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SITTING DAYS—2008

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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-SECOND PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—SECOND 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—Mr Harry Alfred Jenkins MP
Deputy Speaker—Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke MP
Second Deputy Speaker—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP

Members of the Speaker’s Panel—Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry Adams MP, Hon. Kevin James Andrews MP, Hon. Archibald Ronald Bevis MP, Ms Sharon Leah Bird MP, Mr Steven Georganas MP, Hon. Judith Eleanor Moylan MP, Ms Janelle Anne Saffin MP, Mr Albert John Schultz MP, Mr Patrick Damien Secker MP, Hon. Peter Neil Slipper MP, Mr Peter Sid Sidebottom MP, Mr Kelvin John Thomson MP, Hon. Danna Sue Vale MP and Dr Malcolm James Washer MP

Leader of the House—Hon. Anthony Norman Albanese MP
Deputy Leader of the House—Hon. Stephen Francis Smith MP
Manager of Opposition Business—Hon. Joseph Benedict Hockey MP
Deputy Manager of Opposition Business—Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP

Party Leaders and Whips
Australian Labor Party
Leader—Hon. Kevin Michael Rudd MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Julia Eileen Gillard MP
Chief Government Whip—Hon. Leo Roger Spurway Price MP
Government Whips—Ms Jill Griffiths Hall MP and Mr Christopher Patrick Hayes MP

Liberal Party of Australia
Leader—Hon. Brendan John Nelson MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP
Chief Opposition Whip—Hon. Alex Somlyay MP
Opposition Whip—Mr Michael Andrew Johnson MP
Deputy Opposition Whip—Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP

The Nationals
Leader—Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP
Chief Whip—Mrs Kay Elizabeth Hull MP
Whip—Mr Paul Christopher Neville MP

Printed by authority of the House of Representatives
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<td>Vamvakinou, Maria</td>
<td>Calwell, Vic</td>
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<td>Washer, Malcolm James</td>
<td>Moore, WA</td>
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<td>Wood, Jason Peter</td>
<td>La Trobe, Vic</td>
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<td>Zappia, Tony</td>
<td>Makin, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
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PARTY ABBREVIATIONS
ALP—Australian Labor Party; LP— Liberal Party of Australia;
Nats—The Nationals; Ind—Independent

Heads of Parliamentary Departments
Clerk of the Senate—H Evans
Clerk of the House of Representatives—IC Harris AO
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—A Thompson
## Rudd Ministry

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<td>Hon. Kevin Rudd, MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion</td>
<td>Hon. Julia Gillard, MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>Hon. Wayne Swan MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and Leader of the Government in the Senate</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Chris Evans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Minister of State, Cabinet Secretary and Vice President of the Executive Council</td>
<td>Senator Hon. John Faulkner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Trade</td>
<td>Hon. Simon Crean MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Stephen Smith MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence</td>
<td>Hon. Joel Fitzgibbon MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Health and Ageing</td>
<td>Hon. Nicola Roxon MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Jenny Macklin MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Finance and Deregulation</td>
<td>Hon. Lindsay Tanner MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and Leader of the House</td>
<td>Hon. Anthony Albanese MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Kim Carr</td>
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<td>Minister for Climate Change and Water</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Penny Wong</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts</td>
<td>Hon. Peter Garrett AM, MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attorney-General</td>
<td>Hon. Robert McClelland MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Human Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry</td>
<td>Hon. Tony Burke MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism</td>
<td>Hon. Martin Ferguson AM, MP</td>
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[The above ministers constitute the cabinet]
RUDD MINISTRY—continued

Minister for Home Affairs
Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs
Minister for Veterans’ Affairs
Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women
Minister for Employment Participation
Minister for Defence Science and Personnel
Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy and Minister Assisting the Finance
Minister on Deregulation
Minister for Superannuation and Corporate Law
Minister for Ageing
Minister for Youth and Minister for Sport
Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and Childcare
Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Procurement
Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support
Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia
Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services
Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance
Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs
Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister
Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector and Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Prime Minister for Social Inclusion
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Trade
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing
Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services

Hon. Bob Debus MP
Hon. Chris Bowen MP
Hon. Alan Griffin MP
Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP
Hon. Brendan O’Connor MP
Hon. Warren Snowdon MP
Hon. Dr Craig Emerson MP
Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
Hon. Justine Elliot MP
Hon. Kate Ellis MP
Hon. Maxine McKew MP
Hon. Greg Combet AM, MP
Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, MP
Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP
Hon. Bill Shorten MP
Hon. Bob McMullan MP
Hon. Duncan Kerr MP
Hon. Anthony Byrne MP
Senator Hon. Ursula Stephens
Hon. John Murphy MP
Senator Hon. Jan McLucas
Hon. Laurie Ferguson MP
SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition
Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Minister for Employment, Business and Workplace Relations
Leader of the Nationals and Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Transport and Local Government
Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for Defence
Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research
Shadow Treasurer
Manager of Opposition Business in the House and Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing
Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs
Shadow Minister for Trade
Shadow Minister for Families, Community Services, Indigenous Affairs and the Voluntary Sector
Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Shadow Minister for Human Services
Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training
Shadow Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Urban Water
Shadow Minister for Finance, Competition Policy and De-regulation
Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate and Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
Shadow Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy
Shadow Attorney-General
Shadow Minister for Resources and Energy and Shadow Minister for Tourism
Shadow Minister for Regional Development, Water Security

Hon. Brendan Nelson MP
Hon. Julie Bishop MP
Hon. Warren Truss MP
Senator Hon. Nick Minchin
Senator Hon. Eric Abetz
Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP
Hon. Joe Hockey MP
Hon. Andrew Robb MP
Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP
Hon. Tony Abbott MP
Senator Hon. Nigel Scullion
Senator Hon. Helen Coonan
Hon. Tony Smith MP
Hon. Greg Hunt MP
Hon. Peter Dutton MP
Senator Hon. Chris Ellison
Hon. Bruce Billson MP
Senator Hon. George Brandis
Senator Hon. David Johnston
Hon. John Cobb MP

[The above constitute the shadow cabinet]
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<td>Hon. Chris Pyne MP</td>
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<td>Immigration and Citizenship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Special Minister of State</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Michael</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Small Business, the Service Economy and Tourism</td>
<td>Ronaldson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Environment, Heritage, the Arts and Indigenous Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Sharman Stone MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Assistant Treasurer and Shadow Minister for Superannuation and Corporate</td>
<td>Michael Keenan MP</td>
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<td>Governance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Ageing</td>
<td>Margaret May MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Defence Science, Personnel; Assisting Shadow Minister for Defence</td>
<td>Hon. Bob Baldwin MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House and Shadow Minister for Business</td>
<td>Luke Hartsuyker MP</td>
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<td>Development, Independent Contractors and Consumer Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Employment Participation and Apprenticeships and Training</td>
<td>Andrew Southcott MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Housing and Shadow Minister for Status of Women</td>
<td>Hon. Sussan Ley MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Minister for Youth and Sport</td>
<td>Hon. Pat Farmer MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Cabinet</td>
<td>Don Randall MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald</td>
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<td>and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Health</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Richard</td>
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<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Education</td>
<td>Colbeck</td>
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<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Brett Mason</td>
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<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure, Roads and Transport</td>
<td>Hon. Peter Lindsay MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Trade</td>
<td>Barry Haase MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship</td>
<td>John Forrest MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government</td>
<td>Louise Markus MP</td>
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<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Ageing and the Volunteer Sector</td>
<td>Sophie Mirabella MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>Jo Gash MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Families and Community Services</td>
<td>Mark Coulton MP</td>
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<td>Senator Marise Payne</td>
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Tuesday, 24 June 2008

The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 2 pm and read prayers.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Fuel Prices

Dr NELSON (2.01 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I draw the Prime Minister’s attention to the fact that petrol has increased on average by 28c a litre on his watch and I ask: what difference has the appointment of a petrol commissioner made? Going forward, could you explain to Australians how watching the price of petrol brings it down?

Mr RUDD—On the question of watching, what occurred on the opposition’s watch when they were in government for over 12 years was a series of increases in the price of petrol, including an increase in the oil price by one-third in the 12-month period prior to the last election. That is the first point. The second point is that what the government has said consistently is that when it comes to enhancing the competition policy powers available to consumers we will do that which is possible. We said that we would establish a petrol commissioner and we have done that. We said that we were committed to the introduction of Fuelwatch. Those opposite oppose it.

We believe that these are modest positive measures that assist motorists to make an informed choice about where to get the cheapest petrol on a particular day. I say to those opposite: what is wrong with a motorist in any city in the country knowing on a particular day where they can get the cheapest petrol? What is wrong with them having access to that information? What we do know about those opposite is that they want the big oil companies to have that information but they want consumers not to have that information.

Climate Change

Mr SULLIVAN (2.02 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister outline the critical importance of confronting the future challenge of climate change and the dangers of an approach that is stuck in the past?

Mr RUDD—Climate change is a great economic and environmental challenge for this generation of Australians. In fact it is a challenge that has stared in the face of governments around the world since the states of the world gathered together and put together the Kyoto protocol and realised that we had a challenge that goes beyond any one nation state to fix. That is why the nations of the world agreed to ratify Kyoto, with the exception of one or two. When the opposition were in government they were one of those two. They said that the only way to fix climate change was for Australia to act unilaterally out there and not in concert with the rest of the international community.

If you are looking at the overall challenges of climate change, I think it is important to note that those opposite are now part of the climate change sceptics brigade mark 2. What we have here quite plainly with this new fear campaign on emissions trading is this: we have the return of the Kyoto sceptics in their new fear campaign on climate change and on emissions trading. That is what this is all about.

I suggest to those opposite that they soberly look at the economic cost. We know that they have no interest in the environmental consequences. They simply look at the flow-through effects in terms of the potential economic cost. I quote from the Preston and Jones report for the CSIRO in 2006, which is when those opposite were in the midst of their 12 years in government. It states that with a less than one degree temperature rise the snow covered area of the...
Australian Alps will shrink by 10 to 40 per cent by the turn of this century. That will have a huge impact on Australian tourism. The CSIRO report further states: with a warming of between two and three degrees, almost all of the Great Barrier Reef will be bleached every year; 80 per cent of Kakadu’s freshwater wetlands will be lost to a 30 centimetre rise in sea level; with a three to four degree rise in temperature, Murray-Darling river flows could fall by almost a half—between 16 and 48 per cent.

For those opposite who say that they have a particularly keen interest in representing the interests of rural Australia, let us look at the effect on primary industries. I will quote from figures provided by the Bureau of Meteorology and the CSIRO in 2007. They stated that climate modelling by the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology suggests rainfall in southern Australia could be reduced by up to 10 per cent by 2030 and by up to 20 per cent by 2050. Furthermore, CSIRO in 2006 stated that livestock heat stress leads to a decline in milk production flowing from the effect which climate change has on temperature rises; that there will be a high annual cost of approximately $12 million a year to manage the southward spread of the Queensland fruit fly; and that with a warming of between two and three degrees there will be a 40 per cent reduction in livestock carrying capacity for native pasture lands. These are significant effects for rural Australia, and because they affect rural Australia they will have widespread effects on the entire national economy.

Let us go to the effects on human health. Annual heatwave deaths in Brisbane will increase from 134 today to between 165 and 189. Furthermore, a Climate Institute report of 2007 states that the southward spread of malaria receptive zones—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr RUDD—These figures are from CSIRO reports, Climate Institute reports and various other reports. So CSIRO is spreading a scare campaign according to those opposite.

Then we have a further report from the Climate Institute of 1,200 to 1,400 more heat related deaths a year in major population centres. Putting all those things into their global context—the impact of overall temperature rises—the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change suggests that the global economic costs associated with an increase in average global temperatures of 2.5 degrees could cost between 1.5 per cent and two per cent of global GDP a year. The case on this question is clear for those who are responsible about long-term planning for Australia’s economy, long-term planning for the future of our rural industries, long-term planning for the future of our public health and long-term planning in terms of what needs to be done to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

This government came to the election with a very clear-cut policy. We would ratify Kyoto. Those opposite remained committed to opposing the ratification of Kyoto. Prior to the election we were committed to the introduction of something called an emissions-trading scheme. Prior to the election, those opposite were also committed to the introduction of an emissions-trading scheme. Prior to the election, those opposite committed further on the question of an ETS. They said that the transport sector should be included in that ETS—and the member for Wentworth seeks to hide once again in his notes. The bottom line is that, if you are responsible about long-term planning for the environment, it means embracing these long-term challenges.

We have a clear-cut strategy for dealing with climate change, a clear-cut strategy for dealing with emissions trading and a clear-
cut strategy when it comes to acting on new technologies which assist in dealing with what is not just a global problem but—

*Mr Laming interjecting—*

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

*Mr RUDD—* a national problem as well. These strategies include a half-billion-dollar clean coal fund, a half-billion-dollar renewable energy fund and a $240 million clean business fund. These are in addition to our commitment to introduce an emissions trading scheme—a responsible, market based way of dealing with the challenge of greenhouse gas emissions.

I say to those opposite that this should be a challenge which transcends politics. This is a challenge for the globe and for the nation which is so intergenerational in its scope that people should start working together on it. Instead, those opposite, since they have lodged in opposition ranks, have decided that this once again is simply a platform for the short-term playing of party politics, rather than long-term planning for the nation’s future. This government is committed to taking long-term, responsible action to deal with the challenge of climate change. I appeal to those opposite to abandon their current commitment to a fear campaign. It may be politically attractive for them once again to see the return of the Kyoto sceptics through their current campaign of fear on emissions trading. I would commend them instead to the challenges which their children and grandchildren face and ask them to act responsibly in their interest, the planet’s interest and in the interest of the Australia economy.

**Grocery Prices**

*Mr TRUSS (2.09 pm)—* My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to his recent announcement of ‘grocery watch’. In the first quarter of this year, the price of vegetables has increased by 2.9 per cent, the price of bread has increased by four per cent, the price of eggs has increased by 5.2 per cent and the price of electricity has increased by six per cent. Prime Minister, how will watching grocery prices bring them down?

*Mr RUDD—* One of the things which has had an impact on consumer prices across the country is 10 interest rate rises in a row. If you have 10 interest rate rises in a row from a party in government which said that they would keep interest rates at—

**Government members—** Record lows!

*Mr RUDD—* What did they say they would keep interest rates at?

**Government members—** Record lows!

*Mr RUDD—* Did they honour that commitment?

**Government members—** No!

*Mr RUDD—* No, they did not. I say to those opposite that, when it comes to making commitments like that on interest rates, you should hang your heads in collective shame. That was part and parcel of the collective strategy of those opposite to seek to win the 2004 election. Those opposite stand condemned for their inaction.

**Climate Change**

*Ms COLLINS (2.11 pm)—* My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer outline for the House why it is in Australia’s long-term economic interest for us to tackle climate change and why an emissions-trading scheme is central to the government’s climate change response?

*Mr SWAN—* I thank the member for what is a very important question. Climate change is the biggest economic challenge that the global community faces. Under this government, Australia is rising to that challenge—unlike the climate change sceptics opposite, who put it in the too-hard basket for 12
years. It is the case that the economic costs of inaction are greater than the costs of action. Left unaddressed, climate change will undermine economic growth and destroy our way of life. Climate change threatens agricultural exports worth $27 billion. The costs of extreme weather alone could reach between 0.5 per cent and one per cent of world GDP by the middle of the century. We need to change the way the economy works, to move from a high-emissions economy to a low-emissions economy. Reducing carbon emissions is a growth strategy for the future. Not acting is what destroys growth and prosperity into the future.

The best way to address carbon emissions is through an emissions-trading scheme. Introducing one of these is difficult. We do not pretend otherwise. Tough decisions will need to be made, because major economic reform is never easy. Major economic reform requires courage, leadership and purpose. The longer we delay, the more it will cost. Just imagine what this country might have been like if back then, five years ago, the former government had had the courage to introduce an emissions-trading scheme when it went to the cabinet, when they had the opportunity to grasp the future, and they squibbed it. This government says we have no choice but to act.

There are some opposite who once thought that an emissions-trading scheme was something that was worth while. That was when they had some faint connection to economic credibility. In fact, the member for Wentworth’s website—and I do not know if he showed this to the focus group or not—had this to say: ‘Australia’s emissions-trading scheme will be the most comprehensive in the world.’

Mr Hockey—Is that the big hit, is it?

Mr SWAN—There is a lot more yet, boy. Of course, we have had some remarkable backflips from those opposite, particularly from the member for Wentworth. The member for Wentworth said inflation was a fairy story. Remember when he said that, on inflation, it was ‘mission accomplished’? In the House he said that it was ‘mission accomplished’. Then he came to the House last week and suddenly admitted that inflation may have been a central challenge. He is someone who will say anything and do anything. This morning on Sky TV he was interviewed by Kieran Gilbert. This is what Kieran Gilbert said the then Minister for the Environment and Water Resources said in 2007:

By bringing transport fuels into the Australian emissions trading system consumers will be given greater incentive to improve the energy efficiency of their transport choices.

Kieran Gilbert said, ‘Who said that?’ Mr Turnbull said, ‘No, that was Howard government policy.’ Who was the environment minister back when they were talking about an emissions-trading system? Was it the member for Curtin? No. Was it the member for North Sydney?

Government members—No.

Mr SWAN—Who was it? It was the member for Wentworth. That is what he said: ‘By bringing transport fuels into the Australian emissions-trading system consumers will be given greater incentive to improve their energy efficiency and transport choices.’ That is what he had to say. He is trying to crab-walk away from the Howard government policy that he was claiming credit for only last year. What does this demonstrate? That those opposite are completely spineless when it comes to facing up to the great challenges of the future. They are yesterday’s men and women in every sense. They are economic and environmental Neanderthals. We had all these old arguments from them before. We had them against
Kyoto. They do not have one ounce of policy courage when it comes to facing up to this challenge of climate change. They are simply prepared to be irresponsible, to play short-term politics and to sell the nation’s future down the drain. They should be condemned.

Child Care

Mr ABBOTT (2.17 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to ABC Learning’s 11 per cent increase in childcare costs following the recent establishment of ‘childcare watch’ and I ask the Prime Minister: how will watching childcare prices keep the cost of child care down?

Mr RUDD—I think one of the things about child care to understand is what happened with the increase in childcare costs over the period during which those opposite were in power. The average fee for a child in full-time long day care increased by almost 80 per cent. The government has a plan for investing in child care some $2.4 billion over the next four years. It includes the establishment of up to 260 additional childcare centres across the country; the childcare tax rebate going from 30 per cent to 50 per cent; universal access to 15 hours of affordable early learning for all children in the year before formal schooling, access that meets the needs of working parents; and also our commitment to act on this in the long term. No-one likes to see the cost of child care going up—this government does not like to see it going up either—but there are ways in which you can handle it. The government has responded in terms of its family support package, which is some $55 billion in the most recent budget; income tax cuts, which flow through from 1 July; as well as the increase in the childcare tax rebate.

I refer to the typical young family of a mother and father with one child at preschool and one at primary school. If you look at the overall flow-through effect for that family, it is some $52 a week. This does not solve all cost of living challenges at all but we believe on this side of the House that it is a responsible course of action to assist families and individuals under financial pressure at this time, including the pressure that occurs as a consequence of childcare cost increases.

I will add one further comment on the affordability of child care, and that is the matter of the input costs which childcare providers are now confronted with, as well as the cost of labour. We have had a gross shortage of qualified workers in this sector for a long period of time, which is why the government has been so keen to additionally invest in this part of the equation as well.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

Mr RUDD—No, the objective is to actually increase the supply of qualified childcare workers to the sector. If you have an adverse balance of supply and demand in that sector, obviously it provides a further cost pressure for providers.

The other thing I would say to those opposite is: reflect on the history. When those opposite were first elected, they froze childcare assistance payments for two years, they removed operational and capital works subsidies for community based centres, which forced a number of centres to reduce in size or close completely, and they withdrew funding that was to support the construction of 5,500 new childcare places. When they finally introduced the childcare tax rebate in 2004, they made families wait two years before receiving their first payment. That is what those opposite did in their first few years. In the first six months of our government’s tenure, our action in terms of the childcare tax rebate, in addition to the input measures we have put in place for those working in this sector and those who need training in this sector, is a solid start, but there is still much more to do.
Climate Change

Mr CHEESEMAN (2.21 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Will the minister update the House on how the government is helping farmers prepare for climate change?

Mr BURKE—I thank the member for Corangamite for his question, and I acknowledge his strong engagement with the primary producers in his own electorate, particularly the dairy farmers in Colac whom he has previously taken me out to meet. Yesterday the coalition scare campaign about responding to climate change got underway again. The opposition spent the last day denying that their climate change policy had changed and they spent the last decade denying that the climate itself had changed. Their approach very much was on the basis that if they can pretend that nothing is happening then maybe nothing will be happening. It is like a child in the playground who covers their eyes and thinks that all the bad things will go away. They ignored the fact that the cost of inaction is so much greater than the cost of action. They had the view that if you do not mention climate change, if you do not talk about it, if you pretend it is not happening, then it will all go away. They became so arrogant as to believe that the climate was actually waiting for the mandate of the previous government before it would feel it had permission to vary in any way.

But what actually is disturbing is the work that ABARE did at the end of last year looking at what is likely to happen to a series of key commodities if we do nothing. Over a series of key agricultural products there is an estimate of nine to 10 per cent reduction in total production by 2030, or around $4.2 billion in today’s terms, and 13 to 19 per cent reduction in production by 2050. In exports the ABARE data was even more disturbing. Australian agricultural exports of key commodities are projected to decline by between 11 per cent and 63 per cent by 2030, and by up to 79 per cent by 2050. The research went through commodity by commodity what will happen if we do nothing. Wheat takes a hit of 9.2 per cent by 2030 and 13 per cent by 2050. Dairy is down by 9½ per cent by 2030 and 18 per cent by 2050. It goes through sugar, beef and sheep meat.

The good news on all these projections is that all the modelling is based on something that, when ABARE started doing this work, was a reasonable assumption and that was that the Australian government would do nothing. That was a reasonable presumption 12 months ago. The good news is that it is not a reasonable presumption any more.

The NFF themselves have stated that climate change is possibly the biggest risk facing Australian farmers in the coming century. Against that now we have a series of long-term plans from this government to help our farmers prepare for a future with climate change. Australia’s Farming Future provides $130 million over four years and involves long-term planning, long-term changes to help people adapt to the challenges ahead, research and productivity programs looking at issues like soil carbon and emissions reduction and making sure that with the global issues our farmers are facing we have a government squarely focused not on a fear campaign—the opposition’s approach—but on making the hard decisions in order to provide a secure farming future.

Qantas

Ms JULIE BISHOP (2.25 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to his comment yesterday in the context of a strike by Qantas staff and a sixfold increase in strike action since the election of a Labor government: ‘We will watch this closely.’ Prime Minister, how will
watching strikes reduce the inconvenience and disruption to airline passengers?

Mr RUDD—I am aware that Qantas’s licensed aircraft maintenance engineers took protected industrial action on Monday, 23rd, and that further protected action comprising work stoppages and overtime bans has been notified for today, Tuesday, 24th, and Friday, 27 June. This action has been taken as part of collective agreement negotiations between the licensed aircraft maintenance engineers and Qantas.

Ms Julie Bishop interjecting—

Mr RUDD—I am glad for the interjection from the member of Curtin because we should all pay attention to this fact—

The SPEAKER—Well, I am really not, Prime Minister. The Deputy Leader should sit there in silence.

Mr RUDD—this action is occurring under the provisions of the Workplace Relations Act that were passed by the previous government. That is the first point. Furthermore, I understand from reports that there is no dispute, that the work stoppages have been notified in accordance with the provisions of the Workplace Relations Act and therefore this industrial action is lawful and protected under that act. This is ultimately a matter that can be determined by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission under the law if that becomes necessary.

As I said yesterday in the House, when it comes to the impact of this and other factors on the tourism industry across Australia it is important for this government to engage in appropriate forms of further advertising Australia as a desirable international tourism destination. That is really important. I ask those opposite to reflect seriously on their campaign, ‘So Where the Bloody Hell Are You?’ In every place I have visited in the world, that campaign has been basically described as an absolute rolled gold disaster. I think those opposite should reflect on their expenditure of government funds on a campaign which did not yield a significant benefit to the Australian tourism industry.

Mr Morrison interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Cook is warned!

Mr RUDD—This government is now seeking to re-examine that because Australian tourism deserves better than that which the honourable member up the back there gave to us when she was minister for tourism. That campaign was a rolled gold disaster. I am talking about the research upon which this campaign was actually engaged. This is a major industry for Australia; it deserves considered and reasonable and substantial support from government over time. We will be doing that. As an interim measure we have done that in part in North Queensland, based on the interventions of the member for Leichhardt. There is still much more to be done.

Climate Change

Ms REA (2.27 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. Would the minister advise the House of the importance of efforts to reduce climate change emissions, including in relation to transport? Is the minister aware of any recent comments that run counter to the government’s position?

Mr ALBANESE—I thank the member for Bonner for her question. This government is indeed committed to tackling climate change. We regard climate change as the moral challenge for our generation. Climate change is a threat to our economic prosperity, and pretending there is not a problem or leaving it to future generations to solve is not an option. The transport sector, which contributes around 14 per cent of total greenhouse gas emissions, must be a part of any
climate change strategy. The government is currently working through the design aspects of the ETS. We will be releasing a green paper in July. For the ETS to be effective we know that it needs to have as broad a coverage as possible. Exempting or shielding sectors of the economy from the ETS will increase costs for the sectors which are included. The government is aiming to get the best results on climate whilst minimising pressures on working families and the risk to the economy.

What we know, not just from domestic reports but also from reports such as that done by Stern, is that the sooner you take action the lower the cost will be. Those opposite denied that climate change was a problem for 12 years. They opposed ratifying Kyoto. They opposed an ETS; they said it was just a tax and it should be opposed. But in the lead-up to last year’s election they had a change of heart. They tried to convince the Australian public that they were serious about climate change. The member for Wentworth’s own climate change policy released on behalf of the government of the day, which the Treasurer has outlined, said this about transport:

By bringing transport fuels into the Australian emissions trading system, consumers will be given ... greater incentive to improve the energy efficiency of their transport choices.

Economics 1A, and said by the member for Wentworth as part of their policy. We know from the Treasurer that today on Sky News the member for Wentworth said this in rejecting an ETS involving transport: ‘It was the Howard government’s policy’—as if it had nothing to do with him. But he actually went further. In the same interview he said the emissions-trading scheme was ‘part of our policy last year and it remains’—

Mr Tuckey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I refer to standing order 75. If this is a written speech I believe it comes under the heading of irrelevant and tedious repetition. They seem to be wanting—

The Speaker—Order! The member will resume his seat. He knows that standing order 75 does not apply, no matter what construct he places.

Mr Albanese—Today in the same interview the member for Wentworth said that the emissions-trading scheme was ‘part of our policy and it remains our policy today’. So here you have it: it does not matter that there has been no change in the threat to climate change; it just matters that there has been a change because now, instead of being the government, they are the opposition, so any principle just goes out the window. It does not matter if the member for Wentworth contradicts his colleagues. It does not matter if the member for Wentworth contradicts himself: last year—‘transport should be in’; this year—’it should not be in’. It does not even matter if he contradicts himself because this is the new Liberal Party. This is the Liberal Party that does not stand for anything. This is a party of ‘back to the future’: we are now back to the days when climate change does not need addressing. The only future that they are concerned about is the future of the Leader of the Opposition, which is why the Leader of the Opposition has to appeal to the dinosaurs on his back bench who have made him the leader and who are climate change sceptics. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to be taken seriously and if the shadow Treasurer wants to be taken seriously they should be supporting and acknowledging that market based mechanisms are the least-cost way of addressing climate change. That is why the government are addressing this issue. That is why we are taking action. That is why we will be introducing an emissions-trading scheme.
Economy

Mr DUTTON (2.33 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Finance and Deregulation. Following recent state budgets, state and territory debts will increase from $35 billion in 2007-08 to $112 billion in 2011-12. Minister, how will watching state governments going into debt to pay for recurrent expenditures not push up inflation and therefore not push up interest rates?

Mr TANNER—It is interesting that after we just heard the minister for infrastructure outline the amazing change of position on the part of the opposition after the election compared with their position on climate change prior to the election we are seeing something similar from the opposition with regard to the role of state governments in the nation’s economy. It is not that long ago that the member for Higgins was up here at this dispatch box as Treasurer lecturing the states about their alleged failure to invest in infrastructure.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I rise in a point of order. Is any member of the government going to answer a question that is asked, when it comes to relevance?

The SPEAKER—Order! The member will resume his seat. A point of order is not an invitation for just making comments off the top of one’s head. The minister is responding to the question.

Mr TANNER—It is not that long ago that the member for Higgins was standing at this dispatch box lecturing the states about their alleged failure to invest in infrastructure. What has happened in the ensuing time, of course, is that the states have made provision for substantial increases in their investment in infrastructure.

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Dickson has asked his question.

Mr TANNER—I would point out finally that the state budgets are in recurrent operating surpluses. We do not have any concerns about the operational positions of the states and the state budgets.

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Dickson has asked his question.

Mr TANNER—They are investing in the infrastructure, something that the former government failed to do for 12 years.

Mr Dutton—What about the inflationary pressure?

Mr TANNER—If you would like an observation about the inflationary significance of these issues—

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Dickson is warned!

Mr TANNER—If you would like some assistance on the question of the significance of these matters with respect to inflation, I would draw your attention to the fact that the Reserve Bank, over a period of three or four years, on no less than 20 occasions warned the former Howard government about the inadequate investment in infrastructure in Australia. It warned the former government that it was failing to provide for appropriate investment in infrastructure, thereby leading to serious capacity constraints, and with substantial increases in money coming into the Australian economy as a result of the mining boom this was generating serious, substantial inflationary pressures. Investing in infrastructure, whether it be by state governments or the national government, is crucial to the long-term economic future of this country. I applaud the state governments for picking up their responsibilities. This government is also picking up its responsibilities in investing in infrastructure after 12 years of complete neglect.
Mr NEUMANN (2.36 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Will the minister advise the House of Australia’s response and that of the international community to developments in Zimbabwe?

Mr STEPHEN SMITH—I thank the member for his question. Can I update the House on developments overnight and update the House following the report to the House yesterday by the Prime Minister. Members will of course be aware that Mr Tsvangirai has withdrawn from the second round presidential run-off ballot on the 27th of this month. The Australian government of course understands, respects and supports that decision. There was no prospect of a full, free and fair election. There was no prospect that in the unlikely event in those circumstances that Mr Tsvangirai would prevail. There was no prospect that the brutal Mugabe regime would respect the will of the people, and obviously the only prospect which Mr Tsvangirai saw was the continuation of the state-sponsored campaign of oppression and violence. Regrettably, overnight, obviously fearing for his own personal safety, Mr Tsvangirai has sought and been granted refuge in the Dutch embassy in Harare. We of course welcome the fact that the Netherlands has undertaken that role.

In a very bleak and grim picture there are some welcoming developments. The Australian government welcomes very much the statement overnight by the UN Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki-moon, and we welcome the consideration by the UN Security Council, this morning Australia time, and the statement released following consideration by the Security Council of Zimbabwe by the current President of the Security Council. It is worth while, I think, to quote from some of the Secretary-General’s remarks and also to quote from the statement released by the President of the Security Council. Overnight the Secretary-General referred to:

... the understandable decision of the Opposition candidate Morgan Tsvangirai to withdraw from the run-off election scheduled for this Friday ...

He continued:

... conditions do not exist for free and fair elections right now in Zimbabwe. There has been too much violence, too much intimidation.

The Secretary-General went on to refer to:

The campaign of threat and intimidation against the very spirit of democracy.

He further said:

... violence and intimidation must stop.

He also said:

The people of Zimbabwe have a right to live in peace and security, to enjoy the protections of the rule of law.

He indicated that, having been in close contact with a number of African leaders, his view was:

... the elections should be postponed until the right conditions are in place. I would strongly discourage the authorities from going ahead with the run-off on Friday.

The Australian government strongly agrees with that sentiment. I am sure all members of the House do.

Following a report by the UN Secretariat to the Security Council, this morning’s Canberra Times reported that the President of the Security Council released a very strong statement in respect of Zimbabwe. Again, I think it is worth while quoting it in part to the House. He said:

The Security Council condemns the campaign of violence against the political opposition ahead of the second round of the Presidential elections scheduled for 27 June ...

The Security Council further condemns the actions of the Government of Zimbabwe that have denied its political opponents the right to campaign freely, and calls upon the Government of Zimbabwe to stop the violence, to cease political
intimidation, to end the restrictions on the right of assembly and to release the political leaders who have been detained...

