INTERNET

The Votes and Proceedings for the House of Representatives are available at

Proof and Official Hansards for the House of Representatives,
the Senate and committee hearings are available at

For searching purposes use
http://parlinfoweb.aph.gov.au

SITTING DAYS—2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>13, 14, 15, 26, 27, 28, 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>26, 27, 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>13, 14, 15, 16, 20, 21, 22, 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>10, 11, 12, 13, 24, 25, 26, 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RADIO BROADCASTS

Broadcasts of proceedings of the Parliament can be heard on the following Parliamentary and News Network radio stations, in the areas identified.

- 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. Malcolm Bligh Turnbull MP
Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP
Chief Opposition Whip—Hon. Alex Somlyay MP
Opposition Whip—Mr Michael Andrew Johnson MP
Deputy Opposition Whip—Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP

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

Printed by authority of the House of Representatives
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbott, Hon. Anthony John</td>
<td>Warringah, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adams, Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry</td>
<td>Lyons, Tas</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albanese, Hon. Anthony Norman</td>
<td>Grayndler, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrews, Hon. Kevin James</td>
<td>Menzies, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bailey, Hon. Frances Esther</td>
<td>McEwen, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldwin, Hon. Robert Charles</td>
<td>Paterson, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bevis, Hon. Archibald Ronald</td>
<td>Brisbane, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biggood, James Mark</td>
<td>Dawson, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billson, Hon. Bruce Fredrick</td>
<td>Dunkley, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird, Sharon Leah</td>
<td>Cunningham, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop, Hon. Bronwyn Kathleen</td>
<td>Mackellar, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop, Hon. Julie Isabel</td>
<td>Curtin, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowen, Hon. Christopher Eyles</td>
<td>Prospect, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradbury, David John</td>
<td>Lindsay, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briggs, Jamie Edward</td>
<td>Mayo SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadbelt, Russell Evan</td>
<td>McMillian, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burke, Anna Elizabeth</td>
<td>Chisholm, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burke, Hon. Anthony Stephen</td>
<td>Watson, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butler, Mark Christopher</td>
<td>Port Adelaide, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byrne, Hon. Anthony Michael</td>
<td>Holt, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell, Jodie Louise</td>
<td>Bass, Tas</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champion, Nicholas David</td>
<td>Wakefield, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheeseman, Darren Leicester</td>
<td>Corangamite, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chester, Darren</td>
<td>Gippsland, Vic.</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ciobo, Steven Michele</td>
<td>Moncrieff, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare, Jason Dean</td>
<td>Blaxland, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cobb, Hon. John Kenneth</td>
<td>Calare, NSW</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collins, Julie Maree</td>
<td>Franklin, Tas</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combet, Hon. Gregory Ivan, AM</td>
<td>Charlton, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costello, Hon. Peter Howard</td>
<td>Higgins, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coulton, Mark Maclean</td>
<td>Parkes, NSW</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crean, Hon. Simon Findlay</td>
<td>Hotham, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danby, Michael David</td>
<td>Melbourne Ports, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D’Ath, Yvette Maree</td>
<td>Petrie, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debus, Hon. Robert John</td>
<td>Macquarie, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreyfus, Mark Alfred, QC</td>
<td>Isaacs, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutton, Hon. Peter Craig</td>
<td>Dickson, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elliot, Hon. Maria Justine</td>
<td>Richmond, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellis, Annette Louise</td>
<td>Canberra, ACT</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellis, Hon. Katherine Margaret</td>
<td>Adelaide, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerson, Hon. Craig Anthony</td>
<td>Rankin, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer, Hon. Patrick Francis</td>
<td>Macarthur, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferguson, Hon. Laurie Donald Thomas</td>
<td>Reid, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferguson, Hon. Martin John, AM</td>
<td>Batman, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitzgibbon, Hon. Joel Andrew</td>
<td>Hunter, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forrest, John Alexander</td>
<td>Mallee, Vic</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garrett, Hon. Peter Robert, AM</td>
<td>Kingsford Smith, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gash, Joanna</td>
<td>Gilmore, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Members of the House of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Georganas, Steven</td>
<td>Hindmarsh, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George, Jennie</td>
<td>Throsby, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgiou, Petro</td>
<td>Kooyong, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibbons, Stephen William</td>
<td>Bendigo, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillard, Hon. Julia Eileen</td>
<td>Lalor, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray, Hon. Gary, AO</td>
<td>Brand, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grierson, Sharon Joy</td>
<td>Newcastle, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffin, Hon. Alan Peter</td>
<td>Bruce, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haase, Barry Wayne</td>
<td>Kalgoorlie, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hale, Damian Francis</td>
<td>Solomon, NT</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hall, Jill Griffiths</td>
<td>Shortland, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartsonyker, Luke</td>
<td>Cowper, NSW</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawke, Alexander George</td>
<td>Mitchell, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawker, Hon. David Peter Maxwell</td>
<td>Wannon, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayes, Christopher Patrick</td>
<td>Werriwa, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hockey, Hon. Joseph Benedict</td>
<td>North Sydney, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hull, Kay Elizabeth</td>
<td>Riverina, NSW</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunt, Hon. Gregory Andrew</td>
<td>Flinders, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irons, Stephen James</td>
<td>Swan, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irwin, Julia Claire</td>
<td>Fowler, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson, Sharryn Maree</td>
<td>Hasluck, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenkins, Henry Alfred</td>
<td>Scullin, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jensen, Dennis Geoffrey</td>
<td>Tangey, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson, Michael Andrew</td>
<td>Ryan, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katter, Hon. Robert Carl</td>
<td>Kennedy, Qld</td>
<td>Ind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keenan, Michael Fayat</td>
<td>Stirling, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly, Hon. Michael Joseph, AM</td>
<td>Eden-Monaro, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerr, Hon. Duncan James Colquhoun, SC</td>
<td>Denison, Tas</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King, Catherine Fiona</td>
<td>Ballarat, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laming, Andrew Charles</td>
<td>Bowman, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ley, Hon. Susan Penelope</td>
<td>Farrer, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsay, Hon. Peter John</td>
<td>Herbert, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livermore, Kirsten Fiona</td>
<td>Capricornia, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McClelland, Hon. Robert Bruce</td>
<td>Barton, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macfarlane, Hon. Ian Elgin</td>
<td>Groom, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKew, Hon. Maxine Margaret</td>
<td>Bemmelong, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macklin, Hon. Jennifer Louise</td>
<td>Jagajaga, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McMullan, Hon. Robert Francis</td>
<td>Fraser, ACT</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marino, Nola Bethwyn</td>
<td>Forrest, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markus, Louise Elizabeth</td>
<td>Greenway, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marles, Richard Donald</td>
<td>Corio, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May, Margaret Ann</td>
<td>McPherson, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melham, Daryl</td>
<td>Banks, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirabella, Sophie</td>
<td>Indi, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morrison, Scott John</td>
<td>Cook, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moylan, Hon. Judith Eleanor</td>
<td>Pearce, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murphy, Hon. John Paul</td>
<td>Lowe, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neal, Belinda Jane</td>
<td>Robertson, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson, Hon. Brendan John</td>
<td>Bradfield, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Members of the House of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neumann, Shayne Kenneth</td>
<td>Blair, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neville, Paul Christopher</td>
<td>Hinkler, Qld</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakeshott, Robert James Murray</td>
<td>Lyne, NSW</td>
<td>Ind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Connor, Hon. Brendan Patrick John</td>
<td>Gorton, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owens, Julie Ann</td>
<td>Parramatta, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parke, Melissa</td>
<td>Fremantle, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearce, Hon. Christopher John</td>
<td>Aston, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perrett, Graham Douglas</td>
<td>Moreton, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plibersek, Hon. Tanya Joan</td>
<td>Sydney, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price, Hon. Leo Roger Spurway</td>
<td>Chifley, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyne, Hon. Christopher Maurice</td>
<td>Sturt, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raguse, Brett Blair</td>
<td>Forde, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramsey, Rowan Eric</td>
<td>Grey, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randall, Don James</td>
<td>Canning, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rea, Kerry Marie</td>
<td>Bonner, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ripoll, Bernard Fernand</td>
<td>Oxley, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rishworth, Amanda Louise</td>
<td>Kingston, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robb, Hon. Andrew John, AO</td>
<td>Goldstein, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert, Stuart Rowland</td>
<td>Fadden, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roxon, Hon. Nicola Louise</td>
<td>Gellibrand, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudd, Hon. Kevin Michael</td>
<td>Griffith, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruddock, Hon. Philip Maxwell</td>
<td>Berowra, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saffin, Janelle Anne</td>
<td>Page, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schultz, Albert John</td>
<td>Hume, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott, Hon. Bruce Craig</td>
<td>Maranoa, Qld</td>
<td>NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secker, Patrick Damien</td>
<td>Barker, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shorten, Hon. William Richard</td>
<td>Maribyrnong, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidbottom, Peter Sid</td>
<td>Braddon, Tas</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simpkins, Luke Xavier Linton</td>
<td>Cowan, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slipper, Hon. Peter Neil</td>
<td>Fisher, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, Hon. Anthony David Hawthorn</td>
<td>Casey, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, Hon. Stephen Francis</td>
<td>Perth, WA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowden, Hon. Warren Edward</td>
<td>Lingiari, NT</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somlyay, Hon. Alexander Michael</td>
<td>Fairfax, Qld</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southcott, Andrew John</td>
<td>Boothby, SA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone, Hon. Sharman Nancy</td>
<td>Murray, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sullivan, Jonathan Harold</td>
<td>Longman, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swan, Hon. Wayne Maxwell</td>
<td>Lilley, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symon, Michael Stuart</td>
<td>Deakin, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanner, Hon. Lindsay James</td>
<td>Melbourne, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomson, Craig Robert</td>
<td>Dobell, NSW</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomson, Kelvin John</td>
<td>Wills, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trevor, Chris Allan</td>
<td>Flynn, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truss, Hon. Warren Errol</td>
<td>Wide Bay, Qld</td>
<td>Nats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuckey, Hon. Charles Wilson</td>
<td>O’Connor, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnbull, Hon. Malcolm Bligh</td>
<td>Wentworth, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnour, James Pearce</td>
<td>Leichhardt, Qld</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vale, Hon. Danna Sue</td>
<td>Hughes, NSW</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vamvakinou, Maria</td>
<td>Calwell, Vic</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Members of the House of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Washer, Malcolm James</td>
<td>Moore, WA</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windsor, Anthony Harold Curties</td>
<td>New England, NSW</td>
<td>Ind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood, Jason Peter</td>
<td>La Trobe, Vic</td>
<td>LP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zappia, Tony</td>
<td>Makin, SA</td>
<td>ALP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**

