COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

House of Representatives

Official Hansard

No. 12, 2008
Monday, 15 September 2008

FORTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—THIRD PERIOD

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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- **CANBERRA**: 103.9 FM
- **SYDNEY**: 630 AM
- **NEWCASTLE**: 1458 AM
- **GOSFORD**: 98.1 FM
- **BRISBANE**: 936 AM
- **GOLD COAST**: 95.7 FM
- **MELBOURNE**: 1026 AM
- **ADELAIDE**: 972 AM
- **PERTH**: 585 AM
- **HOBART**: 747 AM
- **NORTHERN TASMANIA**: 92.5 FM
- **DARWIN**: 102.5 FM
FORTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—THIRD PERIOD

Governor-General
Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, Companion of the Order of Australia

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, Mr Peter Sid Sidebottom MP, Hon. Peter Neil Slipper 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

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<td>Vale, Hon. Danna Sue</td>
<td>Hughes, NSW</td>
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<td>Vanvakinou, Maria</td>
<td>Calwell, Vic</td>
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<td>Washer, Malcolm James</td>
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<td>Windsor, Anthony Harold Curties</td>
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Members of the House of Representatives

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<td>Zappia, Tony</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

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

[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]
SHADOW MINISTRY—continued

Shadow Minister for Justice and Border Protection; Assisting Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
Hon. Chris Pyne MP

Shadow Special Minister of State
Senator Hon. Michael Ronaldson

Shadow Minister for Small Business, the Service Economy and Tourism
Steven Ciobo MP

Shadow Minister for Environment, Heritage, the Arts and Indigenous Affairs
Hon. Sharman Stone MP

Shadow Assistant Treasurer and Shadow Minister for Superannuation and Corporate Governance
Michael Keenan MP

Shadow Minister for Ageing
Margaret May MP

Shadow Minister for Defence Science and Personnel; Assisting Shadow Minister for Defence
Hon. Bob Baldwin MP

Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House and Shadow Minister for Business Development, Independent Contractors and Consumer Affairs
Luke Hartsuyker MP

Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs
Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP

Shadow Minister for Employment Participation and Apprenticeships and Training
Andrew Southcott MP

Shadow Minister for Housing and Shadow Minister for Status of Women
Hon. Sussan Ley MP

Shadow Minister for Youth and Sport
Hon. Pat Farmer MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Cabinet Secretary
Don Randall MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern Australia
Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Health
Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Education
Senator Hon. Brett Mason

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence
Hon. Peter Lindsay MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure, Roads and Transport
Barry Haase MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Trade
John Forrest MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship
Louise Markus MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government
Sophie Mirabella MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Tourism
Jo Gash MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Ageing and the Voluntary Sector
Mark Coulton MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs
Senator Marise Payne

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Families and Community Services
Senator Cory Bernardi
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The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 12 pm and read prayers.

The SPEAKER—Order! I would remind members that it would assist the proper conduct of the chamber if they were to leave their mobile phones outside the chamber or at least turn their phones off.

LYNE ELECTORATE: RETURN OF WRIT

The SPEAKER—I have received the return to the writ which I issued on 4 August 2008 for the election of a member to serve for the electoral division of Lyne, in the state of New South Wales, to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of the Hon. Mark Vaile. By the endorsement on the writ, it is certified that Robert Oakeshott has been elected.

MAIN COMMITTEE

Private Members’ Motions

The SPEAKER—In accordance with standing order 41(h), and the recommendations of the whips adopted by the House on 3 September 2008, I present copies of the terms of motions for which notice has been given by the members for McMillan, Kingston, Fisher and Lindsay. These items will be considered in the Main Committee later today.

COMMITTEES

Treaties Committee

Membership

The SPEAKER—I have received a message from the Senate informing the House that Senator Ludlam has been appointed a member of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties.

HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORT AMENDMENT (REMOVAL OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION WORKPLACE RELATIONS REQUIREMENTS AND NATIONAL GOVERNANCE PROTOCOLS REQUIREMENTS AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL 2008

FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2008

AVIATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (INTERNATIONAL AIRLINE LICENCES AND CARRIERS’ LIABILITY INSURANCE) BILL 2008

AVIATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (2008 MEASURES No. 1) BILL 2008

OFFSHORE PETROLEUM AMENDMENT (DATUM) BILL 2008

Returned from the Senate

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

INTERNATIONAL TAX AGREEMENTS AMENDMENT BILL (No. 1) 2008

Report from Main Committee

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

Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.

Bill agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Procurement) (12.03 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.
I move:
That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent:
(1) the Member for Fremantle moving immediately a motion relating to the International Day of Democracy;
(2) debate on the motion ensuing and on being adjourned, the order of the day for the resumption of the debate standing referred to the Main Committee; and
(3) in the Main Committee, the item being called on and debated during government business time.

Question agreed to.

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (12.04 pm)—I move:
That the House:
(1) notes that, on 8 November 2007, the United Nations General Assembly decided in resolution 62/7 that the International Day of Democracy would be observed annually on the fixed date of 15 September, and that all Member States, organizations, non-governmental organizations and individuals are invited to commemorate the International Day of Democracy in an appropriate manner that contributes to raising public awareness;
(2) notes further that the United Nations General Assembly invited Member States to make sure that parliamentarians and civil society organizations are given appropriate opportunities to be involved in, and contribute to, the celebration of the International Day of Democracy;
(3) notes also that the United Nations General Assembly reaffirmed that “democracy is a universal value based on the freely expressed will of people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems, and their full participation in all aspects of life;” and that “While democracies share common features, there is no single model of democracy and that democracy does not belong to any country or region.”;
(4) notes that the Inter-Parliamentary Union adopted a Universal Declaration on Democracy on 16 September 1997 in which it recalled the principles of democracy, the elements and exercise of democratic government and the international dimension of democracy;
(5) notes further the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s strong support for the International Day of Democracy held on 15 September as declared by the United Nations;
(6) notes that the Inter-Parliamentary Union has urged parliaments to celebrate the International Day of Democracy as an opportunity for parliaments to:
   (a) emphasize the importance of democracy, what it involves, the challenges it faces as well as the opportunities it offers, and the central responsibility that all parliaments have as the key institution of democracy; and
   (b) examine and discuss how well parliament performs its democratic functions and identify what steps it may take to strengthen its effectiveness; and
(7) declares its strong support for the International Day of Democracy.

On 8 November 2007, the 192 member states of the United Nations General Assembly resolved by consensus that 15 September would be celebrated annually as the International Day of Democracy and invited all member states, organisations, non-government organisations and individuals to commemorate this day each year in an appropriate manner that contributes to raising public awareness. The UN invited member states to make sure that parliamentarians and civil society organisations are given appropriate opportunities to be involved in and contribute to the celebration of the International Day of Democracy. I note in this regard that the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which is the world organisation of parlia
ments, had adopted a universal declaration on democracy back in September 1997. It is a function of the IPU to promote democracy by strengthening the institution of parliament. It does this by developing principles of governance and standards for free and fair elections. It also helps establish parliamentary systems where they do not already exist and assists more than 40,000 parliamentarians around the world in representing their constituents freely and safely. In 1976 the IPU established the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians. It has also played a strong role in encouraging women’s participation in political life. The IPU is celebrating the first International Day of Democracy today by holding a special event at its headquarters in Geneva.

Like motherhood, everyone seems to agree that democracy, or rule by the people, is a good thing. An international survey in 2005 found that eight out of 10 citizens across a range of countries believed that democracy was the best form of government. Or perhaps they agreed with Winston Churchill that ‘democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried’ from time to time. But what does democracy really mean? The preamble to the UN resolution about international democracy day reflects its fluid nature. The General Assembly:

... reaffirmed that democracy was a universal value based on the freely-expressed will of people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems, and their full participation in all aspects of life.

And furthermore:

... while democracies share common features, there is no single model of democracy ... it does not belong to any country or region.

As noted by Duncan Green of Oxfam International in the recently released book From Poverty to Power, today 120 countries out of 192 UN member states are identified as having democracy as their system of government, of which some 85 are thought to be full democracies in that they provide respect for the rule of law and civil and political rights. The international system supports democracy as the preferred form of government. The United Nations charter begins with the words:

We the peoples of the United Nations determined ...

... to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948, of which we will celebrate the 60th anniversary this year, provides in article 21(1): Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. Article 21(3) states: The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

Green notes that, more than any other political system, democracy has a track record of promoting and protecting individual political rights and civil liberties, such as freedom of speech and association, which fosters democratic politics and paves the way for economic, social and cultural rights. He notes, however, that democracies are not always benign, citing the atrocities committed against indigenous groups by emerging democracies in the USA, Argentina and Australia.

In Green’s view, democracy is best understood as a cluster of devices and institutions—legislature, judiciary, executive, media and civil society. It is the checks and balances that these institutions exert on each
other that determines the degree to which democratic regimes respect the rights of all their citizens. This complex interrelational view contrasts with the minimalist notion of democracy consisting of a vote for representatives every few years.

Mahatma Gandhi warned that democracy should not merely be a game of chess between rival parties with the people as pawns. The man often referred to as America’s first poet of democracy, Walt Whitman, asked: Did you, too, O friend, suppose democracy was only for elections, for politics, and for a party name? I say democracy is only of use there that it may pass on and come to its flower and fruit in manners, in the highest forms of interaction between [people], and their beliefs—in religion, literature, colleges and schools—democracy in all public and private life …

My predecessor in the seat of Fremantle Dr Carmen Lawrence took up this subject in a speech entitled ‘Exporting Democracy’. Dr Lawrence noted:

… [t]here has been a lot of talk of late about the virtue of spreading democracy to those corners of the globe still ruled by monarchs, dictators and juntas of various persuasions. Democracy is unchallenged as the ne plus ultra of governance. What is puzzling is that such prescriptions stop short of any serious examination of exactly what is meant … Many, myself included, would regard as central the extent to which citizens actively participate (beyond the simple act of voting) in the political life of the country. This will depend, in turn, on whether we respect and encourage the expressions of diverse views and whether we provide for open deliberation before decisions are made, giving everyone a chance to voice their interests and concerns.

Dr Lawrence’s assessment of Australia’s achievement in this expanded participatory form of democracy is striking. It is obvious that, when measured against these objectives, Australia’s democracy is falling short, particularly in citizen participation. It is a sad fact that many Australians have an almost monumental lack of political interest and knowledge; they leave the work of democracy to others. But knowledge is a prerequisite to effective political engagement and, in turn, participation informs citizens about politics and increases their attentiveness to political events.

Dr Lawrence remarked that ‘whether it is a cause or effect of disengagement, Australians are very cynical about politicians and political institutions’. We have recently seen some remarkable results in elections around the country that bear this out—for instance, in Western Australia where the vote on 6 September reflected voter sentiment of ‘a pox on both your houses’ more than a rousing endorsement of either major party. The result is the replacement of the state Labor government with a minority Liberal government in a power-sharing arrangement with the National Party. Fortunately for all, the bloodbath was a metaphorical one. Meanwhile, people in other parts of the world, including some of the places I have lived, are actually dying for the right to participate in the political process.

Earlier this year we saw the military junta in Burma make a mockery of democracy by holding a referendum on a new constitution in the immediate aftermath of the devastating Cyclone Nargis and, at the same time, renewing the house detention of Burma’s democratically elected leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, who has now been imprisoned for 19 years. In Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe’s idea of a free and fair election was to intimidate the people of his country through starvation and violence. Victims of the state sponsored intimidation in Zimbabwe heard repeated reference to ‘Operation Where-Did-You-Put-Your-Vote?’ Under this operation, supporters of the Movement for Democratic Change were pulled from their homes in the middle of the night and beaten with logs, whips and bicycle chains. A report by the NGO Human
Rights Watch documented gruesome cases of torture and murder.

On the positive side, there is the example of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who became Liberia’s and Africa’s first elected woman president two years ago. As her success shows, women can overcome historic barriers. And as her country’s experience shows, women can help build stronger, healthier communities. Liberia today is recovering after a devastating civil war, thanks in large part to the contributions women are making to the country’s political, economic and social life.

We are generally quite proud of the fact that Australia and New Zealand led the world in extending the franchise to women. Nevertheless, it was disturbing to discover that, of the 1,059 members in the House of Representatives since Federation, only 78 have been women. In my first speech in this place, I noted the Labor Party’s success in selecting and promoting women as parliamentary representatives. Women make up approximately 35 per cent of the Labor parliamentarians in this new parliament; and women constitute 36.5 per cent of all state, federal, and territory Labor parliamentarians. This is compared to 23 per cent and 13 per cent for the Liberal and National parties respectively. While the Labor Party’s performance is comparatively better than that of other major political parties, and while acknowledging that we have made substantial progress, when we consider that women make up more than half of the population it is clear that there is still a long way to go.

Our nation’s record of promoting Indigenous representation is even worse. Aboriginal people did not gain the right to vote in federal elections until the 1960s. It is sobering to reflect that, in this year of the apology from the national parliament to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, there are no Indigenous members in the federal parliament.

I note that on 26 July 1901 Hugh Mahon, then ALP member for Coolgardie—who, incidentally, later became the only member to have ever been expelled from federal parliament—moved in the new federal parliament to establish a royal commission on the condition of Aborigines in northern Western Australia. He noted that ‘in this particular matter the reputation of the whole people of Australia is at stake’. Unfortunately, there was no further debate and the motion lapsed at the close of the first parliament. That we should be here more than 100 years later still grappling with these issues is indeed a state of affairs for which we should be sorry. The lack of representation of Aboriginal people in the parliament has no doubt contributed to this situation.

In addition to the issue of representation, a functioning democracy needs a strong civil society. The active involvement of citizens in community groups, in sporting and in other clubs and the ability to engage in open debate is so ingrained in Australian life that people may not even realise they are part of a civil society. They may also not realise when it is being taken away. As noted by Clive Hamilton and Sarah Maddison in their book Silencing Dissent, the frog that is put in cool water that is slowly brought to the boil will not notice and will die. In this case the authors were referring to the disturbing trend of the previous government towards attacking NGOs, scientists and others with alternative views from the government and the increasing politicisation of the Public Service and the boards of statutory bodies, among other things.

One of the most important changes that came in on 24 November 2007 was the reopening of the space for public debate. I see the success of online community activism...
through groups such as GetUp! as an extremely positive development in Australian democracy. Nevertheless, in Dr Lawrence’s view, there are very few serious attempts to engage the public in debate about policy and legislation in Australia. While we are not alone among the mature democracies in these deficiencies, we seem to be unusual in the lack of serious attention we give them. Dr Lawrence studied new approaches being adopted in Scotland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark, which are consciously broadening and deepening civic participation and re-engaging their communities based on the premise that citizen engagement beyond voting is desirable. Dr Lawrence cited numerous examples, including in Scotland, where the public were invited to submit questions to a special question time. And in Denmark a board of technology was established to disseminate knowledge about technology, its possibilities and its effects on people, on society and on the environment. One of its principal methods of assessment is the ‘citizen technology panel’, or consensus conference, which is in effect a dialogue that is open to the public between experts and about 14 lay people who are selected from a random sample of Danish citizens.

The Rudd government has developed several interesting initiatives to engage with the community, including events such as the 2020 summit and community cabinets. I am also very much looking forward to the national consultation process on the issue of a charter of rights for Australia. It is important that democracies like Australia continue to take an interest and active involvement in promoting universal respect for human rights. Human rights are profoundly democratic. Entrenchment and exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association, assembly and participation in public life enhance rather than diminish democracy.

Another element critical to a strong democracy is an independent media. While we may complain—with good reason in some instances—about the standard of journalism in Australia, we are a long way from a situation where state issued propaganda is the only information available to us. However, the increasing tendency of governments of all persuasions towards spin based on polling and slavish adherence to the media cycle is not conducive to genuine and open debate and it contributes to voter cynicism and the anti-politician vote evident in recent elections.

There are ways in which media independence and effectiveness can be strengthened in Australia. In this connection I applaud the government proposal to protect whistleblowers in the Australian government public sector and I note that the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs is currently conducting an inquiry with a view to developing a preferred model. The government is also committed to ensuring much greater access to government documents through changes to the FOI Act, including the abolition of ministerial conclusive certificates.

Integrity in government is fundamental to democracy. Accountabilty and transparency are about ensuring that public officials are acting in the public interest. At the last election Labor made it clear that it would seek to make a range of changes to the ground rules of the political process. These changes can only be described as pro-democratic, because they increase transparency in the political process and they reduce the value of incumbency. The changes to the electoral rules and to the operational practice of government, some legislative and some administrative, include reinstating sensible disclosure thresholds for political donations; prohibiting foreign and anonymous donations to registered political parties and candidates; adopt-
ing a lobbying code of conduct and establishing a register of lobbyists; introducing a ministerial staff code of conduct; and releasing new guidelines to govern the content and oversight of Commonwealth government campaign advertising.

There are two further matters I wish to mention in connection with the notion of strengthening our democracy. The first is my support for a requirement for parliament’s consent before Australian troops are committed to war in the absence of an immediate security threat or a UN Security Council mandate. It is notable that the United States congress must approve military action against another country but in Australia the parliament does not need to be consulted before we go to war. I note that the UK is currently considering the introduction of a war powers act.

The second matter is the constitutional anachronism that an Australian citizen who also happens to hold citizenship of another nation cannot be elected as a representative to this national parliament. Section 44(i) of the Constitution currently operates to exclude from representative politics at the national level an estimated four to five million Australian holders of dual citizenship, on the basis that they are presumed to be subject to an ‘allegiance, obedience, or adherence to a foreign power’. In a nation founded upon immigration and which is proudly multicultural, it seems to me undemocratic to have a quarter of the Australian population excluded from standing for parliament unless they agree to relinquish their other nationality. I hope to see this matter addressed in any future referendum on constitutional change.

There is one kind of dual citizenship that I am happy to say does not present any constitutional difficulties for aspiring federal representatives. It is described in a poem by the Nobel prize winning Irish poet Seamus Heaney called *From the Republic of Conscience* and it seems an appropriate way to mark this first International Day of Democracy.

I

When I landed in the republic of conscience it was so noiseless when the engines stopped I could hear a curlew high above the runway
At immigration, the clerk was an old man who produced a wallet from his homespun coat and showed me a photograph of my grandfather
The woman in customs asked me to declare the words of our traditional cures and charms to heal dumbness and avert the evil eye
No porters. No interpreter. No taxi.
You carried your own burden and very soon your symptoms of creeping privilege disappeared

II

Fog is a dreaded omen there, but lightning spells universal good and parents hang swaddled infants in trees during thunder storms
Salt is their precious mineral. And seashells are held to the ear during births and funerals.
The base of all inks and pigments is seawater Their sacred symbol is a stylized boat
The sail is an ear, the mast a sloping pen, The hull a mouth-shape, the keel an open eye.
At their inauguration, public leaders must swear to uphold unwritten law and weep to atone for their presumption to hold office and to affirm their faith that all life sprang from salt in tears which the sky-god wept after he dreamt his solitude was endless

III

I came back from that frugal republic with my two arms the one length, the customs woman having insisted my allowance was myself
The old man rose and gazed into my face and said that was official recognition
that I was now a dual citizen
He therefore desired me when I got home
to consider myself a representative
and to speak on their behalf in my own tongue
Their embassies, he said, were everywhere
but operated independently
and no ambassador would ever be relieved

The SPEAKER—Is the motion seconded?

Mr JOHNSON (Ryan) (12.25 pm)—Yes, Mr Speaker—I am pleased to second the motion, and to support the member for Fremantle’s remarks. I am delighted to speak on this tremendous motion for several reasons. But, first of all, I notice in the gallery upstairs that there are some young Australians. Wherever you are from in this great country of ours, I welcome you to the people’s House, the House of Representatives of this parliament. I am not sure if you are from Queensland, but if you are from Queensland: a particularly warm welcome! To those citizens from elsewhere in our great country who are visiting the national parliament, I extend a very warm welcome as well.

I am delighted and, indeed, honoured to support this motion because I am a believer in democracy. I certainly subscribe to the democratic way of life, so I want to put on the record that I am for democracy. In my maiden speech I said in my opening comments why I think that this is a great country. I want to revisit those words, because I think they also say something about this democracy—the great democracy that is Australia. This is what I said, way back in 2002, when I came to this parliament:

… I consider my election to the Commonwealth parliament a very deep privilege. Indeed, that someone like me—who claims no fancy background, no establishment patronage and who possesses no material advantage—can be elected to the parliament of Australia says much about the strength of our contemporary civil society. My fellow Australians, the majesty of our democracy is alive and well.

We are a majestic democracy because anyone—from any station in life, of any gender, of any financial background, of any capacity at all—can come to this place, be a representative of the people and make a contribution to the greatness of this country.

The member for Fremantle referred to Indigenous representation in our country. I take this opportunity to honour an Indigenous Australian who did in fact come to this parliament to represent the state of Queensland. I refer, of course, to Senator Neville Bonner AO, who was born on 28 March 1922 and died on 5 February 1999. He was an Australian who loved his country immensely, and he broke new ground by being the first Indigenous person to become a member of the federal parliament. I would like to very briefly talk of his stature and his background because they go to the heart of this motion, I think, and reflect the significance of what democracy is all about: to reflect the people’s will, to be a voice for the people, to carry the sentiments and the views—diverse, of course, but also united in many aspects—of the people. That is, in my reading of it, something that is part of the spirit of this motion. Senator Neville Bonner was a great Australian. He came to this parliament not with great wealth, great networks or great education but simply as a man who was a farm labourer. He came to this parliament with great distinction and a great reputation—so much so that he was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia in 1984. Before that he was also an Australian of the Year—a great honour indeed.

Senator Neville Bonner in this place served not only his party but also, more significantly, his state of Queensland—so much so that we as a nation honoured his service in this place by creating the federal seat of Bonner. I touch on Senator Neville Bonner
because, as an Indigenous Australian, he is someone who created history. He is someone that all of us must remember and honour in our deeds and words here in this parliament.

In relation to this motion specifically, on 8 November 2007 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution introduced by Qatar and declared 15 September 2008 the International Day of Democracy. A UN press release states:

… the Assembly recognized that 2008 marked the twentieth anniversary of the first International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, which would offer a special opportunity to focus attention on the promotion and consolidation of democracy at all levels. As such, the world body decided to commemorate the International Day, and invited all Member States to participate in a manner that contributed to raising public awareness.

I note that the preamble of the resolution affirmed:

… while democracies share common features, there is no single model of democracy.

It affirmed that democracy does not belong to any country or region and:

… democracy was a universal value based on the freely-expressed will of people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems, and their full participation in all aspects of life.

The UN General Assembly, in making these remarks, highlights one of the very strong points of the UN: to focus on something that draws attention to the wider international community. I think that there is a significant place for the UN in the architecture of international bodies and in the architecture of our global system. I am sure that many would know of its flaws, and it is certainly an organisation that can be improved.

As a graduate student at Cambridge university, I had the distinct pleasure of being the president of the Cambridge UN society. While being one who puts up his hand for democracy, I also say that, as someone who was a voice for the UN as a graduate student at Cambridge, I am certainly one who is in the corner of the UN—overwhelmingly so. It does not mean that the UN is the sole repository of all solutions to our challenges, but it is a very significant organisation in our global architecture.

The International Conference of New or Restored Democracies began in 1988 and was initially an intergovernmental forum. The ICNRD process developed into a tripartite structure with participation of governments, parliaments and civil society. The sixth conference, which took place in Doha, Qatar in 2006, reinforced the tripartite nature of the process and concluded with a declaration and plan of action which reaffirmed the fundamental principles and values of democracy. Following up on the outcome of ICNRD 6, an advisory board set up by the chair of the process, Qatar, decided to promote this International Day of Democracy. It took the lead in drafting the text of that UN General Assembly resolution. The resolution was entitled ‘Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies’. That was adopted by consensus on 8 November 2007.

As a federal member, I think one of the great pleasures we have is to visit our schools and talk to young people. Certainly, as the federal member for Ryan, I do that in the western suburbs of Brisbane. It is a great joy and delight to engage with our young people and talk about the work we do as members of parliament and as representatives of the people. One of the questions I get asked quite often when I talk about Australia being a democracy is: what is meant by ‘democracy’? I always go back to a little bit of history when I talk to the students of the schools that I visit. I take pleasure in talking about the history of ‘democracy’. It comes
from ancient times, from the Greek historian Herodotus, who as we understand first used the term in the fifth century BC. He coined the word from ‘demos’, ‘the people’, and ‘kratien’, ‘to rule’. It really is rule by the people. The people are supreme, and they are whom we serve as elected members of parliament.

One of the other famous definitions that I like to raise when I talk to students about democracy and its meaning is a phrase by a very historic figure in American politics: Abraham Lincoln, a former American president. He coined the phrase ‘government of the people, by the people, for the people’. It is this simple eloquence that really does go to the heart of what democracy is all about and, in a sense, also what government is all about. ‘Government of the people, by the people, for the people’—what majestic words they are to describe the spirit of this motion and the spirit of a way of life that we in this country certainly treasure very much: the democratic way of life.

Getting back to Herodotus for a moment, I think it is no accident that it was a Greek who coined the word, because ancient times were when scholars were able to see democracy in Athens during the fifth and fourth centuries. We understand that people at that time actually assembled together and ruled in a very direct, community oriented fashion. It is a lesson for those in politics today that the community forum or town hall still has its supreme place in modern politics. It is interesting how something so long ago has profound relevance to politicians in the 21st century.

In my view, the ultimate benefit of democracy to the modern state and to people who believe in democracy is that it confers a sense of legitimacy on the elected government of the day—that legitimacy of course comes about quite simply because the will of the people is reflected in the government of the day. The mechanism to achieve democracy in modern times is through the ballot box and through elections. It is through that mechanism that a government is formed. It has a mandate to govern on behalf of the people.

I want to make three observations about a fully democratic and pluralistic state as I see them. The first great benefit of democracy is the right to oppose. Professor Kenneth Minogue of the London School of Economics has suggested that no state is seriously democratic unless opposing and critical voices are permitted to criticise governments; there is guaranteed freedom for people to form political organisations of many types—whether formal or informal, direct or indirect; and people are able to freely contest fair and frequent elections. The tolerance of opposition is distinctive to a genuine democratic form of government.

Another benefit of democracy is that democracy enjoys and respects individual freedom. Citizens can meet whomever they like, whenever they like and do whatever they like in terms of worship, free speech and movement. They can actively engage in the democratic process. In our modern times that would of course involve things like writing letters to newspapers, ringing up talkback stations and getting involved actively in the democratic and the political process. Citizens of course are not barred from voting or from seeking the votes of their fellow citizens if they wish to contest elections.

Another significant benefit of democracy is that government is seen to be transparent with a two-way communication between governments and citizens. Governments must not only be prepared to listen to the communities they represent but clearly communicate their decisions. The member for Fremantle made observations of the me-
dia and I acknowledge her point about the significance of the media as part of the architecture of a fully functioning democratic state.

Australia is the sixth-oldest uninterrupted democracy and is recognised all over the world for its history of political stability and its values—the sixth-oldest uninterrupted democracy only behind the United States, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, New Zealand and Canada. What a great place we occupy. We are, of course, a parliamentary democracy with our roots set deep in the British tradition of Westminster. The distinctive feature of our modern democratic Australia is our proud liberal democratic tradition that provides for robust public debate and exchanges from town halls to national stadiums. I am very proud to be a member of the Australian parliament and to be a citizen of this great country, and I pledge to do all I can to guard our significant way of life.

Debate (on motion by Mr Combet) adjourned.

AUSLINK (NATIONAL LAND TRANSPORT) AMENDMENT BILL 2008
Second Reading

Debate resumed from 4 September, on motion by Mr Albanese:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (12.40 pm)—On 4 September when I was speaking on the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008, I referred to its three basic elements. I indicated the opposition’s keen support for the inclusion in the bill of continuing arrangements for the universally popular Roads to Recovery program. I also indicated that the opposition were supportive of the amendments proposed on the bill in relation to unincorporated areas to ensure that funding could be provided for road projects in those places. We also support the alterations to the definition of a ‘road’ contained in the bill to put beyond doubt that AusLink and other funding can be applied to roadside projects such as rest stops, parking bays and decoupling facilities.

I also referred to the somewhat curious reference by the minister in his second reading speech to funding for electronic monitoring systems. He referred to it in the speech but there is no reference to it in the bill. I am hopeful that he will give the House an assurance that no changes will be made to the arrangements for electronic monitoring systems as a result of this legislation.

I was in the process of commenting on other elements of the minister’s second reading speech when my time was interrupted, so I want to go back to the minister’s second reading speech. Much of it had very little to do with what is actually in the bill. The minister took the opportunity to outline the government’s policy on the heavy vehicle safety and productivity package. This policy is really one of blackmail. The minister stated:

… the package is contingent on the passage of the enabling legislation for the 2007 Heavy Vehicle Charges Determination …

That legislation will authorise an increase in heavy vehicle registration fees announced by the minister at the same time as he trumpeted his safety package. The opposition rejected these increased charges in the other place in March this year. We did so because we understand that the heavy freight sector is already doing it tough with high interest rates and rising fuel bills. Moreover, all Australians are battling to meet their daily requirements in the face of increasing cost of living pressures. For the Rudd Labor government to slap higher taxes on trucks—and, in so doing, belt a small business sector and push up
the cost for all Australians—seems to be a remarkable response. This is obviously going to increase the cost of most items sold in supermarkets around Australia because they are transported around the country by trucks.

How can a government look pensioners in the eye and tell them that they cannot raise pensions because they do not have the money when it is going to raise taxes on everything that pensioners buy? Pensioners will be in a worse position as a result of the proposals being put forward by this government. There will be higher taxes on everything that they buy. That will make it harder for pensioners to survive—yet there is a $20 billion plus budget surplus.

The opposition makes no apology in rejecting these higher charges. They are a tax grab which would keep on going up. Regular increases are proposed to be built on a road cost adjustment formula associated with road construction. These costs, such as steel and concrete, are skyrocketing so we can be sure that registrations will go up even more than the CPI. Moreover, the structure of these charges penalise productivity since they fall heavily on highly productive multi-combination vehicles such as B-doubles and B-triples. At the same time, the government wants to increase the effective rate of the diesel fuel excise on the road user charge. Specifically, the Rudd government seeks to increase the diesel excise from 19.633c per litre to 21c per litre and then regularly increase the rate on the same formula used for the heavy vehicle registration charge. In other words, the government is seeking to reintroduce the indexation of fuel excise, and at a higher rate than the CPI.

Members may recall that the indexation of fuel excise was introduced by the Keating government and abolished by the coalition in 2001. The government tried to quietly get the relevant regulation through the parliament earlier this year but fortunately the opposition rejected it on 14 May 2008. These measures are a tax grab. They are designed to raise government revenue by another $168 million per year. The fuel tax take to Labor states and territories will rise by $80 million and the increase in heavy vehicle charges will lift Labor’s tax grab by another $88 million. So let us not get too excited about the proposed $70 million safety package—it is simply robbing Peter to pay Paul a lot less. And do not get too excited about Labor’s claim that in 2007 the then coalition federal minister for transport supported the development of a new charges regime. The coalition has always believed that the heavy vehicle sector should pay its way but we do not support the reintroduction of the indexation of fuel excise. We also want a rational registration charge-setting regime that does not unfairly penalise the most efficient vehicle combinations.

The opposition calls upon the government to take seriously its rhetoric about helping working families. The opposition calls upon the Rudd government to stop the bullyboy blackmail tactics to get this tax grab through the parliament. The opposition asks the government to simply fund the safety measures for truckie’s without condition. Do not use the lives of truck drivers as a negotiating pawn. There is money available to the government to introduce these safety measures which they regard as important; they do not have to be tied to new taxation measures which will actually raise vastly more money than the government is proposing to spend on the package.

The opposition is also concerned about the way in which the heavy freight sector is regulated, particularly the longstanding inability of the states to agree on uniform vehicle laws. The states have been promising for years to unify the laws but they have not done so. Previous governments even tied
certain funding to uniform regulations but progress has been slow. The government should not be giving new money to the states out of registration and fuel taxes unless the states guarantee that they will at the same time deliver harmonisation of the laws, as has been promised for decades. As an example, I refer to the heavy vehicle driver fatigue reforms agreed by the Australian Transport Council in February 2007. These laws are designed to provide a national standard for managing heavy vehicle driver fatigue. The coalition supports a national template providing for the consistent and safe management of fatigue by drivers of heavy vehicles. Late last year the Australian Transport Council approved the heavy vehicle driver fatigue national model legislation.

Of course, the regulation of the heavy vehicle sector is the responsibility of states and territories. They must pass the required heavy vehicle fatigue management laws and implement them. I understood that the states agreed that these should be uniform laws—but this is the beginning of the problem. Not all of the states and territories have decided to do so. New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia are implementing the new laws on 29 September. Tasmania and the Northern Territory plan to implement them later. The Australian Capital Territory and Western Australia are not going to implement them at all. Secondly, the participating states have made changes to the national model legislation. For example, under section 56 of the model law, a truck driver engaged in standard hours only has to carry a work diary if he or she drives more than 100 kilometres from their home base or has done so in the last 28 days. This means that a driver of a truck over 12 tonnes working a regular day delivering furniture around a regional centre should not have to worry about filling in the work diary. But in New South Wales or Tasmania every heavy truck operator must fill out the diary, even for local work. So the driver delivering furniture must waste time filling out paperwork and the drivers who transport containers around Botany Bay will simply have further red tape to deal with as well. It is inconsistent, it is irritating and it loses valuable business time.

Another example is the different treatment of short rest breaks. Under section 47 of the model law, a driver working standard hours must take a short break after 5¼ hours of work. A driver may make a defence against a breach of this provision if there was no suitable place of rest to be found and the driver found a rest stop within 45 minutes. In New South Wales or Victoria this is not a defence. This is in spite of the fact that a recent audit of 12,700 kilometres of Australia’s major highways found that the states and territories have largely failed to meet the National Transport Commission guidelines regarding the provision of rest stops. Surely it is not too much to ask the New South Wales and Victorian governments to be a little more flexible, as other states are prepared to be.

The third example of the haphazard way that the states have applied national fatigue management reforms is the inconsistent transitional arrangements. For Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia, drivers who operate under the basic regulated hours of 12 hours driving plus two hours extra work have six months from 29 September to move to the new standard of 12 hours work in total. Not so in Victoria. In that state there will be no transitional arrangements for drivers on standard hours. As of 29 September, drivers in Victoria on standard hours will only be able to work 12 hours a day. What is more, this arrangement will apply to interstate drivers coming in from New South Wales and South Australia. Victoria’s insistence on pressing ahead, despite the transitional arrangements in other states, is a major concern, naturally, to interstate trucking op-
operators. The national freight carriers have to manage not only the inconsistent application of the fatigue laws but also the inconsistent transitional arrangements.

Unfortunately, there are other bizarre consequences and inconsistencies in the treatment by states of national road freight. For example, Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland have designated road train routes that make it possible for trucks to pull highly efficient B-triples across those states. B-triples are highly efficient vehicle combinations; they are up to 30 per cent more productive than B-doubles. They also help to get trucks off our roads, since two B-triples are equivalent to five semitrailers. Unfortunately, New South Wales refuses to open up its road systems to these vehicles. In spite of the COAG decision in 2006 that the states and territories would establish a B-triple network, New South Wales simply refuses to recognise B-triples as a legitimate vehicle combination able to operate freely on road train routes. Victoria is not much better. It allows strictly limited B-triple use between Broadmeadows and Geelong, and then only for the trucks moving car components for the Ford Motor Company. Talk about a sweetheart deal! These odd policy decisions by New South Wales and Victoria mean that B-triple freight cannot take place on a national basis. This is in spite of the fact that the road freight task is expected to nearly double by 2020.

There are plenty of other anomalies. One is the glacial take-up by particular states of the common higher mass limits for trucks with road friendly suspension. As far back as 1999, the states and territories agreed with the Commonwealth that Australia should develop approved routes for trucks with road friendly suspension. This is an important reform that would generate freight efficiencies worth hundreds of millions of dollars and would place Australia at the forefront of the world in pioneering and applying new developments in pavement friendly technologies. According to the reform, an approved road network for trucks fitted with state-of-the-art suspension systems would roll out as specific roads and bridges were protected.

In spite of Commonwealth funding being provided for this purpose, now, after nearly 10 years, Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia, the Northern Territory and areas of Queensland have developed an extensive approved road network for these types of trucks. But, ever since this initiative started, New South Wales has been blocking it by imposing unique and difficult regulations that effectively make it impossible for vehicles to qualify. New South Wales continues to refuse to publish its higher mass limit network or to open up in a transparent way its approval for vehicles to drive on it.

Another inefficient agony in our so-called national road freight system is the different treatment of widths of loads. For example, states cannot agree on a harmonised approach to minor overwidth loads, such as hay bales. Drought and even average seasons around the state generate significant movements of hay, including across state borders. In New South Wales, rigid semitrailers and B-doubles may be loaded to a width of only 2.83 metres. But, in next door Victoria, these trucks can be loaded to three metres. Beware the farmer in Victoria who dares load his truck with hay as wide as legally possible in that state and then drives across the border into New South Wales! Is he expected to cut a few inches off every hay bale? The laws are a nonsense and clearly need to be standardised. Containers that can be legally trucked in Queensland may be too long in New South Wales. Loads in New South Wales may be too high to move into Victoria.
The opposition supports the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008, but the government should not be providing any additional funding to the states unless the states deal with these issues of inconsistency of regulations. The states have been promising for years to fix this, but their progress has been appallingly slow. The opposition also notes the agreement by the Australian Transport Council, in July this year, to establish a single national system for heavy vehicle regulation and the adoption of a consistent approach to heavy vehicle licensing. The opposition supports this initiative, but let’s make it clear: this is not the first such commitment. The states have promised repeatedly and have failed to deliver. In spite of financial incentives, they do not respond. They expect compromises from the transport sector but they have not met their share of the deal made with the trucking industry. The trucking industry is prepared to respond to some of these issues, but it expects the governments to act responsibly as well. Instead, state governments consistently impose new burdens on the trucking sector without meeting their share of the burden.

No number of communiques and press statements change the fact that there appears to be foot-dragging and a fundamental lack of political will by certain non-federal jurisdictions to address this basic problem. It is time we had serious discussions about the slow and fragmented approach of some of the states and territories towards road freight reform. It seems extraordinary that, in this successful, modern and mobile country of the 21st century, those in the business of putting necessities on our supermarket shelves have to put up with this kind of irrational, irritating and inefficient nonsense.

I remind the Rudd government that ending the blame game is not code for friendly failure—or just giving up. The federal government cannot walk away from its task of driving the states to act responsibly. There should be no further concessions or additional financial grants to the states under higher fuel taxes and registration until there is clear and demonstrated approval of standardisation and harmonisation of state transport laws. If it is safe in one state, it is safe in another. If a container is okay to be hauled around the roads in one state, why is it inappropriate as soon as the truck crosses a border?

It is these sorts of anomalies that make us a laughing stock in other parts of the world. It is the rail gauge story repeated time and time again. But this is not last-century stuff. It is not 100-year-old stuff. It is happening today. The various states are simply unable to find the necessary common ground to institute laws which would enable our transport system and industries, particularly those in regional areas, to operate with a higher level of efficiency. The Labor government must stop rewarding the failure of the Labor states by giving them even more federal money. It must start placing rigorous conditions upon the states and point out that they too are part of Australia and they must contribute to this vital reform.

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (1.00 pm)—The AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008 is an important piece of legislation. It certainly demonstrates the government’s commitment to road safety and to the infrastructure of our local roads. It is very important to my electorate of Werriwa. As I know you appreciate, Mr Deputy Speaker, my electorate straddles one of the most important road transport corridors in the country, and that is the Hume Highway. The Hume Highway sees about 365,000 heavy vehicle movements per year. That accounts for about 20 million tonnes of freight. I saw the statistics that were produced in the lead-up to the widening of the F5. They showed that in my electorate there were 6,000 truck movements per day. That indicates the
amount of reliance that we have on heavy road transport, which remains a vital element in the economic wellbeing of our communities.

Heavy vehicle road transport accounts for 1.7 billion tonnes of freight per annum. That means that 70 per cent of total domestic freight is moved by road. Therefore, it is only appropriate that we as a government see that every effort is made to ensure that our roads are not only efficient and effective but, very importantly, safe. Reliance on road transport, regrettably, as indicated by all the various statistics I have seen, results in a road carnage figure which is obviously devastating for those personally affected but, with respect, is also devastating to the community as a whole. This is the case particularly when you appreciate that one in five road fatalities involves heavy vehicles. Speed and fatigue are significant factors which contribute to that. They are factors which this bill sets out to do something about.

Road safety is an obligation for all road users. It is certainly a responsibility that is shared between state, territory and local governments. But the federal government’s responsibility is to provide leadership in, and resources for, the proper and efficient use of our road transport infrastructure. That is what this bill does. The government’s leadership, quite frankly, is evident in this bill. The bill demonstrates an ongoing commitment to road safety and to local road infrastructure.

The bill will enable funding for heavy vehicle safety. It will continue the Roads to Recovery program. It will allow better management of the Roads to Recovery funding list. It will also enable the funding of state governments while the most appropriate local government to be affected is being determined. So it will not hold money back while those bureaucratic assessments are being made; it will actually do something about ensuring that our roads are as safe and effective as possible in being the conduit by which heavy vehicles deliver their product to market.

The amendments in the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008 will enable the funding of projects, including the Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program, from 1 July 2009. The bill will allow the continuation of the Roads to Recovery program for a further five years, extending beyond June 2009. It will allow for the better management of the Roads to Recovery funding list, which sets out all the funding recipients in Australia and the amounts they receive. That is currently not able to be amended except, as I understand it, in very, very limited circumstances.

I will deal with the safety aspects of this bill. As I said, safety is very much at the forefront of this legislation. The bill will amend the definition of ‘roads’ contained in the act so that it will include heavy vehicle safety facilities. Some might think that that is just a semantic gesture, but this will enable the funding arrangements to be made so that investments can be made in the establishment of heavy vehicle rest areas; truck parking and decoupling areas, particularly in the outer suburban and regional areas; and new technology for vehicles’ electrical systems so that the performance of drivers can be validated to ensure that drivers are not driving excessive hours and that they are observing legislated rest periods. Those are very much fundamental things in improving truck safety.

I should indicate that for some time now I have been visiting a truck stop. I started visiting that truck stop probably because of issues about Work Choices in the lead-up to the last election. I regularly go down to Uncle Leo’s truck stop at the crossroads in
Casula. It is a practice I have developed. I just listen to these drivers. Most of these drivers, by and large, are owner-drivers. They talk to me about what they have to do to make their times. One of the things that I did not appreciate until last year is the amount of down time a number of the transport operators have. The need to have rest areas or decoupling areas is just so critical.

I was talking to one driver who had been at Uncle Leo’s truck stop for 14 hours. He had haulage that was going to one of our main distribution points in the outer metropolitan area of Sydney, but he was waiting for a slot time. Where I came from, I dealt regularly with slot times. We had them in the aviation industry. By and large, that is how we regulated when planes arrived and departed. This driver explained to me that he had been waiting 14 hours for a slot time. His vehicle—his rig and the contents of it—was at this truck stop waiting for a time that he could unload. He was not getting paid. As he put it to me, ‘I am a mobile storage facility.’ He was simply going to be there until he could get his slot time so he could unload. This fellow was from Brisbane—he had nothing to do with my electorate to that extent—and he was simply waiting for a period when he could get and unload. In terms of the economics of that, he was not getting paid; he would have to wait for his slot. On other occasions at the same truck stop, I have heard drivers haggling and negotiating over the telephone for passage back to Brisbane. They are trying to get a load to go back. I have been with one driver there who settled on the fuel costs on a return load back to his home port of Brisbane.

The picture I am trying to paint is that, in the heavy vehicle transport industry, it is more than possible that people will, where necessary, cut corners. They will certainly push the envelope. They will certainly do what they see as necessary to make a quid, which unfortunately leads to speeding and perseverance despite fatigue. That might be their own personal business, but doing it on our roads is an issue for the community generally. That is why this piece of legislation is very important: it puts that very much in the forefront. It recognises the competitive issues within this industry and it aims to help regulate those issues in a safe and effective way.

I have got a lot of time for these owner-drivers out there. I appreciate the amount of work they have to put in to make a quid, to look after their families, to pay the mortgage and to pay the repayments on their vehicles, but when you hear their personal stories, as I have, it gives you a new appreciation. There is a large amount of pressure on drivers in the heavy haulage industry, and one in five road fatalities in this country involves a heavy vehicle. That should be of concern to all of us. That is why this legislation is so essential.

I have heard the view of the shadow minister and the Leader of the National Party. It is true that this piece of legislation has the intention of ensuring that the heavy vehicle industry pays its fair share. You are probably at the sharper end of this than I am, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, coming from a rural background, but I know from my local councils of Liverpool, Campbelltown and, to some extent, Camden the amount of money that is required for road maintenance. Heavy vehicles contribute largely to the deterioration of some of the local roads, as vehicles are using those roads to get to ports, marketplaces or other transport hubs. I do not think that it is improper to ensure that people pay their fair share for that. I do not think it is proper to think that our local government organisations are going to foot the bill. What we are trying to do in this piece of legislation is ensure that there is proper balance—the sort of balance that Minister Truss, as he was
at that stage, was talking about when he gave a speech on 28 June 2007 entitled ‘The coalition government’s transport reform agenda’. In that speech he said:

The National Transport Commission will develop a new heavy vehicle charges determination to be implemented from 1 July 2008. The new determination will aim to recover the heavy vehicles’ allocated infrastructure costs in total—and I emphasise ‘in total’—and will also aim to remove cross-subsidisation across heavy vehicle classes.

When you hear a speech like that, you think that means they are going to come in and at least make an attempt at a fairer system by having the heavy vehicles industry pay a fair share for road damage. I sat through the last speech and, probably like you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I came to the conclusion that that is not what the minister—now the shadow minister—was effectively saying. There must be that balance, and we are working hard to establish that.

The very effective Roads to Recovery program is due to run out on 30 June. It ensures that local governments are not left high and dry in having to maintain road infrastructure to accommodate damage and deterioration of local roads. This bill will ensure that Roads to Recovery will be extended a further five years through to June 2014. Additionally, the bill will facilitate Labor’s increase in funding from $300 million per year to $350 million per year. That is an increase of $250 million over five years. The Labor government’s total commitment to fixing local road transport issues will increase to $1.75 billion over the life of the Roads to Recovery program. That is certainly a major commitment to the infrastructure requirements of not only the heavy vehicle industry but also local governments, who often find it difficult to maintain roads to accommodate heavy vehicles travelling in their constituencies.

This bill deals with AusLink, and I want to put on the record the commitment that the Rudd Labor government delivered to the people of south-west Sydney. A $140-million project has been initiated to widen the F5 freeway. Of that, the Rudd Labor government has already committed $112 million, and the remainder of the funding will be found by the state government. That is effectively an 80-20 arrangement. Tenders for the project were called only two weeks ago, notwithstanding the member for Macarthur’s view that it was in never-never land. I assure him—and this could help when he visits his electorate from his home in Mosman—this project is going ahead.

I congratulate Campbelltown City Council and the mayor, Aaron Rule, who, with due respect to them, went to great lengths in lobbying both major parties in the lead-up to the last election to get the funding commitments necessary to proceed with this significant upgrade of road infrastructure. The upgrade involves a two-lane section of road about 10 kilometres long between Ingleburn and Narellan. It will be upgraded to four lanes between Campbelltown and Ingleburn and to three lanes each way between Narellan Road and Campbelltown Road. That is a significant net adjustment to the area.

It is very significant because it is what we need to be doing—that is, building these pieces of infrastructure—not simply to make it easier for people to move from point A to point B around my electorate, although it will do that as well, but also to help open up commercial land or employment-generating land so that we can establish industries that will have access to both road and transport facilities, including the M5, the F5 and the M7. It will also allow the proper development of intermodal terminals, which will facilitate the establishment of south-west Sydney as an inland port.
That is what we argued in the lead-up to the election. However, believe it or not, the member for Macarthur took the view—for which he was pilloried by the electorate—and ran the argument that the airspace on top of the Hume Highway is not owned by the Commonwealth but by the state government. Therefore, we could build it and the air would be a state government responsibility. If members do not believe me, I am happy to produce newspaper articles about that. That is the way the member for Macarthur treated the people of south-west Sydney. He had the audacity to say that the F5 freeway argument almost cost him his seat. Granted, his margin went from 11.2 per cent down to 0.7 per cent, but I think that was the result of things other than ridiculous comments like that. It might have been a result of the general servicing of the area. With respect, if members show disdain like that for the people of south-west Sydney perhaps they should not enjoy even a 0.7 per cent margin. As I have said to him previously, at least this government is building a road to make it easier for him to travel occasionally from his home in Mosman to his electorate of Macarthur. I am glad the member has joined us, because he might want to attest to what I have just said.

This project is so fundamental to south-west Sydney that it had to become a bargaining tool. Doing something fair and right should not have been a bargaining issue; it should have been committed to. (Time expired)

Dr NELSON (Bradfield—Leader of the Opposition) (1.20 pm)—It is a great honour to speak to the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill and, in particular, about experiences I have recently had directly with the trucking industry. The bill does two principal things. Firstly, it extends the Roads to Recovery program, which was one of the many excellent Howard government initiatives. It put more resources directly into the hands of local government, particularly for the maintenance of important local roads. Secondly, the bill amends the AusLink legislation to allow AusLink to fund and support off-road rest stops. Members on this side of the House know that they are a bugbear for people in the transport industry.

I pay special tribute to Australia’s truck drivers, owner-operators and the men, and increasingly the women, in the industry. Too often many Australians, particularly those who live in built-up city areas, do not appreciate the sacrifices that are made to get our goods transported literally the length and breadth of this country.

In the last financial year, 2006-07, road freight was worth just under $17 billion to the Australian economy. That is 1.7 per cent of the entire nation’s gross domestic product. If you add storage, you are looking at closer to $30 billion or three per cent of Australia’s GDP. There were 2.1 billion tonnes of freight carried last year—2.1 billion tonnes of freight carried right across Australia—by Australia’s transport industry and, of course, our drivers. And it is forecast that, from 2000 to 2020, that tonnage is going to double. When you think about it, there is really nothing in this country that these people do not deliver—with the possible exception of babies!

In 1996, when the Howard government came to office, road funding was less in real terms than it had been at the time of the change of the previous government in 1982-83. In other words, the record of the last Labor administration, the last Labor government, was to actually reduce in real terms funding to Australian roads. In contrast, under the previous coalition government, there had been a 24 per cent real increase by 2007. So there was a real reduction under the previous Labor government and a real increase
of 24 per cent under the last coalition government. Much of that money was invested in national highways but about 80 per cent of it actually went into local councils—bypassing the seriously constipated state governments mismanaging their resources and going instead to local governments, which know exactly which roads have to be fixed, which roads have to be built and which roads best serve the local communities.

In 2000 the Roads to Recovery program was budgeted at $1.2 billion over four years and it funded 25,000 projects, including in my electorate of Bradfield, in a built-up suburban Sydney area, right through to the most remote regional communities, including in your own electorate of Maranoa, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott. An issue that is very important to all Australians—particularly to the drivers but to all of us who use the roads—is road deaths. There were 10.76 deaths per 100,000 in 1996. So for every 100,000 Australians almost 11 Australians were killed. In contrast, by the time of the change of government last year, as a result of a range of initiatives, the number of deaths had declined from 11 per 100,000 to 7.6 per 100,000. I think everybody in the industry, the federal, state and local governments, the designers of vehicles and a whole variety of people should take an enormous amount of credit for that. The deaths that involved articulated trucks had declined over the last 11 years by some 11 per cent.

One thing that was done by the previous government was to reintroduce the Black Spot Program. It is estimated that, by June 2008, the Black Spot Program will have prevented some 6,000 serious crashes and saved in the order of 130 lives. So the end result is that one of the programs which we initiated in this parliament and which we fund and which we support has saved 130 lives. And, as a matter of record, it was a program that was scrapped by the Labor Party. There were 172 deaths last year involving articulated trucks.

There are a couple of things that the new Labor government has done already to which we on this side take great exception—as do people in the industry. Firstly, in an environment where this country has gone backwards under the Rudd Labor government—where Australians now are worse off than they were in 2007, with crippling increases in fuel, groceries and rents and increasing cost-of-living pressures—one of the things that the government did was to increase the road user charge. In plain language that is understood by the truckies of the country, what the government did was to increase the cost of the charge on diesel from 19.6c a litre to 21c a litre. That will raise $80 million a year. That is an $80 million tax on the industry—at a time when every motorist and, in particular, every truck driver and owner-operator knows that diesel costs are crippling them and adding to inflationary costs.

We are told by the government that it is fighting a war against inflation. We are told by the government that the price of groceries is something about which it professes to have concern. You would think that, if you were concerned about the cost of fuel to, in particular, Australian truckies, the last thing you would do is put an increased tax on diesel. Yet that was one of the first things that this government did. You would think that, if you were worried about the cost of groceries, instead of just watching the price of groceries, the last thing you would do is put inflationary costs onto it. It does not matter whether you go to a small independent grocer, a corner store or a supermarket, wherever you buy groceries, a truck driver somewhere drove those groceries to that facility and the cost of getting it there contributes to the price that real consumers ultimately pay.
So that was the first thing the government did: they increased the road user cost. They increased the cost of diesel and thereby, of course, increased the price of groceries to Australians. I bet we will not be hearing about that on the ‘grocery watch’ website that the taxpayers of Australia have paid $13 million to set up. That increase in the road user cost raises $80 million a year. So that is an $80 million tax on Australia’s owner-drivers—$80 million a year. The second thing the government did, in its enormous wisdom, was to increase the registration costs. So now we have an $89 million impost in increased registration charges. We are supposed to be fighting inflation, we are supposed to be worried about the cost of groceries and doing something about it, and the government’s first two actions were, firstly, to increase the price of diesel for truckies and, secondly, to increase the cost of registering the vehicles.

We were told that the registration charges were necessary to fund safety programs. No one on this side opposes safety programs, but I ask: why is it that, with escalating cost-of-living pressures, rising interest rates under Mr Rudd and his government and people losing their jobs, we have to fund safety from an increased tax on Australia’s truckies instead of funding it out of the $21.7 billion surplus given to the government by the previous coalition government? When we oppose the registration costs, the government says, ‘We’ve got to fund safety.’ In other words, the government is saying that, if you do not increase taxes, you will not have funding for safety. What a load of nonsense! We were not born yesterday, and I can tell you that the truckies of this country—if they know what is going on—certainly know that this is a government that is hostile to the interests of everyday Australians and, in particular, fair dinkum, hardworking Australians who work on average about 100 hours a week driving this stuff around the country.

I had the great privilege—and that is how I describe it—of being able to spend 12 hours in a B-double weighing just over 60 tonnes with a guy called Rod Hannifey, who has seven kids. We went from Melbourne to Dubbo over approximately a 12-hour period. During that period of time, apart from getting to know Mr Hannifey very well, getting to know the issues of the drivers and getting to listen to a bit of Slim Dusty as we went along, I had the very important opportunity to get a better understanding of the issues that are facing these men and women in this industry. We stopped in Albury and I was met by the member for Farrer, who brought out a welcoming committee. We also stopped in Forbes at the Ben Hall Road Stop—and I send a very big cheerio to Carmel. There were a dozen or so truckies at the Ben Hall when we pulled in to Dubbo at about eight o’clock that night. If you are looking for a high-quality meal, particularly rissoles about four centimetres thick, you will pay $11.50 for two rissoles, salad, chips and a free coffee, and you will get the best company you could ever spend a bit of time with. I will not relate to the Prime Minister the reaction of the truckies when they saw him pop up on the TV in the corner of the truck stop. Needless to say, it was not dissimilar from the cheerio he got from the crowd at the Bledisloe on Saturday night.

There are a number of very important issues here. We had an opportunity to look at rest stops. For those of us who just drive around the country in our cars and stop every couple of hours to have a coffee and to freshen up, a rest stop is a rest stop. But, for a driver driving a 60-tonne B-double, an articulated vehicle, or, increasingly, a triple, these rest stops are absolutely essential. These men and women need a rest. All drivers need a rest, but these people need to be
able to sleep. They have an enormous amount of responsibility in driving these vehicles. It is not unusual for a driver to be waiting for three or four days to get a call from a company, to get a call and then to find that he is going to be on the road for 10 days and will go through four states through that period of time. So, when a driver pulls in for a rest stop, he needs a break. Some of the rest stops are very well designed with parking that is clearly demarcated, with the trucks further off the road and with the refrigerated trucks being kept away from the non-refrigerated trucks because the engines in the refrigeration, of course, keep the drivers awake. Whilst technically they might have had a four-hour break, a driver can get back onto the road really having had no sleep at all.

Some of the rest stops have showers. Some of them have toilets that are well designed and all the rest of it, but some of them are appalling. Some of them are not only a disgrace but indeed a threat to the safety of all road users—just a bit of dirt on the side of the road with a rubbish tin and maybe a bench if you are lucky. There is no shade, trees have been chopped down and there has been no thought given to drivers driving in 40-degree heat needing to get a bit of sleep in shaded conditions—there is none of that. One of the things that hopefully this bill and this amendment will help to achieve but which political will will ultimately deliver is truck stops that are designed by drivers for drivers.

When you go over a hump in a car, you might barely notice it. If you are in a B-double and you go over a hump at 100 kilometres an hour, it is like an F18 lift-off. I commend the Queensland Department of Main Roads for what they have done with Mr Hannifey. They have put a GPS link computer system into his truck so that, when he goes over a road that has a defect that potentially threatens the safety of the truck and other road users, he can immediately lock it in and go straight to Queensland Roads, and within a very short space of time they will send a road crew out to fix it. That is in everybody’s interests. However, trying to deal with the RTA in New South Wales is quite a different matter. It takes quite a few calls. The roads minister has had a bit of a problem, but—

Opposition members interjecting—

An opposition member—Who is it this week?

Ms Julie Bishop—What time is it?

Dr NELSON—My colleagues are teasing me. They want me to name the roads minister; that is a big call. His first name is Tony. On a serious note, it is important to have a system where our sentinel drivers all through the country are able to directly communicate with roads authorities and have defects in roads fixed. Too often we focus on building new roads; not often enough do we focus on the maintenance of existing roads.

It is very important for us to appreciate that these men and women run their families by phone. Ron said to me, ‘Very few people in my industry are not on their second marriage.’ We fail to appreciate that these are men and women who, uniquely, need to go away from home, often at short notice and for extended periods of time, and the stresses on families are in no circumstances to be underestimated.

I think Coles and Woolworths have a bit to answer for. I know that they are trying to do the best they can to manage the trucks as they come through the loading bays, but when a truck driver arrives six hours early and has to wait six hours before he can unload and is not even allowed to use the toilet, I say: Coles and Woolworths, if you are listening, just have a listen to some of the drivers; they need a better go. A lot of these
drivers and owners are providing free storage to supermarkets. You have a truck out in the road for four, five or six hours that is completely loaded up—that is free storage, and the drivers and owners are paying for it. There is no question that, whilst there is goodwill on the part of the supermarket owners and operators, there needs to be a lot more of that and a lot more common sense.

We need plain common sense when it comes to fatigue laws. There is no question that fatigue laws, generally speaking, need to be supported and strengthened. When Rod Hannifey, who is based in Dubbo, drove for 10 minutes around the block in Melbourne and then pulled over, I said to him, ‘Mate, what are you doing?’ He said, ‘I’m filling in my logbook.’ I said, ‘What do you mean?’ He said, ‘I’ve got to fill in the logbook.’ I said, ‘Mate, we just went round the block.’ He said, ‘Yeah, I know, but I’m away from base.’ Filling in the logbook then triggers a compulsory rest period in the trip from Melbourne to Dubbo. I understand the motive, but it is a lack of plain common sense. These people are seriously battling. If they are fined they will lose not only money but demerit points. So plain common sense must be applied in some of these fatigue laws.

Another issue is pay. I asked Rod: ‘What sort of pay do these blokes get? What sort of money do you get?’ He said that, generally speaking, if you are away from home for five days and you drive 200,000 kilometres a year—about 4,000 kilometres a week—you would expect to bring in about $80,000 gross or you might max out at $100,000. A lot of people listening to this debate would say, ‘Gee, that’s a lot of money.’ However, I would not want to have to feed seven kids, be away from home for at least five days a week and have all the stress of doing what these men and women do for that kind of money. I think we should take our hats off to them.

There are a number of other very important issues, and one of them is car drivers—for instance, this bloke in a Barina who pulled out of a road stop and sat on 80 kilometres an hour. We have a 60-tonne truck doing 100 kilometres an hour, the merging lane is too short and this bloke in the Barina pulls out in front of the truck. So what happens? Of course, the truckie has to hit the brakes. Goodness knows if there was someone behind us with a caravan. When drivers are being educated for their road licence, is it too much to ask for them to watch a 10-minute simulation to give them an understanding of what it is like to be in a major articulated vehicle out on the road?

There is the issue of caravans and the drivers who tow them. Another issue is the twin headlights on new motorbikes. These lights can give truck drivers the perception that there is a car some distance away when in fact it is a motorcycle that is relatively close. A further issue that I think we should focus on is fog lights. A lot of drivers have fog lights on their cars—and they are called fog lights for good reason. You put them on when there is fog; however, these lights are blinding to other drivers, especially at night. Also, imagine being a truck driver out on the road and trying to do something as simple as getting to a dentist or a doctor or dealing with kids or with any of the problems that occur in domestic relationships.