The Security Council regrets that the campaign of violence and the restrictions on the political opposition have made it impossible for a free and fair election to take place on 27 June...

The Security Council calls on the Zimbabwean authorities to cooperate fully with all efforts, including through the UN, aimed at finding a peaceful way forward, through dialogue between the parties...

The Australian government strongly supports the view that there is no point to a second round run-off on Friday of this week. The brutal Mugabe regime has no electoral or democratic legitimacy so far as Zimbabwe is concerned.

I also welcome, in the last 24 hours or so, much more robust statements and interest by the Southern African Development Community states and the African Union states. I very much welcome the very strong remarks by the President of the Southern African Development Community, the President of Zambia, President Mwanawasa, and I welcome very much the statements by the President of the African Union, the President of Tanzania, Mr Kikwete. I note that the Southern African Development Community foreign ministers met in Angola yesterday, and we very much await a readout of those reports. Can I say that the Australian government regard those statements as very welcome, very robust and, frankly, overdue. But we welcome them very much. There now appears to be a growing chorus from the African states that the campaign of intimidation in Zimbabwe has to cease.

The Australian government continues its diplomatic efforts. We strongly support the statements of the Secretary-General. We strongly support the statement by the Security Council. And yesterday I instructed our posts in Africa to discuss with their counter-parts in the Southern African Development Community states the plans by those member states in relation to Zimbabwe and to register Australia’s very strong view that Mr Mugabe had deprived himself of any legitimacy whatsoever, the need for a full, free and fair election in Zimbabwe and Australia’s ongoing support to ensure a political outcome in Zimbabwe which meets the will of the Zimbabwe people. I hope that the consideration of this matter before the Security Council leads to a turning point where Zimbabwe’s neighbouring African states take up the primary responsibility of ensuring that the brutal Mugabe regime stops its campaign of intimidation and violence and we have some prospects of the people of Zimbabwe expressing their will through a ballot and having that will respected.

**Dr NELSON** (Bradfield—Leader of the Opposition) (2.43 pm)—Mr Speaker, on indulgence, I strongly associate this side of the parliament with the remarks by the Minister for Foreign Affairs in relation to Zimbabwe and encourage and support the Australian government in doing everything it possibly can in a diplomatic and a multilateral way to see that this grave injustice in Zimbabwe is brought to an end. The time is approaching when the world needs to take an even greater interest in Zimbabwe than it has.

**Fuel Prices**

**Mr TURNBULL** (2.43 pm)—My question is addressed to the Treasurer. I refer to the Treasurer’s top 10 tips for shoppers, which are listed on his personal website, and to the Prime Minister’s answer to the Leader of the Opposition’s first question. Tip No. 8 states that shoppers should:

Ask store managers to match their competitor’s prices on particular products...

Will the Treasurer confirm that under the government’s proposed Fuelwatch scheme, once a petrol retailer has nominated their
price, it will be illegal for them to match a lower priced competitor, even if asked by a customer to do so?

Mr SWAN—I thank the honourable member for his question. The opposition can do nothing but sneer at average Australian families who do the shopping. They have a snobby disdain for the fact that people out there might be interested in where they can buy a special. That was absolutely on display in this House last week by the member for Curtin—the snobby disdain for the fact that I have had a price watch operating in my electorate since 1993. It is staffed by a band of loyal volunteers who have supplied information to people in my electorate who want that information and who have come to rely on it.

Mr Turnbull—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order to do with relevance. It is a very simple question.

The SPEAKER—The question made reference to the 10 tips.

Mr SWAN—Yes, I was asked about the local price watch activities of my team and my volunteers. I think the question demonstrates a lot about the mindset of those opposite. It was those opposite who only last year said working Australian families have never been better off. That is what they were saying last year. This year we have the so-called concern for cost-of-living pressures from fuel and from the supermarket. I know what they were saying last year about our activities when we were talking about the things that really mattered to Australian families—and the government are still talking about those things. We are putting in place policies to deal with them, but I will come to those in a moment. There seems to be a competition on the other side of the House. They are trying to outdo the former Prime Minister’s comment that working families had never been better off. We have had, since the election, the comment from the member for North Sydney that he did not know what was happening under Work Choices. Do you remember that? He had no idea that people’s wages and working conditions were being ripped away under Work Choices. Of course, we had, in the middle of last year, the comment by the former Treasurer that he had inflation right where he wanted it—

The SPEAKER—The Treasurer will relate his remarks to the question.

Mr SWAN—just at a time when inflation was building to a 16-year high. Of course, to top it off, the doozy of them all was the comment by the member for Wentworth in this House that when it came to inflation at a 16-year high—

The SPEAKER—The Treasurer will bring his answer to a close.

Mr SWAN—it was mission accomplished.

Mr Turnbull—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order to do with relevance.

The SPEAKER—The Treasurer will return to the subject matter of the question.

Mr SWAN—If the member for Wentworth spent less time in focus groups, less time in front of the mirror and more time with working families he would understand the importance of supporting our inflation fighting budget. That is what he would understand and he would be backing us in the Senate to push through the building of our surplus so that we can put downward pressure on inflation and do something fundamentally for working families.

Budget

Mr PERRETT (2.48 pm)—My question is also to the Treasurer. How will the benefits, which are to be delivered to households from 1 July to help with the rising cost of living, differ from those delivered in previous years?
Mr SWAN—Very simply, we are going to tip the scales in favour of working families—that happens from 1 July—because for the first time in a long time we are going to deliver tax cuts which go to low- and middle-income earners. That was something that could not be delivered by the previous government in 12 years. Not only are we going to deliver substantial tax cuts for low- and middle-income earners but we are going to deliver an education tax rebate. That is something the other side could never have delivered. We are going to deliver a 50 per cent childcare tax rebate, something that was never delivered by those on the other side of the parliament. We absolutely understand that families and seniors are under cost-of-living pressures and that is why from 1 July we will be delivering our tax cuts, our seniors bonuses and increases in the utilities allowances. We understand that they need support, and this government is delivering it.

Broadband

Mr BILLSON (2.50 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Does the Prime Minister stand by his election commitment to deliver a minimum 12-megabit broadband service to 98 per cent of Australian households and premises for between $8 billion and $10 billion?

Mr Rudd—Our commitment prior to the election was 12 megabits per second for 98 per cent of the country. We said we would be making an investment from the public resource in excess of $4 billion and we would do so in partnership with the private sector. We stand by that commitment; there is a competitive process underway. It is the right way ahead because we believe in investing in the future. As I said to this House yesterday, this government is not prepared to stand idly by while this country’s available bandwidth and speed languishes between the Slovak Republic and Slovenia. That is where those opposite left us; we intend to make a difference.

Budget Surplus

Mr ZAPPIA (2.51 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Finance and Deregulation. Will the minister outline to the House the importance of maintaining a strong budget surplus and is the minister aware of any obstacles to achieving a strong surplus?

Mr Tanner—Members will be aware of newspaper reports today on the outlook for Australian minerals and energy exports from a report from the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics which indicates an expected 50 per cent increase to $178 billion in export income for Australia in the 2008-09 year from minerals and energy exports. That is a huge increase in the amount of money coming into Australia through these exports projected for the forthcoming financial year.

That is great news for Australia. That money will flow through the Australian economy not just to the companies involved but to their shareholders and employees, to contractors and to small businesses—and it will gradually spread across much of the economy. That is good news for most Australians. It does, however, underline the importance of the ongoing battle against inflation and of the need to have a strong budget surplus and to put strong downward pressure on inflation. Typical demand driven inflation, of course, consists of too much money chasing too few goods and services. In an economy that is running at close to full capacity—as the Australian economy currently is—if you have such a substantial injection of additional funds into the economy without a matching increase in economic capacity, inevitably inflationary pressures build. The serious risk for our economy is that that will end in a wage and price spiral and that inflation will become embedded and therefore
you will end up with significantly higher interest rates.

It is, therefore, absolutely critical that as well as getting the benefits from this huge surge in our national income we have very strong anti-inflationary measures in place in order to ensure that it does not fuel inflation—that we get the benefits without the potential downsides of higher inflation and higher interest rates. That is why the government has put in place three key strategies in the budget in order to fight inflation. First, we have a very, very substantial surplus, much larger than was initially projected for the forthcoming year in the budget last year by the previous government. And, indeed, we are reducing the rate of growth in government spending from five per cent per annum down to one per cent per annum. Second, we have put in place three large long-term infrastructure investment funds—the Building Australia Fund, the Education Investment Fund and the Health and Hospitals Fund—to provide for the long-term investment in the nation’s economic capacity that will help us to grow in a sustainable way into the future. We have also put in place other initiatives designed to improve economic capacity, such as the increase in the childcare tax rebate to encourage greater participation in the workforce and, indeed, the education tax credit to encourage parents to invest in their kids’ education.

Third, as has been indicated by the Treasurer, we have put in place very substantial tax cuts that will also boost participation but that, primarily, will help to cushion the burden on individual taxpayers and their families from rising prices that we are endeavouring to deal with as part of that inflation threat that we have inherited from the former government.

The opposition’s reaction to the government’s budget strategy in dealing with what is a very serious inflation challenge has been spectacularly boneheaded. They have tried on every front imaginable to unravel the surplus—to erode that substantial surplus that the government has put in place as the bedrock of its efforts to put downward pressure on inflation—and they have tried to jeopardise the investment funds that we are putting in place to invest in economic capacity for the future. There has been something of a competition on the part of members of the opposition as to who can come up with the biggest or the best fuel excise policy. We have now got no fewer than five different fuel excise policies on the part of the opposition. Malcolm says nothing, Brendan says five—

The Speaker—Order! The minister will refer to members by their titles and bring his answer to a close.

Mr Tanner—Sorry, the member for Wentworth says nothing, the Leader of the Opposition says five, the member for Aston says 10—he is still out there promoting his policy—we have got the leader of the National Party promoting 20, and the member for Tangney has today got his own version that nobody can quite work out. That is typical of the member for Tangney—it is Triton or Mars or somewhere that he is inhabiting. The member for Tangney has got a policy position about the GST and the excise that nobody can quite work out, but it is number 5. It appears that there is hardly a member of the opposition who has not got their own personalised, customised fuel excise policy. There are undoubtedly going to be more to come.

We face a very serious inflation challenge in this nation. The government has a strong budget in position to deal with that challenge, with a strong surplus and long-term investment in the nation’s economic capacity to enable us to take the benefit of those huge...
additional funds flowing through our economy without fuelling inflation and very substantial tax cuts to ease the burden on working people, who are coping with higher prices as a result of those inflationary pressures. We are committed to delivering that budget. I would call on the opposition to get its act together, to get a single policy and a single position not just on petrol but on all other things—including what the budget position should be—to advocate that forcefully and to pass the budget.

Member for Robertson

Ms JULIE BISHOP (2.57 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Yesterday the Prime Minister said that neither he nor his office had anything to do with the statutory declarations relating to the Iguana affair made on 10 June, yet on 9 June—the day prior—in Japan, the Prime Minister confirmed that his office had been in contact with the member for Robertson. Exactly what advice did the Prime Minister’s office provide to the member for Robertson?

Mr RUDD—To state again clearly, no one in my office had any role in relation to initiating, approving, writing, instructing, participating in or disseminating any of the statutory declarations which are relevant to this matter. On the question of telephone contact between my office and the member for Robertson, it is normal that there be contact between the leader’s office and government members. That is, of itself, unremarkable. In relation to the press statement which, I think, is the subject of multiple questions—many of them wrongly based—on the part of the member for Curtin, my office advised me that they requested the member for Robertson to send to the office of the Prime Minister a copy of that statement, and I understand that that was done.

Infrastructure

Mr RIPOLL (2.58 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. Would the minister outline the need for a strong surplus in order to invest in local government infrastructure?

Mr ALBANESE—I thank the member for Oxley for his question. The Rudd government’s first budget was indeed centred on strengthening our economy by investing in national and local infrastructure. When it comes to local government funding, in the coming financial year the government will deliver $1.9 billion in financial assistance grants to Australia’s local governments. We will also provide $350 million in the coming year to local councils for the Roads to Recovery program, and our $512 million Housing Affordability Fund will provide grants mainly to local councils to fast-track housing approvals and to fund community infrastructure.

It was not surprising, therefore, that the Australian Local Government Association welcomed the budget and particularly the announced Building Australia Fund. The ALGA president, Paul Bell, said:

Local government welcomes this initiative as a sensible investment of budget surpluses that will stand Australia in good stead in the long term. The role of local councils in maintaining local water, road, building and community infrastructure certainly cannot be underestimated. For example, local councils are responsible for some 657,000 kilometres of road across Australia. Often it is local government that will control the last kilometre from the highway to the port. That is critical in terms of dealing with our infrastructure bottlenecks. That is why the government has put local government at the heart of its nation-building agenda.
We have to engage all three tiers of government as well as the private sector in cooperation. That is what we are doing with the creation of Infrastructure Australia. That is why we appointed a nominee of local government, Professor Peter Newman, to the advisory council of Infrastructure Australia. It will help guide allocations from the government’s $20 billion Building Australia Fund.

But, of course, that fund is only possible because of the surplus and the good economic management of the budget produced by the Treasurer. The opposition are threatening to blow a $22 billion hole in that surplus. Every dollar that is taken away from the surplus is a dollar less to build the long-term future and to deal with capacity constraints in the economy. The threats of those opposite in opposing the government’s budget measures are a direct threat to the nation-building agenda that this government has. I call upon the opposition to show some economic responsibility. It is not too late; the Senate is still sitting. It is not too late to ensure that there is a change of heart and to pass the government’s responsible budget.

**Member for Robertson**

**Mr PYNE (3.02 pm)**—My question is to the Attorney-General. When did the Attorney first become aware of the concerns of Ms Melissa Batten, a former staffer of the member for Robertson, regarding the preparation of a statutory declaration?

**Mr McCLELLAND**—I will set out the facts of this important matter. Yesterday, in light of matters in the public domain and following consultation with the Prime Minister, I sought advice from my department as to the appropriate course of action to pursue with respect to these matters. These matters, as members are aware, are the subject of investigation by the New South Wales Police. I will quote from the letter of advice I received from my department:

Under the arrangements which exist between the Commonwealth and the state of New South Wales, New South Wales Police are able to investigate and charge people with Commonwealth offences.

The advice continued:

Where New South Wales Police are already conducting an investigation, the usual practice for the Australian Federal Police, if the same events or circumstances are referred to it, is to liaise with the New South Wales Police to see if it can provide any assistance in relation to the investigation. This arrangement avoids unnecessary duplication of work and inconvenience to the people and witnesses involved in the investigation.

**Dr Nelson**—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. With respect to the Attorney, he was asked when he first became aware of the allegations.

**The SPEAKER**—The Attorney is addressing the question.

**Mr McCLELLAND**—I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for the point he made. As I said at the outset, in light of matters in the public domain, I am outlining for the benefit of the House the action I took. Obviously matters in the public domain over the weekend and indeed yesterday motivated the course of action that I have taken. I am outlining to the House the very important matter. I will continue to quote the advice from my department:

In these circumstances, I advise that an appropriate course of action for you to take at this stage would be to request the Australian Federal Police to contact the New South Wales Police to ascertain whether they would be assisted by the Australian Federal Police conducting an investigation as well.

I, in turn, acting on that advice, wrote to Commissioner Mick Keelty. In the concluding paragraph I said:
In light of the fact that the investigation and matters now in the public domain over the weekend and yesterday—

Mr Hockey—When?

Mr McCLELLAND—I again refer to matters now in the public domain and, for the benefit of members opposite and in response to the interjection from the member for North Sydney, I continue with the advice—

I would appreciate you considering liaising with the New South Wales Police Commissioner to confirm the extent of their investigation and whether those investigations would be assisted by an investigation conducted by the Australian Federal Police.

That communication occurred earlier today between Mick Keelty, the Australian Federal Police commissioner, and the New South Wales Police commissioner, Andrew Scipione, and they in turn issued a statement—

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I appreciate the level of detail the Attorney is providing, but he was asked when he first found out about the claims from Melissa Batten, and I would like that question answered.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Attorney-General is addressing the question.

Mr McCLELLAND—That communication issued today is material for honourable members in respect of this important matter. The advice from the New South Wales Police is that the commissioners have agreed that New South Wales Police will remain in charge of the investigation until its conclusion, which is expected to be in the near future.

That is the point I would draw to the attention of all honourable members. We have in this country complete operational independence of the Australian Federal Police force. That is confirmed by section 37 of the Australian Federal Police Act. We also have, significantly, a presumption of innocence. I have communicated to honourable members, and deliberately so, the extent of the investigation that is occurring and the fact that the New South Wales Police are investigating this matter.

Ms Julie Bishop—Don’t avoid it.

Mr McCLELLAND—in those circumstances, it is quite inappropriate, I say to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, to purport to have a trial by this parliament in circumstances where the matter is being investigated by the New South Wales Police. If I can provide advice to honourable members opposite, the appropriate course of action here is to let the professional police forces undertake their investigation without political interference.

Health

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (3.08 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. Will the minister outline to the House any new research on health care in Australia?

Ms ROXON—I would like to thank the member for Dobell for his question. I know with his background and the community’s interest that he has always taken a keen interest in healthcare matters. This morning I had the pleasure of launching Australia’s health 2008, the nation’s premier health report card compiled by the Institute of Health and Welfare. It is an authoritative report and I congratulate all of those involved in the mammoth task of researching, collecting and preparing it.

Based on the report, one fact is very clear, and that is that our health needs in this country are changing. GPs are increasingly working on chronic diseases as the burden of chronic diseases continues to increase exponentially. Each year there are 676,000 preventable hospitalisations.
all, this report shows that in the eight years from 1997 to 2005 the supply of primary care doctors like GPs fell by nine per cent across the country.

These facts lead me to a number of conclusions. First of all, we need to refocus our health system to deal with the new tsunami of chronic diseases that is currently washing over us. This reshaping of the health system must concentrate on the need to keep people well and out of hospital, taking pressure off our already strained hospital system. We of course need to better equip GPs to tackle chronic diseases, and as the shortage of GPs becomes a more significant problem and more families are turned away from GP surgeries, with individuals ending up in hospital instead because they cannot get front-line care, we must examine new ways to utilise our health workforce and we must also look at how we can relieve the burden of red tape on GPs.

These conclusions are based on the raw facts that are in the report, and it turns out that the community agrees with these facts. Members might be aware that the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission has been travelling around Australia in the last few weeks hearing from members of the public about their ideas on health. Dr Bennett, the chair of this commission, has provided some information about what these consultations have revealed, and some of the community views that she reports are resurfacing time and time again are about the need to keep people well and out of hospital, about placing a greater focus on prevention and about the desire for a one-stop shop where people can access a local GP as well as other health professionals. In other words, there is a great deal of crossover between what the facts are telling us we need and what the community is telling us they want.

It is this combination, expert evidence as well as grassroots testimony, that is driving our government’s health policy. It is why we are investing $275 million in GP superclinics, it is why we have established a national preventive health task force, it is why we are committed to developing the first ever primary healthcare strategy for this country and it is why this morning I spoke about the need for us to rethink the gatekeeper model of primary health care. To really improve our health system we need to make the best use of the skills and qualifications of all of our health professionals, be they GPs, nurses or allied health professionals. We on this side of the House want people to have more access to health care, not to lock them out of it. The evidence that an organisation like the Institute of Health and Welfare provides is vital in informing these debates, and once again I want to congratulate the many people at the institute for the very hard work involved in the production of this important report.

Member for Robertson

Dr NELSON (3.12 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, one week ago the New South Wales Premier stood down John Della Bosca as a minister for his role in the Iguana nightclub affair. Will the Prime Minister now stand down the member for Robertson as Chair of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications?

Mr RUDD—I would say this to all honourable members participating in this debate: these are most serious matters. Furthermore, that is why this government believes in due process. That is, furthermore, why this government believes in allowing an independent police investigation to proceed politically unmolested. Furthermore, I would ask those opposite to reflect on how they handled these circumstances only last year, when there was a police investigation underway into the
member for Moreton, the member for Bowman and the member for Bonner. What happened on that occasion was that the then member for Moreton used the platform of the parliament to launch a direct attack on the police who were conducting that investigation. That is not proper.

Furthermore, I would draw honourable member’s attention to this fact: there is an importance which should be attached to due process. We on this side of the House will adhere to due process proceeding. The honourable Attorney-General has outlined the processes concerning the police investigation. We will await the outcome of those investigations and we will act appropriately in response to the conclusion of those investigations. That is the right course of action. The wrong course of action was that which was sanctioned by those opposite when they used the platform of the parliament, I presume authorised by the Prime Minister of the day, to directly attack the Australian Federal Police in the midst of the conduct of an investigation.

For the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition, I would say this: the member for Robertson has advised the Leader of the House that she will not be chairing the House of Representatives standing committee while this process ensues and that she will be donating the allowance as chair of that committee to a local charity until such time as the investigations are concluded.

Council of Australian Governments

Mr GEORGANAS (3.14 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister outline the matters being considered by the Council of Australian Governments next week and what the traditional Commonwealth approach to COAG has been?

Mr RUDD—This government, as it embraces the challenges for the next six months of the year, is dealing with the underlying challenge of long-term tax reform. That is why we have commissioned the Henry commission of inquiry. Coming out of the 2020 Summit was a call for this nation, for the first time in a quarter of a century, to undertake a root and branch analysis of the tax system, the income support system and the retirement income system. This is a major item of economic reform. Secondly, we are also looking at the great economic reform task of business deregulation. That is the task in which the Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy is currently engaged; I referred to it yesterday in answer to a question in the House. Again the call from the 2020 Summit was: how in this place do we go about creating a seamless national economy, a seamless national market, as an important element of microeconomic reform?

Beyond that, we will also, in the next six months, be dealing with the great reform challenge that is climate change and in particular the emissions-trading scheme. This is a comprehensive piece of reform. It is complex. It involves not just our international negotiations through the Kyoto and post-Kyoto process; it involves the negotiation here, domestically, of an appropriate responsible emissions trading scheme for the future. That is the right course of action and we believe that is the responsible reform oriented course of action in which any properly-minded government of this country would proceed.

Beyond these areas of reform, there is another third basket of reform in which we are collectively engaged—that is, the reform of the federation itself. If there is one thing which we as members on this side of the House have heard from our constituents over a long period of time it is this: will you bring an end to the blame game between Canberra and the states? Will you bring an end to the blame game so that real progress can be
achieved in health, in hospitals, in schools, in universities, in our TAFE colleges, in vocational education and training, in water and in our management of the natural and national resources of our country and, furthermore, will you bring an end to the blame game when it comes to Indigenous affairs? Housing—the list goes on.

These are important matters which affect the daily lives of working Australians across our nation. You can either have an approach that it is best to preserve this old, tired, worn-out political script which says, ‘I don’t want to act on this nationally; it’s all too hard. Instead, I want to blame somebody else—a state government here, a territory government there or a local government there,’ or have the approach adopted by this government, which says, ‘Let us as a nation work together. Let us as a nation pull in the one direction. Let us as a nation act on the big challenges in health reform, in education reform, in climate change, in infrastructure, in business regulation, in competition reform, in housing and in Indigenous affairs.’ These reforms affect the lives of so many Australians.

That is the work program which we have established for the Council of Australian Governments. This Council of Australian Governments, in the course of a 12-month period, will be meeting on five occasions. We met within two weeks of the government forming office last year. We met again in March. There is a meeting coming up early in July. We will meet again in September-October and again in November. On the agenda we are dealing with the critical future of the Australian healthcare agreement. We are dealing also with the future of education, including vocational education and training. We are also dealing with critical decisions which will affect housing, homelessness and, on top of that, what we do with the future of Indigenous affairs.

This is an important area of incomplete microeconomic reform for the nation. I would say to those opposite that this is where the real action lies for so many Australians, waiting for governments at last to cooperate with each other and to address and deal with in a sustainable, long-term fashion these huge challenges facing our people, as opposed to simply playing short-term, opportunistic politics.

On the question of the construction of public finances, we have had this ramshackle system of payments between the Commonwealth and the states, between some 90 specific purpose payments, each with their own implementation machinery, each involving waste and duplication. Instead, this government is committed to the comprehensive reform of the payment system between Canberra and the states when it comes to the future of specific purpose payments.

There is a large program of reform to be undertaken through COAG. It affects the lives of working Australians. I would commend those opposite to, rather than permanently disappear down the sink hole of opportunistic politics which has a 12-hour news cycle, instead lift their eyes to the nation’s long-term needs, lift their eyes instead to the challenges on climate change, lift their eyes instead to the challenges on long-term tax reform, lift their eyes to the long-term challenges of microeconomic reform and lift their eyes to the challenge of fixing the federation.

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

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (3.20 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

The SPEAKER—Does the honourable member claim to have been misrepresented?
Mr MORRISON—Yes, I do.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr MORRISON—Today in question time, the Prime Minister reflected on my performance as managing director of Tourism Australia. I refer the Prime Minister to his statement of 24 February 2006—

The SPEAKER—The member for Cook will resume his seat. The Leader of the House.

Mr Albanese—This is not a personal explanation, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER—Order! I am listening carefully to what the member for Cook has to say. He has to indicate where he has personally been misrepresented.

Mr MORRISON—Thank you, Mr Speaker. On 24 February 2006, the Prime Minister, then—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Cook must go to where he has been misrepresented today in the statement by the Prime Minister.

Mr MORRISON—I make reference to the comments made by the Prime Minister today reflecting on my performance as managing director of Tourism Australia. When answering a question on the performance of the campaign, the member said at that time, ‘I think they’re great.’

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

MEMBER FOR PATERSON

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter—Minister for Defence) (3.22 pm)—On indulgence and for the benefit of the House, I seek to respond to the rather serious matter raised by the member for Paterson after question time yesterday, when he invited me to retract and indeed apologise for statements I made about amendments he made to a defence home ownership assistance bill earlier this month.

There will be no such retraction or apology. The member for Paterson has been quite mischievous.

Mr Baldwin—No, I haven’t!

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will be careful! The minister will resume his seat. The member for Paterson will resume his seat. I will give him an opportunity. The Minister for Defence will wrap up very quickly.

Mr FITZGIBBON—The amendment the member for Paterson referred to was a second reading amendment. The amendment the member for Paterson sought advice from the clerks on was a second reading amendment. He knows I was referring to his consideration in detail amendment, which he had intended to move—

Mr Baldwin interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Minister for Defence will resume his seat.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (3.23 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

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

Mr BALDWIN—Yes, most gravely.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed.

Mr BALDWIN—Mr Speaker, the member for Hunter, the Minister for Defence, is misleading the House. I was very clear—

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the House will resume his seat. The member will go directly to where he claims to have been misrepresented by the statement.

Mr Albanese—Mr Speaker, on a point of order, I ask that the member for Paterson withdraw that allegation or move a substantive motion.
The SPEAKER—Order! The member did not accuse the minister of deliberately misleading. The member will come very quickly to where he has been personally misrepresented.

Mr BALDWIN—The minister said that I put forward a motion which was not in compliance with the standing orders. That is not true. Yesterday, I tabled a statement from the Clerk—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member will resume his seat and the minister will resume his seat. This Hunter regional saga is closed—surely!

Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter—Minister for Defence) (3.25 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

The SPEAKER—Does the minister claim to have been misrepresented?

Mr FITZGIBBON—Yes, I certainly do.

The SPEAKER—Please proceed. The minister will come directly to where he has been personally misrepresented.

Mr FITZGIBBON—I will, Mr Speaker. I know that the member for Paterson proposed a consideration in detail amendment because he lobbied me to support it.

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister will resume his seat. The Hunter local papers can deal with this now. The member for Cook has the call, very briefly, on indulgence.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! Indulgence is in my hands, and it will be dealt with very quickly. The member was given guidance about his personal explanation, so I hope that we are not raking over those old coals.

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (3.25 pm)—I seek leave to table the statement of 24 February 2006.

Leave not granted.

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

Question Time

Mr HOCKEY (3.26 pm)—Mr Speaker, today in question time the Prime Minister said he did not support the ‘Where the bloody hell are you?’ advertisements. The member for Cook attempted a little while earlier to table Sunrise—

The SPEAKER—Order! The Leader of the House will resume his seat. What is the Manager of Opposition Business trying to establish?

Mr HOCKEY—I am asking a question of you, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER—Is this about the administration of parliamentary departments or procedure?

Mr HOCKEY—Mr Speaker, it is about procedure. The member for Cook attempted to table and then to clarify statements from 24 February 2006, when the now Prime Minister said that the advertisements were great.

Mr Tuckey interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for North Sydney will resume his seat. I would like to say to the member for O’Connor that, for the last hour and a half, I have listened to his running commentary on everything that has proceeded. I am tempted to arrange that he have one of the redundant soundproof barriers on the second floor above me, where he can rabbit on all he likes and it will not affect my blood pressure! But it is not my intention to answer questions about procedures. If members wish to raise points of order they can, but they cannot abuse the processes of the House to try to make points. I think that we have now had our fun. I could have brought this to a quicker end by calling for reports.
Auditor-General's Reports

Report No. 43 of 2007-08

The Speaker (3.28 pm)—I present the Auditor-General’s Audit report No. 43 of 2007-08 entitled Third tranche sale of Telstra shares: Department of Finance and Deregulation.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

Documents

Mr Albanese (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.24 pm)—Documents are tabled in accordance with the list circulated to honourable members earlier today. Details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings.

Ministerial Statements

Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation

Mr Crean (Hotham—Minister for Trade) (3.29 pm)—by leave—I have the pleasure to make a ministerial statement to update the House on developments with the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC) and particularly on an important meeting I attended on 31 May and 1 June—the APEC Ministers for Trade Meeting in Arequipa, Peru.

APEC is the premier forum for promoting trade and investment in the Asia-Pacific. Let us not forget, Mr Speaker, that the genesis of the APEC idea was the Australian Labor government under then Prime Minister Bob Hawke. APEC started right here, in Canberra, with a ministerial meeting in 1989. Reflecting the initiative of Prime Minister Keating, since 1993 APEC has also included an annual leaders-level meeting, which allows the leaders from around the region to hold informal discussions on important trade and economic developments as well as the broader set of regional and international issues. Importantly, APEC leaders have played a key role in responding to issues such as the Asian financial crisis, SARS, avian influenza, the Indian Ocean tsunami and North Korea.

The Rudd government will work to re-energise APEC because we are committed to it. We initiated it. We believe in it. We support it. We will continue to shape its thinking and its direction. We understand its strategic importance for prosecuting Australia’s interests as well as those of our regional partners.

The three areas of APEC’s focus—trade and investment liberalisation, business facilitation, and economic and technical cooperation—form the basis of its work and help APEC pursue the Bogor Goals of free and open trade and investment set out by APEC leaders in 1994. It was a commitment in 1994 that built off the Uruguay Round—a point I referred to yesterday.

APEC has also been instrumental not just in supporting the multilateral trade negotiations in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) but indeed in enhancing them. That is what the Bogor Declaration was—it was to say that we have not completed the argument with the Uruguay Round; we will use regional architecture to further enhance multilateral objectives in the region.

Whilst APEC did support efforts to bring the Uruguay Round to its conclusion in 1994 and continues to do that with Doha, in its day, when Labor was in office, we used it to enhance the WTO Round. We want to do that again in the expectation that we can conclude successfully the Doha Round. From the point of view again of Labor governments initiating the important reform agendas when it comes to trade and engaging the global community, it would be great to have an outcome with Doha that would bookend the two major multilateral negotiating efforts over the last two decades.

APEC is a leader in building a better environment for business and emphasises private...
sector participation in its activities. The APEC Business Advisory Council, which is a high-level permanent forum of regional business leaders, advises APEC leaders directly on private sector priorities and is a key part of APEC’s architecture.

Our membership of APEC expands our focus beyond the domestic market and provides tremendous opportunities to create jobs and income. Australian business has access to over 2.5 billion consumers and around 60 per cent of global income in 21 APEC member economies. These economies also purchase more than three-quarters of Australia’s exports. In 2007 Australia’s trade with APEC economies comprised almost 70 per cent of our total two-way trade. Eight of our top 10 export markets are APEC economies. So APEC does matter to this country.

By progressively reducing tariffs and other barriers to trade, APEC members’ economies have become more efficient and exports have expanded dramatically. APEC has been a driving force in the reduction of tariffs in the region from an average of 17 per cent in 1989 to around five per cent today. In the last decade APEC exports have more than doubled to nearly A$7 trillion, and APEC economies have generated 195 million new jobs.