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

*[The above ministers constitute the cabinet]*
**RUDD MINISTRY—continued**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Home Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Bob Debus MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Chris Bowen MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Veterans’ Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Alan Griffin MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women</td>
<td>Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Employment Participation</td>
<td>Hon. Brendan O’Connor MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Defence Science and Personnel</td>
<td>Hon. Warren Snowdon MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy and Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation</td>
<td>Hon. Dr Craig Emerson MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Superannuation and Corporate Law</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Nick Sherry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Ageing</td>
<td>Hon. Justine Elliot MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Youth and Minister for Sport</td>
<td>Hon. Kate Ellis MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and Childcare</td>
<td>Hon. Maxine McKew MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Procurement</td>
<td>Hon. Greg Combet AM, MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support</td>
<td>Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia</td>
<td>Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services</td>
<td>Hon. Bill Shorten MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance</td>
<td>Hon. Bob McMullan MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Duncan Kerr MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister</td>
<td>Hon. Anthony Byrne MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector and Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Prime Minister for Social Inclusion</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Ursula Stephens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Trade</td>
<td>Hon. John Murphy MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Jan McLucas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services</td>
<td>Hon. Laurie Ferguson MP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition
Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Treasurer
Leader of the Nationals and Shadow Minister for Trade, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government
Shadow Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Leader of the Opposition in the Senate
Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research and Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate
Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and COAG and Shadow Minister Assisting the Leader on Emissions Trading Design
Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate
Shadow Minister for Finance, Competition Policy and Deregulation and Manager of Opposition Business in the House
Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources
Shadow Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
Shadow Special Minister of State and Shadow Cabinet Secretary
Shadow Minister for Human Services and Deputy Leader of The Nationals
Shadow Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water
Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing
Shadow Minister for Defence
Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training
Shadow Attorney-General
Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations
Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
Shadow Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors, Tourism and the Arts

Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP
Hon. Julie Bishop MP
Hon. Warren Truss MP
Senator Hon. Nick Minchin
Senator Hon. Eric Abetz
Hon. Andrew Robb MP
Senator Hon. Helen Coonan
Hon. Joe Hockey MP
Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP
Hon. Tony Abbott MP
Senator Hon. Michael Ronaldson
Senator Hon. Nigel Scullion
Hon. Greg Hunt MP
Hon. Peter Dutton MP
Senator Hon. David Johnston
Hon. Christopher Pyne MP
Senator Hon. George Brandis SC
Hon. John Cobb MP
Mr Michael Keenan MP
Hon. Dr Sharman Stone MP
Mr Steven Ciobo MP

[The above constitute the shadow cabinet]
SHADOW MINISTRY—continued

Shadow Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law  
Hon. Chris Pearce MP

Shadow Assistant Treasurer  
Hon. Tony Smith MP

Shadow Minister for Sustainable Development and Cities  
Hon. Bruce Billson MP

Shadow Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs and Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House  
Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP

Shadow Minister for Housing and Local Government  
Mr Scott Morrison MP

Shadow Minister for Ageing  
Mrs Margaret May MP

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

Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs  
Mrs Louise Markus MP

Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare, Women and Youth  
Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP

Shadow Minister for Justice and Customs  
Hon. Sussan Ley MP

Shadow Minister for Employment Participation, Training and Sport  
Dr Andrew Southcott MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern Australia  
Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Transport  
Mr Barry Haase MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development  
Mr John Forrest MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance  
Senator Marise Payne

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Energy and Resources  
Mr Don Randall MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Affairs  
Senator Marise Payne

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector  
Senator Cory Bernardi

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Water Resources and Conservation  
Senator Fiona Nash

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Health Administration  
Senator Mathias Cormann

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence  
Hon. Peter Lindsay MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Education  
Senator Hon. Brett Mason

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Justice and Public Security  
Mr Jason Wood MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  
Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and  
Senator Concetta Fierravanti- Wells

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader in the Senate
MONDAY, 20 OCTOBER