In conclusion, I think the government has already shown itself to be hostile to the interests of working Australians—dare I say working families. It has certainly shown itself to be hostile to the interests of Australia’s road industry. Further to all those people losing their jobs, can I give you one more figure: there were 3,600 truck repossessions in the first six months of this year. Behind every one of those repossessions is a story of heartbreak. Somebody with a mortgage, somebody with debt, has had their truck re-
possessed. Worse still, the finance companies have stopped repossessing because they do not think they will get their money back.

(Time expired)

Debate adjourned.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr SOMLYAY (Fairfax) (1.40 pm)—by leave—I move:

That leave of absence from 15 September to 4 December 2008 be given to Mrs Gash on the ground of parliamentary business overseas.

Question agreed to.

AUSLINK (NATIONAL LAND TRANSPORT) AMENDMENT BILL 2008

Second Reading

Debate resumed.

Mr RAGUSE (Forde) (1.41 pm)—I have a quite an audience here today, but I think they will soon move out of the chamber as their leader has spoken. The Leader of the Opposition gave a very impassioned speech. His support for truckies is well placed. Unfortunately, I do not believe the Leader of the Opposition really understands a lot about the trucking industry from one trip from Melbourne to Dubbo on what are probably some of the better roads in the country.

I will talk a little on the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008 and its effect on my electorate of Forde in South-East Queensland. Travelling in the electorate of Forde is very different from the description that the Leader of the Liberal Party gave of his horrendous trip. That trip would have been sheer luxury. It does not happen that way in my electorate. If you want to take a trip from Brisbane across the border to Kyogle, you will not find truck stops or facilities. In fact, with the single tarmac and the potholes, it is quite a horrendous trip. I think the point of the legislation was missed in that impassioned speech. The legislation is about safety, safety and safety. Of course, productivity measures will be put in place to ensure safe outcomes for our drivers. The trucking industry and particularly its drivers, who do those trips day after day, week after week, is what this legislation is about.

Before I talk more about how the funds that will be appropriated through this legislation will support the electorate of Forde, I want to make a couple of points about the legislation itself. The bill strengthens road safety and proves the government’s commitment to improving local roads, particularly for heavy vehicles. The definition of a road will be amended so as to put beyond any doubt that projects for the development of facilities used by heavy vehicles in connection with travel on road may be funded.

The Leader of the Nationals spoke earlier this morning about his concerns with this bill. I want to debunk some of the fears and concerns that he raised. In a former life, on one occasion I had the responsibility to listen to a number of representations from people within his electorate—people from the trucking industry—who wanted better roads and more funding for their roads. There seems to be a lack of connection between what funding raised through the levies or other charges may mean in terms of supporting productivity. If you are going to save costs in this industry, if you are going to make it better, you are going to prevent accidents and other events and you are also going to make the industry more productive. Any charges that may go toward improving productivity essentially mean that you will lower costs overall. That is what this legislation is about. The Liberal leader talked about listening to Slim Dusty. Lights on the Hill is a song that I remember well. It is about the trucking industry. It is a hard road; it is tough. I wonder whether he listened to the words of those songs, which talk about the grief, the heartache, the rattled kidneys and all of the other
problems that people suffer from as a result of bad roads.

We as a government want to invest in roads. Look at the last 12 years. Where have those on the other side been? Where is their investment? I do recognise the fact that Aus-Link, the funds towards Roads to Recovery and the blackspots funding have all gone to helping the cause, but the reality is that our road transport network is in a shambles. I again point to the fact that the Hume Highway—or any connection of roads from Victoria to New South Wales—is a wonderful road compared with what we have in Queensland. I mentioned my electorate of Forde in South-East Queensland and the importance of alternative road and freight transport routes.

It is interesting to see that a number of Gold Coast members—the members for Moncrieff and McPherson, and I think the member for Fadden was in the crowd here somewhere today—have been essentially talking about upgrades to the M1. They have been talking about safety and expansion of that network, and yet in one fell swoop they can say, ‘We don’t need any more money to do it, so lay off the trucking industry.’ As I said earlier, it is productivity that will bring costs down. Look at the issues in the Senate right now. There is the blocking of $550 million from a luxury car tax, just to allow people to buy Mercedes-Benzes, Porsches and Rolls Royces—$550 million that would otherwise come into the budget. I fear that that is the first instalment of a $6.2 billion hole that they will blow in the budget by blocking some of this legislation. They stand here and talk about safety, about supporting the industry and about the concerns that the industry has. There is no mention of productivity and the fact that they are prepared to give more money and yet take it from everyone else through those blockages in the Senate. That is the issue for me today.

I might talk a little bit more about the electorate of Forde. It is in South-East Queensland. It is in the Gold Coast hinterland—in fact, it sits inland from those three federal seats on the coast that I spoke about. Yes, congestion is heavy in that particular corridor—in fact, it is overcongested. It is the major and almost the only road and freight network to the south. The electorate of Forde is somewhat inland. It has road corridors but they are certainly underfunded. The former member for Forde, my predecessor—who was a member of the Liberal Party—was frustrated by the lack of funding to that region. It is important for me today to speak up about the requirement to get more dollars into the system to support the safety features that are in this particular bill.

This $70 million package is essentially a way of attacking the causes of fatal truck accidents. It is all about ensuring and funding the establishment of the road safety action plans and understanding the nature and the scope of the lack of road safety for the trucking industry. The Royal Automobile Club of Queensland, the RACQ, as part of the wider road users network, has put together information about road safety and the number of fatalities in South-East Queensland and on the Mount Lindesay Highway. While trucks probably represent only about two per cent of the traffic load in that region, they are involved in upwards of 30 per cent of the road accidents and fatalities. That is not the drivers’ fault. I think it is quite concerning that the Leader of the Opposition would suggest that the drivers are to blame, through lack of facilities or whether or not they can or cannot get two-inch-thick rissoles. I think again that he has missed the point—that this really is about providing facilities where people can get appropriate breaks. Okay, if the logbooks are part of the process, we understand that that is a regulation that is all about ensuring safety.
One of the major concerns for my electorate of Forde is the Mount Lindesay Highway. It is otherwise known as ‘the goat track’, yet it is a major transport corridor not only for freight movement but also for tourism and for the residents who live within the electorate. I want to talk about areas to the south of my electorate, on the beautiful border ranges, such as Mount Tamborine and Canungra. I have been known to sing the praises of Canungra in this parliament. The reality is that it is a significant area that has significant tourism potential. While this bill is essentially about freight and about safety for trucking movements, it is all related. The accidents that occur with general transport are all about the overall design of the road. While figures show that there has been a large number of trucking accidents in my region, it comes down to poor road design. I think that 60 per cent of the concerns are not necessarily related to drivers or to their well-being. So it is a case of making sure that through this bill we can provide those extra services.

I keep talking about the region of Forde. Realising the tourism potential of this region is essential for its growth. While tourism in the first instance opens up a lot of these road corridors, there is an alternative route. I spoke about the Gold Coast being very much the narrow connection between Queensland and New South Wales. We have untold opportunities to open up some inland routes. On a number of occasions I have spoken in this House about ‘the great south-west’, a concept being put forward by a number of local government authorities, the state government and me as the federal member. That route goes across the border and has gained support from the members for Page and Richmond, who also understand the importance of opening up other north-south corridors through the region from Forde, across the border ranges into Kyogle and further south. In fact, the whole great south-west conceptualises the opportunity to grow that region. But regional growth also means transport routes. It means safety and it means the productivity that can come with that.

I know the opposition always like to beat up the state governments, but essentially in Queensland there has been a major infrastructure investment. While some federal government funding is required, that infrastructure investment has largely been on the basis of what the state government has been able to envisage for the region. In my own electorate is the area of Bromelton, which people in this House and across Australia will hear a lot more about in the next few years. Bromelton, as an inland port, will be the site of the largest industrial area to be created and will include soft industries and transport logistics. The area of Bromelton is key to this particular area of the great south-west that we talk about. It is the hub of that development. But, currently, if you look at that region, the access roads and the corridors are very poor—in fact, in some cases they do not exist. On the one hand we have the demand and the growth in that region and on the other hand we do not have the facilities or the resources—or, dare I say, the safe transport or freight networks—that should be in place to allow this area to grow.

That is on the commercial side, and a great economic boost. But I mentioned earlier the growth of tourism. Just to put that in perspective: we have a lot of mountainous areas, simply because we have the Border Ranges region. There are concerns that people are trying to move freight through those regions on roads that were not designed for that. Yet, going back many years, there was an understanding by the community fathers of the time that they needed to open up those regions and to make better provision even just for safe transport for the people who lived in the region. I could talk about Mount
Tamborine, as an example, and the inadequate road system that feeds that mountain. In the areas of Canungra, Camp Cable, Beaudesert, and Kyogle, across the border, the road network is very poor.

Let us look at the history of the region. Many people in this House would be aware of the famous Stinson air wreck, when that plane hit a mountain in the Border Ranges back in 1937. That is an area of major interest to our region. Lots of people visit the region to go to the Lamington National Park, and to visit sites—where they can—that are very historic. As I have said previously in this House, the historical areas of my electorate include Beaudesert, which was where, during the Second World War, the 2nd/14th Light Horse Regiment was mobilised. Not far from there, we have Canungra, or the Kokoda Barracks, which are still part of the Land Warfare Training Centre. We have Camp Tabragalba, which was an area of training for the ‘Z’ force for the invasion of Singapore. Camp Cable housed 20,000 American troops during the Second World War. Yet these areas are essentially lost in time. We have no memorials, and I have talked in this House on another occasion about the need for military memorials, for national recognition of these sites. Essentially, what I am saying is that this region has huge significance historically, as well as for tourism and ecotourism. People want to come into the region to have a look at what went before. Unfortunately, however, the road network just does not support that.

As I said previously, early in the last century there were moves to create roads and thoroughfares into that region. There were some, in fact, by the O’Reilly family—and people will know of O’Reilly’s guesthouse, which is also closely related to the wreck of the Stinson. Bernard O’Reilly, a dairy farmer in that region in 1937, was aware that a Stinson plane had gone missing and, after eight days, decided that no-one else was able enough to go and find where the plane’s wreckage was. He traversed the bush and found the wreckage. There were national and international headlines about this passenger plane that had gone down in the Border Ranges.

Yet the roads that supply that area and support tourism in that area are winding and dangerous. In fact, back in the late 1970s it was decided that a road would be built from the Lamington Plateau, down the side of the mountain, to service the Beaudesert region, both ways. I have mentioned the Stinson wreck of 1937, and it is interesting that this road came about as part of the efforts of people to move into that region to rescue those people who were marooned on the mountain, lost, for eight days. After 10 days they were found and finally brought off the mountain in different ways. But Duck Creek and the Duck Creek Road, as it is now known, came into being then.

In late 1978 there was a decision by the Beaudesert Chamber of Commerce, of which I later became the president, to build and create a road that would service the tourism aspects of O’Reilly’s guesthouse. I talk about that today because it is so important that this major tourist attraction, which employs about 130 people and turns over a large amount of revenue for the region, is unsupported by the local road network. In fact, major employment comes to that area from the town of Beaudesert. To go straight up the Duck Creek Road, which I have just mentioned, would take someone coming from Beaudesert less than half an hour. But if they were to go by the only route that would ensure that they got there safely, it would take about an hour and a half. So the Duck Creek Road is essential to servicing that area. It is unpaved. While that is not an issue, and people do not necessarily expect it to be paved, the local authorities have said that the Roads
to Recovery funding is very important for projects that can continue to support the economic growth and development of the region. Duck Creek Road was inspired by the O’Reilly family—Bernard O’Reilly, who I have spoken of, and Herb O’Reilly, who had sat on the mountain and dreamed that it would be wonderful for people to be able to traverse the mountain by going up this Duck Creek Road. That is essentially the history of this road. This road, which was built from private funds, essentially, and initially through private land, has since been gazetted. Unfortunately, since its gazettal—and while there have been donations made towards that road; while it raises about $6,000 or $7,000 a year in donations—it has taken about $60,000 a year to maintain the road, simply because the road is badly designed. The new mayor of the Scenic Rim Regional Council, John Brent, said to me only last week—as have a number of local council members—that Roads to Recovery funding and Black Spot Program funding is essential to regions like the Scenic Rim region and the Beaudesert region. He has implored me on many occasions to ensure that we, as a government, continue the funding.

Getting to the point of my discussion today: the funding that we can raise through the continuation of AusLink and AusLink II is about productivity, road safety and ensuring that we have safe routes for people to traverse.

Mr Bidgood interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Dawson!

Mr RAGUSE—Duck Creek Road is a good example—

Mr Bidgood interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Dawson should listen to what is being said about the Duck Creek Road.

Mr RAGUSE—and I commend this bill to the House.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (1.58 pm)—It is a great day to be a West Australian, Mr Speaker! I think it is important to commence any discussion on roads with a reflection of activity over the last week. I would like to say that the people of Western Australia have made a very fine decision to elect the Barnett conservative government and get on with the job of responsible government in Western Australia. It is no surprise that this has occurred, when you consider some of the activities of the former government—that is a good thing to say!—and the former Premier of Western Australia, particularly in the way that he approached things like road funding: delaying, looking for opportunities to reannounce activities in connection with the election, making sure his candidates were there at the right time, rather than—

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 2 pm, the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 97. The debate may be resumed at a later hour and the member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Prime Minister) (2.00 pm)—I inform the House that the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs will be absent from question time today as he will be at the dedication of the Onslow War Memorial and the 65th commemoration of the bombing of Onslow in Western Australia. The Minister for Defence Science and Personnel will answer questions on his behalf. The Minister for Sport and Youth will also be absent from question time today as she is attending the Olympic victory parade in Sydney. The Minister for Health and Ageing will answer questions regarding sport and the Deputy Prime Minister will answer questions regarding youth on her behalf.
I also table for the information of the House a revised ministry list reflecting a number of changes to the representation arrangements in the other place. There are no changes to the representation arrangements in this chamber. I seek leave to have the revised ministry list incorporated in Hansard. Leave granted.

**RUDD MINISTRY**

*15 September 2008*

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The Hon Dr Craig Emerson MP

Senator the Hon Kim Carr

The Hon Dr Craig Emerson MP

The Hon Julia Gillard MP (Research)

The Hon Dr Craig Emerson MP

Senator the Hon Kim Carr

The Hon Dr Craig Emerson MP

Senator the Hon Kim Carr

The Hon Peter Garrett AM MP

Senator the Hon Penny Wong

The Hon Robert McClelland MP

Senator the Hon Penny Wong

The Hon Bob Debus MP

Senator the Hon Penny Wong

The Hon Joe Ludwig The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Age Pension

Dr NELSON (2.01 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Why are pensioners worse off since the election of the Rudd government?

Mr RUDD—In the budget that we brought down in May, the government provided three additional things. The first was a one-off cash bonus of $500 a year, and I contrast that to the previous government, which did that for the previous three financial years on a one-off basis but in the preceding eight years of their term in office did not do that. That is the first point. The second is that the government also increased the utilities allowance from $107 a year to $500 a year and
made that permanent into the future. That was not done by the previous government in previous budgets. The third thing was to increase the telephone allowance, as we foresaw prior to the election. The consequence of this is that the overall increases to payments for pensioners in that budget were something in the order of $900 per year once you put those various additional payments together. That is a figure approaching $20 per week. Furthermore, as the government has already indicated, consistent with the recommendations put forward by the Senate inquiry into cost-of-living pressures on pensioners, which was supported by both government and opposition members, that there should be therefore a full review into the long-term structure of pension payments into this country. That is what is currently underway.

**Housing Affordability**

Mr CHEESEMAN (2.02 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister outline what the government is doing to address Australia’s housing affordability crisis?

Mr RUDD—The government, in building an Australia for the future, is determined to ensure that whatever can be done to preserve the dream of Australians to one day own their own home does not just remain a dream but can still be a reality. The problem that we faced coming into office was that any measure of housing affordability in this country represented some stark figures indeed. The average house cost represented some four times the average annual wage back in 1996 but, as of the end of last year, represented some 7½ times the average annual wage. That is a huge change over time. The average size of a first home buyer mortgage has more than doubled, from $107,000 at that time to $248,000 as at the end of last year. These figures are then reflected in how much first home buyers are spending on mortgage repayments as part of their total income. Back in 1996 they spent 15.2 per cent of their total income on mortgage repayments. As of the end of last year it was getting up towards 30 per cent. These are clear-cut measures of a real decline in housing affordability, and everyone understands this core fact. If, back in the 1996 period, a new house was going to cost you some four times your average annual wage and if, by the end of the period in office occupied by the Liberals, that had risen to 7½ times, that is a huge change. That is what is reflected right across the Australian community. The practical challenge that we face is what is to be done about it. What we did about 12 months ago was convene a housing affordability summit in opposition.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr RUDD—We said we would embrace three major new policies. I have news for those opposite who interject: each one of those policies has been implemented in government. There have been $2.2 billion worth of housing affordability investments by this government, against zero investment in these areas by the previous government. Under this government there is a Minister for Housing. Under the previous government there was no housing minister. Under this government there is an investment in First Home Savers Accounts. Under the previous government there was no such investment at all. Under this government there is investment in a new National Rental Affordability Scheme. On the part of those opposite there was no such investment.

Today we took this one step further by releasing the guidelines for the new Housing Affordability Fund. The Housing Affordability Fund is more than half a billion dollars strong and it is designed to do one thing: to provide a partnership with local government and others across Australia to bring down the
on-costs for a new house in a new housing development across the country. If you have
a participating local authority, we would seek to do two things. If they wish to partner with
the government in the new Housing Affordability Fund, then the way in which we propose to do it is as follows. Firstly, if that partnership occurs, the amount which we invest with that local authority will represent a parallel drawdown in the infrastructure costs which are passed on by the local authority to a new homebuyer. That is one thing, but the second is that the other real increases in costs which are faced by new homebuyers out in new housing developments are also what are called holding costs or holding charges—in other words, charges which arise from delays in the development approval process. This is the second part of the proposal contained in this new fund. If we enter into an agreement with a local authority somewhere, the other part of the deal is to draw down the delay in the development approval process and again to draw down further the additional costs passed on to the homebuyer. Put those two things together and our calculation is that new homebuyers could be up to $20,000 per house better off. That is a practical step forward on the part of this government. It is a half-billion dollar program. It does not solve all the problems in housing affordability, but it is a program which has been warmly welcomed by the industry, including the Housing Industry Association.

The other thing I would say is this: if you also look at this in the context of the other measures we have put forward on housing—$623 million for a National Rental Affordability Scheme to encourage the building of up to 50,000 new affordable rental units of accommodation as well as the $1.2 billion investment in the First Home Saver Accounts, on which the Treasurer is currently engaged in final negotiations with the banks—what you have are three programs on housing affordability, more than $2 billion worth of activity, out there in the marketplace for the use of Australia’s homebuyers, or those who wish to invest in affordable rental housing and those who wish to save for their home. These are practical actions by a government getting on with the job of putting real programs out there to help first home buyers and other homebuyers deal with the challenge of declining house affordability.

We have said many times in debate in this House in recent months that cost of living pressures for working families, for pensioners and for carers have been going through the roof in recent years. Housing affordability—

Dr Nelson—Recent months.

Mr Rudd—Recent years. I would say to the Leader of the Opposition—so keen as he is to interject—that increased cost of living pressure only occurred in this country as of 24 November 2007! If you are going to have any credibility in the cost of living debate in this country, you have to recognise that these pressures have been building for a long, long time. The housing affordability figures that I referred to before go right to where they stood as of November last year. Let me just repeat this for the Leader of the Opposition. In March 2006, housing affordability stood at four times the value of the average annual wage. When those on the other side left office at the end of 2007, it was seven and a half times the value of the average annual wage. That is a huge decline in real housing affordability for working families. We have a practical plan of action to do something about a real need for working families.

Age Pension

Mrs May (2.09 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to the latest economic data showing that, in
the first six months of his government, the 
price of bread has gone up 3.2 per cent, tea 
and coffee have gone up 3.6 per cent, lamb 
has gone up 4.1 per cent, electricity has gone 
up 4.6 per cent, butter and margarine have 
gone up 7.6 per cent, gas has gone up 5.3 per 
cent, pharmaceuticals have gone up 12.1 per 
cent and petrol has gone up 14.6 per cent. In 
addition, rents and general living expenses 
have also gone up. Why won’t the Prime 
Minister take immediate action to help pen-
sioners pay their increased bills?

Mr Rudd—I thank the honourable 
member for McPherson for her question. I 
would assume that the point that the honour-
able member is making in her question is 
that there is an inflation problem in Australia 
today that is affecting pensioners, carers and 
working families across the country. One of 
the things I would ask the honourable mem-
ber to reflect on in asking that question is 
what is it that drives inflation a lot? What 
drives inflation a lot is where you have gov-
ernment expenditure out of control. What we 
had with the previous government, as of 
when this government took over, was annual 
expenditure growth running at some 5.3 per 
cent.

If you have government expenditure out 
of control, it adds to the fuels of inflation, 
which in turn affects the cost of living and 
which in turn has the effect of putting up-
wards pressure on interest rates—which af-
flicts all working families, including small 
businesses. That is why the government have 
a clear-cut strategy for dealing with the infla-
tion challenge, anchored in the budget sur-
plus that we brought down in May. The gov-
ernment’s objective is to make as much room 
as possible for the Reserve Bank to put down-
ward pressure on interest rates. We ap-
preciate the fact that we have had one small 
decrease in interest rates—the first decrease 
in interest rates in seven years and after 10 
interest rate rises in a row on the part of 
those opposite.

Mrs May—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point 
of order. I asked the Prime Minister: why 
won’t he assist pensioners in this country to 
offset the increase in their expenses?

The Speaker—The member for 
McPherson will resume her seat. The Prime 
Minister will respond to the question.

Mr Rudd—I note carefully where the 
shadow minister’s position on the pension 
lies. When asked on 16 May this year:
Let me just be clear—

Mrs May—It’s about you.

Mr Rudd—It is a question put to you 
and I think the honourable member knows 
exactly what this refers to.
Let me just be clear there, the opposition— 
that is, the Liberal Party—
is … endorsing an increase in the base rate of the 
pension.
The response from the shadow minister was: 
Yes. Absolutely.
However, about an hour later—and they do 
not like this, and the member for Wentworth 
will even less so because it may interrupt 
other events that he has planned in the next 
fortnight or two—the member for Wentworth 
stood up and he said, ‘Well, we have not got 
a policy to raise the base rate of the pension.’ 
So the shadow minister says on radio that 
they are going to increase the base rate of the 
pension and an hour later the Shadow Treas-
urer says, ‘We have got no policy to raise the 
base rate of the pension.’

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a 
point of order. We are asking the Prime Min-
ister what his policy is on increasing the base 
rate of the pension.

The Speaker—The honourable mem-
ber will resume his seat.
Mr RUDD—The point that I would make in response to the other part of the honourable member’s question is this: the shadow Treasurer said in a statement only a few months ago that they had no policy to increase the pension. They had 12 years to increase the base rate of the pension but failed to do so. What we find instead—

Mrs Bronwyn Bishop—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: I would direct you to page 553 of Practice, which deals with the situation where a minister—in this case, the Prime Minister—does not come to the point of a question at all and engages in irrelevancies. Practice points out that you have the power to direct him to answer the question or to ask him to resume his seat. I ask that you ask him to answer the question about what he is going to do for pensioners or else ask him sit down because he cannot answer.

The SPEAKER—The question had a long preamble and then asked about actions. The answer has gone to matters related to the preamble and it has gone to actions.

Mr RUDD—So concerned were the Liberal Party about the state of the pension that for 12 years they had an opportunity to do something about the base rate of the pension and did nothing. Furthermore, in August last year, when, as reported in the Australian newspaper, the then Minister for Families and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Mr Brough, took a submission to the cabinet to increase the pension, what did the Leader of the Opposition do? What did the member for Wentworth do? He was a member of the cabinet. What did the member for Higgins—now absent and presumably preparing for tomorrow’s performance at the National Press Club—do? What did the member for Curtin do?

Ms Julie Bishop—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: this is the second time that the government has sought to reflect adversely on the member for Higgins for his absence. He has leave today to attend a funeral.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order!

Mr RUDD—One year ago, they had this matter before the cabinet. After 12 years in office—and therefore, I presume, a continued determination to act on the age pension—what did the member for Higgins, the member for Wentworth, the member for Bradfield and the member for Curtin have to say about it when the matter was before the cabinet one year ago? We can only assume from the actions which came from that cabinet that the answer is: nothing. What has changed in the last month or so is that a certain member of the opposition is particularly concerned about the moves against him on the question of the leadership. Let us go to the substance of the proposal by those opposite. What about the 2.2 million other Australians who depend on the pension? You put forward a proposal which goes to a group of 900,000 worthy Australians. What do you say, however, to the group of 2.2 million other Australians who are carers, widows or in receipt of the disability support pension? We have a program of reform on this. We will deal with it in the proper way, not opportunistically like those opposite.

Housing Affordability

Ms Saffin (2.18 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Housing. Will the minister update the House on the government’s progress in delivering on its commitment to establish a housing affordability fund?

Ms Plibersek—I thank the member for Page for her question. She has a long and abiding interest in housing affordability issues, particularly in the area of homelessness. She has been a very strong advocate in her own community on issues around homelessness. Today the Prime Minister and I launched the second stage of our Housing
Affordability Fund. This $512 million fund tackles two major impediments to housing affordability: the holding costs associated with planning delays and the impact of infrastructure charges on new housing development. The Housing Affordability Fund will give local councils the chance to improve housing affordability in their communities. It is all about local solutions for local communities.

I note that the Australian Local Government Association has welcomed the government’s announcement already. Its president, Councillor Paul Bell, said:

We are pleased that funding can be made available to help councils facilitate affordable housing projects. We are particularly grateful that the Australian government are prepared to fund community infrastructure related Housing Affordability Fund projects.

It is very important to emphasise that the Housing Affordability Fund is not a one-way street. Councils will be expected to implement more efficient planning processes and work in collaboration with builders and developers to cut the red tape that adds so much to the cost of building. For example, the first initiative of the Housing Affordability Fund is the $30 million electronic development assessment project, which invests in changing our 18th century, paper based planning system and dragging it into the 21st century and making it an electronic system. That project is already well underway.

The government’s most important criterion when assessing projects will be value for money. It is about how much new home buyers will save at the end of the day on their new homes. We are expecting a wide range of projects. Some of them will involve planning right across a local government area, which will deliver modest savings on every new home in a local government area going into the future. Other projects will fund specific pieces of local infrastructure that will deliver larger savings for a more limited number of homes.

Just as no two communities are the same, we do not expect any two projects to be exactly the same. Some areas might apply for funding for libraries, childcare centres, roads, sewerage systems or stormwater collection and recycling—costs that would otherwise be passed on as levies to new home buyers. Other areas might apply for help to fast-track rezoning to deliver more affordable land or perhaps to do site remediation which will bring land to market more quickly. Other councils might apply for extra funding for master planning which will bring on higher density developments closer to shops and railway stations.

Following the launch today, the Housing Affordability Fund has received strong endorsement from the housing industry. For example, Caryn Kakas, the Executive Director of the Residential Development Council, said today:

The HAF is strongly focused on achieving systemic cost reductions, and the guidelines encourage best practice in local government in respect of residential development assessments and planning processes.

She further went on to say:

HAF funding has the potential to improve development processes and should have long-lasting, long-term benefits which can achieve cost reductions not only across one development but across entire LGAs, regions or whole states if taken on in a cooperative manner.

Wilhelm Harnisch, the Chief Executive Officer of the Master Builders Association, also said today:

The HAF is a welcome return of the Commonwealth into this vital part of the Australian social fabric and the economy. There has been a decade of policy neglect in addressing the supply-side barriers, and the HAF is supported by industry as a first and vital step in redressing this area of policy neglect.
The government recognises there is a need for action on housing affordability. As the Prime Minister said, the government’s housing initiatives go well beyond the Housing Affordability Fund and include $2.2 billion worth of new initiatives in this area. Next month our first home saver accounts will be open for business, with banks and credit unions providing those accounts particularly for young Australians. We have also got the $623 million National Rental Affordability Scheme, a scheme that will provide industry with the incentives to build 50,000 new affordable rental properties. I am very pleased that industry and the not-for-profit sector have been enthusiastic in taking up the challenge through the National Rental Affordability Scheme and have applied for more than 12,000 of the National Rental Affordability Scheme incentives in this first funding round. We have applications with start dates spread over the first three years and will have two further funding application rounds in October and early next year. This is a vote of confidence in the government’s housing affordability projects and shows that the government is getting on with the job of addressing the housing affordability issues that are so important to Australian families, pensioners and carers.

Age Pension

Mr TRUSS (2.24 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to revelations that for five months his government has been sitting on an 83-page report from Dr Ken Henry and the Department of the Treasury which outlines a range of options to ease the burden for pensioners. Given the Prime Minister already has comprehensive advice on helping pensioners, why does he need another committee to tell him what to do?

Mr RUDD—Can I say to the honourable member who has just asked the question that the recommendation from the Senate inquiry last year on the cost-of-living pressures on seniors was supported by the government and by the opposition, and the recommendation from it was there should be a comprehensive review, which led to a reform of the pension system. That is what we are doing, supported by you, as a consequence of the same report.

Housing Affordability

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (2.25 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, why is it important that we act to improve housing affordability after 12 years of neglect?

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The SPEAKER—If it will assist the member for North Sydney, the Treasurer should ignore the last part of the question.

Mr Hockey—There was only one question.

The SPEAKER—No, the add-on bit—‘why is it important’—but not the last bit, which was argument.

Mr Hockey—I think it was—

The SPEAKER—No. If the member for North Sydney reads the question carefully, the last bit can be deducted and it still makes it a question. That then puts some restrictions on the Treasurer and his answer.

Mr SWAN—Affordable housing is the cornerstone of a fair and well-functioning society. It is a very high priority for the Rudd government. Affordable housing is also important when it comes to labour force mobility so that people can move more easily.

Housing affordability has declined markedly in this country in recent years. For example, mortgage repayments for the typical first home buyer now consume 28.5 per cent of their gross income compared to 15.2 per cent in the March quarter in 1996. And on top of that we had 10 interest rate rises under
the member for Higgins, which certainly put a very substantial dent in housing affordability. Those 10 interest rate rises added something like $400 to the mortgage of an average home owner. Housing affordability just got a lot worse under a decade of neglect, which is why it is such a priority for the Rudd government. It is why we have announced the Housing Affordability Fund, which was announced today by the Prime Minister and the Minister for Housing. We do, for the first time in a long time, have a Minister for Housing, which is an indication of what a priority this side of the House puts on housing. This is all about helping local government reduce the cost of developing new infrastructure. And, of course, we have the Housing Affordability Fund along with that. We have our first home saver accounts and the National Rental Affordability Scheme. We on this side of the House have done more in nine months than those opposite even contemplated in 12 long years.

Age Pension

Mr ABBOTT (2.28 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to his comments reported in the Herald Sun today that:

It would be, I think, almost impossible to continue to live on the current age pension.

Why is the Prime Minister refusing to provide timely relief to pensioners, whom he acknowledges are struggling to survive on what they get now?

Mr RUDD—Firstly, the group of pensioners we are concerned about covers the 2.2 million pensioners, carers, widows and others who are not part of the recent leadership related proposal put forward by the member for Bradfield. That is the first point. The second is this: we have acted as a government consistent with the following recommendation. Let me read it to you. It says:

... recommended the Government review the suitability of the base pension levels through economic analyses of amounts required to achieve at least a modest standard of living for retired Australians.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

Mr RUDD—The interjection from the member for North Sydney was, ‘Another committee’. This recommendation was the unanimous final report of an inquiry by the Senate backed by you, Joe—backed by him, backed by everyone on his side, including the member for Warringah. Pardon us for actually doing what we all agreed to do as a consequence of this particular Senate inquiry.

Furthermore, I draw the attention of those opposite as to who initiated the Senate inquiry last year: the Labor Party from opposition. We initiated it from opposition, the then Prime Minister, Mr Howard, agreed with that inquiry proceeding. Its recommendation was to go to the heart of the base pension level for the future. That recommendation was supported by the Liberals and by the Nationals in the Senate. Labor have acted upon that and now opposition members say they do not agree with their own party. That is what they are saying.

Dr Nelson interjecting—

Mr Dutton—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It goes to relevance. This bloke is supposed to be the Prime Minister, not the chief bureaucrat.

The SPEAKER—The member for Dickson is warned that he cannot come to the dispatch box and put points of order in an inappropriate manner.

Mr Adams interjecting—
The SPEAKER—I know the member for Lyons has great affection for the member for Dickson, but he is not assisting. The Prime Minister is responding to the question, but he will respond to the question through the chair.

Mr RUDD—The measure which is being reviewed at the moment, comes out of the Senate inquiry which was backed as a course of action by those opposite, except when they ran into a problem with their own internal leadership politics last week and decided to change tack. That is what all that was about.

Secondly, in terms of the budget and providing assistance to pensioners now, again, I draw the attention of the honourable member for Warringah to what actually happened in the budget whereby we came up with not just a $500 annual bonus but on top of that an increase, from $107 a year to $500 a year, in the utilities allowance for pensioners, something which those opposite had never done in their 12 years in office. On top of that, we also increased the telephone allowance for pensioners. We put those three measures together. The member for Warringah’s question goes to providing assistance to pensioners now. What I am saying in response to that is that the measures contained in the budget add up to an additional payment for pensioners of something approaching $20 per week. That is what was put forward in the budget. That is nearly double that which was put forward by those opposite. That, therefore, provided us with a basis to continue with this particular course of action, which the Liberal Party and the National Party agreed to until they ran into leadership politics problems last week.

I conclude on this: again, for the benefit of those opposite, the reason that we on this side of the House are looking carefully at the total impact which this has on the budget and on all categories of pensioners is that every $10 a week increase in the pension results, across the system, in a further $2 billion per year to the budget bottom line right into the future. Therefore, it is important to get this reform right—a reform we have been working on in our first nine months in office that those opposite spent the previous 12 years not working on at all.

But on the 2.2 million carers, 2.2 million widows, 2.2 million veterans, 2.2 million sufferers of one disability or another, who are omitted from the proposal put forward by the Leader of the Opposition last week, I draw his attention to public statements, including one by People with Disability Australia, dated 11 September, entitled ‘Disability pension rise needed now’—

Opposition member interjecting—

Mr RUDD—He said that they supported it. The disability pension rise needed now goes to the fact that the Leader of the Opposition did not provide any provision at all for the disability pension in his statement last week. I suggest the Leader of the Opposition actually reads the statement. Furthermore, there is a statement by Queensland Advocacy Inc. which deals with another group which were not the beneficiaries of the proposal put forward by the Leader of the Opposition. Then there are statements by Family Advocacy, the National Council on Intellectual Disability and the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia and there is a statement from Carers Australia entitled ‘What about the hardest working families of all?’ On top of that, we have a statement from the Brotherhood of St Laurence entitled ‘Increases to income support need to be fair for all’.

I table each of those statements from those various community organisations. The reason I do so is to go back to the core point: because the member for Bradfield is challenged on his leadership, he has changed the
position put forward by the member for Wentworth only a few months ago on the age pension. He changed it last week in a real hurry and, as a consequence, missed out 2.2 million carers, recipients of the disability support pension, widows and others. Labor intend to undertake this program of reform thoroughly. We have commenced that program of reform and we intend to prosecute it fully, those opposite having had 12 years to deal with this problem. Their inattention to it for 12 years demonstrates how much they really cared about this, which was not at all.

**Rural and Regional Australia**

Mr BIDGOOD (2.35 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. What are the benefits of the Rudd government’s nation-building agenda for regional Australia?

Mr ALBANESE—I thank the member for Dawson for his question and thank him for welcoming me to his electorate once again last week when I joined with the Prime Minister, the Queensland Minister for Main Roads and Local Government, Warren Pitt, and local figures, including the deputy mayor of Townsville, to turn the first sod on the Townsville port access road. When we talk about this government’s nation-building agenda, the Townsville port access road is a good example of how this will help individuals where they live and how it will help boost the nation’s productivity. Work is starting two years early on this project as a result of Labor’s budget, which brought forward $20 million of spending. The first stage, the 2.5-kilometre Stuart Bypass, will mean that the road can go away from existing residences, therefore leading to a substantial increase in the quality of life of people in the south Townsville area. The second stage, a 7½-kilometre eastern access corridor, will be completed by late 2011 or early 2012. In total, this 10 kilometres of road, costing $190 million in total—with a fifty-fifty split between the Commonwealth and the state government—has the potential to add some $10 billion to economic activity in Northern Queensland. It will enable the Australian economy to benefit from the booming northwest minerals province to get those goods out of the port of Townsville.

It was one of the first commitments made by the Prime Minister when he became the leader of the Labor Party and visited Townsville in December 2006. It seems to be supported by everyone in Townsville. Indeed, last week the Deputy Mayor of Townsville, Councillor David Crisafulli, attended the sod turning and congratulated the government on its nation-building agenda. Someone who would be known to some of those opposite as a former staffer of Senator Ian Macdonald, a minister in the Howard government, had to wait for this government to be elected before we engaged in nation building as part of our $76 billion nation-building infrastructure agenda.

But it is not supported by everybody, because on 19 December 2006, in response to the then Leader of the Opposition’s support for the Townsville port access road, the Minister for Finance and Administration, Nick Minchin, put out a press release entitled ‘Rudd splurges on national spending binge’ and he opposed not just the Townsville port access road but the Ipswich Motorway as well. That was their position in government. We on this side of the House are going to get on with our nation-building agenda in spite of the opposition and obstruction of the friends of those opposite who sit in the Senate.

**Age Pension**

Dr NELSON (2.38 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Given the Prime Minister believes that he could not live on the
single age pension of $273 per week, how much more does he think that single pensioners need in order to survive?

Mr Rudd—The Treasurer, the Deputy Prime Minister and I—and I believe others in response to that question—have been straight up and down about this. We have been clear-cut in our language in saying that there is a massive problem in terms of the ability of age pensioners to live on the current age pension. That is what we believe. We have said that. That is why we have a program of action to deal with it.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Rudd—Can I just say to those opposite that they should bring some attention to bear on a further piece of data on this, which came out today. The Leader of the Opposition said before that the cost-of-living pressures for pensioners had really gone through the roof but only in the last few months. Can I suggest that he has a look at the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia, HILDA, Survey, which came out today, which studies the period 2001 to 2005. Can I say to those opposite that this is a period for which we have clear-cut data on what was happening when it came to elderly couples. This survey says—

Mr Tuckey—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order on relevance. I think the pensioners of Australia are entitled to a clear answer.

The Speaker—The member for O’Connor will resume his seat. He knows he has to indicate which point of order he is making and not just make a debate.

Mr Tuckey—The answer should be relevant to the question, and this account—

The Speaker—The member has made his point of order. The Prime Minister is responding to the question.
Dr Jensen—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order, once again on relevance. There are thousands of seniors waiting to hear this answer.

Mr Rudd—The problem for those opposite is that the past does not exist. It is as if the problem with cost-of-living pressures suddenly emerged on 24 November last year. My question to the member for Bradfield is: what did you do in cabinet 12 months ago when this was put before you and you had money to deal with it? What did you do as—

Opposition members interjecting—

The Speaker—The House will come to order so that question time can continue.

Mr Rudd—The question is: when could this have been dealt with properly? Those opposite sat there in cabinet—the member for Bradfield; the member for Curtin, she who interjects most robustly, given her deep, longstanding compassion for the poor in this country; the member for Wentworth, given his deep, longstanding compassion for the poor—

Mr Pearce—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order as to relevance. The Prime Minister is now answering his own question.

The Speaker—The member for Aston will resume his seat. When the member for Aston earlier raised a similar point of order on this question I said I would be listening carefully. I simply say that, in the traditions and precedents of this place, the answer that the Prime Minister is giving is relevant. If people have a problem with that then, as I have suggested ad nauseam, there are other ways in which the House might address a perceived problem.

Mr Rudd—In August last year the member for Curtin said nothing in cabinet, the member for Bradfield said nothing, the member for Higgins said nothing and the member for Wentworth said nothing. They were all there and prepared to act, but they did nothing. This government is getting on with the business of implementing reform.

Budget

Mr Craig Thomson (2.45 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer update the House on the importance of responsible budgeting and recent warnings about the impacts of irresponsible budgeting on inflation and interest rates?

Mr Swan—I thank the member for his question. We on this side of the House do understand that responsible budgeting and investment for the future is critical, and it is needed to tackle inflation. That is why we have delivered a strong surplus. And, of course, that is why we have reined in growth in government spending to one per cent, in contrast to the past four years where spending under those opposite grew by four times that amount. Those opposite went on a spendathon over a four-year period. The whole time they were engaged in that spendathon they were mean and silent about pensioners in their priorities. Pensioners were not in their priorities at any other time during their 12 years in government.

Mr Baldwin interjecting—

The Speaker—I warn the member for Paterson!

Mr Swan—So why do we have this gimmick and why do we have this stunt from those opposite? Plan A over here, the Leader of the Opposition, did not have this position at budget time. His spokeswoman did at budget time, but she was overruled by plan C, the member for Wentworth—it is great to see you back. You have the Andrew Peacock suntan—terrific!

The Speaker—Order! The Treasurer will get back to the question.

Mr Swan—Of course, plan B is not here today. Plan B, of course, was the architect of
the spendathon. It has fallen to this government to control reckless spending. It has fallen to us because the consequence of that reckless spending was upward pressure on inflation and upward pressure on interest rates.

The IMF told a few home truths about this last week. In effect, the IMF said that that spendathon, that spending spree put upward pressure on inflation and upward pressure on interest rates. That was backed up by Treasury minute after Treasury minute after Treasury minute. Indeed, in their last budget, they had a $40-billion spendathon. Could they find any room in that budget to do something about the base rate of the age pension? No, they could not. So why has the Leader of the Opposition got this proposition here today? I will tell you why: because he is now being hunted by plan C, the member for Wentworth. It would not be here if it was not for the looming leadership challenge that is coming from the member for Wentworth. There is nothing in their proposal which is genuine. They are leaving out 2.2 million pensioners. We on this side of the House will do the responsible thing: we will put in place a set of arrangements which are economically responsible and fair because we have a 100-year history of looking after low-income earners.

Mr RUDD—In the budget the government delivered an increase in payments for the forthcoming year of an order of magnitude of nearly $20 a week. We have indicated also that, through the process of the Harmer inquiry, we will undertake long-term pension reform. The core problem we face is: how do you deal justly with the two to three million Australians who find themselves in these difficult economic circumstances? What the Leader of the Opposition has done opportunistically, challenged as he is on the leadership front, is reach into the tin and say, ‘How can I get myself a headline while Malcolm is away in Milan?’ or wherever he was. He did this without any reference to the 2.2 million pensioners who were left out, without any reference to the widows, without any reference to the carers and without any reference to those who are disabled. He simply went for one category of pensioner in order to get himself a headline. But where the real rub in this lies is here: if the Leader of the Opposition were fair dinkum, he would have demanded action when they had the power, when it was before their cabinet only last year. This Leader of the Opposition is not fair dinkum about this. He is just not fair dinkum. The member for Wentworth is not fair dinkum about it because he slapped down the member for McPherson when she raised it only three months ago. None of those opposite are fair dinkum about this. As the Treasurer just said, the Australian Labor government is proud of its history in looking after those Australians most in need of support from government. We have done it for 100 years. If you look at the debates on the introduction of the age pension 100 years ago, it was the conservatives who said it will be the ruination of the economy. We have constantly stood by those Australians who need help. We will do that now and we will do it into the future.

Mr RUDD: In the budget the government delivered an increase in payments for the forthcoming year of an order of magnitude of nearly $20 a week. We have indicated also that, through the process of the Harmer inquiry, we will undertake long-term pension reform. The core problem we face is: how do you deal justly with the two to three million Australians who find themselves in these difficult economic circumstances? What the Leader of the Opposition has done opportunistically, challenged as he is on the leadership front, is reach into the tin and say, ‘How can I get myself a headline while Malcolm is away in Milan?’ or wherever he was. He did this without any reference to the 2.2 million pensioners who were left out, without any reference to the widows, without any reference to the carers and without any reference to those who are disabled. He simply went for one category of pensioner in order to get himself a headline. But where the real rub in this lies is here: if the Leader of the Opposition were fair dinkum, he would have demanded action when they had the power, when it was before their cabinet only last year. This Leader of the Opposition is not fair dinkum about this. He is just not fair dinkum. The member for Wentworth is not fair dinkum about it because he slapped down the member for McPherson when she raised it only three months ago. None of those opposite are fair dinkum about this. As the Treasurer just said, the Australian Labor government is proud of its history in looking after those Australians most in need of support from government. We have done it for 100 years. If you look at the debates on the introduction of the age pension 100 years ago, it was the conservatives who said it will be the ruination of the economy. We have constantly stood by those Australians who need help. We will do that now and we will do it into the future.
Those opposite, led so particularly by the member for Bradfield, are simply playing short-term politics with this, rather than long-term reform. If any of you had a skerrick of sincerity about this, you would have acted when Mal Brough brought this to the cabinet. None of you did. None of you raised your voice—not one of you—when you had all the money available to do it. In nine months we have turned this around in terms of the process we have now got under way. We intend to act responsibly on this.

I look at the examples on the part of those opposite as they now confect moral outrage. Having had 12 years to act on this, they now say to us, after nine months, ‘Why do you fail to address what we were not interested in dealing with in our 12 years in office?’ Do you know something? The Australian people actually see through what you are up to. It says everything, I think, about the member for Bradfield and why the member for Bradfield is not to be much longer with us. It is the Leader of the Opposition who stands up and memorises everything and believes in nothing. That is the Leader of the Opposition—he memorises everything and believes in nothing. We see it on the age pension; we see it on so much which is before this parliament. I think it is time those opposite actually were fair dinkum with the Australian people and answered this question: if this was of deep concern to the Liberals, why, after 12 years, did you not even lift a finger?

PRIME MINISTER

Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Dr NELSON (Bradfield—Leader of the Opposition) (2.54 pm)—I seek leave to move a motion of censure against the Prime Minister.

Leave not granted.

Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There is no bill and there is no motion before the House. Where is it?

Dr NELSON—I move that this House condemns the Prime Minister and his government for their failure to urgently act to help older Australians battling to make ends meet and to live with dignity on the single age pension—

Mr Albanese—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am trying to be helpful here. He sought leave, and then he sought to move a motion. What he has to seek is a suspension, and he has not done that.

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr Albanese—And he had not signed it at the time that he was beginning. I am trying to help.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I thought the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business might have learnt a lesson in the late hours of the last sitting day. The Leader of the Opposition has moved a suspension of standing orders to move a motion. I will seek advice on whether that has now been given to the clerks.

Dr NELSON—I move that this House condemns the Prime Minister and his government for their failure to urgently act to help older Australians battling to make ends meet and to live with dignity on the single age pension—

Mr Albanese—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Once again, leave has been denied. The Leader of the Opposition has to move a suspension motion. He is not doing that. He must say that is what he is mov-
We are still waiting for your bill. Where is your bill? You told people it was here.

The SPEAKER—The question that is before the House is that so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended that would allow the Leader of the Opposition to move a motion. The written motion that has been given to the clerks goes to that motion, not to the suspension.

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Regrettably, that means at this stage I would have to rule that out of order.

Mr Albanese interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The Leader of the House will withdraw that remark.

Mr Albanese—Of course, Mr Speaker, but it is a fact that the Leader of the Opposition—

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

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I rise of a point of order. The Leader of the Opposition was reading out the motion. He is perfectly entitled to read out the motion and then table the motion once he has completed it and it is signed. The Leader of the Opposition still has not read out the motion for which he is seeking to have the standing orders suspended.

Dr Nelson—I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent the Leader of the Opposition from moving immediately—

That this House:

(1) condemns Prime Minister Rudd and his Government for their failure to urgently act to help older Australians battling to make ends meet and live with dignity on the single aged pension, and, in particular, for:

(a) promising Australia last year that they would do something about cost of living pressures when they have done nothing but watch fuel, grocery and housing costs soar;

(b) the Government’s damning admission that while neither the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister nor the Treasurer could live on the single aged pension rate of $273 per week, they have refused to do anything about it;

(c) the Government’s failure to increase pensions in the May Budget when the Treasurer’s own Budget speech highlighted an 18 per cent increase in the price of bread and only mentioned ‘pensioners’ once;

(d) failing to give pensioners real and immediate help despite the fact that his own pension authority, led by Dr Jeff Harmer who is also chairing their new pension review, provided Cabinet with an 83 page report of options to ease pensioners’ pain during recent Budget deliberations;

(e) failing to support the Coalition’s call for either an additional lump sum payment for pensioners, or an immediate $30 per week increase to the single aged pension; and, most importantly,

(2) condemns the member for Griffith for turning the job of Prime Minister from a position where tough decisions are made and action is taken into one, under his 10 month term, where process overrides people and where spin masquerades as substance.

Under the previous coalition government, Australian pensioners received on average, for each of the 11 years, a two per cent real increase in the pension above and beyond inflation. The indexation of the pension was matched to a minimum of male average total weekly earnings or the consumer price index. A 30 per cent private health insurance rebate was introduced. There were changes to the tapering rate to allow and encourage pensioners to earn a little bit more income. A utilities allowance was introduced. A lump sum payment annually was introduced. An enormous amount of reforms were intro-
duced to assist the plight of Australian pensioners.

A report which we know that the Prime Minister received prior to the budget this year confirmed, amongst other things, that in the 10 years to 2007, under the previous government, there was an increase in the financial position for people surviving on the age pension of 19 per cent for singles and 19.4 per cent for couples. In other words, through a long period of economic growth and economic certainty, when this country was governed by a government that actually made decisions, a coalition government, Australian pensioners and Australians generally had certainty in relation to their position and their economic future.

In 2007 the then Leader of the Opposition, now the Prime Minister, went around Australia and said a lot of things to Australians. He led them to believe that he would do something about petrol. He led them to believe that he would do something about cost-of-living pressures. He led the pensioners of this country to believe that he would do something about groceries. He led all Australians to believe that in some way he would make things better. Well, less than a year since he came to office, Australians are worse off today than they were under the coalition. And there is no group that is worse off in this country than those living on fixed incomes and, in particular, single age pensioners surviving on $273 a week. In the past week the Prime Minister and six of his front-bench ministers have said that they could not live on $273 a week. They have said they could not do it, and yet they demand that close to 900,000 Australians—full and part pensioners, trying to survive on $273 a week—do exactly that.

Australia’s pensioners and carers remember that, prior to the budget this year, we had a lengthy debate in this parliament about lump sum payments. For five days the Prime Minister would not confirm that he would deliver a lump sum payment to Australia’s pensioners. It was only under pressure from the coalition, the opposition, that he finally admitted that he would deliver a single lump sum payment. We then had the spectacle of the budget speech. We now know that the Prime Minister—who is the chief bureaucrat of the country, not a Prime Minister—shortly after that debate said to his officials: ‘Gee, I’d better write a letter to the Treasurer. There’s going to be a problem with these pensioners.’ So he then gets an 83-page report that tells him precisely what the options are and what the government can do to improve the position of Australian pensioners, delivered by no less than Dr Jeff Harmer. What was his response to that? What was the government’s response? It had all the options. It had an 83-page report. Cost-of-living pressures have gone through the roof under the Rudd Labor government. What did the Prime Minister do? He said, ‘I know—we’ll form a committee, and the committee will be chaired by the same bloke that has just given me an 83-page report.’

So the Australian pensioners sat down to their processed sausages and jam sandwiches for dinner and watched the budget to find out what was going to happen to pensioners in the budget. They watched the budget speech from the Treasurer—that nervous bloke that is in charge of our $1.1 trillion economy—and waited to find out what was going to be delivered for them. In a 30-minute speech on the budget, the word ‘pensioner’ appeared once. Once in 30 minutes, the Treasurer mentioned the word ‘pensioner’. But thanks to The Hollowmen, that ABC documentary about the Prime Minister’s office, the term ‘working families’ appeared, in contrast, 12 times—12 times for ‘working families’, once for ‘pensioners’.
It is important that the Prime Minister appreciates just how desperate the situation is for Australian pensioners. This is a Prime Minister who next week is not going to be in Australia. He is not going to be in the Australian parliament. He is going to visit his 16th country since he has been the Prime Minister. So at the same time that this parliament will be debating the issues of Australian pensioners trying to live on $273 a week—not $273 an hour—the Prime Minister of the country is going to go to the United Nations. He has got a plan for the world, he has got a plan for Asia, but he has got no plan for Australia and no plan to do anything other than wait for a committee to tell him what he has got to do for Australian pensioners.

The Prime Minister needs to understand something, and that is: to live on $273 a week under a Rudd Labor government is the most distressing and hardest thing that close to 900,000 Australians are doing. I have received, for example, an email today from a lady in Woodcroft, South Australia, who says:

I am appalled at Kevin Rudd and Wayne Swan’s response to suggestions for an immediate increase for single pensioners. Does this not indicate a complete disregard and lack of understanding for the plight of pensioners or is it simply a contempt for a section of the Australian community that are unable to give Kevin Rudd the global kudos he appears to crave? I have to go to the supermarket to buy packets of toilet rolls, bread and a can of Homebrand baked beans plus any visits I might have to make to my local GP.

Prime Minister, that is the reality for Australia’s pensioners—baked beans and jam sandwiches. That is what they are living on when you are at the United Nations General Assembly and the parliament sits at the cost of $1 million a day.

It is time that the government made a decision, instead of having a committee to organise a committee to tell you what to do. Prime Minister, these are the men and women who have made this country what it is. It is their sacrifices that gave our generation what we have. They did not buy something until they had saved up for it. They thought their responsibilities to one another and their country were more important than their rights. They thought that values were more important than the value of things. Thanks to the previous coalition government, the Labor government sit on a $22 billion surplus while Australian pensioners live on baked beans and jam sandwiches.

Prime Minister, the whole idea of being the Prime Minister is to make decisions in the interests of Australia. The pensioners of this country are diminished. You are diminished. Your government is diminished. You have demeaned our country by not delivering an immediate increase in the single base rate of age pension. It is disgraceful.

The SPEAKER—Is the motion seconded?

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah) (3.09 pm)—I second the motion. This motion is about the fraudulence of the government, which says it cares about pensioners and says that pensioners cannot live on what they are being paid, and yet does not do anything to address their real problems now. It is impossible to go on national television and say that the single rate pension is totally inadequate and then not do anything about it. It is impossible to say that and not do anything about it, unless you are a total fraud—someone who parades and frets and struts as the friend of the pensioners and workers but in fact is the friend of nothing but the slush fund which members opposite are creating for the state governments.

Mr Melham—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I did not do this for the Leader of the Opposition but I will do this for this
member. This is a motion to suspend standing orders. Standing orders require him to address that question and not go into the substantive debate. That occurs if standing orders are suspended. I would ask you to call him to order.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Banks has made his point of order and in the absolute strict sense he is correct. The Leader of the Opposition was allowed a great deal of leeway. I remind the member for Warringah of the fact that we are now debating the reasons for suspending standing orders.

Mr ABBOTT—Mr Speaker, it is absolutely urgent that we debate pensions now, because pensioners have a problem now. They have a problem now, which members opposite know about. We have had a succession of ministers admit that there is a problem now, led by the Prime Minister. Let’s do something about it now. That is why we have to have a debate now—not in a week’s time, not in a month’s time and not in a year’s time or two years time. We should have a debate about this problem now, because the problem is now.

It says something about the fraudulence and the phoniness of this government and this Prime Minister that they say that there is a problem—they say they cannot live on the single rate of the pension—and what do they do? They do not fix the problem, they do not resolve it and they do not decide it; they study it. That is so typical of this government. They cannot make a decision on anything, even on a problem which is staring them so much in the face that they are forced to admit it time and time again on national television.

What we have heard from members opposite today is that the former government did nothing about it. The former government did everything about it. I refer members opposite to a statement from their very own public servants which says: ‘Pension rates have grown by more than two per cent a year above inflation over the last decade.’ The single base rate of the age pension has increased from about $9,000 to about $14,000 a year thanks to the work of the Howard government. Pensions today are 57 per cent higher than they were in March 1996. They are 24 per cent higher in real terms thanks to the Howard government. Pensioners have bonuses now thanks to the Howard government—and no thanks to members opposite who wanted to abolish the pensioners bonus in the budget. It only survived because the department of the minister for families leapt on the Treasury to protect the bonus that they knew was necessary and which Treasury wanted to scrap. Pensioners now have a utilities allowance thanks to the Howard government—and no thanks to members opposite who simply lifted Howard government proposals from the election campaign.

What we had from the Prime Minister was a claim today that he had a program for action. His program for action is not action now; it is action possibly in February next, possibly in May next year, but most likely in May 2010 and then only because there is an election looming. That surplus does not belong to him; it belongs to the people of Australia. What he is saying is that he would rather give that surplus to the states than spend it on pensioners. Pensioners will not forget this. In voting against this motion, the Prime Minister is voting against the pensioners of Australia—and they have very long memories. Standing orders should be suspended and this House should debate pensions now.

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) (3.14 pm)—This concocted anger from those opposite is extraordinary. What we want to know is this: when
this issue was before cabinet this time last year, which way did you vote? Did you consider then that you could live on $273 a week when you voted no to a proposal from the previous minister for families to increase the base rate of the pension?

Mr Pearce—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Mr Speaker, could you ask the minister to address her remarks through the chair?

The SPEAKER—The minister will refer her remarks through the chair.

Ms MACKLIN—The opposition have decided today that they want a suspension of standing orders to bring on an urgent debate about the pension. Last week they said that they wanted to bring on an urgent debate to have a new bill brought into the parliament. Well, here is the Notice Paper for today. Is there any mention anywhere on the Notice Paper today of this proposed bill? There is no mention whatsoever. Last week it was so urgent because the Leader of the Opposition finally figured out, via Laurie Oakes when he was cross-examining the member for North Sydney yesterday, that the member for North Sydney had no clue that it is completely unconstitutional for them to put a bill like this into the parliament. There is no bill here in the parliament today. So much for it being urgent; there is nothing on the Notice Paper today.

The member for Warringah should actually read the responses to his blog in the Daily Telegraph today because I think members of the public have really summed up their view of what this opposition is all about. One voter says:

This is cheap politics at its lowest point and part of the reason Howard (and Nelson, and Abbott) were given the flick.

"Mean and Tricky" was the Liberal Party's own assessment of itself and how true it still is …

Another writer says to the member for Warringah:

You can't start blaming the current government, for former Liberal party indifference to our elderly!

Of course, it is the case that pensioners did not all of a sudden start needing an improvement in the base rate of the pension on 24 November last year.

We have had a look at the coalition’s policy that they took to the election. Was there any mention of increasing the base rate of the pension? There was absolutely none. We know from a book that is supposed to be released today that the former Treasurer argued against the former minister for families, Mal Brough, when he wanted to increase the base rate of the pension—Mr Howard opposed it, the member for Higgins opposed it and the cabinet opposed it. That is why there was no increase in the base rate of the pension. What did we do when we first came into govern-
ment? We recognised that pensioners were under significant financial pressure. In the first piece of legislation that I put into the parliament we increased the utilities allowance from $170 to $500 a year. For the first time—it was not the previous government that did this—we extended that utilities allowance to carers and to people on the disability support pension. That had never been done before. As a result of our move all of those people are now getting a $500 utilities allowance which they did not get under the Howard government.

What do we have from those opposite in this hastily cobbled together proposal from the Leader of the Opposition? It was hastily cobbled together because he is under so much political pressure from those sitting behind him. We have no bill. There is no new proposal in front of the parliament, and if they do finally get their act together what we know is that they are going to leave out 2.2 million pensioners, carers, veterans, people on the disability support pension and married couples who are on the pension who are also doing it tough.

Let us have a look at some of the comments that were made by some of some of the people who are doing it so hard in our community and who the Leader of the Opposition has decided he can just ignore. The carers put out a press release just last week, following the Leader of the Opposition’s proposal that completely ignored carers. They said:

The fact that the current proposal from the Leader of the Opposition leaves out so many Australians further highlights the need for long-term reform—

this is the carers saying this—

The significance of the pension review cannot be overstated.

But, of course, the Leader of the Opposition thinks that he knows better than carers. Rob Allen, from a group representing those on the disability support pension, says when talking about the Leader of the Opposition:

If his concern is genuine and not a stunt to politically grandstand, then they must not only advocate for an increase in the disability support pension and carer payment but he must also explain to the Australian community why they were not considered in the first place.

How true that is. I really thought the comment from the Vietnam veterans summed it up. The National President of the Vietnam Veterans Association said:

Dr Nelson spent Tuesday speaking with hundreds of veterans at the RSL's national congress, yet the next day seemed to have forgotten about us altogether.

This Leader of the Opposition hastily cobbles together a proposal apparently designed to increase the single base rate of the pension. He is ignoring married pensioners, carers and those on the disability support pension. He is ignoring all of those people because all he is about is saving his own political hide. There is no proposal whatsoever before the parliament; he has offered no properly costed proposal. This is the other issue. This Leader of the Opposition has demonstrated that he cares only about his own leadership. He does not care about getting the proposal right. He is ignoring 2.2 million pensioners and he cannot cost his policy. The costings that he has proposed for the single base rate of the pension are about $900 million shy of what it would actually cost. He cannot cost the policy, he cannot get a bill ready for the parliament and he leaves out 2.2 million pensioners.