APEC has also helped Australia’s neighbours in reducing poverty by a third in some APEC economies. Higher incomes have enabled people to have better access to safer drinking water and facilitated increased expenditure on health and education. These improving social indicators promote regional stability and generate more stable and larger markets for the goods and services Australia can provide.

The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics commodity forecasts released yesterday highlighted in clear terms that Australia continues to benefit from a resources boom of historic proportions. ABARE forecasts that Australia’s minerals and energy exports will grow from $120 billion in 2007-08 to $178 billion in 2008-09. Further price increases are expected for a range of Australian minerals, energy and farm exports. These figures highlight the challenge before us—to build Australia’s competitiveness and productivity in a way that sustains us beyond this resources boom.

Unlike the previous government, the Rudd government will not squander the opportunity provided by this resources boom. Rather, we will use it to shift the Australian economy onto a more sustainable, longer term footing. That means using our resources boom as a basis for building our services and investment performance. Services currently comprise 80 per cent of our economy but only about 20 per cent of exports—there is considerable room for improvement here and we need to strengthen our two-way investment flows.

On the investment front, the stock of direct investment abroad by Australian companies now stands at $318 billion. It is not far short of foreign direct investment into Australia of $357 billion. This underlines the importance of investment to the offshore strategies of Australian businesses. It also highlights the changing nature of trade. APEC has been working on these issues for many years and we want to build on this agenda. We need both pillars of the Rudd government’s trade policy to be fully deployed—bringing down trade barriers at the border, as well as important behind-the-border reforms to improve and sustain our international competitiveness.

With its successful work on trade facilitation over many years and recent agreement to extend this to investment facilitation, APEC has a central role to play in promoting reforms behind the border throughout the
Asia-Pacific region. APEC work on issues like customs facilitation, business mobility and regulatory reform can have a major impact on the costs of doing business in the region, and can have a major impact on productivity growth. APEC has recently agreed to accelerate several measures in its second Trade Facilitation Action Plan, which has as its goal reducing the transaction costs facing business in the region by a further five per cent by 2010.

Regional economic integration

I have spoken many times about the importance of open regional arrangements and the contribution they can make to increasing prosperity in the region and expanding job opportunities for Australians and opportunities for Australian exporters. APEC’s agenda for strengthening regional economic integration is designed to achieve this aim.

APEC’s future work on trade, investment and economic reform for the next few years will be guided by a report endorsed by leaders on Strengthening regional economic integration (REI) and reaffirmed by the Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Trade in Peru. This document contains some fifty agreed actions and recommendations aimed at giving a boost to APEC’s efforts to promote regional economic integration. The agreed actions include: continuing support for the multilateral trading system through strong commitments and concrete actions; an examination of the options and prospects for a Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP); strengthening APEC’s work to promote high-quality free trade agreements; strengthening APEC’s work on structural reform and reducing behind-the-border barriers; and intensifying efforts to strengthen and deepen financial markets.

Australia will engage actively and constructively in the APEC discussions on the scope for a free trade agreement covering the Asia-Pacific region. To support this work, Australia recently led an examination of the possibility of enlarging or merging regional trade agreements and free trade agreements to simplify the trade landscape. Australia will continue to strongly support APEC’s ongoing encouragement of high-quality, comprehensive free trade agreements among APEC members. I was pleased to be able to convey to my colleagues in Peru news of Australia’s high-quality FTA with our APEC partner Chile, which I hope will enter into force on 1 January 2009. FTAs of this quality will boost economic integration in the Asia-Pacific. Successful implementation of the APEC program for regional economic integration offers substantial scope for boosting the economic dynamism of the Asia-Pacific region even further. We will, of course, also be talking to our regional partners about closer economic integration in the region in the context of Prime Minister Rudd’s long-term vision for a new Asia Pacific community. This proposal once again shows Australia is looking to shape the regional architecture to 2020 and beyond, and is the next logical step in deepening the sense of community in our region.

Structural reform agenda

As I said earlier, getting our domestic policy settings right is a key component of what I call our twin pillars approach to trade policy. Getting our own house in order is vital, because there is no point fighting for improved market access opportunities if we as a nation are not competitive enough or productive enough to take advantage of those new opportunities. We need, above all, a trade policy that crosses traditional portfolio barriers and forms the basis of a genuine whole-of-government approach and one that acknowledges that investments and infrastructural improvements, for example, involve the states as well as Canberra. So as well as re-
quiring a whole-of-government approach, we need a whole-of-government approach.

Many behind-the-border or structural reform issues—such as decisions on investment, and infrastructure improvements, on skills development, on innovation—require extensive consultation with state and territory governments. So I was pleased to announce in March that the Rudd government will now coordinate our efforts within the framework of the new Ministerial Council on International Trade through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) process. The Rudd government is committed to working with the state and territory governments to restore Australia’s level of productivity and international competitiveness through better dialogue and cooperation on a broad range of trade-related issues.

Structural reform behind the border is a new and extremely important area of focus in APEC, particularly as barriers at the border continue to fall. These issues include regulatory reform, strengthening competition policy, improving governance, fighting corruption and enhancing trade and investment facilitation. To assist in this process, the Treasurer will host APEC’s first ministerial meeting on structural reform in August in Melbourne. This meeting will allow participants to share experiences with building a domestic constituency for structural reform, identify regional priorities and inject greater direction into APEC’s work on these issues. The meeting will be a key milestone to set the direction of, and build further momentum on, behind-the-border issues within APEC. With my colleague the Treasurer I look forward to working with our counterparts to further enhance APEC’s work program in this area.

**APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC)**

The Rudd government is also committed to strengthening APEC’s links with business and ensuring it continues to play a leading role in the region. As much as trade negotiations involve government-to-government exchanges, it is critical, if we are to develop this improved competitiveness and productivity, that we also strengthen the business-to-government relationship.

The APEC Business Advisory Council, otherwise referred to as ABAC, is a group of 63 leading businesspeople, comprising three business representatives from each of the 21 APEC economies. ABAC meets four times a year and it plays a key role in ensuring APEC reflects business priorities. Recently the Prime Minister appointed two highly respected members of the Australian business community—Mr Lindsay Fox, AC and Mr John Denton—to serve on Australia’s APEC Business Advisory Council.

Mr Fox is a leader in the transport and logistics sector in Australia and throughout the region. Mr Denton is Chair of the Business Council of Australia’s Trade and International Relations Task Force as well as being CEO of the legal firm Corrs Chambers Westgarth. Mr Fox and Mr Denton join Mr Mark Johnson, the former Deputy Chairman of Macquarie Bank and Chairman of AGL, who remains as chair of our ABAC group. Australia’s three ABAC representatives have already been active in formulating business advice to APEC and I look forward to working with them in driving APEC’s agenda.

**Other Priorities to Strengthen APEC**

Member economies are pursuing a number of other priorities to strengthen APEC. Institutional reform of APEC is continuing—notably a 30 per cent increase in membership contributions, the establishment of a policy support unit to boost the APEC secretariat’s analytical capacity, and a proposal to appoint a fixed-term executive director to provide greater continuity and leadership.
In addition APEC’s human security agenda also continues to expand, with new initiatives on counterterrorism, food security, cleaner energy and energy efficiency, health initiatives and emergency preparedness. Prime Minister Rudd and Indonesia’s President Yudhoyono recently agreed to take to this year’s APEC leaders meeting a joint proposal on better coordination of regional disaster response work.

APEC should fully reflect regional economic influence. That is why the Rudd government is a strong supporter of India’s membership of APEC at the end of the moratorium. This was a point referred to by the Minister for Foreign Affairs yesterday, when he was hosting Foreign Minister Mukherjee from India. Personally I have been a long-time and strong proponent of India’s membership and I will continue to be a strong advocate for India’s inclusion in the APEC forum.

**Conclusion**

The Rudd government is committed to strengthening APEC to ensure that we can best capitalise on the opportunities that will arise in the Asia-Pacific century. We need to tackle head-on the policy challenge represented by the changing nature of international trade. We need to recognise the enormous opportunities that we have in the Asia-Pacific region. APEC provides us with the mechanism to pursue these objectives.

To help shape APEC’s forward agenda, I am working closely with Peru, this year’s chair, along with future hosts Singapore, Japan and the United States, to ensure that we achieve an ambitious, cohesive approach to APEC’s ongoing work in this the first term of the Rudd Labor government. Australia has much to gain from supporting and strengthening APEC and working with our Asia-Pacific neighbours to further liberalise trade and investment in our region. I look forward to working with other members of APEC to this end.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)**—The Minister for Trade may like to move a motion to allow the member for Groom to speak.

**Mr CREAN**—by leave—I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Mr Macfarlane speaking for a period not exceeding 19 minutes.

Question agreed to.

**Mr IAN MACFARLANE** (Groom) (3.49 pm)—I am delighted that the Minister for Trade has seen fit to fill in the Australian public on the outcome of his latest international trip, even if it is more than three weeks after the event. I am sure it has nothing to do with the fact that the Labor Party are having trouble filling the time in the House this week and are looking at all sorts of padding to take up time!

**Mr Crean interjecting**—

**Mr IAN MACFARLANE**—I will certainly not be speaking for 20 minutes about nothing.

**Mr Crean**—You never have.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)**—Order! The Minister for Trade will cease interjecting and will sit in silence. The member for Groom gave him silence.

**Mr IAN MACFARLANE**—I will not be wasting the House’s time to present a ministerial statement which contains absolutely nothing. The ministerial statement contained a great little history lesson on the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum but not much else. It is the usual from the Minister for Trade: a history lesson about what the Labor Party does, never acknowledging—unlike when we were in government—what its predecessors had done. We certainly acknowledged the work that Bob Hawke did, when he was Prime Minister, in establishing
APEC. We acknowledged the fact that it was a Labor government who initially set APEC on its course. We supported that. We are of course interested in what that past Prime Minister and his successor both think of the APEC alternative put up by the current Prime Minister, and I will come to that later.

I would have thought that, in a ministerial statement to the House six months into his term—and getting on to seven months—the Minister for Trade would actually be able to say something substantial other than just giving us a history lesson, firing a few political barbs—

Mr Crean—You have not done much in the last 12 years, I tell you. You dropped the ball.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The Minister for Trade will desist interjecting.

Mr IAN MACFARLANE—I am happy to interject in the minister’s speeches if that is the way he wants to do it. I pay him the courtesy—I always do—of not interjecting through his speeches, boring though they are.

In terms of the opportunities that APEC provides to create jobs and create income in Australia, I support the minister’s words. You would not know it from his speech, but Australia did host APEC last year. Those of us who were fortunate enough to be ministers were involved in that process and we do understand how APEC works; we do not need a 20-minute lecture from him about it. I acknowledge that what he says is true and I acknowledge what he says about the importance of reducing tariffs. I also acknowledge what he says about services being an important area where we need to do more. All of those things are supported by this side of the House. I further acknowledge that productivity growth is something that every government aspires to.

We are in a time when trade is going to be important. We are in a situation where we are never sure what is going on in the trade portfolio in government. We know the minister was unable to stand up for the exporters of Australia during the budget process. He was only able to gain a one-off allocation in terms of his much-vaunted EMDG scheme. We know that, at the same time, he lost ground in terms of negotiation ability because the budgets for the FTA negotiations with China and Japan were cut. We know that he merged two government departments to try to have Austrade do the job of those two departments but with 100 fewer people. No matter how much he blusters and speaks at the box there is no way he can convince me that with 100 fewer people you can do the same job.

Letting major budget cuts undermine Australia’s exporting programs and our support agency leaves plenty of time in the minister’s diary to contemplate ministerial statements at this box, and I would have thought there would have been more content in what he said.

Mr Crean—As opposed to what we are hearing now.

Mr IAN MACFARLANE—I am happy to sit on that side of the chamber and do something about trade, unlike those who sit there and talk about doing something on trade or about having a review into doing something about trade.

We on this side of the House are committed to APEC. When in government rather than just talk about that commitment our government preferred to let our actions and achievements within APEC speak for themselves. The trade minister talks about recent developments within APEC but, again, with glaring omissions—anything that the previous government did is omitted. Anything previous governments achieve is expunged from history. The government having spent so much time during question time today
highlighting the importance of taking measures to lower emissions, I would have thought the minister would have at least mentioned the Sydney declaration, which was a major achievement of APEC last year, and a truly historic international consensus on the challenges related to that issue.

The member for Hotham’s greatest achievement in trade should not be reading out a list of trade liberalisation goals of APEC. He should actually be out there doing something about it. He should actually have evidence that his actions will further trade liberalisation in the region. It is almost as if the trade minister hopes that if he studies the rules hard enough and long enough and regurgitates some statistics often enough he might overcome the fact that there is little happening in trade policy on that side of the chamber — apart, of course, from a review. You can go anywhere in government at the moment and find a review. In fact, you would probably find 10 or 20 or 30 or 40. In fact, there are over 100. I would like to see, in what are deemed to be his ministerial statements, something substantial in the next one.

We all know that he comes from a government that is renowned for frenzied, one-off announcements as the government approaches a 24-hour media cycle. Things these days are either in that 24-hour media cycle or they are in 2020. There seems to be nothing in between. I was interested that again today we got absolutely no more detail on what the Prime Minister had announced, completely out of the blue, with regard to the Asia-Pacific union. I have been fascinated listening to some of the ambassadors around the hill here who say, ‘The Prime Minister made this announcement; none of us knew anything about it. We thought we had better ring up and see what issues there are and what is planned.’ Their inquiries to the Prime Minister’s office have been fruitless — in fact, less than fruitless. It was a waste of the cost of a telephone call.

Today, in anticipation that this ministerial statement that we had been asked to come and listen to had something of substance, I thought, ‘Well, it’s two weeks down the track, let’s be honest, let’s be open, let’s listen.’ I sat at the doors when the Prime Minister announced it; at face value it was a step in the right direction. But there was nothing. We got a history lesson on APEC. We got the usual jumble of bilateral this week, multilateral next week and whatever is the flavour of the day depending on the location. Still there is nothing on the Asia-Pacific union. I wait patiently.

I know this all came as a surprise to a lot of people, including, I understand, Richard Woolcott, who found out about the proposal literally hours before the Prime Minister revealed his grand vision. There are trading partners who are important to Australia, and certainly I welcome their involvement and interest in trade policy in Australia. There is the Indian community, who have been out here. They had heard nothing about it either and they still do not know any more about it.

I mentioned earlier that we have been treated to a bit of insight from previous prime ministers about what they think about it. Both previous prime ministers Bob Hawke and Paul Keating basically said it was flawed. I guess they know something about it. I know those opposite never give credit to anything that our side of politics has done but I assume that they have some respect for their own prime ministers, and their own prime ministers’ comments were that they thought the concept of an Asia-Pacific union was flawed. We can only speculate about what black hole of Labor policy ideas this grand scheme has fallen into. We await with interest what thought bubble pops out of the Prime Minister’s head next on this. We wait — perhaps maybe the review will come
out and put some meat on the bones of the Asia-Pacific union.

The trade minister says the Rudd Labor government is committed to the principles that underpin APEC. But again it seems words are favoured over actions as the evidence shows this commitment is shaping up as little more than lip service. Again, the Rudd Labor government is not living up to these principles. The trade minister talks about furthering trade liberalisation by bringing down the barriers to trade at the border, but at the same time the government seems determined to undercut the possibilities of bilateral free trade agreements, as I mentioned earlier, by cutting the budgets for the negotiations on FTAs with both China and Japan.

As for living up to the goals of APEC by removing behind-the-border barriers, the Rudd Labor government seems to have done the reverse and, instead, is intent on creating a new barrier behind the border by appointing pro-tariff former Labor premier Steve Bracks as the head of the automotive review. This issue will create a real credibility problem for Australia if a decision is made to retain tariffs. That is something that every minister has to make a decision on, and the best way to have some international credibility when you do that is to have a credible process. They have no credible process. They dispensed with the Productivity Commission—they did not want them involved; they did not want a rigorous process. They put a previous Labor premier in charge of the process and then bolstered the committee with a few union hacks to make sure that they got the answer they wanted. Well, whatever answer they want, they are in government and they have to sell it internationally as well as to the Australian people. If they are trying to be credible in this trade arena they do have to have some consistency and some substance to what they do. They have been found wanting in that regard.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I can assure you I was paying attention to the minister’s history lesson—that was only to see whether or not he was correct. I must admit I did not learn anything new. One of the features that stuck in my mind was the minister’s declaration of the Labor government’s strong support for APEC’s ongoing encouragement of comprehensive free trade agreements with APEC nations. The reason I found this statement so remarkable is that it is a marked divergence from what the trade minister has been proclaiming far and wide about Doha being his main priority, in fact at times his only priority—and in the process has downgraded the value of bilateral agreements. Either the government has seen the error of its ways and is now ready to follow the example of the previous, coalition government and adopt a comprehensive trade policy that gives strong support for both bilateral and multilateral agreements, or it is fudging the facts on its commitment to APEC principles. As for working on trade facilitation and encouraging investment, it seems strange that this government thinks the best way to do so is to merge trade facilitation bodies like Invest Australia and Austrade while slashing the staff numbers and budgets.

Earlier today I discussed the issue of engagement with Asia at the Asialink leaders forum and outlined the way in which the coalition had engaged extensively with Asian trading partners on a comprehensive basis. Those opposite do not want to acknowledge this but, in fact, the Howard government’s record on this is held in very high regard in the Asia-Pacific region. Mr Howard was a Prime Minister who looked for the opportunities when they presented themselves in order to further the trade and therefore the economic opportunities for Australia but, at the same time, to ensure that the process was
mutually beneficial. On that basis, with the countries that our trade relationship grew with and that our diplomatic relationship grew with, we were able to do that in a mutually beneficial way. The trade minister spoke after me at the leaders forum but unfortunately I had a very important meeting I had to come back here for because I would have been interested to hear what he had to say. Apart from that, I was not invited to the lunch! But I will get some reports on that, and I hope what he had to say had more substance and interest than the 20-minute diatribe we have just had here. And I would like to know whether or not today is a bilateral trade day or a multilateral trade day, because it does vary depending on the audience and the place. I am always open to some insights. We did not get one today but, as I said, I am a patient man; I will wait.

Mr Crean—Don’t think it will do you much good!

Mr IAN MACFARLANE—I think everyone can benefit from a little knowledge. We did not get anything today from the Minister for Trade that would tell us anything we did not know last year or the year before—although, as I said, we did get some interesting aspects on trade from previous prime ministers over the last few weeks. The trade minister’s course on trade 101 is obviously directed at his own frontbench colleagues because I think a lot of Asia-Pacific members have lost interest after the Prime Minister’s sudden announcement and no follow-up. I hope that the trade minister’s next statement will show a true commitment to trade liberalisation and actually show ways to consolidate and enhance market opportunities for Australian exporters. We do, after six months, need something of substance from the trade minister. We do actually need something more than a review. And we do need to know that at some point the Labor Party as the government of the day is going to move forward with a trade policy that will benefit the exporters of Australia.

Drought

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (4.05 pm)—by leave—Labor governments have a proud history of improving Australia’s agriculture policy to support our farmers and underpin economic growth. Under the Hawke and Keating Labor governments, significant agriculture policy reforms were introduced, many of which have enjoyed bipartisan support over the years including:

- Establishing the Rural Research and Development Corporations.
- Creating Landcare, an internationally acclaimed partnership between farmers and the environmental movement.
- And, of course, introducing ‘exceptional circumstances’ policy to help farmers and their families in times of extreme drought.

Labor has consistently faced the challenges of rural policy reform. That has continued under the Rudd government with the introduction of the Caring for our Country and Australia’s Farming Future programs and again yesterday when the Wheat Export Marketing Bill was passed in this House. The government recognises, however, that there is now more work to do.

The farm community now widely acknowledges that climate change is the greatest challenge facing rural Australia. Climate change is the greatest challenge facing rural Australia. It is a major challenge for rural communities, farm businesses and policymakers, particularly in the area of drought policy.

Labor has long recognised that, despite the best efforts of farmers to prepare for periods of low rainfall, severe droughts have a serious impact on the livelihood of rural Australia. Labor’s early drought policy reforms
recognised for the first time a key principle that has since been supported by all sides of politics—that is, despite farmers’ efforts to prepare for drought, no-one could have predicted the severity of the drought we are now facing. Indeed, that is what is meant when we refer to ‘exceptional circumstances’.

Exceptional circumstances policy was underpinned by a number of key principles including:

- encouraging primary producers and other sections of rural Australia to adopt self-reliant approaches to managing climate variability;
- maintaining and protecting Australia’s agricultural and environmental resource base during periods of climate stress; and
- helping agricultural industries return quickly to levels of production which are sustainable in the long term.

To deliver these objectives, early drought policy was based on a number of key elements including:

- exceptional circumstances (EC) declared areas to define those areas in need;
- EC business assistance grants and interest rate subsidies to help farmers sustain their livelihoods in times of drought;
- financial planning programs for farmers and rural communities;
- drought relief payments to help families struggling due to drought; and
- the Income Equalisation Deposit Scheme, a precursor to the Farm Management Deposit Scheme, to help the benefits of the good years stretch into drought years.

In opposition, Labor gave broad support to changes to drought assistance introduced under the previous government. It is now widely acknowledged that the current drought has been significantly worse than when EC was originally conceived in 1992. The early drought policy was initially based on a model of a one in 20 to 25 year event. For example, at the time, it was not envisaged that a situation would arise when irrigators were unable to access water, as is currently the case. Furthermore, it was never conceived that some areas of the country would be in drought for eight consecutive years, as is the case in some parts of Australia today.

These facts have raised questions in the minds of all Australians, including rural Australians, about the link between climate change and drought. The band of climate variation is shifting. In recent years, these questions have been confirmed by a growing body of credible science. Recently, both CSIRO and the Australian Bureau of Meteorology have explicitly recognised the link between the current drought and human induced climate change. Against this background, the government believes that it is time for Australia’s farming community and rural policy makers to reconsider the meaning of EC for the future. By undertaking reform to drought policy now, we can help farmers to adapt and respond to climate change, as well as develop closer links between the objectives of drought policy and the challenges of climate change.

There is now an urgent need to start planning for a future likely to be characterised by:

- reduced water availability;
- increased frequency of extreme weather events such as flooding, drought and cyclones;
- increased frequency and intensity of fire;
- altered distribution and survival of pests, weeds and disease; and
- increased risk of heat stress for intensively housed animals.
That is why the government has announced a major review of drought policy. There are a number of critical areas where it is clear there is a need for new thinking in relation to drought policy. For example, it is now clear that climate change means we will need to re-examine the early model of a one in 20 to 25 year drought. Despite all the different views about the pace of climate change, there is agreement on one thing. I do not think anyone believes that, when this drought breaks, we will be waiting 25 years for the next one. If we change nothing, farmers in the future will miss out when the one in 20 to 25 year test is applied.

Another area of concern that many farmers have raised with me is the issue of lines on a map. This is one of the critical elements of early drought policy which the government believes needs careful consideration. With the benefit of time and experience, both sides of the House would probably now agree that creating distinct geographical regions within which a drought event is declared has its own challenges and difficulties. During my travels across the nation over the past six months, many farmers have made it clear to me that the lines on the map are unable to distinguish accurately those farmers in need. The current system allows neighbouring farms with identical needs to see one farm receiving assistance while the neighbouring farm receives nothing. We can do better.

It is now clear, with the benefit of hindsight, that this model needs closer examination. There is certainly widespread support from the farm community about the need to review drought policy. As the President of the National Farmers Federation, Mr David Crombie, has said, and I quote:

While the Government must continue to address the ‘here and now’ of drought through Exceptional Circumstances as the first priority, equally, we must cast an eye to the future.

That demands a new cooperative partnership between government and farmers to invest and work together to better drought-proof Australia and, ultimately, shift the policy focus from ‘drought relief’ to ‘drought management and preparedness’. That is why, on 19 June, after extensive consultation with my state colleagues, I was pleased to publicly release the terms of reference for three separate investigations which form the national review of drought policy. I table the terms of reference for those reviews.

The three parts of the reviews are:

- firstly, a climatic assessment by the Bureau of Meteorology and the CSIRO;
- secondly, an assessment of the social impacts of drought by an expert panel; and
- thirdly, an economic assessment by the Productivity Commission.

The assessment being conducted by the Bureau of Meteorology and the CSIRO will provide underpinning evidence on the effect of climate change on the nature and frequency of exceptional climatic events. This scientific assessment will comment on the appropriateness of the current one in 20 to 25 year exceptional circumstances event trigger, based on the historical record, and will identify information needs and areas that require more detailed assessments. I expect to receive the Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO report in the next month.

I recently announced the members of the expert panel to conduct an assessment of the social impacts of drought, which will be chaired by Peter Kenny, who is a cattle producer from Queensland and is President of Agforce Queensland and board member of the National Farmers Federation.

Other members of the panel include:
Sabina Knight, an academic and expert in remote area health;

Mal Peters, principal of a family farming enterprise in northern NSW, board member of the Australian Farm Institute and a former President of NSW Farmers Association;

Professor Daniela Stehlik, Foundation Chair in Stronger Communities at the Curtin University of Technology;

Barry Wakelin, the former member for the electorate of Grey, and a former Chairman of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs;

Sue West, the chair of Anglicare Western NSW and a former senator; and

Lesley Young, National President, Country Women’s Association of Australia, who is also a mixed farming operator in Tasmania and a former Chairman, Rural Financial Counselling Service Tasmania.

The panel will visit rural communities to hear first-hand how the drought has affected them.

The work done by the Productivity Commission will look into the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of current Commonwealth, state and territory government drought business and income support measures. It will also examine the most appropriate measures to build self-reliance and preparedness to manage drought. As part of the inquiry the commission will release a paper on the issues surrounding drought and that its impacts are considered. The commission will provide the government with a final report by the end of February next year.

These assessments, taken together, are a crucial step forward in the government’s efforts to ensure drought policy meets the future needs of our farmers in a changing climate. The Rudd government is determined to support our farmers to build even more competitive, productive agricultural industries. The drought policy review will complement other initiatives such as the $130 million Australia’s Farming Future package, which will increase on-farm preparedness, boost research and provide more professional advice and training to primary producers.

I want to stress that the Productivity Commission’s inquiry and the expert social panel’s assessment include comprehensive public consultation processes. The government does not have a predetermined outcome in mind except that the overriding policy objective of the government is to better prepare farmers for climate change. It is important to reiterate that the review will not affect anyone receiving assistance in a current EC declared area. This review is about preparing for the next drought.

Equally important to note is that the National Rural Advisory Council’s reviews of expiring EC declarations are not related to the review of drought policy and will proceed independently. The membership of NRAC remains the same as under the previous government and their assessment and recommendation tasks remain the same as under the previous government.

The government also recognises that some farmers coming out of EC drought declarations still require further income support. That is why, on budget night, the government announced a new program—the transitional income support program. TIS has been intro-
duced to assist farm families who are in serious financial difficulty or who are recovering from drought, while they adapt to changing circumstances, including climate change. TIS is not a replacement for EC relief payments. The program is available to farmers coming out of EC declarations who still may find it difficult to put food on the table. It is also available to any farmer in any area who is in serious financial difficulty.

TIS has eligibility tests in line with other social security income support payments to ensure that those seeking financial assistance from the taxpayer must first draw on their own reserves. Farmers will need to meet a liquid assets test and farm business net assets test which has been benchmarked with other social security payments and set in line with the net assets level of low-income farmers.

Transitional income support will be available for up to 12 months from 16 June 2008 until 30 June 2009. Any assistance after that date with respect to TIS will be considered in context of the drought policy review. Transitional income support will have a climate change focus and strengthened eligibility criteria, and farmers will be obliged to take action to achieve self-reliance. Rural financial counsellors will assist farmers to plan for the future and take action to improve their long-term financial position.

The Rudd Labor government is helping farmers prepare for the future, a future in which the greatest challenge they will face is the challenge of climate change. The Australian climate has always been challenging for people working the land, and Australia’s farmers have proven to be adept at responding to our harsh climate. I believe Australian farmers can and will adapt to the challenge of climate change. The Australian government stands ready to assist them with this challenge.
have happened ever since modern history has been recorded. The reality is, therefore, that we need to take advantage of the good times to help us through the bad—a philosophy that enjoys, I think, a high level of bipartisan support.

Many believe this particular drought to be the worst in recorded history. It is certainly the worst in modern history and the worst since Australia has had a sophisticated farming sector. Just before the last federal election, around three-quarters of the farm area of Australia was declared to be in exceptional drought circumstances. One hundred per cent of New South Wales and South Australia were so declared, and more than 25,000 farm families were receiving assistance, at that stage, in a program that had by then already cost over $2 billion—way beyond what has ever been spent on drought assistance in the past. That number is undoubtedly continuing to rise, because many people are still receiving assistance. There has been good rain in some parts, and that has been good to see, but there are still many, many areas where the situation is quite desperate, and it is hard to see that farmers in those circumstances can look forward to normal seasons in the short to the medium term. I welcome the announcement by the minister a fortnight or so ago about extensions of many of the areas that were expiring on 15 June. As I said to him previously, that announcement was too late—a delay which gave people unnecessary concern. Of particular concern was the fact that Centrelink was contacting people to tell them they were going off assistance when in fact many of them did not in the end go off assistance. That demonstrates what can go wrong when these announcements are delayed.

The first two or three pages of the minister’s statement included a fair dose of political propaganda, no doubt written in party headquarters. I am always amused at the way in which Labor ministers rewrite history to take credit for the good things that have happened in history, whether they were there or whether they were not. I notice that the Hawke and Keating governments, in the minister’s statement, are given credit for establishing rural research and development corporations, for creating Landcare and for introducing exceptional circumstances policy. I think that many people would highly dispute such a version of history. True, the Hawke and Keating governments played a role, but some of those things were in place long before the Hawke and Keating governments, and certainly there had been assistance for drought going back a long, long way before those governments. Indeed, the Keating government had to be dragged kicking and screaming to provide the exceptional circumstances drought package at that time, and even then what was provided—though generous by Commonwealth standards at that time—was well below what people now expect.

Of course, the states originally provided drought assistance but, sadly, they have walked away from their responsibilities in that regard. Some of the real challenges that the previous government faced were in getting sufficient cooperation from the states to make the process work. I was particularly pleased to note the rapid turnaround by the states when the minister, a couple of weeks ago, asked them to redraw boundaries. When this process first started and I went to the states and asked them to redraw boundaries, they said, ‘No, we are not going to redraw boundaries.’ We had to take the political flak for knocking back people who were perhaps entitled and, therefore, we were being asked to approve areas which simply did not meet the criteria just so we could pick up a few people who could have been fixed if there had been some willingness to redraw the boundaries in a sympathetic way. Some of
the ice has thawed over the years, particularly as we have progressively let the states off their share of the responsibility. They have been a bit more cooperative, but I do think that it is unfortunate that the states are not bearing a bigger cooperative load in meeting the needs of those farmers and of people in the community who have to face the problems of drought.

The minister then went on to comment about some of the great things that the new Rudd government has done, such as the new Caring for our Country program which, of course, cut $1 billion off the assistance for environmental programs around the nation. Then there are the Australia’s Farming Future programs, which have taken $100 million off the programs provided by the previous government to assist farmers. And then yesterday the Wheat Export Marketing Bill was passed in this House. Not everyone considers that to have been one of the great reforms of the modern era, and I note that the Prime Minister, when he was Leader of the Opposition, wrote to scores of Australian farmers before the last election—

Mr Hartsuyker—Not scores.

Mr TRUSS—Hundreds, was it? He wrote to them and said that Labor supports the single desk. He then went on to argue conclusively why the single desk should stay and how it was delivering enormous benefits to farmers. But, of course, when he gets into government, as Labor has done in every state, the single desk goes out the door quite quickly. That is why farmers are a bit suspicious when they hear the minister say that the Rudd Labor government commits to helping drought affected farmers in the future. If that promise was written by the same pen that made the promises about single-desk marketing, you can understand why many people have doubts about the reliability of that promise.

The minister then went on to outline the elements of the proposed review into exceptional circumstances support. There are three elements of that review, as he said. Firstly, there is an examination of issues associated with climate—and I note that he has asked the Bureau of Meteorology and the CSIRO to undertake that review. It is interesting, as a side point, that the government in the last budget slashed $60 million from the funding of the CSIRO and $5 million from the Bureau of Meteorology; so they may not be in the best of moods when it comes to responding to the government’s request to assess climate issues of this nature. I note that the cuts to the CSIRO in particular have led to another round of cuts to country based research facilities. I think it is deplorable that there are these kinds of budget cuts and that the CSIRO is now moving so far away from its original direction in supporting research in agricultural areas.