Chamber
International Tax Agreements Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2008—
   Returned from the Senate ................................................................. 9487
Archives Amendment Bill 2008—
   First Reading .................................................................................. 9487
Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (Digital Radio) Bill 2008—
   First Reading .................................................................................. 9487
Family Law Amendment (De Facto Financial Matters and Other Measures) Bill 2008—
   Consideration of Senate Message.................................................... 9487
Main Committee—
   Private Members’ Motions .............................................................. 9494
Safe Work Australia Bill 2008—
   Consideration of Senate Message.................................................... 9494
Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008.............................................. 9506
Schools Assistance Bill 2008—
   Second Reading ............................................................................... 9506
Ministerial Arrangements ........................................................................ 9518
Questions Without Notice—
   Taxation ......................................................................................... 9518
   Economy ......................................................................................... 9518
   Economy ......................................................................................... 9520
   Economy ......................................................................................... 9520
   Economy ......................................................................................... 9521
   Small Business .............................................................................. 9522
   Employment .................................................................................... 9523
   Future Fund ..................................................................................... 9523
   Housing Affordability .................................................................... 9525
   Family Payments .......................................................................... 9526
   Economy ......................................................................................... 9527
   Economy ......................................................................................... 9527
   National Security ........................................................................... 9528
   North West Shelf Venture ................................................................. 9529
   Infrastructure .................................................................................. 9530
   Employment .................................................................................... 9530
   Infrastructure .................................................................................. 9532
   Nuclear Nonproliferation ................................................................. 9532
   Education Funding .......................................................................... 9534
   Mental Health ................................................................................ 9535
Documents ............................................................................................ 9536
Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008.............................................. 9536
Schools Assistance Bill 2008—
   Second Reading ............................................................................... 9536
Petitions—
   Mr Richard Manthorpe .................................................................. 9610
   Age Pension ................................................................................... 9610
   Immigration: Asylum Seekers ......................................................... 9610
   Bendigo Electorate: Community Radio ............................................ 9610
   Australia Post: Services .................................................................. 9611
Responses—
CONTENTS—continued

Olympic Dam............................................................................................................. 9611
ABC Radio Service in Nannup ................................................................. 9611
Immigration: Asylum Seekers ................................................................. 9612
Statements ............................................................................................................. 9613
Committees—
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government
Committee—Report .......................................................................................... 9615
Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government
Committee—Report: Referral to Main Committee ........................................ 9618
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Committee—Report ................. 9618
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Committee—Report: Referral
to Main Committee ...................................................................................... 9621
Private Members’ Business—
United Nations................................................................................................................ 9 621
Adjournment—
RAAF Museum, Wagga Wagga.......................................................... 9628
Pensions and Benefits .................................................................................. 9630
Armenian Genocide .................................................................................... 9631
International Day of Older Persons ................................................................. 9632
Pensions and Benefits .................................................................................. 9633
Economy............................................................................................................... 9634
Notices ......................................................................................................................... 9636
Main Committee
Statements by Members—
Flinders Electorate: Arthurs Seat Chairlift .................................................. 9638
Franklin Electorate: Bruny Island Tourism ............................................... 9638
Essendon Airport ......................................................................................... 9639
Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia .................................................. 9639
State Politics ........................................................................................................ 9639
Mr Noel Maybon ............................................................................................ 9640
Foster Care ....................................................................................................... 9640
Hasluck Electorate: Ellis Brook Valley Development Project ..................... 9641
Cowan Electorate: Telstra .............................................................................. 9641
Fremantle Electorate: United Nations Youth Association ......................... 9642
Private Members’ Business—
GROCERYchoice ....................................................................................... 9642
Tasmania: Drought ......................................................................................... 9649
Fair Trade Chocolate ..................................................................................... 9657
Daw Aung San Suu Kyi ................................................................................... 9663
Grievance Debate—
Swan Electorate: Roads .................................................................................. 9666
Dobell Electorate: Surf-Lifesaving ............................................................... 9669
Banking .............................................................................................................. 9671
Leichhardt Electorate: Torres Strait Islands .................................................. 9673
Economy............................................................................................................... 9676
Millennium Development Goals ................................................................. 9679
Questions In Writing
Job Capacity Assessments—(Question No. 270) ............................................. 9682
Job Capacity Assessments—(Question No. 271) ............................................. 9682
Job Capacity Assessments—(Question No. 272) ............................................. 9682
CONTENTS—continued

Job Capacity Assessments—(Question No. 273) ........................................................... 9682
Job Capacity Assessments—(Question No. 274) ........................................................... 9683
Job Capacity Assessments—(Question No. 275) ........................................................... 9683
Job Capacity Assessments—(Question No. 276) ........................................................... 9683
Job Capacity Assessments—(Question No. 277) ........................................................... 9684
Job Capacity Assessments—(Question No. 278) ........................................................... 9684
Job Capacity Assessments—(Question No. 279) ........................................................... 9684
Job Network—(Question No. 284) ................................................................................. 9685
Monday, 20 October 2008

The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 12.00 pm and read prayers.

INTERNATIONAL TAX AGREEMENTS AMENDMENT BILL (No. 2) 2008

Returned from the Senate

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

ARCHIVES AMENDMENT BILL 2008
First Reading

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

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

BROADCASTING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (DIGITAL RADIO) BILL 2008
First Reading

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

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

FAMILY LAW AMENDMENT (DE FACTO FINANCIAL MATTERS AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2008
Consideration of Senate Message

Message from the Governor-General recommending appropriation for the bill and proposed amendments announced.

Bill returned from the Senate with requested amendments.

Ordered that the requested amendments be considered immediately.

 Senate’s requested amendments—

(1) Schedule 1, item 50, page 23 (lines 3 to 21), omit section 90RB, substitute:

90RB Meaning of child of a de facto relationship

For the purposes of this Part, a child is a child of a de facto relationship if the child is the child of both of the parties to the de facto relationship.

Note: To determine who is a child of a person see Subdivision D of Division I of Part VII.

(2) Schedule 1, item 50, page 29 (line 24), omit “application time.”, substitute:

application time;

or that the alternative condition in subsection (1A) is met.

(3) Schedule 1, item 50, page 29 (after line 24), after subsection 90SD(1), insert:

(1A) The alternative condition is that the parties to the de facto relationship were ordinarily resident in a participating jurisdiction when the relationship broke down.

(4) Schedule 1, item 50, page 29 (lines 27 to 31), omit subsection 90SD(3), substitute:

(3) If each State is a referring State, the Governor-General may, by Proclamation, fix a day as the day on which paragraph (1)(b), and the alternative condition in subsection (1A), cease to apply in relation to new applications.

Note: Paragraph (1)(b) and subsection (1A) will continue to apply in relation to applications made before the proclaimed day.

(5) Schedule 1, item 50, page 39 (line 25), omit “application time.”, substitute:

application time;

or that the alternative condition in subsection (1A) is met.

(6) Schedule 1, item 50, page 39 (after line 25), after subsection 90SK(1), insert:

(1A) The alternative condition is that the parties to the de facto relationship were ordinarily resident in a participating jurisdiction when the relationship broke down.
(7) Schedule 1, item 50, page 39 (lines 28 to 32), omit subsection 90SK(3), substitute:

(3) If each State is a referring State, the Governor-General may, by Proclamation, fix a day as the day on which paragraph (1)(b), and the alternative condition in subsection (1A), cease to apply in relation to new applications.

Note: Paragraph (1)(b) and subsection (1A) will continue to apply in relation to applications made before the proclaimed day.

