheme. Although provisions cancelling spouse pensions on remarriage were removed from the 1922 act scheme in 1976 and the DFRB Act and the DFRDB Act schemes in 1977, spouses who remarried before the cancellation provisions were removed continued to be affected by the former provisions. From 1 January 2008 restrictions on the restoration of spouse pensions that were previously cancelled when a spouse remarried will be removed prospectively upon successful application. The changes will also apply to persons who have previously had their spouse pension only partially restored.

The bill also includes, as I referred to earlier, amendments to the CSS act as a consequence of the government’s Better Superannuation reforms. The main amendment will ensure the continued payment of employer productivity contributions for a member who cannot make member contributions because they have not provided their tax file number. This is consistent with the arrangements in the broader community, where employer contributions would still be payable even though the member has not provided their tax file number.

The Better Super reforms generally commence from 1 July 2007. The amendments in relation to the CSS Act may commence between 1 July 2007 and 1 July 2008, depending on the particular amendment. Amendments to the PSS Act are not required as the necessary changes will be made by the PSS amending deed.

The bill also amends the DFRDB Act to improve access to reversionary benefits in certain circumstances where the retired pensioner commenced a marital relationship after the age of 60. Currently a spouse’s pension under the DFRDB Act scheme is generally not payable if the pensioner who commences a marital relationship after the age of 60 dies within five years of the relationship commencing. The bill removes the restrictions on the payment of benefits following such post-retirement relationships. However, a pro rata rate of a spouse’s pension will be payable where the relationship existed for less than three years immediately before the pensioner’s death. Where the resulting rate of the pension is small, it may be commuted to a lump sum in some cases. These amendments will also apply to the MSBS and the necessary changes will be made by amending the MSBS trust deed and rules.
It is proposed that the new postretirement marriage arrangements will commence on a day or days to be fixed by proclamation or six months after this act receives royal assent. These changes will ensure consistency between the military schemes and the civilian schemes. Labor believes that this should date from the operative date for the civilian schemes—namely, 1 July 2003. There was no satisfactory explanation given to the Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration for why this did not happen. The parliamentary secretary has indicated consideration of act of grace payments. The number of people advantaged by greater retrospectivity is very small—less than 10 a year—so the associated cost is negligible. Certainty and consistency should apply to widows and Labor asserts that it would be better if this were covered by the act rather than act of grace payments.

The bill will address an anomaly in the family law provisions of the DFRDB Act to allow family law orders to be applied as intended. As the current legislation stands, family law orders only apply to a current lump sum or pension. This amendment only applies to a second and subsequent or later pension or lump sum that is paid as a result of a period of effective service that begins on or after the day on which this amendment commences.

The amendments relating to voluntary member contributions for CSS members and a choice of fund for PSS members are part of a package of measures announced in the 2007-08 budget which overall will cost approximately $160 million over four years.

As I said in my opening remarks, what causes the opposition concern is not what is in the bill; it is what is not in the bill. There are a range of contemporary issues that need to be considered, particularly against the background of the various reforms to private sector superannuation that have occurred over the past 20 years. These issues include indexation provisions of pension entitlements; interdependent relationship reversion pension benefits, a promise made by the Prime Minister but not delivered upon; the tax increase that members of the MSBS will suffer as a consequence of the 1 July Better Super changes; the ability to salary sacrifice; real super choice and portability; the value of the 10 per cent rebate for untaxed schemes and income tax treatment of non-super income at age 60; the foreign defined benefits schemes such as those covering the Australian staff working for the United Nations—again, consequences of the 1 July Better Super changes; transition to retirement provisions; and the tax treatment for class A military invalidity pensions.

Again, many of these matters were canvassed at the Senate finance and public administration committee hearing into the bill, but very few answers were received from the government. Labor is particularly concerned that the various actuarial and other modelling carried out by the Treasury on a number of these matters has not been made public, despite constant requests by the shadow minister for intergenerational finance, Senator Sherry, at many Senate committee hearings over many years.

The government’s response to Labor’s concerns in the matter of superannuation in military matters has been arrogant to say the least. They have arrogantly said there is no problem and that the Labor Party do not know what we are talking about. The veterans community would certainly beg to differ and has certainly been very vocal in support of the Labor Party’s position, as the Labor Party has been very vocal in support of the needs of veterans. That has been articulated by the shadow minister for veterans affairs and by the Leader of the Opposition, who has made this a priority for the opposition. The shadow minister for veterans affairs will

MAIN COMMITTEE
be following later in the debate. He will be moving a second reading amendment which refers to some of the matters I have addressed in these remarks.

**Miss Jackie Kelly** (Lindsay) (10.11 am)—The coalition government has consistently worked to provide incentives for Australians to boost their retirement savings. The record of this government on superannuation is exemplary given the 13 years of mismanagement under Labor before the Howard coalition government came to office.

Let me remind you, in light of the amendments to be moved by Mr Griffin, that it was the Labor Party that actually defunded the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Scheme, or the DFRDB. They took all of our veterans’ contributions in DFRDB, rolled them into consolidated revenue and left it as an unfunded Commonwealth scheme. It has been left to this government, in the form of the Future Fund, to come forward, to step up to the plate, to do the hard yards, to say, ‘No, you can’t spend this; no, you can’t spend that,’ to save the money and to build a Future Fund. And now we are looking at a situation where our Commonwealth service public pensions, our public sector public pensions and our Defence public pensions will be funded. They will not be an impost on my children. My children will not be paying double tax for something that the taxpayers of previous generations should have and have already paid for. So my children’s tax will be going to support their standard of living. With the Future Fund that we have reinstated you will see the veterans cared for by their own contributions and their own employer contributions, and that is how it should be.

There was a magnificent announcement yesterday by the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs of a support package worth more than $330 million to index veterans affairs disability pensions with MTAWE. That is something that the veterans community has been asking for. They have asked us to go further in terms of also pegging DFRDB with MTAWE. On our calculations, that is a $6 billion promise. I know Bernie and co. from the veterans community say: ‘No, it’s not that; it’s only $35 million. You can do this for $35 million.’ Heaven help us if the ALP ever get into government because, if they are taking those types of sums, making those types of rash promises and taking out—recklessly—$6 billion per annum, how many hospitals will go unfunded? How many schools will go unfunded? What will that do to our education sector? How do we respond to something like the equine influenza? When some outside shock hits our economy, where do we get the wherewithal to run with that?

The previous speaker was talking about contemporary issues within the veterans community. I have superannuation locked up in MSBS, Military Superannuation and Benefits Scheme, and I would like to see that rolled over. I, like everyone else who did less than 20 years in the military, would like to see our super rolled out. Certainly in the time I have been in parliament I have seen MSBS perform in a manner where, after administration costs, mine actually went backwards, whilst private sector funds were streaming ahead at 10 per cent and 15 per cent. But the cost of doing that is something that needs to be looked at and needs to be considered. It is certainly something that this government is looking at in a responsible fashion. Certainly the amendment which looks at removing the tax increase that applies to members of MSBS as a consequence of the recent Better Super changes is something that I would like to see passed. As for a few of the other issues that have been raised by the opposition in relation to military super schemes, we have restored the reversionary benefit for people who have remarried pre-1979.
The opposition want to implement the same date as that of the civilian schemes. This can be done by other measures. Again, it shows that they really want to use a hammer on an eggshell rather than working through, in a fiscally responsible manner, issues that are put to them by the veterans community and by the people who have funds invested in these unfunded schemes. They go on to a number of other contemporary issues, which no doubt have been canvassed widely amongst the various communities affected.

This government’s track record on superannuation is exemplary, and the opposition’s track record on superannuation is woeful. Every time they have seen a bucket of funds accumulated for people’s super, they have gone and raided the hollow log. Every time. Why would you put them in charge of the cookie jar once again? They have already spent the Future Fund on some broadband infrastructure for the bush or for Australia that we have stimulated the private sector to fund without any recourse to the Future Fund. On several other occasions we have seen the opposition wanting recourse to the Future Fund. Here, again, they are going to have recourse to the Future Fund to allow MSBS and DFA, Defence Families of Australia, to be rollovers. You should see their candidate in Eden-Monaro. He is an ex-military officer. He himself is facing the same fiscal issues that we all do given that we have investments in those schemes, and he has recklessly just proposed the expenditure of $6 billion for his party when he is not even in parliament yet. This is another example of the reckless disregard that the opposition consistently show on these issues.

These are complex issues with knock-on effects. I have no doubt that our veterans deserve an increasing standard of living and that it should keep pace with commensurate schemes in the community, but this should not be done at the cost of services that need to be delivered for our children, for the next generation, in critical things such as health, disability, care for our aged and education. We have slowly made major contributions to that with the establishment of our education fund. We see higher education consistently funded into the future. You are seeing from this government consistent financial investment to allow these matters to run the full course. Labor, on a whim, wish to race in and destroy 12 years of good, solid, hard work. I know our veterans communities can get impatient, but I ask them to bear with us. We will be giving a better service, a truer service over a longer period of time. I urge them to remember the ALP’s raid on DFRDB. That is what put us in this situation. Up until then we had a funded scheme. It was a scheme that would have seen us continue in the future independent of any call on taxpayers. Now we find ourselves in the situation that we are in today.

Let me go through the history of what this government has done on superannuation to give people an understanding of our commitment to people’s savings. We are serious about seeing elderly Australians living on something more than a straight-out pension, which is the very minimum standard below which we want no Australian to fall. We certainly want people who have been in employment all their lives, who have done serious work with the public sector and with the Defence Force, to really see the benefit of their super contributions and their savings over their lifetime and the same for those who, through various circumstances, have been unable to save and have found themselves totally reliant on a support pension in their retirement.

We have introduced a scheme for workers earning less than $28,000 where we contribute $1.50 for every $1 contributed by the low-income earner. That scheme runs up until someone is earning $58,000. Our co-contribution scheme means that $2,500 each year can be contrib-
uted to someone’s super and, after a lifetime on a low-income wage, they can retire with substantial savings in excess of a quarter of a million dollars and up to half a million dollars, which will have a significant impact on their standard of living in the future.

One of the important things in the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2007 is that it also makes provision for the circumstances of marital break-up, in which we frequently see the female severely disadvantaged if she has been in and out of work. We have looked at a tax rebate to encourage individuals to make superannuation contributions on behalf of their low-income spouses—that is, for the wife who stays at home or only has a part-time job so that she has time to look after children. I think one of the most important things that we do in life is take time out to look after our children. If you make the decision that you want to dedicate a substantial amount of your time to that, you should not be penalised by your super scheme. The ability to continue contributions throughout the time that you take out of the workforce so that in retirement you have a consistent and continuous history of super contribution is an important landmark that this government can be justifiably proud of.

There is capital gains tax relief for small businesses when they roll over their small business. That is a major saving. If a small business is rolled out for retirement purposes, it is free of capital gains tax. We have increased the deduction limits for superannuation contributions made by the self-employed. There are dollar for dollar deductions up to $5,000 for self-employed people. We find that a lot of mums work from home and that having their own job or small business allows them to superannuate themselves.

These are relevant issues because they show this government’s continuing dedication to improving the superannuation savings of not just our Public Service, our Commonwealth sector employees and our defence sector employees but the Australian public as a whole. You can trust this bill. You should go with the government on this one. You should ignore the ALP bleatings because in government they do something completely different and really do not manage super at all well. They now have a shadow minister for intergenerational finance. They never even understood it when they were in government. Do you seriously think they even remotely understand it in opposition? They did not even have a charter of budget honesty. They do not even do regular intergenerational reports. We have all of these reports established and reporting to parliament in an ongoing way to continually remind Australians about our ageing population, our financial obligations to those people, how those must be funded and how we can minimise the call on generations that have not yet had the benefit of their tax payments.

We have seen a number of improvements in a number of sectors. I have heard the defence lobby. I obviously have a lot of sympathy for it, given my own financial situation, but I would still stick with the government in coming up with the funds to fund it rather than the ALP’s raid on the Future Fund. That is irresponsible. There are ways of doing this. When Bernie and Keith Tennant and everyone can come up with the rigorous financial investigation into the costings of these things that can really nail it down and we can negotiate things, I think we can deliver for the veterans community in a way the ALP will never be able to. They can make all sorts of wild promises in opposition, but, with 12 years experience in parliament, I know that things are not as easy as the Labor candidate in Eden-Monaro might think they are. He is straight out of the military, obviously. He has realised his pension situation and wants to help his fellow diggers, as we all do. But the opposition amendments are irresponsible. Their
promises are erratic and funded out of a mechanism that is just reprehensible. It leaves us in a situation where my children will be continuing to pay for pensions that should have been funded and paid for by the pensioners themselves.

We have a terrific record on superannuation. We have removed the work test for those aged under 65 so that these people can contribute to super at any time after 1 July 2004. We have introduced a new transition-to-retirement policy allowing Australians aged over 55 to access their superannuation as an income stream while remaining in the workforce. We have abolished the superannuation surcharge, giving a greater incentive for higher income earners to contribute to their superannuation. We have allowed superannuation benefits to be split between married couples who separate. That is doing something for females, who traditionally have been less well superannuated than males in our community. We have increased the safety of superannuation entitlements by requiring quarterly superannuation guarantee contributions rather than annual contributions because we were seeing a number of businesses leaving their employees high and dry in the private sector—and that truly was something the ALP did in government in the public sector. They were leaving them high and dry with the promise on the never-never that the future taxpayer would pay their pension for them. That is a serious inter-generational impost that we have corrected. The list on our record on superannuation goes on and on.

I urge the Australian community to understand this government’s rigour, experience, dedication and commitment to the retirement savings of Australians. We are economically sound. We have a proven track record. Why you would consider falling for the very empty promises of the opposition, who, when they were in government, hollowed out the log of the DFRDB, is beyond me. I commend the bill to the House and call for the amendments to be disregarded.

Mr Griffin (Bruce) (10.28 am)—In speaking on the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2007 today I have a number of points to make. As has been mentioned earlier, I do have an amendment. I would also like to pick up on some issues from the previous speaker. I would like to start by saying to the member for Lindsay: all the very best. I know she is retiring at this election. I am happy to consider her to be someone on the other side of the House who I have a good deal of time for, and I wish her all the very best with her retirement. I am sure she will keep busy and lead a productive life. Having said all that—that is the nice bit, but then here is the catch—there are a couple of things that she said which I would like to try and address in the context of the circumstances around superannuation and the history of this area.