The Australian public is well aware that this is a political stunt. It is all aimed at protecting this failing Leader of the Opposition’s leadership. A number of people in the media who are engaging in serious commentary recognise that this is a very complex task, and it is one that this government is
determined to get right. We are not going to play politics with pensioners. We have already delivered an increase of $900 to pensioners and carers to ensure they get the extra support they need. On top of that, we have delivered an increase in the telephone allowance and we are ensuring that their transport concessions can be used across state boundaries. All of these changes are available to pensioners to ensure that they can better make ends meet. We know that the social security system is complex. We intend to get it right and not play politics like this Leader of the Opposition is.

The SPEAKER—The time allotted for the debate has concluded.

Question put:
That the motion (Dr Nelson's) be agreed to.

The House divided. [3.29 pm]
(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

Ayes............. 57
Noes............. 77
Majority ........ 20

AYES

Abbott, A.J.       Bailey, F.E.           Schultz, A.
Baldwin, R.C.      Billson, B.F.          Secker, P.D.
Bishop, B.K.       Bishop, J.I.           Slipper, P.N.
Broadbent, R.      Chester, D.           Somlyay, A.M.
Ciobo, S.M.        Cobb, J.K.            Stone, S.N.
Coulton, M.        Dutton, P.C.          Tuckey, C.W.
Farmer, P.F.       Forrest, J.A.         Vale, D.S.
Georgiou, P.       Haase, B.W.           Wood, J.
Hartsuyker, L.     Hawke, A.            
Hawker, D.P.M.     Hockey, J.B.         
Hull, K.E. *       Hunt, G.A.            
Irons, S.J.        Jensen, D.            
Johnson, M.A. *    Keenan, M.           
Ley, S.P.          Lindsay, P.J.         
Macfarlane, I.E.   Marino, N.B.          
Markus, L.E.       May, M.A.             
Morrison, S.J.     Moylan, J.E.          
Nelson, B.J.       Pearce, C.J.          
Pyne, C.           Ramsey, R.            
Randall, D.J.      Robb, A.              
Robert, S.R.       Ruddock, P.M.         

NOES

Adams, D.G.H.      Albanese, A.N.         Scott, B.C.
Bevis, A.R.        Bidgood, J.            Simpkins, L.
Bird, S.           Bowen, C.             Smith, A.D.H.
Bradbury, D.J.     Burke, A.E.           Southcott, A.J.
Burke, A.S.        Byrne, A.M.           Truss, W.E.
Campbell, J.       Champion, N.          Turnbull, M.
Cheeseman, D.L.    Clare, J.D.           Washer, M.J.
Collins, J.M.      Combet, G.            
Crean, S.F.        D’Ath, Y.M.           
Danby, M.          Debus, B.              
Dreyfus, M.A.      Elliot, J.            Ferguson, M.J.
Ellis, A.L.        Emerson, C.A.         Garrett, P.
Ferguson, L.D.T.   George, J.            Gillard, J.E.
Fitzgibbon, J.A.   Giess, S.             Grierson, S.J.
Georganas, S.      Hall, J.G. *          Irwin, J.
Gibbons, S.W.      Kelly, M.J.           
Gray, G.           King, C.F.           
Hale, D.F.         Livsey, J.             Macklin, J.L.
Hayes, C.P. *      Livsey, L.            McClelland, R.B.
Jackson, S.M.      Livsey, M.            Melham, D.
Kerr, D.J.C.       Livsey, P.            Neal, B.J.
Livermore, K.F.    Livsey, R.            O’Connor, B.P.
Marles, R.D.       Liddell, D.           Parke, M.
McKew, M.          Liberman, T.          Pilger, T.
Murphy, J.         Likely, S.             Raguse, B.B.
Neumann, S.K.      Lindsay, P.M.         Ripoll, B.F.
Owens, J.          Luke, P.              Roxon, N.L.
Perrett, G.D.      Lyle, G.              Saffin, J.A.
Price, L.R.S.      Mack, J.              Smith, S.F.
Rea, K.M.          Mack, K.              Sullivan, J.
Rishworth, A.L.    Mack, M.              Symon, M.
Rudd, K.M.         Mackay, J.            Thomson, C.
Ruddock, P.M.      Madden, A.            Trevor, C.
Sidebottom, S.     Manners, P.           Vanvakinou, M.
Snowdon, W.E.      Marshall, G.          
Swan, W.M.         Martin, J.             
Tanner, L.         Mort, B.               
Thomson, K.J.      Morrow, J.             
Turnour, J.P.      Mullany, S.           
Zappia, A.         Mullany, R.            

* denotes teller

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

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER
Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Mr Hockey (3.32 pm)—Would you please confirm that, when a motion to suspend standing orders is moved in this place, the motion does not have to be submitted in writing until it is put to a vote by the Speaker? Therefore, in a situation where there is a suspension of standing orders, there is 25 minutes to lodge a written motion.

The Speaker—Whilst it is not my intention to have a practice of taking questions on procedures, the correct procedure in this matter—as I understand it—is that the time that the member has put a proposal to the chamber and read it fully is the time that it would be presented in written form. That is all I am saying.

Mr Hockey (3.34 pm)—Mr Speaker, can I ask one more question?

The Speaker—Not really, but go ahead.

Mr Hockey—It is relevant, particularly to interested parties who might be watching this. When the Prime Minister takes a point of order, it is eating into the time of the Leader of the Opposition and therefore the Leader of the Opposition has the right to put the motion again.

The Speaker—I am not going to pursue a debate of recent events through questions. The fact is that, when any member is given the call in a situation like that of recent events, the clock starts from the time that they get the call. That is all I am saying.

NATIONAL GREENHOUSE AND ENERGY REPORTING AMENDMENT BILL 2008

Assent

The Speaker—I inform the House that today I personally presented to Her Excellency the Governor-General at Government House the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Amendment Bill 2008 for assent, this being the first bill ready for presentation following the swearing-in of Her Excellency. The Governor-General, in the name of Her Majesty, was pleased to assent to the bill, which is now act No. 84 of 2008.

AUTHORITY TO ADMINISTER OATH OR AFFIRMATION OF ALLEGIANCE TO MEMBERS

The Speaker—I present an Authority I have received from Her Excellency the Governor-General authorising me to administer to members the oath or affirmation of allegiance.

DOCUMENTS

Mr Albanese (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.36 pm)—Documents are tabled in accordance with the list circulated to honourable members earlier today.

AUSLINK (NATIONAL LAND TRANSPORT) AMENDMENT BILL 2008

Second Reading

Debate resumed.

Mr Simpkins (Cowan) (3.36 pm)—I spoke before debate on the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008 was interrupted by question time about road funding and the shameful activities and politicking of the former Premier of Western Australia in neglecting roads. I will return to that in due course. At the start of the second reading speech of the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, he stated that the bill
demonstrated the government’s commitment to road safety and local road infrastructure. It is these specific points, so clearly stated in the bill, to which I want to direct my comments today. In the electorate of Cowan in Western Australia there are a number of important roads and routes that need to be improved. Two years ago I wrote in support of the Alexander Drive and Reid Highway overpass. I have been advocating for a long time support of the Gnangara Road-Ocean Reef Road upgrade, the Hepburn Avenue extension in Ballajura, the Hepburn Avenue duplication to a dual carriageway from Wanneroo Road to Alexander Drive and the Wanneroo Road upgrade between Pinjar Road and Joondalup Drive. Local people in Cowan will recall my petitions to the state and local governments regarding Hepburn Avenue, Wanneroo Road and the Gnangara Road-Ocean Reef Road situation. In 2007 the Howard government provided $7 million of the $10 million total required to extend and duplicate Ocean Reef Road to link up with Gnangara Road. The critical upgrade of this local road was a high priority for the people of Landsdale and nearby suburbs due to the truck traffic along Gnangara Road. I am pleased that my advocacy helped get that road started. It is due for completion in June 2010.

Hepburn Avenue is another local government road that exists as a single carriageway between Wanneroo Road and Alexander Drive. It ends abruptly at Alexander Drive, leaving even more traffic to move down Alexander Drive and over or onto the Reid Highway. Given the proximity of a light industrial area called Malaga, some of the traffic from Hepburn Avenue then diverts through the suburban streets of Ballajura and moves past three schools on that route. Traffic congestion and the concern for the safety of children of Ballajura resulted in my raising a petition to the state government, asking them to contribute to the extension of Hepburn Avenue towards Beechboro Road. I did that in 2007, at the time the City of Swan had been talking about building the road for six years. A number of problems had gotten in the way and nothing had been achieved. All that changed when the member for Higgins came out to Cowan about two weeks before the election was called and announced a $10 million federal contribution to the dual carriageway from near Wanneroo Road to Alexander Drive and then to help build a new road over to Beechboro Road. Two weeks later, the department, unfortunately, called the announcement an election promise rather than a government commitment, which is a source of great disappointment and regret. I note that some weeks later the now Labor government, then the opposition, also made the same commitment. I have recently found that the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia has written to the Cities of Wanneroo and Swan to inform them that $10 million will be provided sometime between July 2009 and June 2014. I hope that it is earlier rather than later for these important roads.

I would like to comment on the safety aspect of the intersection of Giralt Road and Hepburn Avenue, which is very close to my electorate office. This is an interesting intersection which has been the scene of a number of accidents and near misses. Although controlled by traffic lights, the lights have red right-turn arrows but strangely no green arrows. At certain times of the day, and with certain lighting, it can be difficult to see oncoming traffic beyond the line of cars waiting to turn. I raised the matter of the danger of the intersection on many occasions, as did local residents with me. It was therefore encouraging that, as a result of raising the issue, $740,000 from Roads to Recovery was allocated to the project. The project is very close to completion now, and I congratulate
John Paton, the Acting Chief Executive Officer, Charles Johnson, the former CEO, and the team at the City of Wanneroo for getting this work done. I look forward, as do the nearby residents in my electorate, to this intersection becoming fully functional in the very near future.

Another great concern is the Reid Highway overpass—which does not currently exist—over Alexander Drive. I first raised this issue in early 2006 in a letter regarding black spot funding. This intersection is a notorious black spot that has seen many accidents. An overpass would improve safety and traffic flows. The member for Stirling will recall only too clearly the objections put up by the former state government, the Carpenter Labor government in Western Australia, when the Howard government committed $10 million, or 50 per cent of the cost, to an overpass of Mirrabooka Avenue and the Reid Highway in 2007. Instead, they wanted the money for the Alexander Drive and Reid Highway intersection. Some members might be aware that during the 2007 campaign both sides committed to that election promise. I recall the media release by the then Minister for Planning and Infrastructure in Western Australia, Alannah MacTiernan, in which she praised federal Labor for their commitment—obviously conveniently not mentioning that both sides had made the same commitment—and said that a win by federal Labor would enable the commencement of construction for this essential overpass to begin in the first half of 2008. So it was good—the local people knew that, no matter who won, the overpass would be built. Based upon her media release, regardless of the federal election result, there was a reasonable expectation that work would commence early in 2008. This expectation was further strengthened by repeated comments by the state minister talking about how unsafe the intersection was. I recall that she even said that it was the state’s No. 1 black spot.

It is now September 2008, and sadly nothing has been done. I do not know if that is because of some problem from the federal government side of things or if it is related to the former state Labor government in Western Australia. I know that this intersection bordered the electorate and the potential electorate of two former, now disaffected, state Labor MPs. I cannot help but feel that the former Carpenter government delayed action on this critical overpass until they could reannounce it in the state election campaign and associate it with their candidates—because that is actually what happened. There was no action until the two relevant candidates for the state Labor Party were able to be there for a photo opportunity. That occurred only some six weeks ago, as I understand it, just before the election. One of the candidates was the former Premier’s chief of staff and the other one was a television journalist. One was well connected to the former Premier and the other one was a high-profile name. Their interest in the lives of those people in those electorates possibly dated from the time they saw the redistributed two-party preferred margin.

The point remains that no action was taken to fix this black spot. I expect that this lack of activity is related to the electoral cycle. We had an opportunistic former Premier who called the election to avoid bad news from the Corruption and Crime Commission of Western Australia and delayed important road safety improvements to make yet another grab for headlines and demonstrate action only where there was inaction. I therefore ask the question: did the federal government know that the safety of West Australians was being jeopardised by former Premier Alan Carpenter delaying the start of this work—and therefore the completion of these
works—and was that just rank political opportunism?

This political opportunism was further demonstrated in the case of Morley Senior High School. The parents of Morley Senior High School know that the state government has rejected addressing critical infrastructure problems in that school for years, only to announce in the recent pre-election weeks an upgrade to the badly decayed toilet block.

But let us go back to roads. I want to talk about the disgrace that is the state controlled Wanneroo Road—in particular, the section from Pinjar Road North to Joondalup Drive. Again, about two years ago I submitted an unanswered petition to the state government to address the safety concerns of this state controlled road. This road is predominantly a single carriageway but is actually a major arterial road. It runs past the new suburbs of Tapping and Ashby. It runs past the lifestyle villages of Lake Joondalup and Pineview. Yet it is only now, around the period of the state election, that it looks like some earth will be turned for this long overdue project. It is only now, with the former state Labor government trying to save the state electorate of Wanneroo for themselves, that the safety concerns of local residents and me are finally being addressed—or were finally being addressed.

It seems appropriate that, in celebrating the federal government’s continuation of the Howard government’s Roads to Recovery program, we talk about infrastructure. Roads have always been infrastructure, and it is good to see that this Howard government infrastructure initiative is also continuing—although I would call it ‘remarkable’, to use the Prime Minister’s favourite word, that this government should lecture us about a lack of commitment to infrastructure when this is just another example of the Howard government’s infrastructure initiatives.

I recall that in the last sitting week the Prime Minister was trying to channel Winston Churchill. He tried, but failed, to assume the mantle of an orator. In his usual casual and undignified manner, leaning on the dispatch box and reading word for word from his speech, he left no doubt that, rather than being in the mould of Winston Churchill, he is merely Winston Smith, the bureaucrat from Orwell’s book 1984. Smith’s job in the ‘Ministry of Truth’ was to rewrite historical reports to make them consistent with the party line.

What we have before us is a continuation of a former government program—and that is great—but, in the end, it will always be about local events such as the roadworks that need to be done in electorates such as Cowan. We should never forget that this bill, this initiative, had its origins in the past; that can never be written out of the future. What we have with this bill is a continuation of a past initiative, and that is good. We have opportunities to get a lot of roads fixed and safety issues addressed. I look forward to those things which were committed to in the past being delivered not by 2014 but as soon as possible. It would be good to see the money spent on fixing these roads and sorting out these safety issues for people in my electorate and no doubt other electorates around the country. I look forward to that. It is very good to see that this initiative is being continued. I look forward to the results making a difference immediately to people on the ground.

Mr COMBET (Charlton—Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Procurement) (3.49 pm)—I rise to speak on the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008. There are two main elements to the bill before the House. The first relates to the Roads to Recovery program and the second relates to the Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program. Firstly, I would like to
address the elements relating to Roads to Recovery.

The bill will deliver a record $1.75 billion in new money to improve local roads around Australia. It will do this by securing the Roads to Recovery program for another five years, to 2014. As many members would be aware, this program was due to cease on 30 June 2009, so this further commitment of $1.75 billion is important. This bill not only secures this program for a further five years but also includes a significant rise in the money allocated to it. The allocation of $1.75 billion includes an increase of $50 million a year for five years, which is $250 million in total, compared to the previous annual allocations under the Howard government.

This funding will deliver benefits to my electorate of Charlton, as well as many other electorates around the country. This financial year alone the Rudd Labor government will deliver over $1.1 million to Lake Macquarie City Council, which covers a large area of my electorate of Charlton. This will be dedicated towards urgent safety upgrades and repairs to local roads. It will help my constituents who use these roads every day to do all the things that you would expect—dropping their kids off at school, going to work or doing the shopping. A number of roads across the electorate have already been upgraded with funding under this program. These include Government Road, in Barnsley; Oakville Road, in Edgeworth; and Rose Street, in Blackalls Park, to name just a few. Future allocations of the money provided under this bill to councils will be determined later in the year by the state and territory grants commissions. I commend this initiative and congratulate the minister for ensuring that this government is investing in safer roads for local motorists, cyclists and pedestrians.

As I indicated earlier, the bill also makes a number of legislative changes to ensure the implementation of the government’s $70 million Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program, which was announced in the budget by the Treasurer. This program will provide additional heavy vehicle rest areas on key interstate routes, heavy vehicle parking and decoupling areas and facilities in outer urban and regional centres, new technology in vehicle electronic systems and road capacity enhancement to allow access by high-productivity vehicles to more of the road network. The bill before us today ensures that this program can be implemented by broadening the definition of a ‘road’ to allow funds to be used for the funding of rest and parking areas, heavy vehicle bays, decoupling areas and weigh stations. That is one important expansion of the application of this program. As the minister indicated in his second reading speech, this is an important initiative as one in five road deaths involve heavy vehicles. In 2007 alone there were over 200 road deaths involving heavy vehicles, with speed and fatigue being significant contributing factors, so in that context the funding available to broaden the program for heavy vehicle safety is extremely important.

Despite those figures, the opposition appears determined to ensure that the government is unable to deliver the program. On 14 May this year, the coalition in the Senate blocked a proposed increase in the heavy vehicle road user charge. This increase provides the funding basis for the Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program, and without it the program will not be able to proceed. It is confusing, to say the least, to try to understand why the coalition would block this charge in order to give rise to greater safety in the heavy vehicle area, because it is extremely important for the reasons that I have outlined. The coalition’s position is
even more confusing, though, considering that only in June last year the now Leader of the Nationals, Mr Truss, a former transport minister, in fact advocated a similar rise in the charge. I listened to the Leader of the Nationals addressing the House earlier today on this particular issue and, noting his complete reversal of position, I was no greater illuminated as to the reason that the coalition was blocking this charge. The rise in this charge will ensure that heavy vehicle road users get much-needed safety and road infrastructure improvements, and therefore it is critical that the coalition rethinks its position and ensures the passage of the charge through the Senate.

There are a number of other aspects of AusLink funding that have been delivered by the government in my electorate of Charlton under the Black Spot Program. In the budget this year, the government allocated $750,000 for improving the safety of Dorrington and Wangi Roads at Rathmines within my electorate. There have been a number of accidents there, including two fatalities. The funding was granted through the Commonwealth Black Spot Program, which of course comes under AusLink. Black Spot Program projects target those road locations where accidents, injuries and fatalities recur, and this program saves the community many times the cost of the relatively minor road improvements that are sometimes implemented. Since being elected in Charlton in November last year, I have been lobbying the state, the federal Rudd government and the relevant minister to secure the necessary funding to make this particular intersection safe. In fact the former member for Charlton was involved in an accident at this intersection not too long ago. The funding that has now been provided under the Black Spot Program will help repair and improve this intersection so that hopefully we can avoid future accidents, injuries or fatalities. As I indicated a moment ago, there have been a number of collisions there. There have been 34 accidents, two fatalities and 21 injury-causing crashes in the last eight years, so I am very pleased that we have been able to secure the funding at a federal and state level to improve the safety of that intersection.

But, apart from the Dorrington Road intersection and the funding announced in the budget, I was also pleased to announce last month that three further projects within my electorate will receive funding under the Black Spot Program. These include funding to the tune of $170,000 to make a number of improvements to the roundabout on the Newcastle Link Road and Cameron Park Drive intersection in Cameron Park, $100,000 to install a concrete median strip on Excelsior Parade to prevent right turns out of Jindalee Street in Toronto and $60,000 for works on Cary Street in Toronto to prevent through and right movements out of James Street and Donnelly Avenue and right turns into Donnelly Avenue in Toronto—for those familiar with the particular locality. These projects were assessed and recommended by a panel of independent road safety experts including the NRMA, the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales, the Council on the Ageing and the Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia. I am very pleased that Charlton is getting this much-needed funding and look forward to safer roads for my constituents.

But, at a broader regional level, it is also important to note that, in a recent report by the Property Council of New South Wales dealing with the infrastructure requirements of the Hunter region, three of the five top infrastructure projects—described as ‘catalyst’ projects because they can give rise to far greater economic activity in the region and create jobs and improve living standards—identified by the Property Council are in fact roads projects, or projects strongly related to
roads projects, that may ultimately command consideration under future AusLink funding. These include the need for the F3 to Branxton freeway connection that commences in my electorate and crosses into the neighbouring electorate of Hunter, held by the current Minister for Defence. They also include the Lake Macquarie Integrated Transport Centre at Glendale in my electorate, which involves an important facility to connect residential, retail and industrial areas—an area where at least 10,000 people are currently working and many thousands are living but which is severely disadvantaged in its transport infrastructure. The third of the top five infrastructure projects includes the F3 to Raymond Terrace freeway connection, the F3 of course being the principal freeway from Sydney north.

The Rudd government is committed to road safety and local road infrastructure. That is evidenced by the bill that is currently before the House. As I have outlined, AusLink, under the Roads to Recovery and the Black Spot programs, is delivering for my electorate and for many other electorates around the country. While my focus of course is on the projects within my electorate—I suspect the rather lengthy list of speakers to follow me may also evidence a similar focus—it is important, though, to emphasise that AusLink is a national program that provides tremendous benefit to the community around the country and does much to improve road safety and reduce injury, accidents and fatalities. For that reason I am very pleased to support the bill as part of the government’s commitment to improvements in road infrastructure.

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa) (4.00 pm)—I am pleased to support the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008. I see that the government are in fact picking up on a coalition policy, one that they, admittedly, did commit to prior to the last federal election and which they have copied in relation to Roads to Recovery.

In fact, prior to the last federal election, we committed, to an area that this bill will address under the government, $350 million to the Roads to Recovery program. At the time, in typical fashion, the now Prime Minister was out there—it was ‘me too’; it was always ‘me too’—saying they would also provide $350 million under the Roads to Recovery program if they were elected. So I am pleased to see that the government are honouring that commitment that it gave to the Australian people prior to the last federal election.

The Roads to Recovery program is very important. The $350 million under that program goes direct to local councils. It bypasses inefficient state Labor administrations. This money will go straight to councils whereby councils can determine where the priorities are in their area for local roads. I am sure that we have all seen the maladministration of many Labor governments. Every dollar which local councils receive under this program will be spent on roads, roads that are a priority in their own local community. Not only does that program deliver all of that money to the local council but, importantly, it upgrades roads that are a priority in those communities and creates jobs in those regional and rural communities, as well as in our councils. It is an important program.

It was originally initiated by a coalition government. I also have to give great credit to a former Deputy Prime Minister and former member for Gwydir, John Anderson. It was his initiative, knowing full well, as I did, that so many of those local shire roads out in our rural communities were beyond the capacity of local ratepayers to upgrade. They were not a federal responsibility nor a state responsibility and yet so much of our nation’s wealth originates in those rural and
regional communities, whether it be from agriculture, mining—which I want to talk a little bit about in my contribution to this debate—or tourism. Those local roads are a very important part of the infrastructure of those local communities which create wealth in those local areas. I commend John Anderson, a former Deputy Prime Minister, a former Leader of the Nationals and a former member for Gwydir. He recognised the need and whilst he was in a position to do something about it brought forward Roads to Recovery. I am pleased it will continue under this government.

There are some definitional changes to the AusLink bill which will see the definition of ‘a road’ expanded. It will include some lay-off areas, not necessarily on the alignment of the road but to the side of the road which will create rest areas. Funding will come from the Commonwealth government for the establishment of these lay-off areas, rest areas, particularly for trucks. I note that there is $70 million in this bill that came from the federal budget last year to provide for this initiative. There is a very urgent need for some of this money to be allocated in many parts of Australia, but there is a particular need in my own electorate and that concerns a road just west of Mitchell. It is on the Warrego Highway, an AusLink highway, which links Brisbane right through to Darwin. It is a very important road; it is a national highway. But type 2 road trains so often use that road. If there is one way that the trucking industry and the freight industry can help bring down costs, it is by using type 2 road trains wherever roads will allow that to occur. Travelling from the west, perhaps even from as far west as Darwin, when you come to Mitchell you have to decouple your type 2 road train at that point. For the benefit of the House, a type 2 road train is a configured heavy vehicle, with three full-length trailers, carrying livestock or general freight. They could be refrigerated vans. A range of goods could be carried in this three-trailer configuration. But once they get to Mitchell, whether they come from the west or from the east going west, they have to couple up to or decouple from that three-trailer configuration.

About a month ago I had a call from a transport operator in my home town of Roma. He said, ‘Bruce, last Friday evening, out on the pad and as far west as another 80 kilometres west of Mitchell, there were some 128 trailers all in the process of decoupling, coupling or waiting to get onto the pad.’ Why were they out about 80 kilometres west of Mitchell? Because they could not come further east. If they came further east and they had to decouple, they would have to do it in the middle of the Warrego Highway and obviously that would cause a dangerous situation. Many of these trailers of course would be carrying drought-affected livestock that have come from as far west as Western Australia destined for the saleyards in Roma, another 80 kilometres further east.

So there is an urgent need for an upgrade of the lay-by area where trucks couple or decouple—128 trailers all costing money while they sit idle, with trucks as far as 80 odd kilometres west waiting to transit east so that they can get on the pad to decouple. This is a situation that I cannot support and that we have to do something about. I say to the minister: make sure that some of this money goes, as a matter of urgency, to this decoupling area just west of Mitchell, in the interests of efficiency, road safety and the welfare of livestock which often have to sit for hours while the trucks wait to get onto the pad to decouple before they travel further east.

Prior to the last federal election, the coalition government committed some $128 million to the Warrego Highway, from this point at Mitchell further east to Dalby, because we
knew that upgrading our highways to see type 2 road trains travel further east, or pick up a point further east to configure their loads if they were travelling west, was going to reduce costs, which of course is good for the economy. Unfortunately, the current federal government committed only some $55 million for this highway. That will probably do the Mitchell to Roma section of the road, but it is the road from Roma right through to Dalby that is in urgent need of money being spent on it. That is why I call on the minister not just to put $55 million into this section of a very important national highway but to commit to the money, some $128 million, we committed to when we were in government.

The road between Roma and Mitchell transits the heart of the Surat Basin coal seam, one of the emerging powerhouses of Queensland. The number of trucks on that road daily is unbelievable and it has ramped up in the last 18 months, driven not only by exploration but by the higher price of oil. I have seen an exponential increase in the road traffic associated with the oil and gas and coal industries as this development has started to ramp up. For instance, just north of my home town, one oil company is planning to drill over 2,000 holes in search of coal seam methane gas. Further north, up towards Emerald, a similar number of holes are going to be drilled to prove up coal seam methane gas reserves. This requires trucks, drilling rigs, pipes and specialised equipment and it is putting enormous pressure on this section of the Warrego Highway. Of course, the development of the coalmine at Wandoan will put similar pressure on this road.

Where some of the coal seam methane gas has already been proven and is being sold into the market, at Braemar, just west of Dalby, there are coal seam methane gas fired power stations—very good clean energy sources; much cleaner than coal fired power stations—being developed. There is another one just near Miles. But, once again, the construction of these coal seam methane gas electricity-generating facilities requires infrastructure to be brought in. It is heavy equipment and has to share the road with tourists, commuters and local traffic, which has put enormous pressure on this road. That is why it is urgent that the commitment of $128 million to this section of the road that we, as the then federal government, made be matched by this federal government.

Tragically, in the last few years there have been some very serious and fatal accidents on this section of the road. That brings into our rural communities tragedy that could have been, I would suggest, avoided had this road been upgraded. This capital injection is long overdue and I would say to the minister: please, have a look at this section of the highway; it cannot wait until 2014 for another round of AusLink. The government should match the commitment of $128 million that the former coalition government was planning for and commit to injecting it into those roadworks as soon as possible.

Under a coalition government this construction would already have started; it would have started on 1 July. The $55 million that the government has committed to will not start until 1 July next year. I say that the road cannot wait that long and the communities cannot wait that long. And, of course, if we are fair dinkum about ensuring the future of our industries—whether it be the export beef industry or the export grain industry or whether it be the establishment of new coal seam methane gas fired electricity generation in the central Darling Downs area—this region desperately needs the money.

I will also touch on the second range crossing at Toowoomba, which connects Brisbane to the Warrego and Gore highways. The Gore Highway goes down through
Goondiwindi into the Newell Highway and feeds through the central western regions of New South Wales, another part of the food bowl of Australia. The traffic that comes up from Brisbane splits at Toowoomba. It goes either to the Gore Highway or along the Warrego Highway. Daily in Toowoomba there are thousands upon thousands of trucks, transiting either to or from the Port of Brisbane, going through some 16 sets of lights. It is just not sustainable. We need federal funding to start the process of building a second range crossing. It is a very big project. In the last federal election campaign we committed funds—not matched by the other side of the House—and, if we had been successful, that money would now be deployed on work to build that second range crossing.

I just want to touch on the other imperative in relation to road funding and the importance of spending money in our regions. In Western Australia over the last 10 days we have heard Brendon Grylls, the leader of the Nationals over there, talk very strongly about the need for resources and funding which come out of the royalties from our regions to go back into the regions. I suggest that that is a very good policy which Anna Bligh, the Premier of Queensland, should follow. I am certainly urging my colleagues in Queensland to adopt a similar process because the rural and remote regions of Australia are where the great wealth of our nation is being generated. However, as we have seen in Western Australia, royalties are stripping the wealth out of the regions, putting it into the capital cities and not providing anything back in the regions for social infrastructure, roads, schools and amenities, which would take the pressure off local governments that have to provide the roads and infrastructure. Of course, local governments have to go to their local ratepayers. In Queensland, with the enormous wealth and the potential for jobs coming out of the Surat coal basin—as well as taxation to come to Canberra—we have to see this money deployed out there now and not at some time in the future. We cannot wait for that, because all Australians are benefiting from this wealth; it is not just a few. Because of our balance of payments and because of the exports—whether it is rural commodities or mineral wealth—all Australians are benefiting from this wealth.

The importance of planning cannot be understated. That is why, as I said earlier, the money that we had planned to put into the Warrego Highway was all about planning for the future. I was out in the west of my electorate during the winter break. It was pretty chilly out there, too, I have to say. I went out onto the Adventure Way, west of Thargomindah in the Bulloo shire—right out to the South Australian border, in fact. Planning for the future and putting money into infrastructure means a lot to those communities. When we were in government, we committed some $10 million under the AusLink Strategic Regional Program. I saw what the local shire was doing with that money. They have now almost completed the sealing of the road from the Cooper Basin oil and gas fields right through to Innamincka. Once the South Australian government matches it on the other side of the border—and I am pleased to see my colleague here in the House, who I am sure will be able to talk about this as well—the Adventure Way, from Adelaide to Brisbane, will be a fully sealed road. That will be wonderful for tourism and, importantly, for the resource sector out there—the Cooper Basin oil and gas fields, and hot rocks power generation capacity. There will be enormous wealth. If there is one thing we should be doing it is investing in infrastructure now for the benefit of future generations. It is roads like that which will make a difference. Once again, it was the coalition government that planned for the future and put money into that road.
The other day, I was delighted to be able to drive on the sealed road west of Thargomindah almost through to Innamincka. I was able to do that because of the coalition government’s planning and funding of roads under the AusLink Strategic Regional Program. I mention this road because it was probably some 14 years ago that I identified the need for a bridge over Cooper Creek. There was not a road going to it or away from it, but strategically it was important. The difficulty was always going to be funding a road to an area where quite a substantial bridge over Cooper Creek was needed. Since then, of course, the road has been built to the bridge and away from the bridge. We have seen the economic activity out there benefit from the decision, planning and funding for the bridge over Cooper Creek. The other day the oil and gas industry up there had new pipelines being built, allowing greater exploration of the gas and oil capacity of that region. Once again, it was about planning for the future and putting infrastructure in some of the most remote parts of Australia. But it is in those remote parts where the great wealth of this nation is generated.

I just mention to the House that Bulloo Shire Council have done a magnificent job. I commend the work of the councillors and council workers. They do a magnificent job under fairly arduous and difficult circumstances, where they camp out for two weeks on a road gang to build roads. They are building roads in some of the great wealth-generating regions of our nation from which all Australians can benefit.

I notice that time is going to beat me, and there is a lot more I would have liked to have talked about. I support the bill, but I call on the minister to not be mean spirited and to use some of the surplus. Put money into the second range crossing now to complete what we would have done had we been re-elected. Put money into the Warrego Highway and do it now. Do not wait until next year to start this process. This money is going to the resource-rich area of Australia. All Australians are going to benefit from it and I call on the minister to act. (Time expired)

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs) (4.22 pm)—I speak in support of the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008. AusLink will remain an integrated part of the Rudd Labor government’s comprehensive plan to deliver key infrastructure projects to all Australians. AusLink is the single integrated national network of land transport funded by state, territory, and federal governments. This is based on a series of transport corridors, including connecting transportation hubs such as airports and railways to urban centres. AusLink includes national projects and the Roads to Recovery program, which maintains and upgrades roads all around Australia.

Sustaining our economic prosperity requires Australia to invest in essential infrastructure which we need to meet the challenges of the future. After 11½ years of the Howard government, our infrastructure backlog in water, energy and land transport alone has been estimated at $25 billion by the Committee for Economic Development of Australia. In 2006, ABN AMRO estimated that $330 billion could usefully be spent on infrastructure in Australia over the next 10 years.

The Rudd government is taking the necessary steps to ensure that the Commonwealth fulfils its role in this area. The government has established Infrastructure Australia and the position of infrastructure coordinator to develop a strategic blueprint for our nation’s infrastructure needs. Under the stewardship of its chair, Sir Rod Eddington, the body is currently seeking public submissions to deliver the government’s nation-building agenda. This body will take a nationally co-
ordinated approach to identify and coordinate priority infrastructure projects which are of high national importance.

After more than 11 years the Howard government failed to deliver not only the required infrastructure to maintain economic growth but the infrastructure to secure continuous economic and productivity growth for the future of all Australians. This is the same coalition government which neglected to tackle climate change and which is still bickering in the back rooms about its existence. It is the same coalition which neglected our schools, our TAFEs and our universities for 12 years. Indeed, we now have an opposition spokesman for education who has barely asked any question on education since his elevation to the front bench this year.

This is the same coalition government which neglected our hospitals and failed to deal with the long list of challenges in the health system. It is the same coalition government which ignored 20 warnings from the Reserve Bank on interest rates. It is the same coalition government which has an opposition leader who believes that he has the right to usurp the independence of the Reserve Bank and then just as quickly changes his mind on the issue when he fronts the next doorstop. That, in its essence, is the problem with the coalition: they are more of the same; they do not understand the neglect that they have left behind. They have wasted the resources boom and the economic reforms of the Hawke and Keating years.

Well might the member for Maranoa, the previous speaker, speak of the wealth generated by resources in the regions. The Howard government never understood that there was a need to build on that resources wealth generated in the regions, a need to build by creating essential infrastructure for the future. On this side of the House, we say more of the same is never good enough. In the last two or three days we have been offered a number of extracts from the memoirs of the former Treasurer, the member for Higgins. The member for Higgins, it seems, is attempting to rewrite the history of the former government, to pretend that the huge areas of inactivity never happened, to pretend, indeed, that the Howard government years were years of near perfect administration, leaving—so the memoirs seem to be asserting—a wonderful legacy. We read, for example, this offering by the member for Higgins—about as close as an admission to failure as it seems we are going to receive:

There are some areas in which the Coalition could have done better. It could have moved earlier to remedy indigenous disadvantage. It could have solved the constitutional issues concerning a republic. It should have rebuffed the challenge from One Nation sooner.

And we can all say to that—

Mr Coulton—Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on a point of order, on relevance.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—The member for Parkes will resume his seat. He would know, if he had been listening to this debate, that it has been far ranging. If he had been in for a couple of previous speakers from his side, he would understand that I am giving the same latitude that I have given to everybody.

Mr Dreyfus—I appreciate the sensitivity of the member for Parkes on the memoirs of the member for Higgins. Well might anyone on the other side of the House be sensitive about the offerings we have received so far.

Ms Macklin—Especially which way they voted on the pension rise!

Mr Dreyfus—Indeed, as I am reminded, especially on which way those opposite voted in relation to the pension rise, and especially on which way those who were
in the former cabinet voted on the rise in the pension. ‘Some legacy’ is all one really need say. That is all the member for Higgins can think of that was wrong about the former government—his areas in which ‘the coalition could have done better’. One can, of course, say, ‘Hear, hear!’ to moving earlier to remedy Indigenous disadvantage; one can say, ‘Hear, hear!’ to having a go at solving constitutional issues; and, absolutely, one can say, ‘Hear, hear!’ that there should have been a rebuff to the challenges of One Nation. But there is, in fact, a much longer list than this suggestion by the member for Higgins that this was all that was wrong with the former coalition government. Chief on that list is the failure to attend to the infrastructure needs of this country.

One could look at the conduct of the former Treasurer in running stimulatory budgets while the economy was booming from resource exports. One could look at the way in which the former Treasurer managed the economy, guaranteeing the need for 10 interest rate rises in a row and running the economy in such a way that compelled the Reserve Bank to seek to slow the economy. One could look at the legacy of the former Treasurer, which was inflation at a 16-year high. One could look at a whole range of other things that the former Treasurer should be regretting, like: halving the capital gains tax rate and thus massively contributing to housing price inflation; the former Treasurer’s failure to build on the superannuation reforms of the Hawke and Keating governments; and—most importantly and relevantly to the debate on this bill—the failure to invest in infrastructure.

This bill demonstrates that the Rudd government is not going to fail to invest in infrastructure, that the Rudd government is going to attend to the infrastructure needs of this country. This bill demonstrates that the Rudd government is committed to continuous road safety improvement and to the delivery of local road infrastructure. The heavy vehicle safety and productivity package, which is relevant to this bill, is part of the heavy vehicle driver fatigue laws which were adopted unanimously by the Australian Transport Council in February 2007 and which are due for implementation on 29 September 2008. In a vast country like Australia, where large amounts of goods are transported in large road trains, this bill will amend the definition of ‘road’ to put beyond any doubt that $70 million of funding can be delivered to fund technologies which will make our highways safer for drivers and other commuters. These technologies include electronic monitoring systems on drivers’ work hours and vehicle speeds. Decoupling facilities, rest stops and heavy vehicle parking bays will also be provided in this package. The Australian Trucking Association has welcomed this announcement and has since provided 18 priority areas for funding.

This government is committed to ensuring that there are quality roads for all users to drive on. It is appropriate and equitable that the heavy vehicle industry matches the government’s significant investments in roads. Thus, this bill seeks to reintroduce the heavy vehicle charges to pay back the money required to maintain the roads which these vehicles use. When I use the word ‘reintroduce’, I refer of course to the coalition’s deliberate obstruction of this legislation in the Senate in May 2008. The same Senate which gave us Work Choices was not willing to leave Canberra honourably and allow the democratically elected government of Australia to deliver its election promises. This is all the more inexplicable given that this very same charge was also proposed by the coalition government in June 2007. This is another example that the coalition are not committed to delivering what is best for the nation’s interest. The coalition and particu-
larly the National Party are so preoccupied with their internal struggles that they neglect the safety of Australian truckies and road safety for short-term political gain.

Indeed, the National Party have really been quite an embarrassment to their constituency. It is no wonder that the Nationals have had continuous drops in their primary vote and the number of members which they send to Canberra. With a national primary vote of just 5.49 per cent in 2007, from a high of 8.2 per cent in 1996, the National Party are very un-national these days. The troubles that the National Party are having in Queensland are really just a small indication of their problems. If the Nationals had truly delivered for their constituents, then maybe they would have held on to Hume, Capricornia, New England, Kennedy, Dawson, Page, Farrer, Richmond and, lately, Lyne. Maybe if the National Party would concentrate on delivering genuine—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Order! I am reluctant to call the member for Isaacs up, given my position, but the bill is the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill and I would ask him to come back to the bill.

Mr DREYFUS—I will come back to the bill. As I said, if the National Party would concentrate on delivering genuine results to people living in their electorates instead of simply providing the mates-rates ‘Regional Rorts’ program then perhaps the National Party would have more than just a—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Order! The member for Isaacs will come back to the bill or I will sit him down. The bill before the House, for his information, is the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill, and we are talking about roads.

Mr DREYFUS—I am indebted to you, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Nationals have had the gall to block the very legislation in this area that their own leader put up last year. Truckies all around Australia missed an opportunity to gain access to better roads and safer technology thanks to the political posturing by the coalition in May. If the Nationals paid attention to the needs of Australian truckies and the needs of the people, perhaps they would have more than just eight MPs in this chamber.

As our economy heads into more difficult times, it is important for all elected representatives to look to the national interest. And yet all we have seen from the coalition is the blocking of measures like this one in the Senate. It appears that the coalition have forgotten that it was their hubris when they had control of the Senate that led to the terrible Work Choices laws being introduced. It seems that they still have not learnt their lesson. We have had an indication that, in addition to the blocking that took place in May of the measures in this bill, we still have the blocking of reforms with regard to alcopops, the Medicare levy surcharge, the Commonwealth seniors health card, the excise on condensate and now the luxury car levy. It seems the coalition simply do not understand that these measures will provide the revenue to bring quality programs to Australians, programs like the Roads to Recovery program.

The second part of this bill is to extend the Roads to Recovery program. It is a program that has delivered $1.2 billion to be distributed among local councils and $30 million to unincorporated areas to make urgent repairs and upgrades to roads. In my electorate of Isaacs, the program has delivered approximately $2 million each to the Frankston, Greater Dandenong and Kingston councils from 2005-06 through to 2008-09. It is money which is designed to supplement and not substitute council road funding, and it has been used for the upgrade of a range of local roads, including the widening of Abbotts Road in Dandenong South, with a
$397,000 contribution from the Commonwealth; the resurfacing of Bloomfield Road in Noble Park, just around the corner from my electorate office, at $86,000; the repaving and sealing of Bear Street in Mordialloc, along with the replacement of kerbs, with a Commonwealth contribution of $688,401; the repaving and sealing of Scotch Parade in Chelsea, along with the replacement of kerbs outside the Beazley Reserve, at a cost of $156,521; and the reconstruction, rehabilitation and widening of Foam Street in Parkdale, with a Commonwealth contribution of $185,000. There are a number of local road projects in Isaacs in addition to these that I hope will get funding from this extra funding package in the near future.

Roads are very important for the people in my electorate of Isaacs, as they are for people throughout Australia—but, I suspect, particularly those in the outer suburbs. Good roads are required for the people and businesses in my electorate to operate on a daily basis. Despite the focus that one sees on public transport in some commentary, we do need to ensure that there are quality roads to serve the outer suburbs of our major metropolitan centres. Public transport at this stage simply does not extend far enough. Shaun Carney wrote a perceptive piece in the Age on 13 August about public transport, particularly in relation to the Carrum Downs area of my electorate. He said:

I suggested that people in the inner suburbs could benefit by taking the nearest train to the end of the line to see how hard it is for people in the outer suburbs to do without their cars. This was a mistake because it implied that Melbourne’s outer suburban belt was accessible by rail. In fact, it extends way beyond the metropolitan rail system.

Mr Carney was spot on. We need to keep clearly in mind that, right now, people in the outer suburbs depend on their cars and that calling only for spending on public transport ignores the very real current needs of people in the outer suburbs.

In the long term, better public transport may be the answer but, right now, we need to attend to much needed investment in local roads. The Rudd Labor government understands that local councils are well placed to prioritise requirements for local roads. Given that more than 75 per cent of roads are overseen by local governments, this extension of funding shows the government’s commitment to a national road improvement plan. This bill seeks to extend the Roads to Recovery project for five more years. The funding will also be increased to $350 million per year, totalling $1.75 billion of direct funding to local councils to fix local transport issues.

The Australian Local Government Association has warmly welcomed this announcement and stated that the government ‘has recognised the economic and social benefits of investment to meet the transport expectations of local communities’. This bill builds on the comprehensive plans that the Rudd Labor government has for infrastructure and transport. I urge those opposite and their party in the Senate to put aside their partisan opportunism and support it. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr COULTON (Parkes) (4.39 pm)—I rise tonight to support the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008. Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, from determination from the Deputy Speaker before you, this is a wide-ranging debate, and I will take the opportunity to add some comments not only on this government’s attitude to infrastructure but on the attitude of the minister himself. For the benefit of the member for Isaacs, I have here a heavy vehicle drivers licence. I come to this place with experience in driving a heavy vehicle. I also have an electorate in which it takes eight hours to drive from one end to the other—it includes the Newell Highway—and in which probably 30 per
cent of the roads are impassable after as little as 10 millimetres of rain. So I am not in here speaking theory or political chat; I am here to represent the people of my electorate.

I would like you to cast your mind back, Mr Deputy Speaker, to last Thursday when the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government was on his feet and just before he was expelled from this place by the Speaker. Just before question time on that day, I had a school in the gallery—Mallawa Primary School—a great little school west of Moree in my electorate on the black soil plains. I was explaining to them, at about five to two, that they were here at an ideal time in the day because they would see question time. I was about to explain what went on when the head teacher said: ‘No, Mr Coulton, we do not want them to stay here for question time. I’ve been teaching my students about manners and respect, and I don’t want them to see question time.’ After the debacle that was question time at last Thursday’s sitting, that teacher showed great judgement by not allowing her students to see that.

At that time, the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government had a series of documents which were requests for funding from members of this House. It is my understanding that, as a member of this House, I take requests from my constituents, whether they be individuals, shires, mayors or general managers, and pass them on to the minister for due consideration. On that Thursday he made a mockery of that whole situation. I say to my colleagues on this side of the House how disgusted I am that the people of Australia have got to the stage where they do not want school students to come into this place. Those opposite say, ‘Oh yes, but it’s a bit of theatre; don’t take any notice. It’s for the benefit of the people up there in the press gallery. It’s about getting a grab on the news.’ What about the people in this gallery? What about the students who sit up there in the soundproof booths, who come here to look at our place of government? I have to say that I am a little disgusted at the behaviour that is going on here. I am not casting aspersions on the Speaker of this House, the Hon. Harry Jenkins, or any of the Deputy Speakers; I think they are doing a fantastic job. And I am addressing my comments not only to the other side of the House but to this place in general. We will need to tidy up our act if we are going to win back the confidence of the people of this country.

Infrastructure is a sacred cow for the people of my electorate. The portfolio of the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government covers my electorate immensely. The government wiped out the Regional Partnerships program on the pretext that it was rorting. There have been umpteen dozen inquiries into that partnership, and there have been no cases of any undue activity. It was an excuse to gut spending for regional Australia. I have heard the member for Blair speak here before about the great largesse that has come to his electorate on the pretext of funding election promises of $10 million for the main street of Ipswich. I have no problem with that, but the hypocrisy of the minister for infrastructure in making a mockery in question time of the people of this House, the elected representatives, for a ploy for television I find quite repulsive.

I cannot speak for everyone else in this House but I can speak for myself, and I can tell you why I oppose that bill for the heavy vehicles charges determination: it was bad policy and it was bad for the people of my electorate. I will explain this because the member for Isaacs might not be familiar with terminology in the trucking industry. In a B-double you have an A trailer and a B-trailer. They are the safest form of transport on the
They allow large volumes of freight to be moved economically, and the development of the B-double has made smaller trucking firms viable.

Right across my electorate we now have transport operators disconnecting their A-trailers because of the cost. They are pulling 22 or 23 tonnes instead of 42 tonnes, so we have more movement and more vehicles on the road, and those businesses are going under. Heavy vehicle charges are fine for the big trucking companies—they are quite happy with them because they have contracts and can pass them on—but consumers will pay more. Operators in my electorate, whether they are farmers or small transport operators, cannot pass the charges on to anyone. I have transport companies in my electorate going broke hand over fist because of some theory in here about road safety. I think we need to have a close look at road safety and not just put more small trucks on the road because operators cannot afford to run the more efficient B doubles.

This bill proposes technical amendments to the AusLink (National Land Transport) Act 2005 to achieve three objectives, one of which is to extend the Roads to Recovery program from 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2014. It is this aspect of the bill which I believe will have the biggest impact for the majority of the constituents of my electorate. This legislation will see the Roads to Recovery program receive $350 million a year for the next year five years, and I commend the government for matching the coalition’s election promise. It is surprising to see the government finally making a decision that will have a positive impact on rural and regional electorates. Their previous actions have seen them axe millions of dollars from regional programs. That has certainly been cause for concern, and it is a relief to know that this will continue.
Some specific projects which have been funded through Roads to Recovery in my electorate include the replacement of the Gowan Creek Bridge near Ballimore, improvements to Talbragar Street in Dubbo and Tooraweenah Road, the sealing of Maryvale Road in Wellington and also the upgrade to the Baradine Gwabegar Road. Gilgandra Shire were able to improve the Armatree to Warren Road, Moree Plains Shire made improvements to Main Road 507 between Mungindi and Boomi, Walgett Shire were able to re-sheet the Collarenebri to Mungindi Road and my own council, Gwydir Shire Council, were able to make vast improvements to the roads around Croppa Creek, Gravesend and Bingara.

Despite these great projects being completed, there is always more work that needs to be done. For many reasons it is so important that local roads are kept in the best possible condition. Firstly, it is necessary to remember that almost every product that we export, and a lot of the products that end up on our supermarket shelves, begins its life on a country road. It is necessary for local country roads to be maintained so that our farmers and truck drivers can ensure their product ends up at its final destination in the best possible condition. Many farmers are at risk of breaching contractual obligations regarding the delivery of produce because of the poor condition of their roads.

Secondly, regional roads often have high numbers of tourists travelling on them. In my electorate, we have a number of highly popular tourist attractions, including the wine regions of Mudgee, the Warrumbungle Mountains near Coonabarabran and the artesian spas in the Moree district. We have a large number of visitors to these areas each year, and often they are grey nomads towing a caravan. It is important that we keep our roads in good condition so that we can continue to attract the tourism dollars.

The third reason for keeping country roads maintained is, to me, the most important, and that is safety. Too many accidents occur on country roads and the condition of the roads is often a factor in accidents in my electorate. Many of the roads in my electorate are gravel and keeping these roads either regularly graded or re-sheeted, or eventually being able to seal them, is a huge priority and can literally mean the difference between life and death. Indeed, many of the roads in the western area of my electorate have reverted to black soil. This is the reality of living in rural Australia in the 21st century. Roads to Recovery is simply an excellent program and it fills some of the gaps that are left by the state Labor government when it comes to road funding. I am delighted that this bill will see it continue.

I have touched on this before, but another important aspect of this bill amends the definition of ‘road’ contained in the AusLink (National Land Transport) Act 2005 so as to put beyond doubt that projects for the development of off-road facilities used by trucks may be funded under the AusLink program. This will mean that future funding under AusLink may be applied to roadside rest stops, parking bays and decoupling facilities. I support this amending legislation as I know that this will make a major difference to many of the major roads in my electorate. I have several major roads going through my electorate, including the Newell Highway, which is one of Australia’s major freight corridors, linking Melbourne to Brisbane.

I have had discussions with many truck drivers in my electorate, including Mr Rod Hannifey of Dubbo, about the conditions of the facilities made available for truck drivers. Incidentally, Mr Hannifey also spent time with the Leader of the Opposition, Dr Nelson, recently, when Dr Nelson and Rod spent 12 hours driving in a truck together from Melbourne to Dubbo. One of the main issues
that Rod raised with me, and I know he raised it with the Leader of the Opposition as well, was not only the condition of the highways but the poor design and lack of rest stops available for our truck drivers. Truck drivers have to comply with an enormous number of regulations in order to carry out their day-to-day job, and part of those regulations includes taking regular breaks to ensure not only their safety but the safety of other drivers on our roads. It is very difficult for drivers when there are not adequate roadside stops, and this bill will mean that there will be a greater pool of money available to improve these facilities for truck drivers.

Our nation’s truck drivers provide a vital service to all members of the community as they deliver all of the goods that we use every day. I am proud to support our nation’s truck drivers by supporting this bill, and I know that by doing so I am helping to improve their working conditions and to recognise their worth in our community. I am also putting their safety above politics, but unfortunately those opposite are not giving Australian truck drivers the same consideration.

In the second reading of this bill, the minister outlined the government’s policy on the heavy vehicle safety and productivity package, stating that the safety package is contingent on the passage of the enabling legislation for the 2007 Heavy Vehicle Charges Determination. The opposition has already rejected the 2007 Heavy Vehicle Charges Determination in the Senate this year because it would have seen an increase in heavy vehicle registration fees. We can see that our truck drivers are already doing it tough and it is a real shame that the government are trying to blackmail the opposition into increasing the costs for trucking industry. Along with my coalition colleagues, I remain firm on this issue.

Consumers, particularly those in regional areas like my electorate of Parkes, are already facing increased costs. To slap the trucking industry with yet another charge will only increase the cost for the transport of goods. If there was an increase in heavy vehicle fees, the major players in the industry would have no choice but to pass the costs on to the consumer, increasing the prices at our supermarkets and grocery stores. Smaller operators like the many farmers in my electorate who only drive their trucks to the silo during harvest time have not got anyone to pass the costs on to. They would be forced to pass the direct brunt of the costs themselves and this would be yet another financial blow that our farmers do not need.

The government should be putting the safety and financial security of the trucking industry before politics. They should not try to blackmail the opposition into making things tougher for our truck drivers. I join with my coalition colleagues, particularly the Leader of the Nationals, in asking the government to simply adopt the heavy vehicle safety and productivity package without placing conditions on it. The lives of truck drivers and all other drivers on our roads should not be risked in order to play petty politics.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (4.54 pm)—I speak in support of the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008. In a seat like mine in rural and regional Queensland—which takes in two-thirds of the city of Ipswich, all the Lockyer Valley and the old Boonah Shire and the new Scenic Rim region—this particular legislation will make an appreciable difference not just to the administration of the council but also to the lives of truck drivers and the citizens in those areas.
The bill has two purposes: to allow funding of heavy vehicle facilities—for example, off-road rest stops—and to extend for a further five years the Roads to Recovery program, funded under the AusLink (National Land Transport) Act 2005. The current funding period expires on 30 June 2009. AusLink is a great thing. The national transport program has a number of elements, including black spot projects, Roads to Recovery, national projects, strategic regional projects and research and technology projects. The bill amends the definition of a road to include heavy vehicle facilities, to ensure that rest stops, parking bays, decoupling facilities and electronic monitoring facilities are included. This will ensure that the federal government will fund the same under a $70 million heavy vehicle safety productivity package.

I do not intend to go through the details of that aspect, but I would urge the coalition to change their minds, because the bill which they have opposed and the determination in the Senate will ensure that the heavy vehicle sector pays its fair and equitable share of road costs incurred by government. It is really a disgrace the coalition have opposed this bill. The Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government has consulted with stakeholders, including the Australian Trucking Association, and they support our position. I would urge the coalition to change their perspective in relation to the heavy vehicle issue and to support our position.

I want to speak principally on the Roads to Recovery program, the black spot funding and of course the road assistance given to the councils in my particular area. This bill extends the Roads to Recovery program until 30 June 2014. Local government, particularly in my area, is responsible for more than 75 per cent of all the roads. This bill will increase the funding under this program from $300 million to $350 million per annum. The proposed clause 87 in the bill requires the minister to publish lists relating to AusLink Roads to Recovery. There is an additional requirement in the bill under clause 87 to allow an amount of money to be allocated for eligible projects in a state or a part thereof where the entity to receive funds has not yet been determined. This will ensure the funds can be preserved even where there is no local council or entity to finance the infrastructure—for example, bridges and access roads in remote areas. Fortunately in my electorate of Blair that is not the case because I have, as I say, two-thirds of the city of Ipswich, all the Lockyer Valley—and the Lockyer Valley Regional Council has newly been amalgamated—and about a third to a quarter of the Scenic Rim Regional Council.

It has been terrific to see the amount of money that has been poured into my electorate. I noticed that the member for Parkes waxed lyrical about the fact that $10 million will be put into the Ipswich CBD in my electorate. The coalition gave the city of Ipswich nothing in 11½ years. The Rudd Labor government is pouring huge amounts of resources into what has been described accurately as the fastest-growing area in South East Queensland—the city of Ipswich. We are pleased that the Rudd Labor government is injecting huge amounts of money into Ipswich, after many years of inertia, ignorance, indulgence and inactivity by the coalition.

In terms of the Roads to Recovery funding allocations for Queensland councils, the Ipswich City Council will receive $1,211,534 and the Lockyer Valley Regional Council will receive $1,300,247. In addition to that, under the chairpersonship of Bernie Ripoll, the member for Oxley, the Queensland black spots consultative panel has been looking at the black spots on the local roads in Queensland. The Rudd Labor government
have announced they will deliver $9.5 million to help fix 64 dangerous black spots on local roads in Queensland. This includes improving roundabouts, improving dangerous intersections, installing speed warnings and traffic signals, and upgrading pedestrian crossings.

In 2009-10, the Rudd government will deliver on its election commitment to increase black spot funding by 33 per cent up to a record $60 million nationally. As the member for Oxley has said recently, for every $1 invested in fixing black spots, around $14 is returned to the community through a reduction in the number and cost of crashes. In my electorate of Blair, the Rudd Labor government will invest $295,000 to fix three dangerous black spots on local roads. These include $205,000 to install traffic signals at the intersection of Whitehill Road and Cascade Street, a notorious intersection in the suburb of Raceview adjacent to my home in Flinders View; $70,000 to upgrade traffic signals at the Jacaranda Street, Norman Street and Chermside Road intersections in East Ipswich, where I actually grew up; and $20,000 to install curve warning signs and upgrade line markings along the Boonah-Fassifern road in Boonah. If you have ever driven on that road, Mr Deputy Speaker, you will know how important that will be.

In addition to that, the councils in my area will receive a record increase in financial assistance through both general purpose grants and road grants. For example, Ipswich City Council will receive $3,551,525 in general purpose grants and $2,005,732 in roads grants, being a total of $5,557,257 in assistance. That is an increase of 4.29 per cent on the previous year. The Lockyer Valley Regional Council will receive in general purpose grants $1,778,881 and in roads grants $988,492, being a total of $2,767,373—an increase of 4.81 per cent. The biggest winner is the Scenic Rim Regional Council, which will receive in general purpose grants $1,816,618 and in roads grants $1,210,302, being a total of $3,026,920—an increase of 7.83 per cent.

Last Saturday night I had the pleasure of being at the Boonah Arts Festival. I am a major sponsor of the Boonah Arts Festival. There are 600 people in the Boonah Arts Collective and it is a small community. I was speaking to the Mayor of the Scenic Rim, John Brent, a well-known National Party figure who thanked me very much for the extra funding that the Scenic Rim received from the Rudd Labor government. I am always pleased to receive plaudits and applause from those on the opposite side of the political divide.

The most important road funding project in my electorate would have to be the Ipswich Motorway. Recently, I met with officials from the Queensland Department of Main Roads who described the Ipswich Motorway as the No. 1 road-funding priority in South-East Queensland. It is interesting, because the previous government, in their ‘2020 Plan for Australia’s Transport Future’ on page 32, actually excluded part of the motorway under their great ‘Go for Growth’ slogan. They actually excluded part of the motorway forever from road funding. We saw 11½ years of denial on the Ipswich Motorway. The Ipswich Motorway is often described by those who live in Ipswich and rural areas outside it as the Ipswich car park because people get stuck in the traffic and cannot move. It is a four-lane national highway and it has been a national highway since 1974. Instead of doing it up like the M1 between Brisbane and the Gold Coast was done up, the Howard coalition government fudged it and flopped around for ages on the Ipswich Motorway. They should have done it, as they were urged to do by all the councils in the local area, by the Liberal Lord Mayor of Brisbane, Campbell Newman, by the state
coalition opposition—I should call them the LNP now—and by the Queensland Labor government. It could have easily been done in four sections and we could be driving along the fully upgraded Ipswich Motorway right now.

It has taken the Rudd Labor government to fix the Ipswich Motorway, and that is what we are doing. The Rudd Labor government is investing $2.2 billion to upgrade the busiest sections of the Ipswich Motorway: $255 million is being put towards the Ipswich Motorway-Logan Motorway interchange, which will be completed by 2009; $700 million is going towards the Wacol to Darra section, which will be completed by 2010; a further $100 million has been set aside for the Wacol to Darra section stage 2; and in excess of $1 billion has been pledged to upgrade the most critical section, the Dinmore to Goodna section, which we committed to during the election campaign.

Yesterday I, along with the member for Oxley, the state members in the local area and the Mayor of Ipswich, Paul Pisasale, had the pleasure to be present when we pressed the go button for the Ipswich Motorway upgrade. The Premier of Queensland, Anna Bligh, was there with the Queensland Minister for Main Roads and Local Government, Warren Pitt, at a very important announcement which ended years of uncertainty in respect of the Dinmore to Goodna section of the Ipswich Motorway. The minister and the Premier announced the project team which will undertake this major upgrade which will benefit my electorate so marvellously in the future. The project team is known as the Origin Alliance and it includes Abigroup Ltd, Fulton Hogan, Seymour Whyte Constructions, SMEC Australia and Parsons Brinckerhoff Australia. They are all partners in this huge construction: eight kilometres of road, 17 bridges demolished and 31 new bridges built. The Ipswich Motorway upgrade between Dinmore and Goodna will play a key role in the strategy of the federal government and the Queensland government strategy to build South-East Queensland into the fastest-growing and strongest-performing economic base in the country.

Yesterday’s announcement ended forever the uncertainty about the project and the blame game is over. The people of Ipswich are sick and tired of being used as a political football when it comes to road funding. This project will offer relief from congestion for the 70,000 residents who use the motorway every day and the up to 90,000 to 100,000 people who use it at the busiest times of the day.