(8) Schedule 1, item 85, page 81 (after line 6), after the definition of commencement, insert:

designated agreed matters, in relation to 2 persons, means the following:
(a) how all or any of the:
(i) property; or
(ii) financial resources;

of either person, or both persons, at the time when the agreement is made, or at a later time and during a de facto relationship between them, is to be distributed;

(b) the maintenance of either of the persons;

in the event of the breakdown of a de facto relationship between them, or in relation to a de facto relationship between them that has broken down, as the case requires.

(9) Schedule 1, item 85, page 81 (before line 7), before the definition of earlier participating jurisdiction, insert:

designated State/Territory financial agreement, in relation to 2 persons, means a written agreement:

(a) signed by both of them with respect to matters that include any designated agreed matters; and

(b) made under a preserved law of a State or Territory; and

(c) in relation to which, either:

(i) a court could not, because of that preserved law, make an order un-

(10) Schedule 1, heading to Division 2, page 81 (lines 22 to 24), omit the heading, substitute:

Division 2—Application of new Act to de facto relationships breaking down before commencement

(11) Schedule 1, item 86, page 81 (line 27), omit “Parts VIIIAB and VIIIB of the new Act do not extend”, substitute “Subject to item 86A, Parts VIIIAB and VIIIB, and subsection 114(2A), of the new Act do not apply in relation”.

(12) Schedule 1, page 82 (after line 17), after item 86, insert:

86A Opting into the new regime
Choosing the new regime

(1) The parties to a de facto relationship that broke down before commencement may choose for Parts VIIIAB and VIIIB, and subsection 114(2A), of the new Act to apply in relation to the de facto relationship.

Note 1: Whether the parties will be able to obtain an order under those provisions of the new Act, or make a Part VIIIAB financial agreement, will depend on whether the tests found in those provisions are satisfied for the de facto relationship.

Note 2: Divisions 3 and 4 of this Part, and section 90UE of the new Act, are not affected by a choice under this item. Those Divisions, and that section, relate to de facto relationships that (if they are to break down) will break down after commencement.

(a) the choice is unconditional; and
(b) subitems (3), (4) and (5) are satisfied for the choice.

A choice is irrevocable.

(3) This subitem is satisfied for the choice if no order (other than an interim order) under a preserved law of a State or Territory has been made by a court in relation to either of the following:

(a) how all or any of the:
   (i) property; or
   (ii) financial resources;
   that either or both of the parties to the de facto relationship had or acquired during the de facto relationship is to be distributed;
(b) the maintenance of either of the parties to the de facto relationship.

(4) This subitem is satisfied for the choice if:

(a) the parties have not made a designated State/Territory financial agreement in relation to their de facto relationship; or
(b) if the parties have made such an agreement, that agreement has ceased to have effect without:
   (i) any property being distributed; or
   (ii) any maintenance being paid;
   under the agreement.

(5) This subitem is satisfied for the choice if:

(a) the choice is in writing and signed by both of the parties to the de facto relationship; and
(b) each of the parties was provided, before the choice was signed by him or her, with:
   (i) independent legal advice from a legal practitioner about the advantages and disadvantages, at the time that the advice was provided, to the party of making the choice; and
   (ii) a signed statement by the legal practitioner stating that this advice was given to the party.

(6) For the purposes of Part VIIIAB of the new Act, a choice can be included in a Part VIIIAB financial agreement for which the parties are the spouse parties.

Setting aside a choice

(7) A court may make an order setting aside a choice if the court is satisfied that, having regard to the circumstances in which the choice was made, it would be unjust and inequitable if the court does not set the choice aside.

(8) A court setting aside a choice under subitem (7) may make such order or orders (including an order for the transfer of property) as it considers just and equitable to, so far as is practicable, return the rights of:

(a) the parties to the de facto relationship; and
(b) any other interested persons affected by the choice;

to their position immediately before the choice was made.

(9) Subsections 90UM(8) and (9) of the new Act apply in relation to setting aside a choice as if:

(a) a reference in those subsections to subsection 90UM(1) or (6) of the new Act were a reference to subitem (7) or (8); and
(b) the reference in those subsections to section 90UM of the new Act were a reference to this item.

(13) Schedule 1, item 89, page 85 (line 5), omit “extend”, substitute “apply in relation”.

(14) Schedule 1, item 89, page 85 (line 6), omit “extend”, substitute “apply in relation”.

(15) Schedule 1, item 89, page 85 (line 8), omit “Note”, substitute “Note 1”.

(16) Schedule 1, item 89, page 85 (line 12), omit “extend”, substitute “apply in relation”.
(17) Schedule 1, item 89, page 85 (after line 13), after the note, insert:

Note 2: The cases covered by paragraph (a) include a case where a de facto relationship has broken down before the transition time for the State and the parties to the relationship make a choice under item 90A.

(18) Schedule 1, item 90, page 85 (line 35), omit “Parts VIIIAB and VIIIB of the new Act do not extend”, substitute “Subject to item 90A, Parts VIIIAB and VIIIB, and subsection 114(2A), of the new Act do not apply in relation”.

(19) Schedule 1, page 86 (after line 17), after item 90, insert:

90A Opting into the new regime

Choosing the new regime

(1) The parties to a de facto relationship that broke down before the transition time for the State may choose for Parts VIIIAB and VIIIB, and subsection 114(2A), of the new Act to apply in relation to the de facto relationship.

Note 1: Whether the parties will be able to obtain an order under those provisions of the new Act, or make a Part VIIIAB financial agreement in relation to their de facto relationship, will depend on whether the tests found in those provisions are satisfied for the de facto relationship.

Note 2: Items 91 and 92 are not affected by a choice under this item. Those items relate to de facto relationships that (if they are to break down) will break down after the transition time for the State.

When a choice can be made

(2) A choice under subitem (1) can be made if:

(a) the choice is unconditional; and

(b) subitems (3), (4) and (5) are satisfied for the choice.

A choice is irrevocable.

(3) This subitem is satisfied for the choice if no order (other than an interim order) under a preserved law of a State or Territory has been made by a court in relation to either of the following:

(a) how all or any of the:

(i) property; or

(ii) financial resources;

that either or both of the parties to the de facto relationship had or acquired during the de facto relationship is to be distributed;

(b) the maintenance of either of the parties to the de facto relationship.

(4) This subitem is satisfied for the choice if:

(a) the parties have not made a designated State/Territory financial agreement in relation to their de facto relationship; or

(b) if the parties have made such an agreement, that agreement has ceased to have effect without:

(i) any property being distributed; or

(ii) any maintenance being paid; under the agreement.

(5) This subitem is satisfied for the choice if:

(a) the choice is in writing and signed by both of the parties to the de facto relationship; and

(b) each of the parties was provided, before the choice was signed by him or her, with:

(i) independent legal advice from a legal practitioner about the advantages and disadvantages, at the time that the advice was provided, to the party of making the choice; and

(ii) a signed statement by the legal practitioner stating that this advice was given to the party.
(6) For the purposes of Part VIIIAB of the new Act, a choice can be included in a Part VIIIAB financial agreement for which the parties are the spouse parties.

Setting aside a choice

(7) A court may make an order setting aside a choice if the court is satisfied that, having regard to the circumstances in which the choice was made, it would be unjust and inequitable if the court does not set the choice aside.

(8) A court setting aside a choice under subitem (7) may make such order or orders (including an order for the transfer of property) as it considers just and equitable to, so far as is practicable, return the rights of:

(a) the parties to the de facto relationship; and

(b) any other interested persons affected by the choice;

to their position immediately before the choice was made.