Then there is the assessment of social impacts, led by a committee of people who, without exception, have good experience in rural and regional areas. I am sure that they will provide an interesting social dimension to the activities.

The third part of the assessment, which worries me the most, is the referral to the Productivity Commission of measures associated with supporting farmers and communities through drought times. This is really putting the blowtorch to exceptional circumstances assistance. We all know the record of the Productivity Commission. It is very economically dry and I cannot recall a recent time when it has actually recommended assistance, particularly to a farm based industry. I was personally appalled at its recommendations in the pig industry inquiry, which we commissioned, which were delivered to the minister shortly after the change of government. Here is an industry in desperate trouble and the Productivity Commission...
came back saying: ‘Things are fine. They don’t need any help.’ If that is a reflection of the mood and attitude that it is going to take into this inquiry, I think farmers have a sound reason to be concerned.

I know that even the Labor Party in government choose which particular industries shall be subject to the venom of the Productivity Commission. When it came to a review of the car industry, they were not game to let the Productivity Commission loose. The Productivity Commission demonstrated clearly why they were not trusted with the review into the motor industry when they made it abundantly clear that they thought that all assistance for the motor industry should cease forthwith and that it was a waste of taxpayers’ money. So I have concerns about the approach that the Productivity Commission will take to this review. I do not have a problem with thorough, proper and scientific analysis, but I am afraid that the Productivity Commission take a predetermined position into many of these inquiries, and most industries that have been subjected to a Productivity Commission review do not feel at the end of that review that they have had a fair go. I ask the minister to consider very carefully whether the Productivity Commission is the right body to be undertaking a review of this nature and to also take into account in assessing the findings the Productivity Commission’s history and attitude towards these sorts of reviews.

The member for Maranoa, who was in here a little while ago, has brought to my attention some issues associated with the new transitional income support program. Let me say that, in principle, I think it is a pretty good idea to provide some kind of interim support for people who have lost their declaration to help them move towards a more normal income stream. It is confirmed in the minister’s statement—and the examples in the field are already coming through—that the criteria for this transitional income support program are different to the criteria that applied to the income support during times of drought assistance. It seems that many, if not most, farmers will not qualify for this new program. I notice that the budget for it is quite small, so the government has an expectation that not a lot of farmers will actually qualify for this program. I think we all need—and I particularly counsel those who are advocating the merits of this proposal—to alert farmers to the fact that only a small number of them will actually qualify for this program. I appreciate that it is likely to be the most needy, but nonetheless those who think that their income support is just going to continue for another year may find themselves mistaken because many will not qualify for this particular measure.

In relation to the review, as I said, the opposition believes that it is quite appropriate to undertake a thorough review, particularly now this program has been going for quite some time and has used more than $2 billion of taxpayers’ funding. If there is to be a food supply crisis, as we hear about in the press from time to time, this will be a particularly high priority because we do need to make sure that our industry is capable of providing food and fibre in good years and in bad to meet not only the needs of Australians but also our obligation to supply food and fibre to other parts of the world. It is an important part of our export income, but we are relied upon also by other countries.

The minister particularly made reference to the issue of the problems of people living just outside a declared EC area—the so-called ‘lines on maps’ issue. We sought to mitigate those problems by allowing buffer zones, and I think that worked well. But then eventually you get to a stage where there is a line on the buffer zone as well. However, the idea of moving to a needs based assessment
from a geographical assessment also has problems. The previous government considered it and we would have done it if we thought we could make it work. The problem is that most farmers do not have sufficient records to be able to establish on their own property that they meet the one in 25 years test. They have never been obliged to keep rainfall records and farms change hands, so this may well be a problematic area also. If an individual farmer facing serious difficulties because of drought has to go through a complicated assessment process and fill out hundreds of pages of forms, that places additional stress on them at a time when they do not need that stress. Therefore, the geographical assessment also has some merit. I am not saying it is perfect—it clearly is not—but I think we need to look very closely at whether that should be tossed out, because it had some benefits too.

There will be a lot of key issues to be considered in the review. I appreciate that the minister is going into this with a constructive attitude, and he can be assured that the opposition will also be constructive. (Time expired)

Small Business

Dr EMERSON (Rankin—Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy and Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation) (4.36 pm)—by leave—In supporting small business and the enterprise economy, the Rudd government believes in reward for effort, risk-taking and entrepreneurship. We believe in restoring incentive for small business owners to create jobs and prosperity.

Inflation is the No. 1 enemy of small business. It increases small business costs and it is a precursor to higher interest rates. Small business prospers in a low-inflationary, strongly growing economy. Remember, the independent inflation-targeting Reserve Bank’s charter is to keep annual inflation within the band of one to three per cent. Yet since 2002 the Reserve Bank has felt obliged to raise interest rates 12 times. Such is the Reserve Bank’s verdict on the previous coalition government’s performance in controlling inflation.

At the time of the change of government in November 2007, Australia had the second-highest official interest rates in the developed world. The coalition rejects any link between inflation and interest rates, describing inflation as a ‘charade’ and a ‘fairytale’. The Rudd government does not subscribe to the coalition’s fairytale economics where, the more you spend, the more you have to spend. In its most recent Economic Roundup, Treasury likens the free spending of the previous coalition government with that of the Whitlam government. The coalition government was never interested in investing in the nation’s future through skills development or investing in infrastructure. Instead, it tried to buy its way back into office. In 2002, the previous coalition government spent around $450 million on community grants. By 2007 it was spending $4.5 billion on grants. That is a 10-fold increase in five years.

Having inherited an inflation rate at 16-year highs, the first task of the Rudd government for small business has been to bring inflation under control. The Rudd government’s first budget reins in government spending. This has been tough, but as responsible economic managers we had no choice. In the coming financial year, Commonwealth budget spending is estimated to constitute less than 24 per cent of GDP—down sharply from an average of just under 25 per cent so far this decade. The budget cuts real spending growth from five per cent to just one per cent. The government’s fiscally responsible budget is helping to put downward pressure on inflation.
In developing our specific policies for small business, we have asked ourselves: what is the role of government in an open, competitive economy? We see that role as being to remove impediments to small business success and to improve the capacity of small business to operate successfully and to compete. The success of small businesses is built on the creativity, ingenuity, innovation and imagination of their owners and staff. The Rudd government is determined to restore incentive for small business through reforms to the tax system by allowing small business operators to keep more of their earnings. The budget made a down payment on both tax relief and tax reform. Small business operators will receive up to $50 per week in tax cuts next financial year and up to $91 a week the following year.

The government supports the desire of small business for a simpler tax system that cuts compliance costs. Small businesses incorporate for a variety of reasons and, once incorporated, they are subject to all the complexities of tax laws that apply to large corporations. To reduce the compliance burden on small- and medium-sized companies, the Institute of Chartered Accountants and Deloitte have developed a proposal for an entity flow-through tax regime for small companies with five or fewer shareholders and for unit trusts. Under these proposals, ownership arrangements would be set to one side for income tax purposes. Instead, the entity would be treated like a partnership with owners taxed at their marginal rates. This proposal could operate as an option for small companies and unit trusts wanting to reduce the compliance costs associated with understanding and accounting for different types of financial flows from the entity to its owners. The government has decided to refer the proposal to the review of Australia’s future tax system headed by Treasury secretary Ken Henry.

The GST remains a major compliance burden for small business. In the MYOB survey of the red-tape compliance burden, more than two-thirds of respondents ranked BAS reporting among their top three red-tape burdens. In April 2007, I released a paper on the BAS Easy option for reducing the GST paperwork burden on small business. It was welcomed by the Council of Small Business of Australia as ‘a simple and practical answer to the current BAS red tape’. BAS Easy will be considered by the Board of Taxation as part of its review of the legal framework for the administration of the GST.

Tax is not the only impediment to small business success. Small business is being choked by red tape that has been hung around its neck by the sloth of the previous coalition government. The Business Council of Australia has lamented the ‘creeping re-regulation of business’ as an example of ‘how the benefits of past reform can be quietly eroded over time’. In government, the coalition re-regulated the economy, reversing many of the deregulatory reforms of the previous Labor government. Way back in 1996, the previous government committed to cutting red tape by 50 per cent in its first parliamentary term. Towards that end, it commissioned a report from the late Charlie Bell, then CEO of McDonald’s. The report, Time for business, made a raft of recommendations to lift the red-tape burden from the shoulders of small business. It was a good report. Yet in 2006, a full decade later, the coalition government commissioned a new report, this time from a task force chaired by the Productivity Commission chairman, Gary Banks. Many of the recommendations of the Banks report are identical to those of the Bell report of a decade earlier. Yet the coalition government showed an intense lack of interest in reducing the red-tape burden on small business.
In the 21st century Australia can no longer operate as nine markets with overlapping and inconsistent regulation. The creation of a single, seamless national market, as called for by the Business Council of Australia and the 2020 Summit, is essential to restarting productivity growth and paving the way to increased prosperity. By reforming business regulation, the Rudd government, in cooperation with the states and territories, is dismantling productivity-stifling barriers to businesses operating seamlessly across state and territory boundaries. Through the Council of Australian Governments, we have identified 27 areas of regulatory reform designed to reinvigorate productivity growth. This is a far-reaching and necessary program which will benefit both large and small businesses.

In the Commonwealth’s own house, the budget provided $16 million over three years to establish a superannuation clearing-house facility—delivering on another election commitment. This free service to small businesses will cut the compliance costs associated with making superannuation guarantee payments under the super choice regime. The superannuation clearing house is scheduled to start on 1 July 2009. These are some of the impediments to small business success that the Rudd government is intent on removing. But governments can do more for small businesses. Governments can and should improve the capacity of small businesses to thrive and prosper.

Labor had been warning of an emerging skills crisis as far back as in 1999. Small businesses know, and the Rudd government knows, that there is a shortage of skilled and even unskilled staff. The Rudd government has made an additional 20,000 training places available in April to start the work needed to ease the skills shortage. We have provided $1.9 billion to deliver an extra 630,000 skilled training places over five years. And over the next 10 years $2.5 billion will be devoted to establishing trade training centres in secondary schools. We will also increase the intake of skilled migrants by 30,000 places this year alone.

Small business competitiveness in the 21st century will depend heavily on wise investment by governments in infrastructure, including broadband infrastructure. That is why the Rudd government has created a $20 billion Building Australia Fund to be overseen by Infrastructure Australia. At a small business forum convened by the Council of Small Business of Australia ahead of its recent national conference, the clearest message to me was the underutilisation by small businesses of the latest information technology. Small business owners simply do not have the time to become experts in information technology. Yet there are potentially huge benefits to small business in adopting and adapting the latest information technologies.

Governments can help. The Rudd government will roll out a high-speed national broadband network. Yet again in question time yesterday the coalition, now in opposition, criticised our high-speed broadband rollout. The opposition seems stuck in the 20th century; Labor is investing in 21st century technology for small businesses. We are building small business capacity in other ways too. The Rudd government is keeping its election promise by providing $42 million over four years to provide ongoing funding for 36 one-stop business advisory services in suburban, rural and regional Australia. This funding commitment means that small business owners will not have to go from place to place to obtain legal, tax, accounting and marketing advice.

Sadly, just last week, in debate on the budget, the coalition criticised Labor’s policy of supporting business enterprise centres. I suppose I should not be surprised since the
coalition provided no ongoing funding for business enterprise centres, but I am disappointed, since the criticism tells us all that, if the coalition were elected to government, it would not look kindly on continuing support for our business enterprise centres.

A further contribution of the Rudd Labor government to enhancing the capacity of small businesses to compete is our amendments to the Trade Practices Act. The Rudd government’s amendments are designed to stop powerful businesses from engaging in predatory pricing in their dealings with small business. These reforms clarify the test for predatory pricing and what it means for a business to ‘take advantage’ of its market power. Victims of predatory pricing will not need to prove that the powerful business in question has the ability to recoup losses after sustained below-cost pricing. These are just some of the Rudd government’s policies for supporting small business. There are others: government procurement policies to bring small businesses onto the competitive field in bidding for government contracts, penalties for late payment of small business invoices by Commonwealth agencies, support for independent contractors—the list goes on.

In closing, I want to acknowledge the contribution to policy development of the Council of Small Business of Australia through its president, Bob Stanton, and its chief executive, Tony Steven. I am sure we will not always agree, but I do know this: Bob, Tony and the board and membership of COSBOA will never relent in representing the interests of small business. That is as it should be and it is as the government wants it.

The Rudd government is supporting small business. We are increasing incentives and rewarding effort, risk-taking and entrepreneurship through tax relief for small business operators and through tax reform. We are cutting the red tape that has been strangling small business initiative and innovation. We are providing critical skills training places and increasing the intake of skilled migrants. And we are promoting competition.

May small businesses in Australia thrive and prosper, freed of government impediments to do what they do best—create prosperity for themselves and their families and jobs for almost four million other working Australians.

I seek leave of the House to move a motion in relation to the debate.

Leave granted.

Dr Emerson—I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Mr Ciobo speaking for a period not exceeding 13 minutes.

Question agreed to.

Mr Ciobo (Moncrieff) (4.49 pm)—How remarkable that the Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy commences his ministerial statement outlining what the Rudd government believes when it comes to small business because, as we know, what the Rudd government does and what the Rudd government claims to believe in are two remarkably different things. The minister said that inflation is the No. 1 enemy of small business. Obviously, it has been a while since the minister got out there and talked to small businesses on the ground, because small businesses are saying that the Rudd Labor government is enemy No. 1. Why is that the case? Because in the first Rudd Labor budget nearly $1 billion of support for small business was axed. Why is the Rudd Labor government enemy No. 1? Because Rudd Labor also whacked Australia’s small businesses with hundreds of millions of dollars of new taxes. Why is Rudd Labor enemy No. 1 for small business? Because Labor’s Treasurer cannot handle the economic chal-
challenges of the day. Finally, why does small business view Rudd Labor as enemy No. 1? Because Rudd Labor is promising the return of unfair dismissal laws, ‘go away money’ and a three-strikes warning system.

Contrast Labor’s first six months to the achievements of the coalition when it was in government. Over the 11 years we were in government, the coalition put the government back into the black. We eliminated $96 billion of Labor government debt, started saving for the future and restored Australia’s AAA credit rating. The minister stated the Rudd government’s first budget was focused on reining in government spending. As is typically the case with Labor, it is important to look at what they do rather than believe what they say. Spending has gone up by $3 billion in this current financial year and by $14.9 billion over the forward estimates. I do not know of any small businesses that would consider that outcome a reining in of government spending. Labor say they will rein in spending, but when you look at what they do you see that it is the opposite. The Rudd Labor government have increased spending. It is an old-fashioned Labor budget.

Similarly, I doubt small businesses care much for the Treasurer’s resolve to talk down the Australian economy. If Labor truly believed inflation was the No. 1 enemy of small business, would the Treasurer really be spruiking to the world that inflation in Australia was out of control? Small business people across the country looked on in horror when, the day before the Reserve Bank met, the Treasurer held that extraordinary press conference—and we recall it—where he said:

The inflation genie is out of the bottle.

In contrast, the strong economy the coalition fostered under the stewardship of the former Treasurer and member for Higgins provided Australia’s small businesses with actual confidence to invest in their businesses, to take risk and to deliver more jobs to working Australians—of whom there will be fewer under the Rudd Labor government, according to their first budget—who deserve better. The Labor government are certainly on target to meet their goal of slashing 134,000 jobs for ordinary working Australians; indeed, they may even exceed it. ABS figures released earlier this month show there were 19,700 fewer Australians in employment in May this year than in April this year.

But a strong economy was not the coalition’s only achievement. The coalition reduced the company tax rate from 36 per cent to 30 per cent. The coalition reduced personal income tax rates in its last five federal budgets, leading to consumers having more money in their pockets to spend in Australia’s small businesses. All of these tax reform initiatives put more money in the pockets of Australia’s small business men and women. I am pleased to see that the minister has become a latter-day convert on tax reform, but I doubt small businesses are giving the government much credit for copying the coalition’s tax cuts. Australia’s small businesses were paying attention when Labor opposed virtually every one of the key economic reforms that the coalition put forward over its time in office—coalition reforms that resulted in Australia being a much stronger, more prosperous nation in 2007 than it was when we came to office after 13 years of Labor mismanagement.

The minister neglected to mention in his speech that the Rudd Labor government actually increased taxes for some small business owners by, for example, adjusting the entrepreneurs tax offset which, under the coalition government, provided an offset of up to 25 per cent to help small businesses with an annual turnover of less than $75,000. The small business community was completely gutted after the Rudd Labor govern-
ment’s first budget axed nearly $1 billion of small business assistance programs. This included $700 million for the Commercial Ready program, which supported commercialisation and innovation in Australia’s small businesses. So much for Labor’s belief in Australia’s small business sector.

On industrial relations, the coalition encouraged cooperation in the workplace, which resulted in nine of the 10 most harmonious years, in terms of working days lost per 1,000 employees, in Australia’s entire history. Labor did not waste any time turning this coalition achievement on its head. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures released earlier this month reveal that 42,800 working days were lost due to industrial disputation in the March quarter of 2008. Yet only 49,700 working days were lost through industrial disputation for the whole of 2007. So in the first quarter of the Rudd Labor government nearly as many working days were lost due to industrial disputes as in an entire year under the previous coalition government.

The coalition was finally able to give small business greater confidence to employ people following the removal of Labor’s job-destroying unfair dismissal laws. The coalition attempted to pass these laws 42 times, and Labor rejected them every single time. These laws were only able to be passed when the coalition gained a majority in both houses.

The minister has a very special history when it comes to unfair dismissal laws. As Labor’s former shadow minister for workplace relations, the minister made it a personal vendetta to oppose the coalition’s unfair dismissal laws. At a doorstep interview on 12 August 2003, the now minister, speaking about the then Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and the fair dismissal bill, said: Labor will not cop his thuggery. I said when I got this portfolio that whenever Tony Abbott brings legislation into the Parliament … we will oppose it. And we opposed it last night, successfully.

So much for Labor’s belief in mandates. Labor believe in mandates when it suits them. But when the coalition had a mandate, which was confirmed by the Australian people on three separate occasions, Labor blocked it, Labor blocked it and Labor blocked it. Little wonder, then, that Labor’s Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy has proposed the reintroduction of Paul Keating’s job-destroying unfair dismissal laws, which will cripple Australia’s small business sector. But this time they come with added red tape—Labor’s mooted but as yet undetailed ‘fair dismissal code’. It is no wonder the minister is already being referred to as the ‘minister for smaller business’. I agree with the minister that the Council of Small Business of Australia will never relent in representing the interests of small business. Indeed, the minister would be well served to revisit the comments made by the President of COSBOA, Bob Stanton, in June 2006:

The continual resolve of the Labor Party to block exemptions for small business on unfair dismissal ... only indicates to us that their position is politically motivated with no regard for small business. The many small businesses I have been meeting with around the country tell me that the lack of regard for small business is alive and well in the Rudd Labor government. I would also draw the minister’s attention to the comments made by the CEO of COSBOA, Tony Steven, in April of last year:

We want to maintain the unfair dismissal exemption and, if an extended probationary period is the Labor Party’s answer, that is not good enough.

The minister says the Rudd Labor government will roll out a high-speed national broadband network that will be of assistance to the small business sector. But at what
cost? In another example of where the Rudd Labor government says it will do one thing and then does another, there are legitimate fears that Australia’s small businesses across the country will be forced to pay substantially higher prices for broadband services. Adding to the price fears are the wild variations in costings that we see surrounding Labor’s proposal. First, Labor said the network would cost $8 billion, and then they said it could be $10 billion. Yet just six months away from Labor’s promised construction start date, key industry figures are lining up against the government. Telstra says the government’s plan will cost $15 billion and Pipe Networks say it could be $20 billion or more. Does the minister really believe that small businesses want $4.7 billion of their taxes squandered on a badly costed proposal to provide subsidies where the private sector is already investing or prepared to invest in commercially viable infrastructure?

The coalition also introduced the Building Entrepreneurship in Small Business program. This program provided training and mentoring in business skills through 65 small business field officers who helped small business access information and get advice, along with funding for providers of skills development, mentoring and succession planning. It was the same skill set, the same advice that the minister just spoke about that was available to the business enterprise centres. The entire program was funded at an annual cost of some $10.3 million. Yet, in some bizarre twist in their new-found alleged economic conservatism, Labor saw fit to scrap this program and replace it with 36 business enterprise centres at an annual cost of $10.5 million. So we have the coalition’s former program of 65 small business assistance contacts at $10.3 million or Labor’s new program of only 36 small business assistance contacts at $10.5 million. The minister said that these contacts will be in suburban, rural and regional Australia. Yet, by reducing the contact points from 65 to 36, the Rudd Labor government has abandoned small businesses in rural and regional Australia. Take, for example, small businesses in Cairns, which were previously serviced by a small business field officer. They are now faced with a round trip of more than nine hours to their closest business enterprise centre. The locations of the BECs the government has chosen to fund are another example of the Rudd Labor government saying one thing and doing another. It is little wonder small business confidence in the Rudd Labor government’s policies has plummeted.

In February, the first Sensis business index after the election of the Rudd government showed the biggest fall recorded in the history of the index in terms of the attitude to federal government policies. And Labor backed it up again in the second index, with the May index showing that the confidence of small business in the policies of the Rudd Labor government has now collapsed by a massive 53 percentage points. Did the index reveal that small businesses thought inflation was the No. 1 enemy of small business? No, it did not. According to the Sensis business index, Australia’s small businesses have lost confidence in the Rudd Labor government because they believe the Rudd Labor government does not offer incentives to small business. They believe the policies of the Rudd Labor government will work against their business interests, and they believe the policies of the Rudd Labor government only favour larger businesses and firms in certain industries. The minister says the role of the Rudd Labor government is to remove impediments to small business success. Well, I am not sure if the Prime Minister would agree with the minister by calling an early election, because Australia’s small businesses say the Rudd Labor government is the
impediment to small business success in this country. *(Time expired)*

**MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

**Climate Change**

The **DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. KJ Andrews)**—The Speaker has received letters from the honourable member for New England and the honourable member for Dunkley proposing that definite matters of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion today. As required by standing order 46(d) the Speaker has selected the matter which, in his opinion, is the most urgent and important; that is, that proposed by the honourable member for New England, namely:

The need for the Government to recognise the role that agriculture can play in addressing the issue of climate change.

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—*

Mr **WINDSOR** (New England) *(5.03 pm)—* May I first thank members from both sides of this chamber. This is one of the first MPIs I have seen where both sides have supported the issue, and I hope that this will be reflected in the broader nature of the issue of climate change. I have the view that agriculture can make a contribution in terms of some of the difficulties we may face in the future but that an emissions-trading scheme will need bipartisan support for it to be successful. I do not mean that as criticism of the opposition or of the government; I think there is an onus on all of us to give way where we can to try to reach a consensus. If we end up with a politicised debate on an emissions-trading scheme, where short-term advantage is taken and we lose sight of the longer term advantages that could be achieved, we will do the Australian public a great disservice. I am encouraged that all members have risen today to support a matter of public importance discussion on climate change and the role that agriculture can play. Hopefully, the government, in particular, will pick up on some of the issues.

The issues I would like to raise, if I could, relate particularly to the current debate that is encapsulated by climate change but also to agriculture, drought—and I was pleased to listen to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the shadow minister talking about drought policy and some of the initiatives being taken there—the production of food, the potential production of fuel, where we are going to gain our energy sources from in the future and what sort of carbon footprint or other footprint will be incurred by some of those activities. Overly-ing that is the whole debate on climate change, which a lot of people encapsulate in terms of carbon emissions. But it is not only about carbon emissions; it is also about nitrous oxide, methane and other greenhouse warming impacts.

I would like to use an example of what is happening with agriculture at the moment. I use the Walgett wheat grower as an example—and some members may have heard part of this story before. Currently, the Walgett wheat grower and other wheat growers—and the minister has seen some of these people—have made a massive adaptation to climate change in some of their cropping systems. The existence of no-till farming in some of the better farming areas, for instance, has effectively produced about 150 to 200 millimetres of moisture available for the cropping cycle. In my own area—and, I know, in the Darling Downs, where the member for Groom comes from—there have been record sorghum crops this year, essentially based on that technology, in what has been a very dry time.
The capacity for farmers to adapt to some of the climate change characteristics is enormous and has been shown in the past, but there is a need for government to participate in the future in encouraging those people, whether through drought policy or other policies such as emissions-trading schemes or land stewardship payments. There are a whole range of initiatives that are potentially out there to assist in driving agriculture in a more positive direction. The minister would have seen some of the perennial pasture techniques that are out there now, where there have been quite massive gains in humus and organic matter in the soil and the impact those techniques have on the moisture infiltration and productivity of those pastures. The no-till cropping system that I mentioned a moment ago also has an impact—the potential to drought-proof those particular farms. There are also advantages that accrue in the build-up of soil carbon. As I am sure most members know, humus and organic matter in the soil profile is stored carbon; it is sequestered carbon. There is some debate about measurement and whether you can enter carbon trades based on the current measurement systems, but there is no debate that humus and organic matter can be accumulated in soils. That is the major issue that I would like to talk to today.

The Walgett wheat grower has a no-till farming system that has come in in the last 20 years, so his potential, the non-disturbance of his soil, the capacity to reduce wind and water erosion, the capacity to get more moisture into the soil when it does rain and the capacity to store that soil moisture have all been massive adaptations to climate change and should be shown as examples, particularly in other dryland farming areas of the world, particularly Africa. The Walgett wheat grower will have a carbon footprint on his property, reduced because he does not cultivate his land anymore, and by not cultivating he is not releasing some of the available soil carbon into the atmosphere. He is making a positive contribution in that sense. He will have another carbon footprint from getting his wheat from the Walgett silo, via a train hopefully—there has been some discussion about that into the future—to the port of Newcastle, which is a distance of about 500 kilometres. The grain will have another carbon footprint when it leaves our shores and heads for, say, the Middle East. On board that ship will be another carbon footprint, based on the carbon held in the starch of the grain.

We send it over there only because we produce 80 per cent too much. Some would suggest that we have a moral obligation to feed the world. I would just like to assure people that Australia in a good year produces 1.75 per cent of the world’s grain. We do not have the capacity to feed the world. We are a small player when it comes to grain. That is in a good year. The Sudan, on the other hand—100 million acres of Walgett style country with Walgett style rainfall, at war and with a starving population—has the capacity to produce six times that which Australia produces in a good year. It could produce 10 per cent of the world’s grain. We are doing essentially nothing, or very little, to assist those people to provide their own food stock. One of the arguments that I put to those people who raise this ‘food versus fuel’ argument is: have a look at how we can help these people feed themselves rather than sending boatloads of carbon all over the world and then expecting the First World to pay for those carbon footprints.

So the boat arrives in Egypt and we take the money from that, and then we move down to another part of the Middle East and we buy another boatload of oil and we bring it back. It will have a carbon footprint across the ocean. It will get to Newcastle without another one. It will not go by train because
that does not happen anymore, so the biggest carbon footprint will occur as it goes out by truck. It will have another carbon footprint on a whole range of activities along the way. The Walgett wheat grower will go around again and produce surplus grain, and the cycle repeats itself.

What is all that going to mean in an emissions-trading system? I do not know the answer to that, but I think it is important that the role of agriculture in that sense is incorporated in any emissions-trading system. Even though it may not be brought in in the first blush, it really has to be factored at some stage into the negative and positive contributions that it would make. There are a number of things that could happen to the Walgett wheat grower. He may decide to grow fuel instead of food, to convert starch in his grain into biofuel—the member for Kennedy has been very involved in some of these initiatives as well—where the by-product is distillers grain, which is a high-protein residue that can be used as a food stock, mainly fed to livestock in feedlots. He may use another process, called anaerobic digestion, which produces biogas, electricity and nitrogen. So, with the anaerobic digestion process, in a sense—and this is happening in Canada and other parts of the world—you can have a semiclosed system. As part of that process—and in Canada they are doing this at this very moment—the carbon dioxide that is emitted from those plants is being re-injected into a hothouse environment to grow vegetables at a quicker rate. So this argument that it is just food versus fuel is a nonsense. There can be a whole range of positives.

The other positive that accrues from the things that I have discussed is the fact that there is a positive carbon impact not only in removing some of the transport shifts—and transport and fuel will have to be in it—but also through the production of a renewable fuel, such as ethanol and biodiesel, which should have a positive impact, particularly under those techniques of no-tillage farming. But the other policy initiative that has to be considered is that there may well be a further step—it relates to land-use policy, it relates to drought again and it relates to nitrogen use and a whole range of other things. If the Walgett farmer decides to change his land use to growing a perennial crop rather than an annual crop—they are starting to do this in the United States through the use of switchgrass, which was the original prairie grass across the United States before they ploughed it up to grow corn—then a number of things will happen. The potential to grow more fuel from that particular plant is much greater than from grain, the carbon footprint is much less because it is a perennial—it is there to be harvested every year; it does not have to be planted, harvested, carted, put on boats and shifted around—and you can produce cellulosic ethanol from that sort of plant. But the other benefit, other than those above-soil carbon advantages, is the capacity of a deep-rooted plant such as that to sequester carbon at depth, as well as all of the erosion and other environmental impacts that people may like to talk about.

I thank all of the speakers for participating in this; I really want this to be an honest debate about a real issue rather than a political debate about who’s who in the zoo. The point I would really like to leave the House with today, and the point I raised with the Prime Minister about three weeks or a month ago now when I met with him on this and other issues, is that there are people out there across Australia—in Emerald, in Western Australia, in New South Wales, in Victoria and in South Australia—who are doing their own carbon-monitoring work to look at this measurement problem. I challenged the Prime Minister, and I do it again to the House now, to fund these people, the innovators in agriculture, and provide measurement.
campaigns with those people, so if they are getting the numbers wrong, if what they are saying is not correct, it can be easily proven. What is happening is that CSIRO and other institutions are basing their measurements and the capacity to measure on old-style farming techniques, not the newer cropping techniques and some of the newer pasture system techniques. I encourage the government, and I am pleased the minister is here, to look at this issue. I know there is funding particularly for cellulosic ethanol in the budget, but look at this issue of measurement. If we go into an emissions-trading system and we do not know what contribution agriculture can potentially make—not just through sequestration in trees but sequestration in our soils—we really will not know what charges to lay off against the major emitters if there is a more natural way of looking at the problem.

I am sure the minister is aware that, outside of the ocean, most of our carbon is held in our soils—not in our atmosphere; in our soils. We have let a little bit go by burning coal et cetera. Eighty-two per cent of the terrestrial biosphere is in our soils. Most of the work that has been done in carbon trade and carbon management has been about vegetation, has been about trees. Essentially, our scientists have not been focusing on one of the major contributors due to natural sequestration. As soon as they have come to a difficulty in the measurement, they have walked away from it. This is an issue about soil health. A healthy soil is a more productive soil; it is one that holds more moisture. If we are talking about drought policy, Minister, irrespective of whether this whole emissions-trading debate went away tomorrow, which it may do if we are going to get some consensus in this place, we should be looking at sequestering carbon in our soils much more thoroughly. (Time expired)

Mr BURKE (Watson—Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (5.18 pm)—I want to thank the member for New England for bringing this matter before parliament today, and also for making very clear the tone that the debate should take in this discussion and future discussions on this matter in the House. I will first of all take issue with the member for New England. I do feel more than a bit ripped off. Within a couple of weeks of getting the portfolio, I spent three days in his electorate. I heard his entire speech today and realised I went to Tamworth, to Inverell, to Glen Innes and finished up at Armidale and never went to Walgett—not once!

Mr Windsor—It’s not in my electorate.

Mr BURKE—It is not in your electorate? Well that makes sense. We have heard about the Walgett wheat grower. That explains why I did not get taken there, so I withdraw that. I should mention, as a matter of interest to the House given what was raised—I will not emphasise this, but I will refer to it at the start—the global concerns at the moment about how we can make sure the population of the world is able to feed itself. These are very real, very deep issues, and the member for New England is right: we should not overstate or understate the role that Australia can play. We are part of the answer for some countries, and some countries do rely on us for their food security. But certainly the long-term response to trying to make sure that the population of the world is able to sustain itself with food goes very much to assisting with capacity building in poor countries.

This morning I had the opportunity to meet with my counterpart minister from Eritrea. We were having a discussion in my office only today about how Australia might be able to assist Eritrea with the development of no-till farming. Those discussions, and the
issues that the member for New England has brought to the attention of the House today, are very much within the frame of the government for how we can assist some of the poorer nations in the world in adapting to the very real challenges they face. As a simple example: for a port nation like Eritrea, the figures are often put out—I know some people will dispute the figures as to whether you go to the first stage of the production process or further down. Some will quote that 60 per cent of Australian agriculture is being exported. For Eritrea, 60 per cent of their agriculture is provided domestically and 40 per cent of what they need to feed their population is imported.