In addition to the motorway upgrade, cycling and pedestrian facilities will be provided, which will ease traffic congestion and improve safety. It means that the present four lanes will be upgraded to a minimum of six lanes. The area near the Redbank Plaza and the site office will have up to 12 lanes of traffic. The current Ipswich four-lane motorway will become a service road, there will be six lanes adjacent to that and another two-lane service road will be constructed to the south.

This is in contrast to the inactivity we saw on the part of the Howard government. In April 1999, the Howard government said that we should do a study about an upgrade of the Ipswich Motorway. At that stage, the estimated cost of a total upgrade was $600 million. We are doing it now, but if we had done it when it should have been done, a great deal of time, money and effort would not have been wasted because of the previous government’s indolence. It should have been done when it was first mentioned. I get no complaints at my office about the Ipswich Motorway upgrade because the people can see it being done.
In the next four months the project team will undertake detailed design and preconstruction activities. We allocated $5 million in the budget for that purpose. There is no turning back—the Dinmore to Goodna section of the motorway will be upgraded. That section straddles two electorates: Oxley and Blair. I commend the member for Oxley for his many years of agitation, argument and advocacy with me and others about this section of the motorway.

The Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics states that, if we do not alleviate the congestion in South-East Queensland by investing in new infrastructure, urban congestion will grow and cost the local economy an estimated $3 billion. That is why projects like the Ipswich Motorway upgrade are so important. In fact, it is the biggest single road infrastructure project ever undertaken by the Commonwealth government. It is vital not only for the health and safety of local residents but also for the economic development of Ipswich.

About 400 people will be working at the site at Redbank Plains and up to 1,500 people will be working 24/7 on this project. A new network of service roads will be constructed down the side that will take up to 25 per cent of local traffic off the motorway. That means local residents will no longer have to use the motorway for short, local trips. That will ease congestion on the motorway and improve safety.

I have been advocating for a long time that the students at St Peter Claver College at Riverview, Dinmore should have a proper bridge across the motorway so they do not have to rat-run between the lights in the morning and the afternoon. I am pleased that the design will incorporate that change. I was recently thanked by the principal of the college for my advocacy on this issue. He recognised that I have been pushing this for a long time. Hundreds of kids in the local community go to that school. I am pleased that the federal government has allocated $2.4 million to the school and that the building project is up and running.

When the final design is complete and the community consultation is over, the construction will begin in February 2009. My constituents can contact me now if they wish to see the draft design. I have a copy of it in my electorate office. This project means that the people of Ipswich will have the road which they deserve and which they have needed for so long. It means that, after many years of failure, frustration and fluffing on this issue by the Howard coalition government, the people of Ipswich, in partnership with the Ipswich City Council, the Queensland government and the Rudd Labor government, will have their future provided for in terms of roads and construction.

This is a big-picture initiative. It is a vital link not only for my electorate but also for yours, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, and the electorate of Moreton and others. I commend the Rudd Labor government for the work it has done. I personally thank the Treasurer and the Prime Minister, who have driven on this road many times and who understand the issue. I commend this bill to the House. It is crucial for my electorate that this legislation be passed. I am very pleased to speak on it and to commend the bill to the House.

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (5.13 pm)—It gives me a great deal of pleasure to speak on the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008. This is good news, particularly for regional and rural Australia. It is good news that the Rudd Labor government is continuing a program that was established under the Howard coalition government. The expansion of Roads to Recovery from $300 million a year to $350 million a year is very well received. The fact that it
will be carried out to 2014 is again good news.

My electorate has received $20,152,614 from the Roads to Recovery program since its inception. In fact, Maitland City Council—which I share with the member for Hunter and now the member for Newcastle—has received $4,181,570, Port Stephens Council has received $4,134,408, Dungog Shire Council has received $3,216,187, Gloucester Shire Council has received $3,186,116 and Great Lakes Council has received $5,434,333. Each and every one of those councils has major road problems—has had problems in funding roads, has had cost shifting on roads from state governments to local government and has had an inability to fund those roads. That is why this funding program was critically important when it was conceived by the coalition government.

I am glad that the program is being extended, because road safety is critical. You improve safety on roads by improving the condition of roads. That being said, it is important that people do drive to the conditions of the roads upon which they are travelling. Many projects have been achieved under the program. Money has been spent on the Lakes Way by the Great Lakes Council; money has been spent on Bucketts Way by the Gloucester council; and, in Port Stephens, money has been spent on Seahams Road and others and infrastructure, such as roundabouts, have been established.

It should be noted—and this should not be forgotten—that it was the coalition that re-established the black spot road funding program that was abolished by the former Labor government. I was able to achieve some $10,768,569 from that program, which led to the upgrading of a lot of terrible, terrible intersections in my electorate—intersections where there had been deaths—and areas of roads where there had been severe accidents. It is amazing that simple things like improving road shoulders reduce the number of accidents and the number of lives that are lost as people drive off the roads into other areas.

There are some concerns that my community has expressed to me. Those concerns go to the fact that, in this House, on the last day of the last sitting, the minister tried to vilify me for putting forward a request on behalf of my community—the community which I am elected to represent—for $20 million worth of road funding, which would have had a major impact in my community. The minister stood up and thought that he would try to belittle me. I said at the time—and I have said subsequently to my community—that I am quite happy for the minister to attack me as long as, while he is attacking me, he is writing the cheque for the road funding in my electorate.

That is what I am elected to do. I am elected to make sure that I put the interests of my community first and foremost. I am their representative in this place, and one of the major issues that has been put forward to me on a consistent basis is road funding. That is why, when I was re-elected in 2001, I put forward a program to the coalition government for $20 million for the Bucketts Way upgrade. The state governments had wound back funding and the councils that share that road did not have sufficient resources to be able to do the work. That $20 million over a period of four years made a substantial difference to the people who travel that route, including those people who travel on it to go earn an income, who need to travel safely because they travel that route on a daily basis.

At the last election, in listening to my community, I put forward a program for passing lanes. The road has been upgraded and, naturally, people are now travelling faster on that road, so I put forward a fund-
ing proposal for passing lanes—but, obviously, the coalition did not win. But what the minister has failed to understand is that that is not a Bob Baldwin wish; that is actually what my community wants. I take what my community wants and bring it this House. So when I hear the minister talk about ‘infrastructure spend’ and the need for investment and the improved safety that comes with it, I ask him to listen to the voices of those communities along Bucketts Way, who are sick of losing loved ones in accidents, and install passing lanes. He can do this in conjunction with the state government, who have, by and large, reduced any funding commitment since we made the $20 million available—and I ask them to consider that.

Another important road in my electorate is Lakes Way. Lakes Way joins from Bulahdelah and comes around through the lakes through to Forster and it is a significant tourism road, and it provides an important economic benefit to that area and that region in my electorate. We have invested a large amount of money in that road, including through black spot funding, Roads to Recovery funding, and the $2 million that was committed and spent as part of the 2004 election campaign. There has been over $12 million spent on that road. That was one of the key drivers of the now-retired mayor, John Chadban, and he worked with me to make sure that we did what we could.

Another road that was put forward for planning and funding was a bypass road to link Fingal to the bay. It would have taken so much traffic out of the Nelson Bay area and would have allowed the expansion of tourist numbers that comes with holiday time to access other areas and not congest that small part of town. But, again, in this House the minister decided that he would attack me for putting the interests of my constituency first.

One of the success stories is Dungog council. Over the years I have worked with the former mayor Steve Lowe and, more recently, Mayor Glenn Wall in making sure that their needs were not overlooked. I was able to secure for them $6 million in road funding under AusLink’s strategic regional program. That achieved a massive amount. Dungog is one of those unusual shires that does not actually have a regional state funded road in its entirety. It has a lot of roads that service the Barrington Tops wilderness area that go through national parks, but they receive no funding to support those roads. It has a very low rating base and a large land mass. A typical problem, as you would be aware, Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, in your role as the representative of the people of Maranoa, is that it is hard to sustain road funding when you have a large land mass, lots of roads and a very small rating base. So we put $6 million into Dungog council. That program has taken a little bit longer to roll out than expected because they did not have the professional expertise to get through the design, planning and tendering as quickly as they would have liked. But that funding is going well and it is actually saving lives on the road.

Safety is critically important. That is why, under Roads to Recovery, the establishment of truck parking bays or rest areas is critically important. A good friend of mine, Mike Almond, who owns Mountain Bulk Haulage, is the former President of the Australian Trucking Association. Over the years, he has been one of the key drivers in improving safety for truck drivers on the roads, particularly in the area of rest so that drivers are not pushed beyond what they are truly capable of or what is lawful for them to do in conducting their passage. It is good to see that the government will be spending $70 million on improving road rest areas. But when they give with one hand, they slap you twice with
the other hand. It has become evident that the increase in fuel from 19.633c per litre to 21c a litre will raise around $80 million for the federal government, which is on top of the $89 million that will be raised through the 2007 heavy vehicle charges determination—another tax on the transport industry via the Rudd government. This will hit drivers twice and give back to them once. We are seeing from this government a great pattern of sticking it into people with taxes.

Today, during question time, the Leader of the Opposition produced a jar of strawberry jam and a tin of baked beans, which our pensioners quite often live on. The extra charges that the Rudd Labor government is inflicting on the trucking industry will carry through to these products. Our nation is carried on the back of our truck drivers. All the products in the supermarket shelves come via trucks—the trucks whose operators will pay this fee and the trucks whose operators will pay the increased fuel costs. If the wild fluctuations in the price of oil and diesel that occur downstream are not enough to drive up the cost of produce in the shops, then this additional tax by the Labor government will surely add to the bottom line.

When I think about road safety in the region, I am always reminded of my colleague the member for Hunter. One of the biggest road safety issues in our region has been the F3 link road. The F3 link road is so important to the member for Hunter that, from 1996 through to 2008, he has raised the F3 link road on 28 occasions in this House. He has raised it in speeches, he has raised it in questions and he has raised it in petitions. In fact, in this place, he tabled a petition from nearly 2,500 petitioners. I have the petition here, and it is important that I quote it. On 4 December 2006, on behalf of 2,148 citizens, the member for Hunter tabled a petition, which stated:

The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House the Howard Government’s failure to provide urgent funding for the construction of the F3 Link Road on the New England Highway between Seahampton and Branxton.

We the undersigned therefore request the House to call on the Howard Government to:

- Fast-track the construction of the F3 Link Road on the New England Highway between Seahampton and Branxton.
- Provide urgent funds to upgrade the New England Highway to a level appropriate given its ever increasing traffic volumes.

It gets even better, because the road is so important that people like Fred Brown, who is one of the more senior gentlemen in the Labor Party in the area, Toby Thomas and others formed the F3 Link or Sink Group. The F3 Link or Sink Group had campaigned long and hard for this roadwork to be done—but not quite as long as the member for Hunter. On 30 May 2006, in a speech to this House, he said:

The F3 link is a 16-kilometre stretch of road between the northern end of the F3 Freeway and the New England Highway just north of Branxton. It is critically needed in the Hunter. I have been fighting for the project for some 17 years. Maybe that makes me an ineffective first councillor and now member, but this is something critical to the region. It has the unanimous support of all the region’s mayors, and all the peak industry bodies nominate it as the No. 1 infrastructure project for the region ...

The member for Hunter has raised the issue of the F3 link road 28 times—and that is despite money being spent with the state government. The funding mix was changed to a point where it finally came down to 80 per cent federal and 20 per cent state under the AusLink proposal. Money has been spent on planning, testing, the EIS and acquisitions. The cost of that program has blown out. As the member for Hunter said, he has been
campaigning for 17 years, and now the cost has blown out.

Whenever the member for Hunter criticised me for not pushing for funding for the F3, I always maintained that I would prioritise the roads in my electorate. When the Pacific Highway upgrade through my electorate was committed to and underway, I would then push our government at the time for funding for a road outside my electorate. In 1996, we started work on the Pacific Highway with the Raymond Terrace bypass. There was also the roadworks between Bulahdelah and Coolongolook. Work between the areas of Raymond Terrace and Karuah were completed. The Karuah bypass was completed. Roads from Karuah to Tea Gardens and Coolongolook to Possum Brush were completed. The last piece—the area between Tea Gardens and Bulahdelah and the Bulahdelah bypass in my electorate—is now underway. I went to our government and said, ‘I think it is now time that I put my support behind the F3 link road.’ I convinced the then Howard government to commit $870 million in funding for the F3 link road, which was on top of the couple of hundred million dollars that had already been committed by the federal government.

And not a word was said by the member for Hunter. In weeks prior to that in the media he had been calling for funding. Why was there no mention of the funding for the F3 link road? Nothing was said to his constituents prior to the election. But the day after the election there was going to be no funding for the F3 link road—none at all; the costs had blown out and they were not going to fund it. In fact, the new minister has decided to really slap the people in the face by offering a million dollars to find an alternative route. So the hundreds of millions of dollars that have already been spent and committed will now be wasted as we delay further for an alternative route. This is the member who for 17 years campaigned for this road. But I do have to agree now, as he has turned his back on the people, with his quote of 30 May 2006: ‘Maybe that makes me an ineffective first councillor and now member.’ That has become true; he has become an ineffective member for the F3 link road.

The issue was so important for a long-time member of the Labor Party, Fred Brown, that, during the last election, the ‘link group’ put together their own radio ads advising people to vote Liberal if they wanted the F3 link road. I do not agree with Mr Brown’s party politics—that is painfully obvious. But, can I say, for a long-time member of the Labor Party to turn around and publicly endorse, through radio ads, people voting against the party that he has loved so much and worked for so long shows that he has been let down by his local member. On every one of those 28 occasions that the member for Hunter has come into this place and raised the F3 link road, he has had no genuine commitment. When he has had the opportunity to step up to the treasury bench, the member for Hunter has walked away, has squibbed it, has dived for cover. I do not think the members of his electorate, or the people in the Hunter, are going to forget the fact that he made so much of a song and dance about the F3 link road and has now walked away from it.

We also hear very little from other members in the Hunter. I know that the member for Charlton is only new to the House but, if memory serves me correctly, part of this road runs through his electorate. But there has not been a word from him. Is he listening to his community?

Mr Byrne—He’s already spoken on it.

Mr BALDWIN—But he has not talked about the F3 link road. He might have spoken on it but he has not committed to the
road funding. I would have thought that members opposite would be there supporting safety and moving the heavy traffic flow that goes up the New England Highway away from Maitland. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why at the council elections on the weekend—\( \text{(Time expired)} \)

Mr GRAY (Brand—Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia) (5.33 pm)—I rise to support the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008. This bill demonstrates the Rudd government’s commitment to road safety and local road infrastructure. It is a disappointing sign that those opposite have chosen to push road safety onto the back seat without a safety belt. This bill is about road safety. In my home state of Western Australia there were 236 road deaths in 2007. This was up from 201 in 2006 and 163 in 2005. In Western Australia in 2007 there were 15 deaths from crashes involving articulated trucks, up from 11 in 2006. Heavy rigid truck accidents accounted for 10 deaths in 2007 and nine in 2006. That is 25 deaths last year involving heavy vehicles—25 too many.

Let me explain what this means. If you do not support this bill you are voting for more road crashes, more deaths, more misery, more pain, more sadness and more injury. The Interstate Road Transport Charge Amendment Bill 2008, rejected in the other place, would have enabled the 2007 heavy vehicles charge determination to be written into law. Australians have had road user charges since 1995, with bipartisan support from successive governments and six different Labor and Nationals ministers. Laurie Brereton first introduced road user charges in 1995. At the National Trade and Investment Outlook Conference in December of that year, the then minister for transport stated that the road user charges scheme would be ‘an achievement in government-to-government cooperation and would keep Australia at the cutting edge of the global road transport industry.’ John Sharp, Mark Vaile, John Anderson and even the current member for Wide Bay supported these charges when the coalition were in government. In April last year, at an Australian Trucking Association conference in Cairns, the then minister Mark Vaile stated:

Whilst investing in transport infrastructure is critical to meeting our future freight task, it is also important that pricing signals are right in relation to accessing transport infrastructure.

He went on to say that there is:

… a need to update the data used in the current heavy vehicle charges determination and to update the charging system methodology.

That is what we are trying to do here today. Mark Vaile also said:

The trucking industry should recognise … that the Australian government has massively increased its investment in the nation’s transport infrastructure in recent years.

This will have a flow-on effect. As a result the cost recovery principle of heavy vehicle charging, better roads mean greater efficiency and higher charges.

How quickly have members opposite abandoned 13 years of bipartisan support? Members opposite, including the member for Wide Bay, have put $70 million worth of road safety and productivity measures at risk. They have put the lives of our truckies at risk. They have put the lives of passengers in cars and buses at risk. They have put whatever skerrick of integrity they had left at risk. The Australian government has long had a role in funding nationally significant transport infrastructure, and it is unacceptable that members opposite would jeopardise that for petty and opportunist political purposes.

Section 96 of the Australian Constitution allows the Australian government to allocate funding to any state or territory in line with any terms or conditions it considers appropriate. This section has been used to allocate...
federal funding to states and territories for the purpose of road construction and maintenance since the 1920s. Over the years, funding has been made available to states and territories as well as local governments in a number of different forms. This has occurred in tied and untied grants, which have included block grants, matching grants, and full funding with deep Australian government involvement.

The Australian government has delivered its road programs since the 1920s via specific road-funding legislation, with each act generally lasting between three and five years. Prior to the mid-1980s, Australian government road funding legislation generally referred to a total funding level to be made available over the period of a particular road act. This effectively provided for a multi-year road program. Following the introduction of the Australian land transport act of 1985 and subsequent legislation, Australian government road funding has tended to be determined largely on an annual basis.

In November of 1997, the Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and Microeconomic Reform concluded an inquiry into federal road funding. It did that at the request of the former government, the Howard government. The committee had been asked to review the Commonwealth’s role in road funding, to assess the adequacy and the extent of the national highway—the major connecting route between our capital cities and major regional centres—and to assess the level of funding required to adequately fulfil the Commonwealth’s role. The committee was also asked to:

- Assess the scope to supplement Government funding through innovative arrangements for private sector involvement in the provision and maintenance of roads infrastructure and the scope for pricing of road services to reflect full resource costs.
- That was the request that the Howard government made of that inquiry—to reflect full resource costs. The resulting report was called Planning not patching: an inquiry into federal road funding. The report found that:
  
  It is essential that the Commonwealth take a leadership role in developing and publishing a national strategic plan for Australia’s transport network.

  It went on to say that:
  
  The Commonwealth role in road funding should focus on achieving national objectives. The committee has identified the need for the Commonwealth to continue to be involved in developing a national road system which is defined in this report as comprising the national highway system and roads of national importance.

In developing the plan, the report recommended that all three levels of government and the community need to participate to ensure success. As the inquiry revealed, Australia’s road system needs to be strategically planned.

The need for an integrated, strategic national transport plan was also raised in several other key reports, including 1998’s Tracking Australia, 1999’s Revitalising rail, and 2000’s Time running out. The reports all called for the Australian government to take a lead role in facilitating a national, coordinated approach to transport infrastructure planning and investment. For example, the first recommendation of the Tracking Australia report was:

... that the Commonwealth assume the leadership role and consult widely in developing an integrated national transport strategic plan ...

These reports argued that a national approach would improve investment decisions and transport overall.

In May 2002, the Australian government announced its plan to create a new national land transport policy to be known as AusLink. Under AusLink, separate Australian
government funding for road and rail programs would be pooled into a single flexible program. In November of that year, the Australian government released a green paper, *AusLink: towards the national land transport plan*. It was widely distributed and discussed, and it generated over 500 written submissions. The Australian government followed up with a white paper, *AusLink: building our national transport future*, in June 2004. I am sure members opposite remember that document. It culminated in the proclamation of the AusLink (National Land Transport) Act 2005 on 28 July 2005. AusLink was the first national land transport plan since Federation, and it was a good plan. The objective of the act was and still is:

... to assist national and regional economic and social development by the provision of Commonwealth funding aimed at improving the performance of land transport infrastructure.

The 2005 act provided for a single funding regime within a five-year rolling plan for the nation’s land transport network. It targeted Australian government funding to national priorities that deliver high levels of national benefit. All of that is good. I am not one to belittle the efforts of those opposite. This was good legislation, put together by serious people.

Now let us look at the history of heavy vehicle charges. Integral to Australia’s land transport network are the heavy vehicle charges introduced in the mid-1990s. The first heavy vehicle duty charges determination was implemented across Australia between July 1995 and October 1996. It sought to recover heavy vehicles’ share of road construction and maintenance costs. In effect, heavy vehicle charges cover the cost of fixing the damage that heavy vehicles do to our roads through two components: a basic fuel based charge, now referred to as a road user charge, and an annual registration charge.

In 2007 the Productivity Commission conducted an inquiry into road and rail freight infrastructure pricing. The report was released on 13 April 2007, and it confirmed that it was unlikely that heavy vehicle charges were sufficient to cover heavy vehicles’ share of road costs. The commission determined that this under-recovery was due to a significant and disproportionate increase in Commonwealth, state and territory road expenditure—around 33 per cent—since the last time the road user charges were set. It also said that there had been a significant increase in the number of B-doubles, which currently do not pay their way. It also said that there had been an erosion of the road user charge, which remained unchanged for the eight-year duration of the second determination. The former government simply refused to address the issue. In addition to the under-recovery, the Productivity Commission found that the charges applied to some classes of heavy vehicle were set in order to subsidise the costs of other—mainly larger, heavier—vehicles. What happened to the importance of pricing signals being sent and received?

In order to address the funding deficiency, in April 2007 the Council of Australian Governments, COAG, led by the former Prime Minister, John Howard, asked that a new road user charge determination be developed. This determination was to ensure that heavy vehicle charges deliver and continue to deliver full recovery of heavy vehicles’ share of road construction and maintenance costs, in aggregate, as well as remove the cross-subsidisation across heavy vehicle classes.

The recommended charges would address under-recovery, create a more even playing field between road and rail and stop smaller trucks from paying too much while the largest trucks pay too little. While the heavy vehicle industry raise some concerns about particular aspects of the methodology used to
calculate the costs to be recovered from heavy vehicle operators, they are on record as supporting the principle that heavy vehicles should pay their way.

COAG’s request had bipartisan support. In a speech given in June 2007, entitled ‘The coalition government’s transport reform agenda’, the then federal Minister for Transport and Regional Development and Leader of the Nationals said:

The National Transport Commission will develop a new heavy vehicle charges determination to be implemented from 1 July 2008. The new determination will aim to recover the heavy vehicles’ allocated infrastructure costs in total and will also aim to remove cross-subsidisation across heavy vehicle classes.

Those are the words of the Leader of the National Party.

In July of last year, the NTC released a draft regulatory impact statement. This outlined a range of options for heavy vehicle charges. A comprehensive public consultation on the draft regulatory impact statement then followed. Industry and government stakeholders and other interested parties were invited to make written submissions and participate in public focus group sessions, held all over the country. Twenty-two written submissions were received, and focus groups were held in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth, Canberra and Darwin. Michael Deegan, the then chairman of the National Transport Commission, said in the final statement’s foreword:

Australia must maintain a world-class road and rail transport network to service the growing freight task, to reduce road trauma, and to ensure Australian businesses can compete cost-effectively in the global marketplace. The trucking industry has long supported the principle of paying its way. The NTC’s recommendations will ensure that this happens, and continues to do so between determinations.

This is a report commissioned by, for and to the former federal government, endorsed by the Leader of the National Party and then minister for roads. That report went on to say:

The Productivity Commission’s Road and Rail Infrastructure Pricing Inquiry, and the direction outlined by heads of government on 13 April 2007, clearly set out an agenda for pricing reform to unlock more productivity from the road network.

The report also said:

… the 2007 Heavy Vehicle Charges Determination … will be the ‘building block’ for pricing reform. It will sustain the revenue base needed for governments to invest in better and safer roads, including the infrastructure upgrades needed for improved heavy vehicle access.

All states and the Northern Territory have now implemented their new heavy vehicle registration charges. The ACT has yet to implement the new charges, as the Road Transport Charges (Australian Capital Territory) Repeal Bill was rejected in the other place by those opposite. Only at the federal level have these new charges not been implemented. The other place blocked bills to give effect to new heavy vehicle registration charges for federal interstate registration scheme vehicles and heavy vehicles registered in the ACT in March 2008. The other place also disallowed a legislative instrument declaring a new rate of the heavy vehicle road user charge from 1 January 2009. It is disappointing to see the safety of Australian road users hindered by politics.

The purpose of this amendment bill that we are debating today is threefold. The first is to ensure funding of all projects in the Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity program from 1 January 2009. The second is to allow for the continuation of the Roads to Recovery program beyond 30 June 2009. Everyone loves the Roads to Recovery program. It is a good program. It works well.
Local governments like it. And we in this place can be proud of the process that built the Roads to Recovery program. The third purpose is to allow better management of the Roads to Recovery funding list, which sets out all funding recipients in Australia and the amount that they receive, and which is currently not able to be amended except in very limited circumstances.

This bill amends the definition of a ‘road’ to include heavy vehicle facilities such as rest stops, parking bays and decoupling facilities. We have heard that many times in this debate. This will enable the government to provide funding for these facilities under our $70 million Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity package. According to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government’s monthly road deaths series reports, more than 200 people are killed in road crashes involving heavy trucks every year. They represent 15 to 20 per cent of all road deaths. I am sure members remember the tragic crash at Kerang in Victoria which caused the deaths of 11 people when a truck smashed into a passenger train. Not all accidents receive such press coverage, but all accidents result in some degree of misery and pain for families.

Most of the people killed in crashes involving an articulated truck are occupants of the other vehicle—64 per cent. One in five people killed are truck occupants—mostly the drivers. Since 1989, single vehicle crashes have accounted for around 15 per cent of deaths in articulated truck crashes. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare’s statistics show that more than 800 serious injuries occur in road crashes involving heavy trucks or buses each year. This represents three per cent of all road crash serious injuries. Over the last decade, from 1998 to 2007, deaths from crashes involving articulated trucks decreased by four per cent, despite a 25 per cent increase in vehicle kilometres travelled by articulated trucks. In the same period, the number of all road crash deaths decreased by eight per cent, while total vehicle kilometres travelled grew by 17 per cent.

The minister has been consulting extensively with the states and territories and with stakeholders, such as the Australian Trucking Association, the Australian Livestock Transport Association, the Australian Transport Workers Union and NatRoad, to identify the most urgently needed works. The facilities that will be delivered under the $70 million Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity package will improve road safety and provide a better deal for truckies. It has been said before in this place: everything in Australia is delivered on the back of a truck. Our prosperity depends upon our trucks and our truckies. Governments need to ensure that international best practice is implemented to foster this productivity.

Local governments are key stakeholders in our national transport network. The Australian government first provided tied funding to local governments in 1974-75. This continued until 1990-91. Since 1991-92, funding to local governments for local roads has been untied and provided as a component of the Australian government’s financial assistance grants. The Roads to Recovery program began on 1 January 2001 and is additional to the untied financial assistance grants funding provided to councils. The Roads to Recovery program provides Australian government funding direct to local governments for both rural and urban roads in all parts of Australia. It is a good program, and local government likes it. It works. The program was implemented by the former government because much local road infrastructure in Australia was about to reach the end of its useful life and replacement was beyond the capacity of councils. It is a good program.
and it should be supported. This legislation creates measures that will ensure that good programs continue, road safety is enhanced and, most importantly, a vital principle of price signals being sent to truck users, truck owners and transport infrastructure operators is adhered to. The term 'parliamentary opposition' does not automatically imply obstructionism. It is disappointing that members opposite cannot differentiate between these two terms. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr RAMSEY (Grey) (5.53 pm)—There are three objectives in the amendments proposed in the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008. The first deals with the extension of the Roads to Recovery program to 2014, and I give my support. The second, confirming the arrangements under which these funds are supplied to the unincorporated council areas through the existing state authorities, I also support. My electorate of Grey covers almost all of the unincorporated areas of South Australia. The Roads to Recovery program was one of the great dividends provided by the previous government as a result of paying off the $98 billion of debt left by the Keating Labor government. When we no longer had to pay $8 billion a year in interest, the government had the funds to begin the nation-building programs. The Roads to Recovery project will by July have delivered $10.79 million to the outback areas of South Australia. The improvements to the Strzelecki Track, which will eventually link up, as the member for Maranoa said earlier, with the bitumen road coming down to Innamincka from Queensland, the Maree-Lyndhurst road and the Wilpena-Blinman road will help unlock tourism and mining potential in this vast area. Much more is needed.

Australia is becoming increasingly reliant on the mining surge. In South Australia, the boom has been a little slower to occur than in the west and in Queensland, but we are getting there. The royalties and the tax receipts from Roxby Downs are rolling in and there are more to come. Adding to the established industries in uranium, iron ore and gas are a large group of new prospects in mineral sands, base metals and more iron and uranium. Almost all of this expansion will happen in rural and outback areas. If the riches are to come from these areas, it is only right that a significant part of that resource should be returned to the regions from where it came. The Roads to Recovery program is just one method of achieving this. This investment will be needed to stimulate the expansion of primary industries that will carry Australia into the next generation. For much of the last 200 years, Australia’s vast inland has been largely neglected, seen as inhospitable desert, somewhere for a few hardy pastoralists to try to eke out a living. We are only just beginning to explore the vast wealth which lies beyond the green fringe of the continent. Australians and the rest of the world are beginning to flock to the middle of the nation to explore its natural beauty and history. The tourism surge will only get bigger. Unfortunately, the tourists and those who seek to exploit their wealth are bouncing around on an inland road network which often looks more like a dry creek bed than a road. Gutters, rocks, loose stones which act as ball bearings, potholes which threaten to swallow vehicles, and unbelievable corrugations and rocky reefs which threaten to launch cars into a low orbit are a fact of life. They are roads which need the kiss of life from a Roads to Recovery program.

During the winter recess I spent some time driving around my electorate. I covered around 18,000 kilometres in that time and travelled several of these tracks. Conditions were generally poor and, in many cases, dangerous. Much of the responsibility for these roads lies with the state government, which has actually reduced its commitment
to maintenance. In the first budget of the Rann Labor government, it axed two road construction gangs in the north of the state. We are now paying the costs.

Some of these roads stand out as worthy of far greater attention from both federal and state governments. The bitumen strip on the Lyndhurst to Maree road is currently being extended under the last rounds of Roads to Recovery. This route should be extended to William Creek, then across to Coober Pedy, which would open up a new tourist route for the grey nomads and make conditions safer for local road users. The Oodnadatta Track north of William Creek is in a dangerous condition and desperately needs resheeting. The Wirrulla to Kingoonya road is a goat track with increasing traffic loads. I have been informed there is a pothole so bad that an iron dropper has been put in the middle of it to force motorists to drive around the hole. This is an absolute disgrace. Much of this track is as much as a metre below the surrounding land surface. You can imagine what that is like after a rain. Locals tell me they expect a rollover a week, and many a tourist has left their suspension in a crater somewhere between Wirrulla and Skull Tanks—which is something of a landmark in that part of the world.

This road, if upgraded, would impart major economic benefits to a number of stakeholders. It would cut 300 kilometres off the heavy transport route moving mining equipment from Western Australia to South Australia’s far north, including operations such as Oz Minerals’s Prominent Hill copper mine, due to start exporting in February, and the Western Plains Resources iron ore prospects in the regions. It would connect the Eyre Peninsula with an economical route to Roxby Downs for miners living in the beautiful coastal towns, helping these communities to grow and flourish by reducing the pressure on expansion in Adelaide, which includes urban encroachment on productive rural land and extra infrastructure requirements. Decentralisation holds many benefits for all of Australia.

An all-weather surface would, like the improvements to the Maree-Coober Pedy road, open up a new tourist route, cutting 300 kilometres off the journey of those linking Western Australia to the north-south corridor of the Stuart Highway. These are nation-building projects. If Australia is to fully utilise the riches that have been bestowed upon us, we need vision and the commitment of both state and federal governments to achieve this. I call on the state government to make a commitment to building regional infrastructure. With just one country based member of parliament, its ignorance of the needs and opportunities of most of our state is appalling.

I call on the federal government to support regional infrastructure through the Roads to Recovery program; to commit to returning to the regions more of the massive surge in tax receipts generated by the resources boom; to make sure the new Infrastructure Australia fund is used not just to prop up Labor votes in the cities but to actually build Australia’s capacity; and to address the opening up of the nation away from the coastal fringe. I call on the federal government to show the kind of vision the previous government showed in completing the north-south rail connection to Darwin.

Returning to the specifics of the amendments, the third part of these changes concerns the long-haul transport industry in Australia—and that industry is in serious trouble. The freight task in this nation is set to double in the next 10 to 15 years but, rather than increasing capacity to meet that demand, the industry is in decline. Rising costs—some influenced by government—an ageing workforce, ever-increasing compliance costs,
stringent and ever-increasing OH&S requirements and tightening environmental targets all contribute to a burden which has become too much for many small to medium sized operators in the field.

The industry has no choice but to pass on these costs, but at the moment it seems we have a form of market failure as desperate operators accept less than the real operating costs just so they can stay in business. Truck owners, with payments to be made on very expensive prime movers and trailers, are trying to pass on their cost increases. But they are being told: ‘Thanks, but no thanks. We’ll find someone else’—and there is always someone who is desperate enough to make a payment that they will take the job. It is only a matter of time before they either give in—to achieve cash flow—or go out of business. Ultimately the market will respond, but it will not come before we have a freight crisis where we see large parts of the Australian economy stranded. The government talk about the bottlenecks in our economy, but I do not believe they understand just how close to collapse the transport industry is—nor do they even begin to understand just how dependent on the transport industry Australia is.

During the first six months of this year there have been 3,600 truck repossessions in Australia. That has slowed a little in the last couple of months because finance companies are finding they have no market for the repossessed trucks, thus encouraging these operators to keep going and being vulnerable to accepting any price contract to keep the wheels turning. The old slogan ‘Truckies carry the country’ is truer today than it has ever been.

Australia is often said to suffer from the ‘tyranny of distance’, so it stands to reason that we should encourage, not penalise, the sectors which allow us to operate against that disadvantage. For instance, it is often said that Australia has low fuel taxation in comparison with the rest of the world. That may be true in the broader sense but, if we have a look at a selection of countries around the globe who also share our ‘tyranny of distance’, the conclusions can be quite different. The average rate of tax on diesel in the United States of America is around 13c a litre. In Brazil it is about lc. In Canada it is 18.5c, which is near the Australian rate of 20c a litre. There are no systematic moves in these individual nations to tax to their own disadvantage relative to the rest of the world. The countries that tax at higher rates, and many do, are by and large those who do not have huge distances to contend with. It is all very well for them to tax at a higher rate for all kinds of social engineering reasons, but it simply does not make sense in Australia to punish this sector. We are penalising our productive capacity.

We have just heard the member for Brand say that the previous government did not take the chance to put up road user charges. That is darn right, and I think we should be proud of that decision. We decided not to put extra costs on road transport users because we knew the implications of those extra costs. It would have meant transport operators closing up and having to pass on costs to the rest of industry. In the end, it means jobs.

How does all this reflect on these amendments? The amendment which will change the definition of a ‘road’ so that Auslink funds can be spent on the development of rest areas is in itself quite acceptable. It is the big stick approach that the government takes to its implementation which is lamentable. The government has threatened that, if the Senate continues to block the fuel tax and registration fee rises, it will not fund the establishment of the new rest stops. The necessity for the new rest stops has been brought about by the advent of the new heavy driver
fatigue laws—more government-led compliance costs. The new regulations will lead to a whole raft of extra costs to the industry—not just new taxes but higher staffing rates, longer down times and a lack of qualified drivers. We all want safe roads but it appears that the government, having taxed this industry to within an inch of its life, is not prepared to wear any of the costs of implementation.

A couple of weeks ago at a function in my electorate, I was speaking to a fair sized regional freight operator. He uses about 100 trailers. He said that he was really only operating as a community service at this stage and that he had never worked harder in his life for less return. He said that, at every turn, government was making it more difficult to operate—never helping. He was considering winding back his operation. He said, ‘When we get a good agricultural season again, the industry won’t be able to meet the freight challenge because we’re losing too much capacity.’ That is the problem—all stick and no carrot. How about, instead of continually making it harder to move freight around the country, the government invests in good operators and partners them and Australian industry in raising our productive capacity? It would be logical to sponsor schemes that would deliver advantages to accredited operators and their drivers—so that we encourage those who do not overload, or use badly trained staff, or run sub-standard equipment—and give the industry encouragement to raise standards and efficiency and not penalise them. Instead, what do we get? We get new compliance costs and no help in meeting the challenge—just the government getting deeper into our pockets with higher registration and fuel taxes.

If the productive sectors of our economy are to survive, all these costs must eventually be passed on to the consumer; otherwise, in the end, there will be no way of moving the freight. The consumer, in the case of exporters, is ‘the exporter’; you cannot pass on these costs to an international market. These new taxes—which up to now, thankfully, the Senate has been able to defer—if implemented will increase the cost of doing business in rural and regional Australia. Every small community will become just that bit more unviable. At a time when our traditional industries in rural and regional Australia are struggling to survive, this out-of-touch government is insisting on new taxes to meet the costs of implementing new government regulation. New driver fatigue rest stops are a good idea, and funding them out of the AusLink package is fine, but making them conditional on new taxes at a time when the freight industry is in decline will impede our productive capacity. It is blackmail and it should be exposed as such.

**Ms CAMPBELL** (Bass) (6.07 pm)—As I stand before you here today, the road toll in my home state of Tasmania stands at 31—31 deaths, 31 shattered families. Also as I stand before you, the Rudd government is the only Commonwealth government in recent memory with a real commitment to doing what it can to reduce that carnage. The Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, Mr Albanese, has introduced the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008, and I am proud today to add my voice in support of this nation-building legislation. It is legislation which allows local councils to plan with confidence how they intend to improve their road networks. Local government is responsible for more than three-quarters of the country’s roads, and it is vital that it be funded adequately to provide for the communities that it services. These communities make up the backbone of our great nation. To survive and prosper they must be supported through adequate and responsive infrastructure. They must be con-
connected through sustainable and maintained road and rail services. The Rudd government is acting now for the long-term future of our economy and our local communities.

This legislation acknowledges the integral role which infrastructure plays in the growth and wellbeing of communities across Australia. Over the next five years, $1.75 billion will be invested through local councils to fix local transport issues. In Bass that translates to more than $1.5 million. Launceston City Council will receive more than $504,000, Dorset Council will receive more than $491,000, George Town Council will receive almost $367,000 and Flinders Island will receive more than $162,600. This money will be spent on funding urgent safety upgrades.

Often when we think of black spot funding we think of highways and rural roads; however, there are urban areas which have proven to be just as dangerous. That is why I, along with the infrastructure minister, was pleased to announce recently funding for a number of black spots in urban areas of Launceston. There was $200,000 to remove median parking along Invermay Road from Forster Street to Lindsay Street in Invermay, $80,000 to improve the median along Penquite Road from Hoblers Bridge Road to Amy Road in Newstead, $35,000 to improve the median along George Town Road from Newnham Drive to Parklands Parade at Newnham and $30,000 to build a right turn lane and splitter island at the intersection of Vermont Road and Clare Street in Mowbray. So, while those opposite continue to squabble among themselves and present nothing in terms of long-term leadership, the Rudd government is working in partnership with local councils and local communities to improve infrastructure and safety. As a government not only have we spoken of nation building but we are acting. The previous government failed to do either.

Over five years we will increase by $50 million a year the Roads to Recovery program spending. I am proud to be part of a government which is set to embark on the single largest nation-building program in our proud Commonwealth's history—$76 billion focused on our most critical infrastructure. Our roads, rail, ports, communications and the like will benefit from the Rudd government's Infrastructure Investment Program. This is about working with local communities and councils in an unprecedented approach to secure our nation's future in a way those opposite failed to do, despite 12 years of unmatched economic prosperity.

The annual economic cost of road accidents in loss of life, injury and damage to public and private infrastructure is estimated at $18 billion and rising—but it is much more than that. Untold pain and suffering are inflicted by road accidents. Not for a second is anyone on this side of the House suggesting that simply through responsible spending on infrastructure we can stop all road deaths. What we are suggesting, however, is that communities across the country, across electorates such as my electorate of Bass in Northern Tasmania, are entitled to safe roads. They are entitled to have confidence in the fact that their national government is listening and acting, that it is funding targeted responses to local safety issues.

Those opposite took a hands-off approach to infrastructure, an approach, as Minister Albanese suggested, which spoke of an attitude which simply said the market will look after it by itself. Well, the market did not and nor, quite clearly, did those opposite. They squandered the proceeds of the mining boom and sat back and watched helplessly as inflation rose—and interest rates along with it. The Rudd government, on the other hand, is committed to an economically responsible program which secures our future prosperity. We are implementing a budget strategy...
which is putting downward pressure on interest rates and inflation while at the same time setting aside funds for long-term investment opportunities. As I said at the outset, the road toll in my home state of Tasmania stands at 31. One thousand, six hundred and sixteen people perished on our nation’s roads last year, 47 of those in Tasmania.

The need for a greater focus on infrastructure goes beyond road funding, and those opposite need to understand the importance of adequate rail and port infrastructure. The neglect suffered under the previous government has consequences at a national level, at a local level and everywhere in between. Industry and productivity are held back because of poor infrastructure creating bottlenecks at major ports all around the country. There are bottlenecks too in towns and cities all over Australia, as parents and carers attempt to drop children at school of a morning and collect them in the afternoon.

We face massive transport challenges, from congestion to carbon emissions. As a country and as a government we need to look to areas such as rail to ease the pressure on our roads. All this requires commitment and vision, and the Rudd government has demonstrated both, as we embark on a $76 billion nation-building program. Yet again, it needs to be pointed out that this ambitious and necessary investment in infrastructure is being jeopardised by the actions of those opposite. Their first act in the Senate was to punch a $550 million hole in the budget surplus. Those opposite appear to have not heard the Australian people at the last election. They appear unable to accept the Rudd government’s right to govern. So, as we embark on this nation-building program, in the context of a fiscally responsible budget, we are being hampered as those opposite play for popularity and headlines.

I would like to echo the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, who, quite rightly, pointed out that each and every time those opposite vote no in the Senate they are really saying no to a whole range of things. Chief among them are solutions to traffic congestions and funds for public transport. They are saying no to investment in critical infrastructure. We know they resisted such investment for almost 12 years, so it should come as no surprise that they should continue to resist.

The legacy which was left to the incoming government was one of disgrace. However, we are committed to rectifying it. That, however, is only possible through a long-term infrastructure investment plan and a commitment to finding solutions because, as I said, this affects everyone, from the parent or carer trying to get their children to school on time to our largest companies struggling to import and export. I commend this bill to the House, proud that it indeed forms part of the Rudd government’s policy which builds and prepares Australia for the challenges of the 21st century and works with local councils to achieve safe and reliable infrastructure.

Dr STONE (Murray) (6.16 pm)—I rise to also speak to the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008. Nothing is more important in Australia, given our extraordinarily large continent and our tyranny of distance, than ensuring we have an efficient transport system. It is ironic that the legislation is entitled in part ‘National Land Transport’, because looking at the continent you would think that it indeed forms part of the Rudd government’s policy which builds and prepares Australia for the challenges of the 21st century and works with local councils to achieve safe and reliable infrastructure.
fracture, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government that will soon be released.

My electorate of Murray is in fact the transport hub of Victoria. It currently serves what we call the food bowl of the Murray-Darling Basin. It has extraordinary production in the form of dairy and fruit. All of that product is shifted from central Victoria or inland Victoria to the ports for export or to local manufacturers and then that finished product goes right around Australia. If we do not have extensive and efficient hubs of transport, such as rail systems and road systems, and a dispersal of product that is efficient, then we cannot continue to be acknowledged as having world’s best practice when it comes to the most cost-efficient food and fibre production.

I am very concerned about one of the key initiatives that occurred under the coalition government: the duplication and upgrading of the Goulburn Valley Highway, which was federally funded in 1996. That was at a time when we had, if you like, a strict division of labour between the states and the federal government in highway funding. The Goulburn Valley Highway comes off the Hume Highway and goes via Tocumwal to become part of the Newell Highway. Under the coalition government this highway was made virtually a dual freeway from the off-take at Hume, near Seymour, right through to Shepparton. But, sadly, there were still two major tasks to go—one was bypassing Nagambie, the other bypassing the city of Shepparton itself. Nagambie is only a small town but has an enormous amount of transport going right through the middle of that town—B-doubles, smaller freight vehicles and significant domestic transport. Those trucks and cars have to slow down to 40 kilometres an hour at school times and then to 50 kilometres an hour, causing major problems such as noise, carbon emissions and safety. The Goulburn Valley Highway goes down to a single lane at that point. It is also about an hour-and-a-half’s drive from Melbourne. That means people are already tired from their long trip. Deaths occur when the road goes from a double-lane freeway down to a single lane just before Nagambie. I am sad to say that deaths are occurring there regularly because people are not concentrating and they think they are still on a dual freeway. Then you go through Nagambie, having slowed down to 40 kilometres an hour, with numerous traffic lights and so on, and back on to a section of freeway through to what is called the Arcadia section—and, gloriously, that was opened just a few months ago.

I was sad not to have been invited to the opening, since it was 100 per cent federally funded. The opening was conducted by VicRoads, the Victorian state road authority. I would have thought it polite to have invited the local federal members, being me, the member for McEwen and indeed the member for Indi, but that did not occur. The good news is that at least the local community understood that it was the coalition Commonwealth government which had funded all of that work to bring the freeway right up to the outskirts of Shepparton.

You can imagine that coming up to last year’s federal election the northern Victorian communities were most concerned to see that the bypassing of Nagambie and Shepparton were top of mind for both the coalition and what was then the opposition, now the Rudd government. The opposition put on the table a commitment that they would in fact fund the Nagambie bypass to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars, as did the coalition. Of course, being fairly simple folk, we then assumed, having that commitment in writing, announced by the shadow minister of the day, that when the Rudd Labor government won office there
would be—in this last budget—an announcement or a commitment in writing to that funding for the Nagambie bypass. It was a shock when only $5 million in fact appeared in the budget, not the $350 million or so needed. When investigated, the feedback from the government was: ‘We said we’d fund it, but we didn’t say when’ and basically, ‘Watch this space.’ It was a terrible shock because VicRoads, which is the managing contractor for all federally funded roads in the state, was ready to march on with its contractors to the next section. The Arcadia section had been completed; it would have been more efficient to go on immediately and do that Nagambie bypass work. The planning had been completed; it was all ready to go. But, no, we discovered that in the budget there was only $5 million.

We do hope that, in light of the extraordinary transport use of the Goulburn Valley Highway—its significance for food and fibre transport—and the deaths that are occurring in those unfinished sections, the Commonwealth government in its national transport planning will look kindly at future funding that includes completing the Goulburn Valley Highway. It is extremely important, under our national land transport task, that we understand that in rural and regional Australia some local government bodies are actually returning bitumen to gravel because they cannot afford to do essential road making. As I have often said in this place, we have tomato growers who cannot get their product to factories in time to be processed because there has been a light sprinkling of rain and the dirt roads bog their B-doubles. That is extraordinary in the 21st century in a developed nation like ours.

I strongly commend to the government the transport task of doing a job that is efficient and effective for the whole of the nation. The coalition understood the significance. We understood the importance of—for the first time in Australia—decent funding to make sure the transport effort in this country was more efficient and to make sure that our domestic and export activity was not impeded by poor transport. We also know that, with the greenhouse challenges, better transport will mean fewer emissions.

So I ask that this government, in addition to the other things I have been saying, looks a little harder at completing the Goulburn Valley Highway. I support the other speakers from the coalition in saying that there are many unfinished tasks. I request that this government goes and looks at what we were doing. It could not do better than to continue the job we set out to do.

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (6.25 pm)—I rise to speak on the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008. The bill is intended to make technical amendments to the AusLink (National Land Transport) Act 2005. The changes seek to achieve a number of objectives. The first change, as you would know, Mr Deputy Speaker, extends the successful Roads to Recovery program for another five years until 30 June 2014. Roads to Recovery was one element of the former coalition government’s AusLink land transport funding program. It delivered road funding directly to local communities that were in need of assistance to fund transport infrastructure. The success of the Roads to Recovery program was achieved by bypassing the states and providing Commonwealth funding directly to local councils. Local government authorities were then in a position to nominate projects within their own communities based on local needs. The Australian Local Government Association has acknowledged the Roads to Recovery program as being an outstanding example of a partnership between national and local government to provide direct funding to local communities.
I looked forward to the opportunity to speak on this bill today because in the Roads to Recovery program we saw a genuine operation where tiers of government, particularly local and federal tiers of government, were working together. There is one tier of government that I believe is totally undervalued in this country, and that is the tier of local government. The way forward with local government is not just to provide some form of superficial recognition of its role but, more significantly, to look genuinely at the role of local government within our system of federalism and at the way in which real responsibilities and real revenue accountability can be attached to local government.

What we are seeing at the moment is a debate about federalism that focuses on federal and state government. We hear about the blame game and all these other issues that the government has raised in a bid to disperse accountability rather than actually assign accountability. But all the discussion of federalism tends to focus on these top two tiers of government: state and federal. The discussion about the transfer of responsibilities has not been about getting service delivery closer to where services are actually used and relied upon, at the local level; it has been all about trying to take it further up the chain. We talk about schools being transferred to federal responsibility; we talk about hospitals being transferred to federal responsibility; we talk about all of these critical social and public services being taken further up the chain, further away from the people who actually use them.

I am currently not filled with confidence in the ability of the government in my home state of New South Wales to deliver these services for my constituents in the Sutherland shire, but I do not think the answer in any of these areas is simply to transfer that power to the federal government so that a bureaucracy in Canberra, as opposed to a bureaucracy at the state level, can take it over. The discussion about many of these services needs to look at to what extent these services can be delivered locally. What we have in the Roads to Recovery program is a rolled gold example of what actually works—we have funding provided to local councils to fund roads that are necessary, funding that does not have to go through a whole other tier of bureaucracy, in terms of assessment, planning and processing, at the state level. It is a functional relationship.

What I like about this relationship is that it sees local, state and federal government sitting as three legs to a stool. In my maiden speech in this place I talked about the three legs to the stool of Federation. At the moment, I think, it is more commonly understood as being like a three-legged dog, because it is not working effectively. One of the reasons it is not working effectively is that we are not assigning responsibilities to these tiers of government and we are not resourcing these tiers of government to do the jobs with the appropriate accountability and then holding them to account. It is no good just to look the other way and to have fingers pointing every which way to avoid what should be competitive conflict, accountable conflict in ensuring value for taxpayers’ dollars.

I would very much commend the idea of our understanding the role that local government can play. On the weekend in my state of New South Wales people turned out and voted at local council elections. Those opposite, particularly in New South Wales, would be well aware of how the vast majority of them voted. A very common theme, while standing at polling booths on the weekend, was that people had very little understanding of what was done at a local council level. It seems to me that there needs to be a greater awareness of the accountabilities of local government. In some cases there
were many things that they expected of local governments that were beyond their remit or that they were not funded to do. There is a need to clarify these things for local government. I think the Roads to Recovery program enabled us to go down this path and to start looking at alternatives to just simply saying, ‘Well, states can’t do it; we’ll hand it all the way up to Canberra.’ I think that is a very short-sighted view and not one that will serve our local communities well because, at the end of the day, the best accountability that you can have is for the person to sit across the desk or across the bed or in the schoolroom from someone who is consuming those services. Parents deal with principals all the time. Parents deal with their doctors in hospitals. Far too much attention is given to what is said by those who sit behind bureaucratic desks in our public services rather than to those who are actually working on the ground. Of course there is a need for bureaucracies, proper accountability and funding mechanisms, review processes and benchmarking, but none of that is a substitute for enabling local communities to have a greater say over how local money is spent on local services.

I think there are some improvements that can be made with Roads to Recovery. It is not only the federal government or the local government that spends money on roads but also the state government, which contributes the lion’s share. In our communities I would like to see our local councils having a better understanding of what the local road priorities are. Local governments own and maintain the overwhelming majority of local roads. The cost of maintaining and upgrading these roads is an enormous financial burden to them. The funding available to local government to allocate to their road budget has not kept pace with the ever-increasing costs associated with maintaining and upgrading roads. Like most infrastructure, roads have a finite economic life and, in many areas, road infrastructure is nearing this point and is in dire need of replacement. The former coalition established the Roads to Recovery program in recognition of the road-funding dilemma facing local government. It was initially a four-year program involving a funding package of $1.2 billion. It was extended for a further four years from 1 July 2005 until 30 June 2009. This provided a further $1.23 billion investment in local road funding—funding for local roads that was delivered directly to local communities.

In my own electorate of Cook, I am sure through the good stewardship and advocacy of the former member for Cook, the Hon. Bruce Baird, from 1 July 2005 the Sutherland Shire Council was the recipient of a significant amount of Roads to Recovery funding. The program delivered more than $3.4 million to the electorate of Cook specifically for fixing roads in the Sutherland shire. Roads to Recovery enabled the Sutherland Shire Council to carry out road projects including Captain Cook Drive between Gannons Road and Woolooware Road at Caringbah—which I note for members is opposite the Sharks’ Toyota Stadium. Not far from there on the weekend was the scene of a great victory which has given us next weekend off before I suspect we will ultimately once again enter the grand final to do battle with Manly. That project cost $1.6 million. This project provided new kerbs, guttering, pedestrian pathways and signals, a bicycle lane and new drainage works. During 2005, $260,000 was provided for Parraweena Road, Taren Point to repair potholes and cracked road surfaces. A project costing $151,000 at the critical intersection of The Kingsway and Gerrale Street, Cronulla, affected by heavy traffic in summer months, provided improved pedestrian safety at this location.
When thinking particularly of my own electorate, like those who have electorates on the coast which are visited by many thousands of people from within the state and right across the country and, indeed, international visitors as well, local services in beachside suburbs come under heavy utilisation. Like many tourism areas, and even in your own electorate, Mr Deputy Speaker Shultz, I am sure, a heavy burden of tourists draw on infrastructure, and we need to recognise that. Not only is the cost of maintaining this infrastructure in critical tourism areas maintained at a local level but also there is a recognition of the responsibility further up the chain to make sure these wonderful assets for our community are at their best and are providing a wonderful experience for locals and for visitors to the area. In 2005, at Gymea Bay Road in Gymea Bay, at a cost of $95,000, the council carried out a construction project to improve pedestrian safety with raised thresholds and new indented on-road parking bays. In 2000, at Carvers Road in Oyster Bay, at a cost of $392,000, the Sutherland Shire Council carried out improvements to road pavement and a repair to the road base. In 2005, across Port Hacking to Maianbar Road in the national park, at a cost of $711,000, the Sutherland Shire Council carried out major repairs to numerous failures in the road pavement—dangerous edges to the road surface.

I note there is much more work to be done in the national park, too. Not only is this an area which is frequented by many visitors but also, for the communities of Bundeena and Maianbar, this is their point of access to services, hospitals, shopping facilities and government services. This single-road gives them access to a range of different services. This is a dangerous road. I drive it regularly when I am visiting the communities in Maianbar and Bundeena. Many young families live in that area, and they need safe roads. There are many winds and bends, and it can be a very dangerous road, particularly in wet conditions. There are many elderly residents in both of those villages, in those communities, and they often have to travel to get specialist attention or to make visits to family. There are many more bends and stretches on the road through the national park which require great attention.

As the new member for Cook, I am working with the community to find an agreed list of local road priorities to guide the investment of the Commonwealth, state and local governments for local roads in the Sutherland shire. I am aware of the good work that the Sutherland Shire Council does in seeking to examine the risk factors and needs issues relating to various roads right across the Sutherland shire. But that process must include a dialogue with the community to understand what it believes the great needs are. The community is well aware of many risk areas right across our community; whether they be traffic lights, roundabouts, improved surfaces with skid resistant works or whatever they may be. If the only guide is that there has not been a fatal accident, or enough fatal accidents, on a particular stretch of road, I frankly cannot go along with that line of reasoning.

The community’s view about what constitutes a safe area of road must be taken into account in any evaluation process. Members right across this House will be aware of the frustrations of their constituents when they raise local road issues with them. They are very unhappy with the response that sometimes we have to give—that we have raised this matter with the council, and, after consideration by their engineers or whoever it might be, the decision is that there is not a high enough risk profile on that particular road. It is of cold comfort to people as they put their children in the car and take them through that intersection as they make their
way to football on a Saturday morning after it has been raining that it is not risky enough yet because there have not been enough accidents. They really do not want to be the pre-requisite for that road actually getting the funding to be fixed.

While we have these measures to determine safety, we need to look at them further as we construct this program. When we provide funding to local councils to spend on local roads, we need to ensure that councils actually consult with their communities about what they believe the priorities are. That is a process that I am working through with the good officers of the NRMA in New South Wales and, in particular, the local director representative of the NRMA in the Sutherland shire—shire legend and businessmen, Michael Tynan, who has a deep commitment to these issues. If it is not this, it is the F6, or any number of other great road issues that Michael works on. We will work together with the NRMA to come up with an even better defined list of community priorities on local roads.

So far, this consultation has already highlighted the need to look at a number of projects, and I will mention them briefly. The first is the construction of a roundabout at the intersection of Bates Drive and Alpita Street in Kareela. Second is the installation of right-turn bays on The Boulevarde to Kareena Rd—not far from Port Hacking High School—which is a notorious local black spot. Third is a skid-resistant surface to improve traction on the Dents Creek bends on North West Arm Road at Grays Point.

To use The Boulevarde project as an example of these road projects, a large gymnastic club is in Kareena Rd, and there are many families who take their children there after school—during peak times—and they have been looking for a right-turn bay there for some time. Similarly, there are the Dents Creek bends, on the roadway out to the Swallow Rock Reserve. Many families, kayakers, boaters or others go down that winding road on a weekend. They are always at risk of skidding off the road and causing damage either to their vehicle or to themselves.

Fourthly is the erection of a noise abatement barrier on Captain Cook Drive near Murrami Avenue at Caringbah—also not far from Shark Park—to provide local residents with relief from worsening traffic noise. These residents have been enduring high levels of road noise caused by trucks speeding down Captain Cook Drive not more than 20 metres from the back of their houses. There are construction trucks travelling to and from the Labor government’s desalination plant at Kurnell. Residents have noticed that, as the construction has gone on, the ill-considered project has caused suffering to them and there has been increased traffic going up and down these roads, with heavy trucks and vehicles increasing the propensity of smog and various vehicle emissions. Frankly, these residents have had enough. We have petitioned for residents, and I think we had to write to the then Minister for Roads, Minister Roozendaal, on eight occasions or thereabouts before he agreed to undertake some new noise monitoring on the site to see whether it would qualify for abatement.

What we are finding on all of these issues is that, as residents raise their voices, particularly at a state level, they are falling on deaf ears. That is why I am encouraged by things like the Roads to Recovery program, because if the state government will not listen in these areas then there is an opportunity for local councils to react to local needs, supported by the measures first introduced by the Howard government.
Fifthly is the widening of the Gannons Road rail bridge at Caringbah. This is a very worthy local project ignored by the New South Wales Labor government when it began duplication of the Sutherland to Cronulla railway line. Despite a new bridge being built for the new railway line, the existing bridge was left in place with a single lane in each direction—a very nearsighted decision. The state member for Cronulla, Mr Malcolm Kerr, has been a keen advocate of this project for many years. There have been improvements to pedestrian safety around local school zones, and there is a litany of those in terms of signage, speed barriers and various other things to protect our children near schools.

The final one that I would like to note, which goes beyond Roads to Recovery, is the F6 extension, with a tunnel to be built under the Sutherland shire to create the missing link in Sydney’s road system. This is an item that I have spoken on many times in this place. The F6 is the missing link. We hear a lot from those opposite about their commitment to infrastructure and, for me, the F6 extension is the litmus test of whether they are serious or not. This is a project that has had its corridor reserved since 1951. The government in New South Wales—and this is something I would commend them for—has been very encouraging with the development of Port Kembla and the promotion of local economic opportunities in the Port Kembla area. They have been successful in securing the transfer of a lot of port activities to that area. But that means the roads that service Port Kembla going back into the major metropolitan market of Sydney have to be up to scratch and so, for that matter, do the rail links to that area in order to carry the goods.

The F6 extension now becomes not just a matter of creating safer roads in the Sutherland shire and shorter commuter times for the residents of the Sutherland shire but all about connecting Sydney to the booming Illawarra. The F6 extension is something that simply must be on the Infrastructure Australia audit, and I trust that it is well in hand and that it is being looked at as part of the Infrastructure Australia audit process. I know that the former Premier of New South Wales has made representations to see that the building fund established by the government would be looking to provide some support to the F6. I would be calling on those members from the Illawarra and St George to join the members in the Sutherland shire—the member for Hughes and me—in banding together in a serious effort to ensure that we get the F6 built.

These are the road priorities in the Sutherland shire. The process of having a Roads to Recovery program is one that gives power to local councils to act on local needs with the support of the federal government. I am pleased that the new government has recognised what is, essentially, a very sound and very successful policy. (Time expired)

Mrs D’ATH (Petrie) (6.45 pm)—I rise to speak in support of the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008. I am very pleased to be talking about infrastructure in this chamber. I have spoken before, in the Main Committee, about the importance of investment in infrastructure in my electorate of Petrie. Investing in Australia’s infrastructure is one of the most important investments we can make in this country. The Rudd Labor government is in the job of nation building. You cannot build a nation without investing in infrastructure. But internationally we face a global slowing of the economy. Many countries, including Japan, Germany, France and the US, have recorded negative growth in recent quarters, and other countries are experiencing zero growth. Domestically, the Howard government left Australia with inflation at a 16-year high. After
10 consecutive interest rate rises, Australia had the second highest interest rates in the developed world, and Australia faces severe capacity restraints due to the lack of investment in health, education, training and infrastructure.