(9) Subsections 90UM(8) and (9) of the new Act apply in relation to setting aside a choice as if:

(a) a reference in those subsections to subsection 90UM(1) or (6) of the new Act were a reference to subitem (7) or (8); and

(b) the reference in those subsections to section 90UM of the new Act were a reference to this item.

(20) Page 108 (after line 17), after Schedule 3, insert:

Schedule 3A—Children

Family Law Act 1975

1 Subsection 4(1)

Insert:

child: Subdivision D of Division 1 of Part VII affects the situations in which a child is a child of a person or is a child of a marriage or other relationship.

Note: In determining if a child is the child of a person within the meaning of this Act, it is to be assumed that Part VII extends to all States and Territories.

2 Before section 60F

Insert:

60E A Definition of de facto partner

For the purposes of this Subdivision, a person is the de facto partner of another person if:

(a) a relationship between the person and the other person (whether of the same sex or a different sex) is registered under a law of a State or Territory prescribed for the purposes of section 22B of the Acts Interpretation Act 1901 as a kind of relationship prescribed for the purposes of that section; or

(b) the person is in a de facto relationship with the other person.

3 Paragraph 60F(1)(c)

After “subsection 60H(1)”, insert “or section 60HB”.

4 After subsection 60F(4)

Insert:

(4A) To avoid doubt, for the purposes of this Act, a child of a marriage is a child of the husband and of the wife in the marriage.

5 Subsection 60G(2)

After “paragraph 60F(4)(a)”, insert “, or paragraph 60HA(3)(a),”.

6 Subsection 60H(1)

Repeal the subsection, substitute:

(1) If:

(a) a child is born to a woman as a result of the carrying out of an artificial conception procedure while the woman was married to, or a de facto partner of, another person (the other intended parent); and
either:

(i) the woman and the other intended parent consented to the carrying out of the procedure, and any other person who provided genetic material used in the procedure consented to the use of the material in an artificial conception procedure; or

(ii) under a prescribed law of the Commonwealth or of a State or Territory, the child is a child of the woman and of the other intended parent;

then, whether or not the child is biologically a child of the woman and of the other intended parent, for the purposes of this Act:

(c) the child is the child of the woman and of the other intended parent; and

(d) if a person other than the woman and the other intended parent provided genetic material—the child is not the child of that person.

7 Subsection 60H(4)
Repeal the subsection.

8 At the end of Subdivision D of Division 1 of Part VII
Add:

60HA Children of de facto partners
(1) For the purposes of this Act, a child is the child of a person who has, or had, a de facto partner if:

(a) the child is a child of the person and the person’s de facto partner; or

(b) the child is adopted by the person and the person’s de facto partner or by either of them with the consent of the other; or

(c) the child is, under subsection 60H(1) or section 60HB, a child of the person and the person’s de facto partner.

This subsection has effect subject to subsection (2).

(2) A child of current or former de facto partners ceases to be a child of those partners for the purposes of this Act if the child is adopted by a person who, before the adoption, is not a prescribed adopting parent.

(3) The following provisions apply in relation to a child of current or former de facto partners who is adopted by a prescribed adopting parent:

(a) if a court granted leave under section 60G for the adoption proceedings to be commenced—the child ceases to be a child of those partners for the purposes of this Act;

(b) in any other case—the child continues to be a child of those partners for the purposes of this Act.

(4) In this section:

this Act includes:

(a) the standard Rules of Court; and

(b) the related Federal Magistrates Rules.

60HB Children born under surrogacy arrangements
(1) If a court has made an order under a prescribed law of a State or Territory to the effect that:

(a) a child is the child of one or more persons; or

(b) each of one or more persons is a parent of a child;

then, for the purposes of this Act, the child is the child of each of those persons.

(2) In this section:

this Act includes:

(a) the standard Rules of Court; and

(b) the related Federal Magistrates Rules.

9 Application
Application to children
(1) Subject to subitems (2) to (8), the amendments made by this Schedule apply in relation to a child born be-
fore, on or after the commencement of this item.

Application to the Aged Care Act 1997

(2) To the extent that the amendments of the Family Law Act 1975 made by this Schedule affect subparagraph 44-11(2)(a)(i) of the Aged Care Act 1997, they apply in relation to that subparagraph on and after 1 July 2009.

Application to the A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999

(3) To the extent that the amendments of the Family Law Act 1975 made by this Schedule affect paragraph 22(2)(b) of the A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999, they apply in relation to that paragraph on and after 1 July 2009.

Application to the Child Support (Assessment) Act 1989

(4) To the extent that the amendment of subsection 60H(1), and the repeal of subsection 60H(4), of the Family Law Act 1975 made by this Schedule affect paragraph (b) of the definition of parent in subsection 5(1) of the Child Support (Assessment) Act 1989, they apply in relation to that paragraph on and after 1 July 2009.

Application to the Child Support (Registration and Collection) Act 1988

(5) To the extent that the amendment of paragraph 60F(1)(c) of the Family Law Act 1975 made by this Schedule affects the definition of child of a marriage in subsection 4(1) of the Child Support (Registration and Collection) Act 1988, it applies in relation to that definition on and after 1 July 2009.

Application to the Health Insurance Act 1973

(6) To the extent that the amendments of the Family Law Act 1975 made by this Schedule affect paragraph (a) of the definition of dependent child in subsection 10AA(7) of the Health Insurance Act 1973, they apply in relation to that paragraph on and after 1 January 2009.

Application to the National Health Act 1953

(7) To the extent that the amendments of the Family Law Act 1975 made by this Schedule affect paragraph 84(4)(b), and paragraph (a) of the definition of dependent child in subsection 84B(4) of the National Health Act 1953, they apply in relation to those paragraphs on and after 1 January 2009.

Application to the Social Security Act 1991

(8) To the extent that the amendments of the Family Law Act 1975 made by this Schedule affect paragraph 5(2)(a), subparagraph (b)(i) of point 1067G-B3AA, subparagraph (b)(ii) of subpoint 1067G-G9(2) and subparagraph (a)(i) of point 1068-B1B of the Social Security Act 1991, they apply in relation to those provisions on and after 1 July 2009.

Mr McCLELLAND (Barton—Attorney-General) (12.04 pm)—I move:

That the requested amendments be made.

I am pleased to indicate that I am moving that these amendments requested by the Senate for consideration by the House be made. This is in fact landmark legislation which will have important implications for de facto relationships across Australia. The passage of the Family Law Amendment (De Facto Financial Matters and Other Measures) Bill 2008 through parliament will mean that for the first time there will be a uniform federal system applying to opposite-sex and same-sex de facto couples when their relationships break down. The bill will end the current arrangements, which place a huge administrative and financial burden on separating de
facto couples. The bill was long overdue. The Rudd government has acted swiftly to provide a simpler, less costly and fairer regime for de facto couples and their children across Australia.

Question agreed to.

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 15 October 2008, I present copies of the terms of motions for which notice has been given by the members for Cowper, Lyons, Sturt and Page. These matters will be considered in the Main Committee later today.

SAFE WORK AUSTRALIA BILL 2008
Consideration of Senate Message

Bill returned from the Senate with amendments.

Ordered that the amendments be considered immediately.

Senate’s amendments—

(1) Page 5 (after line 6), after clause 5, insert:

5A Objects
The objects of the establishment of Safe Work Australia are, through a partnership of governments, employers and employees, to lead and coordinate national efforts to:
(a) prevent workplace death, injury and disease; and
(b) harmonise occupational health and safety laws and associated regulations and codes of practice; and
(c) improve national worker’s compensation arrangements.