There is no doubt that defence superannuation is a very important part of the benefits provided to our defence community, and there are very good reasons for that. There are also very good reasons why, in many cases, it should be treated differently to others, because of particular circumstances around defence service. Also, it is true to say that it is an area where there have been a range of urban myths and legends have grown over the years with respect to what has actually happened historically with defence superannuation. I would like to pick up on a couple of those on this particular occasion. There are many in the veterans community who have accused Labor of dismantling the former defence superannuation scheme—the DFRB, the Defence Forces Retirement Benefits Scheme—in the early seventies. The member for Lindsay referred to that. Again, that is not really the case and it is not really clear. We need to
understand the history of what actually occurred with respect to the changes to defence super-
annuation at that time.

The chronology goes something like this. In 1970, the then Liberal government, headed by
John Gorton, formed the Joint Select Committee on Defence Forces Retirement Benefits Leg-
islation in September 1970 to examine the operation and suitability of the Defence Forces
Retirement Benefits Scheme. The committee provided its report, which was commonly
known as the Jess report, to the Liberal government in May 1972. It concluded that the DFRB
was unnecessarily complex. Its recommendations covered a range of things that included: the
establishment of an entirely new contributory military super scheme on the grounds that
DFRB lacked simplicity and was incomprehensible to servicemen; a recommendation that the
new scheme be an unfunded scheme; a recommendation that all contributors to the DFRB
fund be transferred to the new scheme; a recommendation that the retired pension be indexed
to average weekly earnings; and a recommendation that the existing DFRB scheme, compris-
ing members’ contributions, be transferred to the Commonwealth.

As is not unusual for a conservative government, the McMahon government, as it was at
that stage, sat on the report for some five months. Then, on 26 October 1972, the last sitting
day before the election, the Prime Minister at the time, McMahon, outlined his response to the
review. His response was that the government would amend DFRB without creating a whole
new scheme but would not change it to an unfunded scheme, and the matter of indexation was
referred to an independent expert. McMahon indicated that amending legislation was already
being prepared. The point I would like to make in relation to that is that, on the question of
funded or unfunded, it took the government of the day five months to come to a conclusion,
and then, in the shadow of an election that they were expected to lose, they got scared and
avoided that particular recommendation.

When the Whitlam government assumed office on 22 December 1972, it accepted several
of the review’s recommendations that McMahon had not accepted, such as the need for a new,
simpler military super scheme which would be funded on a pay-as-you-go basis and the need
to transfer DFRB members to the new scheme to ensure administrative simplicity. It referred
the issue of indexation to an independent expert. The new military super scheme at the time
corrected several disadvantages in the old scheme. Under DFRB, a member only received the
age pension at 60; the new scheme was based on length of service, not age, allowing for the
eye retirement of defence personnel. This meant that ex-service personnel could receive a
stable income earlier. The new scheme also would allow the commutation of a lump sum and
was far simpler.

It is important to remember that the committee that actually made the recommendations re-
lating to this was set up by a conservative government, it reported to a conservative govern-
ment and that conservative government accepted many of its recommendations but in fact
only gave its hasty response on the last day that it could before an election that it was ex-
pected to lose. The Labor government then came in, acted upon the recommendations—not all
of them, but more of the recommendations of that independent committee set up by the con-
servatives—and then this government, and conservative governments ever since, and there
have been a few, never acted to reverse it. It will not address what it says is a fundamental
problem with what occurred at that time. So it really is not quite the way the legends have
built it up and it does not really take into account what really occurred. Members of the coali-
tion have been very happy to spread far and wide some of those urban legends, as the previous speaker did. That is why I seek to mention it today. It is a subject on which I will have more to say in the future.

Today I rise to speak particularly about issues relating to serving and former defence personnel and the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2007. The bill proposes a range of amendments to both the Australian government civilian superannuation scheme and the military superannuation scheme. Three provisions hold particular relevance for defence personnel and the ex-service community. Firstly, there is the provision from 1 January 2008 to allow for prospective restoration of previously cancelled spouse pensions. This applies to persons who had previously had their spouse pensions cancelled upon remarriage. Secondly, there is the provision to ensure that the entitlement to benefits in the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Act 1973 scheme relating to post-retirement marriages is consistent with their treatment in the civilian schemes. Thirdly, there is the provision to address an anomaly in the treatment of the benefits payable in the DFRDB Act scheme upon marriage breakdown. These amendments are welcome but they do not go far enough.

I have been very concerned about defence superannuation over the last few months and the way in which the government seems to be operating under a veil of silence about the superannuation conditions of defence personnel. It is what is not in this bill that is relevant to defence superannuation and that particularly concerns Labor. There are a whole range of contemporary issues that need to be considered, particularly when set against the background of reforms to private sector superannuation that has occurred over the past 20 years.

What has been particularly alarming has been the government’s sluggish response to remedy the tax hike imposed by the Better Super reforms on Military Superannuation and Benefits Scheme members, who generally retire earlier, as a result of the new proportioning rule. People were left to wonder why the government was not acting when it was revealed on the military super website that some MSBS members, MSBS, would pay an increased tax on their partial commutation lump sum of up to 413 per cent. The government now says it will fix that, but when will this happen? I do not see such a guarantee in this bill. This is no small matter either. There are some 46,400 contributing members in the MSBS.

When Labor first raised this issue, it took several goes to prod the government into doing something about it. Initially, the government refused to guarantee that members of both the DFRDB Scheme and the MSBS would be protected from higher taxes imposed by the reforms. The government then protected DFRDB members from the tax increase but refused to explain why it did not extend that same protection to MSBS members. MSBS is the larger scheme, as I said, with more than 46,400 contributing members. Then the government refused to allow the military super review to consider the impact of the tax changes on defence superannuants.

Apart from the new proportioning rule, there are a whole range of other superannuation issues that concern defence personnel and the ex-service community. These include, but are not limited to, the indexation method for defence superannuation pensions; the appropriateness of the 10 per cent tax offset, in lieu of tax-free treatment upon reaching 60 years of age, under the Better Super reforms; the taxation treatment of non-super income for defence superannuants over 60; salary sacrifice arrangements for defence personnel; portability of super choice for defence personnel; outdated life tables used to calculate superannuation benefits;
tax arrangements, including for those medically discharged who are in receipt of class A invalidity pensions and for those who fall under the compassionate or hardship provisions; and alignment between the preservation age of ADF members and the normal ADF compulsory retirement age.

We know that the minister has the report of the military superannuation review, which addresses a number of these issues. We also know it is likely that he has had the report since July. With an election just around the corner, what is the government doing? It is sitting on the report. The independent review, announced in February 2007, was to examine the suitability of current military superannuation arrangements in the DFRDB and MSBS in light of recent changes in the areas of superannuation and the Australian Defence Force.

Labor hopes that, in the absence of any action from the government, the review will provide crucial data regarding how these issues should be addressed and how military super can be improved. The proper consideration of these issues demands that the review be released immediately. Defence personnel and the ex-service community are entitled to know what the review says and what the government will do about it before the election. Are we going to see a repeat of what we saw with the McMahon government, when the response came only in the shadow of an election being called?

Labor’s second reading amendment reflects the range of concerns I have briefly outlined. However, let me quickly discuss two aspects of the bill: prospective pension restoration and reversionary benefits for post-retirement marriages. This bill will enable the prospective restoration of pensions for persons who have previously had their spouse pensions cancelled upon remarriage. By way of background, prior to 1977, under the Defence Force and Retirement Benefits Act 1948 and the DFRDB Act schemes, spouse pensions were cancelled on remarriage. This cancellation never applied to the Military Superannuation and Benefits Scheme. Spouses who remarried before these cancellation provisions on remarriage were removed from the DFRB Act and the DFRDB Act schemes in 1977 continued to be affected by the former provisions. From 1 January 2008 restrictions on the restoration of spouse pensions that were previously cancelled when a spouse remarried will be removed prospectively upon successful application. The changes will also apply to persons who have previously had their spouse pension only partially restored.

The bill also amends the DFRDB Act to improve access to reversionary benefits in circumstances where the retirement pensioner commences a marital relationship after age 60. Currently, a spouse’s pension under the DFRDB Act scheme is not payable if the pensioner, who commenced a marital relationship after age 60, dies within five years of the relationship commencing. The bill removes this restriction for post-retirement relationships. This change will provide consistency between the military schemes and the civilian schemes and is a positive measure supported by Labor. However, a pro rata rate of spouse pension will be payable where the relationship existed for less than three years immediately before the pensioner’s death. Where the resulting rate of pension is small, it may in some cases be commuted to a lump sum. I note that these amendments will likewise apply to the MSBS once the necessary changes are made to the MSBS trust deed and rules.

It is proposed that the new post-retirement marriage arrangements will commence on a day or days to be fixed by proclamation or six months after the act receives royal assent. However, for the sake of equity between the military and civilian schemes, Labor believes this should
commence from the date it applied to the civilian schemes—1 July 2003. There was no satisfactory explanation given to the committee on why this did not happen. I understand that the parliamentary secretary has considered act of grace payments and that the number of persons affected by this would be very small—less than 10 a year—so the cost would be negligible. The government has been strangely silent on these issues. It has vacated the field. I know for a fact that veterans everywhere are expressing concern and anger over current indexation arrangements. I am receiving many emails every day about this issue. The level of concern within the veterans and defence community is high and is only building, due to frustration at the government’s neglect of them. The government is shutting its eyes in the hope that this will go away. Many of the matters I have raised today were canvassed at the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee hearing on the bill. Sadly, few if any answers were received. Labor is particularly concerned that various actuarial and other modelling carried out by Treasury on a number of these matters has not been made public despite constant requests by our shadow minister, Senator Sherry, at many Senate committee hearings over many years. What is the government hiding? Why will it not be accountable to the public on this issue and why is it so scared of providing the necessary information for a full and frank debate?

The second reading amendment circulated in my name seeks to address some of the deficiencies in the bill that I have discussed today and calls on the government to do the right thing by defence personnel and ex-service members and to provide the data and reports necessary to hold informed and accountable policy debate on this important matter. Serving and former defence personnel deserve no less than a government that is accountable to them on their pay and conditions. I move:

That all words after “That” be omitted with a view to substituting the following words: “whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading, the House notes that:

1) in the case of military schemes the restoration of a reversionary benefit, so called widow’s pension to these schemes is not to apply from the same date as civilian schemes, 1 July 2003, but supports Labor’s calls on the Government to apply the same date;

2) there is no provision to remove the tax increase that applies to members of the MSBS as a consequence of the recent Better Super changes but supports Labor’s calls on the Government to remove the tax increase;

3) there is no provision to implement equality of treatment on reversionary benefits for interdependent couples, a promise made by the Government, but yet to be implemented;

4) there are a range of contemporary issues that need to be considered in the light of reforms to private sector superannuation over the last twenty years, including:

(a) indexation provision of pension entitlements;

(b) interdependent relationship reversionary pension;

(c) the tax increase that members of the MSBS will suffer as a consequence of the 1 July Better Super changes;

(d) salary sacrifice provision for the public sector;

(e) full portability for the public sector;

(f) the value of the 10% rebate for untaxed schemes and income tax treatment of non-super income at age 60 and tax treatment of foreign defined benefit schemes such as Australian staff working for the United Nations, again consequences of the 1 July Better Super changes;

(g) transition to retirement provisions; and
(h) tax treatment for class A military invalidity pensioners.
and supports Labor’s calls on the Government to further investigate all these matters with a view to updating; and.

(5) Treasury has a range of studies, modelling and reports on issues listed above that at the direction of government, despite numerous requests at Senate Estimates it refuses to release and is keeping secret, and supports Labor’s calls on all these to be released publicly”.

I commend the amendment to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Is the amendment seconded?
Ms Hall—I second the amendment.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this the honourable member for Bruce has moved as an amendment that all words after ‘That’ be omitted with a view to substituting other words. The question now is that the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

Mr NAIRN (Eden-Monaro—Special Minister of State) (10.46 am)—In summing up this debate on behalf of the Minister for Finance and Administration, I will say that the Superannuation Legislation Amendment Bill 2007 makes a number of enhancements to the Australian government’s civilian and military superannuation schemes. The bill removes, from 1 July 2008, the requirement for contributory members of the Commonwealth Superannuation Scheme, the CSS, to make member contributions to the scheme. As a result, member contributions will become voluntary. This will provide members with the same flexibility and incentives to contribute to superannuation that are available to the broader community.

The bill also allows, from 1 July 2008, eligible members of the PSS to elect to leave the PSS and join another superannuation arrangement for the payment of future contributions. A member’s eligibility to join another superannuation arrangement will be determined by the choice arrangements that their employer has in place.

From 1 January 2008, the bill will enable members of the CSS to obtain early release of their funded account balances on severe financial hardship and compassionate grounds to the extent allowed under the superannuation regulatory framework.

The bill will also facilitate, from 1 January 2008, the prospective restoration of pensions for persons whose spouse pensions, provided under certain closed Australian government civilian and military superannuation schemes, were cancelled upon remarriage. Upon valid application, spouse pensions cancelled upon remarriage—prior to 1976 in the civilian scheme and prior to 1977 in military scheme—will be prospectively reinstated.

Changes to the CSS as a consequence of the government’s Better Super reforms are also included in the bill. The main amendment will ensure the continued payment of employer productivity contributions where a member has not provided their tax file number. This is consistent with the arrangements in the broader community, where employer contributions would still be payable even though the member has not provided their tax file number. The other amendments are technical and take account of the payment of amounts from the CSS fund in relation to release authorities issued by the Commissioner of Taxation and to reflect changed superannuation terminology.

The bill also ensures that the entitlement to benefits in the military superannuation schemes relating to postretirement marriages is consistent with the treatment in the civilian schemes.
The bill also addresses an anomaly in the family law provisions of the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Act 1973 to allow family law orders to be applied as intended. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Original question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation announced.

Ordered that the bill be reported to the House without amendment.

AUSTRALIAN POSTAL CORPORATION AMENDMENT (QUARANTINE INSPECTION AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2007

Debate resumed from 9 August.

Second Reading

Mr NAIRN (Eden-Monaro—Special Minister of State) (10.50 am)—I present the explanatory memorandum to this bill and I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Australian Postal Corporation Amendment (Quarantine Inspection and Other Measures) Bill 2007 amends the Australian Postal Corporation Act 1989 to provide for the inspection and examination of postal articles carried by Australia Post for interstate quarantine purposes.

The bill will implement recommendation 13 of the November 2005 report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry entitled Taking control: a national approach to pest animals.