All of this has resulted in pressure on businesses to maintain their competitive advantage and to grow. It has also, importantly, resulted in the average family suffering increasing financial pressures. The Howard government and its Treasurer, the member for Higgins, imposed an average of $400 per month on the average family through increased mortgage repayments as a result of the consecutive interest rate rises. The Howard government did nothing to put downward pressure on inflation and consequently on interest rates. Quite simply, it failed to invest in Australia’s future.

In addition, Australia is facing a serious skills shortage in many occupations across a large number of industries. Our schools are crying out for teachers in maths and science. Our health system is crying out for doctors, nurses and other health professionals. Our blue-collar industries—manufacturing, construction, mechanical, electrical and plumbing—are all in need of more skilled workers. And many other professional occupations, including engineers, are in need of more trained people. This is a snapshot of what we are currently dealing with—domestically, as part of the global economy and as a country seeking to maintain itself as a country with vision and as a nation builder.

For the past 12 years, Australia has experienced an influx of revenue from the resources boom, yet the Howard government failed to take advantage of this additional wealth in our country to ensure that investment in the future occurred. It failed to invest in health, education and transport infrastructure and failed to address the need for investment in training to ensure the best skilled workforce for a growing economy.

As a country, we need to look to the future with long-term strategies to ensure we can compete on the global stage. Australia needs to invest in human capital: in education, from early childhood through to tertiary, and in training for both young people and adults, to ensure portability of skills and the multi-skilling of Australia’s workforce. This needs to occur to ensure that we can deal with the rapid change of occupations and the skills needed—the fact that many people have a number of careers in their lifetime—and to ensure that we can provide the highest level of skilled workers to grow productivity and thus grow the economy. In investing in human capital, we need to ensure that we look after that capital. We need to invest in fair workplace laws for the future, laws that provide for wages and conditions for workers and appropriate flexibility for businesses. We need to get the balance right.

Of course, we also need to invest in infrastructure. In the area of roads, as a federal government we are responsible for our national highways across this country. Our responsibility should not stop there. We need to work in partnership with the states and local governments to ensure adequate investment in improving our state and local roads as well. In the area of rail, in a country the size of Australia we cannot leave it to the states to simply run their own rail systems without ensuring that we have a national gauge system that can transport freight and people around our country. And much more needs to be done in the area of investing in public transport, for not only cost but also environmental reasons.

In the area of broadband, as a country we cannot compete internationally if we are not able to respond at the speed needed and with the technology needed in today’s society.
Australia’s broadband system is behind those of most developed countries. The economic impact of outdated IT is obvious. Businesses both small and large rely heavily on accessing fast broadband. Those companies wanting to compete on the national and international stage cannot do so with a broadband system that does not allow rapid response to the needs of business. This affects productivity within businesses and their ability to compete.

At a much more basic level, the lack of more fast broadband access is preventing many people in normal households from making life that little bit easier. The fact is, by having fast broadband at home, people can get access to information at their fingertips, opening the door for people to further their education through remote learning courses, for schoolchildren to get access to important research for assignments or for people to simply pay their bills quickly and easily. This may not sound like much, but, if you are a person with a disability or mobility problems, the ability to do many day-to-day activities via the internet can make your life that little bit easier.

The Howard government, in relation to roads, simply tinkered around the edges, ignored our national highways and did not adequately enter into partnerships with our states to build new roads and road infrastructure. We have just heard from the member for Cook, who is asking this government to help, through Infrastructure Australia, to finally build the F6 expansion, an expansion that apparently has been on the books since 1951. This is further evidence that the Howard government sat back for 12 years doing nothing on this project—no long-term strategy. The Howard government, through its inaction, let down the business community and individuals both nationally and at a local level. It failed to invest in rail to link our cities and regions, and it failed to invest in broadband.

Why is investment in infrastructure so important? As I have already stated, it builds a nation and it strengthens an economy. In south-east Queensland the Queensland government is currently investing $1.9 million to upgrade the Gateway Motorway—the only north-south bypass of Brisbane—to six and eight lanes. Up until November 2007 the federal government had not committed any funding towards this important road project. There remained a missing link between the Bruce Highway and the Pacific Motorway; with the current link only four lanes, motorists would be stuck in traffic jams. Already up to 70,000 motorists use these sections of road every day—and certainly many in my electorate do. If we do nothing, by 2012 over 94,000 commuters will be sitting in daily traffic jams. Without an upgraded link to the Bruce Highway and Pacific Motorway, truckies from the port and airport—the fastest-growing industry and trade precinct in Australia—will struggle to meet their schedules, pushing up costs for consumers.

The Rudd Labor government has immediately provided $10 million to kick-start urgent planning on the Gateway Motorway’s two missing links—the second link being the 4.5 kilometre Mount Gravatt-Capalaba Road to the Pacific Highway link. The construction of the missing links will mean that Queensland motorists will have a first-class arterial road linking the Pacific Motorway to the Bruce Highway. The Rudd government made a commitment in the federal budget to reduce the traffic congestion on this busy highway once and for all. For 12 long years the Howard government refused to commit to building the two missing links—leaving Queenslanders with a road that was half built. The investment by the Rudd Labor government will fund critical pre-construction activities, such as community
consultation, geotechnical surveys, design, environmental assessments and land acquisition—and consultation has already commenced. From 2009-10, an additional $195 million will be invested in pre-construction funding for these links under the AusLink 2 investment program. Kick-starting this critical planning work means that the construction of the missing links could be ready to begin as soon as 2011.

As we know, the Ipswich Motorway and the Bruce Highway through Central and Northern Queensland have also been neglected for far too long. The Australian community and the Queensland community now have a federal government that is willing to act on these issues, and in the first nine months of government the Rudd Labor government has commenced that action.

Back at a local level, in my electorate of Petrie, the Queensland government has commenced the construction of the Houghton Highway Bridge duplication. Of course, with this new bridge, further improvements in road infrastructure from the bridge to the Gateway Motorway on the Houghton Highway will need to be assessed. And I look forward to having discussions with the three levels of government on the need for improved infrastructure.

Another issue that is extremely important in my electorate, as with other growth areas around Brisbane, is public transport and the need for all levels of government to invest in this area. What the outer northern metropolitan areas of Brisbane need is a fully integrated public transport system. The Howard government made improvements to the Bruce Highway from Carseldine up through Pine Rivers and further to Caboolture. The problem is that the previous federal government failed to work with the state and local governments to plan for dedicated bus lanes or an improved rail system for the area. Infrastructure like this is not just beneficial for business but also essential to ensure mobility of people in our community for training and employment opportunities. It is also an important investment in the challenge of reducing carbon emissions through the reduction of vehicles on our roads. With the growth in areas such as Pine Rivers, Mango Hill and North Lakes and with the lack of adequate public transport on the Redcliffe Peninsula, public transport infrastructure such as new rail lines and dedicated bus lanes is critical to the future sustainability of the area.

That is why investing in infrastructure for our future is so important. The bill now before the House is another step forward in building this nation. This bill has two important elements: amending the definition of ‘road’ so as to put beyond doubt that projects for the development of off-road facilities used by heavy vehicles in connection with travel on the road may be funded, and extending the Roads to Recovery program until 30 June 2014. The first of these elements will increase safety for heavy vehicle drivers, making it safer for those people performing the important task of moving products around this country. It will also make our roads safer for the broader community. Too many lives have been lost to heavy vehicle accidents. As a federal government we must do whatever we can to save lives on our roads.

On the extension of the Roads to Recovery funding, I welcome—as do my local councils—the additional funding to go into our local roads. I was pleased to see in the most recent announcements of the budget figures for 2008-09 for Roads to Recovery that one of my councils in the electorate of Petrie, the Moreton Bay Regional Council, will receive $3.6 million in Roads to Recovery funding. As one of the new amalgamated councils, with over 300,000 constituents in it, I am sure that funding will be well re-
ceived by the council. I certainly look forward to working closely with the consultant group that the council has engaged on road safety issues. They have already come to meet with me to talk about important safety initiatives on our local roads.

I have to say that I am very, very passionate about making sure that the roads outside of our schools are made as safe as possible to ensure that our children can go to school safely, and I look forward to talking with my local councils about ensuring that we achieve that. I also have many constituents coming to meet with me to talk about the need for traffic calming around their suburban streets. This is another issue that I look forward to talking with my council representatives about, and I look forward to seeing the Roads to Recovery funding really delivering for the local community. Having federal government and local government working directly with each other to build on our infrastructure is an important obligation that we must continue to support. That is why I am so pleased to see as part of this bill an extension of the Roads to Recovery funding to 2014. I acknowledge all of the projects that have been funded in my electorate since the implementation of this program in November 2000 and look forward to working with my councils, through the mayors and local councillors, to see the improvements in our local roads over the coming years. Building a nation requires investment. This bill works towards that aim, and I commend it to the House.

Mr HAASE (Kalgoorlie) (7.00 pm)—I rise this evening to continue the debate on the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008. To do the mandatory summary of the bill is relatively simple—important, but simple. The bill extends that wonderful program called Roads to Recovery through until 2014. I might add that Roads to Recovery is considered by every member of local government across my huge electorate as the finest program to ever come out of federal government. So it is very wise of this government today to consider extending it. I congratulate them for having the common sense and for showing it on this rare occasion.

The second thing that this bill will achieve is to allow in cases where we still have unincorporated areas funds to be preserved for a particular state or territory whilst a determination is made as to which particular local government area those funds will be spent in. Thirdly, the bill amends the definition of ‘road’ to include adjacent areas directly associated with roadways, and the classic example is of course heavy transport parking bays. Having achieved all of those things, what it means in short is that we are going to have a continuation of this wonderful AusLink program—the umbrella over the Roads to Recovery program.

I said already that the Roads to Recovery program is the finest thing that has emanated from federal government in recent times. There is a particular strategic funding section of Roads to Recovery that I wish to discuss in further detail this evening. One of the great highway initiatives that has developed in the last decade in this nation is the Outback Way. The Outback Way is a road that links Winton in Queensland through to Laverton in Western Australia in the north-eastern goldfields. We set out aiming to promote the ‘Outback Highway’. Some took issue with the term ‘Highway’. We heard on good authority that some overseas visitors wanted to bring their Lamborghini and do the run on the ‘Outback Highway’ and we felt that we may be criticised if our roadmap showed that particular set of roadways as a highway because it may not handle the low chassis of the Lamborghini. So we modified our terminology and accepted that it may be referred to as the Outback Way.
What is the Outback Way, what does it do and why is it important to all Australians? To take the last part first, unfortunately it is not presently important to all Australians. Surprisingly, it is not apparently important to even Northern Territorians, because it has taken since 2004, when I secured $10 million worth of funding on a dollar for dollar basis for the Outback Way, for still nothing to be done on the Docker River to the Olgas section of the road. This is the third national link that joins north-eastern Australia with southwestern Australia. There are only two others—one goes north-south and the other goes around the outside. When it comes to Central Australia, we are not big on road infrastructure. It has taken until now and still nothing has been done with that Docker River to Olgas section.

A road train attempted to get through there some weeks ago only to find that it needed to be in diff lock for 120 of 192 kilometres. When you are burning diesel and hauling a big load, that is a damned expensive exercise. Were there any apologies from the Northern Territory government? Not on your Nelly! They blame things like negotiation—they had to negotiate heritage titles with the Central Land Council, with the Northern Territory government and with the federal government. I know that that process can be laborious but it is not meant to be that laborious. We have a wonderful Australian adage that says, ‘Where there’s a will, there’s a way.’ But where there is no will it is often, ‘No way.’ I hope that they will honour their last promise—that by the end of September there will be some start made on repairing and bringing up to a reasonable condition that dreadful section of road. They tell me that they are going to achieve all clearances by that date and get the job under way.

There is in excess of $2 million waiting to be spent on that section of road and that will be the last of the $10 million worth of funding. We need more funding for the Outback Way. As I said, it is the third link. Why is it necessary? Well, believe it or not there is something in the Red Heart. There is a thriving pastoral industry, there is a thriving mining industry and there are communities of Indigenous people that are supposed to be very important to the Northern Territory government and to the current federal government. I cast about constantly trying to find evidence of that. Those industries and those people are being neglected because there is no decent road infrastructure through the centre.

The Outback Way should be upgraded to an all-weather condition at least. Think of the grey nomads, of whom we are all very proud and for whom we would like to get a decent pension. When grey nomads plan their trip to see Australia, it is often their once-in-a-lifetime trip. They want surety. They are already saddled with the highest petrol prices this nation has ever seen. They are already trying to survive on the smell of a greasy rag, with jam and baked beans for dinner. They want to be able to plan a trip into Central Australia with some surety. They cannot afford to get stuck on the side of the road for three weeks waiting for the water to go down because the road has not been designed to deal with localised, short-term flooding.

I am not asking for a bitumen highway, nor are my supporters in Central Australia, but we would like a road that is engineered to make it safe and well drained so when we get that localised flooding the road is passable. It is not too much to ask, surely, in 2008. It is not too much to ask the Northern Territory to cooperate along with Queensland and Western Australia. Queensland and Western Australia cooperated and they contributed to analysing the 10 worst locations on the Outback Way and prioritising them from one to 10. Queensland got on with the job on a dollar-for-dollar basis; so did West-
ern Australia. What about the Northern Territory? ‘We are very sorry. We’ve got things like native title, heritage clearances and federal government environmental issues to deal with.’ Everyone else could do it but the Territory sat on their hands.

When they finally do this stretch of road from Docker River, we need more funds so that the grey nomads and others who wish to tour the inland can plan their trip, and not be caught on the side of the road waiting for a waterway to go down or waiting for a mud surface to dry out sufficiently to get a vehicle across it. The road will be engineered in a manner that is well sheeted and well drained. People will be able to plan a trip into Central Australia and then execute that trip on the basis of just having to pay through the nose for fuel and having to deal with the lack of facilities in outback Australia, but at least the road will get them through—and that will be a wonderful change.

I fought very hard back in 2004 to get that funding. It disappoints me so much that (a) it has been unspent for such a long period of time and (b) the Outback Highway Development Council today in its constant interaction with government is not getting much traction. We are enjoying such an upbeat environment right now with the knowledge that minerals are making a lot of money for this nation. In the next five years, the Outback Highway Development Council is seeking to again do as they have done in the last four years but on the basis of a $10 million contribution in each of those five years. They are looking for $50 million from this federal government to support on a dollar-for-dollar basis the upgrading of some 2,800 kilometres of road. There is a lot of upgrading to do. But there is a lot of mining gear to shift through Central Australia, there are a lot of cattle to shift through Central Australia and there are a lot of opportunities to be created by Indigenous populations in communities so the travelling public can call in—to check out an art gallery possibly or to take a tour with local Indigenous persons who have so much to contribute to the touring experience in Central Australia. Their art is becoming internationally famous but they cannot get people to their front door. People will not come because they cannot plan with any surety because the road is in such a tragic condition. No-one in their right mind, save the outback explorer, would tackle the trip.

The Outback Way is the name of it, colleagues. It needs funding to the tune of just $10 million a year on a dollar-for-dollar basis from Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. I recommend it to you as a highway that in the future will become an icon. Instead of having to go all the way around, you will be able to drive up to Winton on the bitumen, head south-west basically, go through the Red Heart, see the Rock, go to the Olgas, go through Giles and into the goldfields of Western Australia and then whip back across the Nullarbor. It would take a fraction of the time and expense and you could experience the Red Heart, see something of real Australia and be richer for the experience. Fifty million dollars over five years is not a lot to ask.

The achievements of Roads to Recovery under AusLink so far have been enormous. I have cited one truly national situation that if funded correctly would be a great boon to all travelling Australians. But there is another issue, a little tiny issue, that I would like to cite because it is a classic case of doing the right thing in the right place at the right time. The Howard led government came up with Roads to Recovery. It was the first time that direct funding was available for local government to fix problems that had never been able to be budgeted for and had never previously attracted funding from the states. A little place called Kookynie would have been a ghost town except for the existence of the
Kookynie grand hotel—a wonderful pioneer structure. It was served always by dirt streets. Those streets were wide enough to turn camel trains in. When the gold ran out in Kookynie, corrugated iron houses were pulled down, thrown on the backs of camels and moved to the next strike. But the Kookynie grand hotel was a stone structure and it stayed there. Ever since, it has served as a little watering hole in the desert for travellers coming down from the north on the Goldfields Highway to get petrol and a cold beer. Now goldfielders living in Kalgoorlie like to go up and spend a weekend there. However, every time somebody came into town on the dirt streets, they were peppered with dust. Roads to Recovery funding paved the streets of Kookynie for the first time in over 100 years. The experience of going to Kookynie now is a pleasant thing to do on a Saturday or a Sunday afternoon. You can have a quiet beer in the beer garden at the grand hotel in Kookynie simply because the previous federal government was on the ground, knew the problems and funded programs that created solutions for local people in local situations.

I sincerely hope that this program will go a long way into the future, that it will be sustained past 2014, because apart from the little jobs like paving the roads in Kookynie this will link the ports, the rails and the roads of this nation. It will produce the arteries so vital for our export industries. Right now, within the archives of this parliament, sits a report from the Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services. The Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services did an investigation into the connectivity of road, rail and port facilities in this nation. Towards the end of 2007, those deliberations were concluded. This standing committee recommended, amongst other things, that additional funds be allocated to improve that road-rail-port connectivity. Our investigations around the nation found that the majority of the major ports had a flaw in their linkage that was creating a genuine bottleneck. That committee made a recommendation either that substantial additional funding be found, such as a contribution to AusLink for the purpose, or that a separate fund be created to improve that connectivity to stop those bottlenecks, to increase the smooth and efficient flow of exports out of this country that earn us such valuable dollars and to allow the efficient handling of imports into this country in the form of consumer goods. I do not know what has happened to that report. Thus far, I have seen none of those recommendations accepted by this government. Prior to the election, it told us how the blame game was certainly going to be solved and that there would be a great concentration on rebuilding the nation’s necessary infrastructure.

There is nothing more necessary than a decent, effective and efficient connectivity between road, rail and port. It has been done by private enterprise in Western Australia. Some of the most efficient railways in the world service the iron ore industry of the Pilbara and take that product to port for export overseas. That infrastructure was installed and paid for by shareholders of corporations. We have heard so much about, as I say, the ending of the blame game and the fascination with and importance of infrastructure, but it is a long time since this government was elected and I still wait for any announcement that goods will actually be delivered. It seems there is a great deal of difference between the rhetoric pre-election and the practical delivery afterwards. We wait with bated breath.

We have seen a great deal happening in legislation that is going to improve the lot of drivers and their safety on the road. Tied in with this bill is the issue of the heavy vehicle safety and productivity plan. There is con-
nectivity in the acceptance of the heavy vehicle safety and productivity plan, because the changes proposed in that plan are going to be funded by the registration fees known as the 2007 Heavy Vehicle Charges Determination. For the minute remaining, I refer to that heavy vehicle safety and productivity plan. It is going to introduce a European transport style monitoring system to Australia. Even though I applaud anything to do with improved safety for the public and drivers, I wonder whether more research ought to be done when it comes to introducing a European plan to Australia. There are not a lot of stops between Port Hedland and Broome, and to impose a system that makes a comparison between that stretch and Berlin to Magdeburg is stretching it a little too far.

Mr BIDGOOD (Dawson) (7.20 pm)—I rise to speak in support of the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008. The main provisions of this bill amend the definition of ‘road’ contained in the act so that it puts beyond doubt that projects for the development of off-road facilities used by heavy vehicles in connection with travel on the road may be funded and extend the Roads to Recovery program until 30 June 2014. The legislation also makes it clear that funds can be allocated under the Roads to Recovery program for use in a particular state whilst the most appropriate entity to finally receive the allocation is determined. This will allow funds to be preserved whilst, for example, arrangements are put in place to provide funds for roads in unincorporated areas where there is no local council or to provide bridges and access roads in remote areas. The bill broadens the definition of ‘road’ to allow funds to be used for the funding of rest areas, parking areas, heavy vehicle bays, decoupling areas, weigh stations and facilities that are associated with or similar to any of these as additional items in the definition. It is not intended that the funding of any commercial developments such as motels, food or fuel outlets would be covered by this addition to the definition.

The heavy vehicle safety and productivity program was announced in the May 2008 budget, subject to the Senate allowing the increase to the road user charge. The program will provide (a) additional heavy vehicle rest areas on key interstate routes, (b) heavy vehicle parking and decoupling areas and facilities in outer urban and regional centres, (c) new technology and vehicle electronic systems and (d) road capacity enhancement to allow access by higher productivity vehicles to more of the road network.

This amendment will enable the government to provide funding for these facilities under the government’s $70 million heavy vehicle safety and productivity package. Funding for the package is contingent on the passage of the enabling legislation for the 2007 heavy vehicle charges determination which was unanimously endorsed by the Australian Transport Council, composed of Commonwealth, state and territory transport ministers, in February this year.

This legislation has been blocked by the coalition in the Senate, even though the determination and policy was proposed by the former government. One in five road deaths involve heavy vehicles, with speed and fatigue being significant contributing factors. In 2007, there were over 200 road deaths in Australia involving heavy vehicles. The facilities that will be delivered under the heavy vehicle safety and productivity package will improve road safety and provide a better deal for truckies.

This bill also extends the Roads to Recovery program. Under the current act, the program will end on 30 June 2009. This bill will continue the program until 30 June 2014. The Roads to Recovery program was implemented in November 2000 to provide Aus-
Australian government funding to local government for both urban and rural roads in all parts of Australia. The Roads to Recovery program provides some $350 million a year to local councils around Australia so they can make urgent repairs and upgrades to their roads. The bill extends the life of the Roads to Recovery program until 30 June 2014 by enabling a new list of funding recipients and their allocations to be determined from 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2014.

The continuation of this program means that local government can confidently plan for the continued improvements of the roads for which they are responsible. The bill allows the minister to allocate funding for special projects of a state or territory and then reallocate that funding to the local government authorities which will be responsible for the special projects, by having the list determine allocations for funding recipients while at the same time preserving an amount, where appropriate, which will be allocated to particular funding recipients at a later date. It does this by allowing the minister to allocate funds under the program for use in a particular state where those funds are intended—and, in due course, for special projects—and correspondingly increase the allocations of funding to the local government authorities which the minister decides will be responsible for the special projects.

In my electorate of Dawson, under the 2008-09 allocation of funding for Roads to Recovery, this totals more that $4.5 million and includes $417,796 for the Burdekin Shire Council, $1,719,121 for Mackay Regional Council, $1,070,659 for Whitsunday Regional Council and $1,301,715 for Townsville City Council. This funding comes on top of local government grant allocations for roads which total $6.3 million for my electorate in 2008-09. That consists of $700,025 for the Burdekin Shire, $2,199,761 for Mackay Regional Council, $1,130,327 for Whitsunday Regional Council and $2,296,588 for Townsville City Council.

The AusLink Black Spot Program has also provided $271,000 in funding for dangerous black spots in the Burdekin, including $121,000 to build a roundabout at the intersection of Young and Burke Streets and erect give-way signs along Young Street, between Hoey Street and Wickham Street in Ayr; $120,000 to build a roundabout at the Young Street and Graham Street intersection in Ayr; and $30,000 to remove the kerb and improve the roundabout at the Chippendale Street and Cox Street intersection in Ayr. Add to this funding under AusLink in 2008-09 which includes $20 million of the government’s $95 million commitment to the Townsville port access road, $1.73 million for upgrades to Connors Road in Paget and $4 million of the government’s $25 million commitment to the Burdekin River bridge.

The government will contribute $95 million in matching funds for the $190 million Townsville port access road project. The funding will provide a highway link to the Port of Townsville. This will support continuing economic growth—in particular, in agricultural and mineral imports and exports through the port. The existing route to the port has operational constraints, due to adjacent residential development, and has significant safety and amenity—noise and vibration—problems. The port access road provides for the import, export and supply chain for North Queensland and, importantly, the north-western mineral province around Mount Isa and Cloncurry, which will enable quicker, more reliable and cheaper access to the port. The road will enhance important economic benefits to the national economy from existing industry and provide for the expected growth from within the northern growth triangle of Bowen to Townsville and inland to Mount Isa.
The port access road also provides a more efficient connection between rural and remote communities to the port and, from there, to interstate and international product markets. There will be an upgrade to Connors Road, Mackay, for a length of 1.23 kilometres between Boundary Road and Farrellys Lane, in the Paget industrial area, and improvements to the intersection between Farrellys Lane and Connors Road and the adjacent rail crossing. The establishment of the Paget industrial area means that Connors Road will need to have pavement of a standard that is suitable for heavy vehicles. The upgrade of the road will assist in the development of the industrial area as a site for heavy industry servicing Mackay and the region’s mining and related industries.

The Burdekin River bridge is a 50-year-old steel structure crossing the Burdekin River. This bridge is a vital link between the towns of Ayr and Home Hill. It is of strategic significance to Queensland as it provides the only safe and reliable connection for road and rail traffic between North Queensland and all points south. This project involves continued structural rehabilitation and patch-painting. The continued maintenance and rehabilitation of this bridge maintains economic productivity and access to the region through reduced travel time and improved route reliability.

I would just like to thank the LNP member for Burdekin, Rosemary Menkens, for her kind words. She said that I did well to secure the funding. Indeed, she is correct—just look at the previous member for Dawson’s record on delivering funding for the bridge. The previous government neglected roads in Dawson, and this government is delivering for the people of Dawson. If you add together all of the funding committed by this government in 2008-09 for roads in Dawson, you will get the figure of $36,800,000. Now, that is delivering for the people of Dawson. I would challenge anybody to compare the record of this government in delivering basic road infrastructure for the people of Dawson against the record of the previous government. The previous government and the previous member completely and utterly failed in delivering basic road infrastructure for the people of Dawson. This government will commit a total figure of $36,800,000 in 2008-09—in one financial year. Now, that is what I call delivering for the people of Dawson. I commend the bill to the House.

**Mr TUCKEY (O’Connor) (7.32 pm)**—I will have to put out a press release in Dawson to remind them that a couple of years ago the electorate of O’Connor got $100 million out of Commonwealth funding and, I think, about $50 million out of Roads to Recovery. I was always able to boast that it was the highest allocation for any electorate in Australia. But I did not boast too loudly, because it was all provided on a formula anyway. Whilst the member for Dawson is entitled to self-congratulation, the fact of life is that most decisions on roadworks, including those in my electorate, are made by the state roads departments and are based upon the funds made available to the various states by the Commonwealth as part of its program of funding.

But isn’t it amazing when people start to talk about doing the right thing? We have just seen retribution taken upon the Carpenter government in Western Australia—or, as I used to call it, the McGinty-MacTiernan government—based on road funding. The growth south of Perth to places like Bunbury and areas south of that—Busselton and the Margaret River—has been exponential. The road system was a disgrace. There was a significant lack of passing lanes. As I speak, there is an ongoing high level of fatalities from crashes on that road.
The good offices of two members—the then member for Forrest, Geoff Prosser, and the incumbent member for Canning, Don Randall—campaigned to our leadership for a significant contribution over and above that funding to extend what is known as the Kwinana Freeway so that it could pass through Bunbury with an appropriate two-lane freeway system. Consequently, and to his credit, the then minister approached the WA government—the WA roads minister was Alannah MacTiernan—and offered 50 per cent of the costs. Alannah MacTiernan replied that she did not want the money. To be honest, I think we went the other way around. We asked how much the road would cost, and she said $300 million. We said, ‘We’ll give you half.’ She said that was not enough. We said, ‘How much more do you want?’ We eventually offered her $170 million, which, on her estimate, was half the cost. She said again that she did not want the money because she could not find the other half—too bad that people were getting killed on virtually a weekly basis.

As Western Australian Liberals, we had to get together and insist that the federal minister withhold the typical annual grant of some hundreds of millions of dollars until Alannah MacTiernan accepted the money and did the job. The minister was subjected to abuse and advertisements in the paper and everything—and we insisted that he hold the line. In the end, that Western Australian minister took the money and commenced the work. In fact, that work is now well advanced. As I have read in the papers, this government has continued its contribution of half the cost, for which it can be congratulated because, as is typical in the present-day environment, the costs keep escalating at a fairly rapid rate. Of all the initiatives that governments can take, building better roads is the one that saves lives. That is where lives get saved—on the road.

In referring to legislation I always look at the explanatory memorandum. Included in the explanatory memorandum to the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008 is a financial impact statement, and the money that we are authorising to be spent will be available only subject to the Senate allowing the increase to the road user charge. We have truckies selling their trucks. The Leader of the Opposition drew to our attention the other day that there have been 3,000 repossessions. The price of diesel has gone through the roof. Many subcontract drivers find it extremely difficult to get their contracts altered. I think that is unfortunate. The rise and fall clauses in many areas—including, I might add, with Australia Post’s subcontractors—are delayed to a point when it gets very painful. And we have the government proposing to increase the road user charge. Why would you do that? Why would you increase the road user charge?

There is a quote in the second reading speech about what our minister said on one occasion. I would like to know the context in which it was said, because every time the Australian Transport Council recommended an increase in these charges we opposed it. The recommendation would come through to the minister, and the backbench on this side of the House always opposed it. One reason for that is that any charge you put onto an intermediate service means the cost is passed on to the consumer. The member for Kalgoorlie was just speaking. If you go into the member for Kalgoorlie’s electorate, you have a great choice of transport for all areas north of Geraldton, which is in my electorate—that is, road transport. There is no rail. There is airfreight, if you think you can afford to pay for that. There is no state shipping service, as there once was—notwithstanding that that was run by a government under the auspices of the Seamens Union. It was so expensive
that trucks going down dirt roads could be cheaper.

We are being told that these sums—$10 million in 2008-09, $20 million in 2009-10 and thereafter to 2011-12—will only be expended if the road user charge goes up. So the purpose of this legislation is to tell the truckies: ‘If you want improved off-road areas in which to take a rest and you want them to be in reasonable condition to drive your truck onto, you are going to have to pay for it.’ Yet the industry is in grave distress at the moment due primarily to the cost of fuel—and as we know, as the price of crude oil is falling so is the Australian dollar, and the actual cost is not changing very much.

If you want truckies to take more rest, I think there is a hint in this. There is a suggestion that some of this money might be spent on electronic surveillance and that that would be a better way of achieving an outcome than a logbook. We have never had logbooks in Western Australia, and I do not think the incidence of crashes over there is any greater than anywhere else. By the way, I had better declare an interest. I still hold a heavy haulage truck driver’s licence and in the early years I was a significant trucking operator around the town of Carnarvon. We formed a co-op to cart freight into our town and the produce of that region back to Perth. It was I who first convinced the then Liberal state Minister for Transport that two-trailer double-bottom road trains were not some invention of the devil that religiously and continuously drove over the top of motorists. He agreed with me and gave us a trial because we were trying to cart produce at a competitive price to Perth, a 600-mile journey. It was a trial with four road trains. It was so successful he opened up the road out of Perth to all such vehicles. They now have three trailers and still they do not run over any more people than a single trailer. As far as I am concerned, when I am on the road I would rather pass one road train with three trailers than three semitrailers all tailgating—though legally they should not do that.

Furthermore, even though that approval was given, originally the breakdown area was 30 kilometres out of Perth. The Richard Court government ran a trial and brought those sorts of vehicles into the city. Everybody said that would be the end of the earth and that people would get run over, but they have been operating like that since then. In the Labor state government, Alannah MacTiernan did everything in her power to try and stop them. The fact is that they improve efficiency. They run around the city on designated routes—and that is quite sensible—but they do not make any trouble.

I have watched the eastern states, and South Australia in particular, come up with all sorts of draconian measures that seem to have a lot more to do with collecting revenue than with road safety. I have never been able to understand why somebody driving out of Western Australia with a perfectly legal vehicle is fined up to $1,000, because the specification of that vehicle changes as they cross the WA-South Australian border. To be honest, I would not mind it if they were to put the money into their roads, because those roads are typically pretty lousy.

I know quite a lot about trucks and I know this: every time you increase a truck driver’s costs he will attempt to drive further to recover the losses. While people are preaching road safety and want to put electronic measurement on the trucks to ensure that truckies only drive given distances, if you increase their costs then they will go out of business.

Let me refer, in this financial impact statement, to the fact that after 2009-2010 the Commonwealth is going to add an extra $50 million to the Roads to Recovery program. It is one of the few programs implemented over the term of the Howard gov-
ernment that the Rudd government has retained. All of the others, such as the Investing in Our Schools Program and Regional Partnerships—all funding programs aimed at the smaller, regional and remote areas of Australia—were scrubbed. Nevertheless, I welcome that extra $50 million a year. When the Liberal government introduced the Roads to Recovery program it was based on the fact that it was known that at that time the local government sector was getting $600 million a year behind in the maintenance of its road network, which the minister reminds me in his second reading speech, was 810,000 kilometres. We put up half of the funding.

In Western Australia, the then Gallop government took back some of the money they were putting in, notwithstanding that Prime Minister Howard had entreated all premiers not to back off on their commitment to roads. As a minister some years ago, on a visit to Birdsville I was taken out, with great pride, on a state government road on which they had spent their Roads to Recovery money. There was some sense in that—inasmuch as most of their so-called road network was on pastoral properties and, when they had previously approached the Labor government in Queensland to get some work done on this road, they were told, ‘You might get it within 50 years.’ They probably did the right thing but, on the other hand, that was not the intention of the funding. I note that this legislation better defines the opportunity for those sorts of things to happen.

In reality the message here is: we will upgrade your off-road parking and do things of that nature, but you are going to pay for it. I do not think the truckies want it that badly. In the present environment they cannot afford to have additional fuel taxes, which is what the road user charge is, placed upon them. And until there is a highly sophisticated electronic management system installed across all Australia, they will cheat on their logbooks and they will drive excessively long hours to try to save their trucks and probably the house they have mortgaged in the process of buying it. That is not smart; it is silly. I do not believe that, typically, these roads are built for trucks. They are built for motorists because there is a large number of them. And it does not matter which side of parliament you are on, you take notice of those people.

I do not agree with the argument that the railways put forward, that they do not get that degree of assistance. The railway system of Australia was constantly protected from open competition from the trucking industry, more particularly on the east coast, and for many years truck configurations were restricted to semitrailers to guarantee that the bloated and unionised rail system could compete. The moment you started to make a B-double or chuck a couple of trailers behind, amazingly, rail could not compete. As we know, in general goods transport there is only one bit of the rail system that is profitable today and that is the bit between Port Augusta, in particular Port Pirie, and Perth. That is partly because of the length of the journey and of course the large volumes of freight that come out of the Eastern States to WA because of the prosperity we have in that state.

The last election, in the electorate of Hasluck, was fought on the opposition by the elected member to a new brickworks in Perth, which happened to be built in that area as the state government would not allocate any land for it anywhere, because they did not like Len Buckeridge, the bloke who was going to build the brickworks, because he does not force his workers to join a union. He does not stop them. Part of that freight coming across the Nullarbor was bricks to the brick and tile state. Why would you do that? In the end, the Commonwealth had to allocate land in not the best locality in Perth
so this bloke could build a brickworks to maintain supply to the homeowners in Western Australia and to prevent the necessary carting of bricks right across Australia. And you wonder why the price of houses goes up. Yet the then McGinty-MacTiernan government, otherwise headed by Gallop or Carpenter, were not prepared to allocate any land. The machinery to be operated in that brickworks stayed in storage for three years, while a bloke who was trying to do no more than provide more bricks, typically at a more competitive price, was stopped from building a new brickworks anywhere.

Might I add, while we are on transport, I am writing to the new Premier of Western Australia to get him to complete an agreement that the Richard Court government made to let this same fellow build a private port. He has had an agreement with the parliament of Western Australia and for two terms of office—or a little less than that, as the public of Western Australia have decided—the previous WA government have prevented that construction. Why would you do that other than to prop up your inefficient government port authority?

In that regard, there is an absolute need for additional capacity. Ships carrying live sheep have come into Western Australia from the Eastern States half loaded. They have had to anchor out at sea because they could not get alongside to pick up the rest of the load. And people talk about cruelty to animals in this form of transport! Why would you do that? If the previous government, specifically McGinty and MacTiernan, had allowed this fellow to go ahead immediately upon getting the contract and the environmental approvals, that port would be operating today to the benefit of business and it would have taken a lot of trucks away from the Fremantle port and those road systems. (Time expired)
have gridlock. Hopefully, the extension of Tiger Brennan Drive will relieve some of the problems we experience on our roads in peak periods. It is also about safety. We have a lot of near misses and other incidents in the current climate, and a lot of that is born of the frustration of motorists trying to get to work and finding it very difficult. That part of the project is very important to the people of Palmerston, of whom I am one. Hopefully, this will relieve the problem of gridlock.

A more national focus of the Tiger Brennan Drive extension is the improvement for business, industry and community. For instance, the industries which utilise the East Arm port and the trade development zone will have far better access. They will be able to go about their daily business in a safe, economical way, relieved of the infrastructure bottlenecks that they have been experiencing. The flyover, which will be the final stage of this, linking Tiger Brennan Drive to the Stuart Highway and replacing the current set-up of a very intense intersection with a constant flow of traffic, will be something that the people of the rural areas, as well as the truck drivers coming up the Stuart Highway, will greatly appreciate.

There is a vast expanse of land in the Northern Territory, and the Northern Territory is growing. In recent times we would not have thought this sort of money would need to be spent in the north of the country. But, as we have grown, roads and rail have become the lifeblood of the NT. We need to have seamless access from Adelaide to the East Arm port facility.

The Roads to Recovery program has been a good program. I know that those opposite are very proud of it. Some of their other initiatives, like Work Choices, have not been as well received by the Australian public. The Roads to Recovery program will continue for another five years. The $1.75 billion in new money to improve local roads around Australia, including those in the Northern Territory, will be welcomed. There will be an increase of $50 million a year, or $250 million over five years. These funds are urgently needed to upgrade and repair local roads.

We have heard from all speakers about the issues facing them in their electorates. I am sure that the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government has become a very popular man among all the 149 other members. We heard a couple of weeks ago how popular he has become. We will all be competing for that money because we all believe in the areas that we represent. I believe in Solomon and I know that the member for Lingiari believes in his electorate. These urgent works in the Northern Territory will get about $4.6 million in 2008-09 alone, which will be well received. It is money that is urgently needed to upgrade and repair the local roads.

Three of the councils in my electorate in the Northern Territory will receive funds. Palmerston City Council will receive some $200,000. Coomalie council will receive some $136,000 and Belyuen council will receive around $43,000. Local roads are critical for efficient and safe freight movements. Often the last kilometres from the highway to the port are on roads controlled by local government. The Rudd Labor government is working in partnership with local councils in order to deliver safer roads.

I am the Chair of the Northern Territory Black Spot Consultative Panel. This year we were fortunate enough to have $672,000 committed to two dangerous intersections in Stuart Park in my electorate. Only a month ago Minister Albanese and I said that we were committed to reducing crashes on Top End roads. Unfortunately, our current road toll is high. Black spot funding, as well as repairing the roads, is one way to try to re-
duce our road toll. I know that the Northern Territory government is very frustrated and is working closely with the Northern Territory Police to try to educate drivers not to take unnecessary risks. Unfortunately, at the moment our road toll is extremely high and is something that we as a community need to address because the accidents are taking a huge toll on families and on the community. As well as family losses, they are a cost to our economy. It is something that we need to look at very seriously. The Black Spot Program complements funding I have already secured for Tiger Brennan Drive and the Stuart Highway. We are looking at trying to improve road safety at both the national and the local level.

Next year black spot funding will increase by 33 per cent, which will be $60 million nationally. When you travel through cities the number of flowers and floral tributes to people who have died on our roads you see is quite staggering. Any money that can be channelled into trying to turn this around would be well received. We have discussed roads a lot, but I think it is a case of consultation as much as anything. With regard to the black spot funding, we are consulting with the Australian Trucking Association, local government associations, the Automobile Association of the Northern Territory, the Office of Indigenous Policy and the Department of Planning and Infrastructure.

I know that the Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, the member for Lingiari, is a very staunch supporter of bush roads and of the communities that he represents. I look at it as a tag team effort between him and me in securing funding for the Northern Territory. Obviously I am in Solomon and he is in the community areas of Lingiari. He was very happy with the road funding that he was able to secure in the current round of funding. He represents a large electorate and covers a lot of kilometres on the roads. He hears stories about deteriorating roads and the ones that need help. The Victoria Highway at the Victoria River bridge gets cut regularly during the wet season and often trucks can be sidelined for weeks. We have committed $10.7 million for a bridge replacement and upgrades to reduce the impact of the flooding. Other areas that will benefit from the funding are the Alice Springs Town Council, $657,000; the Barclay Shire Council, nearly $100,000; the Central Desert Shire Council, over $300,000; the East Arnhem Shire Council, nearly a quarter of a million dollars; Katherine Town Council, $270,000; Roper Gulf Shire Council, $632,000; and the Tiwi Islands Shire Council, $683,000. They are significant amounts of money. That will bring the total spent in the Roads to Recovery program in the seat of Lingiari to $6.8 million, which is a significant amount. Territorians have a problem with the distances that they have to travel. A lot of Territorians move around. They need to be moving around in a safe environment. The cattlemen, fishermen, women, police, teachers, nurses, tourists and mining and gas industry workers rely on the roads for the simple things as well as for going fishing, camping, having fun and spending time with relatives. We need the roads to be in good condition.

We welcome the effort that has been put into this bill by the minister. The minister understands, as does the Prime Minister, who has been to my electorate on four occasions already. I think there is a significant commitment from the Prime Minister as well as from the minister for infrastructure to helping areas such as the Northern Territory and the electorate of Solomon to improve what we already have and to build on a growing area. The people up there appreciate the time and effort that is being put in. This investment in our roads will promote economic growth and benefit not only the Territory but the nation as a whole. These initiatives are
great examples of the federal and Territory governments working together to deliver vital pieces of infrastructure for the people of Solomon and the Territory. I think this bill demonstrates our ongoing commitment to road safety and local road infrastructure. It also confirms our commitment as a federal government to nation building. That cannot be underestimated. There has been a fair bit said in the first part of this new parliament by those opposite about infrastructure. Without dwelling on that, I think a very positive note to finish on is to say that there is a commitment to infrastructure and nation building. It is not something that we on this side of the House say flippantly. I think we have the best minister in that position to deliver it. I really believe that he is committed to making sure that we build all 150 electorates and that we do not just single out ones that we want to secure. The member for O'Connor mentioned the $100-odd million that he was allocated and said that was probably just to make sure that the Prime Minister had a henchman in the party room. We are committed to delivering this. We are fully committed to continuing what has been a good program. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr Lindsay—In God’s country—I thank the member for Lowe. The member for Leichhardt and I are trying to ensure that we get the best roads we can for our people in the north. Last year the mayors alliance did a lot of good work in trying to convince the federal government that we should be putting more resources into North Queensland. In fact, we were successful, and we will certainly be doing a lot of work on the Bruce Highway between Townsville and Cairns.

In supporting the AusLink amendment bill tonight I want to observe that the bill does extend the Howard government’s commitments to delivering real benefits to the people of Australia, especially in North Queensland. The bill is going to amend the definition of ‘road’ contained in the AusLink (National Land Transport) Act 2005. This puts beyond doubt that projects for the development of off-road facilities used by heavy vehicles in connection with travel on the road may be funded, and it extends the Roads to Recovery program until 30 June 2014. That is a terrific outcome. Local councils all across this great land of ours have warmly welcomed the Roads to Recovery program, and they have done great things with it.

As was foreseen by the Howard government, the beauty of it is that the money is delivered directly from the Commonwealth to the local government, and we do not get money being hived off by those inefficient states along the way, as they do in so many other areas of federal funding. I am particularly thinking of health at this stage, in the way that bureaucracies in the states take a good percentage of the money that the federal government gives the states for health and use it to prop up the bureaucracies. In Queensland, of course, we have more bureaucrats in health than we have hospital beds. There is something wrong when you get to that sort of situation—but that takes me away from the bill.
I certainly welcome the extension to the Roads to Recovery program, but I am alarmed that the bill links funding for roadsides to the introduction of a new tax. Why am I surprised? For how many years did this country see no new taxes? There was budget after budget after budget with no new taxes. In fact, what we saw was tax cut after tax cut after tax cut for many years in a row. Suddenly, the government of Australia changes, and there are all these new taxes—$20 billion worth of new taxes. Surely the Australian people must realise that these new taxes were not talked about at the time of the last election. What was talked about was: ‘We are going to reduce your grocery prices, your fuel prices, your mortgage rates and all of that sort of stuff.’ People clearly saw that in the brochure that was distributed by the Prime Minister. They did not see—because it was not there—’Oh and, by the way, we are going to increase taxes by $20 billion.’

People are waking up to that, and they are getting angry—and so they should. We are seeing one of those taxes in this bill tonight. I guess the government is embarking on a situation where they are endangering the lives of Australia’s truckies and road users by insisting that funding for the maintenance of roadsides be linked to the introduction of increased heavy vehicle registration fees—in other words, making the safety of Australia’s road users hostage to the introduction of a new tax. As a matter of public principle, that is shameful. The coalition will support the changes that this bill is making in the hope that the $70 million for roadside safety areas will eventually be decoupled from the new tax by the government. It may well attract the attention of colleagues in the Senate. I am particularly pleased, however, to support the extension of the program, and what a great program it is. Many great projects have been funded across my electorate, as they have in other members’ electorates. They have improved the safety of Townsville streets, and I am pleased to support the extension of the program.

I would like to draw the parliament’s attention to money that has come out of the existing AusLink program for very valuable projects. I know that a number of colleagues will speak about projects in their electorates. In my electorate, and in areas surrounding my electorate, we have probably got about $300 million worth of projects, which is a terrific result. We have got $120 million being spent in the Tully area on the Bruce Highway between Townsville and Cairns. There is more money being spent in the Gordonvale area, and north of Townsville we have got the $40 million that I secured for the Woodlands to Veales Road extension. This is going to four-lane the Bruce Highway in that location, and it is going to fix up the dreaded Mount Low Parkway and Bruce Highway T-junction.

I am particularly pleased that we will see the opening of the Townsville Ring Road, probably in November. It is well on track. We just need to lay the asphalt now. The earthworks have all been done. A bit of tidying up needs to be done on one or two bridges, then the asphalt will be laid and we should see that opened in November. It is going to complete the Douglas Arterial Road through to the northern beaches. It will allow heavy vehicle traffic to bypass the city of Townsville. It will take a tremendous load off Nathan Street and Woolcock Street and out of the suburbs of Heatley, Vincent, Aitkenvale, Cranbrook, Mount Louisa and so on, and those trucks will have a high-speed, motorway-standard bypass of the city of Townsville.

More than that, because it connects the northern areas of the city to the hospital, the university and Lavarack Barracks—which you are well familiar with, Madam Deputy
Speaker Vale; they are very large employers in the city of Townsville—the high-speed connection will enable many more people to have different living choices. They will be able to live in the northern beaches and the emerging Stockland development up on the Bohle Plains and in the Bohle area. There are some 5,000 new house lots being proposed in that area, and people will be able to have very high-speed connections to their place of work and the hospital—although I might observe, with the way the state government has been going, if they go to hospital they will not get a bed. We had a code yellow last week—24 people could not get a bed in the Townsville Hospital. We had one cancer patient dying on a trolley in emergency—very sad indeed. It is such a pity that the Townsville Hospital should be in that perilous condition.

Opening up the Townsville Ring Road—a project of mine that I committed to the electorate that I would deliver—will bring a lot more traffic into the Douglas Arterial Road, and that raises the prospect of four-laning the Douglas Arterial Road, doubling it in size. That will proceed as soon as the Townsville Ring Road opens. I understand we are going to proceed with the duplication of the Douglas Arterial Road to four lanes. Again, that will be warmly welcomed.

The member of Dawson alluded, in his speech earlier in the evening, to the Townsville Port Access Road. That was a commitment of both sides of politics—

Mr Murphy—I was up there. I saw it.

Mr LINDSAY—Yes. It was always going to happen. I was a bit disappointed with the member for Dawson. I wanted to make an observation to him about what I felt was an error in the first sod-turning at the Townsville Port Access Road, which opened last Wednesday. But he turned his back on me and would not listen. I had not had a colleague do that to me previously. It was quite sad because I wanted to tell him that he had forgotten to invite the port authority, who started all of this and had lobbied very hard, and he had forgotten to invite Townsville Enterprise, the peak development body in the city, who also lobbied long and hard to everybody and sundry. I do not think it was a wilful oversight, but he needs to build bridges with those people because currently they are very angry. I wanted to tell him quietly, but he turned his back on me so I have told the parliament and he can take it from there.

Mr Murphy interjecting—

Mr LINDSAY—It was inappropriate, yes.

This bill is a step in the right direction. I do remain concerned, as my colleagues do, with the linking to the new tax by the Rudd Labor government. This government has made a number of promises in relation to road funding in North Queensland, many of which were copied from the announcements that I made on behalf of the coalition. But, if the current government takes up announcements that I made, that is great. It is a good outcome for my community and I certainly strongly support that. But my community expects these commitments to be met. I think there is goodwill on the part of the Rudd
government to meet those commitments, and of course they should be met regardless of who is in power.

I close with the observation that, among the many issues that we face as members of parliament, particularly in regional areas, roads is right up there in lights. It is important that we recognise that, and this bill is recognising that. AusLink also recognises the link to rail, and in North Queensland the Townsville-Mount Isa corridor, which has been recognised as an AusLink corridor, does not yet have any money. It is a lifeline. Heavy freight coming from the west should be on rail; it should not be on road. I think we see that in many instances. There is even a case to be made now for the reintroduction of local shipping services to move heavy freight around this country. AusLink needs a lot of thought, but we need support to get the Townsville-Mount Isa rail corridor upgraded, because currently it is in such a parlous state that trains have to move at grasshopper speed to be safe on that line. I conclude now with the observation that this is a step in the right direction. I thank the Rudd government for continuing the AusLink programs that were introduced by the former government.

Mr TURNOUR (Leichhardt) (8.22 pm)—The Rudd government is committed to enhancing the safety of all Australians on our roads. We have an expansive road network that covers many thousands of kilometres throughout every state and territory. There are many thousands of kilometres in my great electorate of Leichhardt, which spans from Cairns through Cape York Peninsula to the Torres Strait. The bill being introduced to parliament by the government, the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008, is firm evidence of our strong commitment to investing in land transport infrastructure and enhancing its safety for all users. Too often we read in our local papers about another person killed on the roads. Too often there are families all across the country who sadly lose uncles, aunts, children and grandchildren to road deaths.

According to the Australian Transport Safety Bureau, in the state of Queensland in the 12-month period ending July 2008 there were 334 road deaths. Across Australia this figure topped more than 1,500. Too many people die on our roads. This issue is at the forefront of many people’s lives. Despite your location, whether you are in the big smoke or in a rural outback community, improving our road network has far-reaching benefits. The AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill is an important part of our effort to enhance safety for roads users and thereby hopefully reduce this frightening toll.

The passing of this bill will have two major benefits. Firstly, the bill amends the definition of ‘road’ contained in the act. This amendment means a tremendous amount for the heavy vehicle operators on our roads. Given that one in five road deaths involves a heavy vehicle, this bill has important repercussions for the safety of heavy vehicle drivers as well as for other road users and the general travelling public. The changes proposed by the government to the definition of ‘road’ will mean that projects for the development of off-road facilities used by heavy vehicles in connection with travel on the road may be funded. This includes rest stops, parking areas, heavy vehicle bays, decoupling areas, weigh stations, electronic monitoring systems and associated facilities. Funding these types of facilities is part of the heavy vehicle safety and productivity package, a measure being introduced by the government to help reduce the incidence of driver fatigue, a problem that exists in the heavy transport industry and threatens the safety of many Australians. With the passing of the AusLink (National Land Transport)
Amendment Bill we are enabling the funding of projects that address heavy vehicle safety from 1 January 2009.

As I said, I am the member for Leichhardt. I live in Cairns. The Bruce Highway winds down the east coast of Australia to Brisbane and further south to Sydney. This bill will enable us to improve safety on the Bruce Highway. Too many people die on the Bruce Highway, and we need to be able to upgrade rest stops, truck driver stops and locations where people can pull up and have a rest to ensure that they are not putting at risk not only their own lives but the lives of many other Australians.

The second major feature resulting from the introduction of this bill is the extension of the Roads to Recovery program for a further five years, through to 2014. The Roads to Recovery program provides local councils across the country substantial funding to undertake upgrades and repairs to local roads. The Rudd government’s decision to continue this program will ensure local government authorities have certainty and direction moving forward, enabling them to plan and budget confidently for improvements to the roads for which they are responsible.

The Roads to Recovery program was due to run out on 30 June 2009. Recently Minister Albanese announced that the Rudd Labor government is set to deliver a record $1.75 billion in new money to councils to improve local roads by securing this program for another five years. This is an increase of $50 million a year, or $250 million over five years. For the electorate of Leichhardt, in the tropical north, this means over $7.67 million for local councils. The projects include over $2.5 million for the Cairns Regional Council, $600,000 for the Cook Shire Council, $400,000 for the Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council and $200,000 for the Torres Strait Island Regional Council. We must remember that regional Australia, including my electorate, very much fits this description. Councils are often the lifeblood of communities, particularly those in rural and remote areas. Federal government grants make up a significant portion of the councils’ revenue. The Rudd government recognises the value of Roads to Recovery and how important a role our local councils play in the ongoing maintenance of our national road network. After all, local governments are responsible for more than three-quarters of all Australian roads—over 810,000 kilometres.

In addition to servicing their local constituents by providing and maintaining roads, libraries, parks, pools and rubbish collection, these councils generate numerous employment and training opportunities, contributing significantly to the local economy. The Australian Local Government Association has acknowledged the value of programs like Roads to Recovery, citing it as ‘an essential element in local government’s ability to maintain and upgrade the local roads network’.

The Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government also recently announced that local councils in the tropical north are set to share over $34.9 million in financial assistance grants from the Rudd Labor government. Cook Shire Council, which is represented by Peter Scott as the mayor, encompasses towns like Cooktown and Coen and runs up to the northern peninsula council area in the very top of Cape York, the top of Australia. It will receive the third highest increase in total grants in Queensland in 2008-09. Again, this is a clear illustration of the Rudd government’s commitment to regional Australia and to our counterparts at the local level. We are delivering for regional Australia. We are delivering for regional Queensland. Roads
funding is a very important part of our commitment.

The Rudd government have a long-term plan for this nation. We have a long-term commitment, whether it is in roads, whether it is in rail or whether it is in other infrastructure. We have established through the budget process the Building Australia Fund. We also have long-term commitments with the Health and Hospitals Fund and an education fund. This legislation is part of our longer term and overall plan for this nation. I am pleased and proud to be a member of the Rudd Labor government, a government that is working hard for local communities in my electorate and all across the country. We stand ready to deliver on our election commitments.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DS Vale)—Order! Is the member for Leichhardt seeking leave to continue his remarks?

Mr TURNOUR—I am happy to conclude my statement on that point. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate interrupted.

AUSLINK (NATIONAL LAND TRANSPORT) AMENDMENT BILL 2008

Referred to Main Committee

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (8.30 pm)—I move:

That the bill be referred to the Main committee for further consideration.

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Mrs Irwin—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Petitions, and in accordance with standing order 207, I present the following petitions:

Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation: Merbein Staff

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

This petition of the concerned residents of Sunraysia, located in the Federal Seat of Mallee draws to the attention of the House: the urgent need for the immediate reversal of the decision to relocate the CSIRO facility staff to Adelaide, from their current location in Merbein. We therefore ask the House to reverse this decision as the ramifications to the district’s horticultural and viticultural industries could be disastrous.

by Mrs Irwin (from 68 citizens)

Pedestrian Crossing: Athelstone

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

The following citizens of Australia draw to the attention of the House that there is a vital need for safer pedestrian crossings near schools and preschools.

We the undersigned are aware of the need to erect a safer pedestrian crossing on Gorge Road at Athelstone to enable local residents and students from nearby St Ignatius College to cross the road more safely. The current pedestrian refuge does not provide enough safety for users on this busy road.

Your petitioners therefore request the House to support this important community issue and encourage the State Government of South Australia to ensure that a safer pedestrian crossing is installed at this location.

by Mrs Irwin (from 194 citizens)

Indigenous Communities

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

This petition from Avila College draws to the attention of the House our concern that Indigenous Australians are not being given a voice.

We say “thank you” to the House for the apology to the “Stolen Generations” and the commitment to address the gap in life expectancy between Australians. Our College has a long tradition of working for reconciliation and believes there is a powerful and important process of healing in the act of saying sorry. We have yearned for this ac-
knowledgment of past wrongs. However, this will mean nothing without reparation. Those of us who are young believe that it is important to acknowledge what the House has achieved. You have given hope to a generation that will shape the future. We have been fortunate to have experienced this moment. We, the youth of our nation say, “thank you”.

Those who are older recognise this historic moment in the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non Indigenous Australians. It was celebrated and wept over in our community, with hearts touched by the goodwill and sincerity of the apology.

We say again, “thank you”.

In the spirit of the 13th February, 2008, we therefore ask the House to actively work with the leaders of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples, listening to their wisdom, and understanding their needs, by giving them a voice as you implement the work that was outlined in the apology.

by Mrs Irwin (from 479 citizens)

Petitions received.

Responses

Forestry

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 27 May 2008 to the Hon. Simon Crean MP, Minister for Trade, requesting a response to a petition on the importation of illegally logged timber, which was submitted for the consideration of the Standing committee on Petitions. Your letter was forwarded to me as I am the minister responsible for the matter raised. I regret the delay in responding.

The Australian Government is committed to restricting the importation of illegally logged timber into Australia and has allocated $1 million to work with regional governments and industry to implement its five election commitments on illegal logging.

In relation to building the capacity of regional governments to tackle illegal logging, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) actively participates in a number of intergovernmental forums on this issue. This work is supported by AusAID overseas development programs such as the $200 million International Forest Carbon Initiative, which includes the $15.7 million Asia Pacific Forestry Skills and Capacity Building Program and the newly announced $3 million Papua New Guinea—Australia Forest Carbon Partnership.

DAFF also supports the development of certification schemes for timber sold in Australia through bilateral cooperation with neighbouring countries, participation in intergovernmental forums and work with Australian industry and certifying organisations, such as the Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification and the Australian Forest Certification and Forest Stewardship Council schemes.

In relation to implementing the election commitments requiring product disclosure and import restrictions, the government is working with stakeholders to develop a new policy that is consistent with international trade, domestic and foreign policy obligations. In arguing for incentives within emerging global carbon markets for avoided deforestation and better management of tropical rainforests, the government advocated trialling market incentives at the climate change meeting in Bali in December 2007. Further work on this action will be led by the Department of Climate Change, supported by DAFF.

Thank you for bringing the concerns raised by the petition’s signatories to my attention. I trust this information is of assistance.

From the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Mr Burke, to a petition presented on 26 May by The Speaker (from 43 citizens)

Moorabbin Public Golf Course

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter dated 26 May 2008 enclosing a petition from residents of Victoria about planning control and the proposed closure and redevelopment of the golf course at Moorabbin Airport.

1. Golf Course

I have given careful consideration to matters raised by Kingston City Council and members of the community concerning the impact of development on the site currently leased by the Council for the Moorabbin Golf Course.
As residents may be aware, the lease negotiated by the Council in 1998 expires in November 2008.

Under the Airports Act 1996 (the Act), Moorabbin Airport Corporation (MAC) is required to submit a new Master Plan for my consideration by August 2009.

At a meeting, I accepted MAC’s offer to bring forward the public release of the preliminary draft Master Plan to October 2008 to allow for a longer period for submissions. This will allow for a more comprehensive and robust consultation with airport stakeholders — State and local governments, and the community at large. I have encouraged the airport to work constructively with all stakeholders in considering options for the future.

The consultative process included in the development of the Master Plan provides an excellent opportunity for all interested parties to participate in the planning process and to contribute to a successful, viable outcome for the site.

2. Inquiry into arrangements at privatised airports

Australia’s long-term planning for the sustainable growth of its aviation industry will be informed through the development of a National Aviation Policy Statement or White Paper in mid 2009 to guide the industry’s growth over the next decade and beyond.

The White Paper will consider a range of issues and challenges currently facing the aviation industry, including issues such as the ones raised in the petition.

I note that several parties with an interest in the future of Moorabbin Airport have made submissions to the development of the National Aviation Policy Green Paper.

3. Planning Control

I note the residents’ view that the Australian Government should require non-aviation related developments at leased federal airports to conform to local planning schemes.

Planning control on leased federal airports is vested in the Government under the Act, as these airports are essential elements of our national economic infrastructure and they are on Commonwealth land. Recent amendments to the Act place increased obligations on MAC to closely consult with state and local planning authorities when developing its planning strategy.

MAC is not required to submit a preliminary draft Major Development Plan (MDP) for a proposed development to the state or local government for an assessment by its planning agency. However, in a preliminary draft MDP, MAC is required to address the extent of consistency with planning schemes in force under a law of the state or territory where the airport is located.

Further, during the consultation phase of a preliminary draft MDP or Master Plan, it is open to a state/territory or local government to have its planning agency conduct an assessment of the proposal and include the outcome of that assessment in a submission to MAC. In addition to the statutory matters that I must consider when the draft MDP is submitted, I am able to take into account issues raised in the submissions made to MAC through the public consultation process and issues raised in correspondence with me.

I note that in response to public submissions, the MAC’s 2004 Draft Master Plan specifically includes a schedule of land use zones expressed in terms consistent with Victorian planning terminology and the inclusion of guidelines and assessment processes for land use decision making.