(2) Clause 10, page 9 (lines 10 to 13), omit paragraphs (1)(d) and (e), substitute:
(d) 3 members nominated by the Australian Council of Trade Unions;
(e) 3 members nominated by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry;

(3) Clause 15, page 11 (line 16) to page 12 (line 1), omit subclauses (2) to (5), substitute:
(2) The Minister can only make the appointment if the person has been nominated for the appointment by the Australian Council of Trade Unions.

(4) Clause 16, page 12 (lines 8 to 21), omit subclauses (2) to (5), substitute:
(2) The Minister can only make the appointment if the person has been nominated for the appointment by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

(5) Clause 26, page 16 (lines 18 and 19), omit “Division 4 allows the Ministerial Council to direct Safe Work Australia to amend either of the final plans.”.

(6) Clause 28, page 17 (line 24) to page 18 (line 24), omit subclauses (2) to (5).

(7) Clause 28, page 19 (lines 1 to 4), omit subclause (8).

(8) Clause 30, page 21 (lines 1 to 31), omit subclauses (2) to (5).

(9) Clause 30, page 22 (lines 8 to 11), omit subclause (8).

(10) Division 4, clauses 31 and 32, page 23 (line 1) to page 25 (line 27), omit the Division.

(11) Clause 38, page 28 (lines 21 to 29), omit subclause (2).

(12) Clause 42, page 31 (lines 15 to 29), omit subclause (2).

(13) Clause 42, page 31 (line 31), omit “or (2)”.

(14) Clause 42, page 32 (line 7), omit “and subparagraph (2)(a)(i)”.

(15) Clause 43, page 33 (line 13), omit “any direction”, substitute “certain directions”.

(16) Clause 45, page 34 (lines 14 to 16), omit paragraph (3)(a).

(17) Clause 46, page 35 (lines 1 and 2), omit paragraph (1)(a), substitute:
(a) about the performance of the CEO’s functions but not in relation to operational matters; or

(18) Clause 46, page 35 (after line 17), at the end of the clause, add:

(5) In this section, operational matters are matters addressed in the strategic and operational plans of Safe Work Australia.

(19) Clause 57, page 39 (lines 27 to 29), omit subclause (3).

(20) Page 45 (after line 9), after clause 67, insert:

67A Audit committee

(1) Safe Work Australia may establish an audit committee.

(2) The functions of the audit committee shall be:

(a) to receive reports and request information from the CEO on the Safe Work Australia Special Account and the financial management of Safe Work Australia;

(b) to make recommendations on the financial management of Safe Work Australia.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (12.06 pm)—I move:

That the amendments be disagreed to.

The amendments moved by the Senate to the Safe Work Australia Bill 2008 are opposed by the government, and they are opposed by the government for one simple reason: in July this year, the Council of Australian Governments agreed to a historic decision—that is, to take action, finally, on harmonising occupational health and safety laws around this country. This has been a long sought after reform. Indeed, it was so long sought after that it made an appearance on the agenda of the former, Liberal government, the Howard government, but like so many other things that appeared on the Howard government’s agenda the Howard government talked but got nothing done.

In February 2006, when the Howard government was in office, COAG did agree to develop strategies to improve the development and uptake of national occupational health and safety standards. But after that agreement there was no effective further action. It therefore fell to this government to actually commence a reform that has been long sought after—long sought after by the business community and long sought after by those who care passionately about occupational health and safety standards for Australian workers.

In entering into the Intergovernmental Agreement for Regulatory and Operational Reform in Occupational Health and Safety, the Commonwealth entered a very specific agreement with our state and territory colleagues. It was a specific agreement about the creation of a new body, the subject of this legislation, Safe Work Australia. We also, as part of that agreement, agreed that we would use our best endeavours to have enacted the legislation required to establish Safe Work Australia as outlined in the intergovernmental agreement. That is, in order to reach a historic agreement with our state and territory colleagues, we agreed with them on the shape of Safe Work Australia and we agreed with them that we would use our best endeavours to ensure legislation passed in the form that they wanted—a Safe Work Australia in the form that they were expecting.

I understand that in the lead-up to the making of the intergovernmental agreement various participants in the discussions may have had different views. That is to be expected when the Commonwealth, states and territories are working on a historic deal—that people would come to the table with differing perspectives—but the essence of moving in this area, and indeed the essence
of ending the blame game between the Commonwealth and the states and territories, is for people to sit around a table, make an agreement and then for that agreement to be adhered to. The Commonwealth will adhere to the things we agree to do in the intergovernmental agreement. That means that we will seek passage of the Safe Work Australia Bill unamended by the amendments that are before the House today, because that delivers on the obligations the Commonwealth took upon itself in entering into this agreement.

I would note that the amendments that have been moved and appear before the House today are also amendments that do not come to this parliament in a good spirit. As I indicated in the parliament last week and as the leaked shadow cabinet submission of the Liberal Party makes clear, these amendments are not motivated by a desire to improve this legislation; they are motivated by a desire to put provisions into the legislation that will ultimately derail this process. This is unacceptable to the government and should be unacceptable to anyone who cares about occupational health and safety harmonisation. The government says that these amendments should be disagreed to. The government will pursue passage of this bill in the form that the government presented it—without these amendments in it. Should it be necessary, because the Liberal Party pursues this course of folly, the government will not further proceed with this bill. The government will report to COAG that occupational health and safety harmonisation has been derailed by the Liberal Party and the process delayed. And the government will ensure that that is reported to the business community and that the business community understands the spoiler role the Liberal Party has taken.

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (12.11 pm)—Nothing could portray the arrogance and contempt that this government has for this parliament more than a refusal to entertain these very simple amendments that make the government’s existing legislation better. The whole world is telling you that you are wrong: in this case the opposition, the Greens, the Independent senators—and that, quite frankly, is an unlikely alliance—the ACTU and ACCI. They are all saying that the government has got this wrong, yet the government is refusing to listen. This is exactly what the Deputy Prime Minister is doing: refusing to listen. The Deputy Prime Minister is walking away from safety consultation at the highest level by refusing to incorporate the Senate amendments of her Safe Work Australia Bill 2008. The bill has been amended because the bill is fundamentally flawed.

I would just like to comment on what the Deputy Prime Minister was saying with regard to this leaked shadow cabinet submission that she keeps referring to. As unseemly as it is for the Deputy Prime Minister to be rummaging around in my bins, I am very happy for her to table this submission and then the Australian people can make a judgement. I am very happy for her to table this leaked cabinet submission, then everyone can make a judgement and see that what she is claiming about that submission is completely and utterly false. When the ACTU, ACCI, the Greens and the Independent senators are all supporting these amendments, yet the minister absolutely refuses to entertain them, that is just being bloody minded and stubborn.

Labor has sold out Australian workers and industry in the interests of placating particular state bureaucracies. The Deputy Prime Minister is refusing to accept that a process that does not seek to actively engage employers and workers in a meaningful way will not bring safety improvements necessary for Australian workplaces. The whole point of an effective occupational health and safety regime is that it encourages employers and
employees to take responsibility for safety within their own workplaces. It is widely acknowledged that this approach is the best approach to create safe workplaces. The government’s bill, before it was amended, did not even contain a set of objects for this new body, Safe Work Australia. Contrary to what the Deputy Prime Minister was saying, the opposition is supportive of a national occupational health and safety regime. The reality is that it will be the government that will be holding up this process if they stubbornly and unnecessarily refuse to countenance these sensible Senate amendments. They are amendments that were supported by every other member of the Senate with the exception of government senators, and, as I have said, they are also supported by the ACTU and ACCI—again, as unlikely an alliance as the alliance that we have formed in the Senate to amend this bill.