The issues in this matter of public importance go to, firstly, the adaptation that farmers have to undertake simply because of what is coming at them with climate change and, secondly, how the people working the land are part of the solution in reducing greenhouse emissions. I will deal with each of those two matters in turn. On the first issue of adapting to climate change, when we talk about the impact of climate change on the agricultural sector we usually go to four key areas: dealing with less water through more frequent and deeper droughts; higher temperatures; more major weather events—if anyone knows about those, it is the member for Kennedy, with what has been experienced in his part of the country; and, finally, increased proliferation in pests, disease and weeds. I will go through some of the issues of each of those in turn.

I think we have covered the impacts of longer and deeper droughts in the ministerial statement and the response from the Leader of the Nationals earlier in the debate, and I will not go into that further now. The issue of higher temperatures is real. It is one of the many issues faced by some of the intensive livestock industries. More regular and more intense heatwaves were certainly faced by people involved in horticulture earlier this year, when we had that heatwave in South Australia, which was completely off the scale. If you actually tried to put it on the scale—if you tried to compare it with other heatwaves—you ended up with a one-in-3,000-year weather event. More major weather events are very much of concern for the people in the north of the country. Cyclones have always been devastating. The cyclone that devastated the banana industry in the electorate of Kennedy and in the electorates to the north and the south was an example of what we do expect to see more intensively and more regularly than in the past.

The final issue with climate change, which I do not think is spoken enough about, is the increased proliferation in pests, disease and weeds. Our biosecurity authorities have never been of greater importance to the future of agriculture than they are now. If there was ever a time we needed to make sure that our quarantine and biosecurity services were sufficiently robust, it is in the situation that we now face where pests, diseases and weeds are going to be covering a greater part of our country’s territory than they ever have previously.

Those issues go to the essential aspects of adapting to climate change. As honourable members are well aware, in the Australia’s Farming Future program, $130 million over four years is going to both climate change and productivity research. The Climate Change Adaptation Program will assist farmers adapt and make sure that the best on-farm methods for dealing with what the climate is bringing forward actually make it from the lab to the farm. All too often we have fantastic research, where the research and development is done well, but the demonstration and extension is done poorly. The investment of those agencies involved in developing some great practices which could be adopted on-farm all too often do not make it to the
farmer. There will be some people, as they face the reality of the climate, who will reach the point where they simply believe that they need to pursue a life away from agriculture. The Climate Change Adjustment Program will have mechanisms in place to assist in the decision and that adjustment. Ultimately, if the decision is taken, the Rural Financial Counselling Service will assist with the adjustment itself.

The challenge then comes in how we reduce greenhouse gas emissions themselves. I know both the member for New England and the member for Kennedy have often referred to biofuels as being part of the equation for how we may be able to reduce greenhouse gas emissions overall. Using the simple example that a fossil fuel if not used remains in the ground, a biofuel if not used will very often deteriorate anyway. There may well be, particularly through the use of cellulose, some methods available, and part of the answer in reducing greenhouse gas emissions is very likely to be found down a biofuels path.

The other issue in reducing greenhouse gas emissions that the member for New England referred to is soil carbon. It goes to no-till farming, to the use of perennial pasture and to best practice farming. This is where we have, in so many ways, the circle completed in the good outcome happening at every step of the equation. No-till farming methods preserve soil moisture, they preserve soil carbon and they lead to a capacity for increased harvest. They go completely against what traditionally had been the belief. For so many centuries the concept of farming was: to prove that the soil was really good quality you had to rip it to shreds. Part of the productivity improvement in areas which have been highly productive, whether it be New England or the WA wheat belt, has been the development and use of these no-till or minimum till methods.

I will disappoint the member for New England in not using his MPI as an opportunity to discuss at length cabinet processes with respect to an emissions-trading scheme, but I certainly can say that the difficulty with soil carbon is precisely as the member for New England described it: we know carbon is being sequestered in the soil, that this is best practice and that the accounting of it is extraordinarily difficult. There is a general public policy principle that, if you are going to count something, you want to be able to count it accurately. That is why, at the ABARE Outlook conference earlier this year, the Prime Minister commissioned me to use some of the money from Australia’s Farming Future—some of that research and development productivity fund—to involve some detailed science in how we can improve the storage of soil carbon and, importantly, how we can improve the accounting mechanisms for soil carbon.

In any trading scheme, if you are going to be able to trade you need to be able to account and measure. The fact that the science of what is going on has not caught up with the measurement of the extent to which it is going on certainly does not preclude the government from investing seriously in trying to get the measurement issues up to speed as quickly as we possibly can.

There is a further, similar concern with respect to livestock emissions. Livestock emissions are easily the largest area of emissions within the area of agriculture, and we have a similar problem here with counting. The accounting mechanisms and the methods that might be available to farmers in order to reduce livestock emissions are not well advanced. Some of the answers may go to methods of feeding, some may go to microbes in the stomach and some may go to breeding, whether it be to breeding stock that have a lower level of emissions or, as may well happen, to breeding animals that simply
grow more quickly. If you end up being able to bring an animal to slaughter earlier, you have therefore had an overall reduction in the emissions over the life of that animal. There are a whole lot of possibilities that science is chasing down, and it is important for there to be a serious government contribution to help to leverage further funding in that area. Australia’s Farming Future will do that. As I have previously said publicly but have not had an opportunity to say to the House, the way we will structure the final break-up of that $130 million will leave a good deal more than $15 million for research and development.

Some of this work is also advanced by Caring for our Country. The landcare movement have for years been doing work which is only now being recognised as being of great assistance in reducing the emissions profile of Australian agriculture. It is worth remembering as well—when you see the figures that our emissions are about 108 per cent of 2000 levels—that, were it not for the work done by agriculture in land clearing and natural resource management, we would be looking at 120 per cent, not 108 per cent. It is all too often forgotten and neglected that we have been within our Kyoto targets very much because of the good work done by people working the land, whether through land-clearing specifically or through the landcare movement more generally.

Against all of these difficulties, we need to get back to what we are trying to achieve. The challenge for farmers throughout Australia, at one level, is as it has always been—that is, to deal with an incredibly harsh climate and landscape. We know that climate change is going to make those challenges far more difficult and make that climb much steeper. If we do the work now, then in the years to come the long-term benefits to Australian agriculture will be extraordinary. A heavy burden rests on our shoulders. I think that the nature of the discussion happening in the House today, thanks to the member for New England, is testament to the fact that this parliament and this government are taking that challenge seriously.

Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (5.33 pm)—In saying how we measure the livestock emissions, I cannot begin to tell you just how bad, when you go into these things deeply, the flow of information has been. A lot of it has been emotive hyperbole rather than scientific reasoning. I was sick while on the ethanol tour to Canada and I was watching the television. A science program on Canadian television showed the latest figure of an eightfold reduction for emissions that were originally contemplated. The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry said, ‘How can you get accurate figures?’ What they did was to completely enclose a shed and measure the CO2 content of the air going into the shed with—I do not know—20 or 40 head of cattle in it and then measure the content coming out of the shed. They found out that there was an eightfold reduction in the original figures—I think it was 53 motor cars for one beast and it reduced to eight. That is a sixfold reduction. I think those were the figures—I have them somewhere—but I would urge the minister to question the figures.

The member for New England mentioned the flawed science here. It is a very little known fact that CSIRO produced a report for the Australian Greenhouse Office which actually said that ethanol increased the CO2 levels. They were all embarrassed by it—you will not find that report—but the Greenhouse Office blamed CSIRO and CSIRO blamed the Greenhouse Office. It really was very contemptible, and it also showed the lack of science. I rang up the person who did it and I said, ‘Did you ring up a sugarcane farmer because the CO2 goes up and the crop pulls it back down again?’ It goes up and down. If you just burn fossil fuel, it goes up and stays
up. That is the fundamental difference. I asked, ‘How could you possibly say what you said?’ He said, ‘Oh, there are all sorts of inputs.’ I said, ‘Name them.’ He said, ‘Ploughing.’ I said, ‘Did you ring up a cane farmer?’ There was silence, and then he said no. I said: ‘How could you possibly have done this without speaking to a cane farmer? If you’d rung up a cane farmer, you would know we don’t plough.’ We plough once every six years. It is just a grass. It just keeps growing, and we keep mowing it; that is all. Once upon a time we did plough, when we burnt the cane, but we do not burn the cane anymore. So we do not touch the soil; we put a huge trash blanket on it. We do not have to put herbicides and all of those things on it now either. We have really revolutionised farming in the cane area.

He then said, ‘Yes, but there is the processing of it.’ I said, ‘What energy inputs in processing? Did you speak to a sugar mill?’ He said, ‘No, I didn’t.’ I said: ‘It is amazing that you could get this document out and tell the federal government that it is negative when the American document says it is 29 per cent positive. One of you is wrong.’ They are a country representing 400 million people; we are a country representing 20 million—I know where my money will be going.

Going back to the sugar mill, I said, ‘If you had rung a sugar mill, you would know that there is not a net taking of energy off the grid.’ We put energy into the grid. We burn the leftover, the bagasse—what you have left over after you take the sugar cane out—and we produce electricity from it. We are net contributors of energy to the grid, not net takers from the grid. So it was quite extraordinary.

I want to strongly endorse the remarks of the member for New England. I came into this matter entirely ignorant. The minister often says he is ignorant. Minister, I have had moo-cows since I was 19 and I was close to farmers all of my life in boarding schools in North Queensland. I had never ever realised the significance that carbon plays in the soil until about three months ago. I had reason to go into it and I was really quite amazed that Australian soil has only one-fifth the amount of carbon in it. Dr Joe Hol- tum from James Cook University did studies for BHP on putting CO₂ into plants. They put the CO₂ in the ground and they got a 36 per cent increase, which was not as good as the other countries where they had done trials, where they recorded a 44 per cent increase. Because of the increase in carbon in the soil, the moisture stays there for two or three months of the year longer, so you get two or three months extra growth out of the plant. That is one of the major factors contributing to this enormous increase in growth.

But it is true that the average Australian content is one-fifth of what it should be. I do not know whether that is from burning done by blackfellas—and I might add that white-fellars burnt; that is how we mustered cattle. You always see the traditional picture of the ringer with the box of matches. They would burn late in the year—about now actually, maybe a month or two later—and it would not be a conflagration, because the grass would still be a bit green. Then the cattle would come in on the green pick and they would pick them up—exactly the same. They undoubtedly learnt it from the First Australians.

We have a natural cycle in North Queensland which is enormously destructive. At the end of the year there is no ground cover. There has been no rainfall for nine months and the ground is bare to monsoonal depressions, which are invariably associated with cyclonic depressions. The sky falls on the ground that is completely unprotected and massive erosion takes place. The dig at Deaf
Adder Gorge by Rhys Jones from the ANU was very interesting because they dug down 30 feet and there were Aboriginal artefacts all the way down to bedrock. The question is: why did the erosion start with the arrival of man? Of course, Rhys Jones’s answer to that question is the firestick farming.

Minister, there are two important points on this fuel for food debate. I had never been overseas when I went on an ethanol tour; that is all I did for the week. We were over there at a cattle station—they call them a ranch over there—and all of their cattle were fed throughout the dry season. It was very similar to my own homeland, the mid-west of North Queensland, except they have cold and we have heat. The land is baked during that period of time. They were feeding distillers grain, which they were buying at prices much, much cheaper than our grain prices. I checked up on the nutritional value, and it is much higher from the Dalby plant. The local graziers and lot feeders are paying more for dried distillers grain than they are paying for grain.

Let me be very specific, Minister. In the first months of this year, the price for distillers grain in the United States was $174 a tonne, the price for sorghum was $240 a tonne and the price for wheat was $320 a tonne. Minister, you would be well aware that all cheese, eggs, butter, milk, chicken, pork and beef is just congealed grain. There is a high grass content, particularly in dairy products, but it is congealed grain. If the Americans can buy their grain for $174 a tonne and we Australians can buy it for $240 a tonne, we are going to be murdered out there! It puts up grain prices—there is no doubt about that. And that is a good thing—these blokes are going broke. Is there something wrong with some of the grain producers making a few quid more than they are making? They cannot stay alive the way they are.

Minister, please go to the cabinet and draw a graph of food imports and food exports; you will see that over the next 10 or 15 years this country will become a net importer of food. If you are worried about food shortages, please start here, because this is the country that will be short of food. What is happening in North Queensland, which has amazed me, is that nothing happens when the food producer leaves. Rich lifestylers buy the land—an American phenomenon too, I might add—and it gets covered in weeds. Minister, if you can afford the time on your next trip to North Queensland, I will take you to some of these places and you can see the whole ground covered by Singapore daisy and giant sensitive weed. So there is that aspect of it. But, Minister, it does not affect the food chain if it is sugar. If we take just one per cent of northern Australia’s landmass—just one per cent—and only seven per cent of our water, along with the sugar industry and a contribution from grain, we can produce all of your fuel forever, at no cost to the food chain whatsoever. There would be a great benefit because our cattle industry would dramatically increase their numbers in northern Australia because they would have access to biodunder and distillers grain. It will benefit the food chain. (Time expired)

Mr GRAY (Brand—Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia) (5.43 pm)—I acknowledge the value of this debate in both setting parameters for public policy and helping the community to understand the importance of the issue of climate change and agriculture. My family in Western Australia, on my wife’s side, are predominantly wheat farmers. Just from reading the last few seasons we know that 2006 and 2007 were difficult seasons. 2008 opened with great promise. We had buoyant world grain prices and in Western Australia in the wheat belt we had fantastic rains through February, March and early
April. Indeed, by Easter it was being predicted that we would have another bumper grain crop—15 million tonnes was speculated on as the Western Australian grain crop for this year.

Since that time rainfall has largely been limited to the coastal plains. Two-thirds of WA’s wheat belt—the grain belt—is now in need of rain. In some areas communities are facing their third consecutive dry year. The central wheat belt around the Merredin district—the core of WA’s grain production—is doing it hard again, and it is just getting harder. Morawa and Perenjori are now in their fifth or sixth year of difficult seasons. That is what they call it—just ‘difficult seasons’.

We are now looking at a projected WA harvest for this year of between eight and 12 million tonnes, which is significantly down on that earlier optimistic 15-million tonne projection, and of course prices have also come off since the first quarter of this year, although they are still high in historic terms. But they are high for a number of reasons, not least of which is the weather conditions in the United States where storms, floods and extreme weather events are affecting agricultural production across a range of sectors.

In this place over the course of the last year we have heard much about working families—and from my family’s experience in Western Australia, they like to occasionally hear about farming families too. The farming families of Western Australia have a strong history of making great achievements in challenging conditions. From the original settlement of Western Australia in 1829 to the planting of the first crops and the famine that followed those crops at Champion Bay, we are now an export state. The sandy soils of the grain belt met science, trace elements and the investment of massive capital, and the farmers of Western Australia, with the support and insight of science, have been able to build magnificent businesses and secure family enterprises. Many members of my own family work on those sandy soils. They farm them, they raise their families and build good livings. Through Kellerberrin and Doodlakine in the central wheat belt the Walsh family worked the land and in Corrow in the northern wheat belt my brother-in-law and sister-in-law Rod and Shelley work up there.

This year Rod and Shelley will plant around 9,000 acres—about 5,000 hectares. Theirs is at the larger end of the family farms, the sort of farm you can support literally with a husband and wife team. They get on with it. They plant canola, lupins and wheat in a combination of early and late crops. The good rains early in March led them to believe that the year was going to be a good one. Thanks to their early sowing, they are pretty well prepared in their business plan for dealing with what has now become a harder year as autumn has come and the rain has dropped off. There has been very little rain—mainly on the coastal plains of Western Australia through Geraldton and Albany—to keep the crops in that country good. But on the family farm, even the pasture for looking after the family pets—the horses—is not there. In fact Shelley describes what one may previously have thought of as being a pasture as being like a bitumen road. It is a bit hard right now for them.

But the seeding, the harvesting and the running of the farm require working through very narrow windows of time. It requires working with great skill. It requires the application of significant capital. It required operating in a world of escalating input costs—not just diesel but also where you have to hire in labour to run trucks. The gas explosion in Western Australia has impacted on fertiliser production, and we see circum-
stances in the wheat belt in Western Australia getting harder and harder. We see it happening not for the first time and not for the second time. We see it happening to areas that have been reliable for the better part of 20 or 30 years. My father-in-law would often make the comment that since opening up their land around Doodlakine in the early 1930s, they have really had only a couple of bad seasons since 1932—and he means that. His daughter is now looking at potentially the third hard season in a row. Areas around the central wheat belt are now looking at perhaps their fifth or sixth hard year in a row.

Western Australian agriculture prides itself on being science based. Indeed there probably is not a better example of science based agriculture in Australia. Combined with improved farm practices, the advent of wheat varieties that are better adapted to the Western Australian environment has meant that yields have improved consistently through the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. We also know that the Western Australian wheat belt contains some of the driest consistently farmed land in the world. Growing season rainfalls are commonly less than 200 millimetres per annum—eight inches in the old scale—in the important period from May to September. Soils in the region are generally old, shallow and naturally infertile. Taken together, those factors alone make farming a challenging business in Western Australia. But with research, with a great system that has an emphasis on plant breeding, and with a lot of work being done on genetic improvements in agriculture, there is serious hope for the future. By national standards Western Australia is a leader. By international standards we set the pace in the application of science to agriculture.

Western Australia also has significant advantages in logistics. Grain points are established at four key locations around the coast—at Esperance, Albany, Kwinana and Geraldton. The long and successful establishment of the farmer-owned monopoly grain-handler, CBH, has made a significant contribution to the ability of Western Australian growers to grow and sell their product competitively and in a timely manner.

Western Australia has some pretty good infrastructure. It has good science infrastructure. It has farmers who are serious about doing their business. It has wonderful opportunities. At this time, we have a parliament and a government prepared to contemplate the impact of climate change on agriculture. Last week I was fortunate to have dinner as a guest of the National Farmers Federation. The President of the National Farmers Federation in his address on that occasion made a substantial set of references to climate change. If we look at the Farmers Federation’s strategic plan for 2006 to 2009, it is clearly stated that they have as one of their goals more efficient delivery of government environmental programs on the farm. They want to manage the impacts of climate change and greenhouse gas emissions on agricultural production.

They make the point very clearly that the NFF pushed the government very hard for a new vision to deal with drought in Australia and want a commitment to assist farmers to adapt to climate change through a $130 million package. The government has responded to that by announcing its climate change package, the Australia’s Farming Future initiative. The $130 million Australia’s Farming Future initiative will help build adaptable and resilient producers and industries to strengthen their ability to manage climate change into the future.

One of the very early conversations that I had when I came into this place was with the member for New England. At that time he made a point of discussing the impact of climate change but also the substantial sci-
ence to do with carbon, soils and agriculture. Since that time I have taken it upon myself to ensure that I am better educated and better informed on the science and the practical measures that farmers are taking in Western Australia to manage climate change as well as they can and to grow their businesses in difficult circumstances. (Time expired)

Mr FORREST (Mallee) (5.54 pm)—It is refreshing to have this kind of discussion on climate change. From that point of view, I am grateful to the member for New England for bringing forward this matter of public importance. I am also grateful that the minister has allocated time to listen to the contributions. In trying to give leadership to my own constituency, which is agriculture and horticulture—75 per cent of the employment, and all of it through small mum and dad businesses, very nervous about this concept of an emissions-trading scheme and how the whole process will work—I note that there are two approaches to this which are significant. One is that it provides an enormous opportunity for agriculture across the board. I know that the discussion is related to what the rest of the world have done. Europe and New Zealand have included forestry, but Professor Garnaut has flagged that the inclusion of forestry in an emissions-trading scheme in Australia is subject to solving certain problems. The minister has made reference to the measuring difficulty and the monitoring. The member for New England has also made comment on the capacity for soil carbon sequestration.

My anxiety is that any scheme that it is resolved to implement should not be a one-size-fits-all scheme. It is fairly clear—the science says—that agriculture is the second-largest contributor behind the fixed electricity generators. But they are two entirely different sectors. Agriculture is made up of small, segregated, individual farm owned enterprises. I am pleased that the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia made reference to that. I have thousands of those in my electorate. The energy sector is more corporatised and made up of larger entities. What that means is that if we get this wrong the potential to do economic harm to much smaller entities could be significant. It is so vital that we get this right and do not rush it and consult across the board.

There are going to be opportunities. Contributors have also mentioned some of those. I have focused a lot on the livestock sector, which is a major contributor—and the minister made reference to it—because it is mostly emitting methane. In my view, methane is probably more of a contributor than carbon dioxide. And livestock emit it from both ends. There is an enormous contribution. I have been relying on experience out of Europe and particularly out of Ireland where work has been a little bit more precise than work on problems that might confront broadacre agriculture. I will mention the scientific figures: with proper diet and improved feed utilisation, methane production per kilo of meat or beef is confirmed to be reduced by 10 per cent to 20 per cent. This is where the win-win situation occurs and where the opportunity is, because in addition to that, if somehow or other we put things in place to encourage agriculture to adopt better diet and feed procedures for livestock—and this is from data collected in Ireland, Britain and France—there are average feed efficiency improvements of up to 20 per cent. So there are productivity gains as well as gains for the environment. That is the sort of balance that I would like to see achieved. I would plead the minister to fight to the death in cabinet to get those research funds allocated, because it is absolutely vital that we get this right. Agriculture in Australia has been through a sabbatical of the worst precipitation outcomes in our history. We
cannot make a mistake and make it any worse. I plead with the minister to get this one right. I want to be part of the discussion. I am not a sceptic. I have a scientific background, and I am willing to lead my own constituency and at the same time provide an opportunity for them to improve their economic outcomes—and also make it rain!

Mr Champion (Wakefield) (5.59 pm)—I fear I am going to bust up a little gentlemen’s club and inject a bit of partisanship into this discussion! It is my first MPI debate.

Mr Windsor interjecting—

Mr Champion—Apologies to the member for New England! I think this is the right matter of public importance but it is at the wrong time and directed at the wrong government. It is a decade too late. We saw from the last government a failure to acknowledge climate change as a threat and a failure to take practical action against that threat.

Mr Katter interjecting—

Mr Champion—No, no. The member for Kennedy talks about the significance that carbon plays in soils and he says he only discovered that in the last three months. If we had had this debate 10 years ago, he might have discovered it earlier. The coalition’s denial and inaction placed their core constituency at absolute risk, because farmers feel the impact of climate change before anybody else—that is a fact.

The possible consequences of climate change for people in the electorate of Wakefield are pretty stark. If you are a poultry farmer between Dublin and Balaklava, you will face potential heat stress of your stock, increased maintenance for animal health and a reduced supply of feed. If you are a sheep farmer at Kapunda, you will face reduced pasture productivity, increased soil erosion and reduced carrying capacity. If you are a wheat farmer at Balaklava, you will face increased variability and changes to seasonality of rainfall. We have just heard other members talking about that. A decade of inaction and irresponsibility by the opposition, particularly around the emissions-trading system, has placed the Liberal Party’s own constituency at risk. You cannot get away from that fact. Agriculture is a critical area of the Australian economy and of Australian society. Australian farmers manage 60 per cent of the land mass—they are the stewards of the land. The farm-gate value of the sector is worth three per cent of our GDP. There are exports worth $30 billion, some of which come from my electorate—from wineries in Clare or from hay exporters in Balaklava.

Because the farming sector is of critical importance to the economy and to our society, we need real leadership. We have had that leadership from the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and from this government. That leadership is demonstrated in our $130 million Australia’s Farming Future policy, which sets out the framework and resources to assist farmers to adapt to climate change and its effects on their businesses. That policy has three main parts. First of all, there is a $15 million allocation to fund a climate change productivity and research program, which will allocate funds to research bodies and coordinate climate change research.

The second part of the policy framework is the $60 million climate change adaptation partnerships program, which allows for on-farm demonstration pilots that contribute to reducing emissions. Such pilots could include things like carbon sequestration in soils. It will allow for targeted training for farmers and it will raise awareness in the sector. As we have just heard, awareness is a critical thing. What the member for Kennedy learnt three months ago and what I have learnt tonight thanks to his contribution to
this debate is that soil is a critical part of climate change.

The third area of the policy is the $55 million Climate Change Adjustment Program, which provides training grants of up to $5,500 for both farmers and their partners and adjustment assistance of up to $150,000 to individuals who have made the difficult decision to leave farming. That is a difficult decision because they lose their job and often lose their home, which are two of the most distressing things that can happen to someone. The government has also signed Kyoto and, as I have said before, we are examining an emissions-trading system.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I know I have upset people with a little bit of partisanship but, as it is my first MPI debate, you could probably make some allowances. I think partisanship does serve the national interest in this case because, if we do not have some fire in this debate and some immediacy and responsibility, we will not get results.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georganas)—Order! The time allotted for this discussion has expired.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2008
CLASSIFICATION (PUBLICATIONS, FILMS AND COMPUTER GAMES) AMENDMENT (ASSESSMENTS AND ADVERTISING) BILL 2008
JUDICIARY AMENDMENT BILL 2008
CRIMES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS) BILL 2008
Returned from the Senate
Messages received from the Senate returning the bills without amendment or request.

RESERVE BANK AMENDMENT (ENHANCED INDEPENDENCE) BILL 2008
Consideration of Senate Message
Bill returned from the Senate with amendments.
Ordered that the amendments be considered at the next sitting.

PARLIAMENTARY ZONE
Approval of Proposal
Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (6.05 pm)—I move:
That, in accordance with section 5 of the Parliament Act 1974, the House approves the following proposal for work in the Parliamentary Zone which was presented to the House on 23 June 2008, namely: Construction of a childcare facility within Parliament House.

I have moved this motion at the request of the Presiding Officers—the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate—and I am very pleased to have the opportunity to do so as Leader of the House. The work proposed will provide childcare facilities to all occupants of the Parliament House building. The campaign for childcare facilities located within Parliament House has been a long one. It reflects our growing appreciation as a nation of the need for affordable, easily accessible and quality child care for working families. Australian families cannot do without child care, and it would be hypocritical of this parliament to say to the families of those that work here that they should. There has been significant effort from many on both sides of the House in campaigning for this facility, and in moving this motion today to commence work I would like to acknowledge their efforts.

The facility will be a quality establishment incorporating best practice design features from an early childhood perspective, acknowledge and address children’s play and
developmental needs. Internal layout of the centre will accommodate up to 22 children in the six weeks to 18 months age range, with individual areas for babies to play and space for toddlers to exercise their new-found mobility. The centre potentially has the flexibility to occasionally cater for older children for short periods. The facility will be located in the former staff bar and adjacent courtyard area. The centre will cost $1.3 million to construct and will open in early 2009.

I acknowledge the results of the staff survey conducted in March this year, which identified the area of greatest need as being facilities for breastfeeding mothers. It has also confirmed that there remains, as mirrored in communities around Australia, a considerable demand for childcare services in Parliament House. The construction of the childcare centre is not a total solution but is a very important and necessary first step.

The facility will be built to the exacting standards demanded of any construction work in a nationally significant building such as Parliament House. The designs for necessary modifications to the building take into full consideration the original design integrity of the building and courtyards. There will be some differences within the centre compared with the rest of the Parliament House. Throughout Parliament House division bells can be heard and numerous clocks indicate the chamber with either the red or green light flashing. Loud bells and sleeping babies are not a good mix so there will be clocks to display the division lights in the childcare centre but no bells.

The two existing hedges in the courtyard are to be removed due to their toxicity and replaced with a vine covered safety fence. A major feature of the courtyard playground will be a sensory garden for the toddlers to wander through, with shrubs of different textures of material and colour finishes to delight and intrigue. The majority of existing paving in the area will be retained with different colour and texture infilled tiles to replace the grass between the pavers. The play areas will be built to best practice standards for early childhood development and two sandpits and grass mounds will provide ample opportunity for toddlers to practise interactive, creative and mobility skills. Unfortunately, heritage considerations rule out using the curved external marble wall as a canvas for budding crayon and chalk artists. Let that be a warning, Mr Deputy Speaker. This is perhaps one disadvantage of having childcare here in Parliament House, but a minor one.

I would like to assure members that internal construction within Parliament House is mainly limited to within the former staff bar, and that internal access to the staff cafeteria will be maintained throughout the construction phase and that noisy or disruptive construction work will be carried out after hours and on weekends, with the main heavy construction occurring during the winter recess. I would also like to acknowledge the understanding decision of the florist currently located outside the staff bar in agreeing to move so that the facility can be built.

It is with some satisfaction that I speak on this motion as I have had some involvement in the many calls over the years for the construction of these facilities. In the Hansard record of 12 November 1998 members can find a motion in my name which reads in part:

That this House:
(1) recognises the importance of affordable, quality child care for Australian parents;
(2) deplores the lack of childcare facilities available to Members, Senators and staff working at Parliament House, noting that this lack of workplace child care has led to increased difficulties for parents working at Parliament.
House following the Coalition’s attacks on child care over the past 3 years ...

The date of that motion indicates, as does the long history of this issue, that child care in Parliament House has been needed for some time. I think it is acknowledged by many in the parliament that it should have been done sooner. The parliament is now more representative of the people of Australia with the entry of more young women, in particular, into the parliament — and I take this opportunity to congratulate the member for Ballarat, Catherine King, on the birth of her first son, Ryan, on the weekend. That is an occurrence that happens now on a regular basis in this parliament and that is a good thing. Previous generations of representatives in this House, on both sides of the chamber, whatever their qualities, did not understand that this was not an issue which should have been negotiable. The fact we have many facilities in this parliament — a snooker room, a pool, a gym, a dining room and many other facilities here that are appropriate in this magnificent building — but no childcare centre reflects the parliament of the last century. It is appropriate that the parliament of this century reflect more adequately values such as ensuring that all parents, whether they be men or women, have access to child care.

I want to put on the record that when I moved that motion in 1998 I did not have an interest in child care. Later on of course I did. I used to bring my son to this House when I could in order to have contact with him. The facilities were not appropriate to keep someone in an office. Indeed, he bears a scar on his forehead from the fact that the offices are extremely unfriendly to children in the way that they have been built and designed. For future generations of not only members and senators but also, and most importantly, permanent staff who are based here and who make such an outstanding contribution, this will help in the work-family balance, and that is certainly appropriate.

I acknowledge in recent times the campaign by many members such as the member for Sydney, and I will also single out the former member for Lindsay, to turn around some of the old-fashioned views that some people — particularly, might I say, of my gender — had on whether childcare facilities were appropriate in Parliament House. That has been turned around. I commend this motion to the House on behalf of the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate.

Mr HOCKEY (North Sydney) (6.15 pm) — I join with the Leader of the House in welcoming this motion. I congratulate him on bringing it to the attention of the House and indicate that we on this side of the House strongly support this motion. Since I was elected in 1996 it seems as though this has been an ongoing saga without resolution. It seems quite odd in 2008 that we should indulge in a motion before the House about the provision of child care in this building, but obviously the building has quite extraordinary work practices.

From a historic perspective, when I first came into this chamber in 1996 I occasionally sat next to the last Right Honourable, the last Privy Councillor, who sat in this chamber: Ian Sinclair, the member for New England. In my first division I said to him, ‘How long have you been here?’ He said, ‘Well, I first came here when Ming was at the dispatch box.’ He told me a brief history of some of the former members for North Sydney — one of whom was Billy Hughes, whose life and achievements I am celebrating at Old Parliament House tomorrow. All the members for North Sydney have been men. Another one of my predecessors was Bruce Graham, who was quite a colourful character. He apparently did not mind the odd drink. Of course, that would be unacceptable.
in the new parliament with the new health minister. But he had the occasional drink and I understand he had a wooden leg, and because he was unable to detach his wooden leg from his body after a few late-night drinks there was a roster system amongst his colleagues to make sure he got to bed and removed his leg.

In those days, because members used to live down here for the entire session away from their families or their families came to live with them in Canberra, it was a very different environment. Workplaces change. The question is whether the legislators keep up with the changes, not only in the workplaces of everyday Australians but, importantly, in the workplaces of the legislators themselves. It was quite obvious to me when I came here, at the same time as the Leader of the House, that I would not in any way be a beneficiary at that time of childcare services, but I thought: one day I might be a father and therefore why wouldn’t you as a parent want to see more of your children if you had the opportunity? This building, with such significant facilities, failed to recognise the fact that members of parliament are also parents. The hours of the parliament have changed dramatically over the years. Governments often start off with long sitting hours and, as governments go on, they tend to narrow the sitting hours, thankfully, to more family friendly practices.