I will consider the concerns raised as part of the Moorabbin Airport Master Plan process. However, I also encourage residents to make a submission when the draft Master Plan is released for public comment.

Thank you for raising this matter.

From the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, Mr Albanese, to a petition presented on 26 May by The Speaker (from 1,192 citizens)

Port Keats Road

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter dated 17 March 2008 about a petition calling for an upgrade of the Port Keats Road in the Northern Territory and referring a copy of the petition for my attention.

The Australian Government understands the access difficulties faced by communities relying on
the Port Keats Road, which can be impassable for extended periods during the wet season.

The Australian Government has announced a range of commitments that will form the basis of a future land transport program from 2009-10 to 2013-14. A total of $386 million has been committed towards projects in the Northern Territory, which includes a package of $52 million for a range of projects on community, beef and mining roads. This package includes $10 million towards upgrading the Port Keats Road in partnership with the Northern Territory Government.

The proposed upgrade works include a high level bridge over the Daly River and bridges over the Moyle and Tommy Turners Crossings on the Moyle River flood plain. The Australian Government will progress the shape of the future program during 2008 through negotiations with state and territory governments and I look forward to announcing the timing of funding availability following the finalisation of program details.

The Australian Government is already providing $4.95 million towards a $9.9 million Port Keats Road upgrade project, which is an AusLink Strategic Regional project. The Northern Territory Government is also contributing $4.95 million towards the project, which is expected to be completed by early 2009.

The project involves the sealing and upgrading of floodways between the Port Keats T junction and Palumpa and selected floodways between Palumpa and the Daly River. These include Anopheles Creek, Chalanyi Creek, Wait a While Creek, Sandy Creek, Moyle River and Little Moyle Creek. Dangerous sections of road between Palumpa and Peppimenarti will be widened and dangerous bends between Peppimenarti and Sandy Creek realigned.

Thank you again for bringing this matter to my attention and I trust this information will be of assistance.

Asylum Seekers

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 2 June 2008 concerning a number of petitions recently submitted to the Standing committee on Petitions by the Synod of the Anglican Archdiocese of Melbourne regarding income support and work rights for asylum seekers.

I am aware that the current Bridging visa arrangements can leave some people destitute in the community without the capacity to work and earn a living. I believe that we need a more flexible system; one that strikes a better balance between making a reasonable allowance for people to work to support themselves while their claims to remain in Australia are considered, and encouraging claims to be made in a timely way. The new system must also reflect the Government’s expectation that people who have been found to have no claims to remain in Australia should depart. To achieve this I have directed the Department to pursue the issue of work rights for asylum seekers as part of a broader, coherent Bridging visa policy.

Bridging visa holders are currently not eligible for Centrelink benefits and there is no plan to change this policy. Protection visa applicants in the community may be eligible for publicly funded assistance under the Asylum Seeker Assistance (ASA) Scheme, which is administered by the Australian Red Cross. The ASA provides financial assistance similar to that available to Australians receiving Special Benefit payments and also includes access to general health care, pharmaceutical assistance, torture and trauma counselling services and bereavement assistance.

Changes to work rights raise complex issues that require careful consideration to avoid unintended consequences. Formal consultations with the community sector and other agencies will be undertaken to determine the best approaches prior to a policy decision on this matter.

The Government takes its international human rights obligations very seriously, and as part of the overall reform process, it is intent on providing an effective Bridging visa framework that treats people fairly while their claims to remain in Australia are considered.
Thank you for bringing these matters to my attention on behalf of the petitioners. I agree that this response should also be applied to previous petitions on this issue from the Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, and trust the information provided is useful.

From the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, to a petition presented on 26 May, 2 June and 1 September by The Speaker (from 95 citizens)

Australia Post

Dear Mrs Irwin

Australia Post — petition request for the retention of postal services in Traralgon.

Thank you for your letter dated 26 June 2008 to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, the Hon Anthony Albanese MP, concerning a petition submitted for the committee’s consideration regarding the relocation of postal services in Traralgon, Victoria. Your letter has been referred to me as I have portfolio responsibility for this matter.

Under the Australian Postal Corporation Act 1989, Australia Post is responsible for the day to day running of the organisation, including all operational matters. As far as practicable it is required to perform its functions in a manner consistent with sound commercial practice.

Australia Post has advised that no decision has been made to relocate its retail services from the Traralgon Post Office in Franklin Street.

I am informed that Australia Post regularly assesses options to review its retail network, consisting of over 4000 outlets across Australia. There are currently two retail outlets in close proximity in Traralgon’s central business district and accordingly Australia Post is undertaking a review to assess postal services to the whole city of Traralgon, not just the central business district. Australia Post has assured me that the review process will include extensive community consultation.

I trust this information will be of assistance.

From the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Conroy, to a petition presented on 25 June by Mr Billson (from 3,821 citizens)

Statements

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (8.32 pm)—I am pleased to have this opportunity to bring to the attention of the House some further aspects of the work of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions and the revised arrangements that now apply to how petitions are received and responded to by the House. I would like to point out to the House that a further five ministerial responses were presented tonight. If we also take into account the several responses the committee has received since its meeting in the last sitting week, there are now only three petitions to which there has not yet been a ministerial response within the 90-day time frame. I am sure that all members will agree that this is a significant achievement and ministers should be commended for their prompt response to petitions. We look forward to the day when we can proudly indicate that we have had a 100 per cent response rate within the 90-day period.

When I last spoke to the House about the work of the committee, there was insufficient time for me to go into detail on several aspects of the petitioning process. I am grateful that the committee agreed that I could have the full allocation of time tonight to complete my remarks. I would first like to say a few words about how the new petitioning arrangements affect individual members of parliament.

Lodging a petition

It was past practice that all petitions had to be lodged by a member. This usually involved counting up the number of signatures, signing the document and lodging it with the Table Office, who then arranged for its presentation. Under the new arrangements petitioners have two options: either lodging them with a member, who should pass the petition
to the committee, or sending them directly to the Petitions Committee. Regardless of how a petition gets to the committee, it will be assessed to ensure that it complies with standing orders.

- Is the petition addressed to the House?
- Are the terms of the petition no more than 250 words?
- Is the petition on a matter on which the House has the power to act?
- Does it contain a request for action by the House?
- Is there a principal petitioner?
- And are the signatures originals and on a page that contains at the very least the request to the House?

Where a member would like to present a petition personally, it must first come to the Petitions Committee for this assessment against standing orders. I strongly encourage all members to follow this procedure. We aim to get the petition back to the member as soon as possible after the committee meets, so members can arrange time for its presentation. Where a member attempts to present a petition that has not yet gone to the committee, it is not recorded as a petition and confusion follows as to its status. Further delays are caused as the petition comes to the committee for consideration. Petitions have a greater risk of falling through the cracks, and it also makes it harder for the principal petitioners to be advised where their petition is up to.

**Opportunities for members to present petitions**

Under the old system, a member had quite limited opportunities to present a petition themselves—usually only during the period for members’ 90-second and three-minute statements. Most petitions were in fact announced by the Clerk on Monday afternoons. Under the new arrangements members now have much greater opportunity to present petitions that have been endorsed by the committee as in order.

As in the past, members can present a petition in 90-second or three-minute constituency statements, both of which occur in the Main Committee. Petitions may also be presented during the grievance debate (in the Main Committee on Monday evenings) and also during the adjournment debates in both the House and the Main Committee. I would encourage members to speak to their whips’ offices about speaking opportunities at these various times as this is not something that the Petitions Committee manages. I would also draw the House’s attention to *Members’ guide to presenting petitions*, available through the senators and members portal, and encourage members to contact the Petitions Committee secretariat if they have any questions about the process.

I would now like to turn to the follow-up action being taken by the Standing Committee on Petitions. As I noted earlier, we have had an excellent ministerial response rate to petitions and these of course are tabled in the House, placed on the committee’s website and sent to the principal petitioner. The committee recently went further, holding a public hearing on 1 September 2008 to discuss petitions in three separate portfolio areas. I thank the departmental staff from the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, the Department of Health and Ageing and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. They were very much guinea pigs as we experimented with what we might usefully obtain from such an exercise.

We were also delighted to have our first principal petitioner appear as a witness at that hearing. Chris Inglis is a college student from Canberra who is passionate about child soldiers and their depiction in the media. He
would like to see more attention given to their plight. The committee was very interested to hear how Chris came to be involved in petitioning, what he thought of the process and whether he thought it was an effective means of raising an issue with the House of Representatives.

We will be speaking to more principal petitioners in the future around Australia. We hope to give them an opportunity to talk directly to the committee about the issue that galvanised them into action and led to them starting up a petition and allow them a public venue to raise their concerns and if possible comment on any ministerial responses received. We also hope they will give us some feedback on how the petitioning system might be improved.

During the hearing, the committee felt it important to try and seek from the departmental witnesses information that would assist petitioners. To this end, we asked about aspects of the written response and whether there was anything further that could be added to the response if some time had passed since it had been signed off by the minister. We also asked questions which aimed to shed light on government processes and rules, and also asked for information about other options that might exist for petitioners to get their message heard or to get more information on how to promote their concerns.

As with petitions and ministerial responses, the transcripts of these hearings will be placed on our website and sent to the principal petitioners as well. In this way, we hope a more detailed picture of particular issues can be developed which can be of assistance to future petitioners.

Electronic petitioning inquiry

Finally, I would like to say a few words about the inquiry we are conducting into electronic petitioning. Although we wrote to all members seeking their input into the inquiry, there has only been one response from a member so far. The nominal closing date for submissions has passed, but the committee would still welcome any comments members might wish to make. The whole issue of electronic petitioning is quite complicated and it is not as straightforward as being either in favour of it or not. There are a number of quite complex questions that we will be seeking to address over the next couple of months. We will of course be looking at the two Australian jurisdictions that have electronic petitioning—Queensland and Tasmania. (Time expired)

COMMITTEES

Australian Crime Commission Committee

Report

Mr WOOD (La Trobe) (8.40 pm)—On behalf of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission, I present the committee’s report on the inquiry into the Australian Crime Commission Amendment Act 2007, together with evidence received by the committee.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

Mr WOOD—I rise to table the report of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission on the inquiry into the Australian Crime Commission Amendment Act 2007. Before I begin on the report, I want to note the great work undertaken by the Australian Crime Commission members, particularly those seconded from the various police forces, but express my concern about the staff reductions of three per cent. I find it very hard to believe that there should be any reduction in tackling crime. I feel very sorry for the members being forced to go back to their relevant state police forces when they have ongoing investigations.
I would like to provide some background of the circumstances leading to the passing of the amendment act. Section 30 of the Australian Crime Commission Act 2002 provides the ACC with coercive powers to conduct their investigations. Coercive powers mean that anyone summoned to produce documents, answer questions or appear before a hearing can be compelled to do so, under the threat of legal proceedings. These powers have been very effective in the investigations into Melbourne’s underworld killings and in continuing investigations into the illicit drugs trade.

The ruling of Justice Smith in the case of ACC v Brereton 2007, handed down on 23 August 2007, placed in jeopardy 5,000 summonses and notices issued by the ACC since its establishment in 2003. Furthermore, the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions advised that up to 600 summonses and 30 prosecutions could have been affected by Justice Smith’s decision, jeopardising ongoing ACC investigations including those into organised crime and outlaw motorcycle gangs.

The possible consequences of Justice Smith’s ruling necessitated the introduction of the bill to amend the Australian Crime Commission Act on 18 September 2007. Those circumstances meant that it did not go before the committee before its passage through both chambers.

As a result of its inquiry, the committee has made 10 recommendations to the government to improve the amendment act. Before I detail these recommendations, I will say that the committee raised a number of concerns with the conduct of the ACC, in particular the failure of the ACC to communicate with the parliamentary joint committee over its legislative needs.

The committee was also concerned over the methods employed by some examiners. Recommendation 1, that the ACC develop a consistent and reliable method for examiners to record their reasons for decision, as required by part II division 2, subsections 28(1A) and 29(1A) of the Australian Crime Commission Act 2002, is in direct response to the committee’s findings that examiners were not recording their reasons for the issuing of summonses as required. This recommendation recognises that there are a range of standards used by examiners in relation to the recording of reasons. Developing a standard reporting method is not merely an administrative exercise; it is a question of improving accountability.

Sections 10 and 12 of the amending act retrospectively validate any summonses or notices issued prior to the amendment act coming into effect. Recommendation 5 calls for the discontinuation of this practice and repeal of these provisions. However, in order to preserve the integrity of ongoing criminal prosecutions, the committee decided that summonses issued subsequent to the commencement of the amendment act until now should remain valid. This recognises that, should these summonses and notices become invalid, many prosecutions currently on foot would be in jeopardy, opening a virtual Pandora’s box of appeals and overturned convictions.

Finally, recommendation 6, that the Australian Crime Commission Act 2002 be amended to include a statutory definition of contempt of court, aims to address weaknesses in the application of the ACC’s coercive powers when dealing with uncooperative witnesses. Many witnesses under examination from the ACC refuse to answer questions or employ delaying tactics, frustrating the efforts of ACC operations and potentially derailing the entire investigative process. This recommendation, if adopted, means that anyone who uses such tactics will face contempt hearings. In closing, I would
Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (8.45 pm)—I join with my colleague the member for La Trobe in speaking to this report of the Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission. The Australian Crime Commission is the nation’s premier law enforcement agency. Its purpose is to combat serious and organised crime. To do that, it has been given extraordinary powers by virtue of this parliament. It has the power to compel people to appear before it and to demand that they answer questions or provide documentation. Unlike other police or criminal law jurisdictions, there is no right to silence. The coercive powers exercised by this body are unique when it comes to law enforcement in this country. As a consequence of that, this parliament in 2002 put various measures in place to ensure that there would be appropriate balance between the exercise of these extraordinary powers in the fight against serious and organised crime and the preservation of civil liberties. Section 29(1A) of the Australian Crime Commission Act requires that, before issuing a summons, an examiner must be satisfied that it is reasonable in all the circumstances to do so and that the examiner must record in writing the reasons for the issue of the summons. The next section deals with the issue of notices in the same way.

I am not a lawyer, yet I would have thought that was pretty plain on the face of it and meant that, before issuing a summons, you would actually write your reasons—but not so, it seems. Our studious legal colleagues in the ACC apparently developed the practice of writing those reasons at any time, including well after the event. That is what came to a head in the Supreme Court in Victoria. Justice Smith held that, for a summons to be valid, those reasons must be issued at the time and recorded in writing prior to the summons being issued. As we have just heard from the member for La Trobe, that put in jeopardy almost 600 active investigations. These are not just your normal police investigations; these are investigations into serious and organised crime. It was on that basis that the government—I think it was in the last sitting we had before parliament was prorogued last year—introduced the Australian Crime Commission Amendment Bill 2007. It sought to validate all those summonses and notices that had been issued but which, by virtue of Justice Smith’s decision, had become invalid. In other words, it kept on foot those investigations and the evidence that was collected in pursuit of those summonses and notices. Furthermore, it retroactively validated those into the future.

We do need to have a balance. It is our role to ensure that there is a balance between an individual’s rights and the rights of the community, which suffers the scourge of serious and organised crime. That is what we attempted to do in the original legislation, but those exercising the powers of the ACC failed to interpret that. Like the member for La Trobe, I too was very concerned when the joint parliamentary committee was not aware of the proceedings that were on foot before Justice Smith in the Supreme Court in Victoria. As a consequence, we were caught last year quite unawares of the need for this retrospective legislation. We had no intention of holding up or prejudicing those investigations, and those matters proceeded through in some haste to ensure that those investigations remained intact.

We have now recommended that the original drafting of the legislation be adhered to. We have recommended that an examiner must record the reasons for summonses and notices when they are issued. As a matter of fact, today the head of the ACC, Alastair Milroy, has written to the committee secre-
tariat saying that, on the basis of the committee’s recommendations, they will comply with that intention.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Order! The time for debate on this report has expired.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS
Ordinary Seaman Edward ‘Teddy’ Sheean
Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (8.50 pm)—I move:
That the House:
(1) recognises the heroic efforts of Ordinary Seaman Teddy Sheean and his crew mates upon the sinking of the HMAS Armidale on 1 December 1942 off the Timor coast;
(2) implores the Government to award a posthumous Victoria Cross of Australia to Ordinary Seaman Teddy Sheean to recognise properly his valour and sacrifice on 1 December 1942; and
(3) urges the Government to establish a mechanism to address outstanding issues and anomalies in the military honours system such as recognising the courageous deeds of people such as Ordinary Seaman Teddy Sheean on 1 December 1942.

I have spoken before in this place about two related injustices in Australia’s military history. The first is that, despite a long, distinguished history of engagement in all manner and types of combat and service, not one member of the Royal Australian Navy has been awarded the Victoria Cross. Why is this? Is the history of the RAN without one incident or act of bravery by any individual worthy of being awarded a VC? In the annals of the RAN, is there nothing remotely familiar to the following: in July 1940, Leading Seaman Jack Mantle of the Royal Navy, although mortally wounded, kept firing his gun right to the end when a swarm of Nazi Stukas attacked his anti-aircraft ship HMS Foylebank in the English harbour of Portland? For his valour, Jack Mantle was fittingly awarded the Victoria Cross. In light of this story, what I am about to briefly describe clearly highlights the second injustice. I am speaking of the tragic yet heroic events surrounding the sinking of the corvette HMAS Armidale on 1 December 1942 off the coast of Timor. More specifically, I am referring to the case of an 18-year-old Tasmanian from the township of Latrobe in my electorate of Braddon—Ordinary Seaman Edward ‘Teddy’ Sheean. Sixty-six years ago, Teddy Sheean gave up his life to help save some of his mates who were being strafed by Japanese planes as the Armidale sank. Teddy ran back to his gun, strapped himself in and, despite being seriously wounded in the chest, kept firing to the end.

Journalist, author and navy wartime veteran, the recently departed Frank Walker, in his book HMAS Armidale: the ship that had to die, described the final moments:
Even when there was nothing left of the ship above the water, tracer bullets from Sheean’s gun kept shooting from under the water …

Jack Mantle RN was awarded the VC for his extraordinary valour; Teddy Sheean was merely mentioned in dispatches. Why has this act of courage, for example—and many others, particularly in the Royal Australian Navy—witnessed then and undisputed today, not been rewarded with a VC?

I have here copies of statements made by seven survivors of HMAS Armidale, all collected by the late Frank Walker and testifying to the historical accuracy and extent of Teddy Sheean’s bravery. Do these eyewitness accounts mean nothing? Were they not countenanced in the official inquiry into the sinking of HMAS Armidale? Clearly, Armidale’s Lieutenant Commander Richards’ special mention of the Sheean bravery would have counted for something—but apparently not. In his search for justice for Teddy Sheean, Frank Walker has pointed to the inadequacy
and the absurdity of the awards system as related to the Royal Australian Navy. And here lies the anomaly: unlike the AIF and the RAAF, where awards were decided by Australians in Australia, RAN awards were not. The Australian Commonwealth Naval Board, headed by a Royal Navy officer, had to send recommendation to the Admiralty in London where the awards and honours committee made the decision. Furthermore, Walker points out that the commanding officers of Royal Navy ships were entitled to recommend sailors for certain awards, but the captains of Royal Australian Navy ships were instructed ‘the nature of the award is not to be suggested’. 

It is Walker’s contention that it was impossible for Australian officers to recommend Australian sailors for a VC. And he did not mince his words. According to Frank, snobbery and class distinctions played their part in this discrimination.

What then is the problem about resolving this issue, about doing the right thing? Contrary to popular belief, since a royal warrant of 31 December 1942, Australia has retained or adopted the Victoria Cross as the supreme award for military heroism in this country. It can be given on a recommendation from the Australian government to the Queen. It can in fact be legislated for and/or recommended by the present government. So why has this not occurred despite the overwhelming recognition of the merit and authenticity of the case? The answer basically is: ‘Let sleeping dogs lie.’ In condescending bureaucratic speak of 25 October 1999, the departmental response, from an adviser, to this very question was:

It is not practical for better judgments about individual actions or merit to be made at this time than were made by contemporary authorities who had direct access to eye witness reports and could test evidence when it was fresh.

Where was the danger? The danger was in: … creating a precedent for unwanted and perhaps divisive comparisons between these ‘hindsight-awards’ and those recommended and granted at the time.

I call on my government, through its newly established Independent Defence Honours and Awards Tribunal, to right the wrongs of the past— (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Is the motion seconded?

Mr SECKER (Barker) (8.55 pm)—I second the motion. It is a great honour for me to support my colleague from the other side, the member for Braddon, who I count as a friend in this House.

In February 2001, in my home state of South Australia, a Collins class submarine was commissioned, the HMAS Sheean. The HMAS Sheean’s motto is ‘Fight on’. She is the only Australian naval vessel to be named after a sailor—Ordinary Seaman Teddy Sheean. Teddy Sheean was no ordinary Australian. In late 1942, during World War II, 18-year-old Teddy Sheean was a sailor posted on the corvette HMAS Armidale on a dangerous mission just off the Timor coast. On 1 December 1942, the Armidale came under Japanese air attack by 13 Japanese aircraft. The Armidale was hit by two aircraft launched torpedoes. She began to sink fast and the crew were ordered to abandon ship.

Teddy Sheean was wounded and could have tried his luck to swim to the Timor coast. Instead, seeing his shipmates being picked off in the water by Japanese aircraft, wounded, he made his way across the deck of the Armidale and strapped himself into his Oerlikon gun. Teddy Sheean started firing at the enemy, forcing some of the planes to sheer away from the stricken vessel and its crew in the water. One of the fighter planes was shot down. Sheean was again hit in the chest by bullets, the ship was sinking fast
and the water was lapping his feet. This is what survivors say of that day:

The men in the water gasped in amazement as they saw the blood-stained, desperate youngster wheel his gun from target to target, his powerless legs dragging on the deck.

As the gun was dragged into the sea its barrel kept recoiling and shots kept pouring from it.

Even as he sank below water, Sheean’s gun kept shooting. Teddy Sheean died that day, aged just 18. Only 49 of the 149 men on board survived the attack and subsequent ordeal on rafts and in lifeboats, many saved by his heroic actions. Teddy Sheean died fighting to the end against impossible odds. He epitomised the phrase ‘Fight on’, a common saying uttered by those trying to encourage their fellow sailors, or by the tired sailors themselves, and it is this motto that the HMAS Sheean took as its own.

Many consider that Sheean’s actions deserved the Victoria Cross. I do. He was not recommended for the VC at the time because commanding officers of RAN ships at the time were not entitled to specify the nature of the award. Unbelievably, while AIF and RAAF awards were recommended and decided by Australians in Australia, RAN awards were not. A recommendation had to be sent to the Royal Navy Admiralty in London, where an awards and honours committee made the decision. This discrimination meant that no member of the Royal Australian Navy has been awarded the Victoria Cross. Sixty-six years later, bureaucratic madness dictates that Teddy Sheean remains ineligible for the honour, because supposedly end-of-war lists for World War II cannot be reopened.

When I think of how I was at 18 years of age and of Teddy Sheean’s courage and valour in sacrificing himself to save others, it is abundantly clear that his actions deserve nothing less than the posthumous award of a Victoria Cross. Australia has retained the Victoria Cross as the supreme award for military heroism. It can be given on a recommendation from the Australian government to the Queen. It can be legislated for and/or recommended by this present government. The only thing that stops Teddy Sheean from receiving this country’s highest military honour for bravery is an unwillingness on the part of the government to tamper with a bureaucratic filing process. Teddy Sheean is remembered and honoured in a variety of ways by family, friends and supporters. He gave his life for his country and his mates in the true Australian tradition. It is now time for Australia to honour him with our highest award for gallantry, the Victoria Cross.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (9.00 pm)—It gives me great pleasure to speak on this motion on Ordinary Seaman Teddy Sheean. I would like to congratulate the member for Braddon for bringing this matter to the House—and not just once. The member for Braddon also presented the Defence Act Amendment (Victoria Cross) Bill 2001 to the House on 4 June 2001, which was the basis of the Labor Party’s election promise in 2001 to posthumously award a Victoria Cross to Teddy Sheean.

In speaking to this motion tonight, I pay credit to Frank Walker. Frank Walker was a very close and dear friend of mine who campaigned tirelessly for Teddy Sheean to be awarded the Victoria Cross. Sixty-six years later, bureaucratic madness dictates that Teddy Sheean remains ineligible for the honour, because supposedly end-of-war lists for World War II cannot be reopened.

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Ms HALL (Shortland) (9.00 pm)—It gives me great pleasure to speak on this motion on Ordinary Seaman Teddy Sheean. I would like to congratulate the member for Braddon for bringing this matter to the House—and not just once. The member for Braddon also presented the Defence Act Amendment (Victoria Cross) Bill 2001 to the House on 4 June 2001, which was the basis of the Labor Party’s election promise in 2001 to posthumously award a Victoria Cross to Teddy Sheean.

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great courage and feats of Teddy Sheean and the reasons why he should be awarded the Victoria Cross. Previous speakers have spoken about the fact that Navy personnel have not received the VC when they have deserved it, and Teddy Sheean sure is an example of somebody who deserved the Victoria Cross.

Frank Walker campaigned for many years for Teddy Sheean to be awarded the Victoria Cross. In his book, he talks about the acts of bravery Teddy Sheean performed as a Royal Australian Navy sailor. He talks about how Teddy Sheean tied his gun to himself and kept firing as *HMAS Armidale* went down. I might just go through some of the feats of Teddy Sheean, because they are outstanding. Although twice wounded, he continued to return fire to try and protect the sailors in the water, bringing down one Japanese bomber in the process and severely damaging two others. Teddy Sheen was seen firing his gun even as the *Armidale* sank. In fact, witnesses reported seeing tracer rising from beneath the water—Sheean had kept firing underwater. There were 102 survivors of the sinking of the *Armidale*, thanks to the bravery of one man, Teddy Sheean—although many more were lost in life rafts on that day. That was because of what Teddy Sheean did. The Japanese continued to fire upon the ship and also machine-gunned sailors who had jumped into the water. This happened at around 3 pm on 4 December 1942. Afterwards, Sheean was mentioned in dispatches for his bravery. In 1999 a Collins class submarine was named after him—*HMAS Sheean*. This is the only vessel in the Royal Australian Navy to be named after an ordinary seaman. His sister, Mrs Ivy Hayes, launched the submarine in Adelaide on 1 May 1999.

This is an exceptionally important motion that we are debating here tonight. I call on the government, through its newly established and independent Defence Honours and Awards Tribunal, to right the wrongs of the past and take up the case of Teddy Sheean and others by establishing a mechanism to address the outstanding issues and anomalies in the military honours system in this country, particularly those relating to the actions of RAN personnel. This is the least we can do for people like Teddy Sheean. Lest we forget. (Time expired)

**Mr SIMPKINS** (Cowan) (9.06 pm)—I came here tonight with some notes that I was going to refer to, but having listened to the previous speakers I think I will dispense with those more formal notes in making a few comments on the circumstances of this great Australian, Teddy Sheean. I understand that at about the time of World War I the Royal Australian Navy fleet was often referred to as the Australian squadron of the Royal Navy. I think things like that really put this into perspective.

The link between the Royal Australian Navy and the Royal Navy has gone on for a long time, and the traditions are obviously very clearly there. But now we see that such traditions have worked against the best interests of this country and people like Teddy Sheean. I think that that is an absolutely tragedy and I join with the government members to endorse the call for Teddy Sheean to be properly recognised in the appropriate manner. When you see what a MID, Mention In Dispatches, looks like when worn on a uniform—it is a small wreath—you note that clearly there is a significant difference between that and the crimson ribbon and the gunmetal cross of the Victoria Cross.

Teddy Sheean is certainly a fine example of the great traditions of this country. He was under pressure, under enormous odds after being wounded twice, fighting to the end with no regard for his own safety, only a regard for those he was trying to protect. He
was out there fighting the fight, trying to destroy the Japanese bombers and fighters that were machine-gunning his friends in the water. He was there doing his duty for his country. He was a great Australian and a great Tasmanian. I understand that he was from—

Mr Sidebottom—Latrobe.

Mr SIMPKINS—in fact it was very interesting to have read ‘Latrobe’, but there was also a reference to Lower Barrington.

Mr Sidebottom—that’s it—just near Latrobe.

Mr SIMPKINS—I have had the pleasure of being in Barrington, and it is a most excellent part of the country. To know that someone of such significance in this country’s history has come from such a pretty place—but not exactly the biggest place—is another one of those great examples of how someone’s background possibly contributes to the effort that they put in.

We have had a number of references tonight to what Teddy Sheean did. With his corvette, the Armidale, having been torpedoed twice—and I understand it received a bomb blast as well—he strapped himself to the aft Oerlikon machine-gun and continued that fight. We also know that HMAS Sheean was named after him.

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

Epidermolysis Bullosa

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (9.10 pm)—I move:

That the House:

(1) notes that Epidermolysis Bullosa (EB) is a rare genetic condition characterised by skin fragility and blister formation, which is incurable and in its most severe forms can be fatal in infancy and childhood;
(2) notes that children afflicted by EB are known as “butterfly children” and are required to pierce, drain and dress their blisters each day in an endless routine that lasts up to three hours in the most severe cases;
(3) notes there are currently 229 patients formally diagnosed and registered on the Australasian EB Registry and that based on international estimates there may be up to 1,000 people affected by this condition in Australia, of whom 100-150 have the most severe form;
(4) acknowledges the support and assistance provided to sufferers and their families by DebRA Australia, the national Dystrophic Epidermolysis Bullosa research association;
(5) recognises that families with a child suffering from EB have problems accessing dressings because of expense or availability from the public system, and in the more severe cases families must spend up to $5,300 per month on dressings; and
(6) calls on the Australian Government to establish a 12 month trial program, managed by the Department of Health and Ageing in partnership with DebRA, to:
(a) fund delivery of dressings directly to patients currently registered on the Australasian EB registry from suppliers identified through a public tender process;
(b) provide access to a dedicated nurse in each state and territory for patients suffering from EB; and
(c) review the program upon conclusion, with a view to establishing a permanent scheme.

In July this year, after putting our little girl to bed my wife and I sat down together on Sunday night to watch Domestic Blitz on the Nine Network. It is not uncommon for my wife to become very emotional at the end of these types of programs, but on this occasion I was right there with her and we were deeply moved by the story of Joshua Gibson,
a brave young boy from the Sutherland Shire, in the neighbouring electorate of Hughes, who, together with his family, received a generous new home renovation.

Joshua is one of 229 Australians who suffer from a rare genetic skin disorder called epidermolysis bullosa, EB, and who have been officially diagnosed and listed on the national EB register. According to DebRA, the national research association for EB, EB is caused by a genetic change or mutation in one of the genes that code for the proteins that glue the skin. This makes the skin as fragile as wet tissue paper. The EB children are often known as ‘butterfly children’ because their skin is as fragile as a butterfly’s wings. In their recent submission to the government, DebRA noted that the slightest knock or rub, rolling in bed or, sadly, a mother’s hug can cause blistering. The fragile nature of Joshua’s skin means he must spend life wrapped in bandages to avoid severe skin damage, which can cause severe pain. The constant damage can cause fingers and toes to completely fuse together, and this is often the case, particularly as children grow older.

DebRA noted that children with EB regularly, sometimes daily, need their blisters pierced, drained and dressed in an endless routine, which lasts three to four hours in the most severe cases. This horrific job is typically undertaken by their mother or their father, and in Joshua’s case by his mother, Kylie, who shared what it was like to do this on the Domestic Blitz program. As a parent, I cannot begin to understand the torment this must be for parents like Todd and Kylie Gibson, or indeed for Michael Fitzpatrick, the president of DebRA and his wife, Bree, whose nine-year-old son, Connor, also suffers from this dreadful condition. This is a mixture of courage and love that defies description and inspires profound admiration. As Sarah Palin recently remarked: ‘Children with disabilities summon a very special kind of love from their parents.’ Even the eating of solids can have a devastating effect on the mouth and the oesophagus, with many taking their food, medication and painkillers through a feeding tube directly into their stomach. Damage to the eyes can also result in children having to sit in the dark for up to two or three days until they have healed. In its most severe forms the disorder can be fatal in infancy and childhood.

In the course of speaking to the member for Farrer in the preparation for this debate today, I learned of the tragic case of Xantha Maree Marshall, a beautiful little girl who passed away from EB last year. Her grandmother lives in the member for Farrer’s electorate, and Xantha lived in the neighbouring electorate of Indi.

In addition to the physical and emotional toll of EB, families have to spend up to $5,300 a month on medical dressings to protect their child’s skin and ensure they can live a life as normally and as free from pain as possible. Unlike in New Zealand, there is currently no national scheme in Australia which allows families like the Gibsons comprehensive free access to proper medical dressings, such as Mepilex, that have a profound and positive impact on the health and wellbeing of their children. That is why Xantha’s family have set up the Xantha Maree Foundation to assist with the cost of bandages and medical expenses and it is why DebRA each year provides more than $50,000 worth of support to families to assist with their dressings. A national survey on dressings conducted by DebRA of parents and families involved with children who have EB found that 45 per cent of members had problems accessing dressings because of expense or availability, and only 35 per cent were able to access dressings through the public system. Of those 35 per cent, only
two-thirds received the types of dressings they required.

That is why the member for Hughes and I have called on the government and our own party to provide bipartisan support for a $5 million national trial to help Joshua and other Australians listed on the national EB registry get free access to medical dressings. The scheme would provide dressings directly from a preferred supplier, selected from a tender process, free of charge to the front door of the 229 Australians currently on the national EB registry. The scheme would also involve the employment of an EB nurse in each state and territory to provide advice and care to families. The trial proposal is based on a submission from DebRA to the government, which I will seek leave to table at the conclusion of my remarks.

I wish to thank those members from both sides of the House for their support of this motion tonight and outside this place, namely the members for Aston, Wentworth, Farrer, Greenway, Hume, Wannon, Mitchell, McMillan, Gippsland, Bennelong and Newcastle. This is an affordable, necessary and compassionate scheme that befits our status as a modern, prosperous and caring nation. I call on the government and my own party to answer the call of these children and their families for their support. I seek leave to table the submission.

Leave granted.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Is the motion seconded?

Ms GEORGE (Throsby) (9.16 pm)—I second the motion. I begin by commending the member for Cook for bringing this very important matter to the notice of the House. I think it is important that in private members’ business we do have the opportunity to raise issues which have been brought to our attention by the constituents whom we represent in this chamber. As the member for Cook indicated, epidermolysis bullosa, commonly known as EB, is a rare genetic condition which is incurable. There are currently 229 patients formally diagnosed and registered with this frightful condition.

Two children in my electorate, Jayden O’Brien, aged five, and his younger brother Billy, aged three, suffer from this condition. As described, this condition is characterised by a blistering and/or a tearing of the skin’s surface with the slightest touch. Not only do their blisters require constant dressings but the two children whom I am aware of also suffer from nutritional problems caused by constant blistering and ulceration of the oesophagus. In fact, one of the children is fed directly from a tube inserted in his stomach. Just a couple of weekends ago I met the two children and it was very obvious, even at their young age, that walking has become increasingly difficult for them as has the use of their hands due to the skin fusing together from constant repair and healing.

In this context, each day their parents face the exhausting task of bathing and bandaging their children’s wounds. As their mum and dad told me, it takes hours and often necessitates pain medication for the children while their wounds are being attended to. The dressings to treat this condition are very expensive, even with subsidised supplies from the Sydney Children’s Hospital and financial assistance from the EB national association, DebRA. The O’Brien family has told me that it spends around $450 a month on dressings and on assistance in full-time care for one of the children.

In recognition of these enormous financial imposts facing a one-income family, members of the local Shellharbour Sunday bowlers club have raised funds to help the family meet their medical expenses. As club president Phil Gall said recently:
It’s very rewarding: our fellas are a generous mob, specially when there is a worthy cause like this one.

In that regard I would like to place on record tonight my thanks to members of the Shell-harbour Sunday bowlers club, to Wals Pharmacy at Warilla and to all who assisted in the recent successful fundraising event at Warilla Bowls. It certainly helped the family meet their ongoing and expensive medical costs.

Some time ago I pursued the plight of the O’Brien family in representations I made to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing. In her reply I was advised that neither the PBS nor Medicare could currently be accessed to help meet the costs of medical aids and appliances. It was noted, and I quote from the parliamentary secretary’s letter:

… there is a growing recognition that out of pocket costs for necessary medical aids and appliances in the community setting are rising and that eligibility and the level of assistance provided is not consistent across jurisdictions.

That certainly is the case and, from what I understand, some private medical insurance does provide some cover but in the case of the O’Briens they are not in a position to draw on that. One glimmer of hope that I detected in the parliamentary secretary’s reply was the statement:

… the Commonwealth Government is currently considering the issues surrounding support for EB dressings. Support for aids and appliances such as EB dressings is one of a number of current commonwealth/state health reform issues.

I was pleased that the issue had, at least, been noted and registered on the list of issues that the Commonwealth is discussing, but it provides cold comfort in the meantime in addressing the needs of the O’Brien family. In that context I do commend the suggestion proposed in the motion moved by the member for Cook that the Australian government establish a 12-month trial program to ‘fund delivery of dressings directly to patients currently registered’ on the EB registry ‘from suppliers identified through a public tender process’. (Time expired)

Mrs VALE (Hughes) (9.21 pm)—I warmly congratulate the member for Cook for raising this important issue of epidermolysis bullosa, highlighting the many challenges faced by Australian families who have a family member suffering from this unusual condition. I support the moving of this motion. Children with epidermolysis bullosa, or simply EB, are commonly known as ‘cotton wool children’ or ‘butterfly children’. EB is a rare genetic skin disorder marked by fine, fragile skin, as fragile as a butterfly’s wings, which forms painful blisters either spontaneously or following minor bumps or knocks, often as a result of the slightest touch. This is the reality for people living with EB, which can affect all parts of the body both externally and internally. EB can appear in varying degrees of intensity and type. EB at its worst can be fatal and, even in its mildest form, it causes a life of pain and physical challenges. Some people spend hours every day dealing with blisters, wounds and destructive scarring by bandaging the affected areas with protective coverings.

This matter was brought to my attention last year by a family in my electorate. The Gibson family have a five-year-old little boy called Joshua who suffers from this condition and needs the constant care and support of his mother and father. Every day, or in some cases every second day, children like Joshua and adults with EB need their blisters pierced, drained and dressed in a routine that lasts up to three hours a day in the most severe cases. The visible wounds on the skin are sometimes only the outside manifestation of this rare condition, because even the eating of solid food can have a devastating effect on the mouth and oesophagus. As a result, many EB sufferers take their food,
medication and painkillers through a feeding tube directly into their stomach.

In most cases, the care of the person living with EB falls to the parents, especially the mother. This can be a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week job, with little or no support options available to many families. This has a significant impact on families, with many living in isolation, as they can often become disconnected from their friends and community. Add to this the ongoing financial burden of medication, most particularly wound dressings and bandages, and it is no surprise that the resultant stress can lead to relationship breakdown within some of those families.

There are significant lifestyle changes required, with at least one parent needing to give up paid employment to take on the role of full-time carer. Children also need support with access to education, with many needing to attend school with a teacher’s aide. Parents are always on call if needed and must spend large amounts of time assisting children to catch up on missed learning opportunities and assisting school care to adapt to the children’s needs.

The National Dystrophic Epidermolysis Bullosa Research Association of Australia, otherwise known as DebRA, and its member state branches are seeking the support of the federal government to fund and implement a national dressings supply scheme for around 229 children and adults on the national EB register in Australia. This will ensure that all Australians have access to care which is medically accepted as current best practice and addresses current inequities, because the present healthcare system does not have a clear strategy to deal with patients with EB. No government funding is provided to any of the DebRA groups, including the national body. It is only through community awareness and support, as well as funding from corporate Australia and other charitable organisations, that DebRA can make a difference.

DebRA proposes that the national scheme be set up with an indexed budget of $5 million, whereby dressings are made available to eligible patients. DebRA is willing to coordinate and assist with the administration of the scheme. This would also bring Australia into line with countries such as New Zealand, the United Kingdom and other developed countries, which have long-established national schemes. The scheme would provide an equitable framework to make dressings available and it would improve the quality of life of individuals and families through improved rates of healing, reduced pain during dressing changes and a reduction in the use of other medications. It would result in greater patient compliance, fewer hospital admissions and cost savings through economy of scale. There would be greater economic productivity through increased school attendance and work participation. It would also reduce the financial burden on families already struggling with the added cost of caring for a person with a major medical condition. It would be a reliable system that is not constantly at risk of review, change or termination and it would allow improved social and community involvement for the families. It was inspiring to meet with Gavin O’Brien this afternoon. I commend this motion to the House.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (9.26 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to speak to this motion, which quite properly highlights the hardships faced by those families affected by this terrible disease, epidermolysis bullosa. On 14 May in the adjournment debate in this place I raised my concern over the hardship and suffering of people with epidermolysis bullosa and the stress, both financial and personal, it places on family members and carers of EB sufferers. I have also spoken on several occa-
sions with Laraine Frost, a Makin resident whose family members suffer from this terrible skin disease. Laraine is one of hundreds of Australians who deal with the disease daily and who live with the emotional and financial demands it causes. Only today I met with a delegation of people representing EB sufferers. I understand the delegation also met with the Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon. Amongst the delegation was a young man by the name of Gavin O’Brien, who had both his arms, the full length of them, heavily bandaged. Gavin’s bandaging is typical of the daily dressings required by many EB sufferers.

Earlier this year I also wrote to the health minister about this very matter, bringing to her attention my concern for EB sufferers and their families. I was heartened by the minister’s reply. The member for Throsby made reference a moment ago to a similar reply that she has received from the minister’s department. Effectively, the minister is saying that she is certainly aware of the needs of people suffering from this disease and that she will be responding in due course. I understand that there is a review taking place right now of some of the health services provided by the government, with an interim report expected sometime before the end of this year. I certainly look forward with interest to that report. It is heartening to read that the Commonwealth is considering the issues surrounding support for EB dressings, and for that I thank the minister.

I also know that DebRA, the National Dystrophic Epidermolysis Bullosa Research Association of Australia, which has been referred to by other speakers tonight, has been pleading with the federal government to provide assistance for victims and their families for some years. Whilst I understand that some state governments provide some level of assistance, the cold, hard reality is that the assistance is simply not enough. As other speakers have already highlighted, the cost of these dressings runs into thousands of dollars. In fact, whilst in some cases the fee might be somewhere in the vicinity of $3,000 to $5,000 per month, it can be as high as $12,000 per month for the special dressings that are required. What is sadder is that there is no consistent support found throughout Australia, and the assistance that is provided to families is indeed very limited. I also understand that in other countries, including the UK, New Zealand and the Netherlands, governments do recognise the needs of EB sufferers and provide assistance as part of their normal health services. Perhaps the minister might take that on board when the review is handed down to her.

Debate interrupted.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The **SPEAKER**—Order! It being 9.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

**Mobile Phone Scams**

Mr **HAWKER** (Wannon) (9.30 pm)—Tonight I would like to raise what is a very vexing matter for quite a number of Australians, particularly in my electorate. Mobile phone users are being ripped off by text message scams. These scams are coming through, users are charged and they are often quite unaware of what is going on. What happens is that a scam is sent, the user quite rightly says, ‘That’s not for me,’ and deletes it; but apparently deleting it is not enough. At the end of the month, when the bill comes in, if people look closely at the bottom of the bill they will see they are being charged for these messages. Generally, it is around $6 a message. I have had one case where a constituent of mine had $24 added to the bill and could not work out what it was. The real fraud in this whole system is that, unless a person reads through the message and actually replies by typing ‘Stop’,
they will be billed. Frankly, I think that is not good enough. It is clearly trying to take advantage of people on the assumption that many of them, when they look down a long list of telephone calls, do not see what that extra bit is because it is not clear. Really, it is nothing short of daylight robbery. To me it is analogous to getting junk mail in your mailbox: if you do not write back to the person who sent the junk mail and say, ‘I don’t want your product,’ you are going to be billed for it. I do not think that is good enough.

I recently had a case where a father of a 15-year-old received a message from a ringtone seller, which she had never contacted at any stage or signed on for. His daughter, sensibly, deleted the message and thought nothing more of it until the amount was deducted from her prepaid account. This continued because his daughter had not sent back the word ‘Stop’ to the seller. So the father had to get on to the provider and then the ringtone seller to get the money refunded. He spent an hour on the phone to get that done and, if it had not been done, he would not have got the money back and it would have just been deducted. Frankly, I think it is a ridiculous situation where companies can take advantage of people through this scam. It is totally unacceptable.

What is most interesting is that, after issuing a media release in my electorate about what was going on, my electorate office was inundated with calls from unsuspecting mobile phone users who suddenly realised that they too were being taken advantage of under this so-called ‘premium phone charge’ that was just being added to the bottom of their account. The problem is that, as it stands at the moment, people who actually want to stop what is going on have to spend up to an hour on the telephone to stop it. Frankly, this is unacceptable. Even worse than that, as I have said, such things as selling a new ringtone or all sorts of promises about finding new boyfriends or girlfriends and so on are often being directed at young people. It seems that there is no level below which some of these people will stoop when it comes to trying to rip off innocent consumers.

It is clear that the mobile phone service providers have to take a lot more responsibility than they do at the moment. I do not accept their excuse, ‘We have these premium services and we do offer to collect funds on behalf of them on the basis that people choose to use these services.’ I do not think this falls into that category at all. The mobile service providers are going to have to sharpen up their game very quickly and stop this ridiculous practice where people are being ripped off quite dishonestly. It is a scam any way you define it, and it really has to be dealt with. Consumers who sign up in good faith with providers like Telstra and Optus expect better than they have got so far. The communications industry is on notice. I know that the federal government is aware of this, but it has to move a lot faster than it has so far. This ridiculous practice has to be stopped. The people who are running these scams have to be run out of town because, clearly, this is just another form of fraud and innocent consumers, particularly young people, are being ripped off in a totally unscrupulous fashion.

Bass Electorate: Economic Development Package

Ms CAMPBELL (Bass) (9.35 pm)—I have spoken in this House before of the resilience, determination and creativity of the people of north-east Tasmania. Since last this parliament sat, all these traits have been well and truly tested. Timber company Gunns, for reasons I will not go into, closed one of the Auspine timber mills in the town of Scottsdale. As you would be aware, Mr Speaker, workers at both of the Auspine mills have
been through a tough and tumultuous couple of years. More than 70 full-time workers and the same number of casuals lost their jobs. In a community the size of Scottsdale the effect was potentially devastating. I was in Scottsdale on the day the workers heard the news and I can say that the government responded quickly with practical assistance. Through the Minister for Employment Participation, Mr Brendan O’Connor, Centrelink and the region’s employment service providers were in Scottsdale almost immediately to offer workers advice and counselling as they made decisions regarding redundancies and their future.

The problems and decisions faced by those in the community affected by the Tognanah mill closure did not stop there, nor did the support offered by the Rudd government. It took time, as well it should, to develop a $4½ million economic development package. The government had no prior notice of the intention of Gunns to close the mill and we responded as quickly as we could, all the while appreciating that it is public money we are speaking about. It must be spent correctly. Accountability and transparency have become a hallmark of this government, and that is essential when dealing with large sums of taxpayer funds. $3.91 million of this package will be spent through the North East Tasmania Innovation and Investment Fund. The remaining $600,000 will be distributed via a business microcapital scheme.

Much has been said by those opposite about this package. To them I would say this: it is a package which is about creating high-wage, high-skill jobs for the north-east. It is not about hollow promises—funds committed but never spent—and empty rhetoric like that practised by the former government. This package and these innovation funds were cheered when they were announced, and well they should have been.

No-one is suggesting, least of all me, that this is a silver bullet which will solve all the issues facing north-east Tasmania. It is an initiative which encourages investment. It rewards projects that facilitate activities which generate sustainable employment and economic development. Quite rightly, there is a particular focus on projects which provide employment opportunities for displaced workers from the Gunns Auspine mill. I am informed by the Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research that a similar program in the Victorian city of Geelong, which invested $3.3 million, generated $24 million worth of additional investment. This is not about propping up unsustainable industries and communities. It is about ensuring that communities are offered every opportunity to develop sustainable and economically viable industries and businesses which secure their long-term future. It is about responsible governing.

The Rudd government has actually committed to spending money in the north-east, rather than simply committing to spend the money—which is what those opposite did. Let me inform the House, if I may, of exactly how the opposition operated whilst in government. It announced a $4 million commitment—and I use the term very loosely—for a road in the north-east. They did so after no consultation and with heavy strings attached, one of which was that this money was actually contingent on it being matched by the state government. Let us be serious here: 18 months after that hollow and deliberately misleading announcement, that road is no closer to being realised, and yet those on the other side of the House jump up and down when the money is actually going to be spent creating jobs, generating investment and building a sustainable future for the region. I congratulate the industry minister for the substance of these funding packages, and I look forward to working closely with AusIn-
dustry and the local community to see their potential realised.

Mrs Linda Lavarch

Mr DUTTON (Dickson) (9.39 pm)—I want to take the unusual step tonight of congratulating Linda Lavarch, the state member for Kurwongbah—soon to be known as the seat of Pine Rivers—on her achievements whilst in office. Mrs Lavarch, of course, comes from a well-known family and was first elected in 1997 to the state parliament. In my experience, she conducted herself in the electorate in an exemplary way. She was well involved in many of the local community groups. I saw her at many functions, and she was well respected at those because she provided support to the community. In fact, she encompassed all that was, in my view, good about a good local member. She came from the area, she represented people and their causes, she provided support to community groups, and whilst in parliament she rose to be the Attorney-General in the Queensland state government. As the House is aware, she recently announced her retirement from the state parliament.

Regrettably, it has been advertised quite widely by many in the Labor Party and by media reports that she is to be replaced by a Labor MP from a seat further north of Kurwongbah, Carolyn Male. Carolyn Male is not a person that I personally know, but what I do know is that, if she is parachuted into the seat of Kurwongbah, she brings with her all the traits of the person that the Labor Party last parachuted into an area in Pine Rivers—which they did in 2001—and that was Mrs Cheryl Kernot. You look at the media reports, many people hold that same view, including many of the local Labor branch members. My call tonight is for the Labor Party to listen to and respect the views of local Labor Party branch members, who are asking for nothing extraordinary except for the opportunity to elect one of their own—somebody like Linda Lavarch who knows the area of Pine Rivers; somebody who is able to represent their interests because they are genuinely interested in representing those interests; and somebody who brings with them the experience to represent our local area.

In 2001, the Labor Party took a decision to override the wishes of the local branch members to parachute Mrs Kernot in, and the result is well known in this place. The arrogance that is being displayed by the Bligh government—a continuity of the Beattie government—for a lot of local people defies belief. People do not want to have imposed on them candidates from outside their own area simply because there has been some sort of a factional deal stitched up by union people in the back rooms of the Labor Party. I want to read into the record a couple of comments which have been made in the press recently. On 1 September, the Courier Mail said:

But this arrogance has now leached into the wider Labor Party. It has been reported that Carolyn Male, Government Whip and Member for Glass House, has abandoned her constituents and manoeuvred a switch—with Premier Bligh’s blessing—to the safer bet of Kurwongbah, now vacated by the retiring Linda Lavarch. This factional game of musical chairs points to the type of arrogance that only long incumbency brings. The Labor Party has come to regard individual seats as its personal property, with the party’s factions taking members and voters equally for granted.

I quote again from the Courier Mail on 1 September, which said:

Glass House MP Carolyn Male has finished window-shopping electorates across Brisbane’s northside and settled on the safer seat of Pine Rivers after Labor was stripped of its majority in the electorate following boundary changes. Her first choice was another new seat, Morayfield, which she said she coveted for a variety of rea-
sons, including her children’s sport, the location of her doctor and—
wait for it!—
better shopping.
The deal was a win for Premier Anna Bligh’s own Left faction. There are a number of other articles which are critical, including some comments which have been attributed to local branch members of the Labor Party. But the point is that the people of Pine Rivers deserve somebody who is local, somebody who is interested in representing their own interests, and not somebody who is a seat-hopper, deciding to take residence in Pine Rivers because they do not believe they can win the seat which they are currently representing any longer. The reality is, I think, that the Labor Party needs to stop the arrogance, to listen to the local branch members and to listen to the local constituents. My prediction is that, at the next state election, the people of Pine Rivers will look at somebody of Cheryl Kernot’s ilk and vote against that person—and rightly so. That is the message that needs to be delivered to Labor. (Time expired)

Maternal and Child Health
Ms REA (Bonner) (9.44 pm)—Every three seconds, a child under five dies from preventable causes. Every minute, a woman dies needlessly in pregnancy or childbirth. These statistics are simply unacceptable in a modern world, and that is why I rise in the House this evening to support and encourage the campaign that is being run by the Make Poverty History coalition around Millennium Development Goal 5, concerning maternal and child health. Millennium Development Goal 5 aims to reduce the maternal mortality ratio by three-quarters and achieve universal access to reproductive health care by 2015. It is a very important goal. Whilst the others are equally important, I think this is a particular issue that we as elected representatives in what is often considered the lucky country—and indeed all of us as citizens of Australia—should take note of and we should support initiatives to reduce these terrible statistics.

Every year, some eight million women suffer pregnancy related complications, and over half a million women die from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth, 99 per cent of them in developing countries. Maternal deaths in Asia and the Pacific account for almost half of the global total. So not only do we have a universal responsibility; we have a responsibility to the many women and children and families within our own region who deserve our support and assistance.

The World Health Organisation has stated:
It is estimated that more than 80 per cent of maternal deaths could be prevented or avoided through actions that are proven to be effective and affordable, even in resource-poor countries.

More than 50 per cent of women in the world’s poorest regions deliver their babies without the help of a skilled birth attendant. Almost two-thirds of the eight million infant deaths that occur each year are due primarily to poor maternal health and hygiene and to deficiencies in maternal and newborn health services.

As a country that is developed and has many resources and a sometimes not so perfect health service but one that does give people access to much better health care than is available in many developing nations, we know that to support women and children in those countries is not just a moral responsibility but actually fundamental to the survival of those nations and those societies. If you take a woman out of those communities, not only do you see an unnecessary death but you see a family and a community fall apart because not only do women produce children and care for the home; they are also respon-
sible for the support of the frail and vulnerable within those communities, where there is often no other system that can help them. So to take women out of those communities is a fundamental blow to their survival and their development.

It goes without saying that to support women through education and better health services is the best way in which we can give assistance to those developing nations. Independent analysis says that educating women, empowering women and improving women’s health are just about the best investments we can make to achieve improved development outcomes. Educated women tend to put their income back into supporting their children and supporting their family.

I would like to once again support and encourage the Make Poverty History campaign. Within my own electorate of Bonner, we have a very well-organised coalition run by the coordinator, Gillian Marshall, a passionate and very dedicated young woman who has managed to bring together a diverse range of people from churches and various community organisations to make sure that the Australian community is aware of these statistics. I encourage everyone, not just within the electorate of Bonner but throughout the whole country, to do what we can to achieve these Millennium Development Goals. Forty-nine million dollars from the government to support health resources for poor communities in Indonesia is one significant step, but we can do more as a community. (Time expired)

Water

Dr Stone (Murray) (9.49 pm)—Last Friday afternoon, on 12 September, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Peter Robert Garrett, in a quiet but shocking announcement, gave approval for the construction and operation of a pipeline to transfer up to 75 billion litres of water per year from the Goulburn River, a key tributary of the Murray, to Melbourne. This approval is to have effect until 2033. For those recently celebrating Minister Penny Wong’s ever more desperate efforts to buy back water for the Murray, this was both stunning and confusing. If Minister Wong has nearly $3 billion on the table to try and save the Murray by buying back water, how could her counterpart in this House be quietly announcing the extraction of 75 gigalitres a year from the Murray-Darling system to go across the divide for the toilets and car washes of Melbourne? Is this the ugly face of the ascendancy of the Murray-Darling states over the federal government as they refuse point blank to implement federal demands that they harmonise water policy by November, or is this a sign that, whatever the Victorian government wants to shore up its re-election in 2010, it will get?

The sad truth is that, once Melbourne and Geelong are hooked into the Murray River’s catchment, they no longer have to be troubled about the prospects of harvesting their stormwater, recycling or desalinisation—all the 21st century options other developed nations’ cities are embracing around the world. This, one of the fastest growing cities in Australia, will be able to relax back into its water-guzzling ways, content in the knowledge that Mr Brumby’s pipeline from the north will keep the concrete wet and the cars clean. Unfortunately it is not going to be quite so simple. You cannot understand the desperation of the response of the people in northern Victoria, in particular in the electorates of Murray, Mallee and McEwen, who will be permanently droughted by this policy. These people care profoundly not just for their economies but in particular for their environment and the health of their rivers. They know that the health of their environment underpins the sustainable agriculture. They know the need for the Murray-Darling Ba-
Mr Garrett, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, however, has put conditions on the water piping from the Goulburn Valley and over the divide to Melbourne. We are very pleased about those conditions but he simply should have said no. Mr Garrett acknowledges that, under the EPBC Act, there are listed vulnerable and endangered species that will be impacted by the project. This list is long and includes the little pink spider orchid, the river swamp wallaby grass, the growling grass frog, the spotted-tail quoll, the striped legless lizard, the Murray cod, the trout cod, the Macquarie perch, the golden sun moth—and so the list goes on. The minister acknowledges that these known listed species are vulnerable. Their populations may shrink or collapse. But he says, ‘Do not worry.’ The conditions include offset habitat to be purchased or translocation—or, in the case of the wonderful golden sun moth, that their habitat should be avoided between February and September. It is not the listed species that have most concerned the minister, who has set conditions under which I am convinced anyone with any knowledge of these ecosystems would wonder if they are indeed going to be protected.

What seems to have preoccupied the minister most, given the conditions he attached to his announcement, is the accounting for the source and volume of water to be taken from northern Victoria. He has said that in fact no environmental flows can come from the Eildon Dam. That is interesting, because Mr Brumby has already said that they will take this water. The environmental reserve will be sent first down the pipeline to Melbourne, because there will be no other water available. It is interesting that Minister Garrett has said that this now cannot happen, because he is still allowing the Bendigo pipeline to take 10 gigalitres out of the environmental flow from that dam, the Eildon Dam, which is of course a tributary of the great Murray River.

Mr Garrett says Melbourne cannot take the water that has already been saved through investments for the Living Murray and Waters for Rivers programs in the Goulburn irrigation system. We could not agree more with this sentiment. This water is already tagged for the Murray and the Snowy rivers. So, therefore, there is not going to be enough water for this pipeline. No other water can be saved sufficiently for it to be filled. So why didn’t Mr Garrett simply say no? The Murray River is in a desperate situation. It is dying. Why did he agree that this pipeline to Melbourne could be built? He should have put politics aside this time and said that the Murray River needs to be saved and Melbourne must recycle, it must desalinate and it must look at stormwater harvesting—and so should Geelong.

**Jayme Paris**

**Positive Living and Lifestyle Forum for Seniors**

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (9.54 pm)—Tonight I want to add my congratulations and best wishes to those of lots of my constituents and students at Doonside Technology High School for Jayme Paris, who is in Beijing competing in the Paralympic Games. She suffers from cerebella ataxia due to birth asphyxiation. She competed in the cerebral palsy division 3 cycling. The cycling competition started on 7 September and finished on 14 September. She competed in the 500-metre time trial, the women’s individual time trial and the women’s individual pursuit. She came third in the women’s 500-metre time trial, fourth in the women’s individual pursuit and eighth in the women’s individual time trial. What a magnificent performance. Currently ranked second in the world rank-
ings, she does not believe in the word ‘can’t’. She competed for the first time in sport in 2006 and for the first time for Australia in 2007. Jayme was named 2008 Blacktown City Young Citizen of the Year at the mayoral Australia Day Luncheon earlier this year. I know when she returns that she will return to much joy and celebration from all her fellow students at Doonside Technology High School and her legion of fans.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank the more than 500 pensioners who attended the Positive Living and Lifestyle forum for seniors that we held on 20 August 2008 at Blacktown RSL. It was a magnificent roll-up. I do apologise because we were totally unprepared for such overwhelming numbers. It made interaction somewhat difficult. Whilst I am pledged to continue to hold these forums I can assure those who attended, and who might like to attend again, and the many who rang to apologise that they could not attend that we will perhaps aim to have a tad smaller audience. I would particularly like to thank the Sydney West Area Health team—Dr Janet Sheridan, Dr John Obed, Mr Mark Kearin and Mr Dominic Dawson; the presenter from the Mount Druitt Community Legal Centre, principal solicitor Robert Stoyef; from Blacktown Centrelink, Eleanor Dasco; from Legal Aid New South Wales, Lee Critchley; from the Cancer Council, Margaret Bunting; and from the Blacktown police, Constable Shaun Collings and Inspector Paul Glinn. Obviously, such a non-political forum would not have been possible without these very distinguished presenters.

I must say that the event was well received by all who attended. There was, as I said, many requests to hold future forums, and I am committed to doing that. Some of the subject areas that we covered at that forum included the demographics and the health of the Blacktown and Mount Druitt communities; healthy ageing; and various lifestyle factors that affect health including—

I am a bit embarrassed to repeat these, and I am not making any personal explanations, Mr Speaker—obesity, alcohol consumption, smoking and risk-taking behaviour. I think I will deny the latter! The forum also covered wills, mortgages and property distribution—key issues for seniors; legal entitlements; Centrelink entitlements such as carer entitlements; the role of the aged pension as a safety net, and how rates are calculated and assessed, including your rights and obligations as seniors; local transport in the Mount Druitt and Blacktown areas; home and personal safety, and what to do in dangerous situations such as a home invasion; and breast cancer. Over 4,000 women each year are diagnosed with breast cancer. All women aged 50 and over should have a mammogram every two years to screen for breast cancer.