I will go through what these amendments are—these shocking amendments that the government will not even consider. The amendments outline the objects of the new body, Safe Work Australia. They do this because surely it makes sense to highlight to the Australian public what the new body exists for. The minister was saying that somehow this is going to imperil the intergovernmental agreement, but she refuses to even go back and consult the states about what these amendments might mean. She would have more credibility if she walked in here and said, ‘We’ve gone back to the states and they find that it’s unacceptable,’ yet all we are seeing is stubbornness and a refusal to even look at the amendments.

The amendments also restore effective levels of representation to employer and employee representatives. The term that people use is ‘social partners’. This is, quite frankly, possibly the most important part of the amendments. As I have said, it is ultimately the responsibility of employers and employees to secure workplace safety. They need to adopt a culture in which they take shared responsibility for the safety of their workplace. We can sit here in this place and legislate ad nauseam, but nothing is as important as this cultural acceptance by employers and employees that workplace safety is their responsibility. I will be happy to run through some of the other amendments as this debate continues. (Time expired)

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (12.16 pm)—In respect of the proposition that the amendments be disagreed to, the contribution by the shadow minister for workplace relations shows that he simply does not understand what is at the centre of this debate. We live in a democracy. I know that that passes the opposition by when they lose elections and determine in their arrogance that they should still be running the place. Something that the Liberal Party might like to reflect on is that we have a system in which governments are elected. Ministers in portfolio areas come together in ministerial councils. Under the former Howard government, what used to happen is that ministers came together in those ministerial councils and nothing got done, because of the unreasonableness, incompetence and laziness of the Howard government. Under this government, we are meeting in ministerial councils and COAG and getting things done.

Most particularly, we are committed in this area to harmonising occupational health and safety laws. To give you an idea of how quickly we are moving in this area after more than a decade of incompetence and nothing getting done, we are committed to the delivery of an exposure draft of model laws in May 2009. We are committed to those model laws going to the Workplace Relations Ministerial Council in September.
2009. Anybody who knows anything about this area knows that that is the undertaking of a huge amount of work in a limited time period. Consequently, there is not a day to waste if we are going to deliver on this major agenda for businesses and working people in this country.

What the opposition is effectively asking the government to do is to not adhere to its word as given when it entered the intergovernmental agreement and to stop proceeding with this legislation to enter new rounds of discussions, inevitably leading to a new intergovernmental agreement. Even if that were possible—and that is an ‘if’—it would occasion a major time delay. The opposition is standing here trying to pretend that somehow these are just sensible amendments that do not go to the heart of what was agreed between governments. But these amendments go to things like who is represented and in what numbers on Safe Work Australia.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—They guffaw in their arrogance. The amendments go to the voting majorities that will make decisions in Safe Work Australia. These things were worked through in great detail by the Workplace Relations Ministerial Council. As I said when I first spoke in the parliament about this, people came to that table with different views. You would expect that. But the essence of entering an intergovernmental agreement is that people sit round a table, have a discussion, someone gives a bit, another person gives a bit and an agreement is made. That is what happened around the table of the Workplace Relations Ministerial Council. It resulted in this historic agreement, something that the Howard government could never deliver.

Now it has been brought to the parliament because we want to get on with this process of harmonising laws. If the Liberal Party, with its improper motivations in relation to this matter, as revealed by a shadow cabinet submission, stays committed—

Dr Southcott—I rise on a point of order, Mr Speaker. Out of the words of the Deputy Prime Minister, to suggest that any member of parliament has improper motives is disorderly and should be done by way of a substantive motion.

The SPEAKER—There is no point of order. The member will resume his seat.

Ms GILLARD—if the Liberal Party remains committed to this folly, then the position that we will end up in is that this legislation will not be further proceeded with at this stage and the Liberal Party will have derailed national occupational health and safety.

(Time expired)

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (12.21 pm)—It appears that the Deputy Prime Minister is going to stick to the idea that somehow governments around Australia can just sit down, nut out an agreement and then expect the parliament—no matter what has been decided—to just rubber-stamp it. Why even bother having this chamber and why even bother having the other chamber if the federal government will just sit down with their state Labor mates—of course, with the exception now of Western Australia—hammer out an agreement and then expect, no matter what is decided, the parliament to accept it? I think that logic is profoundly undemocratic. For once, you will find me defending the very important prerogatives of the Senate.

I think it is very important that we outline the amendments. Again I would invite the Deputy Prime Minister to table the leaked cabinet submission that she keeps crowing about. I would be very happy for her to table it. She seems to think that that means we have improper motives. It says nothing of the sort. I would be very happy for her to table this alleged document. Then people could
actually make a judgement about whether or not we have improper motives. We support the idea of a national OH&S system and, through these amendments, we are trying to improve the legislation that the government seems to think the parliament just has to accept no matter what.

I talked in my earlier contribution about the representation of the social partners on Safe Work Australia. I would be very interested in who the government thinks might best represent workers and employers on this body, because apparently they cannot decide if it should be the ACTU and ACCI. The Senate is able to help them do that. These are appropriate representatives of employers and workers in this country. They are acknowledged as the peak bodies. If the Deputy Prime Minister has a different view about who should represent workers then we would be very happy to hear it. But we think it is sensible that it be the ACTU, as that is a role they have traditionally played. I would be very happy to hear it if she thinks they are not a genuine representative of workers or if there is a better representative body in Australia to sit on this body and represent the interests of workers.

With these amendments we—in conjunction with our partners in the Senate—are trying to stop the employers and the employees being drowned out by state government bureaucracies, by introducing a more balanced voting process. It will help employers and employees engage with this process rather than be just appendages who will sit there and be consistently drowned out by state government bureaucracies. We have also moved to improve the independence of the social partners on this body. The government’s bill said that they will have a power of veto over anyone who is nominated to this committee. If ACCI wants to nominate somebody or if the ACTU wants to nominate a particular representative and the government does not like them, they will just say, ‘No, they cannot sit on Safe Work Australia.’ How can they be independently represented if that is the case?

We have also moved to improve the independence of the CEO, freeing him from unnecessary ministerial interference that could imperil his job if he was doing something that the government did not like. We think that is important because it gives him or her freedom of action to do their job without incurring ministerial displeasure. Let us say you were the CEO of this new body and you were pursuing a course that the government of the day did not like. Of course, this government will not always be the government of Australia; that will change over time. We believe that the CEO should have the capacity to act without having hanging over his head the threat of losing his job. These are all very sensible amendments designed to facilitate a fairer and more effective move towards a national OH&S system. They enhance the engagement of the very people within our community who are responsible for delivering workplace safety—that is, employers and employees.

The Deputy Prime Minister continues to hide behind this alleged commitment to the intergovernmental agreement and does not even countenance accepting these Senate amendments, yet she refuses to go back and engage with the states about whether they might accept them. We have had some indication that some of the states might accept these amendments, but she is too arrogant to even ask the question. You would have more credibility if you walked into this chamber and said, ‘I’ve gone back to the states; this will imperil the intergovernmental agreement.’ The reality is that you cannot even do that. I would be very interested if you would outline which of the amendments you feel does imperil the intergovernmental agreement. (Time expired)
Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (12:26 pm)—Can I say again: at heart this is a simple proposition and one that members of the Liberal Party ought to be capable of understanding. Proposition No. 1: the intergovernmental agreement that I am referring to is not a creature of state bureaucracies. The shadow minister might want to come to the dispatch box and say that because he thinks it diminishes it, but it is simply not true. The intergovernmental agreement was talked about in great detail at the Workplace Relations Ministerial Council, a meeting of elected representatives from elected governments around the country.