The bill will also make other minor amendments to clarify the operation of certain provisions of the Australian Postal Corporation Act 1989.

The Australian Postal Corporation Act 1989 currently prohibits the opening of postal articles except in specified circumstances. These exceptions include the opening of articles suspected of containing drugs or articles on which customs duty is payable.

Incoming international mail may also be opened in accordance with powers set out in the Quarantine Act 1908. However, opening the postal articles for interstate quarantine purposes is currently not allowed under the Australian Postal Corporation Act.

The inspection regime proposed in the bill provides that certain procedures must be followed by state or territory quarantine inspection authorities and that specified records be kept. The record-keeping requirements will be set out in amendments to the Australian Postal Corporation Regulations 1996, which will be prepared with a view to commencing at the same time the interstate quarantine measures commence.

The bill has been developed in consultation with state and territory governments and Australia Post. There is general consensus about the proposal, including that the reserved services be exempted from inspection under the scheme because of the low risk of standard letters carrying quarantine material and to ensure that Australia Post’s ability to meet its regulated performance standards is not adversely affected.

The scheme will allow prescribed state and territory inspection agencies to identify and examine articles in the course of normal mail processing and enable them to deal with the article
under the applicable state and territory laws. It is expected that participating quarantine inspection agencies will bear the cost of inspection and will assume responsibility for identifying and isolating articles which are believed to contain quarantine material.

The bill also addresses the concern that Australia Post is currently treated differently from other delivery agents whose articles are potentially already able to be inspected under the applicable state and territory law. It is expected that, once the bill is enacted, Australia Post will no longer be treated differently to other private delivery agents.

At this stage, Western Australia, Tasmania and Northern Territory have indicated a wish to be prescribed in the regulations, which will enable them to take advantage of the bill’s provisions to inspect postal articles carried by Australia Post for interstate quarantine purposes. The other jurisdictions have taken the view that they consider the biosecurity risks associated with the interstate mailing system to be relatively low and that their focus is better directed at the general risk posed by people and personal effects moving across state borders. The bill will enable them to participate in the scheme by the making of further regulations, should they later decide to participate.

It is proposed that the interstate quarantine provisions and other provisions in schedule 1 to the bill will commence on proclamation but not later than six months after royal assent. This will allow sufficient time for those quarantine inspection authorities which intend to implement an interstate quarantine inspection scheme to make appropriate administrative arrangements.

The bill also contains a number of other amendments.

The bill includes amendments to allow compliance agencies such as the Australian Customs Service and the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service a discretion to pass information to Australia Post regarding seized articles. This information will, in turn, be able to be passed to other postal administrations. This will ensure that Australia Post is not unnecessarily liable to other postal administrations under the acts of the Universal Postal Union and is better able to respond to queries about missing mail.

The bill also contains a measure which will streamline the disclosure of scam mail to consumer protection agencies. Once the bill is enacted, Australia Post will be able to hold suspected scam mail for inspection by a consumer protection agency. If upon inspection the mail is found to be evidence of a breach of a consumer protection law, the mail will be able to be dealt with by the relevant consumer protection agency in accordance with the laws they administer. If mail is not found to be scam mail, it will be returned to the mail system as soon as possible. These changes will better protect consumers by allowing the earlier interception of scam mail than is currently possible.

The bill also contains minor technical amendments to ensure that the Australian Postal Corporation Act reflects the introduction of the GST and wine tax.

A further measure will provide the minister with the flexibility to exempt Australia Post from the current requirement to prepare a service improvement plan where the minister considers the preparation of the plan is unnecessary in the circumstances. These would include circumstances where the failure to meet a performance standard was beyond the control of Australia Post or if Australia Post had already implemented measures to address any drop in performance.
The bill also includes an amendment to allow regulations made under the act to deal with determining the level of mail delivery service. For example, this would enable a regulation to set out processes to be used by Australia Post for polling communities to determine whether delivery services should be provided ‘to the property’ if regulation in this area became necessary. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (10.56 am)—I rise to speak on the Australian Postal Corporation Amendment (Quarantine Inspection and Other Measures) Bill 2007. Labor supports this bill as it provides for the removal of legislative anomalies, the prevention of the spread of pests across jurisdictions, the equitable application of the wine equalisation tax, the reduction of scam mail and improved compliance with the Universal Postal Convention. The bill seeks to remove legislative anomalies that currently prohibit the inspection and examination of interstate articles carried by Australia Post for quarantine purposes except in certain circumstances. Currently unless there is a suspicion that the article contains drugs or that customs duty is payable Australia Post is not authorised to inspect an article. However, articles that are moved interstate by carriers other than Australia Post are not subject to the same prohibitions against opening. This bill seeks to resolve this anomaly and is therefore welcome.

The government has chosen to apply these quarantine provisions only to those states that wish to be bound and it has made provision for other jurisdictions to opt into this process by amending regulations at a later date if they choose to do so. At this stage only Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory have expressed interest in coming under the scheme. I understand that the other jurisdictions have taken the view that they consider the biosecurity risks associated with the interstate mail system to be relatively low. That various jurisdictions will not participate in the inspection of interstate articles carried by Australia Post for quarantine purposes except in certain circumstances. Currently unless there is a suspicion that the article contains drugs or that customs duty is payable Australia Post is not authorised to inspect an article. However, articles that are moved interstate by carriers other than Australia Post are not subject to the same prohibitions against opening. This bill seeks to resolve this anomaly and is therefore welcome.

Numerous submissions have been made to two inquiries held over the course of the last five years. Interested parties called for the Commonwealth government to strengthen the national effort in order to control and manage invasive species. The reports emerging from the two inquiries, namely the Turning back the tide: the invasive species challenge report tabled in 2002 and the Taking control: a national approach to pest animals report tabled in 2005, reflect the strong call for more involvement by the federal government in dealing with the problem of pest animals.

The bill before us seeks to legislate relevant recommendations contained within these reports and is therefore welcome. The bill also provides for the opening of international articles where there is reasonable suspicion that GST and/or the wine equalisation tax is payable. Labor supports this amendment as it ensures that an equitable system of taxation and import duty is imposed on all.

On the issue of scam mail, which is also dealt with in this bill, various consumer protection agencies have expressed concerns about the increasing amount of scam mail received by households throughout Australia. Scam mail is a serious problem. Unsuspecting and vulnerable Australians can be negatively affected by scam mail, so Labor believes there must be
effective consumer protection measures in place at the national level to protect us. Scam mail can arrive in Australia in large batches from a single overseas location in envelopes that are virtually identical. Once identified, batches of such mail can be readily removed from the mail stream. This bill makes provision for the removal of batches of articles from the normal course of carriage where there is reasonable suspicion that the batches contain scam mail. Once removed, Australia Post is required to notify the ACCC, the Australian Securities Investment Commission and/or the consumer protection agency for the state or territory in which the removal has occurred. This provision has the support of the Labor Party; however, I note that it is important that the removal of mail be monitored so that articles are not unnecessarily delayed.

The proposed amendments will also allow Australia Post to request information from a compliance agency such as the Australian Customs Service, the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service or a consumer protection agency about articles that have been removed from the normal course of carriage for reasons of quarantine or scam mail in order to comply with its obligations under the Universal Postal Convention. Australia Post will be able to request information on matters including the name and address of the sender and/or recipient of the article, a description of the article’s contents and any other information prescribed by the regulations. The compliance agency may accept or refuse the request. While this provision is necessary in order to make a fair determination about how to deal with any mail removed from the normal course of carriage, Labor notes that this amendment may have privacy implications and that any privacy or information-sharing issues that may arise should be dealt with promptly and in a serious manner.

The various changes put forward in the bill are sound and sensible. I am also encouraged to read that this bill has been developed in consultation with state and territory governments. I commend the bill to the House.
The House take note of the report.

Mr McARTHUR (Corangamite) (11.05 am)—I am very pleased to make a contribution on The great freight task report. In opening my remarks I would like to thank the chair, the member for Hinkler, and other committee members. I commend the chairman for his conscientious attendance at the meetings and an outstanding report. I also thank Mr Tas Luttrell, who was the secretary to the committee. This is a landmark report. It will act as a benchmark for transport in Australia, be it road, rail or sea.

Fundamentally, the initial task of this committee was to investigate the connection between the ports and other modes of transport. However, the committee in its deliberations and its inspections of ports all around Australia developed some other aspects of the report. The evaluation of the road freight task, the rail freight task, the intermodal activity plus the operation of the ports around the eastern seaboard and Western Australia is to be commended in terms of what the committee observed and some of the recommendations.

Obviously the fundamental task facing Australia is the doubling of the freight tonnage by 2020. Everyone in this parliament should be aware that freight movements in Australia in a very short period of time will double so that we will need better roads, better trucks and a better railway system. Of course, the sea trade for exports and imports will need to be improved, as will the operation of our port structure.

In the time available I want to refer to some aspects of the report that I have some interest in. As members would be aware, I have had an interest in the rail systems of Australia, having participated in the Tracking Australia report. I have had an ongoing interest in making sure that the rail task is improved, that railway systems do reach the 21st century and that they make a contribution to the moving of freight, both internally and for export.

I will deal with some of the aspects in the report. Looking at the containers, which are moving in both the export trade and internally, I will deal with some of the observations that there are increasing numbers of containers being used, there is a growing proportion of 40-foot containers replacing the 20-foot size and there is a need to move double stacked containers along rail routes. Those observations cover an enormous number of problems. If you go to the urban areas of Australia, you see different types of containers, but I am delighted that in fact there is a movement to the bigger container, compatible with international trade.

I was part of the inspection of the Port of Melbourne. It is worth noting that the Port of Melbourne is Australia’s biggest container and general cargo port. It handles 39 per cent of Australia’s container trade, amounting to 1.7 million TEUs in 2003-04. Melbourne acts as a natural cargo hub. That is a pretty important feature of the Port of Melbourne. Obviously other ports around Australia do play a very important role. It is worth noting that the committee were briefed on the problem of the channel dredging. We note in the report:

The port management has plans to dredge the channel to 14 metres. This measure is necessary because 30 per cent of the visiting container ships cannot enter or leave the port fully laden.
That fact is of critical importance. As container ships become bigger, obviously the Melbourne port will have less accessibility, so it is fundamentally important for both Victoria and Australia that that dredging operation is completed. I understand the political sensitivities of environmental concerns and the politics of the people who live around Port Phillip Bay, but in the longer term we need to ensure that that dredging is completed and that the Melbourne port continues to play its pre-eminent role in access for containers into Australia.

Some of the issues that the committee looked at with regard to port access included: the channel dredging in Melbourne, as I have mentioned; the removal of curfew restrictions at Port Kembla, which I visited; the rail connection of Web Dock to Melbourne; the review of the capacity of West Gate Bridge; the dock line in Melbourne; the reinstatement of the standard gauge link between Mount Gambier and Portland, which the committee had a good look at; and the overpass at Wellington Road at Portland. There is a great list of other quite significant changes that would add to the efficiency of rail access to ports, particularly on the eastern seaboard.

Looking at the rail network, there is a very good summary in the report on the problems facing rail operators, particularly with regard to access difficulty. I note the problems identified in the report. The committee looked at some of the problems regarding access to Sydney from the south, north and west. Historically, the committee are very aware of that access through both the geography of Sydney and the problem of making access to the port through the metropolitan area. Regarding the line from the Queensland border to Brisbane, again the geography is difficult for that particular proposition. Regarding the southern Sydney freight line, it is very important that we can have a single, special purpose freight line through Sydney rather than it being committed to the domination by the passenger lines in the Sydney orbit. The committee had a good look at the problem of the Hunter Valley coal chain, and I think some good work has been done by ARTC in improving that. That is a pretty good system compared to world standards, but obviously improvements could be undertaken. Regarding missing rail links in the Hunter Valley, some of the crucial parts of the Hunter Valley rail link could be improved. Those of us who have been interested in the issue of the line through or around the Toowoomba ranges know that that is a major impediment for the Brisbane to Melbourne line. Regarding the missing rail links in Queensland coalfields, with massive exports of coal, we need to ensure that in 2007 we can do it efficiently. And there is the rail connectivity in Victoria and across the South Australian border. Some of those issues identified problems that the committee found in the rail area.

I would just like to quote Mr Vince O’Rourke, who is a very well known and very well respected railway man—a former head of Queensland Rail. He put a most interesting proposition to the committee in terms of the Melbourne-Brisbane link. I think his quote is fantastic. It says what the parliament and governments of all political colours should be thinking about in the future:

Regarding the Melbourne to Brisbane railway line proposal … let us build a new railway line, and a decent one. This is a position I was advocating when I was in QR. Why don’t we do something that the rest of the world does? … We see modern freight trains and passenger trains throughout Europe and the great railways of North America. … We will patch up another railway and think we are doing pretty good to get along at 80 kilometres per hour when we should be thinking about freight trains that will travel up to 160 kilometres per hour, which happens in other parts of the world.
We are suggesting that we should build a modern railway between Melbourne and Brisbane on the shortest corridor of about 1,600 to 1,650 kilometres, west of the Great Dividing Range on the flat country with very low gradients, that it should cater for high speed freight trains up to 160 kilometres per hour and double-stack trains travelling at up to 120 kilometres per hour. It should have the capacity for fast tilting trains that would run between Melbourne and Brisbane and probably more importantly that would service the regional areas of southern Queensland and northern Victoria.

In philosophic terms, that encapsulates the thinking of the committee—that we should really try very hard to improve the rail system. We should invest some capital, both private and government money, to look very carefully at that inland route, but more importantly we should have a railway system that works, is modern and can reach those higher speeds.

One of the debates that the committee had was the significance of intermodal terminals, and there has been a lot of debate on this subject amongst transport operators on the seaboard and inland. On intermodal terminals, the report says:

The intermodal sector consists of two subsystems; one servicing import and export (port oriented) movements and the other supporting interstate freight movements. In many ways these operations are independent of each other, but some terminals cater to both port-oriented and domestic movements.

This debate about the operation of intermodal terminals has been going on for some time. There is a strong argument that freight and containers should be moved from the ports to an intermodal terminal and then distributed around the areas of population. It is interesting to note that most of the containers coming into Sydney are distributed in about a 35-kilometre area, so there is a tendency to use road transport. Those other containers are being encouraged to go to intermodal terminals where they can be distributed in an efficient manner.