I want to recognise the fact that when I was Minister for Human Services I took a very strong view about child care. As the biggest employer in the Public Service outside of Defence, Human Services, through Centrelink, employs more than 30,000 people, most of them women. If I can just drop the veil of bipartisanship for a moment, I was subject to criticism by the Labor Party at the time because I was entering into a contract through Centrelink for the provision of childcare services at Centrelink offices. One of the reasons we did that—and Jeff Whalan as chief executive helped to drive that initiative—was that overwhelmingly, the workforce at Centrelink is made up of women and you have to have family friendly provisions in Centrelink offices, or any other offices for that matter, if you want to retain good staff. One of the benefits of having low unemployment is that employers are driven to think more about the interests of their staff rather than the bottom line. But I was criticised by the Labor Party at that time for ensuring that we could have guaranteed places for Centrelink workers at childcare centres so that we could retain the female staff.

Having said that, I have to say there has been strong bipartisan support by a new generation of members of parliament for childcare facilities in this place. I agree with the Leader of the House that there was some resistance from an older demographic on both sides of the House, or should I say from Speakers and Presidents, through to party leaders. There was a grudging reluctance to go down the path of having a childcare centre in Parliament House when, in their view, every worksite in Australia could not have the same facility. That is true, but it does not mean that you should not start.

I was reminded of that only this afternoon when I saw the member for Flinders and the member for Ryan at Aussie’s cafe with their wives and their two young children—in the case of the member for Flinders, a three-year-old, and in the case of the member for Ryan, a two-year-old. As I have said to my colleagues on this side of the House, you need to keep in touch with your family and do everything you can with your family in order to maintain some civility in this place and, importantly, to understand the challenges that Australian families go through. Parliamentarians are no different from long-distance truck drivers or defence personnel or many others who might not have the op-
portunity to have their families in their workplace from time to time. But given that parliamentary life is a matter of years—for some, decades—it is a long time to be away from your family, on occasions for 25 weeks a year, without having the opportunity to spend a bit of time with them. So, without going into the details of this facility, I think this is a symbolic moment: the parliament is suddenly coming into the 21st century and recognising that you have to provide these sorts of facilities to help parents see more of their children.

We tend to moralise a lot in this place about the relationships between parents and children. I remember standing at this dispatch box with a former member for Werriwa asking question after question about whether the former Prime Minister read to his children and whether it is a good thing to read to young children. Of course it is, but if they are in a different city for 25 weeks a year, it is pretty difficult to do. We have the benefit of Skype and we have the benefit of 3G, which I use to try and speak to my two young children under the age of three twice a day. But, at the same time, there is nothing that is going to ever replace the opportunity to spend a little bit of time with them when you can.

I think it is also the case that when the issue was first raised in parliament in 1981 there were only 14 women in parliament. Today—and I welcome this—there are 68 women, representing 43 per cent of all federal politicians. There has been a dramatic increase in the numbers particularly of young women and young men. Just for the record—and it is something that I think is very important—the former member for Lindsay, Jackie Kelly, was the first minister to take maternity leave in the Australian federal parliament. Ros Kelly, at the time when she was the minister for sport, said that she did not feel that she could take maternity leave, which was an indictment on the system at that time.

Jackie Kelly was the first minister to take maternity leave, and I know, because I filled in for her as Minister for Sport and Tourism when she did that. I was the first male minister, obviously, to take paternity leave. This happened in the last 10 years, and to me it was the pretty obvious thing to do. So ministers, shadow ministers and all members, for that matter, should not be afraid to break new ground when it comes to spending time with their families and helping families through some of those difficult times. If you are not compassionate towards your work colleagues, if you are not compassionate to each other, then you are hardly going to be compassionate towards the people whom you represent right across Australia.

For that reason, this is a very good initiative. I congratulate the government on getting it through. I welcome it and, quite frankly, I really look forward to the opportunity, perhaps at another moment, to thank those people who did break new ground. The member for Sydney is one, as is the member for Lindsay. There are a number of senators who also worked very hard on this and I hope that, during the course of all the discussions, they are properly recognised for their pioneering efforts in helping to make this place a little more family friendly.

Ms McKEW (Bennelong—Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and Childcare) (6.25 pm)—I also commend this motion moved by the Leader of the House tonight and indeed many of the comments made by the member for North Sydney. As he said, some things do take a very long time, and I am delighted that this proposal is being put before the House this evening. It is long overdue. When this building was first occupied in 1988 it opened with a gym, with dining facilities and with many other facili-
ties for MPs and senators, but no child care. In fact, I remember when I was first in this building as a member of the gallery remarking on that. It was a live issue in the early nineties. And, as we have just heard, it goes way back with a long history.

Despite the prominence of women in the workforce today and their growing representation in government, a quick survey of other countries indicates that provision of childcare centres in parliaments still lags. Indeed, the Commonwealth parliament now has an opportunity to set an example both here and to assemblies elsewhere, internationally, by providing accessible, high-quality child care for the workplace within the parliament—for parliamentarians and, indeed, for other occupants of the building.

The location of this childcare service also sends a message, I think, about the importance for working women of having access to convenient onsite care. The provision of facilities for nursing mothers particularly highlights the need to assist women in meeting the needs of their young children while they are at work. A survey of Parliament House occupants in March 2008 found that of 221 respondents, 124 indicated their interest in using a childcare centre within Parliament House. A total of 16 children were indicated at that stage by members and senators as requiring some form of care. Ten members and senators indicated a requirement for care from January 2009. This is a welcome reflection of the increase in female participation in parliament as well as something that reflects the increase in the female workforce in the broader community.

Responsibility for the Parliament House childcare centre is a matter for the Department of Parliamentary Services and has been promoted through a joint House committee, with deliberations on this issue now spanning—wait for it—almost 16 years. It is wonderful that now something is happening. Through this motion, from January of next year Parliament House facilities can expand to include a childcare centre which will initially provide spaces for 22 infants and toddlers aged from six weeks to at least 18 months. It is a small start but a very welcome one. It is phase 1 of the provision of child care. Phase 2 will be to provide child care for children up to the age of five.

As the Leader of the House indicated, the former staff bar area is going to be refurbished for the childcare centre. I hope that does not send too many incorrect signals! In the design, the Department of Parliamentary Services is giving full consideration to the heritage values of this national iconic building. The preferred service provider, Anglicare, will manage places in the centre so as to accommodate the children of senators, members and non-Canberra based staff during sitting periods while providing year-round places to the children of Canberra based parliamentary staff and other building occupants.

This local change is being proposed in the midst of a broader agenda of change across the country. The Prime Minister has identified early childhood education as the starting point for the education revolution. The government has delivered on its election commitments by investing a total of $2.4 billion over the next five years on integrated early childhood initiatives that will provide high-quality services and deliver better educational opportunities and outcomes for Australian children. These initiatives are all about improving accessibility and affordability and, importantly, the quality of care and learning. It will be pleasing to see Parliament House showing leadership in this endeavour.

Our children’s early years of course are of the utmost importance. Parents, policymakers, business leaders and the general public
increasingly recognise the importance of these years for promoting healthy physical, emotional, social and intellectual development and ensuring children are more successful in their school years. A major budget item this year has been the investment of $533.5 million, over five years, to provide all Australian children, including Indigenous children in remote communities, with access to affordable preschool programs delivered by a qualified teacher. By 2013, children will have access to 15 hours of early learning programs each week, for 40 weeks a year, in the year before formal schooling.

So the Australian government’s focus on quality early childhood education and care will now be seen within a few steps of this chamber. At last, after many years the need for child care at Parliament House is being acknowledged and met. My thanks to all those many, many members of parliament who over these 16 years have pursued this enterprise and who have not let it lie idle but kept at it and made this initiative happen.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah) (6.31 pm)—I am extremely happy to support this motion, which, as other speakers have pointed out, is long overdue. As all of us know, this fine Parliament House, this marvellous facility, contains a bar, a gym, a pool, a theatre, a billiards room and a clinic but it does not yet contain a childcare centre even though most modern workplaces with some 3,000 staff would have one. We here in this place on both sides of the parliament have always prided ourselves in providing a best practice workplace because we are best practice employers.

It strikes me as very hard for the mothers of young children to be physically separated for long periods of time from their children and without accessible child care it is very hard for new mothers to hold down significant jobs. If we are serious about giving women real choices—if we want women to have the choice of being both mothers and workers rather than just one or the other—we have to encourage the provision of accessible child care.

It seems to me that those who regard motherhood as the highest possible vocation should particularly support accessible child care lest its absence keep motherly women from the workforce or even, in the case of parliament, disenfranchise motherly women—or perhaps disenfranchise conservative women, which is the last thing that I would personally want to see happen. I would hate to see conservative women decline to serve in this parliament because they feel that it is impossible to be a member of this parliament and also to give their children the care and attention that they deserve. Good quality child care is not an issue just for mothers. It is certainly not an issue just for women; it is an issue for everyone and, if we want this society of ours to be fair to everyone and to offer as many opportunities for everyone as it should, accessible child care is absolutely critical.

I certainly would want to acknowledge the very good work of so many people in bringing things to this happy pass. I particularly acknowledge the work of the member for Sydney, who has been a long-time advocate of child care in this building. I would also like to acknowledge the work of my friend and former colleague the former member for Lindsay. This childcare centre almost certainly will not be named the Jackie Kelly centre, but I rather feel it should be because it was her ceaseless badgering of the coalition party room, even to the point of threatening to vote against the budget if this measure did not go ahead, that finally brought us to this happy pass. Of course, she would say that the centre should be larger and should offer a wider range of facilities to a greater number of families; nevertheless, as she
would acknowledge from her political retirement, it is a very significant step in the right direction.

I have to say, I am very pleased to be at one with the government on a childcare issue. I think child care has been a bit of a difficult issue for the government over the last few weeks because of the significant increases in childcare fees, notwithstanding ‘child care watch’ as promised by the government. Nevertheless, this is not an occasion to quibble over wider policy. This is an issue to celebrate the fact that things do change and, even in this building, they do change for the better. I know that the member for Lindsay often felt when talking to senior colleagues in the former government that getting them to focus on this issue was like pulling teeth without anaesthetic; nevertheless, eventually they relented—they agreed to this and thank God it is now happening.

I am all in favour of grumpy old men. I think they have a place in the wider world and I think they do much good, but they should not be allowed to stand in the way of good women having a go. That is why it is so important that the parliament is doing what it is tonight. I defer to no-one in this building in my general conservatism and in my support for traditional role models, but, if we want modern women to be mothers and if we want modern mothers to make as much impact on the world as we would like, we need to have facilities like the one that this motion is going to bring about. I commend the motion to the House and again I commend all those people who have striven so hard and for so long to bring this about.

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women) (6.37 pm)—It is a wonderful opportunity to rise with members on both sides tonight and commend this motion to the House. We are not always in agreement on these issues, but there is a great deal of agreement across both sides of the chamber tonight that this is certainly a wonderful step forward. There really have been, I think, too many people involved in this struggle over the years for all of them to be named. I certainly agree with the member for Warringah, however, that Jackie Kelly, the former member for Lindsay, was particularly prominent among them. The member for Grayndler, who spoke earlier, and the member for North Sydney—both before they became fathers but particularly after they became fathers—have been very supportive of child care in the parliament. We have had a number of senators who have been particularly involved: Senator Kate Lundy and Senator Trish Crossin have both played very active roles over the years. I know you, Madam Deputy Speaker Burke, have been a great supporter of this initiative over very many years as well.

As I say, there are too many people to name all of those who have been involved, but I think I can safely say that one thing unites all of those people. It has not been an issue of self-interest for those people. It has been an issue of principle. It has not been an issue about child care for members of the House of Representatives and for senators; it has been an issue of work based child care that would serve the whole of the population of this Parliament House—which in a sitting week is, of course, as substantial as 3½ thousand. It has always been the argument that this centre would benefit all of the inhabitants of this House who needed it.

The construction of the facility is due to commence shortly, in July 2008, and, as a number of speakers have said, the initial focus is for children under the age of two. Of course, it would be lovely to have older children as well—in a facility that is larger and caters for more children—but having that
group of very young children close to where their mothers are working is so very critical in supporting the establishment and maintenance of breastfeeding. I think it is terrific that all of those staff in Parliament House will be able to not just have the security of work based child care but to also have the additional benefit of being able to continue to breastfeed their children for longer. Of course, the staff of the parliament, members and senators, will pay childcare fees—like all other Australians. We can hope that this establishment of a childcare facility here in parliament will motivate other workplaces and employers to consider the establishment of other work based childcare centres around the country.

Mothers who return to work often stop breastfeeding their children younger than they would like to. We know that the benefits of breastfeeding are very well established, and it is essential that we support mothers’ choice—where they are able to—to continue to breastfeed their infants. As I say, this will be a wonderful benefit of this childcare centre. I am not sure that it will be as useful for parliamentarians, in fact, as it will be for the staff. For many of us who brought our children to Canberra with us in those early months and years it was absolutely essential to have someone with us. It is not suitable, I think, for children to be in child care over the length of the very long hours that we sit. On the other hand, for Canberra based staff and for staff travelling with us who do not have to be here until 9.30 or 10 o’clock at night, this childcare centre will make an enormous difference. It will mean that some of our very valuable staff—the hardworking, intelligent staff that we depend on to do our work—will be able to return to us sooner. They may perhaps be part-time, or they may job share, but they will be able to return to us sooner.

We know that breastfeeding rates in Australia are low by some international standards. While 71 per cent of infants are fully breastfed at the age of one month, only 56 per cent are fully breastfed at three months and just 14 per cent are fully breastfed at six months. Obviously it would be wonderful to increase those figures. The National Health and Medical Research Council Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia, released in 2003, called for breastfeeding to be encouraged and supported in recognition of the positive effect on immediate and long-term health of breastfed infants. The World Health Organisation recommends exclusive breastfeeding for six months, and breastfeeding with complimentary foods for up to two years—and even beyond. We thought that the National Health and Medical Research Council’s initial target of exclusive breastfeeding for six months or more in 50 per cent of infants would be very easy to achieve, and the goal was to achieve exclusive breastfeeding for six months or more in 80 per cent of infants within a decade. We were not able to do that, and the challenge is for us to do that more broadly in the community.

This childcare centre has been the subject of debate, surveys and questionnaires. I believe that we even had employees of the Joint House Department asking—in order to assess whether a childcare centre was needed—female members of parliament, at one stage, whether they were thinking of having any more children. It has had a very long period of deliberation. It is a very important step forward to be doing it now and to be making our workplace here in Canberra—and hopefully our workplaces back in our
electorate offices as well—more family-friendly, and also more breastfeeding-friendly, with the provision of child care.

Of course, the government supports the choice of many women with young children to return to the workforce, and construction of the childcare centre will provide an immediate benefit to those parents who want to return to work while their children are very young. It will provide a good model for other workplaces. It will make it easier for people to continue to breastfeed. It will make our relationships with our children much easier when we work such long and difficult hours.

I think there is one potential problem. It will be that those of us who are missing our own children at home will perhaps have to be banned from the childcare centre or we will be giving cuddles to strange children. That is the only potential drawback I can see. I think having children in Parliament House will be a very humanising thing for all of us. I think it will encourage us all to behave better and to remember that even our opponents and the journalists in the gallery—each and every one of us—have another side and other responsibilities. It will improve the way we treat each other and the feel of the parliament to have more children around.

Ms LEY (Farrer) (6.46 pm)—I would just like to take a few moments to endorse pretty well all of the remarks that we have heard in this debate and to welcome the new childcare centre, which will, I understand, appear over the next few weeks and be, hopefully, fully operational with its 22 places when we return after the winter break.

Parliament House has changed a great deal even in the time I have been here, having joined as a new member in 2001. At that stage, my children were certainly no longer babies. They have grown up to be an adult and two teenagers in the meantime. There is no doubt that Parliament House and our job is extremely unfriendly to families. I still remember, when it was all happening and life as a member of parliament was beginning for me, my middle daughter saying, ‘What happens to me?’ She was about eight at the time. I can still remember, looking back, when my three children had chickenpox at home in Albury and I could not be there. Obviously they were being looked after, but the feeling of being even four hours drive away was awful. I can look back further to being a mother of three toddlers on the family farm and not having any child care at all. Having to cart the children down to the dairy and park them out in the cold on a winter’s morning while I tried to run between them, the milk house, the dairy, the cows, the yard and the dogs on a foggy morning made it all incredibly chaotic. I am very pleased that over the last 10 years we have seen the introduction of good child care for farms. In many cases that child care is mobile, which allows women in farming partnerships to contribute to the farm’s operation in the way they really need to.

I think this is a terrific initiative and I know that it will make a difference for those who use it. We as members of parliament are each just one tenant in this place. The childcare centre is just as important for those who come from elsewhere for different reasons. They may be members of staff or members of the press or people who find themselves here on temporary work contracts. It is very easy for us as members and senators to forget that there might be some 3,000 to 4,000 people here on a sitting week and about 2,000 people on a non-sitting week and that a lot of children belong to those people.

This is a big step forward for the parliament in terms of addressing work-family responsibilities. But, having drawn attention to the drawbacks of being a mum and a member of parliament, it is still very apparent to me that I am extremely lucky with the
services that are provided. We will be lucky, as many are who have workplace provided child care, so we must not forget those who, for whatever reason—they may be in low-paying jobs or in extremely rural and regional areas—cannot find child care and have unacceptable arrangements that they continually struggle with because they need the income. If they cannot manage to take the children to work, they may have arrangements with grandparents, neighbours or after-school care where older children look after them, arrangements which they are never quite happy with. That can create enormous tension, stress and emotional uncertainty in the hearts and minds of women who find themselves in this position.

Last night at this time I talked about International Cleaners Day. We recognised the good work that cleaning staff do in every building across Australia. At that moment, the young woman who cleans my Albury office was doing that and her 10-year-old was in the car doing his homework. I use that as an example. While we take great steps forward, we must not forget those who are still struggling on low incomes or managing family pressures, possibly as a single parent, that make it almost impossible for them to achieve what they want for their children. This is what it comes down to: you want the very best for your children. If you are determined to breastfeed while they are babies—and that is very much encouraged, of course—this will make all the difference. You want to give your child the best start in life. You have a great need as a young mother, I know, for it all to go well and for it all to be perfect, and when things start to go off the rails or go downhill because of the stresses and strains of life it becomes extremely difficult to get yourself back into the picture.

This childcare centre will be of great help to women in Parliament House. This will be of great assistance in leading the way for other workplaces that may be thinking about implementing such a measure. I congratulate all those involved. Mention has already been made of the member for Sydney. I would like to mention the member for Lindsay. I was, of course, present in our government party room when Jackie Kelly would ‘bang on’, if I can use that expression, about the subject of child care. She would stand up and everybody would take a deep breath knowing that she would be talking about child care in Parliament House. It took people like her to be driven in the way that she was to actually make this happen. I know that there were members of both sides. I want to mention the late Senator Jeannie Ferris, who was an advocate for child care, and my colleague the member for Mackellar, who talked very much about tax deductibility in child care—a different but related issue. I look forward to the opening of the new childcare centre and congratulate all those involved in it coming about.

Question agreed to.

STANDING ORDERS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (6.52 pm)—I move:

That, unless otherwise ordered, the following amendments to the standing orders be adopted to operate for the remainder of the 2008 sittings:
1. Standing order 34, Figure 2, be amended as follows:

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<th>MONDAY</th>
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2. Standing order 207 be amended to read:

207. Presenting a petition

A petition may be presented in one of two ways:

(a) The Chair of the Standing Committee on Petitions shall present petitions and/or reports of that committee, and the Chair and one other Member of the Committee may make statements concerning petitions and/or such reports presented, in accordance with standing order 34 (order of business). The time provided may extend for no more than 10 minutes.

(b) A Member may present a petition during:

(i) the period of Members’ statements in the Main Committee, in accordance with standing order 192A and standing order 193;

(ii) adjournment debate in the House in accordance with standing order 31, and in the Main Committee in accordance with standing order 191; and

(iii) grievance debate in accordance with standing order 192B.

CHAMBER
3. **Standing order 209 be amended to read:**

   **209. Petition may be referred to a Minister for response**

   (a) After a petition is presented to the House, the Standing Committee on Petitions may refer a copy of the petition to the Minister responsible for the administration of the matter raised in the petition.

   (b) The Minister shall be expected to respond to a referred petition within 90 days of presentation by lodging a written response with the Committee.

   (c) The Chair of the Petitions Committee shall announce any ministerial responses to petitions. After the announcement, ministerial responses shall be printed in Hansard and published on the House’s internet website.

I rise to speak to standing order 34, figure 2, and standing orders 207 and 209. These amendments to standing orders are a continuation of the government’s reforms aimed at making parliament more accountable and more accessible. In establishing the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions upon coming to government, we signalled that we no longer wanted only lip-service paid to the concerns of Australians. We wanted a process to deal with petitions that allowed the ideas and concerns contained within them to be heard and to receive a response. These changes continue that process. They allot time in the parliament so that the newly established petitions committee can report and present petitions to the House. The petitions committee will now be able to report and present petitions to the House for 10 minutes from 8.30 pm on a Monday night. They also formalise the role the committee will play in reporting to the House on responses to petitions received from ministers. The changes do not remove the ability of members to present petitions.

I am pleased to report to the House that this year 44 petitions have been presented, and so far nine of them have received ministerial responses. I can indicate to the House that that figure is now at least 10 because I signed a response just prior to this debate being held. This is compared with the more than 900 which were received in the entire term of the last parliament, of which only two received responses.

The proposed changes are being adopted on a trial basis only and will be reviewed at the end of 2008. They are consistent with a more responsive parliament, they are consistent with a more modern parliament and I commend the changes to the House.

Question agreed to.

**Mr ALBANESE** (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (6.55 pm)—I move:

That the standing orders Nos. 1, 192 and 193 be amended to read as follows:

1. **Maximum speaking times (amendment to existing subject, as follows):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members’ statements in the Main Committee</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>90 second statements</strong></td>
<td><strong>Whole period</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Each Member (but not a Minister or Parliamentary Secretary)</td>
<td><strong>standing order 192a</strong></td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>3 minute constituency statements</strong></th>
<th><strong>Whole period</strong></th>
<th><strong>30 mins</strong></th>
<th><strong>3 mins</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Each Member</td>
<td><strong>standing order 193</strong></td>
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192. Main Committee’s order of business

Figure 4. Main Committee order of business

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.30 am</td>
<td>5 min constituency statements</td>
<td>9.30 am</td>
<td>5 min constituency statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>approx 10.00 am</td>
<td>Government business and/or committee and delegation reports</td>
<td>approx 10.00 am</td>
<td>Government business and/or committee and delegation reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>approx 1.00 pm</td>
<td>Adjournment Debate</td>
<td>approx 1.00 pm</td>
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</table>

The meeting times of the Main Committee are fixed by the Deputy Speaker and are subject to change. Adjournment debates can occur on days other than Thursdays by agreement between the Whips.

193. Members’ three minute constituency statements

If the Main Committee meets on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday, the first item of business shall be constituency statements by Members. The Deputy Speaker may call a Member to make a constituency statement for no longer than three minutes. The period for Members’ constituency statements may continue for 30 minutes, irrespective of suspensions for divisions in the House.

I rise to speak on the amendments to the standing orders. These amendments change the name of members’ statements to ‘constituency statements’ and, importantly, will now allow ministers to make them. I should declare an interest in moving this motion and these changes to the standing orders, because at the moment as a member of the executive I do not have an opportunity to put forward issues of concern to constituents in my electorate. This will change that. It was my privilege on Saturday to visit the home of a lovely
couple in Marrickville who celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. Those are the sorts of events concerning constituents of members who have had the honour of being appointed to the executive which should not be excluded from representation.

This motion also mandates that the statements should be first in the order of business on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday, regardless of the time when the Main Committee commences. The purpose of the statements is to allow members of the House to report on and raise issues of importance to their constituencies. This should extend to all members of the House, as all represent areas that require such attention.

In the last parliament, three-minute statements occurred on 118 occasions, providing 1,105 speaking opportunities or 55 hours of speaking time. This statistic alone proves the effectiveness of this measure in creating opportunities for members to raise matters of importance to their constituencies. As a minister, I now look forward to being able to use these statements to raise issues of importance to my electorate. I would like to single out the Chief Government Whip for his initiative in supporting these changes and the previous changes, which have just been carried by the House. I commend these changes to the House.

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (6.58 pm)—I wanted to make a few brief remarks about these changes to the standing orders. You will recall that when three-minute statements were first foreshadowed in 1997 the then Leader of the House in fact referred to constituency statements. So the current Leader of the House, Mr Albanese, the member for Grayndler, in changing the name back recognises this fact and, in particular, recognises the central importance of all members of the House being given opportunities to speak about issues of concern to their constituencies.

I want to place on record my appreciation to the Leader of the House for supporting this. I should point out that when three-minute members’ statements first started only three speakers were allowed on each side of the House and the debate went for only 18 minutes. It was extended, of course, to half an hour. This motion by the Leader of the House completes the circle.

Originally, three-minute statements were not preserved by the interruption of divisions. If a member was making a three-minute statement or was due to speak next, they lost their opportunity—the Main Committee did not take up where it left off. This was to the considerable detriment of those members who wanted to utilise the facility. It is true to say that this was rectified in 2006 for all the scheduled meetings of the House—that is, on Wednesday and Thursday. Rather than moving a separate motion in the House when there are extra sittings of the Main Committee, the Leader of the House now has automatically provided for constituency statements and also the fact that, if there are interruptions by divisions in the House, we will take up where we left off. The term ‘constituency statement’ is not defined in the standing order. It will be up to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and members of the Speaker’s panel to determine, by way of precedent, whether there should be any confining of statements made on that speaking opportunity.

The Leader of the House also mentioned that, in the last parliament, there were 118 occasions providing a total of 1,105 speaking opportunities for members to make three-minute statements. This shows how members have responded very positively to the speaking opportunity. As with other changes to the standing orders, I would expect the member...
for Parramatta, who is chair of the Procedure Committee, would review that. Hopefully, the review may even encompass whether or not there is a case to be made for more constituency statements now that both parliamentary secretaries and ministers have that opportunity to speak.

I strongly support this change and I commend the Leader of the House, who has always sought, in his short time as Leader of the House, to provide more opportunities for members of the House.

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee

Access to Information

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (7.02 pm)—I move:

That:

(1) the Honourable TRH Cole AO RFD QC, President of the HMAS Sydney II Commission of Inquiry, be authorized to access exhibits held for less than ten years and confidential submissions received by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade during its inquiry into the loss of HMAS Sydney, subject to:

(a) appropriate consultations by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade being undertaken with those who provided confidential submissions, prior to any such material being accessed by President Cole;

(b) the Commission not using the material in a manner contrary to the law of parliamentary privilege as amplified by section 16 of the Parliamentary Privileges Act 1987;

(c) the material not being made public as evidence tendered to the Commission or as part of the Commission’s report without the agreement of the Presiding Officers; and

(2) the foregoing resolution have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders; and

(3) a message be sent to the Senate informing it of this resolution and requesting that it concur.

This motion authorises access by the Hon. Terence Cole AO, RFD, QC, President of the HMAS Sydney II Commission of Inquiry, to obtain certain documents received by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade during its inquiry into the loss of HMAS Sydney. The motion is in response to a request from Mr Cole to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and President of the Senate. The commission has previously received copies of the joint committee’s report and other material authorised for publication by the committee. Mr Cole has now sought access to the remaining documents of the committee’s inquiry—namely, seven confidential submissions and 68 exhibits.

The Presiding Officers are able to authorise access to some of the material sought, exhibits which have been held for more than 10 years. However, the confidential submissions and any exhibits held for less than 10 years may be available to the commission only by resolution of both houses of parliament. The motion proposes that Mr Cole be authorised to access the requested material subject to three conditions, which are: firstly, that appropriate consultations be undertaken by the joint committee with those who provided confidential submissions prior to any such material being accessed by President Cole; secondly, that the commission not use the material in a manner contrary to the law of parliamentary privilege; and, thirdly, that the material not be made public as evidence tendered to the commission or as part of the commission’s report without the agreement of the Presiding Officers. The Presiding Officers have consulted with the joint commit-
tee, which has agreed with this course of action. I commend the motion to the House.

Question agreed to.

Public Works Committee

Report

Mr BUTLER (Port Adelaide) (7.05 pm)—On behalf of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, I present the fourth report for 2008 of the committee relating to the proposed referrals tabled March 2008.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

Mr BUTLER—by leave—This report comprises some seven referrals of works, totalling over $1 billion, to be undertaken by the Department of Defence. A good number of these works involve upgrades to existing defence facilities where those facilities have become tired and are in need of replacement or refit for various reasons—usually age. Also, a significant number of proposals which we are approving in this report go to a number of increases in the operational capability of the defence forces—things like the Hardened and Networked Army initiative, purchase of the multi-role helicopters and the new facilities needed at a number of bases to deal with those new helicopters.

The report addresses seven referrals made to the committee in March 2008, namely: facilities for the Hardened and Networked Army at Edinburgh Defence Precinct, South Australia, at an estimated $623.68 million; upgrades at RAAF Base Darwin, at an estimated $49.83 million; developments at Robertson Barracks, Darwin, at an estimated $72.12 million; RAAF Tindal redevelopments at an estimated $58.7 million; airborne early warning and control facilities at RAAF Tindal at an estimated $64.2 million; multi-role helicopter facilities at Nowra, Townsville, Oakey, Enoggera and Sydney at an estimated $168.7 million; and developments at Enoggera Base in Brisbane at an estimated $80.2 million.

The committee has reported on an exception-only basis on issues that it thought warranted further comment and in some cases has recommended further action. However, many more issues were raised at the public hearings, and I would urge those interested in any of these works to supplement the report with the transcripts and submissions that are available on the committee’s website. In all cases, the committee has recommended that the House resolve that the works be carried out. For three of the seven works, the committee has made some additional recommendations. In the case of the Edinburgh Defence Precinct development, the committee has recommended that the Minister for Defence progress land acquisition negotiations as a matter of priority. The land in question will enhance the Army’s training capacity, and any expenditure on temporary facilities whilst awaiting this acquisition would be wasted.

Secondly, the committee has made a general recommendation that Australian government contracts for major capital infrastructure developments include a requirement for the provision of employment and training opportunities for the local community. The committee considers that Commonwealth agencies delivering capital works projects have an obligation to contribute to the local community by ensuring these opportunities are provided.

The concerns of the local community were also raised in the inquiry into developments at Robertson Barracks in Darwin. Local residents expressed concern about the impact of base traffic on local roads. Although this is the responsibility of the local government, the Department of Defence indicated that it was keen to resolve the concerns of residents and thus the committee has recommended
that Defence facilitate a resolution to this issue.

Finally, the multi-role helicopter facilities project highlighted concerns about residential housing development encroaching on Defence establishments and the resulting restrictions that this places on Defence activities. The committee has recommended that the government negotiate with relevant state, territory and local governments to develop protocols to manage development on land surrounding Defence establishments. While the committee understands that residential land is at a premium, it does not want essential Defence activities to be retrospectively curtailed.

I would like to thank the committee for its work in relation to these inquiries. The committee was aware that several of these projects had been delayed due to the prorogation of the 41st Parliament, so we went to great lengths to ensure that they were completed by this sitting period. I commend the report to the House.

Mr LINDSAY (Herbert) (7.10 pm)—by leave—I would like to make three quick points. It is important to put these points on the public record. First of all, under the chairmanship of the member for Port Adelaide, the Public Works Committee has been functioning extraordinarily well. We all work together in a completely bipartisan way and deal expeditiously with the matters brought before us. In these matters, which are all to do with Defence, Brigadier Bill Grice and his team are working in an outstanding way to make sure that the evidence is presented to the committee in a proper way and the committee can be satisfied that the proposed works are good value for the Commonwealth of Australia. I congratulate Bill Grice and his team.

I have two comments on the report. First of all I want to comment on a matter alluded to by the member for Port Adelaide—that is, the report on the Edinburgh Defence Precinct. Some of the land that is required for this particular project was sold. Our report says:

Although initial planning for this project began in 2005, it was not factored into land sales and the Commonwealth is now facing the additional cost of buying back this land.

The Minister for Defence calls it a hiccup. But it is not a hiccup; it is more than that. The land was sold under the previous government. My point is that it is time to stop selling Defence land without thinking about the future. For example, the open space at Randwick Barracks must not be sold. Warradale, Hampstead and Keswick Barracks in Adelaide must not be sold. They must be kept for Defence purposes. You find these examples across the Commonwealth of Australia, and I want to alert the parliament that I will certainly be advocating that Defence land not be sold, with an eye to what might be required in the future.