These subject matters were keenly listened to by more than 500 seniors, and there were questions. Unfortunately, because of timing schedules and the size of the audience not too many people got to ask a question, but it was thoroughly worth while. And, as I say, I intend to repeat the exercise.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 10.00 pm, the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 10.00 pm

NOTICES

The following notice was given:

Mr Hayes to move

That the House:

(1) Recognises and acknowledges the significant contribution that officers across all Australian policing jurisdictions make to our local communities as we approach National Police Remembrance Day on 29 September 2008;

(2) Remembers and comes together to commemorate the ultimate sacrifices made by all police officers who have been killed in the course of their duties;
(3) Honours the courage, commitment and memory of the many fine men and women who lost their lives in the execution of their official duty each made in serving our community;

(4) Pays tribute to the families and friends of those fallen police officers for the support they unreservedly provided during the career of their respective loved ones;

(5) Encourages all Australians as a sign of respect to those who have fallen, to attend a ceremony or wear or display the traditional blue and white chequerboard ribbon, officially recognised as the symbol of Remembrance Day; and

(6) Supports and thanks all serving police of Australia for their invaluable dedication and commitment to make a difference, defend our way of life and safeguard the peace.
The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) took the chair at 6.40 pm.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Royal Flying Doctor Service

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa) (6.40 pm)—I rise tonight to honour the work of the Royal Flying Doctor Service. For more than 80 years, since the first flying doctor was hired by the Reverend John Flynn to fly into remote North Queensland, the RFDS have saved numerous lives and comforted families across Queensland and in many parts of remote Australia. At the same time, they have conquered the isolation of the bush.

In my own electorate of Maranoa, my constituents truly appreciate the invaluable service of the Royal Flying Doctor Service. In fact, any visitors to the famous Birdsville Pub are asked to donate to the Royal Flying Doctor Service for any photos taken inside the pub and, if someone dares walk into the pub with a baseball cap on backwards, they incur a fine in the form of a gold coin donation to the Royal Flying Doctor Service. Visitors may get a giggle from the light-hearted signs around the pub, but the people of the Diamantina shire and in fact many other remote communities, particularly up there in Birdsville, are deeply serious about supporting a service to which so many owe their lives.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my congratulations and gratitude to the RFDS. Whether providing emergency care, delivering a baby or holding health clinics for remote communities, for more than 80 years the flying doctors, nurses and pilots have worked tirelessly to help the people of the outback. I salute them and I thank them for saving so many lives, both young and old.

National Child Protection Week

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (6.41 pm)—I note that last week was National Child Protection Week, from 7 to 13 September. In the lead-up to the week, the member for Macarthur and I hosted a lunch and parliamentary briefing for members and senators by the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, or NAPCAN. Maree Faulkner, the CEO of NAPCAN, and other speakers briefed us on how we as individuals and as parliamentarians can support the work of NAPCAN to prevent child abuse in our communities through early intervention and prevention programs and by raising public awareness through campaigns such as the ‘Children See, Children Do’ campaign. NAPCAN released the ‘Children See, Children Do’ campaign nationally last week, and I was fortunate to also attend a NAPCAN breakfast last Monday for the Perth launch of the campaign. The campaign includes a short yet very powerful video graphically depicting how children mirror the behaviours of their parents. I urge those members who have not yet seen it to do so.

In accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children are entitled to special protection and, as Michelle Scott, the WA commissioner for Children and Young People, has said, ‘Children are entitled to be valued and heard, to be healthy and safe, to be acknowledged, encouraged and enabled.’ That is our challenge and our collective and individual responsibility.
Mr Ian Munro

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (6.43 pm)—Three weeks ago I had the opportunity, together with the Minister for Ageing, Justine Elliott, to pay tribute to Ian Munro of Prestons for his volunteer work for the elderly at the Blue Hills Retirement Village, an aged-care facility in my electorate. Mr Munro was presented with the Australian government community service plaque, which is an award for people who have made an outstanding contribution and provided service to older Australians, or for older Australians who provide outstanding community service. The award was actually presented in front of his own community at the Blue Hills Retirement Village.

As I said, the award is designed to recognise people for their contributions and outstanding efforts in their own particular field. Mr Munro was a very worthy recipient of the award. He is a great inspiration to his local community. Personally I know that Blue Hills and the wider local community value the contributions he has made over many years, particularly in relation to causes such as Daffodil Day and Bandaged Bear Day. He was also a volunteer at the Sydney Olympic Games. Mr Munro was an organiser with the Electrical Trades Union and, in his retirement, has continued to represent his community in the best way he sees fit. He has certainly been a valuable member of the Blue Hills Retirement Village, one who has actually played a constant role in putting the views of his community first—(Time expired)

Royal Flying Doctor Service

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa) (6.44 pm)—I would like to continue my tribute to the Royal Flying Doctor Service. The Reverend John Flynn established the Royal Flying Doctor Service in Cloncurry in north-west Queensland through Frontier Services. I have got to say I admire his vision and his compassion, and it is that same vision and that same compassion that has been transferred for more than 80 years by, and lived at the heart and soul of, the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

I want to pay tribute, also, to the nurses and the doctors, and to the pilots who fly those aircraft. The doctors, nurses and pilots who are on call may be called at very short notice at any time of the day, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They provide a magnificent mantle of safety that stretches across the length and breadth of this country. People—regardless of where they come from or their background—whoever they may be, have access in an emergency to the Royal Flying Doctor Service. It is a magnificent service.

In my early days working on remote cattle stations, I used to wait for the Royal Flying Doctor Service to visit the station to give medical care and run clinics for the workers and the station staff. I saw firsthand the magnificent service of the Royal Flying Doctor Service. Once again I pay tribute to all who have worked with the Royal Flying Doctor Service and also to all those communities who raise at least one-third of the money every year that is needed to run the Royal Flying Doctor Service. That money is raised by those remote communities. (Time expired)

Franklin Electorate: Environment

Ms COLLINS (Franklin) (6.45 pm)—I would like to take this opportunity to put on the public record a wonderful project that involves young people in my electorate of Franklin. In August of this year it was my pleasure to launch the Cygnet Heritage, Culture and Community Green Corps Project at Burtons Reserve. Cygnet is a major centre of the Huon Valley,
located 56 kilometres south of Hobart. As part of the Green Corps project, a team of young southern Tasmanians will preserve, conserve and restore Cygnet’s environmental and cultural heritage. Under the guidance of their team leader, Mr Rod Munro, the team will spend 26 weeks improving the presentation and grounds of the Cygnet Living History Museum, the Community Children’s Centre, Bridge Cottage, the community garden and the Port Cygnet Conservation Area. The activities include minor repairs to heritage buildings; landscaping of grounds, including the establishment of raised garden beds for access by those with disabilities; and researching historical information about the buildings in the context of Cygnet’s history.

Team members will be able to make valuable contacts with members of the local community and will have the opportunity to demonstrate their skills to local employers. It is an ideal community project that will foster an interest in local history and the local environment and will also develop a sense of ownership among local participants. I wish the project team every success and thank and congratulate all of the project partners in the community. I know that they and the Cygnet community will stand to benefit greatly from this work.

Blair Electorate: Apprenticeships Queensland

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (6.47 pm)—I want to congratulate a great Ipswich business, Apprenticeships Queensland. Twenty years ago, Apprenticeships Queensland was established in the car park at Ipswich City Council. The then and now manager, Dave Handyside, said he knew every apprentice at the time. On 12 September 2008, at Ipswich RSL at North Ipswich, we had an awards night honouring the school based trainees with encouragement and achievement awards, and the first-year to fourth-year apprentices with the same. Dave Handyside and his board of directors and management are to be commended for the thousands of young people who have found jobs, courtesy of their efforts. Some of the biggest employers in Ipswich—the Ipswich City Council, the Queensland Times, CS Energy, the Bremer Institute of TAFE and others—were there.

Dave Handyside had the misfortune of not being born in Ipswich but for 20 years he and his organisation have served the people of Ipswich well. It is fitting that Mayor Paul Pisasale, of Ipswich City Council, gave Dave a crest effectively honouring him as if he were born in Ipswich. In Ipswich we often say that the world is made up of those who were born in Ipswich and those who wish they had been. Dave, congratulations on becoming an Ipswichian after so many years!

Royal Flying Doctor Service

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa) (6.48 pm)—I want to continue my contribution honouring the Royal Flying Doctor Service. The Reverend John Flynn, through Frontier Services, has given us a great legacy of health care and a great mantle of safety across rural and remote parts of Australia. I know of no other service in the world that could match the Royal Flying Doctor Service for the work they do and the 24-hour service they provide.

You should see some of the remote airstrips that these pilots fly onto. I know that many people in this House would not hop on some of the lighter planes—although they are very sophisticated—and they certainly would not want to be flown into some of those very difficult situations, in circumstances where the airstrip might just be lit by flares. I admire the pilots
and the doctors and I also admire the nurses, who so often provide care and compassion during the transfer of people in emergency situations out of remote locations.

Over the last few weeks in western Queensland there have been race meetings, including those at Birdsville and Bedourie and this week at Betoota, where they will once again be raising money for the Royal Flying Doctor Service because they believe in it so much. It is an important part of their lives. It is a way of life out there to support the Royal Flying Doctor Service. Once again, I want to commend all who have worked towards and supported the Reverend John Flynn’s vision, a vision from so long ago, and all who have worked in the Royal Flying Doctor Service over the last 80 years.

FlinSchools

Ms JACKSON (Hasluck) (6.50 pm)—Today I want to send a special greeting to the participants in and supporters of this year’s FlinSchools state final in Western Australia. At the launch of this year’s WA Schools Innovation Design Challenge in February, I had the pleasure of meeting many of the student participants and their teachers. The program, initiated by the not-for-profit organisation Re-Engineering Australia Forum, provides WA students with access to the world’s best three-dimensional software, wind and smoke tunnels and CNC milling machines for the purpose of designing, building, testing and racing their own miniature Formula One cars.

I appreciate the hard work and the effort that has gone into each team’s project. It is a wonderful and stimulating opportunity to be involved in a program that successfully connects education with industry. It exposes students to the exciting career opportunities that are available in science and engineering. I wish I could be with you for the finale—the racing of your cars. I hope that each of you who have participated in this year’s program have learnt lots and, more importantly, had fun along the way. I congratulate and thank Re-Engineering Australia Forum, especially Arun D’Souza; Swan TAFE; and local industry sponsors for their ongoing commitment to the challenge. Congratulations to all the school teams who have participated—good luck in the state finals. To the eventual winners, let’s bring the national championship home to the West. (Time expired)

Family Relationships Centre Coffs Harbour

Mr HARTSUUKER (Cowper) (6.51 pm)—I recently had the opportunity to attend the opening of the Family Relationships Centre Coffs Harbour. I was delighted to receive an invitation to that opening and pleased to see the Attorney-General in attendance. Family relationship centres are a very important part of our social fabric going forward. Unfortunately, the tragedy of family breakdown is all too common in all of our electorates. I am delighted that the current government has continued this very fine program that was initiated under the watch of the previous Attorney-General, Mr Ruddock.

We need to attend to the issue of family relationship breakdown at an early stage. Early intervention is the key in such matters, rather than getting to the court stage. If we can head off litigation and if we can reduce the pain of family breakdown, we can provide a much improved outcome for not only parents but most importantly children, and that is what all this is about. Family relationships centres will mean better outcomes for children and a strong society. I commend the government for continuing what is one of the really great programs that was instituted by the previous government.
Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (6.52 pm)—I congratulate Jenny Macklin for her recent appearance in my electorate on a very moving morning with the Salvation Army. It was Overdose Awareness Day and it was a very important healing experience for families, including local families from my electorate, who have experienced the pain of suicide or the death of very close friends or family as a result of drug overdoses.

I also commend both Minister Macklin and the Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and Child Care, Maxine McKew, on their assistance to the parents of Melbourne Ports in the area of child care. The new government has a very extensive childcare program and a very extensive program of assistance via government rebates for child care. The residents and constituents of mine in Melbourne Ports are finally going to benefit from this government’s support with two additional childcare centres, one in Port Melbourne and the other in St Kilda. It is good to see state, local and federal government cooperating to make sure that the parents and children of Melbourne Ports have some proper child care in our electorate. We appreciate the federal government’s assistance, which was absolutely key to seeing these two centres get up. The effect of the new government on the voters of Melbourne Ports is commendable.

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (6.54 pm)—Recently, tenders were called for the final stage of the F5 Freeway, the upgrade near Campbelltown. The F5 is one of the busiest transport routes in Sydney. It is used by more than 81,000 vehicles per day, 6,000 of those being heavy vehicles. This section of freeway, between Brooks Road, Ingleburn, and Raby Road, St Andrews, will be widened from two lanes to four lanes in each direction, and a section between Raby Road to Narellan Road will go from two lanes to three lanes in each direction. This project is about delivering new and improved infrastructure for the hard-working families of Sydney’s southwest—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order! In accordance with standing order 192A the time for members’ statements has concluded.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

Infrastructure

Debate resumed, on motion by Mr Ripoll:

That the House:

(1) notes that:

(a) infrastructure planning provides the platform for regional economic growth;

(b) the rapid growth in many regional centres has placed the nation’s infrastructure network under significant pressure;

(c) the changing social and demographic environment in major regional centres presents significant economic and development challenges; and

(d) the past 12 years have been a missed opportunity for the nation to invest in the future beyond the current mining boom; and
(2) supports the Government’s:

(a) agenda of creating a stronger and more participatory regional development structure through the establishment of Infrastructure Australia, Regional Development Australia and the Major Cities Unit; and

(b) commitment to regional development and the delivery of regionally significant infrastructure.

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (6.55 pm)—It is said that infrastructure structure planning provides the platform for regional economic growth. If this is the case then we need to provide the framework and the mechanisms that will enable the federal government to facilitate land use planning which in turn will support regional development and the ongoing delivery of regionally significant infrastructure.

The Commonwealth has taken a significant step in this regard by commencing a program focused on creating a stronger and more participatory regional development structure. Things such as Infrastructure Australia, Regional Development Australia and the Major Cities Unit are all key components of this structure that has been designed to foster and facilitate the nation’s future development. These already established initiatives, together with the $20 billion Building Australia Fund and the current environment of close collaboration through all tiers of government, have created a unique opportunity to ensure a new alignment between the previously disparate regional planning and infrastructure programming activities. But, to solve the problems, we must first understand what the full challenges are.

The challenges can best be described in the context of four broad themes underpinning the nation’s development. The first is to meet the economic development challenges. This can be done through the transport infrastructure network, which plays an integral part in supporting economic growth throughout the nation. With the private sector investments across mining, resource and industrial sectors forecast to continue at unprecedented levels, government needs to continue to ensure that road and rail networks support the ongoing competitiveness of our major industries into the future. But we must also meet the regional and urban challenges in a changing social and demographic environment. Persisting growth such as in Western Australia and Queensland means that there is more pressure for governments to get it right and to meet the challenges in those networks in both transport and population. We also need to meet the funding challenge. An increasing scale of infrastructure means that we have to keep finding new ways to fund and resource those projects, and there are ways to do this. Finally, we need to meet the delivery challenges. The expenditure of limited public funds means that all governments have to look very closely at how they actually deliver and bring forward those projects.

South-East Queensland is one of the nation’s regions where those challenges are most acute because of the huge growth and development happening in that region. Unique to Queensland—though I know one of the other states has something similar—is an infrastructure regulatory regime which is part of the State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971. I particularly want to mention that because this declaration gives the power to the state to form state development areas for the purpose of promoting that infrastructure coordination and growth, which I think is very important. But, secondly, it also gives sight to a program of works that can be planned, funded, programmed, delivered and coordinated. If at a federal level we can look at doing similar things—which we are already through our Major Cities Unit and Infrastructure Australia—then we are on the right path in getting to that position.
One of the biggest issues we have is how to fully coordinate strategic regional infrastructure development. I believe very strongly that one way we could make a real difference would be to set up—as Queensland has—a coordinator-general’s position focusing specifically on what could be federal regional development zones, tackling the issues of infrastructure and regional development and giving the federal government, the Commonwealth, a real role to play. Historically that is being done at a state level, and I think that there is a real opportunity for us with the institutions that we have established. The role would encompass things such as identifying areas within a state with the potential to be economic or industrial hubs, planning for sustainability and growth into the future and working with state development areas in controlling and being part of their development schemes as well. Land could also be acquired where necessary to ensure that critical projects and infrastructure facilities of significance to the state but also to the Commonwealth progress in a strategic manner. Individuals, government departments or government created organisations could be engaged to carry out those functions and ensure that they work.

Identification of a significant project would not be lightly decided. It is very similar to what we are doing with Infrastructure Australia. These are subjects and projects of national significance. They would follow the criteria of complex approval requirements, including those imposed by local, state and federal governments, with high levels of investment by the states and so forth. If we want to see strategic development of infrastructure and regional development in this more complex world then the Commonwealth government needs to play a major role. We are doing that through a number of units that we have set up. I think there is more in that space. (Time expired)

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (7.01 pm)—Well developed infrastructure allows for the expansion of industry in regional areas, and for improved services more generally. The expansion of new industries in regional areas brings jobs and it also helps indirectly by promoting growth in the retail sector and for service providers in our regions.

The sea change and tree change phenomena have seen significant numbers of people leaving the big cities and moving to regional centres such as Coffs Harbour, Kempsey, Maclean and the towns of the Nambucca and Bellinger valleys. This increased population is putting strain on our regional areas. The task of providing infrastructure to meet the needs created by these massive population shifts is daunting indeed. We need improvements in major infrastructure, such as road links like the Pacific Highway or rail links like the east coast rail line. We also need new infrastructure at a local level such as facilities that support cultural activities like music and the arts. In Coffs Harbour we need a permanent home for the regional conservatorium, continued improvement in infrastructure for internet users, new bridges and upgraded indoor sports facilities, to name just a few.

This motion ignores the massive contribution that has been made by the Howard government in the area of infrastructure. Far from being a missed opportunity, the Howard years saw unprecedented investment in national infrastructure projects. With the AusLink program, the former government spent billions of dollars upgrading our land transport infrastructure. AusLink was introduced in 2002 and was Australia’s first national land transport plan. It revolutionised the way that the federal government provides funding for our road and rail infrastructure. AusLink set aside almost $16 billion for land transport projects. AusLink 2, announced in the 2007 budget, will provide almost $23 billion over four years to 2013-14.

MAIN COMMITTEE
The impact of that locally in my electorate is seen in projects such as the Bonville deviation. Some $245 million has been spent to remove an accident black spot. The official opening was held yesterday and the road should be open for traffic this week. Unfortunately, in the past the New South Wales government has ignored the need to upgrade the road around Bonville, with tragic results. A number of fatalities have been recorded on that stretch of road. The New South Wales government would still be procrastinating if it were not for the previous federal government’s pressuring it to get on with the job. In terms of local infrastructure, the Australian government has been funding the crucial completion of the Hogbin Drive extension, working with local government and the state government to construct that vital link in Coffs Harbour’s road network. The Howard government was much more interested in getting things done in the infrastructure field than using it as a political football.

A prime example of Labor’s irresponsibility is the stalled development of broadband infrastructure. The OPEL consortium project has stopped and long delays are already starting to occur in Labor’s proposed national broadband network. The issuing of tenders has been delayed for 12 months—which is a long time in technology terms—although major regional businesses and small businesses alike use the internet as a lifeline. The internet is as important to them as the railways were to businesses in the 19th century.

In conclusion, the member for Grayndler is looking at regional infrastructure from his office in Sydney and delaying funding for local community infrastructure projects, such as the upgrading of the Coffs Harbour Regional Conservatorium with no funds being available until 2009-10. Local communities cannot wait an extra year in limbo for their local infrastructure projects to be upgraded. Community projects need assistance from our federal government. The Coffs Harbour conservatorium needs the assistance of the federal government if it is going to find a permanent home in which it can undertake the teaching of music to young and older people alike in the Coffs Harbour area. I certainly commend the work of the Howard government in the area of infrastructure, and I certainly condemn the delays that this new incoming government is causing to regional communities by abandoning the Regional Partnerships program and the Sustainable Regions program and delaying access to any future regional development funding for the year 2009-10.

Ms LIVERMORE (Capricornia) (7.05 pm)—It is a pleasure to speak on this motion. I commend the member for Oxley for bringing it before the House. It is great to be speaking on it at a time when this Labor government is committed to playing its part in building and investing in the infrastructure of our country—the infrastructure our regions need in order to prosper. In preparing for this motion I was hard-pressed to think about what I would have spoken about a year ago. Over the past 10 years I have given a lot of speeches in this House about infrastructure, but in the past they have usually been about what was not being done in the area of infrastructure provision and the problems that was causing. There was nothing you could really talk about under the previous government’s term when it came to the points in this motion, such as infrastructure planning to provide the platform for regional economic growth, an agenda of creating a stronger and more participatory regional development structure through the establishment of Infrastructure Australia and Regional Development Australia and a commitment to regional development and the delivery of regionally significant infrastructure. They are all points in this motion and they are all points about which we now thank-
fully have something to say, because this government has made infrastructure planning and investment a priority.

In fact, one of the first pieces of legislation brought into the new parliament this year was the Infrastructure Australia Act, which came into effect on 9 April. Infrastructure Australia will develop a strategic blueprint for Australia’s future infrastructure needs. In partnership—and partnership was something else you did not hear much about under the previous government—with the states, territories, local government and the private sector it will facilitate its implementation. Infrastructure Australia will also provide advice to Australian governments about infrastructure gaps and bottlenecks that hinder economic growth and prosperity. It will identify investment priorities and policy and regulatory reforms that will be necessary to enable timely and coordinated delivery of national infrastructure investment. That is something that this country has been crying out for. For too long the former government cherry-picked projects for their political value and blamed the states for everything else. When it comes to infrastructure, we need clear, strategic priorities that will grow this nation, not pork-barrelling to grow someone’s margin. That is the planning side of things, but there is also the investment side that is important to get things moving.

Not long after Infrastructure Australia was established in April this year the Labor government showed in the budget that we are serious about investing in infrastructure as well. We need to get moving on some of these bottlenecks that have been holding back our productivity and contributing to inflationary pressures. The Labor government announced in the budget the Building Australia Fund, an initial $20 billion from the budget surpluses expected this year and in 2008-09. This is money that, in the years to come, will be used to build critical economic infrastructure such as roads, rail, ports and, of course—we cannot forget—broadband. We have to get moving on this task of building our national infrastructure after years of neglect, infrastructure that will underpin growth in regions like the one I represent, allow us to make the most of our opportunities and ultimately set Australia up for a strong future.

In the time I have left I want to report on two infrastructure priorities in my electorate that I am pleased to say are receiving some much-needed attention as a result of this government’s commitment to getting on with the job of fixing our overstretched infrastructure. As members here would know, my electorate of Capricornia in Central Queensland is at the heart of the coal mining boom. The increase in people and heavy vehicles using the roads around Mackay, in particular, has tested the capacity of both the Bruce Highway and the Peak Downs Highway. As part of the $2.2 billion promised by Labor out of AusLink 2, there will be major improvements to the stretch of Bruce Highway in my electorate running between Childers and Sarina. This includes money for fixing black spots, for providing overtaking lanes and for strengthening and widening the highway.

In good news for the people at the northern end of the electorate of Capricornia, work is already underway on one of Labor’s election promises, the duplication of the highway from Bakers Creek to the city gates in Mackay. The other notorious road in my electorate is the Peak Downs highway linking Mackay with the mines and towns of the Bowen Basin. The spot where the highway crosses the Eton Range has claimed more lives than anyone cares to remember and needs serious improvement to become a safe and efficient road. I am pleased to say that the Prime Minister has committed to partnering with the state government. We are
putting in $1 million to investigate a realignment of the highway over that dangerous Eton Range crossing. (Time expired)

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (7.10 pm)—I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this motion and my thanks go particularly to the member for Oxley for bringing it to the chamber. In his motion he makes some very good points in that infrastructure planning provides a platform for regional economic growth and jobs. He is also right in saying that the rapid growth in many regional centres has placed significant pressure on the nation’s infrastructure. That is certainly the case in my electorate of Pearce.

I have long advocated the need for greater investment in infrastructure, particularly in the regional and rural areas, but to claim the past 12 years have been a missed opportunity to invest in the future infrastructure of Australia is just plain wrong. Firstly, AusLink was established by the former coalition government in 2004 and represents the most significant change since Federation in the way the Commonwealth tackles national transport. Thanks to AusLink, the Commonwealth and the states are now able to develop long-term strategies for key major transport corridors, rating projects according to merit and giving ample lead time to the private sector. Through COAG, the states and territories were asked to prepare an infrastructure report every five years. This makes a lot of sense, and here we are today discussing whether a further $20 million of Commonwealth money should be spent over the next four years with the introduction of Infrastructure Australia.

This leads us back to a key issue here, which is effectively an issue of governance: the objective and sensible management of Infrastructure Australia. It seems as though Infrastructure Australia may well be a duplication of the states’ efforts and responsibilities. If so, should the federal government be in a position to be bailing out the states? I don’t think so. Nor should it be allowed to use Infrastructure Australia as a slush fund. It is important to make it clear that the coalition supports infrastructure development and has done so over a long period of time. It does not, however, support the government having complete control over a body that is entrusted with handling the future of this country’s infrastructure requirements. Any entity handling infrastructure in Australia should be independent of government to provide objective and balanced views on what this nation needs going forward. Perhaps such a body could take the time to investigate the Labor government’s election promises, but I digress.

The government cannot and should not protect the states from their own incompetence. Within my own electorate of Pearce I have witnessed first hand the former state government’s inability to act. For example, the Commonwealth government committed $98.1 million to upgrade the Great Northern Highway between Muchea and Wubin more than four years ago. So far only $41.9 million has been spent on the road and it is far from finished. Angry members of the Bindoon safe roads committee are entitled to know where that money has gone and they have not to date received any answers. As the Bindoon safe roads committee chairman, Ian Watson, said, this highway is the lifeline to the state’s north-west and services many road trains, trucks, tourist caravans and wide loads under escort. I remind the chamber that we contributed something in the order of $50 billion to the national wealth out of mining alone in WA and these roads are absolutely critical to that continuing. Main Roads in WA promised everything but it is impossible for them to deliver when they do not know where the money has gone to and they do not have it available to do their job. Here we have a situation where the coalition government was investing in the future of infrastructure in the Pearce electorate but
the state Labor government’s ineptitude has left many residents without services and very dis-
illusioned. It is a very dangerous situation. That disillusion has been well and truly evident in
last weekend’s poll with the disastrous election result for Labor. So I think that speaks vol-
umes.

The concept of an independent body that assesses these issues in an unbiased fashion has
merit, but the idea of the federal Labor government running such an entity, intent on protect-
ing its state Labor colleagues, has no place at all. The regions in Pearce, long starved of funds
for infrastructure development, would welcome an independent assessment by government of
future growth predictions. They would also like a fair allocation of infrastructure funding
from the government without political interference, particularly for new rail lines for the cart-
ing of wheat—which is absolutely essential now that we have changed the marketing ar-
rangements for wheat—and for upgrades to major highways. (Time expired).

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (7.15 pm)—I congratulate the member for Oxley for bring-
ing this important motion before the House, a motion that notes that ‘infrastructure planning
provides the platform for regional economic growth’. My electorate of Newcastle is a great
group of economic growth in New South Wales and a significant driver for the national
economy. The trade value of all exports out of the port of Newcastle, the largest coal-
exports in the world, in the 2007-08 year was $10.3 billion—a $2 billion increase on
the previous year. Newcastle’s regional airport, the fastest growing regional airport in Austra-
alia, contributed half a billion dollars into the regional economy, with $150 million specifically
into tourism, according to the latest data. Almost one in every 10 jobs in the Newcastle-
Hunter region is involved in manufacturing, another major source of our regional exports. But
we can achieve more. It is strategic infrastructure planning and delivery of freight and pas-
senger links that will keep the people and goods moving efficiently around our region, our
nation and the world, maximising the potential of our region by linking our roads, rail, ports
and airports and providing the platform for economic growth.

Earlier this year I hosted Newcastle’s 2020 summit in conjunction with the University of
Newcastle. Under the leadership of co-chairs Karen Howard and Graham Sargent, the infra-
structure group agreed that our region needs to speak with one coordinated voice when it
comes to infrastructure priorities and planning. As a result, I met with the co-chairs and other
stakeholders last week to discuss the private submission that will go through to Infrastructure
Australia. We discussed the nation-building infrastructure priorities for our region: maximis-
ing the coal chain; maximising freight links to regional, national and international routes;
maximising the connectivity and movement of people within our region, through our region
and out of our region; taking steps that will lead to the formation of a new and modern east
coast freight centre that meets the expanding needs of the Newcastle, Hunter and Central
Coast communities, takes pressure off Sydney and assists our trade exposed industries to bet-
ter find emission efficiencies in a Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme world; securing effi-
cient, reliable energy to the region; and maximising IT connectivity to support all sectors of
our economy—particularly our research institutes and the numerous small and medium enter-
prises now reliant upon high-speed broadband.

I make particular mention of the importance of taking steps towards creating a new entry
and exit point for the state of New South Wales. If we are going to cope both with infrastruc-
ture bottlenecks in Sydney and with the growth of my region, then making freight and trade
routes more efficient makes good economic sense. Newcastle is well placed to be a major additional freight and logistic hub for the state of New South Wales.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the Australian Rail Track Corporation, ARTC, for their infrastructure work in the Hunter Valley and thank them for the update and briefing that they gave to me last week. There is much work to be done in our region, but I congratulate the Hunter Business Chamber and the Hunter Economic Development Corporation for their leadership in infrastructure planning and look forward to tabling their private submission, when completed, in the House in the near future.

The motion before us also notes that ‘the changing social and demographic environment in major regional centres presents significant economic and development challenges’. This has been particularly evident in the city of Newcastle casting off its industrial image and moving towards a new modern vibrancy. This transformation was greatly assisted by the previous federal Labor government’s Building Better Cities program, but sadly the Howard government that followed was more interested in regional rorts and pork-barrelling than in investing in securing the long-term prosperity of regional Australia.

The motion notes also that ‘the rapid growth in many regional centres has placed the nation’s infrastructure network under significant pressure’. This is very true of my region. Population growth between the census of 2001 and that of 2006 was four per cent or more in the Newcastle, Paterson, Hunter and Charlton electorates. However, booming areas like Thornton in my electorate have not been well served by transport or communications infrastructure. The infrastructure lag is dramatic, inconvenient, discouraging and definitely loss-creating. The last 12 years under the federal coalition government have been ones of missed opportunity for the nation to invest in the future beyond the mining boom, particularly into our regions.

The motion supports the government’s agenda of creating a stronger and more participatory regional development structure through the establishment of Infrastructure Australia, Regional Development Australia and the Major Cities Unit. Newcastle is included in the Major Cities project. I look forward to an upcoming meeting with Minister Albanese to acquaint him with the General Property Trust proposal for revitalising the almost dormant retail heart of my city, Newcastle. I support the government’s commitment to regional development and the delivery of regionally significant infrastructure, and I commend this motion to the House.

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (7.20 pm)—I rise to support the intent of the first part of the motion but, frankly, I laughed myself a little silly at the second half. With respect to the first half, I agree: infrastructure planning does provide the platform for regional economic growth. The rapid growth in many regional centres has placed the nation’s infrastructure network under pressure. The changing social and demographic environment in major regional centres certainly presents a significant economic and development challenge. I agree wholeheartedly that the past 12 years have been a missed opportunity for the nation to invest in the future beyond the current mining boom. I can only assume from the motion that, when referring to the past 12 years, considering that the coalition government was in power for 11½ years, they are simply referring to the states.

In reference to the missed opportunity by the Labor states over the last 12 years, I can only say ‘hear, hear’ to the Labor Party for recognising what the nation knows: the Labor states have failed the nation. The states’ record is abominable. Since the GST was implemented, the states have received $46 billion more than they would have done if the wholesale sales tax
structure had still been in place. Out of this $46 billion windfall—because if we had stayed with the wholesale tax regime the extra $46 billion would not have been there—how much have the Labor states spent on infrastructure? Is it 10 per cent, 20 per cent or 50 per cent? If infrastructure planning provides a platform for economic growth, if growth is so important, out of this $46 billion you would expect the Labor state governments to have expended a substantial amount. They have spent $2 billion. That is it—a lousy $2 billion. Out of $46 billion in unanticipated income, they have spent $2 billion.

Let us look at the moribund state of New South Wales. Frankly, any Labor member for New South Wales should be embarrassed at the state that New South Wales Labor has fallen into. Over that period of time, the pay of state public servants has increased 14 per cent above the business sector. The Labor state governments across the nation will have taken debt—as in public debt—from something like $10 billion in 2005 to over $80 billion by 2010 as they rapidly seek to catch up on the infrastructure quandaries that their 12 years of neglect have caused.

The Henry Ergas review also reinforces that only $2 billion out of the windfall $46 has been spent. What did our Prime Minister say on 30 June 1999 about that GST windfall of $46 billion? Frankly, it is a little laughable. He said:

When the history of this parliament, this nation and this century is written, 30 June 1999 will be recorded as a day of fundamental injustice—an injustice which is real, an injustice which is not simply conjured up by the fleeting rhetoric of politicians. It will be recorded as the day when the social compact that has governed this nation for the last 100 years was torn up. It will be recorded as the day when the nation’s taxation system moved from progressivity to regressivity. It will be recorded as the day when the parliament of the country said to the poor of the country that they could all go and take a running jump.

Well, thank you, Prime Minister Rudd, for your incredible insights in 1999, because the GST delivered $46 billion to Labor states and what did they do with it? At a time of record need for infrastructure, what did these abominable Labor state governments do? They spent $44 billion on pay rises for public servants and a whole range of other anomalies and $2 billion on infrastructure.

The Labor government has the hide to walk into the House with a motion decrying the lack of infrastructure that has been put in place, decrying the previous coalition government for it but secretly knowing that it is their own Labor states and talking up the Labor fest. This government has put in place a whole range of Labor slush funds on the back of the surpluses provided by the member for Higgins.

This Labor government should look very carefully at what the Howard government left: $38 billion for AusLink, which includes Roads to Recovery and $2.4 billion in interstate rail networks; $4.1 billion for broadband, and $2 billion for the Communications Fund. What the previous government left goes on. Do not try and cover up the abominable and moribund behaviour of state Labor governments through your revisionism. It is not worthy of you, nor of me.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms S Bird)—Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting. The honourable member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.
Water

Debate resumed, on motion by Mr Broadbent:

That the House:

(1) notes the recent decision of the Federal Court to award costs against the incorporated community group, Your Water Your Say, following an unsuccessful action against the Australian and Victorian Governments in relation to the proposed construction of a Water Desalination plant at Wonthaggi, in the Electorate of McMillan;

(2) recognises that community groups such as Your Water Your Say:

(a) have a democratic right to express their legitimate concerns about the environmental impact of major infrastructure projects;

(b) have the right to pursue their concerns through legal action if they consider these concerns are not being properly addressed; and

(c) should not be constrained from seeking recourse to legal process because of a threat of onerous costs; and

(3) calls on the Australian Government to:

(a) waive the court costs awarded to the Commonwealth as a result of the failed court action by Your Water Your Say; and

(b) agree not to pursue individual members of Your Water Your Say for the recovery of the costs.

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (7.26 pm)—I rise to draw the attention of the House to the serious community concern about a Victorian state government project to develop a major water desalination plant on the Gippsland coast near Wonthaggi, in the McMillan electorate. The $3.1 billion project was announced by then Premier Bracks as the answer to Melbourne’s water supply issue. From day one it has met with strong community opposition. There are serious concerns about the potential impact on the environment and the amenity of the area and about the total lack of communication on the part of the Victorian government. The Bass Coast Shire Council has consistently asked the state government to justify its decision and to engage in an open dialogue with the Bass Coast community, but to no avail.

This is typical of the arrogance of the Victorian government. It has demonstrated on innumerable occasions its willingness to ignore and override local planning and environmental concerns. The frustrations of the local community was such that a local action group, Your Water Your Say, resorted to legal action in the Federal Court. It challenged a government decision to annex a planned pilot plant from the major work to avoid it being subject to an environmental effects statement. Sadly, the group lost this action, and they now have hanging over them the threat of having to pay the legal costs of the federal and state governments.

In defence of its move to pursue costs in the legal action, the Victorian Premier cynically referred to ‘vexatious litigants’ opposing government projects. Does this mean that government decisions that raise legitimate planning and environmental concerns for community groups cannot be tested in the courts without the threat of them facing crippling legal bills? The federal and Victorian governments should both waive these costs in the interests of open government and accountability. These costs have been estimated at $50,000 to as much as $200,000. This is a pittance when compared to the overall costs of the project, given the amount of money the Victorian government is spending on its media campaign to try to justify the project to an unconvinced community.
There are two other issues that raise questions about the Victorian government’s commitment to open government and community consultation. As I have already mentioned, they have bypassed the requirements of the environmental effects statement process to proceed with drilling and other preparatory works. They are also prepared to call for expressions of interest for the desalination plant, an 85 kilometre transfer pipeline, power supply and the purchase of renewable energy. At the same time, Victorian government officials have been visiting properties along the proposed route of the proposed powerline to run north from Wonthaggi to connect with the existing grid in the Garfield-Nar Nar Goon area.

The desalination plant will initially require a power supply of 90 megawatts rising to 120 megawatts. In this context, it is interesting to note that this is around the anticipated output of a proposed wind farm development at Bald Hills to the east of Wonthaggi—which I pray will never go ahead—and that the proponent of this project has, with the support of the Victorian government, sold its interest to the Japanese corporation Mitsui.

More recently, the Victorian government released its environmental effects statement on the project as a fait accompli. The EES comprised no fewer than 11 volumes and 80 supporting technical reports. The EES was released on August 20, and the Bass Coast Shire and opponents of the project were given less than six weeks to respond. This is democracy Brumby-government style.

The concerns I have raised so far relate largely to the lack of proper community consultation and cooperation on the part of the Victorian government. Other concerns include: the capital costs of the project; the financial impact on water users outside the metropolitan area; the environmental costs, including the greenhouse gas emissions resulting from the power consumed; the pumping of highly concentrated brine into the marine environment; and the disposal of solid waste generated by the desalination process. These are all serious issues that are being brushed aside by the Victoria government.

This is a flawed project the Victorian government intends to implement through a flawed process and over the well-founded objections of local government and the local community. It is a poorly thought out and expensive response to a serious issue facing the Victorian community. Even if it is completed on time, it will not deliver a single drop of potable water for four years. Nor will it be operational full-time: potential bidders for the building and operation of the plant have been advised that there will be periods when the plant will not be required to operate.

The Rudd government has a role to play in this. It committed to the Wonthaggi desalination project when still in opposition during last year’s federal election campaign. I call upon the Rudd government to withdraw any federal funding for the project until the Australian government has made its own assessment of the environmental and economic viability of the project. I also call on the environment minister to withhold any approval required for the project based on the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act until such time as the Victorian government’s EES can be independently tested. *(Time expired)*

Mr KELVIN THOMSON (Wills) *(7.31 pm)*—In June 2007 the Victorian government released Our Water Our Future, the next stage of the government’s water plan to secure Victoria’s water supplies for at least the next 50 years. That water plan includes building a desalination plant in the Wonthaggi region. Desalination is the fastest growing form of water provision throughout the world. It creates new drinking water supplies that are not rainfall depend-
ent and is therefore a drought-proof source of water. Once in operation, the desalination plant will provide 150 billion litres, or 150 gigalitres, of water each year to Melbourne, Geelong and, via other connections, to towns in Westernport and South Gippsland.

The Wonthaggi region on the Bass Coast was chosen as the preferred site for the plant following a comprehensive feasibility study which examined a range of potential locations. The Wonthaggi region was found to have the best mix of features needed for a desalination plant, including ready access to open ocean water for intake, freely circulating ocean water for rapid dispersal of saline concentrate and suitable connections to existing water distribution infrastructure. The desalination plant will use approximately 90 megawatts of electricity, which will be offset through the purchase of renewable energy credits. In other words, the plant’s operations will be carbon neutral; and, importantly, the renewable energy source will be in addition to the government’s current renewable energy target.

An environment effects statement, or EES, for the project has now been completed. It is an extensive environmental assessment, with input from over 200 scientists, environmental engineers, and experts in areas such as marine ecology, flora and fauna, landscape, energy efficiency and waterway health. Key findings include: (1) penguins will not be impacted by the operation of the plant; (2) seals, whales, orange-bellied parrots, giant Gippsland earthworms and hooded plovers, and their habitats, will not be significantly affected by the project; (3) the saline discharge will dilute within a very short time and will be subject to a works approval application to the Environment Protection Authority; (4) dinosaur fossils beneath the sands of Williamsons Beach, adjacent to the plant site, will not be affected by the plant’s construction or operation; and (5) there will be small reductions in local larval numbers in the order of less than one per cent but no wider impact on food chains.

Furthermore, an independent economic report has established that there will be significant economic benefits from the construction of the desalination plant, including the creation of over 3,000 full-time equivalent jobs, 920 direct and 2,260 indirect, during construction of the plant; 150 full-time equivalent jobs, 50 directly on the operation of the plant and 100 indirectly, to support the ongoing maintenance and servicing of the plant; and a billion-dollar economic boost to Victoria during the construction of the plant. It represents one of the most significant infrastructure projects in the state’s history and a commitment to investing in the future. Local companies like the Morwell based company Drilltech and Korumburra based Ancon Drilling have been awarded contracts for work and will benefit.

The desalination plant at Wonthaggi is yet another example of the fact that, when it comes to water, the Liberal and National parties create problems and Labor solve problems—and, even when we are trying to solve the problems they created, they run interference. They try to block solutions yet offer no solutions of their own.

I have four examples. First, state Liberal and National parties trash the Murray-Darling river system by handing over water allocations to irrigators which have run the system dry, and when Labor acted just a week or so ago, purchasing the 91,000-hectare agricultural property Toorale to return some water to the river system, the Liberal and National parties opposed that. Second, Labor in Victoria is building a north-south pipeline to achieve water efficiencies and better secure Melbourne’s water supply and the Liberal and National parties oppose that too, running interference through a campaign called ‘Plug the pipe’. Third, there is the issue of global warming, which is causing southern Australia to lose rainfall and to dry out, but,
when Labor acts to set up a carbon trading scheme to reduce CO2 emissions, the Liberal and National parties oppose that too. They say it will drive up prices. What on earth do they think will happen as our water supplies diminish? And, four, they are at it again here with desalination. Labor comes up with a solution; they come up with obstruction. Their pandering to special interests has got Victoria and Australia into the water mess we are in, and this motion shows they continue to be bereft of ideas or answers. The best they can do is to sledge and undermine Labor’s serious efforts to address a monumental challenge of our time: providing water for a rapidly growing population. This motion shows the Liberals as not ready to govern—not ready to govern in Victoria, not ready to govern in Australia.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms S Bird)—Order! The time allocated for the debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

British Pensions

Debate resumed, on motion by Ms Rishworth:

That the House

(1) notes with concern, the previous Government’s termination of Australia’s Social Security Agreement with the United Kingdom in March 2001;

(2) notes:

(a) that the termination of this agreement led to a lost opportunity for the previous Australian Government to negotiate indexation of the British pension for those British migrants living in Australia;

(b) that many British pensioners made substantial contributions to the United Kingdom’s National Insurance system but many have not received an increase in their British pension for a decade, and as a result their payment has not kept up with the cost of living; and

(c) that the United Kingdom has entered into social security agreements that include pension indexation with many other nations, including the United States, Israel and Switzerland;

(3) calls on the Commonwealth Government to commence negotiations for a new social security agreement with the United Kingdom that includes provisions for the indexation of British pensions.

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (7.36 pm)—I have moved this private member’s motion on behalf of the many British pensioners living in my electorate of Kingston and throughout the nation. The issue of the indexation of the British pension has been raised regularly during my time in the parliament. British migration has played a central role in the creation of the Australian nation. Many British migrants have come to Australia and have contributed significantly to this country. I regularly speak with many British migrants who reside in my electorate, and they talk with fondness of their adopted country even though they acknowledge that by migrating to Australia they have been disadvantaged in the pension payments they receive from the United Kingdom’s National Insurance Fund. It is important to note that they are not referring to a system that is the same as the Australian pension system. Rather, British residents pay compulsory, regular contributions from their gross salary into the United Kingdom’s National Insurance Fund. Upon reaching retirement, Britons become eligible for an allocated pension from this fund. This means that the British scheme resembles more the Australian superannuation system than its social security programs. Further, British pensioners remain entitled to an allocated pension whether they are living in Britain or not.
Like most allocated pensions for most recipients, the British pension scheme is indexed for increases in the cost of living. This ensures in real terms that the pension remains the same amount over time. This indexation is applied to British pensioners residing in most countries. Unfortunately, this is not the case in Australia, where the British government refuses to honour its obligations to the national insurance contributors. Instead, the pension ceases to be indexed at the point that the pensioner migrates to Australia.

The inequity of this scheme is demonstrated by comparing the situation of two members of the British Australian Pensioners Association. These two British pensioners are the same age and have paid identical contributions into the NIF, and yet one receives a basic pension of £46 while the other receives £62. The difference in the pension is due to one pensioner immigrating to Australia before the other. This is clearly not a logical or an equitable system. The further inequity in this situation is that if either of these British migrants had immigrated to, for example, the United States, Israel or a country in the European Union their pension would have been fully indexed. However, because these migrants have chosen to settle in Australia, their pensions—which they have contributed to—have failed to keep up with the rising cost of living.

In my election campaign, I initiated a petition to gather the dissatisfaction of British pensioners in my electorate. The petition received widespread support and recorded hundreds of signatures from British expats. Of these I would like to formally acknowledge a number of people in my electorate who contributed to circulating this petition. Norman Woodend of Morphett Vale, Terrence D’Lima of Trott Park, Dennis Walter Docherty of Port Noarlunga and Jack Stoner, the Secretary of the British Australian Pensioner Association, have all been very actively involved in lobbying to correct this massive oversight.

And it is not just an issue in my electorate of Kingston; it is an issue affecting ex-Britons all around Australia. I have been contacted by an elderly couple, Mr and Mrs Waterhouse, living in Sippy Downs in Queensland, who have given me their support for this motion. The couple, now aged 83, moved to Australia in 1985, after making a lifetime working contribution to the British National Insurance Fund. They came, as did many others, to support a family member who had fallen ill and needed support. Astonishingly, Mrs Waterhouse has not had an increase in her British pension in 23 years, while Mr Waterhouse has not had an increase in 18 years.

As you can imagine, there have been rises in inflation and in the cost of living between 1985 and 2008, yet these pensioners have missed out. I have been informed that Mrs Waterhouse is now wheelchair bound and her husband is her registered carer, and they are both doing it very tough. The Waterhouses are not looking for a hand-out; they are looking for remuneration from the thousands of dollars they have contributed to the National Insurance Fund. This inequity highlights why it is imperative that the Australian government commence renegotiation with the United Kingdom on UK-Australian social security. I commend the motion to the House. (Time expired)

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (7.41 pm)—I rise in support of the motion before the Main Committee. This issue of UK pension indexation, or uprating, has been a problem for a very long time and has had a very negative impact on the lives of former UK residents for more years than they care to remember. We should not beat about the bush on this matter. We should not get lost in details, because the bottom line is that residents or now Australian citi-
zens in Cowan and probably in every other electorate have had their UK pensions frozen by the UK government. I thank Jack Stoner of the British Australian Pensioners Association for contacting me about this issue.

In Cowan, recipients of British pensions like Peter Evans and John Beyfus are literally going without money they are entitled to because the government of the United Kingdom do not want to pay them the same rate as they pay former UK residents that now reside in non-Commonwealth countries. It is a disgrace, and the government of the United Kingdom bear full responsibility for their heartless action and their terrible lack of loyalty. Mr Evans has supplied me with copies of letters and newspaper clippings going back more than 10 years. He is 75 years of age now and has been in Australia for 30 years. Twenty-three years of his working life was spent in the UK. Having been in receipt of a UK pension since 1997, he is now in receipt of a pension that is around 60 per cent of what UK residents would receive. He told me that Australia spends $288 million per year topping up the pensions of UK pensioners such as him, yet they can still suffer disadvantage where exchange rate differences undermine the money they do get from the United Kingdom.

I also spoke to Mr John Beyfus. Mr Beyfus has been in Australia since 1970. He arrived when he was 40 years of age, yet he continued to make contributory payments to the UK pension fund for another 20 years. They took the money—let there be no doubt about that. Mr Beyfus’s situation is a very interesting case. He served in the Royal Navy and receives a small pension from his armed service, as well as a 20 per cent disability pension from that same service as a result of a back injury. It is interesting to note that both those pensions are indexed. Mr Beyfus took the UK aged pension in 1995, and he estimates that the £80 that he got then has not moved since. It is estimated that he would be around £30 better off if indexation were paid.

For a long time Australia was the patsy for this mean and nasty trick. The UK was happy for Australia to top up the UK pensions while not trying to advance the issue at all. Having had enough of the lack of progress, the former federal government drew a line in the sand from 2001. That meant that new residents in Australia who were eligible for a UK pension would have to wait 10 years to qualify for any additional Australian pension assistance. Those already here under the previous arrangements would still have their UK pensions augmented by Australian taxpayers.

It is clear that British pensioners are highly motivated by this issue. Each time the cost of living rises, the inequity of their situation becomes starker. If you look at the price of rents, food and petrol, the injustice of the situation not only becomes rapidly clear but also can be seen as something of a crisis. The problem relates to the British government not indexing the pensions it pays to former UK residents who now live in Australia and a number of other countries around the world. Indexation is still granted to former UK resident pensioners in Europe and the United States, but UK pensioners who now reside in Australia, South Africa, New Zealand et cetera are not similarly supported, and this is in spite of most of their working lives being spent in the UK and their contributing to the UK pension fund.

The fault in this matter is clear. This is not about past Australian government decisions; it is about the government of the United Kingdom not fulfilling their responsibilities. I call upon them to do so and to end this national disgrace. They must show some loyalty to the people
who built their nation, people like Peter Evans and John Beyfus. The UK government should do this and they should do it now.

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs) (7.45 pm)—I congratulate the member for Kingston for bringing this matter to the attention of the House. Until it was terminated in 2001, Australia’s social security agreement with the United Kingdom benefited thousands of Australian residents who have lived and worked in the United Kingdom. The agreement honoured significant contributions made by many Australians and Australian residents to the United Kingdom’s national insurance system. Many voluntarily gave up salary throughout their working lives in good faith that their contributions would be protected in retirement.

UK pensions are frozen in Australia at the time of immigration and are not indexed for inflation. UK pensions are similarly frozen in Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. This occurs despite the United Kingdom providing indexation in bilateral agreements with a range of other countries, including Cyprus, Turkey, Israel, Yugoslavia—or the former Yugoslav Republic—Bosnia, Mauritius and Jamaica. The former government allowed the UK-Australia social security agreement to lapse when it came up for renewal in 2001. This meant that the opportunity to negotiate indexation was thrown away. Given the historical links between the United Kingdom and Australia, and the ongoing close ties between our two nations, it is vital that a new agreement be negotiated.

Since the termination of the social security agreement with the UK in 2001, Australian parents wishing to join their children in the United Kingdom no longer qualify for the United Kingdom pension. As over 70 per cent of Australian immigrants to the United Kingdom are between the ages of 18 and 34, choosing to spend your retirement with your children has become a much more difficult choice to make. Similarly, prospective migrants to Australia from the United Kingdom are no longer entitled to apply for early access to Australia’s social security system. Parents wishing to join their children in Australia must now accrue 10 years of qualifying residence before they will be eligible for the age pension. As many parents do not wish to be a burden on their children, this makes the decision to reunite the family in Australia all the more difficult.

In my constituency of Isaacs alone there are over 7,000 United Kingdom born residents, many of whom may be entitled to benefits. Among these are many pensioners who, like approximately half a million other United Kingdom residents, chose to retire in more temperate climes overseas. Retiring to a home by the beach in Mentone, Mordialloc, Bonbeach, Edithvale or Chelsea has obvious attractions against the harsh winters of the United Kingdom.

Groups in Australia, such as the British Australian Pensioner Organisation, have supported pensioners who have experienced the difficulties that I and other speakers have indicated. They have provided assistance to Annette Carson, who is currently involved in a legal action before the European Court of Human Rights. Annette is a British expatriate living in South Africa who has had her pension frozen, like the pensions of many Australian residents. When her case came before the House of Lords, Lord Caswell, in dissent, expressed in no uncertain terms the view that there was no justification at all for paying some expatriates in Jamaica and Cyprus more than others in Australia and South Africa.

I believe there are no grounds for discriminating against any Australian resident simply because they choose to retire here. It is to be hoped that Annette Carson’s case will be a catalyst for resolution for the many thousands of Australian residents who may be adversely affected.
by the freeze on their United Kingdom pensions that is preventing them from obtaining indexation on those pensions and that the return on lifelong contributions to the British scheme will be restored to full value.

For these reasons, the Rudd government is pressing for a new social security agreement between Australia and the United Kingdom. We would all say that it is vital that a new agreement is reached. The motion before the House emphasises the importance of indexing the British pension for those migrants living in Australia. It recognises that these pensioners have made personal contributions to the National Insurance scheme in the United Kingdom and it notes that indexation also occurs in many other countries around the world. I commend this motion to the House.

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (7.50 pm)—I rise to agree with the content of the motion—that is, that the UK pension should be indexed. However, the member for Kingston just could not help herself with respect to the part of the motion which refers to the termination of the social security agreement with the UK in March 2001 and the ‘lost opportunity’ to negotiate the indexation of UK pensions. If she had just come out and said, ‘Let’s look at a motion to get indexation of UK pensions,’ there would have been widespread support. But she had to put the partisan bit in.

Let us look at the history of this so that we can really see where some of the fault lies, shall we, Member for Kingston? I support the indexation of UK pensions and I certainly call on the UK government to do so. But let us understand history before the member for Kingston tries to rewrite it. This host country agreement, like the agreement with New Zealand, means that the country in which the individual resides has primary responsibility for their income support. Host country agreements are different from the more than 19 reciprocal agreements Australia has signed with other countries since 1973. The major difference is the responsibility for support to be provided by the country in which the person spends the majority of their working life.

The Agreement on Social Security Between the Government of Australia and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland was signed in October 1990 and was amended in 1992. It replaced an earlier agreement that entered into force in April 1958, with amendments in October 1962, March 1975 and February 1987. The 1990 agreement, as amended in 1992—negotiated by a Labor Prime Minister—does not provide for the indexation of benefits. In fact, report 27 of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, on page 6, paragraph 2.11, says, ‘Why indexation was not included in the 1990 agreement or the 1992 amendment is not altogether clear.’ So, in fact, the treaties committee could not work out why the Labor government did not include indexation of pensions. But apparently, according to the member for Kingston, it is the previous coalition government’s fault. Clearly the buck does not stop with the former Labor Prime Minister.

Under its domestic legislation, the UK does not index the cost of living for the benefits it pays to those eligible for pension benefits under its compulsory National Insurance system if they reside outside the UK in Australia. All such indexation benefits are frozen on the date the person leaves the UK for Australia or the date of granting of the pension, whichever comes first. UK pensioners in Australia are required to rely increasingly on Australian income support because the UK’s indexation policy means that the value of the UK pension reduces over
time. I thoroughly disagree with that. I call on the UK government to change that and index the pension. I think that is clear.

As at December 1999, more than 140,000 UK pension recipients also received the Australian pension, including approximately 2,500 people who relied on the agreement to access Australian pensions. Supplementation for these pensions, which includes pensions paid under the agreement, is estimated to cost Australia about $100 million per year. Australian pensions paid to former Australian residents residing in the UK gained the benefits of increases to the CPI and MTAWE. This reduced the burden on the UK. The UK government did not do the same for the UK pensions paid in Australia. They were not indexed; thus, Australia is effectively subsidising the UK National Insurance system. Furthermore, the agreement allowed former UK residents to lodge claims for UK pensions whilst residing in Australia. But Australian residents living in the UK could not do likewise. This was a major bone of contention for the Australian government.

The UK has acknowledged the inequality of its policy. Former Prime Minister John Howard negotiated with four different UK prime ministers to persuade them to change their position and amend the agreement. The UK has refused, citing cost. One of the great reasons for the current situation is that in 1990 and 1992 the Labor Prime Minister and the Labor government could not negotiate an agreement on the indexation of pensions, yet somehow we are responsible for the inherent failure of the Labor government in 1990 and 1992.

The Australian government terminated the agreement for a range of issues. The hide of the member for Kingston to come out and say it is somehow the coalition’s fault is staggering, when the Labor Party negotiated it, when you could not get it right and when the report on the treaty showed the ineptitude of the government.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—I remind the chamber that, while I was being a bit freer, when I cannot hear myself it is getting too loud. I expect the member for Wakefield will be heard in silence.

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (7.56 pm)—I rise to support the motion and to congratulate the member for Kingston for bringing this matter before the House. It is an incredibly important issue and deserves some respect. The previous speaker, the member for Fadden, included the same rank partisanship that he puts in all of his speeches, which is very sad because this is an opportunity for the House to address this issue in a bipartisan way—nobody made any sort of great point about the 2001 issue. It is a bit of a pity that he had to give such a flamboyant and inflammatory speech.

I would like to talk a bit about the strong links to the United Kingdom that our country has, particularly South Australia and particularly my area. Anytime the Central Districts Bulldogs play, you can go down to the oval at Elizabeth and see the Union Jack being waved every time they kick at goal. You can also see the flag of St George and other English paraphernalia in the crowd. That is testimony to the fact that so many people in that area, including myself, have relatives back in the old country, back in England—it is their heritage.

That heritage is part of a strong emotional and institutional link that defies geography and economic circumstances. It is an emotional relationship and it is a relationship that we have...
always treasured. It has been through two world wars. It meant that we paid our debts to British banks despite the Depression. It meant that we rationed petrol after World War II. Despite being orientated to different trade zones, Australia and the United Kingdom have a great deal to do with each other even today in terms of exchanging people back and forth. Indeed, my sister leaves for the United Kingdom in October.

That link is why the failure to index state pensions for UK pensioners living in Australia is such a disappointment. It is an insult to our shared history and the shared bond between our countries. There are many people in my electorate, as I have said, that were born in the United Kingdom. Elizabeth is a city built on English migration: 14.5 per cent of the residents in the city of Playford were born in the United Kingdom and, to its north, Gawler has 13 per cent. So there is a great bond between those two towns and the United Kingdom.

I want to speak briefly about one of the residents, Mr Michael Woodley, of Willaston, which is part of the town of Gawler. He started work in England at the age of 14. He worked in a blanket factory to start off with. Then at 18 he went into the army. He served his nation in the British Army for a number of years before leaving to work in a car factory, building the Hillman Minx. He later worked in the coal mines in the north of England and, later again, back in a car factory building Austin 1800s and the old Wolseleys. The entire time he paid his National Insurance contributions.

When he left for Australia at the age of 42, he had an expectation that that work and that commitment would be recognised by the British government. Sadly, he now receives a frozen state pension of $180 per fortnight and his wife receives a frozen pension of $118 a fortnight. Every year the real value of those pensions drops. We know that the cost of living places an awful lot of pressure on pensioners and those on fixed incomes; it places even more pressure when those fixed incomes are not adjusted for inflation.

Mr Michael Woodley has had a bit of correspondence with the British government. I am not going to go into it in great detail, but he has received a reply from the ministerial correspondence unit of the Department of Work and Pensions. The subtext of this letter is basically that it costs too much—that it costs £440 million a year to unfreeze state pensions and the British government basically will not do that until they are forced to. I think this is a real disgrace and a real slur on our shared history. I hope that the British government addresses that matter fairly and reasonably for the sake of people like Mr Michael Woodley and all the other UK pensioners who live in my electorate and around Australia. I commend the motion to the chamber.

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (8.01 pm)—I would like to support the parts of the motion which deal with the indexation of British pensions but also express my disappointment that the member for Kingston has chosen to make a party political point on something which any honest observer of this would know has been a bipartisan position—that governments of both colours, of both stripes, have long been pushing Her Majesty’s government for indexation of British pensions. You only have to look to how it was reported when Jocelyn Newman made the announcement that we would be terminating this agreement. It was reported like this on The 7.30 Report: After demands by successive governments that Britain index pensions to its former citizens living in Australia, the UK’s practice with almost every other country in the world, Community Services Minister Jocelyn Newman today decided enough was enough and cancelled the agreement.
Those were the words of Maxine McKew, now the member for Bennelong, a Labor member. That is how she reported it. The Joint Standing Committee on Treaties also looked at this and they said:

There is no doubt that the continuing refusal of the UK government to meet its indexation obligations has resulted in an unfair burden being placed on Australian taxpayers. The UK government has acknowledged the inequity of its policy but, despite extensive lobbying by successive Australian governments, the UK government has shown no signs of being prepared to change its policy. The only options left available to the Australian government are to continue to accept the UK government’s burden or to terminate the agreement. In principle, termination is the better option.

The committee made a recommendation supporting the termination of the agreement. There was no minority report; there was no dissenting report. That was supported by all Labor members of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties in 1999, including Senator Joe Ludwig, the Minister for Human Services, and including former senator Chris Schacht as well, who I think would be familiar to some of the members in the chamber.