The debate is ongoing, and various proponents of Parkes, west of Sydney, are suggesting that intermodal operations are the way to go. That debate is yet to be concluded, and it is a matter of logistics and the use of modern technology. In Melbourne, the Somerton intermodal operation is showing great promise in view of its proximity to the port and its proximity to the national standard gauge.

In conclusion, some of us have had a longstanding interest in freight operations. It is not an issue that excites interest in the parliament but, in the long run, the standard of living of Australians will depend very much on the ability of freight to be moved efficiently across this broad continent. The movement of freight from Western Australia to the eastern seaboard is now done about 80 per cent on rail, which is a very big change from what was done historically.

The development of the Australian Rail Track Corporation has been a wonderful step in the right direction. Mr David Marchant, who is the managing director of that operation, has proved the theoretical concepts that rail can operate an efficient track system and that independent operators can move on that track system at a profit. This has been a major change in policy position—that, in Australia, where we have had three different gauges going back to the turn of the century, we now have a standard gauge going from Brisbane to Perth, and this is being improved all the time. So there is great hope that this parliament and state parliaments can move in the right direction to inject some funds into the port and rail facilities. There is also hope from the ongoing injection of funds into the national highway system. There is always great debate on the way in which we inject funds into the road network: is it...
done on political grounds or is it done on the rational grounds of improving the national freight task?

I commend the report. I have been delighted to participate in these deliberations. I also commend the photograph on the front of the report, which depicts the fundamental argument that some of the freight now moved by road could be placed in the top of a flat-top rail wagon; it shows what could be done at container ports. I hope that the report stands the test of time and that it will be used as a reference work for those who are interested in these important activities of shifting freight through our ports, shifting freight internally and, of course, exporting all those important goods and services that we export around the world. I commend the report.

Dr JENSEN (Tangney) (11.20 am)—This report of the House of Representatives Transport and Regional Services Committee inquiry into the integration of regional road and rail networks and their interface with the ports highlights areas of critical need in our transport infrastructure and very carefully documents what is required at each of the various ports to increase capacity, which is a very important aspect of keeping up with the demands of freight in Australia. Having said that, I will be focusing on the port of Fremantle, which is my local port. What is very interesting—and this is something this report highlighted is at just about every single port that we visited—is that, when major cities and regional centres in Australia are building roads and ring-roads to protect suburbs and towns from heavy traffic, heavy through-traffic and road freight, the Western Australian Labor government has been dismantling crucial components of the Metropolitan Region Scheme. This is a magnificent forward-thinking plan for the future growth and transport network needs for the south metropolitan region well into the 21st century. This is a plan that has been in place for over 40 years.

The components of the scheme were the Fremantle Eastern Bypass and the final stage of the Roe Highway—stage 8. The Roe Highway road reserve was first set aside in the Metropolitan Region Scheme in 1963 and it forms part of the ring-road system which surrounds the Perth metropolitan region. More than 40 years of planning of a sustainable transport network has now been absolutely destroyed by the Gallop and Carpenter Labor governments. Why? To serve the short-term political gain and self-interest of Labor MPs.

The alignment of Roe Highway stage 8 was to have run from the Kwinana Freeway to the Fremantle Eastern Bypass, allowing a controlled, purpose-built transport road to the port of Fremantle. I say ‘was to have run’ because the Fremantle Eastern Bypass has been deleted from the Metropolitan Region Scheme by a Labor government which saw no use for an essential integrated transport system. This action flies in the face of the assistance that AusLink was to give the states.

The state Labor government’s decision to delete the Fremantle Eastern Bypass and not complete stage 8 of the Roe Highway effectively destroyed a safe and efficient route for freight and traffic. This has resulted in the ever-increasing lethal mix of commuter traffic and heavy freight on the major highways running through my electorate of Tangney, which is mainly residential with schools, colleges, Murdoch University, retirement villages, a major hospital campus, hospice and shopping centres.

The increases in freight vehicles and other traffic also negatively impacts on the electorate of the federal Labor member for Fremantle, who conveniently forgot to represent her constituents who wanted to retain the Fremantle Eastern Bypass.
Mr Hardgrave—Is that why she is retiring?

Dr JENSEN—It could be. The majority of Fremantle residents wanted the Fremantle Eastern Bypass built for their own safety and for relief from the freight vehicles that are increasingly invading their streets. However, the member for Fremantle did remember that her state Labor crony Jim McGinty had promised 100-odd voters that he would make their properties more valuable by deleting a crucial road reserve. So much for the one-vote, one-value champion! Thousands want the bypass built—hundreds do not—but Labor does not care.

This politically motivated decision was rationalised with junk planning. You know that I am incensed by junk science; the Labor Party have discovered junk planning. They replaced a brilliant and successful transport network system with a six-point plan. Labor seem to love these six-point plans. Have a look through their documents; there are six-point plans everywhere. What was this plan? The big solution, point 1, was to put more freight on rail. Labor’s promise was that 30 per cent of freight would be on rail by 2006. Halfway through 2007, what do we have? Around five per cent to six per cent. Great planning!

To achieve Labor’s target, you would have to run 600-metre-long double-stacked container trains at least three times a day through the heritage and tourism precincts of Fremantle. It would take about 15 minutes for each train to get through level crossings. But McGinty’s few voters are happy. They do not live anywhere near the noise and delays. Here is the kicker: even if the government put 30 per cent of freight on rail, what would happen to the other 70 per cent? Do Alannah MacTiernan and her Labor government expect it to levitate over residential areas, schools, universities and hospitals? Of course, it was the Lawrence government that deleted it in 1992, and a Liberal government had to clean up the mess in 1994. Even in those days, Labor ignored expert advice and community needs.

The planning department, Main Roads, Fremantle port authority and surrounding councils strongly recommended the retention of the Fremantle Eastern Bypass. This was in addition to independent consultations and over 1,000 submissions from the public calling for the retention of the bypass. History repeated itself in 2004 when the Gallop government deleted the Fremantle Eastern Bypass, yet again, knowing that the need for the FEB was demonstrably greater. The unpredicted growth in Spearwood and the industrial areas in Cockburn, Canning Vale and Welshpool made the need for the completion of the ring-road blindingly obvious. The government’s own consultants had advised against the dismantling of the thoroughly planned integrated transport route. Labor ignored the results of its own consultation process and a record 8,290 submissions received from people and businesses that strongly objected to the deletion of the Fremantle Eastern Bypass. Submissions came from as far away as the Port of Albany in the south. The significance of the freight route to the port of Fremantle was clearly appreciated state wide. Even as late as 1997, the Main Roads report on the Fremantle Eastern Bypass stated that it would provide a vital link in the integrated transport network and that it would remove through-traffic and heavy vehicles from Fremantle streets, with accidents on Hampton Road predicted to fall by as much as 50 per cent. But Labor did not care.

The Labor government’s consultants, Sinclair Knight Merz, clearly stated that the FEB and Roe Highway stage 8 were integral components of the freight network—something the majority of residents, transport companies and the TWU had been telling the Labor government free of charge. Did the queen of controlled community consultation, Alannah MacTiernan, listen? No. She rejected the advice of her own department’s consultants and that of the people di-
rectly impacted by the cynical and politically motivated decision. The report made a mockery of the WA Labor government’s six-point plan, touted as the alternative to the ring-road. The minister wanted the report rewritten because it did not suit her politically motivated and anti-planning purposes. In order to deal with the pesky objections that were still coming out loudly and clearly from betrayed communities across three councils—Canning and Melville in my electorate and Fremantle in the member for Fremantle’s electorate—the farce called the Local Impacts Committee was formed by Alannah MacTiernan, minister for misrepresentation and misinformation, and chaired by the disgraced former minister Tony McRae.

McRae did not even care about his electorate of Riverton because he does not even live there. He even privately admitted that the bypass of Roe Highway stage 8 should be built. The Local Impacts Committee comprised Labor government MPs, members of MacTiernan’s Department of Planning and Infrastructure, and Main Roads Western Australia. They had to compromise their professional integrity by toeing the party line to keep their jobs. They had seen what happened to the engineers who had expressed opposing views to the minister’s intentions. Representatives from the City of Melville and the City of Canning were hopelessly and purposefully outnumbered so that the chair did not have to worry about their votes. These are the council areas through which we are getting this massive build-up of traffic. The state Labor government has spent $32 million on the rail loop at the port. More than half of that amount was Commonwealth funding. It is still only taking about five to six per cent of the freight.

With Fremantle Ports planning to deepen the harbour and expecting growth of about 10 per cent per annum, this growth in traffic will be travelling through our suburbs, past homes, schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, retirement villages and shopping centres. Growth in container traffic is increasing by 3½ per cent per annum—501,400 TEUs and growing. The vast majority of container freight has its origin and destination in the metropolitan area. Even the optimistic projection of carrying 30 per cent of this on rail will not alleviate the current and future congestion and its associated dangers on suburban roads.

My electorate, and that of the member for Fremantle, will continue to see an increase in road trauma from a lethal mix of heavy freight and family cars as the WA Labor government ignores the need for a completed integrated transport plan. Indeed, when we held hearings in Perth, I put the question to MacTiernan’s bureaucrat as to what studies had been conducted to indicate that the FEB should be deleted. His response was that it was a state government decision. I repeated the question and he repeated that it was a state government decision. In other words, no planning and no analysis has been conducted and a route has been deleted that has been in the planning for over 40 years.

We have travelled throughout Australia and had hearings in all sorts of ports and towns. Just about everywhere, they indicated how important it is that ring-roads be completed. What do we have in Western Australia? We have the enviable situation where we have most of a ring-road completed and we have land set aside for the completion of the ring-road; and the state Labor government is deleting the final portion of it—the portion that is actually critical to the entire thing because it leads right into the port of Fremantle.

The Labor government in Western Australia need to rethink the way in which they have planned for our future freight task. They need to complete both Roe Highway stage 8 and the
Mr HARDGRAVE (Moreton) (11.34 am)—It is a delight to be able to speak before you, Mr Deputy Speaker Quick. The independence of the chair is absolutely assured; there is no doubt. The member for Tangney has explained the situation very well so that even I, a Queenslander, can understand and visualise the sorts of problems that obviously he and the member for Canning are far more intimately aware of. I think he has done a great service to the parliament with regard to The great freight task report that we are considering.

I want to congratulate the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services on the clarity they have brought to the issues in my electorate of Moreton. The Acacia Ridge intermodal terminal is mainly contained within my electorate, and I am greatly indebted to the committee for flushing out something that the Queensland government simply will not fess up to—that is, that the Queensland Rail controlled facility located 15 kilometres from the Brisbane CBD has, according to this report, some 380,000 TEUs, which, essentially, are 20-foot or longer containers, passing through it each year. The thing that frustrates me—and people in this place have heard me talk about this so many times over the years, and we are getting progress—is that the Howard government, under Auslink, had to negotiate contractual access to the Brisbane-Sydney rail freight line, owned and operated by Queensland Rail. It is amazing, isn’t it, that we had to negotiate to get access to a railway line 100 or so kilometres from the New South Wales border to the Acacia Ridge rail freight terminal? The QR freight terminal at Acacia Ridge then unpacks the trains and puts the goods on the backs of trucks, which then rat run through my electorate, down McCullough Street in the main these days. McCullough Street is now reporting about an 80 per cent increase in the number of trucks. People in my area are being confronted by trucks, authorised by the Queensland government to rat run down that road to get on to the Gateway motorway to go to the port of Brisbane, where the other great intermodal terminal referred to in this particular report is located.

From 1993 to 1996 the Keating government had a program called One Nation. That program was about building a stronger rail network in certain areas. For the first time ever in history a standard gauge rail line was built from Acacia Ridge rail freight terminal to the Port of Brisbane, running mainly through the member for Griffith’s electorate—and I do not mean any disservice to him by that observation. But if I ever see a train on that line, I will give somebody $100, because they have to negotiate the signalling systems of the Queensland Rail Gold Coast line which runs right through my electorate. In other words, the passengers get the priority, which is exactly what the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services is outlining as a fundamental farce in the way our rail freight and intermodal systems are operating.

To sum up: people in my electorate get B-double trucks and 380,000 20-foot containers a year thudding through suburbs, past people’s letterboxes, instead of going down Beaudesert Road and onto the Logan Motorway—the only toll road in the whole state of Queensland. QR refuses to pay a toll to its own government, so it sends all its trucks thudding through my electorate.

I welcome this report because it brings some clarity to the argument. It also highlights the folly of the federal Labor Party’s policy to build a $300 million priority road for trucks
through my electorate. They want to extend the Ipswich Motorway onto the Kessels Road corridor and turn it into a Kessels highway—a six-lane extension of the Ipswich Motorway, giving a green light to interstate trucks, while local residents have to wait for the trucks to pass. That is the plan they have for the corner of Kessels Road and Mains Road. It shows the folly which it is. The report also outlines the plans of the Beaudesert Shire Council to move some of that intermodal work to Bromelton, about 50 kilometres south of Acacia Ridge. But either way, if we make better use of rail and actually bring the trains all the way to, say, the Port of Brisbane, you could have a dry port in Brisbane, where the movement of containers could be undertaken in one spot—the Port of Brisbane. You could have road, rail and sea all co-located in one spot. The basic infrastructure is there, but instead we have a lazy approach, a lack of planning, which simply means local residents in my electorate have to suffer as the trucks go by.

Finally, the scariest part of this report is that it forecasts a seven to 10 per cent increase in the number of trucks that will come out of Acacia Ridge. According to this report, King & Co. may have said that Acacia Ridge’s future is constrained by the fact there are so many residential communities nearby, but the point I make is that residents in my electorate are suffering every day—24 hours a day, seven days a week—because of the lack of planning by the Queensland government with regard to the rail freight task. I commend the report to the House.

Debate (on motion by Mr Somlyay) adjourned.

Health and Ageing Committee Report

Debate resumed from 9 August, on motion by Mr Somlyay:

Mr SOMLYAY (Fairfax) (11.40 am)—It gave me great pleasure on 9 August to table the report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing inquiry into the health benefits of breastfeeding. Due to the pressure of the business of the House I was not able to speak to the report at the time; nevertheless, the committee felt that we should table the report because it was World Breastfeeding Week.

The report is entitled The best start—report of the inquiry into the health benefits of breastfeeding, and the committee is clear in its belief that breastfeeding really does provide the best start for the youngest and most vulnerable of our community members. The genesis of the report came during the committee’s inquiry into health funding, when a submission was received on the health benefits of breastfeeding. The evidence pointed to the fact that breastfeeding babies would have long-term financial benefits for the health budget in the out years. We could not consider the submission at that late stage but we agreed to have a short, sharp inquiry later into the health benefits of breastfeeding, following the completion of the health funding inquiry.