My final point—and you would expect me to cover this—is in relation to Townsville. In this report we recommend the spending of multimillions of dollars at 5th Aviation Regiment in Townsville to look after B Squadron with 10 new MRH90 medium lift troop helicopters. Works will involve modifying the B Squadron aircraft shelters, extending the mission planning facility, building a new simulator building, upgrading the technical support troop facility, upgrading the technical support squadron aircraft life support equipment workshop and providing a new forward repair troop and draft priority 1 store building. In addition to this, and through a separate arrangement, a multimillion dollar simulator will be built. This will provide the opportunity for a new aerospace industry to develop in Townsville, and for that reason I certainly commend this report to the House.
BUSINESS

Rearrangement

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide—Minister for Youth and Minister for Sport) (7.13 pm)—by leave—I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent order of the day No. 4, committee and delegation reports, being called on immediately.

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee

Report

Debate resumed from 23 June, on motion by Mr Dreyfus:

That the House take note of the report.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (7.14 pm)—I rise to speak on the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs report Reforming the Constitution: A roundtable discussion. When I was a kid in grade 1 in 1971—that is going back a while—Australian history, as I recall it, was comprised primarily of lists of white explorers and the dates on which they encountered various parts of Australia. I still remember some of the dates that were flogged into me, I guess, by the nuns, such as when Thomas Mitchell crossed the Balonne River on St George’s Day, 23 April, and I remember Burke and Wills. So much of our history back then was about white explorers and how they encountered Australia. The other bit that I particularly remember from my childhood education was the drawing of maps, rivers and towns—particularly rivers, where it was all about drawing the river accurately. Obviously, our approach to Australian history has changed significantly since 1971 and the time that I finished school.

So how do we make sense of the modern Australia and have an inkling as to its future direction? As I said, the Australia that I grew up in during the 1970s and 1980s had a very ‘whitefella’ approach to what constituted Australian history. It was all about explorers and the like. I would like to refer to a quote by Robert Alter in a book called Commentary in 1970—it is a literary commentary, but I think it is relevant here in terms of looking at Australia’s role in the world.

People who shrilly insist on the uniqueness of their own identity are likely to be insecure about it.

Robert Alter is an American commentator and—I do not have the whole text in front of me—I assume he was talking about the US experience rather than the Australian experience. The quote is actually from A Map of Australian Verse by James McAuley, which is a history of Australian poetry.

The reason I refer to that quote is that the legal and constitutional affairs committee has spent a lot of time and resources talking about how our Constitution could be reformed. We do so in the context of being a people who do not shrilly insist on the uniqueness of our own identity. There are certainly some obvious Australian characteristics, especially when it comes to politics: we are very sceptical of our politicians; our politicians do not have the same religious affiliations that might have once been there but are certainly not present in the modern Australia; we do not have the US approach in terms of saying, ‘This is what defines an Australian culture,’ because we have always been, I guess, a multicultural community. Even when we did not write a history that reflected that multicultural community, we were a multicultural community.

That brings me to the efforts of the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. The Australia that the committee is a part of is a very different Australia from the one that I experienced when I was a child. It
is not so Anglocentric. We are particularly relaxed and comfortable as a nation when it comes to talking about politics. We have realised that the Australian history has many more explorers. For example, we understand that it was not just James Cook and a few other English blokes—there were the Macassans, who landed in the Darwin area long before Captain James Cook landed in Australia in the 1770s. We also know the role of the Chinese explorers and the Dutch, who more than 400 years ago had already settled in Australia. Then there are the French, the Portuguese and many other groups. I was even approached by one of my constituents who assured me that much of the gold in the Egyptian pyramids came from Gympie. I hasten to point out that I do not subscribe to this view of history, but nevertheless it is a view that is put out there by some of the more adventurous members of my electorate.

The Australia of 2008 has a much broader history. It recognises—and I say this proudly—that Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders have played a much more significant role in our history than just some bloke called Bennelong who went off to England. Obviously we now recognise many other significant individual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, such as Jandamarra, Vincent Lingiari, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Lowitja O’Donohue, Neville Bonner et cetera, and I have not even started on listing sports people because I thought if I started there the list would go on and on. The Australia of 2008 recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders played a very significant role in our country long before white men first landed here—or Macassans or Chinese et cetera.

I started this speech by talking about when I was in grade 1 in 1971. When I was in grade 5, the Racial Discrimination Act came into force. Then, if we just go forward a few years to 3 June 1992, the High Court handed down its Mabo decision, which forever changed our view of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders because they were no longer classified as fauna, which had been the convenient fabrication for much of Australian history. To digress, it is interesting that Torres Strait Islander Eddie Mabo’s case about individual ownership, which was all about his individual ownership of a block of dirt or some fish traps and the like, failed. Other claimants were successful, but Eddie Mabo’s case actually failed. If you look at the Queensland Supreme Court decision, he failed at first instance. Then, amazingly, the High Court was able to make that leap about individual ownership of property—which is quite common in Torres Strait Islander culture—and transfer that over to an Aboriginal collective ownership of property. From there we had the Mabo decision and moved on to the Native Title Act.

The reason that I give this lengthy introduction is that the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs is looking at what makes Australia. We are looking at our Constitution, that document which is up on level 1 and level 2 of this House and which is an act of the British parliament dated 9 July 1900, and which is pictured on the front of the report. We are looking at the future of Australia. As the report indicates, referendums that have attempted to change this very old document have not been successful. Since 1901, there have been 44 referenda proposals but only eight have been successful.

One of those was the 1967 referendum proposal about changing the way in which we approached Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, which was an incredible decision. It is easy to see now in the atmosphere of 2008 that it was right, but 1967 was a completely different world. It was a segregated world in many country towns—certainly where I came from was a segregated town. It was a time of freedom rides in Australia. It
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was a different world. But still we had an overwhelming majority of Australian people say, ‘We want fairness to come to Australia.’

We then leap forward to Mabo in 1992. In 1993 there was Paul Keating’s Native Title Act. Then there were later decisions, such as the Wik decision in the High Court and the Yorta Yorta decision. We can even look at John Howard’s 10-point plan, which I will not comment on. After all of these progressions in Australian history, we still have section 25 of the Constitution, which, according to a common-sense interpretation, despite its initial intent, is still discriminatory. This is one of the key things that the committee was looking at in its roundtable discussion.

Before I speak more about the roundtable discussion, I commend the people who turned up in Canberra to have input into the discussion. I also commend the chair, Mark Dreyfus QC, for the team that he put together. It was an edifying day for me. It was a great occasion for me to get some further understanding of this white fella document that has governed so much of Australia for so long.

One of the key topics that the committee looked at was how to amend the Constitution. Obviously, there is a school of thought that, with only eight out of 44 referenda getting up, the Australian people must be doing something wrong. I am quite comfortable with that ratio, because I believe that the Australian people always get it right. Even though I campaigned for the republic on 6 November 1999, I understand that the Australian people always get it right. Even though I will vote for something like that if we are to take the Australian people with us, even when someone is trying to shove a preamble down their throat, like John Howard tried to—with all respect to Les Murray—or bringing through a constitutional model that the Australian people have not embraced. The Australian people will change the Constitution when they see that the change is right, as they did in 1967 and as they did on one out of three occasions when Curtin and Menzies put up the idea of the dental plan. The Australian people will get it right, but it is up to politicians and leaders in the community to make sure that we move them with us.

We also looked at the disqualification provisions, especially those relating to foreign allegiance and office of profit under the crown. I particularly raise that because I represent an electorate where one in three voters was born overseas. I personally have never thought that, because she was born in Wales, someone such as Julia Gillard would somehow not be loyal to Australia if she happened to have a Welsh passport. That is ridiculous. We also looked at parliamentary terms. Coming from Queensland where we only have one house, a unicameral system, and we do not have four-year terms, I have some interesting perspectives. We also looked at federal-state relations. The Rudd government will set some new standards in terms of what can be achieved when we work cooperatively. However, it is still the role of the federal parliament to look at some of the practical functioning implications for the rest of Australia. I have already touched on Indigenous recognition and the possibility of a new preamble. We saw from the apology in February that some symbolic things have a lot of resonance and a lot of weight in the Australian community. We also looked at citizenship and a bill of rights.

From that, I will segue into my last comment, which is that, when I have talked to kids in schools as a teacher and as a politician, often kids will talk about their bill of rights or even their Constitution. This might be due to the fact that Nicholas Cage’s movie National Treasure was so popular—I am not sure. I think that there is even a sequel, National Treasure II. There has never been an
Australian version of *National Treasure*. Kids can quote their rights, but obviously they are quoting from the US Bill of Rights and are not aware—which is why we have this cover: so that we can make the Constitution real for them—that we have a document as well. Hopefully, over the next few years we will be able to engage them with the fact that they have a document that governs their country and that they have a right and a responsibility to make sure that it is an accurate document.

**Mr NEUMANN** (Blair) (7.28 pm)—I rise to speak in relation to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs report *Reforming our Constitution: a roundtable discussion*. I want to first pay tribute to and thank the member for Isaacs for his bipartisan nature and the way in which he chaired the meetings. Members of the committee approached his chairmanship with confidence. I thank him very much for the leadership he showed in the committee. The constitutional change that we have experienced in this country over such a long time has gone not just at a Darwinian evolutionary pace but a glacial pace. We have not seen any constitutional change by virtue of referenda since the mid to late 1970s. We have seen some change caused by judicial interpretation, if not activism, and some change in relation to intergovernmental negotiation and referral of powers. But change by way of referendum with the majority of votes being cast by Australians in a majority of states has been a cautious and a reluctant experience for the Australian community.

In the lead-up to the 2020 Summit, I conducted a number of fora—2020 summits in schools—in my electorate of Blair in southeast Queensland. Of all the topics that were looked at by the grade 12 students in the various schools, both urban and rural, the one that caused them the most angst and vexation was the future of Australian governance. What struck me was that, whilst the grade 12s were across agricultural issues, multiculturalism and economic pressures on their families, the future of Australian governance was not really to the fore. Very few of the children in the classroom understood very much about constitutional arrangements in the federal system of government, which we have experienced since the turn of the 20th century.

I note that there were five big ideas arising out of the 2020 Summit—an Australian republic; collaborative governance, through revolutionising the way government and communities interact; a modern Australian federation, through reinvigorating the federation; a bill or charter of rights for all Australians, including Indigenous Australians; and open and accountable government. These are values and aspirations which I share. The idea of a preamble in the Constitution to recognise the first people’s custodianship is also a worthy goal.

Coming from a background as a practising lawyer, the roundtable summit was perhaps the most fascinating and interesting experience that I have had since I was elected to this House. The roundtable was very interesting for me because I have read articles, essays and books from the eminent scholars who on 1 May 2008 came to this place here in Canberra. I thank them all for their participation. I was somewhat in awe of their intelligence and breadth of experience in constitutional and legal matters. I also thank all the members of the committee who participated.

There are three main ways that we change the Constitution in this country. The first is by referendum. That is the highest benchmark and probably the one that we should aspire to the most. As I said, the Australian public has shown caution and reluctance to
make changes through referenda. Perhaps when it comes to this issue I am, for one of the few times in my life, to the left of the member for Moreton. I do not think we always get it right when it comes to constitutional change. I think 1946 was the last time this side of the House proposed a successful referendum to the Australian people without the support of those opposite. They have had more success. We have only had eight successful referenda out of 44, and that is very sad, in my view. We have then gone about other ways and means to effect change, perhaps of a less consultative nature, and that has not been a good thing. I have very democratic sentiments, as do most if not all of the people in this House, and I believe it is important that the Australian public be involved in this process.

The idea that somehow we can rely upon judicial interpretation and activism is not a good thing. That activism and interpretation has waxed and waned over the years. We have seen it evoke criticism from both sides of the House. When there have been liberal interpretations of the Constitution, those on the other side of the House have criticised it. But when the High Court has taken a lacklustre, legalistic, conservative approach, those on this side of the House have been critical. Resorting to the idiosyncrasies and peculiar eccentricities of legal interpretation to effect constitutional change is to me a second-best option. Relying upon intergovernmental negotiation and referral of powers without any real parliamentary oversight is not really the best way to go about constitutional change. The proliferation of many agreements without any automatic referral to a parliamentary committee is also not a good thing. I applaud the recommendation of the committee which said:

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government introduce the requirement for intergovernmental agreements to be automatically referred to a parliamentary committee for scrutiny and report to the Parliament.

I think that is a very good recommendation and I ask the government to take it up.

Section 44(i) of the Constitution lacks certainty and clarity with respect to the disqualification of people from becoming members of parliament. In this era of multiculturalism, with many people holding dual citizenship, it is really quite extraordinary that people who come to live in our country and show a degree of commitment to it cannot be elected by the people to this parliament without having to renounce their citizenship elsewhere. I think we should have a look at this again. Disqualifying many people from becoming members of parliament and causing them financial disadvantage by saying that they are exercising offices of profit under the Crown is really quite an antiquated notion. People change jobs and retrain; we have a great deal of social and vocational mobility in this country. I think section 44 needs attention. Even though I am a proud Queenslander, I have some criticism of my own state of Queensland. Queensland really ought to move to four-year parliamentary terms. The other states have moved to that, and the Commonwealth, like Queensland, also needs to play catch-up.

I have some concern about how the Australian public would consider the notion of electing senators for eight years, and that idea of a nexus. I think that we should be looking at changing the duration of time that senators serve on behalf of the people. I also think we should have a good look at the idea of four-year fixed terms as well. The timing of the Senate is really quite strange. The idea that someone like, say, Senator elect Mark Furner from Queensland could be elected on 24 November 2007 and have to wait until 1 July 2008 to take up office is quite strange and quite extraordinary. I am sure that the average person in the street would think that
was an odd thing indeed. I think the climate is ready for a change in that regard. If people generally knew that that is the provision in our Constitution they would think better of us for seeking to change it.

There are very few rights in our Constitution. The founding fathers—and they were all founding fathers; not founding mothers and fathers—were nonconformist when it came to issues of religion. So we have section 116 as one of the few rights in our Constitution:

The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth.

It would really surprise a lot of people that we do not have rights as the Americans would consider them. The Americans adopted a Bill of Rights in 1791. I would like to see a bill of rights constitutionally included, although I am not confident that the Australian people would accept that. The notion of Professor George Williams, who has been an advocate for a human rights charter, is a good one. It has been adopted in Victoria—the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. The UK in 1998 adopted a law of this kind. I think it could serve an educative role in our community. It is important that it is about not just rights but also responsibilities. It is important that one of those responsibilities is that we obey the law and respect the rights of others. That is crucial to the notion of a fair go for all. Victoria has done this, the ACT has done this, New Zealand has done this and the UK has done this as well. I think this would bring human rights issues to the fore when any law was passed through this parliament. It would not fetter the sovereignty of the parliament. It would not involve judges interpreting and applying laws, but I think it would bring to the attention of the Australian people where a law was being passed that was contrary to the charter of rights and responsibilities. It is a good way, as Professor Williams says, of weeding out bad laws while leaving the decision of how to fix the problem with elected representatives.

I would like to see the Constitution changed insofar as the preamble is concerned. I think it would be a wonderful idea if we recognised the special position of our Indigenous people as our first Australians and recognised their traditional custodianship of the land as well. The recognition of their identity and belonging is also important. It is important that our preamble states who we are, where we come from and what we believe. But I am also concerned about how it would look. The wording of the Australian Constitution and the preamble that we have operated under for so many years is quite archaic, turgid and Victorian in nature. It uses words which we do not often use these days. I am sure if you went out into the street and discussed with the average person things in relation to the preamble using words like ‘Lords Spiritual and Temporal’ they would find it very hard to accept. They would find that very strange indeed. It is time that we looked at the preamble, but I am concerned about how it would look juxtaposed with a constitution that uses such antiquated language. I am concerned about the beauty and the eloquence of such a preamble and how it would sit alongside the Constitution as it is constructed and operating.

It is important that we look at the principles of the Constitution and constitutionalism. I would like to see the preamble looked at in the context of looking at the Constitution as a whole. It is important in 2008 and beyond that we have a Constitution that is modern and that would reflect where we are going, where we are presently and what we believe as a people. It is time we looked at
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federal-state relations again. There is no way we are ever going to get rid of our state governments. I think the states serve a useful purpose and I am proud to say I come from Queensland. It is time our young people were better educated and our people more engaged in civic and public constitutional issues. I look forward to the day when we have on a regular basis constitutional conventions so that the Australian people can be involved in the process of constitutional change, and their democratic beliefs and their aspirations for the future can be reflected in a document that does not use terminology which is better suited to the 1890s.

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs) (7.44 pm)—This report of the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs of the House of Representatives entitled Reforming our Constitution: a roundtable discussion is a largely bipartisan report, both as to the need for constitutional change generally and support for some particular reforms such as the removal of the section 25 of the Constitution, which is a directly racist provision, and as to possible changes to section 44, which deals with qualification for membership of this parliament. I thank the speakers who have preceded me, the members for Moreton and Blair, both of them members of the legal and constitutional affairs committee also I thank them for their participation in the roundtable and the work of the committee which has led to this report.

There is an important message in this report in the bipartisanship which is reflected in its text, and that is that there is a recognition by the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee that we need to learn the lessons from past experience of referendums. And those lessons are: that without bipartisan support there is unlikely to be change to the Constitution; that to get bipartisan support there needs to be support not only from parliamentarians and members of the major political parties but also from the public; and that there needs to be public involvement and a groundswell of public support.

The Aboriginals referendum of 1967 is probably the best example of the generation of public support and the building of a groundswell. There was a long and very public campaign over some 20 years, and the referendum in 1967 was supported with a resounding vote of over 90 per cent. The Senate casual vacancies referendum in 1977, which was the last occasion on which there was a successful referendum, was prompted by the events surrounding the filling of casual Senate vacancies which, on one view, led to the 1975 dismissal of the Whitlam government. And it could be said of that 1977 referendum that the changes proposed and agreed to in the referendum were well understood; certainly they were resoundingly supported, being approved in all six states and with 73 per cent of the popular vote.

The deputy chair of the committee, the member for Fisher, put the need for community involvement very well on the tabling of this report when he said that the public ‘must enjoy a sense of ownership of the process’. Indeed, this is a recurrent theme in this report. The report looks at the machinery of referendums, which of course is part of the process of constitutional change. The booklets with the yes case and the no case which we currently use are a procedure that was prescribed in 1912 and, quite probably, are a procedure which does not work any longer as a means of informing the public. One of the roundtable participants, Professor George Williams, who is a professor of constitutional law, told the committee that during the republic referendum in 1999 not one of his constitutional law students had read the booklets containing the yes and no arguments. It is apparent that information mechanisms which were appropriate for 1912 are
unlikely to be appropriate for 2008 and beyond.

Very many Australians now engage in politics through the net, through television or through other means, and we need to pay attention to this if there is to be community engagement with constitutional change. It is worth recording what another of the roundtable participants, Mr Peter Black, of the Queensland University of Technology law faculty, said on this subject. He referred to a group of Australians as ‘digital natives’, saying that they:

... spend more of their recreation time each week surfing the net than they do watching television, let alone any other recreational activity. They have grown up in this environment. The ability to make the case through YouTube or Facebook applications, or through a range of other online tools, should be an important part of any education and public ownership process.

That observation is salutary because it indicates that there is a very real need to consider whether we need to move beyond pamphlets containing a yes case and a no case, a procedure that, as I said, was prescribed in 1912.

The committee in its report supported the idea of regular constitutional conventions as a means of giving opportunities to the public to engage in debate on constitutional reform. But as well, I would suggest, we need to consider forms of community consultation. The consultation in 2005 in Victoria which led to the charter of rights enacted by the Victorian parliament in 2006 shows that it is possible to engage with the community on fundamental rights and law reform issues. That process involved more than 2,500 written submissions, 55 community meetings and 75 more focused meetings with government and non-government bodies. It was conducted by a four-person consultative committee: a former Victorian Liberal Attorney-General, the Hon. Haddon Storey; an Olympic basketballer, Andrew Gaze; a community leader in disability issues, Rhonda Galbally; and Professor George Williams. This was a model of community consultation that was not in any sense top-down and that meant that the proposal for a charter, which was the focus of this extended consultation process, was not seen as just an idea of politicians. If there is to be another constitutional convention—and we have had one in each of the last three decades—it is very clear that a long period of community consultation leading up to it would make the convention much more reflective of community ideas.

Turning to the specific ideas canvassed in the report, they include the committee’s sole direct recommendation in relation to scrutiny of intergovernmental agreements. The report also sets out the debate which occurred at the roundtable on other constitutional reform ideas, including fixed four-year terms for the Commonwealth parliament and qualification for membership of this parliament, particularly section 44 of the Commonwealth Constitution and particularly the parts of that section which deal with foreign allegiance, and the office of profit under the Crown disqualification.

There were ideas concerning the constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including the possibility that that constitutional recognition might be included in a preamble. There was some discussion of, and indeed general agreement about, the need to remove section 25 of the Constitution. There was discussion about a concept of Australian citizenship in the Constitution. I suspect that many Australians would be surprised to learn that there is no definition of Australian citizenship in the Constitution. As well, there was discussion, which is set out in the report, about the possibility of either constitutional recognition of human rights in the form of some kind of
constitutional bill of rights or a legislated charter of rights.

In relation to the scrutiny of intergovernmental agreements, it is probable that the difficulty of amending the constitutional provisions concerning federal-state relations and the unwieldy nature of the referral of power provision in the Commonwealth Constitution has led to the proliferation of intergovernmental agreements that we see today. As was discussed at the roundtable, there are some hundreds of these agreements between the Commonwealth and the states. Almost all of them are secret in the sense that they are not scheduled to any act of parliament, they are not readily accessible and they are not available to members of the public when they request them. As a consequence, a very important area of federal-state relations is not transparent and it makes any sense of accountability extremely difficult. Certainly it cannot be said to be consistent in any way with notions of open government that there should be these hundreds of intergovernmental agreements. It is worth noting that the legal and constitutional affairs committee of this House made a similar recommendation in 2006 in its report on harmonisation of the legal system, and it is to be hoped that the government will look seriously at this particular recommendation in the report—there should be parliamentary scrutiny of intergovernmental agreements in a similar form to the way in which there is now parliamentary scrutiny of international treaties through the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties.

On four-year terms, this is a matter which would involve an amendment to at least section 28 of the Constitution, if not some other provisions. Section 28 of the Constitution is the provision which specifies three-year terms for this House. There are separate provisions which deal with the Senate. At Federation, all of the states except Western Australia had three-year terms but over time all of the states except for Queensland have moved to four-year terms, and in Queensland this is being very actively discussed. The consequence of this is that most Australians have had an opportunity to see four-year terms in operation, and that creates a good climate for considering four-year terms for the Commonwealth parliament. The report sets out some of the discussion about four-year terms and also notes that the issue of whether the terms should be fixed is itself a separate issue. Certainly, this is not a new idea. The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, in its report after the 2004 election, with apparent bipartisan support, recommended four-year terms for the House of Representatives.

If I could briefly mention section 25 of the Constitution, this is a provision which refers to the possibility of Australians being disqualified from voting on the ground of race. That is a startling provision even to mention. There is no such disqualification anywhere in Australia at the present time. It is to be sincerely hoped that there never would be again. It is an outdated provision which should be removed, and it was striking that there was very clear agreement among all the members of the committee that section 25 should be removed from the Constitution. Professor Hilary Charlesworth, an eminent professor of law at the Australian National University, said this in very direct terms at the roundtable. It is worth quoting her words. She said that section 25:

... is quite an extraordinary provision to have in a constitution. Were a Martian to pick up our Constitution, they would get quite a shocking reflection on current modern Australia.

Happily, as I said, there are no disqualifications on the ground of race, but the provision simply should not be in our Constitution.
There was a very strong call at the recent 2020 Summit for a preamble or, alternatively, some form of recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Constitution. Again, the preamble is certainly not a new idea. The last failed referendum in 1999 put a referendum to the Australian people but it was rejected, and I would suggest that it was not so much the idea of the preamble that was the problem; it was that the proposed preamble then put to the people was seen as being imposed in a top-down way rather than being generated out of a lengthy process of consultation. It might be that recognition of Indigenous people should be provided other than through a preamble. The national reaction to the apology given by the Prime Minister on the first sitting day of this parliament suggests that there would be support for some form of recognition of Indigenous people in the Constitution. Certainly, it is clear that it would need to be achieved through consultation.

The 2020 Summit showed that there is real interest in the Constitution. There were calls for constitutional reform, not just from the governance stream but from other streams as well. This roundtable in May and the report before the House are intended to prompt further debate and to perhaps inspire Australians to engage with our Constitution, to recognise its importance as the founding document for our nation, to seek reform so it is a relevant document that reflects Australia as it is now and to debate how it might shape our nation into the next century.

Question agreed to.

GOVERNANCE REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION (AASB AND AUASB) BILL 2008

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 18 June, on motion by Mr Burke:

That this bill be now read a second time.
changes that became apparent. While governance frameworks and structures vary, they are ultimately subject to the FMA Act or the CAC Act. The difference between these two acts is that the CAC Act authorities are bodies corporate with separate legal identities to the Commonwealth and hold money and other assets in their own right while the FMA Act provides for clear lines of accountability to the Minister for Finance and Deregulation in relation to use of public money and other Commonwealth resources. Essentially one of the acts really deals with bodies of a more commercial nature.

In relation to the AASB and AUASB boards, the Uhrig review highlighted concerns with the governance framework and in particular with their status as within the CAC Act. Going forward it became clear the structure of these boards was more consistent with the framework outlined in the FMA Act framework. Essentially the bill that we are debating today is a rather technical bill, but it is a continuation of the very good work that the Howard government did when it comes to corporate governance in Australia. The opposition supports the bill and we urge the House to pass it unamended.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (8.03 pm)—I rise to speak in support of Governance Review Implementation (AASB and AUASB) Bill 2008. The bill seeks to amend the Australian Securities and Investments Commission Act 2001. The bill will improve the governance framework and financial arrangements of the Australian Accounting Standards Board, known as the AASB, and the Auditing and Assurance Standards Board—I will get this right; the acronyms are strange—known as the AUASB. I will call them the boards.

Mr Keenan—That’s one of your favourite statutory authorities.

Mr NEUMANN—That is right. The AASB is responsible for developing and issuing accounting standards and for the ‘care and maintenance’ of the body of standards. The board’s functions and powers are set out in the Australian Securities and Investments Commission Act 2001. Since 2002, the board has been implementing the strategic direction from the Financial Reporting Council to adopt international accounting standards for periods beginning on or after 1 January 2005.

Many entities regulated under the Corporations Act 2001 are required to apply accounting standards in preparing their financial reports. Some public sector entities are required to apply those standards by state or territory legislation as well as Commonwealth legislation, through specific instructions to preparers or reporting frameworks set out in guidelines or regulations. Various members of accounting bodies are also involved and have professional obligation to take reasonable steps within their power to ensure that entities with which they are involved comply with accounting standards in preparing their general purpose financial reports—and so they should.

The AUASB is an independent statutory body. As the national auditing and assurance standards setter, the AUASB has an important role in developing high-quality standards and related guidance for auditors and providers of assurance services. At its meeting on 4 April 2005, the Financial Reporting Council considered in detail an appropriate strategic direction for this board in relation to its work program and, in particular, its approach to setting auditing standards for the future. This bill does not seek to change current statutory functions performed by these two boards with respect to the development of accounting and auditing standards. It really seeks to enhance the financial and administrative arrangements of the boards. It is quite technical in nature.
The bill simply transfers the boards from the Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997, known as the CAC Act, to the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997, known as the FMA Act. The bill makes other changes to the Financial Reporting Council. It goes about improving the financial management and governance of the boards. The transfer of the boards between the acts is being done as the boards do not serve any commercial purpose. The purpose of these boards relates to enhancing, as I said, accounting and auditing standards for private and public sectors in our economy. Good accounting and auditing standards are crucial to business and government. As someone who was in business for about 21 years before I was elected, it is extremely important in my experience.

The Financial Reporting Council is responsible for various administrative functions relating to both boards. The FMA Act, not the CAC Act, is the appropriate governing act, as the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry said in his second reading speech. This will provide a rigorous framework for the management and expenditure of public money. The FRC is responsible, of course, for broad oversight of the process and for setting accounting and auditing standards, as well as for monitoring the effectiveness of auditor independence requirements in Australia and for giving the minister reports and advice on these matters. There are some changes to the role of the FRC concerning some matters—affording the FRC the opportunity to concentrate on the overall direction of the various boards.

I have to say that this is a particularly uninteresting and non-sexy bill—if I can put it like that. It really lines up the improvements we have made in other areas in relation to the Australian Securities and Investment Commission and the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority. We have already passed the Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Amendment Bill 2008—and that will improve transparencies, efficiencies, controls and practices of Commonwealth companies and Commonwealth authorities. The CAC Act lines up those bodies, of course, with the Corporations Law relating to directors’ duties, responsibilities and obligations. Under the CAC Act, financial statements and audit reports must be provided to the responsible minister. There has to be a base level of annual reporting to the responsible minister who tables the report in the parliament.

Australia needs Commonwealth companies, Commonwealth authorities and Commonwealth boards to act with probity and to engage in best practice in governance and financial management. This bill will not seek to augment the number of agencies in operation; it will merely transfer two existing CAC boards to FMA agencies. It will not seek to change the legal functions in relation to either board. The FRC will maintain its strategic oversight of the boards. There are, in the bill, various schedules which help in the transition arrangements as well. It arises out of a review that has been going on for quite some time, and comes about as a result of the Treasury’s 2007 recommendations concerning the board’s functions. That review identified a number of concerns with respect to governance of the two boards, including their status. There are two agencies created in this bill: the Office of the Australian Accounting Standards Board and the Office of the Auditing and Assurance Standards Board. The agencies comprise the chair of the board, other members of the board and the staff thereof. The respective chairs of the board will each hold positions as chief executives in their respective agencies.

I have to say that, despite the fact that the bill is short and pretty uninteresting, it really is part of the Rudd government’s reform
agenda concerning corporate governance. The legislative shift ensures that those bodies which do not have a commercial purpose are transferred to another act. Those with commercial purpose should be governed by the CAC Act. It is about improving the board. It is about best practice. It is about good governance. It is about good federal government. It is about responding appropriately in the circumstances, and in a timely fashion, to recommendations. It is about ensuring better administration and better use of public funds and is quite necessary in seeking a more propitious legislative framework for these two important boards. In such circumstances, and in such a short time, I recommend the bill to the House.

Mr BOWEN (Prospect—Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs, and Assistant Treasurer) (8.10 pm)—I would like to take this opportunity to thank the member for Stirling and the member for Blair for their contributions. It is fair to say that the Governance Review Implementation (AASB and AUASB) Bill 2008 is not the most exciting bill that has ever been before the House. It is, nevertheless, very important. I am sure that all honourable members would agree that corporate governance is a particularly important matter.

The Australian Accounting Standards Board, or the AASB, and the Auditing and Assurance Standards Board, or the AUASB, both play a vital role in promoting the integrity of Australia’s financial reporting and auditing framework. The new financial management framework will improve both boards’ existing governance arrangements by bringing them under the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997—the FMA Act. The FMA Act will ensure that both boards are directly responsible to parliament. In addition, the new arrangements will allow the Financial Reporting Council, which is the statutory body responsible for strategic oversight, to focus on setting the strategic direction of the boards rather than approving administrative and financial matters. The bill will also improve consistency in relation to other government bodies by bringing boards into line with similar amendments made to other bodies. In summary, this bill will enhance the governance arrangements of the AASB and the AUASB. This will, in turn, improve the efficiency of the accounting and auditing standards process, which will deliver benefits to the business and wider community. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Mr BOWEN (Prospect—Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs, and Assistant Treasurer) (8.12 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

PROTECTION OF THE SEA LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2008

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 18 June, on motion by Mr Albanese:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (8.13 pm)—The Protection of the Sea Legislation Amendment Bill 2008. The bill contains three separate schedules, deals with three issues that are not, basically, of great substance but which are, potentially, of some importance. It has been brought on because the government has run out of legislation of substance and it needs to fill in time while it awaits the end of the week. Of the three schedules, the first gives effect to the
implementation of a supplementary fund for compensation for oil pollution damage from oil tankers. This will form a third tier of compensation available in the event of an oil tanker accident. Schedule 2 introduces amendments to the Protection of the Sea (Prevention of Pollution from Ships) Act 1983, known as the MARPOL amendments. The amendments to this act make miscellaneous amendments to the requirements for maintenance of garbage record books, and allow regulations to prescribe penalties of up to 50 penalty units. Schedule 3 introduces amendments to the definition of an Australian port consistent in three separate acts, and to amend the definition of ‘collector’ in the Protection of the Sea Act 1981.