This is a serious issue. Of the British pensioners living overseas, there are about 330,000 who are indexed, in countries like the United States and many other European countries, but there are 608,000 whose pensions are not indexed. Most of those are in Commonwealth countries, 220,000 of them in Australia. As the member for Isaacs correctly said, there is at the moment the Carson case, which has been launched by a British pensioner from South Africa. This is awaiting a hearing before the European Court of Human Rights. At the moment the position of Her Majesty’s government is to await the findings of the Carson case.

In the time remaining I wanted to say that this is something that has had bipartisan support, and on a recent visit to the United Kingdom I took the opportunity to lobby a minister from the Department of Work and Pensions for indexation of the British pensions. This is not a Liberal position; it is not a Labor position. It is something we all agree on on behalf of our constituents.

Of this motion, paragraphs (2)(b), (2)(c) and (3) are elements that should be supported. Unfortunately, paragraphs (1) and (2)(a), I think, are incorrect and misguided. The problem was not the termination of the agreement; the problem was the agreement. It was an old-style host country social security agreement which does not provide for indexation of pensions. What we want is a newer agreement like the ones that we have negotiated with a whole range of countries, including most recently Greece, which does provide indexation of pensions.

In conclusion, this is an important issue, but I should also make the point that we have a whole range of Australian pensioners who are on $273 a week. The opposition have said that we want to see an increase in the base rate of the age pension and we want to see a look at the indexation that is used for Australian pensioners. We believe that the Rudd government should act in making a $500, one-off payment before Christmas.

Ms COLLINS (Franklin) (8.06 pm)—I rise this evening to commend the member for Kingston for moving this important motion and to acknowledge the points made by my colleagues on this side of the House. After hearing the contribution from the previous speaker, the member for Boothby, one thing that I think we can all agree on is that a reciprocal arrangement between the Australian and United Kingdom governments does need to include provision for the indexation of British pensions. I think the previous speaker actually admitted in his contribution that when they terminated the agreement they removed the ability to con-
continue negotiations, which is what we are asking the governments to do. By my calculations, 2001 to 2007 means there were another six years in which they could negotiate and they did not.

To give a bit of history on this issue, UK pensioners living in Australia have been paid at the same rate since the date they became entitled to receive contributions from the UK government, and there is currently no entitlement or provision for an annual increase in their retirement pension.

Earlier this month I received a letter from a married couple living in my electorate of Franklin who are approaching retirement age. They have lived in Australia for the past 25 years and are British expatriates. These are their concerns, and I read directly from their letter:

We were horrified to discover recently that when we claim our British pensions, which we have continued to pay for while living in Australia, they will be frozen from the first payment. That is to say, if things remain as they are now, the British State age pension we will receive from the British Government will not be indexed.

My constituents are really concerned that there is no universal approach to the indexation of UK pensions. For example, British expatriates living in the USA or any country in the European Union benefit from the indexation of their British pension, as do retirees in Britain. The married couple in my electorate are set to lose thousands of pounds that other British expatriates receive as a matter of course. In this instance, the decision not to index their pensions is based solely on where these British citizens choose to reside. Currently, over 500,000 British expatriates who call Canada, New Zealand, South Africa or Australia home do not receive any annual increase—no indexation.

I support this motion to reform the status quo and to bring about a more equitable arrangement for all British expatriates, no matter where they live. Many British pensioners, like the married couple who wrote to me, have made substantial contributions to the United Kingdom’s national insurance system throughout their working lives. They did this to ensure that they would have access to adequate funds for when they decide to enter a new chapter of their lives and begin retirement. What they did not bank on was frozen pension payments. This has had real financial implications for them during their retirement, or in their pending retirement, as the pensions payments will fail to keep up with the cost of living. These people have made significant financial contributions—in many cases over decades—and should rightly have access to indexed social security payments to ensure their pensions keep stride with the rising costs of living. The Australian government is concerned about the UK’s indexation policy, which I believe is inequitable and adversely affects 250,000 UK pensioners in Australia.

The purpose of this motion is to seek rectification of a former social security agreement with the UK government so that it includes provision for indexation. The previous government—that is, the Howard government—had a window of opportunity to address this issue for, as I said earlier, more than six years but they failed to do anything about it. The Rudd Labor government is taking a keen interest in this serious matter. We have already re-established communication channels with the UK government representatives and concerned UK pensioners now living in Australia. In fact, earlier this year the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the member for Jagajaga, wrote to her counterpart in the UK to raise the matter again and to suggest that officials meet to discuss the possibility of a new social security agreement. I have been assured that the Australian government

MAIN COMMITTEE
will, at every opportunity, continue to press these matters with the UK government. In July this year the minister also met with UK pensioner representatives in Australia to discuss the matter and we are considering what other action the government might take. We are also monitoring the legal actions mentioned by previous speakers. A case is expected to be heard at the end of 2008 or early in 2009, and I am sure we all await that outcome.

As you can see, the Australian government and UK pensioners are seeking to change what I and they believe is an unfair and inequitable social policy. In supporting the member for Kingston’s motion, I feel that it is important we move forward to commence negotiations for a new social security agreement that includes provisions for the indexation of pensions. The Australian culture is underpinned by a fair go for all, and we want a fair go for all, including the British expatriates. I commend the motion to the House.

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

Human Rights in Tibet

Debate resumed, on motion by Mr Slipper:

That the House:

(1) notes:

(a) the continuing human rights concerns in Tibet; and

(b) the continuing restrictions on entry to Tibetan areas for journalists, international observers, non-government agencies and foreign diplomats;

(2) welcomes the informal talks between the Chinese Government and representatives of His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama on 4 and 5 May 2008 in Shenzhen, China, and the agreement to hold a further round of the China-Tibet dialogue;

(3) encourages both parties to work sincerely towards a peaceful and mutually agreed resolution on the China-Tibet issue;

(4) welcomes the Prime Minister’s forthright statements to the Chinese Premier and President in public and in private on the need for constructive dialogue during his recent visit to China;

(5) recognises that the China-Tibet issue was also raised with the Chinese authorities by the former Government;

(6) acknowledges there is bi-partisan support in the Australian Parliament for a peaceful resolution on the differences between Tibet and China; and

(7) requests the Government actively to support and monitor progress of the China-Tibet dialogue and to offer its support to help bring about a positive outcome.

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher) (8.11 pm)—I am particularly pleased to have moved this motion in relation to the situation in Tibet, which is entirely unsatisfactory. My personal view is that the Chinese invasion of Tibet was no more justified than was the German invasion of Poland at the commencement of the Second World War. However, the Chinese now occupy Tibet, and the world has recognised Chinese sovereignty over Tibet. We have a situation where dialogue is going on between the Tibetan authorities and the Chinese authorities.

Five minutes is not really very long—and I have only three minutes left—to talk about the situation in Tibet at the moment and the situation between Tibet and China. I personally believe that the Chinese authorities agreed to this further dialogue only as a way of getting the
Beijing Olympics out of the way. The seventh round of the Sino-Tibetan dialogue, held on 1 July, has been described by the Dalai Lama’s special envoy as one of the most difficult sessions held so far. In keeping with their policy of engagement with the Chinese government, and with no other options presenting themselves, the Central Tibetan Administration—that is, the Tibetan government in exile—have agreed tentatively to a further round of dialogue in October. However, the Tibetans are concerned that in the absence of serious and sincere commitment on the Chinese government’s part the continuation of the present dialogue process would serve no purpose. The Tibetans have worked very hard to try to make sure that this process works, and they have indicated that at the next discussions they will attempt to progress negotiations by tabling at the October session a detailed plan for Tibetan autonomy.

It really is important that the Chinese recognise that the world is not prepared to have the human rights of Tibetans overridden roughshod. We have a situation where Tibetans have been murdered. The Chinese are acting like a brutal occupying force and they are simply not recognising that Tibet is a nation. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is saying that he is not seeking independence. Honestly, Tibet historically has been an independent nation, but His Holiness is prepared to work with the Chinese to seek a form of autonomy which would be satisfactory to the Tibetan people and, hopefully, satisfactory to the central Chinese government. But, unfortunately, the Chinese are simply not prepared to play ball.

We have to make it very clear as a world community that we are not prepared to accept this continued prevarication by the Chinese authorities. We cannot accept a situation where Tibetans are murdered. We cannot accept that human rights in Tibet are somehow less valuable than human rights in other parts of the world. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is one of the most incredibly sincere people on earth. He is a person I greatly admire. He is a person who has made concessions to the Chinese authorities that he ought not to have been required to make. He is a person who is seeking the best for his people. We as a nation salute him. I call on the Chinese authorities to bring about real and meaningful change and to bring about sincere negotiation with a view to better outcomes for the oppressed Tibetan people.

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (8.16 pm)—I second the excellent motion on Tibet moved by the member for Fisher. For 16 days last month we saw an unrelenting display of Chinese might—sporting, organisational and economic might. Unfortunately, the Communist Party machine is also unrelenting in its verbal war with the leader of the Tibetan people, the Dalai Lama. Many people, from human rights NGOs to Western governments—and, perhaps more dubiously, the IOC—had high hopes that the world spotlight would pressure China to make some genuine steps towards a just resolution of the Tibet question.

Amongst other governments who have raised the issue of Tibet with the Chinese authorities in recent months, as the motion indicates, the Australian government has been one of the most persistent—a fact I welcome. The Prime Minister, having already raised human rights issues in Tibet with China’s President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao in April, also raised human rights concerns again with Premier Wen on 8 August, prior to the commencement of the Olympic Games.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Acting Prime Minister both met the Dalai Lama earlier this year. The Minister for Foreign Affairs has also called on China to respect the human rights of Tibetans, to allow greater access to Tibet and to engage in substantive dialogue.
before the end of the year. His Holiness the Dalai Lama had a highly successful function in Sydney with many new members of parliament when he was here in May.

It seems that calls for dialogue and a genuine attempt at resolution of the Tibet problem have so far fallen on deaf ears amongst the communist regime in Beijing. On 7 August, on the eve of the Olympics, New York Times commentator Nicholas Kristof published an article where he argued that he had found at a meeting with the Dalai Lama in June a more flexible and pragmatic position on the resolution of the conflict. Kristof argued that the Dalai Lama recognised that time was running out and was signalling a willingness to deal comparable to the way Richard Nixon sent signals to Beijing in 1972. According to Kristof, the Dalai Lama said he was willing to state that he would accept Communist Party rule in Tibet—something that Beijing has always demanded. In the words of the Dalai Lama:
The main thing is to preserve our culture, to preserve the character of Tibet. That is what is most important, not politics.

So this influential tribune of liberal Western opinion, Kristof, said China should reciprocate. Unfortunately, the events of the last year have shown that the current talks between the communist representatives and the Dalai Lama’s representatives are not making progress. Kristof’s view was that direct talks between the Dalai Lama and either the Chinese President or Prime Minister were the best way of ensuring that a deal could be reached.

Important concessions from the Chinese might have been to issue residential permits to stop the wave of Han Chinese migration to Tibet, to cease the restriction on monasteries and to allow the Tibetan language in government offices in Tibetan regions. Tibetan regions of China currently encompass several provinces. While the Tibetans have to concede their desire to create a central government, as Kristof suggests, a regional authority for Tibetan affairs could administer key aspects of life in all Tibetan areas, particularly education, culture and religion. This is the kernel of what would be a compromise. In terms of Tibetan concessions, the Dalai Lama said that he would play no political role after such a settlement and that other existing Chinese communist controls would remain in place. It would not be a one country, two systems approach, as exists in Hong Kong.

A successful deal would be beneficial to China’s reputation and the Tibetan people. The Dalai Lama is 73, and once he passes away a deal might be impossible as there is no Tibetan leader to unify the people behind such a plan. Frustrated Tibetan youth have in some cases already turned to violence against the Chinese. Prolonged repression along the current lines of China’s stance in Tibet without the Dalai Lama’s moderating voice is a powder keg with the potential to explode—in the form of greater violence and terrorism.

However, despite the potential for such an outcome, the Chinese stance has so far been very disappointing. On 21 August, in the full glare of the Olympic Games, the English language mouthpiece of the Chinese government, the China Daily, published a response to Kristof’s suggestions. Rather than seizing on dialogue or constructive criticism, they launched a tirade against the Dalai Lama in classic neo-Stalinist language, calling him ‘the so-called Dalai Lama’, ridiculing the fact that he talked through an American journalist et cetera, et cetera.

I agree with the member for Fisher: let us hope against hope that, at the resumed October session of the dialogue between Tibet and China, the regime in Beijing realise that, at the end of their economic boom, the West will still be there pressing for Tibetan cultural autonomy.

MAIN COMMITTEE
and that the Tibetan people deserve the right, guaranteed under the Chinese constitution, for Tibetans to practise their religion and culture without interference from the communist regime.

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

Prostate Cancer

Debate resumed, on motion by Mr Bradbury:

That the House:
(1) notes that September is Prostate Cancer Awareness Month;
(2) notes that prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men after skin cancer and the second highest cause of male cancer deaths;
(3) acknowledges the work of the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia in promoting greater awareness of prostate cancer within the broader community and the need for men to undergo regular testing; and
(4) congratulates the Rudd Government for developing Australia’s first ever men’s health policy.

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (8.21 pm)—I rise to note that September is Prostate Cancer Awareness Month, and I wish to draw to the House’s attention the important work being done in the community to raise awareness of this very serious disease. As part of Prostate Cancer Awareness Month, I am supporting the blue ribbon campaign, which is helping to raise funds for prostate cancer research. I am wearing one of the blue ribbon badges to show my support this evening.

Men’s health is a topic that many men studiously avoid. We are more likely to ignore symptoms of illness until it is impossible not to—but, by that time, for many men, it is unfortunately too late. Prostate cancer is one of those diseases that many men would prefer to not talk about. It involves uncomfortable testing in uncomfortable areas, but it is a killer. Prostate cancer is the second highest cause of cancer deaths among men, after skin cancer. Each year in Australia 18,700 men are diagnosed with prostate cancer and, of those, tragically, 3,000 men die. This is roughly equal to the number of women who die from breast cancer each year. One in nine Australian men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer during their lifetimes. Those most at risk are men with a family history of prostate cancer. But the chance of being diagnosed with prostate cancer increases with age: it is one in 1,000 for a man aged in his 40s but as high as one in 13 for a man aged in his 80s. Research shows that early detection is the key to survival for men diagnosed with this disease, and this underlines the importance of raising awareness of prostate cancer within our community.

September is Prostate Cancer Awareness Month, and I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the Prostate Cancer Foundation, which plays a key role in campaigning for a better understanding of the disease in the broader community. The foundation helps to fund life-saving research into prostate cancer and provides scholarships for young urologists and prostate nurses to travel overseas and further develop their skills so that they can provide world-class health care to patients in Australia.

The Rudd government has also recognised that we need to do more to look after the health of men and has developed Australia’s first ever men’s health policy. This policy seeks to get
the topic of men’s health on the national agenda so that more men are talking about their health care to their healthcare providers. We have also committed $15 million to establish dedicated prostate cancer research centres.

The message of Prostate Cancer Awareness Month is simple: if you are at risk of prostate cancer, have regular tests. I would encourage men to ask their GPs for a simple prostate specific antigen, or a PSA blood test, which can show early signs of any cancer growth. Surveys undertaken by the foundation indicate that only 10 per cent of men between the ages of 50 and 70 have regular prostate checks. This underlines the significant hurdles that need to be overcome if we are to change men’s attitudes towards their own health.

Some months ago I joined my colleagues in celebrating the life’s work of the late Jane McGrath, whose tireless campaigning put breast cancer front and centre of the nation’s mind. The result of the successful pink ribbon campaigns and the support of many high-profile Australians for that message is that many more women and their families are aware of the risks of breast cancer and the need to have regular examinations. Reaching out to men about their health, however, proves to be a more difficult task. Prostate Cancer Foundation surveys show that, while 78 per cent of women feel well informed about breast cancer, just over half of Australian men surveyed felt that they had enough information about prostate cancer.

In my electorate we are very fortunate to have an active group of supporting sufferers and survivors of prostate cancer. The Nepean-Blue Mountains Prostate Cancer Support Group have lent an understanding ear to many men and their families in the local area, and I would like to acknowledge the hard work of President Victor Cipants, Secretary Alan Moran, Vice-President David Price, Assistant Secretary Gabrielle Moran, Treasurer Brett Sowerby and all of the members of that group.

On Friday, 5 September, we were honoured to have the Treasurer, the honourable member for Lilley, join the Nepean-Blue Mountains Prostate Cancer Support Group for an afternoon tea generously hosted by the Penrith City Council and speak about the challenges that face prostate cancer sufferers and their families. Diagnosed in 2001 with the same disease that claimed the life of his father, the Treasurer himself is a survivor of prostate cancer—a member of the secret brotherhood, as he likes to refer to it—and he attests to the benefits of early detection. It is important that we have men of the profile of the Treasurer willing to speak out, who are unafraid to have honest conversations with other men about prostate cancer. It is stories like that of the Treasurer that we can all look to for inspiration, and I would like to extend my thanks to him for his time in coming to my electorate and sharing his experiences.

I also acknowledge that Sydney broadcaster Alan Jones will return to work tomorrow after being diagnosed with prostate cancer earlier this year and I wish him all the best with his battle. (Time expired)

Ms MARINO (Forrest) (8.26 pm)—I would like to raise the profile of the need for men to continue to have regular check-ups and to commend the good work being done by the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia in promoting greater awareness of prostate cancer. As we have heard tonight, every year 18,000 Australian men are diagnosed with prostate cancer and approximately 3,000 will die from it. Prostate cancer occurs mainly in men over 50 years old and is the most common male cancer after skin cancer. The specific causes of prostate cancer remain unknown. A man’s risk of developing prostate cancer is related to his age, genetics, race, diet and lifestyle as well as medications. The primary risk factor is age, as prostate can-
cer is uncommon in men who are less than 45 years old. However, men who have a brother or father with prostate cancer have twice the usual risk of developing the disease. Prostate cancer risk can be decreased by modifying these known risk factors, such as decreasing the intake of animal fat and meat and increasing the fibre content in one’s diet.

Jill Margo wrote in the *Australian* in November 2002 on comments from Max Gardner, the chairman of the foundation’s support and advocacy committee:

… most men are poorly informed and only at diagnosis do they realise that early detection would have been their best hope of obtaining a cure.

A divisive argument continues about whether early detection makes a difference:

This is a central debate in the management of prostate cancer.

One side holds that, as the cure can be worse than the cancer, there is no point to early detection. The other side contends that early detection and treatment is the only way the death rate from prostate cancer can be reduced. However, there are three universally agreed points:

… that the cancer can be cured if it is treated while wholly confined to the prostate gland; that once the disease spreads beyond the prostate it can no longer be cured; and that death from prostate cancer is almost always slow and painful.

As Jill Margo writes, these three points ‘should help men think more clearly about their disease’, because unless treated the disease has painful symptoms and is invariably fatal. The Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia is an umbrella organisation for prostate cancer support groups from all over Australia and seeks the views of thousands of men who have experienced diagnosis and treatment. The article ends:

To those who are debating whether to be tested for prostate cancer, Gardner says it is well to remember that every man with advanced prostate cancer greatly regrets not being diagnosed while the cancer was curable.

The health system expenditure on prostate cancer in 2001 was $201 million, making prostate cancer the fourth most expensive cancer to treat. The majority of this expenditure, some $97 million, was for non-hospital pharmaceuticals while some $58 million was spent on treating admitted patients in hospital, usually associated with surgical procedures, and $10 million was for out-of-hospital medical costs such as GP or specialist visits and pathology. Government funding for existing programs for prostate cancer includes the Australian Centre of Excellence in Male Reproductive Health, which aims to increase the knowledge base of health professionals and the community generally on prostate cancer. The centre specifically develops and implements professional and community education programs, undertakes research on men’s sexual and reproductive issues and provides information in the form of publications and newsletters, and via their website. Since 2000, funding of over $6.4 million has been provided to the Australian Centre of Excellence in Male Reproductive Health.

Funding for research into prostate cancer is also directed to the National Health and Medical Research Council. Since 2003 the government has awarded over $29.4 million in research grants, over $8.2 billion for the 2007 year. I note that funding of $15 million was announced by the government in 2008-09 to provide for two dedicated prostate cancer specific research centres to develop improved diagnostic tests and treatment, allocating $5 million for three years. I would strongly urge all men to become more aware of prostate cancer and undertake regular testing with their GP by both the PSA test—the prostate specific antigen test that can
detect abnormal prostate cells by a simple blood test—and a physical examination, which can
pick up some cancers that are missed by the blood test.

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

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Debate resumed from 1 September.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—The question is:

That grievances be noted.

Cowan Electorate

Western Australian Election

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (8.31 pm)—I rise tonight to speak about the concerns of the peo-
ple in my electorate of Cowan. As all members would be aware, when you are in your office,
when you receive your emails, when you are on the street, you encounter a lot of people with
a lot of opinions. People will come to you and they will tell you what concerns them. The fact
that the majority of people’s concerns are not federal issues has no real bearing on the matter.
If you are there, if you are available, they will tell you what they think needs to be done. The
majority of things that come before me are clearly not federal issues. People want to talk
about their footpaths or they want to talk about graffiti or health or hospital problems or areas
like that.

I do not want to linger on the negative today. What I would like to speak about are the
changes that have occurred in my home state of Western Australia. I am sure members would
be aware that circumstances have prevailed that have seen a change of government in Western
Australia. For me in Cowan it has represented a certain change in the landscape. Prior to the
state election there were four state MLAs covering the area of Cowan. Now, with the redistri-
bution, there are six state electorates—in whole or in part—within the same area that I cover.
But now I have two good friends who have joined the team to work for the interests of the
people in the area. I would like to mention the excellent work undertaken by the now member
for Kingsley in Western Australia, Andrea Mitchell. Andrea Mitchell is a local resident of the
suburb of Woodvale within the electorate of Kingsley. She has a great background of commu-
nity service and has been a significant board member for Tennis Australia, working on the
Hopman Cup. We have worked very closely together through a number of issues within the
Kingsley electorate.

The abiding issues for the people there often concern public transport—the lack of buses
connecting the suburbs to the major rail line running down the Mitchell Freeway. There are
also issues regarding schools in the local area. I have spoken before in this place on Green-
wood Primary School, which is being constructed, and some issues regarding how the former
state government wanted to take the oval area away from the school site and sell off a hectare
of the land. They thought the kids could then just go down to the council oval, which is next
door. Of course, that raises a number of issues. With the change in state government, and with
Andrea Mitchell now being the member for Kingsley, I look forward to a resolution of that
problem. There are also issues for schools in Kingsley regarding security and even mainte-
nance issues. Beyond schools, there is a great problem with graffiti in suburbs like Woodvale
and Kingsley. In fact, it is disappointing that graffiti is particularly prevalent at the moment in the northern suburbs of Perth and, I would imagine, elsewhere in the city as well.

Those are some of the issues that I worked on with Andrea Mitchell. The reason why I am going through those will become apparent shortly. But, before moving into what the overall election result will mean, I would like to speak also about the new member for Wanneroo, Mr Paul Miles, a very good friend of mine whom I have known for many years. Paul Miles and I arrived in different parliaments but via a somewhat similar route. He was unsuccessful on his first try as well, but perseverance saw him through. It was good to know that those early morning starts waving corflutes on the side of the road had some effect and were not all just fun for the rest of us! Paul has certainly been working hard on the public transport issues as well—the lack of a continuous or reasonable bus service from the suburb of Landsdale, in the east of my electorate of Cowan, through the Kingsway Shopping Centre, where my electorate office is, and then linking up with the trains as well. The lack of that bus has been a real problem for the local people. Again, there is graffiti. I remember one night that Paul and I and a local resident spent in Willespie Park in Pearsall, where we confronted and had a chat to some under-age drinkers and dealt with that problem. So Paul has shown a great commitment to getting things done. As a councillor for the city of Wanneroo, he did some great work with regard to Willespie Park. I have also worked with him on a number of other issues. So I am very confident that these very good friends of mine, Andrea Mitchell for Kingsley and Paul Miles for Wanneroo, will make a great contribution under the Barnett government.

I will talk about what this election will mean for the people. I will not go through every little policy point that the new government in Western Australia has outlined, but I would like to mention some of the things that really are going to count. They include the re-establishment of the graffiti task force, a state funded force to deal with graffiti and to fight that fight up close. But, of course, along with that commitment there is also the commitment in law to back this up and to impose on these vandals—these criminals—the penalties that need to be there to send a clear message. I have no problem with penalties for graffiti of $26,000 in fines or two years in jail. Similarly, with the tough response on hooning, I again endorse that. The penalty for a first offence of hooning is loss of the vehicle for a week, for a second offence it is loss of the vehicle for three months and for the third offence it is confiscation. I say: carry on, send this clear message, fight that fight and let these people know that their dangerous and risky behaviour is not just a matter of fun. It is not the way to leave your mark on the world by leaving tyre on the roads—a bit of burnt rubber. These people need a clear message because, if they make their mistakes, innocent people could be killed. So they need to be dealt with, and I applaud the plan of the new government in Western Australia.

In the limited time I have left I will talk about the changes in a number of key laws within WA. Recently there was a prostitution bill passed by the former government, with some support from others in Western Australia, that effectively would allow prostitution to take place even in residential suburbs. That again is a fight I think is worth having, and the repeal of the law will see a turnaround, to never giving up the fight. Also there is the repeal of the soft cannabis laws in Western Australia and the introduction of harsher penalties for sale, cultivation and possession, and the sale of drug paraphernalia. The truth in sentencing laws in Western Australia will also be repealed. That is where a third of the sentence is basically taken off immediately. I believe there was a case where a person was shot dead over a $100 drug debt and
the offender was given a sentence of something like six or 6½ years, but with truth in sentencing that was rounded down to about four years. For loss of a life to be worth four years, I think, sends a very bad message, and I am glad to see that those truth in sentencing laws are on their way out.

Although I have not had the time to cover all the good policy changes, the changes that are coming in Western Australia are fundamental; they are positive and they give me great hope for the future. I look forward to working with Andrea Mitchell and Paul Miles as well as the rest of the new state government. I look forward to the best result for the people of Cowan and the people of Western Australia through this great change.

Page Electorate: Health Funding

Ms Saffin (Page) (8.41 pm)—Tonight I am speaking on two particular health initiatives underway in Page: the upgrade of operating theatres and the emergency department at Grafton Base Hospital; and a GP superclinic and a radiotherapy unit at Lismore Base Hospital, or more specifically the fast-tracking of the latter—health related issues that affect people in Page and health in general.

Health is something that I have quite a passion for, having long advocated, lobbied and pressured to ensure that we get the health services we seek and indeed deserve, which I am sure you seek too, Mr Deputy Speaker Washer, given your other profession. I did this during the election campaign last year and have continued to do this since I was elected. In fact, I have been doing it for many years, firstly serving as director of Lismore Base Hospital, being a founding member of the then North Coast breast screening program, becoming president and serving in that role for a number of years; and having a wide involvement in many health initiatives, many firsts, including the issue of treatment for homeless people, a very challenging group of people to get health services to but a group that we still have to be very focused on in the delivery of health services.

All governments have for a long time needed to do better on health. It is a big-ticket item and is becoming more so. With the technological medical changes, we face the increasing longevity of our population and the lower age of viability, all issues impacting on our health system. Having had significant experience of health systems outside Australia as well as in Australia, I can say we have a pretty good one, but it can always do with improvement. That is what good policy is about and that is what the Rudd Labor government is about: it is about good policy and continued engagement, which bring continued improvement. It needs a federal government to be actively engaged in health policy. I am not letting the states and territories—in my case, New South Wales—off the hook, but it is well documented that the previous government ripped a lot of money out of health, most tellingly in the area of Australian healthcare agreement funding to our public hospitals, which meant a loss of about $1 billion, most of that in New South Wales. You do not need to be a health economist to work out what that meant in services.

The current Australian healthcare agreement has been extended for 12 months, with an extra billion dollars going to public hospitals, reversing the trend of decline in the Commonwealth share of public funding. Importantly, for the first time it allows, in recognition that primary and acute care cannot be separated, the healthcare agreements to go beyond public hospitals to include primary and preventive and aged care.
So what is the government doing in terms of health? I can report that it is delivering on all of its election commitments. It has established the Health and Hospitals Fund, to the tune of $10 billion. That will support strategic investments in health to equip Australia’s health and hospital system for the future. Significantly, it will drive the provision of health and hospital facilities and equipment as part of the government’s health reform agenda. It will fund or invest in medical technology and equipment and in major medical research facilities and equipment, including projects and facilities that will better support links between hospital based clinical research and high-quality clinical practice.

The health needs of people in rural and regional areas such as my area have their own unique characteristics but they also have characteristics in common with the health needs of all Australians. In July, the Rudd government established the Office of Rural Health in the Department of Health and Ageing. It will drive much-needed rural health reform, and a lot of that will be in response to the findings of the audit of the health workforce in rural and regional Australia which revealed, surprisingly, that the figures the previous government was using regarding medical health workforce issues were 1991 census figures—a bit outdated, I have to say. The office will also review the Australian government’s 60 targeted and disparate rural health programs, among other things.

The government has restored the Commonwealth dental health scheme to the tune of some $290 million so that an additional one million or so Australians will get consultation and treatment. People in my area say to me, ‘Janelle, can I get my dentures?’ and in our case I can say, ‘Yes,’ because this means an additional $2 million will flow to the North Coast Area Health Service. That will impact very positively on dental waiting lists. The funding is worked out on a dental RDF, or resource distribution formula. Even though the North Coast Area Health Service resource distribution formula is still lower than it should be—but moving up in both general medical and dental—the money for dental will be based on what the RDF should be for dental, and that is good news for the people of Page and the North Coast. When the Howard government came to government in 1996, they ceased the Commonwealth Dental Health Program and that created a lot of problems that have lingered on for the past decade. There is a lot of catch-up to be done, not only in my area of New South Wales but right across Australia. The other initiative is funding of up to $150 for families who receive family tax benefit A so that their young people from 12 to 17 years of age can get annual dental health checks.

In mental health, there is an extra $50 million to strengthen mental health services, with approximately $20 million going to help prevent suicide. Another initiative is in men’s health. The Rudd Labor government, under Minister Roxon, has introduced a national men’s health policy. That is a first for Australia at the national level, and it is another election commitment being delivered. I was able to launch that policy locally in Lismore with the local men’s helpline. I note the debate that took place before in this chamber and also that it is Prostate Cancer Awareness Month. Last week I had the privilege to spend some real quality time with three key members of the Clarence Valley Prostate Cancer Support Group. We got together to promote the prostate cancer phone-in last Thursday. We need to develop more awareness of this cancer that is devastating to men.

I raised two local initiatives at the beginning of my speech, the first one being at the Grafton Base Hospital. During the election campaign the Labor opposition and I gave a commit-
ment to fund the upgrade of the operating theatres and the emergency department at Grafton Base Hospital. I am pleased to report that planning for the three operating theatres that will be upgraded is nearly completed and that we have a timetable in place.

There is a project definition plan which should be completed by October and signed off; the architectural design completed by around May 2009 and tender documents issued around the same time; development applications approved by about June-July; construction to commence around August-September; and then operations should commence by October-November 2010. I am really pleased to be able to report that because Grafton Base Hospital has needed those upgrades for a long time and the community has waited a long time for it. The community is quite excited that it is going to happen but still want to see the first sod of earth turned so that they know it is a reality with their eyes. They know it is now because of all the planning that has happened. I am pleased that that was in the budget.

Lismore Base Hospital is redeveloping and building an integrated cancer care centre. Again, during the election campaign there was a commitment given to go with the $8 million that had already been allocated by the previous federal government but to match it by $7 million so that the upgrade of the radiotherapy unit could be fast-tracked and it would come on line in 2010, with the first patients going through by about June 2010. So the $8 million plus the $7 million—a $15 million commitment in all—will allow patients to be treated in their own area. They will not have to travel to the Gold Coast or to Brisbane and suffer not only the inconveniences but also all the emotional trauma that that brings in that time of treating the disease.

Proposed North-South Pipeline: Goulburn River

FRAN BAILEY (McEwen) (8.51 pm)—Tonight I want to bring to the attention of this House the ramifications of the decision the Minister for the Environment has made in bowing to the pressure of the Brumby government in Victoria and signing off on the construction of the north-south pipeline that will divert 75 billion litres of water annually from the drought affected and heavily stressed Goulburn River. To put that amount of water in perspective, that is equal to around 20 per cent of the capacity of Sydney Harbour. This decision will have devastating long-term and short-term consequences for the Murray-Darling system. The hundreds of farmers who depend on this water to grow food for not only Victoria but also the wider domestic market and the export market and the magnificent farming properties along the route of this pipeline, together with the protected areas of national park—home to many species of native flora and fauna—will have a swathe some 100 metres wide cut through them to accommodate this pipeline. In addition five pumping stations will be needed to pump the water up steep gradients like those of the King Lake National Park plus filter stations along the route. The National Water Commission listed the Goulburn River as one of the hardest working rivers of the Murray-Darling system. The Goulburn River provides the water needed for $2 billion worth of farmed products each year and the environment that is responsible for attracting increasing numbers of tourists to the region, supported by growing numbers of small businesses that underpin many of the small communities in my electorate.

The question that people in my electorate want answered is: why would the Brumby state government put all of this at risk? To even attempt to find an answer to this question we need to go back to the period before the last state election when the state government was coming under pressure from Melburnians about severe water restrictions. The state government prom-
ised that they would build a recycling water plant in Melbourne to alleviate the growing pressure of supply but they also stated categorically that they would never divert water from north of the divide—that is, Eildon and the Goulburn River. Within months of winning that election they did a complete about-face: they scrapped their recycling water plant and announced that they would build the north-south pipeline diverting water from my region north of the divide that has been in severe drought for years and with the major catchment of Eildon being at record low levels—in fact, at 14 per cent of capacity at the time of the announcement.

Let me get on the record that currently there is no more water in Eildon now than there was at the same time last year or the previous year. The reality is that Eildon’s capacity is very stressed. Given that CSIRO states that there must be at least nine per cent capacity in storage to be able to deal with a break-out of blue-green algae, the level of capacity simply cannot accommodate the increased demands the state government has decreed. The state government has claimed that its decree is not unreasonable because the extra 75 billion litres of water will come from savings that will accrue from the irrigation modernisation project. These savings are in fact a myth, but even if some savings were achieved wouldn’t the responsible course of action be to demonstrate those savings before any additional water was diverted out of the system?

Central to the state government’s spin on water-saving initiatives and the irrigation modernisation project is its claim that, with a new automation scheme in place, leaking channels would be identified to enable repairs to be made. However, the Victorian government has allocated funding in its budget to line only five per cent of the 7,000 kilometres of irrigation channels. The total cost, I might add, for repairing the channel system would be around $2 billion. No-one believes that merely repairing five per cent of the channels sometime in the future is going to deliver savings of water in the order of the 30 billion litres that is needed annually.

Importantly, all the water savings that the Victorian government loves to quote are dependent on 100 per cent of water allocation over the entire length of the full irrigation season. The reality is that that has not been achieved for many years because the water quantity needed to fill those allocations has simply not been available. How then does the Victorian government intend to deliver these totally unachievable promises? The answer of course is that it cannot. The amount of water in the Goulburn River now is not able to meet reduced allocations, and it will not be able to meet the amounts of water currently allocated while the amount of water available is reducing by 75 billion litres each and every year. At the numerous public meetings and the committee of inquiry set up by Mr Brumby that I have attended, not one public official or water scientist has been able to verify the Victorian government’s claim of water savings. There simply has not been one shred of evidence to support its assertions.

That begs the question: how could the federal minister for the environment have given the green light to this project using his authority under the EPBC legislation when this is just plain bad policy, no matter which way it is examined? If he honestly was prepared to test the project rigorously, he would ask the following questions: does this project have the potential to threaten our environment? Does it place even greater stress on the Murray-Darling system? Does the project threaten not just the viability but the very livelihood of many hundreds of our farmers and small rural communities? Does it threaten the many species of native flora and fauna? The answer to all these questions is a resounding yes. The fact that the Victorian gov-
ernment refused point-blank to conduct an environmental impact assessment of this project is unbelievable, but the fact that the federal minister was prepared to overlook this total abrogation of responsibility by the Victorians is untenable.

Furthermore, the federal minister for the environment was prepared to sit on his hands and look the other way while the Premier of Victoria decided to remove the Goulburn River from the Murray-Darling system. Yep, that’s right—while the National Water Commission lists the Goulburn River as the hardest-working river of the Murray Darling system, that did not suit Mr Brumby’s purpose. So he simply put out a press release and announced the Goulburn River to be no longer part of the Murray-Darling system, which means he can divert water at his will. Tragically, Mr Brumby’s mate the federal minister for the environment has been more than happy to accommodate his irresponsible and damaging policy.

Then we get to the nub of this issue and why Mr Brumby is so hell-bent on pursuing this bad policy. It is simply that he wants to shore up his support base and his votes in metropolitan Melbourne. He is prepared to damage the environment and people’s lives and add more stress to the Murray-Darling system simply to ensure he holds on to those metropolitan electorates. And the man who has the title of federal minister for the environment is happy to oblige him. While this man is overseeing the removal of 75 billion litres of water from the system, his counterpart, the Minister for Climate Change and Water, is spending almost $24 million of taxpayers’ money to buy Toorale Station to gain a mere $14 billion litres of water for the same system. I say that the minister for the environment has no credibility, and I would like to very quickly read into the record what some of my constituents have said about him. They said:

Today you have approved the ultimate act of environmental vandalism, the go-ahead for the Sugarloaf pipeline in Victoria. When you were elected to office, it was on the basis of your conservation commitments, and now not only have you betrayed those people in your electorate but all the people of the Murray-Darling system who rely on the elected representatives to be true to their beliefs and to fairly represent all Australians.

My constituents went on to say that the minister has received ‘two prestigious awards, all for his supposed environmental work, and yet he has had the audacity to support the Victorian government in this’. They concluded by saying:

I have no doubt that this decision will come back to haunt all those party to this project, but you most of all, with your history of environmental concern, should hang your head in shame.

I challenge the minister to meet my constituents—(Time expired)

Parramatta Female Factory Precinct

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (9.02 pm)—I rise today to speak to an issue of grave significance for a special group of my constituents, and that is the state of the historical precinct on the bank of the Parramatta River, known as the Parramatta female factory precinct. The Parramatta female factory precinct has been a site for the incarceration and institutionalisation of women from 1804 to the present day, over 200 years. Institutions of various types have been housed there, opened and closed, rebuilt, expanded or added to the site. It is undoubtedly one of Australia’s most significant historical sites, yet it remains neglected and largely unknown. It was home to the first female convict factory in Australia, later an institution known as the Industrial School for Girls, then the Girls Training School and then the infamous Parramatta Girls Home. Its current use is as a prison for women.
Twenty per cent of Australians are descended from women who were housed, incarcerated or institutionalised on the site over its 200-year history under white settlement. I refer to its history under white settlement because it had a history dating back thousands of years before that. The Burramattagal clan of the Darug nation, from which Parramatta gets its name, had marked the site as women’s place generations earlier. It is where the saltwater from the harbour mingles with the freshwater of the river. It was a woman’s place for gathering and a site for ceremony and matrimony. The north bank of the river, where the female convict factory and later the institutions for girls were built, was a Burramattagal women’s site. For it to have been turned into such a place of suffering and punishment for women is one of the cruellest ironies in our history.

The rich but tragic history of the site—the appalling stories of abuse and intimidation, and its connection to so many contemporary women—was brought to my attention by Bonney Djuric of Parragirls, an extraordinary group of women who are still putting their lives together after a childhood in one of the most notorious institutions, the infamous Parramatta Girls Home. I am fascinated by this site, and I was fascinated by it before I knew its history. It is physically an amazing place, with its sandstone buildings and sandstone walls, unexplained until you know its history—a patchwork of styles built on top of each other over 200 years. It is hidden behind walls and imposing doors and nestles on the bank of the Parramatta River. For the architecture alone, it is an amazing precinct.

The Parragirls and their parent organisation, the Parramatta Convict Factory Precinct, have a personal interest in retaining the site, including the notorious Parramatta Girls Home. They are deeply and personally associated with the site because of their months or years of brutal incarceration within its walls. I am lending my support to those trying to elevate the precinct in the minds and hearts of Australians, to recognise the history of women that was played out on this site and to wonder with them whether it would be possible for any other site of such significance to stand unrecognised and unpreserved with its history untold.

The female factory at Parramatta was originally built in 1804 and acted as a workhouse, jail and holding area for newly arrived female convicts and their children. Female convicts assigned there were engaged in activities such as spinning and carding and even hard labour, such as breaking rocks. It was the first of the 12 convict factories built around Australia. From his office in Old Government House, just across the river, Governor Macquarie engaged Francis Greenway to design a new female factory and the building began in the precinct in 1818. The new Parramatta female factory was opened on the site in 1821 to house the hundreds of female convicts being sent to Parramatta. Before that opening, the female convicts were housed on the upper floor of the first Parramatta jail, up the road. In the factory the women did laundry, wove, spun fabrics and even did stone-breaking and a variety of other work. Up to 700 women and their children were at the factory at one time, and this number nearly doubled in the 1840s.

On arrival in the colony, all unassigned women were taken to the factory and even women signed out would spend some time there. Female prisoners were selected for transportation to Australia partly because of their trade skills, and Australia’s first exports came from the female factory in Parramatta. The cloth that was spun and woven there by the women was sold in England, and that was the beginning of Australia’s export trade. It was also the site of Australia’s first industrial action, with the riot of 1827, caused by a lack of food, when 100
women broke out of the facility and converged on the town demanding food from local shop owners. Eleven other female factories were built in New South Wales and Tasmania but Parramatta’s remains the best preserved. The end of convict transportation from Britain in 1840 coincided with an economic depression that reduced employment prospects for assigned female convicts, and the factory was their only refuge. In 1841 the census of the colony placed 1,168 women, 236 under the age of 14, within the walls of the factory. The overcrowding was horrendous and in 1842 around 100 women again rioted over the maladministration.

In 1847 only 124 women and their 48 children remained, and the factory was reassigned as a convict and lunatic establishment. Meanwhile, in 1841, an orphanage was built adjoining the site and, in 1844, with the arrival of children from a Catholic orphanage in Waverley, it was renamed the Roman Catholic Orphan School. In 1886 the school was asked to vacate the building, and the Industrial School for Females was declared on 1 April 1887, with the transfer of girls from Biloela. At that time, only one class of school was maintained by the government for orphans and destitute children. There were two classifications of children: those considered destitute, abandoned or orphaned, who were deemed as not corrupt, and those who were deemed as having tendencies towards criminal behaviour. The Parramatta Industrial School for Females held both classifications of children, and it was very much an institution. In 1897 additional isolation cells were built, and in the following year there was the second of a number of riots because of a lack of food. By 1910 there was, however, a growing awareness that not all the girls sentenced to the Parramatta industrial school were corrupt and this saw the establishment of a training home on the adjacent acre. The school was intended for girls of uncontrollable character but not of immoral tendencies. But, a few years later, again trends changed and the schools were merged again and renamed the Parramatta Girls Home, with even more isolation cells being built in 1934.

The year of 1961 saw a repeat of a series of riots, and a derelict colonial jail at Hay in regional New South Wales was gazetted as a maximum security annexe of the Parramatta Girls Home and was named the Hay Girls Institution. Tales told by both the Parra girls and the Hay girls are of deprivation, of harsh discipline, of life behind walls, of keeping their eyes down, of beatings and of rape. Most of these girls had not committed any offence but had merely been placed in institutions under child welfare legislation. Their crimes included being neglected, being exposed to moral danger, being homeless or being uncontrollable. Many had run away from home because of violence and many were there simply for being the Indigenous children who later became known as the stolen generation.

In 1973 a series of protests called for the closure of welfare institutions and in October the following year, 1974, the Parramatta Girls Home was renamed Kamballa and continued to operate under the management of the Child Welfare Department. In 1980 the Department of Corrective Services took over part of the site and established the Norma Parker Periodic Detention Centre. It was closed, finally, in 1986, some 99 years after it had opened under a different name. In the near-century from 1887 to 1986, around 30,000 girls aged from 11 to 18 passed through the various incarnations of what became known as the Parramatta Girls Home.

The site has a long history of abuse, degradation and shameful conditions for both women and children, firstly as the Female Convict Factory and then through the Parramatta Industrial School for Females and finally the Parramatta Girls Home and Kamballa. It is an ugly story but it is a history that we should not back away from. It is a history that needs to be told. As
many as one in five Australians today are descended from women who were once incarcerated in the Parramatta Female Factory Precinct, and members should consider that for a moment—that is, 20 per cent of all Australians, well over four million people, have a direct family link to women who were incarcerated on that site over its two-century history. Yet, while the Cascades Female Factory in Tasmania has been excavated extensively and is under consideration for World Heritage listing, there have been no similar archaeological digs conducted in Parramatta. We need to preserve this site and celebrate its heritage.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the work of Bonney Djuric, who has worked so hard to raise the profile of this site. In 1970 Bonney spent nine months in the Parramatta Girls Home, when she was just 15 years old. Her experiences are mirrored by the many stories told by the report of the 2004 Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs inquiry into children in institutionalised care, *Forgotten Australians*. Members who have not read that report would be well served by doing so.

The Parramatta Female Factory Precinct is an extraordinary site, and if you peek in through the gates your imagination will run wild as mine did and you will wonder why such a treasure and such an opportunity to preserve and acknowledge our history has been ignored for so long.

**Age Pension**

*Dr Jensen* (Tangney) (9.10 pm)—I want to take this opportunity to convey the disgust older Australians, in my electorate and indeed Australia, feel over their treatment by the Rudd government. They feel neglected, particularly given that the federal government demonstrated absolute contempt today for those who have built the great society and country we call home. They feel exploited, especially by the underhand manner in which the government slipped in punitive clauses which will cut out their benefits from next year. They are furious, and they have every right to be. They have been let down by a government that promised the world and so far has delivered nothing.

The Rudd government promised to bring down the price of groceries. The Rudd government promised to bring down the price of petrol. The Rudd government promised to bring down the cost of living, and I ask you: what have they done? They have done nothing. All they have done is watch—watch the cost of living get worse and worse. Of course, they now continually blame the global economy for their failures. They should not have made those wild, pre-election promises to the Australian people if they could not deliver—and deliver they most certainly have not. They knew they could not. The public was duped by a smooth spin master and now we all bear the consequences of an inadequate, insensitive government full of talk, talk, talk and no action.

To top it all off, the Rudd government, by rejecting the coalition’s proposal for an immediate $30-a-week increase to the single age pension, has flatly refused to act on the difficulties that Australian pensioners are experiencing. This $30 a week would greatly assist in dealing with the skyrocketing prices we have seen since this government took office. This $30 a week would be a godsend for hundreds of thousands of Australians who, we know, are not coping; who, we know, are suffering; and who, we know, cannot wait any longer for relief.

The Prime Minister and six of his senior ministers have admitted that they could not survive on the current pension allowance, yet they arrogantly and ruthlessly will not act now to
help. That is right: Mr Rudd wants to wait until next February. That is six months away—six months of hardship for our pensioners for yet another one of his committees to finish yet another review. I would also like to point out that Mr Rudd had already seen an 83-page report on the plight of pensioners, by Dr Jeff Harmer. On viewing the report, what did he do? Yes, you guessed it: he called for another review into the review he already has in his hands. Unbelievable and inexcusable! He cannot show leadership on important issues without review after review and committee after committee before he can make up his mind. Let me also ask: will the never-ending review into pensioner entitlements actually change anything? We have to wait six months at least to find out if the findings are adequate and a positive way forward. Maybe he will be setting up ‘pensioner watch’!

Question time today was a lively and very frustrating debate for me, my colleagues and, in particular, our senior Australians. The Prime Minister continually—time after time after time—refused to answer questions on why he would not act now and endorse the $30 increase. He is letting this country down with his spin, his rhetoric and, most importantly, his blatant disregard for the Australian public and, in particular, our senior Australians. In fact, today Mr Rudd and Mr Swan had the gall to say that the opposition’s proposal of a $30 increase was nothing but a political stunt. A political stunt? How dare he call a necessary solution to a dire situation a political stunt? That is pretty rough coming from the masters of political stunts.

In June I wrote to seniors in Tangney, my electorate, to inform them of the latest cut to their benefits, an item hidden in the Rudd government’s first federal budget and planned to come into force at the beginning of the next financial year.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—The member will refer to the Prime Minister and the Treasurer by their correct titles, please.

Dr JENSEN—Seniors across Tangney were outraged to discover details of a Rudd government plan to strip—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—I have asked you to use the appropriate titles, please.

Dr JENSEN—Madam Deputy Speaker, isn’t it the Rudd government? I am not referring to him; I am referring to the Rudd government. The government plan is to strip them of many hard-earned benefits, including access to the critical Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. The change, which was included in the recent federal budget and is intended to come into effect on 1 July next year, slashes the number of self-funded retirees who are entitled to a Commonwealth seniors health card. Eroding the entitlements at this stage in their life is simply despicable and causes undue worry and stress. At present seniors are entitled to the concessions, provided that their annual income does not exceed $50,000 for a single or $80,000 for a couple, with payments drawn from superannuation excluded from the assessment. However, from 1 July next year, superannuation will be included in the assessment, meaning that many self-funded retirees will exceed income caps. I have had many visits from self-funded retirees who are very worried, scared and distressed that they will not be able to afford their medicines or cope financially with buying them if they lose their Commonwealth healthcare card.

In the mail-out to seniors, I also enclosed a postcard for recipients to sign and return to my office to express their disapproval of the government’s handling of seniors’ affairs, and the response was overwhelming. More than 3,000 cards were returned in just days, and the
phones in my office did not seem to stop ringing for over a week. These 3,000 cards were returned by seniors who are angry and frustrated with the Rudd government’s neglect of pensioners and the Prime Minister’s false promises, and this bundle of cards contains the cards from those who agreed with the Prime Minister’s stance. There is somewhat of a difference, don’t you think? In fact it is a huge difference, clearly demonstrating to the Prime Minister that our seniors are not happy with him and not happy that they are being treated as second-class citizens—which they most definitely are not. Let us hope he gets the message loud and clear and rethinks the pig-headed refusal to act now.

As well as the postcards, many seniors—both pensioners and self-funded retirees—returned lengthy letters expressing their concerns and outlining their individual plights. I was shocked and deeply moved at what was going on in our senior community. To be honest, I had no idea of the extent of the hardships that are occurring now and the further hardships to be experienced after next year’s budget. I felt the need to act promptly, to do something to allay people’s fears, to explain what is happening and to give advice as to what services are available to both pensioners and self-funded retirees. I decided to hold a public forum two weeks later and, again, I was stunned by the feedback. The capacity of our venue was less than 200, and we were fully booked days ahead of the event. Even so, on 24 July, more than 200 people packed into Riverton-Rossmoyne Bowling Club to vent their frustration and get answers to their questions, particularly about the plans which could see them stripped of their federal concessions.

In conclusion, we have the financial plight of our pensioners and we have the absolute contempt with which the government is treating self-funded retirees. If this is the way the government treats such a deserving part of the population, what hope is there for the rest of us? I will be assuring the seniors of Tangney that their voices will be heard not only now but well into the future in Canberra. I will maintain the rage—I think we have heard that expression before—and I will continue to fight for a better, fairer, more realistic outcome for our senior Australians.

**Broadband**

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (9.21 pm)—I rise tonight to highlight a serious issue affecting many people living in Adelaide’s south, and that is inadequate access to high-speed broadband. This is a problem for homes where high-speed internet access is now a necessity for education and basic finances, particularly for businesses competing in a tough commercial environment. The failure to ensure a world-class broadband network in our country is one of the greatest failings of the previous government. It would be comparable to a government in the late 19th century neglecting to build rail lines.

My constituents have indicated, in a wide-ranging survey, that broadband access ranked behind only water security and cost of living as a matter of importance. I have frequently encountered people in my electorate who are not able to access ADSL2 and who have to rely on dial-up internet. In South Australia, records indicate that only 29 per cent of people have high-speed broadband access. It is difficult to comprehend why the previous government so badly neglected the broadband issue, but the ramifications for my state and my local area have been pronounced. The Howard government was obviously not listening to those living and working in the southern Adelaide area—the families, businesses and residents of Morphett Vale, Hallert Cove, Aldinga, Willunga, Hackham and Woodcroft, to name a few.
An illustration of the previous government’s lack of interest in or understanding of broadband is clearly shown by the comments made by the previous Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Senator Coonan, who said, ‘Australian broadband is okay,’ and, ‘No-one is complaining about the speeds of broadband in metropolitan areas.’ The previous minister was certainly not listening to the constituents in the southern suburbs of Adelaide, who were loudly saying that broadband was a problem in metropolitan areas as well as in rural and regional areas.

For local businesses to remain internationally competitive and to operate in global markets in a digital age, they depend on high-speed bandwidth. As it stands currently, there is a significant shortage of connection lines in outer metropolitan suburbs and country areas. Despite the best efforts of residents and businesses to acquire it, high-speed broadband internet is essentially out of reach. Residents can choose to install and maintain personal satellite dishes to achieve a high-speed connection, but this process is too expensive for the majority of local families who genuinely need broadband for the purpose of keeping up with increasingly advanced software and websites. Anyone who has tried to negotiate a contemporary website or to use email with large attachments will understand just how inadequate a dial-up modem can be.

I would like to now highlight three cases in my electorate where people are suffering adversely from the broadband inadequacy. In my electorate I have many small wineries in the McLaren Vale region. These wineries rely on exporting their products around the world. One such winery is the internationally renowned Chapel Hill. Unfortunately, this winery is unable to access fast broadband, although other businesses less than 300 metres away can. Not being able to run their business on dial-up, the winery has connected to satellite broadband but finds its speeds are still extremely slow. In addition, the winery manager has reported that on wet days the satellite broadband often does not work. The manager reports having to often send large documents urgently to the winery’s Swiss parent company. He has reported to me that doing business without fast, reliable broadband is extremely frustrating and time consuming for this winery, which is trying to compete in a global market.

However, it is not only the areas on the edge of the metropolitan areas, such as McLaren Vale, which are experiencing problems. One family I spoke to, who live in Warburton Drive, Woodcroft, demonstrated to me the scope of the problem. Woodcroft is only 24 kilometres away from the CBD of Adelaide. The father, Brian, contacted my office after continued attempts to find a service provider proved unsuccessful. Service providers simply did not want to risk the expenditure, because they believed there were not enough customers to make it viable. Brian’s family need the internet to attend to their study commitments. His wife is forced to commute 45 minutes to Marleston TAFE to do all of her homework. Brian’s son has to stay late at Flinders University and catch the bus home late at night to remain academically competitive. Meanwhile, Brian cannot maintain his own business to the standard he wants because he cannot establish an email service for his clients. Each member of the family has their own personal reasons for needing the internet, but they could not get it despite their efforts and because of where they live.

The same goes for Paul, a man who is 30 years of age and who lives in Hackham. With no cables laid in his street, he has no access to high-speed internet. None of the wireless service providers want to help. Eventually Paul did apply for a subsidy under the Australian Broad-
band Guarantee. However, while the government subsidised the installation and maintenance, Paul found himself paying huge amounts of money, which was just not competitive with what people were enjoying in the city. The installation of the satellite facility affected the value of his house and impacted adversely on his relations with his neighbours. He eventually ended the service because he could no longer afford it. It is clear that it is an economic and social imperative that people in my electorate have access to high-speed broadband.

The Howard government slotted broadband internet into a list of extravagances that Australia did not need. Just as they did not believe in climate change—and still really do not—the previous administration did not see the critical need to keep up internet speeds. The previous government tried and failed 18 broadband initiatives because they lacked proper consideration and, most importantly, any financial conviction to see it through.

Fortunately, the Rudd Labor government is a government that acts and follows through with the necessary investment. We have committed $4.7 billion for the installation of a national broadband network in Australia, which will see 98 per cent of homes and businesses gain access to high-speed broadband services upon completion, ensuring that all Australians, including people living in outer metropolitan areas and rural and regional Australia, participate in the digital economy. This broadband initiative will facilitate the mass flow of information of digital cargoes from house to house, town to town, state to state and from Australia to the rest of the world. This broadband initiative will make Australia technologically competitive with other developed nations overseas and seriously upgrade the flow of information between borders that is so vital in the newly emerging digital economy.

The Rudd government’s commitment to having a high-speed national broadband network will be of great benefit to my electorate, and I know families in my area are looking forward to this great national project coming to fruition. Broadband is critical to Australia’s long-term future. High-speed broadband is a critical, enabling technology that will influence and define our economic prosperity into the future. Businesses and local councils in the south of Adelaide, in addition to the Southern Adelaide Economic Development Board, have sent me a clear message that the lack of broadband is creating constraints to the productive capacity of these businesses. Families have sent me a clear message that they want to access fast, reliable and reasonably priced broadband to allow them to participate in the knowledge economy. I am pleased that the Rudd government is listening and is getting on with the job of rolling out fast and reliable broadband for all Australians.

Debate adjourned.

Main Committee adjourned at 9.30 pm
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Prime Minister: Overseas Travel
(Question No. 90)

Mr Pearce asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 13 May 2008:

(1) What was the total cost to the Government for the Prime Minister’s overseas travel from 27 March 2008 to 13 April 2008, inclusive.

(2) Were there any costs to the Government for any cancellation fees for, but not limited to, accommodation; if there were cancellation fees for accommodation, what: (a) are the details of that accommodation; (b) rooms were booked; and (c) were the total cancellation costs to the Government.

(3) What was the total cost to the Government for the Prime Minister’s accommodation while overseas.

(4) Were there any extra costs or associated extra costs incurred by the Government when the Prime Minister chose to stay with the Australian Ambassador in Washington rather than at alternative booked accommodation.

(5) Were there any extra costs or associated extra costs incurred by the Government when the Prime Minister chose to stay with Australia’s United Nations Ambassador in New York rather than at alternative booked accommodation.

Mr Rudd—I am advised that the answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) $491,294.14

There was a cancellation fee for the Prime Minister’s accommodation in Washington. The cancellation fee was equivalent to one night’s accommodation. Had the Prime Minister stayed at the hotel, there would have been an account for three night’s accommodation. (a) The Willard InterContinental. (b) One suite. (c) USD1700.

The cost of the Prime Minister’s accommodation in Brussels was $1,693.68 and Belgrade was $961.04. The Prime Minister stayed at the Ambassadors’ residences in New York, Washington and Beijing. The Department of Finance and Deregulation is yet to receive the itemised accounts for the accommodation for the Prime Minister and the official party in the United Kingdom and China, and is therefore unable to provide at this time the specific total of the Prime Minister’s accommodation costs in London and Sanya.

(2) No.

(3) No.

Counter-Terrorism
(Question No. 158)

Mr Melham asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 25 June 2008:

In respect of each counter-terrorism exercise conducted or coordinated by the Government since November 2006: (a) what was the name of the exercise; (b) when was it conducted; (c) which (i) Government departments and agencies, and (ii) State and Territory government departments and agencies, participated in the exercise.

QUESTIONS IN WRITING
Mr Rudd—I am advised that the answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Exercise Name</th>
<th>Lead Agency</th>
<th>Agencies Involved</th>
<th>Type</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 November 2006</td>
<td>Defence Force Aid to Civilian Authority (Part IIIAAA of the Defence Act) (Green Luminary)</td>
<td>Tasmania Police, PSCC</td>
<td>Tasmania Police, Tasmania Department of Premier and Cabinet representatives</td>
<td>DISCEX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 November 2006</td>
<td>Media/Public Information (Green Luminary)</td>
<td>Tasmania Police, PSCC</td>
<td>Media representatives from the Tasmanian and Australian Governments</td>
<td>DISCEX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 November 2006</td>
<td>Counter Terrorism First Response Airport Security (Green Luminary)</td>
<td>Tasmania Police, PSCC</td>
<td>AFP, DoTARS, APEC Task Force, ASIO, PSCC, Air Services Australia, Tasmanian police, fire and ambulance Service, Tasmania Dept. of Premier and Cabinet, Hobart International Airport, Dept. of Health and Human Services, Airline Operators Committee</td>
<td>DISCEX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 December 2006 to 7 December 2006</td>
<td>Maroon Luminary</td>
<td>QLD Police, PSCC</td>
<td>QLD Police, QLD Dept. Premier &amp; Cabinet, QLD Emergency Services, ADF, PSCC, APEC Task Force, ASIO, AFP</td>
<td>A-TEX</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 December 2006</td>
<td>Counter Terrorism First Response Airport Security (Maroon Luminary)</td>
<td>QLD Police, PSCC</td>
<td>Australian and Queensland Government agency representatives including APEC Task Force, defence, police (state and airport), AFP and emergency services, airport and aviation industry security providers.</td>
<td>DISCEX</td>
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<tr>
<td>14 December 2006</td>
<td>Death of a Foreign Dignitary (Maroon Luminary)</td>
<td>QLD Police, PSCC</td>
<td>Queensland Police, PSCC, DFAT, APEC Task Force, AFP and Queensland Dept. of Premier and Cabinet</td>
<td>DISCEX</td>
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Dr Southcott asked the Minister for Employment Participation, in writing, on 26 June 2008:

In respect of the current Job Network Employment Services Contract 3 (2006-09): what proportion of funding goes to: (a) Intensive Support Customised Assistance 1; (b) Intensive Support Customised Assistance 2; (c) Intensive Support Job Search.

Mr Brendan O’Connor—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows: Job Network is a single line appropriation thus a breakdown of expenditure is not available for release.