When we first started the inquiry into the health benefits of breastfeeding, the committee noted the amount of guilt and emotion that surrounds the subject. Initially, most of the submissions were from breastfeeding mothers, so the committee actively sought submissions from mothers who had chosen to bottle-feed, to give us another perspective. The committee were very sensitive at all times to the problem of making mothers feel guilty if they had made
the decision not to breastfeed. Mothers making the decision either to breastfeed or to formula-feed their babies need the best available information, and the committee recognised this need for additional support and information.

The health benefits of breastfeeding are numerous and are backed up with evidence. Breastfeeding protects babies against common infections such as those of the gut and the respiratory tract. It lowers the risk of ear infections and allergies and asthma may also be prevented, because the special properties of breastmilk help to give the baby a stronger immune system. The impact of breastfeeding upon chronic disease is also important. Evidence suggests that there is a link between breastfeeding and weight gain in later life. The good early nutrition provided by breastmilk could lessen the risk of obesity in childhood and adulthood. Research is continuing on the links between breastfeeding and other chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease. The health benefits of breastfeeding are not limited to the baby alone. Breastfeeding also helps the mother to recover more quickly from childbirth and lowers the risk of breast cancer.

The most recent national health survey found that 83 per cent of women initiated breastfeeding when they were discharged from hospital, that several weeks later many women had stopped breastfeeding and that by six months only 48 per cent of babies were receiving any breastmilk. The dietary guidelines for children and adolescents in Australia say that the goal of having 80 per cent of women exclusively breastfeeding for six months ‘is achievable’. The committee found that women want to breastfeed, health professionals want women to breastfeed and babies want to be breastfed, but somewhere along the way something has changed with breastfeeding and it has become a complex activity for many women.

So what goes wrong? In the early days after they had given birth, many women found that breastfeeding was a lot more painful and complex than they had expected. They got lots of conflicting advice from different nurses and midwives and found themselves discharged from hospital within a couple of days, trying to learn how to breastfeed at home by themselves. When mothers take their babies to the maternal and child health service they may be told that their baby is not gaining enough weight and that they should give the baby some formula. When mothers go to a shopping centre and try to breastfeed in public they are told to go and do that somewhere in private or told that what they are doing is disgusting. Even at home mothers can be told by their family that if they give their baby some formula it will sleep through the night, which will be better for everyone. At every point along the way it seems our mothers are not given enough support to breastfeed.

The committee considers that the Commonwealth government needs to develop a national strategy to promote and support breastfeeding. The rates of breastfeeding in Australia need to be monitored more accurately, especially in remote and Indigenous communities. There needs to be more research in Australia into the health benefits of breastfeeding and into the best ways to promote and support breastfeeding. The committee was told that partners are a big influence on a breastfeeding mother, so they need to be included in breastfeeding education. Maybe there could be special programs for them, like the Talking Dads program at Melbourne’s Royal Women’s Hospital. A key recommendation of the committee is that more needs to be done to educate the community on the benefits of breastfeeding and on how the community can support breastfeeding mothers. The committee found that there was still a strong belief in the community that infant formula was as good as breastmilk. This is not true,
and the community should be helping breastfeeding mothers rather than telling them to use formula. However, we recognise that it is important to support mothers who for whatever reason choose not to or cannot breastfeed. These mothers need to be able to access information from health professionals, and this information needs to be accurate and informative. The committee considers donor breastmilk banks could be critical in saving the lives of sick and premature babies and found that there were many women in the community who would happily donate their excess breastmilk. The committee visited the Mothers Milk Bank at John Flynn Private Hospital Medical Centre on the Gold Coast and heard from several parents how the donor milk had contributed to saving the lives of their children. The committee observed the work of the Australian Breastfeeding Association in the community and believes they do a great deal for breastfeeding. The committee was so impressed with the support the ABA provides to mothers that it has recommended that a national, toll-free, 24-hour number helpline be funded.

Returning to work and breastfeeding are two things that are often difficult to combine. Employers can greatly assist women to continue breastfeeding while working by providing lactation breaks and a room with appropriate facilities and just by being encouraging. We should provide leadership here at Parliament House, and to this end the committee has recommended:

That the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate take the appropriate measures to enable the formal accreditation by the Australian Breastfeeding Association of Parliament House as a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace.

The health system has taken steps to improve how it supports breastfeeding, with the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative. The committee considers that this initiative should be implemented in all maternity hospitals and has recommended accordingly. The committee considers that any strategy to improve rates of breastfeeding in Australia needs to provide protection for breastfeeding as well as support and advice to expectant and new mothers. The committee has taken the decisive step of recommending that the World Health Organisation International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, better known as the WHO code, be implemented in Australia, because the committee considers that mothers need the best information they can get when making a decision on how to feed their baby. I have often said during the course of the inquiry that this is not a witch-hunt against manufacturers. The committee welcomed evidence from the infant formula manufacturers. It acknowledged that, when breastmilk in any form is not available, the only suitable alternative nutrition for infants is infant formula. The committee also reaffirms its support to all mothers.

Compiling such a comprehensive report relies on the assistance of many people. The committee would like to thank the many individuals and organisations who assisted by making a submission or giving evidence at a hearing. Their expertise and experience are greatly valued and it laid a strong foundation for our deliberations. We would also like to acknowledge those who spoke from the heart and told us of their experience about breastfeeding. It was clear that for many women breastfeeding was very difficult, and it is a topic that still fills them with emotion. For others, we could see how fulfilling they found breastfeeding to be.

The committee was fortunate to hear directly from several well-respected organisations and groups who promote and support breastfeeding in the community. We thank the Australian Breastfeeding Association, the National Health and Medical Research Council, the Uniting
Church in Australia and the Baby Friendly Health Initiative. There were more groups than I have time to mention, but the committee would like to extend its appreciation for their participation.

The committee also thanks the members of the Gulf communities in Queensland at Pormpuraaw and Kowanyama in remote Far North Queensland. We visited these communities as part of the inquiry and were very appreciative of the time that they gave to the committee. I would also like to place on record our thanks to the hardworking secretariat staff, under the guidance of James Catchpole. James is in the clerk’s chair at the moment. As usual, James has ensured that his team has provided first-class support. I especially want to mention Pauline Brown, who had carriage of this inquiry. It was Pauline’s very first inquiry, and I do not think I have ever seen in my 17 years in parliament a more conscientious officer. Pauline went through a baptism of fire and came out very well indeed. I would also like to thank Lauren and Meg for their expert assistance. I must thank my fellow committee members for the assistance they provided in the course of the inquiry—in particular, deputy chair Steve Georganas, and the previous deputy chair, Jill Hall. I commend the report to the House.

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (11.52 am)—I would like to begin by thanking all members of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing, especially the chair, Alex Somlyay, the member for Fairfax, for his great chairing of the meetings of this inquiry. I would like to thank the secretariat—Mr James Catchpole, the secretary, Ms Pauline Brown, and Meg Byrne and Lauren Walker—for all their assistance in making this committee work and run so smoothly. I would also like to thank all the individuals who lodged submissions with the committee and the witnesses who attended the hearings for being part of the inquiry into the benefits of breastfeeding. The inquiry and its subsequent report would not have been possible without the assistance and input of all these people.

It was good to see that the inquiry generated nearly 500 submissions—in fact, a total of 497 submissions. There was a great amount of public interest. There was a flood of submissions to the health and ageing committee. At some of our hearings, there was standing room only for people who came to watch the proceedings.

The report, titled The best start—report of the inquiry into the health benefits of breastfeeding, found that many different factors may influence a mother’s decision to provide breast milk or to use formula for her newborn child. It found that a mother’s decision to use one feeding method over another may be related to cultural background, the mother’s health or a personal preference. Whichever decision a mother comes to, they should be supported by the Australian community and Australia’s health system because it is the responsibility of every new mother to assess her own personal circumstances when making a decision about whether to breastfeed or to use a formula. It is our role to ensure that the services are in place so that Australian mums have the information they need to make an informed decision.

Breastfeeding has been practised for centuries. Breastfeeding is very natural; it is one of the most natural occurrences that takes place in a woman’s life. Somewhat, we in the Western world have made it very clinical over a couple of generations. The key to promoting breastfeeding is in educating our society to better understand what it means to breastfeed. Education about breastfeeding and how to breastfeed is very much needed for a new mother in pregnancy and soon after the birth of her child so that she is aware of the short- and long-term health benefits and has all the information in front of her to make an informed choice on
whether she breastfeeds or not. There should be a concerted effort to change the attitude of society so that, once again, breastfeeding becomes a very natural, normal thing that takes place in a woman’s life.

How do we change an entire society’s view of this issue? That is the big question. We have somehow, as I said earlier, changed breastfeeding from something that was very natural for thousands of years, passed from mother to daughter, generation to generation, to something that is no longer the cultural norm.

The report of the inquiry into breastfeeding outlines the health and other benefits of breastfeeding, noting that breastfeeding protects against gastrointestinal and respiratory illnesses and ear infections, just to name a few. These illnesses have the ability to impact adversely on the health of a newborn baby. Breastfeeding has also been identified as a factor in contributing towards lowering obesity and the prevalence of chronic disease later on in life. Despite these benefits, many women who have the capacity to breastfeed are choosing not to breastfeed their child up to the recommended age of six months, let alone to the World Health Organisation’s ideal age of 12 months. Here in Australia, only 18 per cent of mothers are fully breastfeeding their child to the age of six months. To increase the number of mothers breastfeeding their babies up to six months, women need support and advice from health professionals.

The report found that the Commonwealth should take a greater role in promoting and educating Australians about breastfeeding and infant health. Poor nutrition in infancy has a significant impact on the future health of many Australians. An improvement in health in infancy would reduce the pressure on our health system. Implementing and supporting preventive measures such as breastfeeding in our health system has the capacity to ease the burden on Australia’s hospitals and medical facilities in the future.

We know that demands on our health services are set to rise in the future. We are now seeing an increasing number of children with chronic illnesses in the middle stages of their development. The prevalence of asthma in Australia is one of the highest in the world, affecting up to 14 per cent of Australian children. Breastfeeding may be used as a preventive measure to lower the number of children in Australia who develop respiratory illness later in life. Prevention, as we all know, is better than cure. Provision of comprehensive child and maternal health services, such as breastfeeding support services, will play a vital role in improving infant and child health.

Knowing, as we do, the health benefits of breastfeeding, there should be a concerted effort by leaders within the Australian community to break down any inhibitors to breastfeeding within social and workplace settings. From the many various submissions to the inquiry there emerged examples where workplaces persuaded women not to breastfeed at work. Knowing the health benefits of breastfeeding, workplaces should endeavour to encourage women to breastfeed their newborns by creating work environments that are supportive and accepting of a mother’s decision whether or not to breastfeed. We saw some great examples when we visited the Westpac workplace in the city of Sydney, where they had rooms set up so that employees, mothers of infants, who wanted to breastfeed would be able to do so. That was a great example to many other employers. We need to set up these places to encourage mums to continue to breastfeed.
As I said, parents should be able to focus on their top priority straight after childbirth, their newborn baby, and we have to somehow make it easier for them. There are great psychological and physical health benefits for babies whose mothers spend time with them during the early months of their lives, including the internationally recognised benefits of breastfeeding.

In Australia, there are sometimes cultural inhibitors to breastfeeding, such as the stigmatisation of women who feed their babies in public. This creates a series of problems for mothers who want to breastfeed, as they feel they cannot feed in public; they are often driven indoors or out of sight, making it too difficult for them and therefore causing them to give up.

This is not the case in many other developing and even developed countries around the globe where there are support systems and open promotion of breastfeeding for newborns, making it more accessible and easier for mothers to do so. In some developed and developing countries where breastfeeding has become culturally acceptable, there is a noticeable reduction in child mortality rates. So it is important that breastfeeding is coupled with peer support. According to a witness in the inquiry, peer support is a proven way of normalising breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding rates declined rapidly to the point where in 1971 only about 20 per cent of babies were being breastfed to three months of age. Currently the rate of breastfeeding is up at 60 per cent. Australia is still getting over the normalisation of bottle feeding. Breastfeeding rates did decrease in the fifties, reaching a low point in the late sixties and early seventies. This was a result of a combination of the availability of infant formula and the promotion of the use of formula by the health system.

Since then, the breastfeeding rates have increased slowly. From the current available data, a conclusion may be drawn that mothers with newborn babies initially want to breastfeed soon after they give birth. The data shows that the rates for breastfeeding are initially extremely high while the mother is still hospitalised or recently out of hospital. However, the impact of a number of different factors such as demographics, psychological health, physical health, cultural and societal influences have led to many mothers stopping using breast milk to feed their child.

In order to ensure that we can continue to accurately monitor the use of breastfeeding across the nation, the inquiry also recommended that there be improvements in the methodology used to monitor breastfeeding. The recommendations included increasing the quality of data on breastfeeding and coming to a consensus on one definition for breastfeeding. With these changes we will be able to collate more accurate data and make well-informed comparisons between breastfeeding and infant health.

Representatives of the breastfeeding phone counselling services who appeared as witnesses to the inquiry estimated that they receive around 200,000 calls annually from new mothers who need support. From this data it appears that there is a high demand for support from new mums who are having difficulty feeding their child and are worried about whether they are giving their child the nutrients they require to lead healthy lives.

We also saw examples during the inquiry of particular marketing companies that target their products towards infants and toddlers, whether they be formula or other products. There were also claims from companies which manufacture fruit juice that their products included...
all the nutrients that children need for their daily intake. Some of these companies are using marketing tools that impact negatively on breastfeeding rates.

Many witnesses to the inquiry brought information forward about the importance of breast milk and how difficult it is to find a replacement that provides the same nutrients to children. However, not all mothers are in the situation where they are able to breastfeed and we should not isolate those people as being poor examples of motherhood. Again, it comes down to the choice of the mum.

It is understandable that formula companies are in the market to make a profit and that is why many of these companies encourage the use of breast milk substitutes and run sometimes very effective marketing campaigns. This is where health professionals need to be there to advise mums on the best course of action they should take in order to give their child the best possible care.

We need an education campaign about breastfeeding so that women can make informed decisions about what is best for their child. We know independent health professionals need to be available to provide the right information to mothers but without bias. As education among mums about breastfeeding increases, we will be able to be increasingly satisfied that they are making the right decisions and the right choices. So it has become clear as a result of this inquiry that new mums need to be more informed about breastfeeding and to be given the support that they require to provide the best nutritional care for their newborn.