Australia has every reason to be a signatory to international maritime conventions which ensure adequate compensation is available in the event of an oil spill in our waters. Because Australia is an island state, almost all of our international trade is carried by sea. Oil tankers are an essential element both in the movement of oil from our off-shore oil rigs and for the importation of oil into our ports and refineries. We all know how vital oil is to our way of life and to our economy. It is a commodity we do not want to be without. As a result of this legislation and Australia being a party to the supplementary fund protocol, in the event of an oil tanker incident, levies on the receivers of oil will be imposed to finance clean-up activities and compensation.

The supplementary fund protocol has been introduced by the International Maritime Organisation as a result of oil spill incidents that have cost more than was available through the first and second tiers of compensation. The first tier is the International Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage of 1992, known as the civil liability convention. Compensation under this regime is the tanker owner’s responsibility to a maximum amount. The second tier, the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund, provides compensation for substantiated claims in excess of the shipowner’s liability for the incident. This fund is financed by levies imposed on receivers of oil in countries like Australia that are contracting parties. The supplementary fund protocol was adopted in 2003 by the International Maritime Organisation to create a further source of funds in the event of damage caused by an oil spill. Levies for this fund will only be collected in the event of an oil spill occurring and after the first two tiers of compensation are exhausted. Unfortunately, in the past, under the two-tier regime the availability of compensation funds has proven to be insufficient to provide full compensation for all claimants in a small number of instances. By way of example, for the Nakhodka oil spill off the Japanese coast in 1997, compensation was insufficient and claimants only received a pro rata amount.

Australia has always taken its place on the world stage seriously. We are a progressive and economically sound nation. We also take our responsibilities to the environment seriously. Australia is in a position to lead by example, and by Australia becoming a signatory to this protocol we are showing the world the importance Australia places on ensuring the financial capacity to compensate those involved in a clean-up exercise and, worse still, those who may have lost income as a result of an oil spill.

A conscientious government is concerned about the aspirations of its people. Australians take responsibility for coastal and marine environments seriously. Australia has some of the most sensitive marine areas in the world and some of the most important. Protection of Australian waters is very important to those who make a living from the sea or who live in coastal towns. Australia has a mostly pristine environment that needs
to be maintained at any cost. An oil spill in Australian waters could have catastrophic consequences for Australia’s environment and economy—our fishermen, crayfish and prawn industries, pearling industry and marine wildlife. Then there is the impact on land based marine vegetation and wildlife, our pristine coastal beaches and the general ambience that the Australian tourism industry so much depends upon and promotes to the world. In the event of an oil spill from a tanker in, say, the Great Barrier Reef, the consequences could potentially be disastrous. The clean up would take many years and costs could run into millions of dollars.

Australia chooses to be a part of well-organised international conventions where industry members can come together to develop and debate the objectives of their international entities. Amendments negotiated at International Marine Organisation level to conventions and protocols are developed through input from stakeholders and industry. It is responsible for a government to legislate to accommodate protocols developed at an international level. International standards are considered to be useful for the shipping industry. Any variance in legislation between different countries or Australian states is restrictive and makes it difficult for the international shipping industry to operate effectively. They prefer one set of rules and guidelines to operate under, not a different set of rules depending on what part of the sea they are entering.

Australia is fortunate to have well-developed umbrella groups like Shipping Australia Ltd, the Australian Shipowners Association and Ports Australia who represent Australia’s interests at international forums, including at the International Maritime Organisation. I appreciate the assistance and advice that they have provided to the opposition in developing a response to this legislation to help us assess the implications of this proposal for industry.

During the years of the previous government, there were many initiatives taken aimed at reforming and enhancing competition in the marine sector for the benefit of users of both international and domestic shipping and to ensure that shipping met community standards in safety, marine environment protection and security. Australia has a reputation internationally for being vigilant in the conduct of port control inspections and also in the other areas where we have international responsibility for the protection of our waterways. It is important that all nations concerned with marine protection and safety work together. Australia has led by example in many aspects. Australia is in a position therefore to influence other nations, including flag of convenience states.

Tanker oil spills are becoming less frequent. Australian importers of oil have recognised for some time the importance of using double-hull tankers as they take their responsibilities seriously and have taken the necessary steps to ensure the shipping of oil is as safe as possible. Australia has agreed to the phasing out of single-hull tankers by 2010. The Australian Maritime Safety Authority has advised that it will be adhering strongly to the International Maritime Organisation’s MARPOL convention and will be denying single-hull tankers access to Australian ports or offshore terminals from 2010.

The shipping industry and the oil industry have been consulted on this legislation and support its ratification. The consultation with Australian industry peak shipping bodies and port bodies, including the Shipowners Association, Shipping Australia and Ports Australia and of course the very important oil industry, reveals strong support for this legislation.
The financial responsibility resting with the oil receiver is a concept that works satisfactorily and is a proven and effective system. Levies on the receivers of oil will only be made in the event of an incident and when the first two tiers of available compensation have been exhausted. The Supplementary Fund Protocol will ensure compensation is paid quickly and effectively.

An argument can be mounted that it would be better to collect some of these levies in advance so that there are funds in place that could be used in the event of an incident. This would ensure that the pressures associated with collecting levies from countries around the world for an incident which may not have occurred in their waters would dissipate. That is an issue that I am sure would have been debated extensively in the international fora and may well prove in the future to be problematic. However, the oil industry are committed to supporting the passage of the bill and they are aware of their responsibilities. The level of financial call on industry is accepted and they understand compensation and insurance are necessary to run an efficient business in the global market.

Schedule 2 and 3 are routine and technical amendments. Schedule 2 will ensure adequate maintenance of garbage record books. Schedule 3 will improve the robustness, clarity and consistency across existing legislation of the definition of Australian ports. The legislation will make certain that a port is not only an area adjacent to land. In this day and age, it can also be a place where a ship comes to unload cargo in an offshore facility. The opposition is happy to support these amendments, and it is for this reason that we support the passage of this legislation.

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) (8.24 pm)—The Protection of the Sea Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 will increase the amount of compensation available to those who have established a claim for damages from approximately A$350 million to about A$1.3 billion. In the event of a major oil spill, this compensation can be used to fund the clean-up costs and help with the recovery of affected marine environments and coastal communities. In the event that an incident involving an oil tanker were to occur, the measures provided for in this bill will ensure that victims of oil pollution damage are able to obtain prompt, adequate and effective compensation.

Every year some 3½ thousand cargo vessels as well as more than 200 oil tankers and chemical carriers navigate through Australian waters, including near environmental icons such as Queensland’s Great Barrier Reef and Western Australia’s Ningaloo Reef. A significant oil spill would clearly be devastating to these fragile marine ecosystems. That is why the Labor government is acting swiftly and decisively to strengthen the legislative approach to protecting Australia’s pristine marine environment from pollution.

This bill complements the Protection of the Sea (Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution Damage) Bill 2008, which passed the House of Representatives in May. These two pieces of legislation will together strengthen Australia’s maritime environment protection framework and align it with international best practice. The Protection of the Sea Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 will place into Australian law the protocol of 2003 to the International Convention on the Establishment of an International Fund for Compensation for Oil Pollution Damage, generally known as the supplementary fund protocol. The bill will implement that protocol of 2003 in schedule 1, it will introduce amendments to the Protection of the Sea (Prevention of Pollution from Ships) Act 1983 with schedule 2, and it also includes amendments relating to shipping and marine navigation levies in schedule 3.
Australia is party to two conventions which establish the international liability and compensation regime for pollution damage resulting from spills of oil from an oil tanker: the International Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage 1992 and the International Convention on the Establishment of an International Fund for Compensation for Oil Pollution Damage 1992. These conventions establish a two-tier scheme to provide compensation for loss or damage resulting from a spill of oil from an oil tanker. The burden of compensating victims for oil spills is shared in the first instance between shipowners and their insurers. If the moneys available are insufficient, the outstanding compensation is provided by the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund, which is financed by levies on cargo owners—that is to say, the oil-receiving entities.

Under the first tier, the tanker owner is strictly liable to pay compensation to a maximum amount, which is determined based on the size of the tanker. The second tier is provided by the International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund, which provides compensation for substantiated claims in excess of the shipowner’s liability for the incident.

Under this two-tier scheme, the maximum amount of compensation available for a single incident involving spills of oil from an oil tanker is 203 million special drawing rights, and I understand that that is worth approximately A$350 million. Following a number of high-profile, high-impact tanker incidents, the maximum compensation afforded by these two conventions has proven to be insufficient to provide full compensation for all claimants. In Australia, given our extensive coastline and our strong environmental perspective, the compensation available under these funds may not cover a major incident. As a result, the supplementary fund protocol was adopted back in 2003 by the International Maritime Organisation to create a further source of funds for compensation in the event of pollution damage caused by an oil spill from an oil tanker.

The supplementary fund will be financed through levies on public or private entities in receipt of more than 150,000 tonnes of contributing oil per year in contracting states. Levies for the supplementary fund will be collected after an oil spill occurred and after the first two tiers of compensation are exhausted. Australia’s accession to the supplementary fund will ensure that compensation to Australian victims following an oil spill from an oil tanker incident is maximised and that adequate financial resources are provided for clean-up and restoration of Australia’s marine environment.

Debate interrupted.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 8.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

*Mitchell Plastic Police*

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa) (8.30 pm)—I rise tonight to take this opportunity to talk about a very special police force in my electorate of Maranoa. This is no ordinary police force. These special police men and women want to eliminate abuse and neglect, but they are not armed with weapons, only with a bag. These police officers cannot arrest a villain, but they can arrest our carbon footprint. These police men and women do not wear a badge and polished black shoes but instead wear sneakers and school uniforms. These special police officers cannot drive a police car, they cannot graduate from the Queensland Police Academy and they cannot join the Queensland police union, but what they can do is save the environment, one plastic bag at a time.
The special police force I talk about today is the Mitchell Plastic Police—a special crime-fighting unit created especially to reduce the use of plastic bags in the Mitchell district, some 560 kilometres from Brisbane. The Mitchell Plastic Police are the crime-fighting force of the Kool Kids Kool World, which is made up of teachers and students from grades 2, 3 and 4 from Mitchell State School and St Patrick’s Catholic School in Mitchell. Their mission, which they have chosen to accept, is to rid the Booringa district of all plastic bags.

I was lucky enough, or should I say cool enough, to join the Kool Kids Kool World in April this year to help launch their new Mitchell envirobag—a 100 per cent recyclable, reusable bag, which has been specially designed by the students of Mitchell State School and St Patricks Catholic School, together with the Indigenous population, for whom I have a high regard. Adorned with drawings of animals—as you can see on this bag—and the earth to symbolise the potential victims of global warming, the Mitchell envirobag is the plastic police’s choice of weapon against pollution and littering. They have also produced a magnetic shopping list pad, to remind consumers to take their envirobag when they go shopping. Their motto is sensible and succinct: ‘Don’t be a dag—bring your envirobag’.

But the Mitchell Plastic Police force is doing much more than reducing the use of plastic bags in the district. A dollar from every Mitchell envirobag sold through school fundraising activities is directly reinvested back into school based environmental projects. Current tasks being undertaken in the precinct include a water wise landscaping project at St Patrick’s Catholic School, and a worm farm, a vegetable garden, a chook yard and a rubbish recycling program at Mitchell State School.

These Kool Kids are also currently designing a car tidy bag and are looking into making the Mitchell envirobag even more environmentally friendly by researching the potential use of green-friendly materials such as jute. Like any effective and proactive police force, the Mitchell Plastic Police has strong community support. The former Boor- inga Shire Council, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Booringa Action Group have partnered with the Mitchell Plastic Police to bring this wonderful project to fruition. Indeed it is an excellent example of what can be achieved by dedicated school students and supportive communities so evident in many of my rural communities. The Mitchell Plastic Police have estimated that their envirobag will eliminate 468,000 bags per annum within the boundaries of what was the Booringa shire and, with plans to expand across the entire, newly formed Roma Regional Council area, this project is only going to get bigger and better.

I was honoured to be part of the Kool Kids Kool World Mitchell envirobag launch. It is truly inspirational to see that Australia’s next generation of adults are already dedicated to reducing our carbon footprint. And it is particularly moving to see these kids from the bush, from the small town of Mitchell, with a district population of only around 2,000, take on such an enormous task. They have proven that, with dedication and support, no project is too big.

In embracing the motto of this young, active, climate-conscious police force, I encourage my fellow parliamentary colleagues to make sure that, when they next go shopping, they don’t act like dags but instead use an envirobag. I am going to present one of these to our shadow minister and also to the minister with the compliments of the Kool Kids Kool World from Mitchell. (Time expired)
Mr Geoff Burn

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (8.35 pm)—I rise tonight to acknowledge the World War II service of a resident of my electorate, Mr Geoff Burn. Originally from Tasmania, Mr Burn enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force at the age of 18 in 1942, and like many young men of the time sought adventure as a wartime fighter pilot. Instead, he was unwittingly seconded to a secretive RAAF unit that would store, test and decommission deadly chemical weapons, including mustard gas and phosgene, until after the conclusion of the Second World War.

It is not a widely known fact that chemical weapons were brought to Australia by England from 1942 and later by the United States. This was a response to the threat posed by the Japanese occupation of the Pacific and the fear that their advance would continue south to Australia. The chemicals were stored in various locations around Australia, including in a tunnel at Glenbrook, near Penrith, as well as at locations in Queensland and in Darwin. The RAAF had even constructed from scratch an entire ‘hoax’ town, complete with a fake pub, at Marangaroo in the New South Wales central west to camouflage the storage of the chemical arsenal from enemy spy planes.

Mr Burn and the other men in his unit were young, inexperienced and ill prepared for the gruelling task that lay before them. In the course of their duties, which included extensive testing of the weapons throughout Australia, exposure to the toxic chemicals was routine. Those exposed suffered from horrible burns, rashes and respiratory illnesses, which for many people continue to recur in old age.

I understand that Mr Burn and the majority of his colleagues have experienced difficulties in receiving appropriate recognition and compensation for their work in this unit despite the risk that it posed to their health. This has largely been because they were not posted overseas during World War II, making them ineligible to receive a gold card, and also because the secret nature of their postings resulted in the omission from their Defence records of details of their service in the Chemical Warfare Unit. This is a difficulty that the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel has recognised. I note the minister’s interest in this matter and his acknowledgement in correspondence to me earlier this year that Mr Burn was, despite the lack of specific mention in the official records, a member of the RAAF Chemical Warfare Unit and involved in the storage and experimentation of chemical weapons during World War II.

The Chemical Warfare Unit was a group of men who made sacrifices for their country during World War II and still bear the scars from their work more than 60 years on. I think it is appropriate to recognise in this place their contribution, and I would like to read from a commendation from Group Captain T Lightfoot, Director of Armament at Air Force Headquarters in Melbourne during World War II. The commendation, written in June 1945, requests the director of personnel services to make the appropriate notations of service on the records of those who had served in the Chemical Warfare Unit, but unfortunately this request was not met. So I would like to read into Hansard tonight an extract of that commendation and give Mr Geoff Burn and his fellow RAAF armourers the recognition they deserve for their service:

... the officers in charge (from time to time) of the various storage depots know just how much effort was expended by the personnel under them in the execution of their arduous and at all times dangerous duties.

The intake of CW stocks from the UK involved much hazardous work in the off-loading from
ships of bombs and bulk containers, the destruction or decanting of 'leakers' and the decontamination of ships holds.

... ... ...
... the various grades of mustard gas were burned under tropical conditions, where scientific trials have proved that mustard gas is more dangerous and persistent than in temperate conditions.

... ... ...
... at times they literally paddled in liquid phosgene on the ground, the concentration given off being such that service respirators broke down and the personnel had to be temporarily relieved.

... ... ...
... such concentrations of mustard gas were encountered that no service protective equipment was adequate to counter them.

It is fair statement that the disposal of these gas stocks rank with the more difficult and dangerous tasks undertaken by RAAF ground staff personnel.

I wish to thank Mr Geoff Plunkett for his assistance in providing that extract. I do not have the power to correct the official records of each and every member of the Chemical Warfare Unit, but, as someone entrusted with the great privilege of being elected to this place, it is my honour to ensure that the service of Mr Geoff Burn and his colleagues is appropriately recognised here in the nation's parliament. I salute you.

Paterson Electorate: Rural and Regional Health Services

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (8.40 pm)—
The Paterson electorate is in the grip of a health crisis. It is difficult, if not impossible, for patients to find a bulk-billing doctor in some areas. One of the larger doctors' surgeries at Raymond Terrace has outgrown its current site. I have been working with the doctors in this practice and the Port Stephens Council for several years to find an alternative site. Much talk has centred on a multi-million dollar health precinct for Port Stephens, with the council owned land in Raymond Terrace’s central business district earmarked as an ideal site. This project was looking to apply for funding through the Regional Partnerships program—a program which the Rudd Labor government has chosen to axe. The future for this project is now unclear.

There is also a tremendous need for dialysis in Port Stephens. I have been contacted by a number of constituents who have advised me that in Nelson Bay alone nine patients travel into Newcastle's John Hunter Hospital or over to Maitland for treatment three times a week. There is also one patient at Tea Gardens and two from Raymond Terrace that I personally know of. The Port Stephens Council Health Advisory Service has lodged an application to Hunter New England Health for a dialysis unit to be established on the Tomaree Peninsula. In the short term, Port Stephens Hospital Action Group is facilitating two other strategies to help these patients. One is the organising of volunteer drivers to help the patients with their travelling and the other is to arrange retired nursing professionals who could assist carers to learn become confident with home dialysis. One of the suggestions has been for a dialysis unit to be integrated into the proposed GP superclinic. The Rudd Labor government promised the people of Paterson millions of dollars to establish a GP superclinic in the electorate. In a joint Labor Party media statement dated 12 November 2007 the Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon. Nicola Roxon, and the member for Hunter, the Hon. Joel Fitzgibbon, confirmed that:

Labor will invest $5 million to establish two GP Super Clinics in the Charlton electorate and Port Stephens.

After the recent Labor budget, we now find that the funding for the Port Stephens GP...
superclinic is apparently not so readily available and it could take up to five years before anything substantial is done to help the health service providers and constituents of the Paterson electorate. The ALP website stated on 21 November 2007:

Australia’s national security will be a first priority for a Rudd Labor Government and taking care of ADF personnel and their families is crucial the defence of our nation.

How crucial is the defence of our nation to the ALP? It took just six months for this promise to lie in tatters. Labor claims to have put defence families front and centre this year but has failed to deliver a key promise on health services. Before the election, defence families were promised a $33.1 million investment for the establishment of 12 defence family healthcare clinics to provide free health care for ADF dependent spouses and their children. The Rudd Labor government budget revealed that this was a promise it never intended to keep. Instead of these 12 clinics, which came with the carrot of more clinics if they were successful, we now realise there will be no clinics at all. The program has been slashed to only $12.2 million, and that will be spent over four years to trial the provision of basic medical and dental services—and only in five locations. To add insult to injury, this half-hearted delivery comes with a cap of $300 a year per dependant for dental services. Williamtown RAAF Base is now in the electorate of Newcastle, and the member for Newcastle has being deadly silent on this issue.

Further north in my electorate, what will it take for Forster-Tuncurry to ever get its own public hospital if there is so much delay in getting the promised public beds, which are years overdue, into the Forster private hospital? Last September I announced $600,000 in federal government funding to introduce an after-hours GP service at the then Cape Hawke Hospital. I said the battle was not over, and called on the New South Wales Labor government to act on its responsibilities. When confronted by the media the next day, New South Wales health minister Reba Meagher had no choice but to announce plans to introduce public beds by March this year. I am starting to believe that it was just a promise to bolster the ALP candidate’s chances at the last election. Kevin Rudd said he would end the blame game. I would prefer he start the action game and deliver on these important projects to my constituents in Paterson.

Military Memorials of National Significance Legislation

Hasluck Electorate: Midland Peace Memorial

Ms JACKSON (Hasluck) (8.45 pm)—I would like to commend the Rudd Labor government and the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs, the Hon. Allan Griffin, in delivering on our election commitment made in June last year to formally recognise and honour the Australian Ex-Prisoners of War Memorial in Ballarat, Victoria as a memorial of national significance. The government has acted by presenting the Military Memorials of National Significance Bill 2008 for debate in the parliament.

This long-overdue recognition demonstrates the government’s pledge to honour the bravery and sacrifice of more than 35,000 Australian POWs held during the Boer War, the Great War, World War II and the Korean War, and it gives further rise to the legacy these men and women have left behind. We as a nation stand forever in their debt and, if the bill becomes law, it will ensure that the POWs who returned home and those who died abroad in the service of this country will be forever remembered. The bill will also provide a stable, consistent and transparent vehicle for the future declaration of other deserving memorials.
In this context, I would like to make special mention of the Midland Peace Memorial in my electorate of Hasluck, which I consider eligible to be accorded status as a military memorial of national significance. The Midland Peace Memorial is located at the historic Midland Railway Workshops. It featured as the Western Australian government’s industrial workhorse for 90 years until it was sadly closed in 1994 by the then state Liberal government. The workshops and the thousands of employees who worked there played a vital role for Western Australia’s economic growth and they helped steer Australia’s war effort during both world wars.

In 1923, the workshop employees banded together to raise money for a memorial to honour the memory of their fellow workers who enlisted, fought and died in the Great War. Some 400 Midland Railway Workshops workers enlisted to fight in the First World War, and 70 died. Despite grudging assistance from their own employer, the workers raised £1,000, largely through raffles and picnics, to build the memorial. I think most members would agree that it was an extraordinary amount of money in 1923 for something such as this. Hundreds attended the unveiling ceremony in December 1925, including all of the dignitaries of the day. The names of the railway workers who died in World War II were later added to the bronze tablets at the base of the column.

The memorial is of an appropriate scale, design and standard. It is suitably dignified and symbolic and in keeping with its purpose and standing as an Australian war memorial. The statue itself comprises a bronze female figure wearing a laurel crown. I must say that there is much local conjecture over precisely who the model for the statue was. A senior Midland resident claims that the girl who modelled for Pietro Porcelli, the sculptor, was thought to have been a 17-year-old Midland resident named Mary Canlon. She was chosen, I am told, for her perfectly shaped arms. She left Midland in her early 20s. Recently Mrs Jean Wymack from the ACT, who was visiting Midland, claimed the model was her aunt Catherine Simmons, who was 16 at the time and was employed at the workshops as a clerk. In any event that is not the memorial’s only controversy. It is considered quite unusual as there is only one other memorial in this country that features a female statue.

Her extended right arm and hand demand silence, her left hand holds a palm leaf and her left foot treads on a sword. Her stance represents peace. The figure is mounted on a classical stone column on a stepped granite base. Bronze tablets inscribed with the names of fallen soldiers who were employed at the Midland Railway Workshops are affixed to the base.

The memorial commemorates the significant involvement throughout Australia’s wartime history and symbolises the strong camaraderie that characterised the workshops in its heyday. Today, the Peace Memorial flies the Australian flag high, and it remains the focal point in Midland for Anzac Day, Remembrance Day and other ceremonial and commemorative occasions. It is located on public land within the city of Swan, nestled back from Yelverton Drive at the Midland Railway Workshops, which are owned and administered by the Midland Redevelopment Authority.

The Midland Redevelopment Authority has refurbished the memorial and its surrounds and installed rose beds, lawns and floodlights. I ask the minister to carefully consider according the Midland Peace Memorial status as a military memorial of national significance. In doing so, it will preserve the proud past of the Midland Railway Workshops and it will ensure the memory and the gallantry of the workers who have served Australia in times of war, especially
those who gave their lives in both world wars, is kept alive. And we want that memory and gallantry to be kept well and truly alive.

Governance of Indigenous Bodies

Mr LINDSAY (Herbert) (8.50 pm)—

Over the years I have come to understand that one of the recurring issues that holds Indigenous Australians back and simultaneously attracts the anger of taxpayers is the continuing incidence of nepotism and corrupt behaviour within Indigenous councils, trusts and corporations. It gives me no joy to speak out about this issue, but it must be done in the interest of the hundreds of thousands of decent First Australians whose reputations and quality of life are so dreadfully impacted by the few who get themselves on the gravy train and misuse it. That is why I will continue to advocate the three Ls as the way forward to best address the terrible disadvantage suffered by the Indigenous Australians.

The three Ls are leadership, land ownership and law, order and governance. In relation to the third point, perhaps the most moral or natural purpose of governance consists of assuring, on behalf of those governed, a worthy pattern of good, while avoiding an undesirable pattern of bad. The ideal purpose, obviously, would assure a perfect pattern of good with no bad. But, when it comes to the governance of a number of Townsville Indigenous corporations and trusts, we see a perfect pattern of bad with little good.

The latest problems have come to light in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service in Townsville. It is widely known that nepotism and rorting of the system is behind the Australian government seeking re-tendering of the legal service contract—the only one in Australia required to do so. A closer look at this organisation reveals the influence, incompetence, nepotism and irresponsible behaviour of the Akee family. It is the same family that has corrupted the ATSI Cultural Centre, 4K1G Indigenous Radio and the Townsville Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Service. This weak capacity and corruption cannot continue.

There must be an Australian government inquiry into the way the Akee family has inappropriately managed and spent millions of dollars that were given to these four organisations for the benefit of the Indigenous community, not for the benefit of the Akee family. The inappropriate nepotism, misuse of public money and lack of ethical behaviour should be investigated and the outcomes and recommendations for action reported to the community.

The Akee family are now squealing at being slung off the legal service gravy train. Why should their family lose the ability to employ all the rellies at way above market salaries? Why should they lose access to the car fleet that they have given everyone? No more lavish up-scale weekends away at resorts in the guise of workshops and so forth, not to mention first-class jaunts for greatly inflated delegations of family and friends to Canberra, which I have personally witnessed.

Never mind the legal service clients sitting in jail waiting for a proper legal interview to get them into the court system and waiting on remand longer than any period they might be sentenced to for their alleged crime. This is what happens when the family pays its family administration staff more than the professional legal staff, and it is terribly wrong. I have the details of the family employment nepotism throughout these four organisations. I know about the financial devastation wrought by the Akees, I know the despair of the medical staff at TAIHS who were forced to reluctantly resign and I know how the cultural centre was brought to its knees by the family.
Good governance encourages boards to create value and provide accountability and control systems commensurate with the risks involved. The Akees have done none of this. If this is allowed to continue, it is just the poor bloody blackfellas who again will be preyed upon by their own, and it must be stopped. I demand that the Australian government establish a full and open inquiry into what has been going on in Townsville.

Mortgage Crisis Support

Mr CLARE (Blaxland) (8.53 pm)—In my first six months as a member of parliament I have felt the frustration of seeing a lot of people suffering and not knowing how to help in a real, practical way—not making speeches or voting for legislation but something at a local level that has a real impact. And there are real problems in Blaxland. Blaxland is the mortgage stress capital of Australia. More families are losing their homes in my electorate than anywhere else in the country. Last year 300 families lost their homes. On current predictions, three families lose their homes every day in my electorate. How can I help in a real, practical way? How can I help people in my electorate save their homes?

The solutions are so macro in nature: building more homes, the reform of financial services and the prudent adjustment of fiscal and monetary policy levers. And this is made more difficult by external factors like the price of oil and food and the commodities boom, which was described by the Governor of the Reserve Bank two weeks ago as ‘the most expansionary external shock to the economy in 50 years or more’. How can a backbencher help in a real, practical way?

In the last few weeks I have been speaking to a lot of financial counsellors. They all say the same thing: people wait until it is too late to seek help. They leave it until the bank is about to foreclose or the sheriff comes knocking at the door. That is when I realised that there is something practical that I can do. I can help local residents get the information that they need in time to save their homes and save their families.

That is why I am holding an information night at my local town hall two weeks from tonight, not to talk about inflation or housing policy or the government’s plans but to give real, practical advice, such as: how to extend the terms of a loan; how to get access to the hardship provisions of the Consumer Credit Code; how to get financial and legal advice; independent dispute resolution options; access to government support, including short-term interest-free loans; whether you should try and access your superannuation or apply for bankruptcy; and, if you have to sell your house, how to make sure you get the best deal.

Next, I needed some experts to provide this advice. So I called the best in the business, financial expert Paul Clitheroe. I asked him if he would act as a facilitator, interviewing panellists and taking questions from the floor. I am glad to say that he has agreed, and I am very grateful that he has. The information night will be held at Bankstown Town Hall on Tuesday 8 July at 7 pm. Panelists will include: Greg Mowle from The Smith Family; Philip Field, the Banking and Financial Services Ombudsman; Karen Cox, from the Consumer Credit Legal Centre; John Moratelli, from Legal Aid; Jenny Reid, from Creating Links, a local NGO; and Tanya Plibersek, the federal Minister for Housing. The Smith Family, the Consumer Credit Legal Centre, Creating Links and Centrelink will also staff information stalls in the lobby on the night.

It is not every day that you get the chance to ask questions of Paul Clitheroe or other experts. This is a great way for people to get some important tips to help pay the mortgage
and keep their head above water. It is a great opportunity for my local residents to get the help that they need to save their homes. I encourage anyone in my electorate and anyone in Sydney who is having problems keeping their head above water to come along. To this end, I have sent invitations to every home in the electorate—all 50,000 of them.

My office has also put together a debt relief information kit that gives local residents the information they need to help themselves. The information kit provides easy-to-read information and a tool for people to get help. People struggling with debt often feel overwhelmed, frustrated or embarrassed. This kit is designed to link people to local services and organisations that can help them, including local financial counsellors, government agencies, local charities and legal and dispute resolution services. It also gives people the information they need to seek help themselves. The aim of both the housing stress information night and the debt relief information kit is pretty simple: to provide real, practical help, and hopefully we can save a few homes and save a few families.

Question agreed to.

House adjourned at 8.59 pm

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr McClelland to present a Bill for an Act to amend the Family Law Act 1975, and for related purposes. (Family Law Amendment (De Facto Financial Matters and Other Measures) Bill 2008)

Mr McClelland to present a Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to surveillance and the interception of telecommunications, and for related purposes. (Telecommunications Interception Legislation Amendment Bill 2008)

Dr Kelly to 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: Multi Role Helicopter Facilities.

Dr Kelly to 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: RAAF Base Darwin Redevelopment Stage 2, Darwin, Northern Territory.

Dr Kelly to 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: Robertson Barracks Redevelopment, Darwin, Northern Territory.

Dr Kelly to 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: RAAF Base Darwin Redevelopment Stage 2, Darwin, Northern Territory.

Dr Kelly to 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: Robertson Barracks Redevelopment, Darwin, Northern Territory.

Dr Kelly to 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: Enoggera Redevelopment Stage One Project, Gallipoli Barracks, Brisbane, Queensland.

Dr Kelly to 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: Enoggera Redevelopment Stage One Project, Gallipoli Barracks, Brisbane, Queensland.
was referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works and on which the committee has duly reported to Parliament: RAAF Base Tindal Redevelopment Stage 5, Northern Territory.

**Dr Kelly** to 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: Airborne Early Warning and Control Aircraft Facilities, RAAF Base Tindal, Northern Territory.

**Dr Kelly** to move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, the following proposed work be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for consideration and report: Construction of the Australian Pavilion at the Shanghai World EXPO 2010, China.

**Dr Kelly** to move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the *Public Works Committee Act 1969*, the following proposed work be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for consideration and report: Fit-out for the Australian Federal Police of the Edmund Barton Building, Barton, Australian Capital Territory.
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Work Experience Placement Program
(Question No. 94)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, in writing, on 13 May 2008:

In respect of the Work Experience Placement Program: (a) to date, how many placements have been arranged; and (b) has a review of the Program been conducted; if so, will it be made public; if so, when.

Mr Brendan O’Connor—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

As the matter falls within the Employment Participation portfolio, the Hon Brendan O’Connor MP, Minister for Employment Participation, will answer on behalf of the Hon Julia Gillard, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations.

(a) The Work Experience Program commenced on 1 January 2007 for the Job Network and Disability Employment Network programs and 1 July 2007 for Vocational Rehabilitation Services. As at 16 May 2008, there have been 1690 commencements.

(b) A specific review of the Work Experience Placement initiative has not been conducted, however, it was included, as were all employment service programs, in the employment services review conducted by the Government. The discussion paper from this review has been released and can be found on www.workplace.gov.au/ESReview.