Mr ENTSCH (Leichhardt) (12.04 pm)—It certainly gives me pleasure to contribute to this debate, having the honour of being part of the committee that looked into the benefits of breastfeeding. It came about actually because, in a previous inquiry we were working on concerning the healthcare system, we had a very good submission from the Breastfeeding Association.

At the time, they raised concerns about needs that they believed they had in relation to raising awareness and support for breastfeeding mothers. We thought it would be an opportunity to have a short, sharp inquiry. When we announced that inquiry, I have to say that I was somewhat surprised at the huge amount of interest that it generated. There were a huge number of submissions—nearly 500 submissions came from right around the country. Reading through those submissions, you are somewhat surprised at the lack of understanding on this issue. You have preconceived views in relation to the availability of formulas, for example, and the activities of infant formula manufacturers in marketing their products.

We were interested in finding out what was happening in remote and regional areas, particularly in Indigenous communities. When we were seeking information to establish where we should be going in relation to Indigenous communities, we were somewhat surprised at the total lack of information that was available. I listened to much of the contribution by my friend and colleague Mr Georganas and concur completely with what he said. I will not repeat a lot of the information that he provided; I will focus on just a couple of areas. One was in relation to Indigenous health. I guess I started this inquiry with an assumption that Indigenous people in these remote communities would be provided with truckloads of formula and that breastfeeding rates would be quite low. It was very surprising. We had the opportunity of visiting a couple of remote communities in my electorate: Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw. We found that the incidence of breastfeeding in these communities was very high—up in the 90
per cent range. We are talking about breastfeeding for six months and extending that through to up to 12 months.

When we had the opportunity of visiting the local community store we found that the availability of formula was quite limited. I have to say that it was provided in a quite responsible way. I think that highlighted to us that there was a lack of information in this area. One of the recommendations was that we need to start to look at this matter closely. What is happening in these remote Indigenous communities is also happening very much in remote Australia generally. I think we need to get a lot more information on that.

The inquiry clearly highlighted the very significant benefits associated with breastfeeding, critically up to six months of age and necessary wherever possible up to 12 months of age, in the best interests of the child. We found that some of the public hospital programs were very good. People raised concerns about their preference or where they were encouraged, basically, to put their children onto formula for convenience sake or because they may have experienced difficulties in early breastfeeding. Nipple soreness and things like that caused problems and they were encouraged to go onto formula.

We actually had evidence from some mothers who were very, very disappointed that they were not given the opportunity to deal with some of the physical problems—the health problems—they had and helped to persevere with breastfeeding their children. In some cases they felt they had missed out tremendously by losing that opportunity when in fact they could have dealt with some of those problems. It may well have been difficult, but if they had had proper support they could have dealt with that and then continued breastfeeding their children. One of the recommendations is to have baby-friendly hospitals where we can ensure that there is the right type of support for nursing mums to ensure that they are able to maximise that opportunity.

At the same time, however, we have to recognise that there is a critical role for formula. Unfortunately, there are some mums who just cannot feed their children naturally through breastfeeding. We have to make sure that the formulas available are as good as possible and as close as can be to mothers milk. We have to also make sure that those mums who, through no choice of their own, are compelled to use alternative methods for feeding their infants are not seen as a lesser person for doing that. There were mums who felt very much that they were seen as a lesser person because they did not have the capacity to breastfeed. It is absolutely critical that we recognise that this does occur and that these mums are just as caring and just as nurturing as those that have the ability and the privilege to be able to breastfeed their children.

We also identified another need: breastfeeding-friendly workplace environments. Mr Deputy Speaker Quick, you would be interested to know that one of the recommendations was to look at how we could turn this place into such an environment. There is a recommendation for the Speaker to consider doing that because, as you are well aware, there are a number of our members who have had children while they have been in service here and it is important that they are able to fulfil their obligations not only to the parliament but also to their children.

It was probably one of the more interesting inquiries that I have been on, and probably one of the more enlightening. You assume that you understand these issues and then you listen to evidence from passionate people who are putting forward some very, very strong arguments. I enjoyed it immensely. I think there were 21 recommendations—I defer there to the chair, Mr
Somlyay, who did an outstanding job in this inquiry. I see that our deputy chair at that time is here as well. It was probably one of the more enjoyable inquiries I have done.

I think it is important that, as recommended, the department provide funds to expand the Breastfeeding-Friendly Workplace Accreditation Program nationally. The other recommended initiative, which I thought was rather interesting and important, is that we are calling on the Treasurer to move to exempt lactation aids such as breast pumps, nipple shields and supply lines from GST. They are an essential part of enabling mums to continue breastfeeding.

I take this opportunity to thank the chairman and members of the committee for doing an outstanding job. To Pauline Brown I say: thank you very much indeed; it was great. Of course I thank other members of the secretariat. It was certainly one of the more rewarding inquiries that I have participated in. I hope that, as a result of the work that we have done in this report, we have clearly identified that breastfeeding a child up to the age of 12 months is by far the best way of being able to give kids the best chance in life. It has been confirmed that we are significantly behind many of our contemporaries. When we look at the European experience, particularly the Scandinavian example, we see that we are very much behind. We start off very well with breastfeeding in the first three months but we fall back significantly at six months and our rate is very low at 12 months. There is a lot of work to be done in this area; a lot can be done to raise awareness and deal with workplace relationships. We could also fund the Australian Breastfeeding Association to enable it to expand its current helpline, to make it a toll-free helpline so it can give young mums the information that they need to make breast-feeding happen. With that contribution, I commend the report to the House. I hope that the recommendations will be adopted in full by government.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (12.17 pm)—I commence my contribution to the debate by recognising the fine role the Chair of the Standing Committee on Health and Ageing has played. I have truly enjoyed working with him on all the inquiries that the committee has undertaken. He is a fine chairman and I feel privileged to have been a member of a committee which he has chaired. I also recognise the fine work of the wonderful Pauline Brown, who is sitting over there with her head bent! Her research powers and her ability to put together a report are second to none. She has excellent skills. I think the parliament is very lucky to have in its employ someone of her calibre. I note the number of submissions that the committee received: 479 submissions is an enormous number of submissions for a committee to receive on any inquiry that it undertakes. It showed us that this is an issue about which there is a lot of passion and it is something people care very deeply about.

I would like to pick up on a couple of the recommendations and then spend the majority of my contribution looking at chapter 8, which relates to the impact of breastmilk substitutes, the MAIF agreement, Marketing in Australia of Infant Formula agreement, and the WHO code, the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes, which are the two different codes that control the supply of breastmilk substitutes. It is also very important to note recommendation 10, which the previous speaker, the member for Leichhardt, referred to. I should have said at the beginning of my speech that I enjoyed working with all members of the committee. Those who have spoken to date—and the member for Ballarat will be speaking a little later—were real contributors to this report. I now turn to recommendation No. 10:
That the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate take the appropriate measures to enable the formal accreditation by the Australian Breastfeeding Association of Parliament House as a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace.

I raised this question with the Speaker on the last sitting day and asked him to report back to me on it. I was extremely disappointed with the reaction—not from my honourable friends opposite—from some of the government members, because it showed a total lack of understanding of this issue. This is about parliament being a role model for the rest of Australia. If we cannot put in place the right sorts of procedures then how can we ask employers in other areas to do so? I felt that that was a very important recommendation. I would ask government members to ensure that their ministers and other people who are responsible for decisions in this area know just how important it is. I notice that the member for Canning is coming back into the room. When I raised that question, he was one of the members who laughed. The recommendation is in relation to Parliament House becoming a recognised and accredited breastfeeding friendly workplace. There is a very important role for this parliament to play. But that is enough said on that.

I would now like to turn to chapter 8 of the report, which deals with an issue of very great importance and one which can make a real difference to improving the rates of breastfeeding in Australia. It also goes to the way that formula is marketed in Australia. Currently in Australia we have the MAIF code of practice, which is voluntarily agreed to by the manufacturers of infant formulas. The first weakness of that voluntary code of conduct is that not all manufacturers have to sign up to it. Those manufacturers that sign up to it commit to it and must abide by it, but if a manufacturer chooses not to sign up to that code of practice there is absolutely no reason why they cannot behave in whatever manner they would like to. I do not think that is good enough. It is very important that women get the correct information about breastfeeding. It is very important that women get the support that they need in relation to breastfeeding and that they are not misled by any side issues.

The MAIF code is administered by APMAIF, the Advisory Panel on the Marketing in Australia of Infant Formula. APMAIF looks at complaints that are lodged with it in relation to breaches of MAIF. Members may be very surprised to learn that APMAIF have not submitted a report to parliament since 2005. We had the CEO of APMAIF come and talk to our committee, and I think I can say without any reservation that every member of our committee felt that the penalty for a manufacturer that breached the code of practice would be something like being hit with a wet lettuce leaf. The representatives who came before the committee quite frankly did not understand what it was all about. If a breach occurred, the penalty was to be named in the report tabled in parliament. If the reports are not tabled in parliament, tell me—please help me understand—how that penalty amounts to anything whatsoever. When the representative from MAIF left the committee hearing, I thought he might have handed in his resignation because he could not in any way justify the action of that panel.

The WHO code, which Australia was one of the first countries to sign up to, was not adopted by the Australian parliament. In 1992 the MAIF code was agreed to. The WHO code is a minimum standard and it covers both the manufacturers and the retailers. I think the fact that the retailers are not covered by the MAIF code is of great concern. The retailers can display and promote infant formula in whatever way they choose, whilst under the WHO code in other countries that is not the case. The handing out of samples to medical professionals is
another thing that infant formula manufacturers can do. In countries that are covered by the WHO code that is not the case. The WHO code applies to products such as breakfast cereals, infant meals and drinks, but those are not covered by the MAIF code. On most of these foods it is recommended that the infant is four to six months old. The standard is that babies should be exclusively fed by breastmilk or nonsolids until they are six months old. So just the labelling of these products breaches the best practice for caring for, feeding and providing nutrition to young babies.

The table set out on page 135 of the committee’s report details very poignantly the contrast between the international WHO code and the rather flawed code that we have in Australia. Our committee strongly recommended that we adopt the international WHO code. The chair played a very strong part in us doing that. I would have been a little more timid in the recommendation, even though I believed passionately that that was the way to go.

When we consider the issue of the WHO code and the MAIF agreement, if the government does not accept signing up to the WHO code, we at least have to have a fallback position. I think that the minimum fallback position is that, if formula manufacturers are to sell their products in Australia, they must be a signatory to the MAIF agreement. Even if you have one group of infant formula manufacturers that are, to some degree, trying to act responsibly—even if they do not go as far as I or our committee believe they should—we need to make sure that every single manufacturer signs up to that. The manufacturers are bound by the MAIF agreement but I truly believe that there needs to be some action taken to bring the retailers under the MAIF agreement. Otherwise, the area is not being covered properly.

I notice that the time for this debate is about to expire. I would refer members to the report. I believe there are a number of really worthwhile recommendations, like those addressing the GST on lactation aids, the baby-friendly hospitals and all those other issues that have been identified in this committee report. Once again, I thank the chair for the role that he has played in the development of this report.

Debate (on motion by Mr Randall) adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler) (12.30 pm)—I move:

That the Main Committee do now adjourn.

Member for Franklin
Dental Health
Mrs Rachael Williams

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (12.30 pm)—Can I just take this opportunity to wish you, Mr Deputy Speaker Quick, all the best in your retirement. I did not get the opportunity to listen to your speech yesterday in the parliament but, for my part, I would like to say that the six years I have spent here in your company have been very rewarding. I wish you all the best and thank you for the advice and guidance you have given me over those years.

Today I want to refer to a petition of 179 signatures from my constituents in Calwell calling for the re-establishment of a Commonwealth dental health program, calling for the easing of the cost pressures on working families by contributing to the cost of dental care, calling for some assistance to keep people with preventable dental conditions out of hospital with and
calling for an end to the blame game and to work with the states and territories to fix Australia’s dental care system.

Australia’s public dental health system is best characterised as a national disgrace. All you have to do is ask any resident in my electorate of Calwell who is on a public dental waiting list what they think of Australia’s public dental healthcare system under the Howard government and that is exactly what they will tell you—that it is a national disgrace. In my electorate of Calwell, average waiting times for public dental care have now blown out to nearly three years. Whilst three years is a long time, whichever way you look at it for the local residents who are left to suffer what are often painful dental conditions without access to proper treatment, it feels like an eternity to those who actually have to wait with those conditions.

With people being left to manage by themselves, stories continue to emerge of local residents who develop irregular eating habits, given the pain they suffer whilst eating. There are many who avoid hot or cold foods or who avoid foods altogether that are too hard to chew. Many resort to over-the-counter painkillers or alternative remedies to try to manage their pain. The fact that this is happening in a developed, wealthy country like Australia, and the fact that it is happening at a time when Australia is reaping the economic benefits of a massive resources and mining boom, shows just how out of touch, unfortunately, the Howard government continues to be when it comes to the basic needs of working Australians.

There are now over 650,000 Australians on public dental waiting lists across Australia, including some 140,000 in my home state of Victoria. Delays in their treatment often mean that relatively simple dental conditions escalate into more serious and more complex dental problems. Dental conditions now account for a quarter of all hospitalisations for children, and around 50,000 Australians are hospitalised each year for preventable dental conditions. Australia’s public dental system is failing, and its failures stem from the Prime Minister’s decision, way back in 1996, to axe the Commonwealth funding for public dental care.

In 1996, the Howard government scrapped Australia’s $100 million Commonwealth dental program, ripping literally $100 million out of the public dental care system. Since then, the Howard government has presided over the virtual collapse of public dental care in Australia and a massive blow-out in public dental waiting times. What is more extraordinary is that, while state and territory governments have nearly doubled their investments in dental care spending over the last decade to try to fill the gap left after the Commonwealth funding was axed, the Prime Minister and the Minister for Health and Ageing are still trying to blame state and territory governments for the dire state of Australia’s public dental care system.

Rather than fix the problem, the Prime Minister and his minister continue to play the blame game and to put politics above the needs of ordinary Australians. Today very few can afford to pay for regular dental check-ups or expensive dental treatments. More and more people are avoiding seeing the dentist because they simply cannot afford it. Their only option is Australia’s public dental health system, but it is a system that can no longer accommodate them and can no longer provide them with the treatment they need when they need it. Indeed, what we are also seeing today is more and more people being forced to take out a loan to pay for dental treatment because of long waiting lists and exorbitant fees. A Rudd Labor government will re-establish the Commonwealth dental program to rescue Australia’s failing public dental health system after 11 years of neglect, and I call on the Howard government to do the same.
With the few moments left I would like to say that I spoke recently of my constituent Mrs Rachael Williams, who was assaulted in her home one month ago. It saddens me today to report that Mrs Williams died on Tuesday night. I want to extend my condolences to her family. I know that our community has been traumatised by the vicious attack on Mrs Williams, and it certainly has led to many of our senior citizens feeling unnecessarily insecure in their own homes. Rachael lived in Broadmeadows for 50 years, and I think this is a very tragic way for her to end her 91 years of life. (Time expired)

Mount Whaleback Mine

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (12.35 pm)—Unfortunately, I have to bring to the attention of this House a report on The 7.30 Report on 11 June this year which was basically bogus. It related to signatures from more than 200 people on a mine site at Newman in Western Australia on a petition suggesting that they had been victimised because they had signed on to an AWA. After receiving information from a number of my constituents who are fly in, fly out workers and other people involved in this industry, I sought to have this record corrected. I wrote to Mr Mark Scott, the Managing Director of the ABC, and asked that he investigate the fact that some of the 200 signatures on the petition complaining about an atmosphere of intimidation, victimisation, safety incidents et cetera due to AWAs were bogus. It was found that, of all the signatures on the petition, at least 80 were illegible, many were from people who were not even working at Mount Whaleback and some were names of people who did not even exist, so the credibility of these claims had to be tested.

I wrote to Mr Mark Scott that I have over 29,000 workers—in other words, one in three people—on AWAs in my electorate, which is the second-highest figure in Australia, and that he might want to correct the record due to this bogus report. I wrote that the report was obviously generated by the union involved and the ABC had fallen into line to support it, so Mr O’Brien and Mr Peacock should address that inaccurate and unprofessional report. By the way, there are 14½ thousand registered AWAs in Swan.

Mr Scott wrote back to me a month later, on 2 August, saying that he had received my letter, that they had looked into this matter, that they had believed it was a relevant story at the time et cetera. I will table all this information because of the time constraints so that it can be looked at properly. He said that the office of workplace safety had gone to the mine site, including BHP, to see whether the mine site was operating unsafely and with a culture of fear and intimidation, and that was found to be incorrect. Mr Scott said to me that he would wait for the state government mine inspectors to do an inspection of this mine site to see if they agreed with the petitioners. I have not heard from Mr Scott since then. He says: ‘Thank you for your concerns. The 7.30 Report will wait for the final report of this investigation and will do a follow-up story depending on the report.’

Well, Mr Scott, you are a bit slow, because I have the mine inspector’s report, by Peter Capon, the district inspector of mines. Mr Capon—without going through all of his report; and I will table this—said that largely the issues raised were not valid. There are at the margins some communication issues, but it says, for example: DOCEP acknowledges the effort of the site management team and employees on the improvement in the record of safety performance at Mount Whaleback mine, which has earned the CEO’s OTC award from BHP Billiton for being the most improved site. There is a higher standard of safety comparable with the higher standards found in other major companies in the region. Of the 43 employees contacted
during the investigation, the overwhelming percentage of the employees interviewed stated that they were not afraid to raise safety issues via direct action et cetera. Allegations that employees were too afraid to raise safety issues were not supported by greater than 90 per cent of the people questioned.

This whole report puts into place the fact that this matter was inspired by the unions and then peddled by the ABC—by one of their great friends in the ABC, Kerry O’Brien. We know he has returned to type. He was a former staffer for Gough Whitlam and we know that, as a former staffer for Gough Whitlam, he was a Labor Party employee. He sneeringly attacks members of the government when they go on his program and he gives an easy ride to the opposition. Mr O’Brien, if you really want to be a player in politics—and you live in Warringah—why don’t you do as other ABC operatives like Maxine McKew, Alan Carpenter in Western Australia and others in the Northern Territory have done? The ABC is an incubator for Labor Party candidates. Kerry O’Brien, you should do the right thing and run for the Labor Party.

(Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wilkie)—To facilitate the tabling of the documents suggested in his speech, I would recommend that the member for Canning ask for leave.

Mr Randall—Thank you. I seek leave to table the documents that I indicated I would.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Is leave granted?

Mr Melham—Has he shown you the documents? You don’t give leave for something you haven’t seen. Let’s have a look at the documents first.

Mr Randall interjecting—

Mr Melham—There is no point of order. If he doesn’t show us the documents he is not having them tabled.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! Before I listen to the point of order can I say that normally someone would suggest they have documents to table and state what is in those documents, and I think the member for Canning did so in his address. He foreshadowed that he wanted to table them. He has asked whether leave will be granted for those documents to be tabled. Can I suggest that, if people are concerned about their contents, they refuse leave and then it could be sought for the documents to be tabled elsewhere. But, at this stage, the member for Canning is asking leave for the documents to be tabled. Is leave granted?

Mr Melham—What I am saying, Mr Deputy Speaker, is that before I grant leave I’d like to see the documents.

Mr Neville—Mr Deputy Speaker, I raise a point of order. My understanding is that if the person speaking describes what the documents are as part of his presentation then at the end of that he has the right to seek leave to have them tabled. I may be wrong, but we have the
Second Deputy Speaker here in the chamber with us and I would invite him, through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, to give us some guidance on the matter.

Mr Jenkins—On indulgence, Mr Deputy Speaker: through you to the member for Canning, both the member for Banks and I are trying not to deny leave. The principle usually is that it is best to show those documents to the person in charge of either the Main Committee or the chamber, and then everybody can be happy. We are in a position where, whilst you are doing your job, we are trying not to deny leave to the member for Canning before he has the opportunity to come around and pass them over to us, and then later on we might be able to give leave.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—To facilitate the next speaker in the adjournment debate, can I suggest that we move on and return to the tabling issue following that. I call the honourable member for Scullin.

Leave not granted.

Skills Shortages

Mr Jenkins (Scullin) (12.44 pm)—Today I wish to talk about one of the major problems that I think will be impediments to the continuing development of Australia’s economy—that is, the trade skills shortage. In doing this I want to indicate that there has been a lot of discussion in the run-up to the election about who is best placed to run the economy and things like that. I think it has to be acknowledged that the Australian economy has gone through great change over the last two decades, under both Labor governments and coalition governments. One of the things that we cannot forgive a government for is not understanding that changes that occur to the economy can lead to problems, as we are seeing with skills shortages.

I was interested to see the document released last year by the Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics, which is part of the Department of Transport and Regional Services, entitled Skills shortages in Australia’s regions. It gave a very good outline of the drivers of skills shortages: firstly, the national economy; secondly, technological change; thirdly, globalisation; and, fourthly, change in regulatory frameworks. Akin to that, the things that are also important are training, wastage, migration and workforce exits. All of these are known. A government that is in control of the economy should know the impact of each of those elements, but we have failed to see recognition of what is going on.

Things are often produced as being indications that the government is on top of the phenomena. We have the Minister for Vocational and Further Education indicating that the numbers of apprentices and trainees have increased by large amounts. However, he does not say that, if we are looking at the underlying trade skills shortages, really the number of trade apprentices and trainees has been very much a flat line over the last decade. These are the issues that we really have to look at and look at hard.

Let us look at the ways in which the government thinks that it is best placed to deal with these trade shortages. We have the fiasco of the Australian technical colleges. I call it a fiasco because it is a duplicate system. Not only is it a duplicate system; it is a piecemeal system because some areas and regions get them and others do not. The fact is that, even if we have the debate about secondary education in Australia going in the wrong direction and it needing to be dragged back to attend to trade skills and the like, we should say that that is the best area to assist. This is why the solution that will be offered by the Rudd Labor Party in the run-up to
this election is the proper way to go. We are saying that we will harness the resources that are represented by our secondary school network. We indicate that, as a federal government, we will be willing to act as partners with them in toto to address the skills shortages.

I have in my electorate the Peter Lalor Secondary College, the old Lalor technical school. It has infrastructure there ready to be resuscitated. It is also used for VET courses for people from surrounding schools, both in the Catholic system and in the state system. It is doing the job. One of the great areas of skills shortage is the building industry in Melbourne. I went there and saw a VET course being conducted in building and construction. People from outside of the Peter Lalor school community were coming in for that course.

These are important ways to tackle our skills shortages—relying on 457 visas and bringing people from overseas are not. Of course 457 visas have a role for some of the skills shortages. In Melbourne the trades in which there have been a skills shortage identified include motor mechanics, metal fitters, metal machinists, toolmakers, metal fabricators, welders and sheet metal workers. These are the trades that we should be encouraging our young people to enter. We should be acknowledging that technological change has changed the nature of that work and that these are very good jobs. People can hold their head high if they go into these trades.

To indicate that we still have the trade skills shortages that we do because we have not addressed the problem is really a blot on the way in which the government has tackled this problem. I believe that a Labor government under Kevin Rudd will tackle this positively. (Time expired)

Mount Whaleback Mine

Mr RANDALL (Canning) (12.49 pm)—I believe I can now seek leave to present the documents I referred to earlier with regard to Mount Whaleback Mine. I again seek leave to present the documents.

Leave granted.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wilkie)—Just to clarify this, I refer to page 589 of House of Representatives Practice, which says that there is no requirement for the documents to be provided to the other person but it is normal practice. I will read it to explain. It states:

It is expected that a Member or Minister seeking leave to present a document will first show it to the Minister at the Table or to the Member leading for the Opposition, as the case may be, and leave may be refused if this courtesy is not complied with.

I intend to extend the adjournment time by a few minutes to allow everyone to have their full five minutes.

Federal Election

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler) (12.50 pm)—I want to raise the matter of a number of brochures and films that have been used in my electorate. My electoral opponent has a brochure out. Three ambulance officers appear with him on the front of this brochure to indicate a fresh approach. I know the rules about advertising. I have no objection to my opposition participating in a robust campaign. But what I do object to is that public servants of the Queensland government are allowed to appear in ALP brochures but not in the brochures of candidates of other parties. This has happened not only with public servants but also with employees of state government corporate entities.
The state shadow minister responsible for ambulance matters, Ted Malone, raised this in the Queensland parliament and the Premier expressed his great surprise. Either the Premier was misleading the parliament or he himself was misled by his ministers. He issued an edict that it was not to happen in future with ambulance and police officers et cetera. But in a very revealing letter, dated 3 September, Mr Ron Monaghan, the secretary of the union that represents ambulance officers, wrote:

These officers immediately identified that this contravened the standard operation procedures that state officers must remain apolitical at all times. The officers then sought clarification from senior officers regarding the matter as Mr Parr—

Mr Parr, I might add, is my opponent—

indicated to them that permission had been given by the then Hon. Pat Purcell—

the now sacked minister for emergency services. He went on to say:

What has concerned me is the fact that you have come out and stated that these officers should not have done this when these officers were led to believe that they were given permission to do this.

In other words, while the Premier is in there saying that it should not happen, the then minister had given permission for his ambulance officers to participate in this particular photo.

My opponent ran the line at one stage that he just called on spec because he thought they did such a marvellous job—funny that there were movie cameras and professional photographers with him, but we will give that a miss. In a report in the Bundaberg NewsMail on 23 August, Mr Parr was reported as saying that he thought the picture was arranged by the party office. So he is now implicating the ALP in Queensland in this scenario. I think that they were on their meal break. He said:

They gave their permission to be photographed. I believe the advertisement was approved by the former emergency services minister, Pat Purcell.

So there you have it. This guy implicates himself, he implicates the former minister and he makes a goose out of the Premier.

As I said at the beginning, I have no objection—if this facility were available to candidates of all parties, I would have no worries. It should be available to candidates of all parties or to no-one. If you want to create an impression of ambulance officers—and I have done this with a policing shot—you use an actor. You can use an actor and the back of a police cap and give the impression that you are on a law and order mission. Indeed, I have done that. My opponent could well have done that and not embarrassed these excellent ambulance officers. They do a marvellous job. I have a great respect for ambulance officers and police officers and the work they do. They were made the pawns in this unfortunate episode. I deplore what happened to them and I condemn those who first tried to obfuscate this and then were caught out knowing that it was done from ALP headquarters with the permission—which perhaps should not have been given—of the then emergency services minister, Pat Purcell. Let us clean up the game. **(Time expired)**

Banks Electorate: Talent Advancement Program

Mr MELHAM (Banks) (12.55 pm)—I rise to take the opportunity to inform the House of a local initiative which fosters talented young people. This is the Bankstown Talent Advancement Program, or TAP, as it is known locally. The unique partnership was developed five years ago between the Bankstown City Council and the New South Wales Department of

MAIN COMMITTEE
Education and Training. The focus of this partnership was to identify and support talented young people in the local area.

The program is designed for local students who either attend school in the Bankstown-East Hills school districts or reside in the Bankstown local government area. Only students up to year 12 are eligible. This year will see the graduating class as the first to have been with the program from the start of their high school years. I went to a presentation concert at the Revesby Workers Club on Thursday, 6 September 2007, for the 2007 advancement program. It was a sensational concert and all are to be congratulated.

The objectives of the program are to identify and develop local talent, to provide encouragement and support through experienced coaches and mentors, to showcase our talent, to develop confidence in our young performers and to provide opportunities for acceptance into other development programs associated with the performing arts. TAP has received encouragement and support from many in the entertainment industry, including its patron, Kevin Jacobsen OAM. Many industry professionals give their time and expertise to support the program and provide their students with coaching and mentoring through regular workshops.

Some of those who have donated their time and expertise include Human Nature, Paulini, Sophie Monk, Glen Nutley, Shaun Rennie, Leigh McRae, Pat Dance-Wilson, Amanda Ballan-Hanna, Mathew Waters, Triple Treat Promotions, Sharon Dermody, Toni Pearson, Bryan Brown and Nathan Foley. Many of these professionals are themselves from Bankstown: Col Joye, Vince Sorrenti, Casey Donovan, Paulini and, of course, some members of Human Nature. Andrew Tierney of Human Nature has said:

Having a community to support talented kids with opportunities to perform and grow in confidence is something that I believe really helped us. This kind of program in Bankstown is fantastic and I hope will ensure good things keep coming from my home district.

Andrew's mother, Wendy, is the Musical Director for TAP. Wendy, along with a number of other dedicated professionals, including Kerry Sebio, the project coordinator, and Ian Bertram, the sound technician, are all committed to nurturing talent in the Bankstown community.

TAP ensures the performers are given the opportunity to perform in order to gain confidence and knowledge of the industry. To date, invitations to TAP participants have included the Sounds of Symphony in Colorado Springs, NRL and ARU half-time entertainment at Telstra Stadium, Australia Day celebrations, many local opportunities within New South Wales, as well as a Disneyland, Anaheim, performance in 2006. Most recently, TAP participants took a trip to perform in Broken Hill, a sister city to Bankstown.

I congratulate Bankstown council and the mayors past and present who have continued to support this brilliant initiative. I mentioned the mentors and supporters, among whom is Kevin Jacobsen OAM. He was there on Thursday night and you could just tell that he was bristling with enthusiasm at the young talent that the community was producing. He has seen the very best of the best in the entertainment industry around the world.

The Revesby Workers Club, of which I am proudly vice-president, has shown support by providing our auditorium gratis to the TAP organisation so that the children can basically have a first-class place in which to entertain. Indeed, we have had there one of the local newspapers, the Canterbury-Bankstown Express. This is the sort of thing that enthuses our local communities, where professionals take time out to mentor young people coming through. It is
not a paid thing that they do, but it is probably one of the most enjoyable things that they do. I had the same experience recently when we had Bryan Brown and Rachel Ward at the Revesby Workers Club for some short film initiatives. Bryan Brown has mentored a number of people in relation to that program. I commend the TAP program and those associated with it.

Local Government

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher) (1.00 pm)—Much has been said in the House and around the country about the plans for local government amalgamations which were announced by the former Beattie government and which will be continued by the new Bligh Labor government in Queensland. Most of the angst, particularly on the Sunshine Coast, results from the process that was followed: the lack of consultation, the failure by the state government to take into account what local people are saying and, of course, the arrogant, high-handed manner in which the state Labor government was going to axe local governments that were proposing to hold referenda or plebiscites.

The Prime Minister and the government introduced legislation, which was debated in the House recently, to enable the Australian Electoral Commission to carry out a plebiscite for any local authority wishing to have one. The cost of those plebiscites would be assumed by the Australian taxpayer. In terms of the Sunshine Coast, I see a lot of merit in merging the Caloundra City Council with the Maroochy Shire Council and the Noosa Council. It would enable us as the Sunshine Coast to advertise ourselves as an entity and to promote ourselves as Australia’s premier tourist destination and, increasingly, as Australia’s most desirable place to live. While we certainly would not want to be like the Gold Coast, we have so often been in competition with it. The Gold Coast has been a single entity for a long time. The former Albert Shire Council merged with the Gold Coast City Council to form Gold Coast City Council a number of years ago and the Gold Coast has been very successful in promoting itself.

We as the Sunshine Coast would not by any means want high-rise from one end to the other. We value the fact that we are a family destination. We value the fact that on the Sunshine Coast we have a range of beaches and facilities. Frankly, we have something for everyone, from the 4½- and five-star resorts at Noosa and Mooloolaba, through to family based destinations and even caravan parks. But one of the difficulties we have had as the Sunshine Coast is that we have Caloundra, Maroochy and Noosa. While we have had SunROC—the Sunshine Coast Regional Organisation of Councils—endeavouring to work together, it was very much a second-best option. As the local member, I will be pleased to see the three local authorities on the Sunshine Coast merge. But, having said that, I very strongly support the position of the government, which enables the residents of Caloundra, Maroochy and Noosa to express their own views on what the state government has sought to do in a high-handed manner.

Following the recent redistribution, the seat of Fisher has been pushed south and now includes part of the Caboolture Shire Council. The Caboolture shire is being forcibly rolled into a new local authority. The other members of that new local authority will be the Redcliffe City Council and the Pine Rivers Shire Council. Again, if the residents of Caboolture decide that they want to have a plebiscite, I will strongly support that as well.

The Kilcoy shire is a rural shire which has now also been returned to the electorate of Fisher. Kilcoy shire was particularly concerned that it was going to be rolled into the Pine Rivers Shire Council, Redcliffe City Council and Caboolture Shire Council merger. Kilcoy is
a small rural area that has absolutely nothing in common with those areas, which are on the northern outskirts of Brisbane and are very densely populated and built up. The state government decided that Kilcoy would merge to the west with the Esk Shire Council to form the Somerset Regional Council. The Kilcoy community has elected to have a plebiscite and I have conveyed that message to the Prime Minister. I am hopeful that that plebiscite will proceed, because it really is important that people in Kilcoy get the opportunity to cast a vote on whether they want decades of existence to be abolished by the state Labor government.

Having indicated my support in principle for the merger of the three councils on the Sunshine Coast, I am, however, disappointed that the state government has decided to call the merged council the Sunshine Coast Regional Council instead of the Sunshine Coast city council. I hope that, once the merger happens, the new council will be able to obtain the city status that the Gold Coast holds. (Time expired)

Question agreed to.

Main Committee adjourned at 1.05 pm
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Climate Change
(Question No. 5035)

Mr Kelvin Thomson asked the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources, in writing, on 8 December 2006:

(1) What is the latest advice received by the Minister in respect of the detrimental impacts of climate change upon the Great Barrier Reef and does this advice reflect (a) qualitative or (b) quantitative assessment of deterioration over time; if so, what are those details.

(2) For 2006, what demonstrable outcomes have been realized by the Minister’s department in respect of protecting whales and dolphins.

(3) For the financial year 2005-06, (a) what was the total cost to the Minister’s department of whale and dolphin protection programs and (b) how many full-time equivalent staff worked on those programs.

(4) Which Australian indigenous species are most at risk from climate change and what steps has the Minister taken to reduce those risks.

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

(1) Climate change poses a significant challenge to the Great Barrier Reef (GBR). Changes in air and sea temperatures, ocean currents, sea level, ocean chemistry, cyclones and storms, and rainfall have the potential to cause significant impacts on the GBR. Impacts are already being observed on seabirds, marine turtles and corals from increases in air and sea temperatures. As climate change continues, impacts are expected in all parts of the GBR ecosystem, with consequences for communities and industries that depend on the GBR.

The GBR has experienced two major coral bleaching events in recent years: 1998 and 2002. Approximately sixty per cent of the GBR was affected in each event. Although most reefs recovered from bleaching, about five per cent of reefs surveyed suffered severe damage. In the 2006 summer, a severe but localised coral bleaching event in the Keppel Island region affected much of the region and resulted in mortality of approximately forty-two per cent of corals. This is the most damage this region has experienced from coral bleaching.

The Government has implemented two key strategies to make the GBR more resilient to climate change. Highly protected areas have been increased from five per cent to more than thirty-three per cent, greatly improving biodiversity protection, and the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan has been implemented, which aims to halt and reverse the decline in water quality entering the GBR by 2013.

(2) Memorandum of Understanding for the Conservation of Cetaceans and their Habitats in the Pacific Islands Region

On 15 September 2006 the “Memorandum of Understanding for the Conservation of Cetaceans and their Habitats in the Pacific Islands Region” was signed by Australia at the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme Ministerial Forum in New Caledonia. This MOU was negotiated under the auspices of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals “to foster cooperation, build capacity and ensure coordinated region-wide actions to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for all cetaceans and their habitats occurring in the region, and to safeguard the associated cultural values for Pacific Islands peoples”.
This is a significant step in whale and dolphin conservation in the Pacific and Australia actively participated in the negotiation of this MOU over the past four years in an effort to continue to build support and capacity in the region for the conservation of all cetaceans.

**International Whaling Commission Meeting, St Kitts and Nevis (IWC58) 14 – 21 June 2006**

In June 2006 Senator Campbell led the Australian delegation to the 58th meeting of the IWC in St Kitts and Nevis where they played a leading role in ensuring continued support for the pro-conservation position. This included effective lobbying of some small island states to abstain on crucial votes on proposed Japanese small type coastal whaling and abolition of the Southern Ocean Sanctuary.

The Australian delegation was also closely involved in developing a program of work on ship-strikes for the International Maritime Organisation and the IWC.

**Australian Centre for Applied Marine Mammal Science**

The new Australian Centre for Applied Marine Mammal Science was launched in September 2006. The centre is based in Hobart at the Australian Antarctic Division and is funded through the Australian Government’s $100 million Commonwealth Environment Research Facility (CERF) programme. The Government has allocated $2.5 million over four years to the Centre, which will harness the expertise of Australia’s very best marine mammal researchers. Applications for research funding for the first year were called for in September and those received have since undergone a rigorous assessment process to determine the successful applicants. The first contracts were signed in May 2007.

**Domestic achievements**

A Whale and Dolphin Research Priorities Conference was held in Adelaide in February 2006 which enabled over 100 managers, researchers, industry and non-government organisation stakeholders to be updated on work done since the previous conference in 2004, and identify gaps and priorities requiring attention for the next two years.

Amendments to the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act Regulations were enacted in June 2006 to implement the new Australian National Guidelines for Whale and Dolphin Watching developed jointly by all Australian, state and territory governments and agreed to by the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council in November 2005.

The fourth annual National Large Whale Disentanglement Workshop funded by the Commonwealth was held in Victor Harbor S.A. in May 2006. Operational staff from all mainland states received training in the latest technology and best practice methods to ensure the safety of those tasked with freeing entangled whales and achieving successful outcomes. To facilitate this, the Commonwealth has also supplied satellite tracking buoys to four states for cases which cannot be dealt with immediately, so that the whale can be re-located and assisted in the future.

Natural Heritage Trust funding of $400,000 was provided for research on blue and southern right whale distribution, abundance and habitat utilisation in accordance with the Recovery Plans in place for these species; development of satellite tracking tags; developments in dolphin and seal mitigation methods/devices in trawl fisheries; and support for an IWC intersessional workshop on in-depth stock assessment of southern hemisphere humpback whales held in Hobart in April 2006.

Capacity-building workshops on cetacean studies and rescue techniques for whale strandings and entanglements were held in Auckland NZ in September/October 2006. Participation by Pacific Island countries was supported financially by the former Department of the Environment and Heritage.

The Department launched a new easily-accessed whales web site: www.deh.gov.au/whales to better educate the general public and students on all cetacean matters and developed new brochures, posters, banners and information packs on whales and dolphins in Australian waters.
Nationally agreed protocols for obtaining samples from stranded cetaceans were launched in January 2006 after extensive consultation with all states. These are designed to be used by managers and volunteers dealing with stranding events and cetacean researchers.

(3) The following table outlines the costs and full-time staffing allocation to both domestic and international whale and dolphin protection programmes during 2005/06:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Total Expenditure 2005/06</th>
<th>Full-time ASL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domestic whale and dolphin protection programme (Approvals and Wildlife Division)</td>
<td>$563,062</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Whale Policy Programme (Australian Antarctic Division)</td>
<td>$494,000</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Whale Science Programme (Australian Antarctic Division)</td>
<td>$925,755</td>
<td>6.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>$1,982,817</strong></td>
<td><strong>13.25</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(4) A summary of the latest scientific estimates of the number of species and communities likely to be threatened by climate change is available on my Department’s website at www.greenhouse.gov.au/science/hottopics/pubs/topic11.pdf. The Australian Government recognises that climate change is a threat to biodiversity. The report, Climate Change Risk and Vulnerability that was released in July 2005 identifies biodiversity as a priority area for adaptation planning.

The Government has taken action to prepare for the impact of climate change on biodiversity. Most recently, in November 2006, the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council agreed eleven priority actions to deal with natural resource management and climate change. The Australian Government has allocated funds to these actions and commenced implementation.

**Defence: Stationery**

(Question No. 5179)

Mr Kelvin Thomson asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 7 December 2006:

(1) For each financial year from 1 July 2004, what was the total cost of paper purchased by the Minister’s department.

(2) Does the department have policies relating to duplex printing; if so, what are those details.

Dr Nelson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) Defence’s expenditure on paper was $3.0m in 2004-05, $3.15m in 2005-06 and $3.21m in 2006-07. These figures include GST. Defence introduced new purchasing processes for paper on 1 July 2006. These figures for 2004-05 and 2005-06 are estimates.

(2) Yes. Defence’s Waste Minimisation Policy states:

(a) ‘Defence will incorporate the waste minimisation objectives for all new tenders into applicable and appropriate contractual arrangements with suppliers of goods to Defence. Specific contracting requirements are to:

(i) ensure that Information and Communications Technology equipment defaults to double sided print and minimises the use of consumables such as paper and toner cartridges.’
Lowe Electorate: Income Tested Fees
(Question No. 6152)

Mr Murphy asked the Minister for Ageing, in writing, on 7 August 2007:

(1) In which year were income-tested fees introduced for nursing home residents.

(2) For each year since the introduction of income-tested fees, how many nursing home residents in the electoral division of Lowe have paid, or are paying, income-tested fees.

(3) For each year since the introduction of income-tested fees, what is the total dollar amount of fees collected from residents in nursing homes in the electoral division of Lowe.

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

(1) Income-tested fees were introduced on 1 March 1998. Only newly entering residents from that date have been subject to the income test.

(2) and (3) The Department of Health and Ageing does not collect information on the amount of income-tested fees paid by residents. The Department sets the maximum income-tested fee that the provider may charge a resident based upon the resident’s income and cost of care. The number of residents, who at some point in that year, were assessed as eligible to pay income-tested fees for the Planning Region of Inner West, of which Lowe is an electorate, is shown in the following table. Note that the growth in the number of income tested residents largely reflects the replacement of residents who entered care before 1 March 1998 with residents who entered care since that date.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count of Income-tested residents *</th>
<th>Financial Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>1998-99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>435</td>
<td>1999-2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>783</td>
<td>2000-01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>909</td>
<td>2001-02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,009</td>
<td>2002-03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,067</td>
<td>2003-04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,251</td>
<td>2004-05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,369</td>
<td>2005-06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,502</td>
<td>2006-07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The number of residents who were income-tested at some time during the year.

Defence Materiel Organisation
(Question No. 6263)

Mr Fitzgibbon asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 15 August 2007:

For the financial year (a) 2004-05 and (b) 2005-06, how was the Defence Materiel Organisation service fee calculated.

Dr Nelson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(a) Not applicable, as the Defence Materiel Organisation (DMO) was not a Prescribed Agency in 2004-05.

(b) The service fee for 2005-06 was calculated by reference to transactions recorded in the Finance Management Information System as being spent on activities related to management, staff, general operating and administrative costs of DMO which provided acquisition and sustainment services to Defence.