Mr Keenan—Senators are elected representatives!

Ms GILLARD—The shadow minister refers to senators. I can give him a little tip on the functioning of democracy in this country: there will never be an elected government formed entirely of senators. In order to be the government, you need to have the majority in this House of Representatives and you need to have the majority in the lower houses around the country. You need to be the government that the people voted for. When the elected representatives of elected governments around the country met, they worked on this agreement. It is not the creature of state bureaucracies; it is the creature of elected representatives. Yes, people had different views. Yes, there was lively discussion. In order to reach agreement, some people had to compromise on one thing or another thing and a consensus emerged. That consensus is in the intergovernmental agreement and we the Commonwealth government—the national government—said in the course of making the agreement and as part of the agreement’s terms that we would come to this parliament with our best endeavours to turn what was agreed about the composition of this body, what was agreed about the voting structures of this body and what was agreed about the management and oversight of this body into law, and the Safe Work Australia Bill represents that agreement.

If, as the opposition is suggesting, we should go back and have these discussions again then what I am indicating to the opposition is that that has the potential to derail this process for many months. We are committed to an ambitious timetable of reform, with model laws as an exposure draft going to the Workplace Relations Ministerial Council in the course of next year, something the Howard government wanted to do and spectacularly failed to achieve. I understand the Liberal Party might have their views about what they would have said had they been in these meetings of elected representatives. But the reality is that the Liberal Party, because they are not the government of this country—and at some point they might want to consider that—were not in those meetings as those arrangements were being made. So the choice for the Liberal Party is a very clear one. They have expressed their view; I understand that. They have come to this parliament and have had an opportunity, in both the House and the Senate, to express their view, but ultimately the decision for them is a very clear one. Having expressed their view, will they accept that the government, in line with the commitments it gave in the intergovernmental agreement, is going to pursue this legislation in the form in which it brought it to the parliament so we can acquit our obligations under the intergovernmental agreement and keep it moving, or are the Liberal Party going to dig in and prevent that? I am going to say once again to members of the Liberal party: if you do that, the government will report to the Council of Australian Governments and to the Australian business community that the occupa-
tional health and safety harmonisation process has been derailed by the Liberal Party.

I say, too, that the shadow minister—who I know has not been in this place for that long a time, but he was here in the last parliament—would recall the way in which the Howard government treated this chamber, and he may like to think, as he comes to the dispatch box engaging in rants and raves about the way in which parliament is proceeding, about some of the things that happened under the Howard government with his support. Can I remind him, for example, of the ramming through of the Work Choices bill. (Time expired)

Dr SOUTHCOTT (Boothby) (12.32 pm)—I rise to support the Senate amendments to the Safe Work Australia Bill 2008. There will be times during your period in government when you will have to admit that you got it wrong and you will have to come into this chamber and eat humble pie. Unfortunately we have a minister for whom such an admission runs contrary to her DNA. What we are considering is the whole area of occupational health and safety, and at the centre of occupational health and safety and the governance arrangements is the fact that they are tripartite arrangements. Everyone understands that. It is government, employers and employees.

The only argument we have heard in favour of this is that, essentially, this has been made as part of the intergovernmental agreement. What we can say to the minister is: you had an existing governance structure—it was already there—when you came into government, and it provided three representatives for the ACTU and three representatives for the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. We do not know what your proposal was to COAG. We do not know if your proposal to COAG was initially to reduce the numbers of workers’ representatives and employers’ representatives or if that is something that you traded at COAG. But what we are saying is that this is wrong. In an area like occupational health and safety it takes a real genius to find a way—an area in which we are broadly supportive of a harmonised occupational health and safety system. Yet what we see from this minister is that she has managed to provide a structure which is not going to be able to get the outcomes. As much as the minister would like to be in every workplace in Australia, in actuality any government relies on employers and employees.

You need to have a look at how isolated the Labor Party leadership is on this issue. When it went to the Senate, these amendments were supported by the Greens and by Senator Xenophon and Senator Fielding. They are supported by the ACTU and they are supported by ACCI. What we are saying as an opposition is that you need to say that you got it wrong, because you are completely isolated on this, Minister. We believe that, in the area of occupational health and safety, having a truly tripartite governance arrangement makes a lot of sense.

A number of the other amendments are good amendments, but I think that the most important one is making sure that there is fair representation of all stakeholders. What is required is for the minister to go back to COAG. We have a COAG meeting in November and a COAG meeting in December. The minister can go back to the Workplace Relations Ministerial Council. The whole idea that this rests on an intergovernmental agreement shows an enormous degree of arrogance and hubris from a government which has only run 11 months of its course. What we are saying is that the ACTU should have greater representation on this body. What is your objection to that, Minister? What is your objection to maintaining the same representation for the ACTU as was...
already there on the Australian Safety and Compensation Council when you came to government? These amendments are about improving the structure. There is a role here for the parliament. The parliament is not a silent partner. We are not a rubber stamp for this minister or this government. The parliament has a role. Workers should have greater representation on Safe Work Australia and so should employers. You need to address why you object to having greater representation from the ACTU on Safe Work Australia and why, when you came to government, you cut the representation from what existed for the preceding body. *(Time expired)*

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Who wants the call?

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (12.37 pm)—I am very happy to go again.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—I remind the House that if you want the call you need to be on your feet.

Mr KEENAN—I actually thought that the government might have said something more to defend their intransigence over these Senate amendments, but astonishingly they seem to have run out of argument. The Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Deputy Prime Minister has consistently repeated the importance of the intergovernmental agreement, yet in her own legislation she has failed to include some of the provisions that were negotiated in this intergovernmental agreement. Apparently she is so wedded to this idea of the intergovernmental agreement—and she is using that as a further reason for refusing to even look at these sensible Senate amendments—yet once we take a closer look at her implementation of the intergovernmental agreement into legislation in this place it is revealed that she has failed to follow the intergovernmental agreement in a number of areas. The Deputy Prime Minister has failed to include in the legislation a requirement to provide the parliament with an annual report on the progress and the achievements of the new authority. The Deputy Prime Minister comes into this place, announces that it is impossible for this parliament to change the intergovernmental agreement and yet we find that she herself has not even followed it in preparing her own legislation.

It is outrageous arrogance for this government to come in and just expect the parliament to rubber-stamp whatever it has decided in consultation with fellow state Labor governments. It is outrageous arrogance to think that the Senate or this House has no role to play in improving legislation. Why even have the Senate if the government is just going to sit down with its state Labor mates—with the exception of Western Australia—hammer out an agreement and then come back to this place and say, ‘You have to accept this agreement or the whole process stalls,’ even though the government has not even accepted all of the intergovernmental agreement in preparing its own legislation?

The Safe Work Australia Bill 2008 is fundamentally flawed. It is fundamentally flawed because it refuses to outline the objects of the new body, it refuses to grant independence to the social partners—in this case the ACTU and ACCI—and it refuses to give them any leeway to nominate their own representatives to this body. The amendments restore effective levels of representation to employers and employees and they introduce a balanced voting process which is designed to engage the very people who need to be engaged when it comes to occupational health and safety—that is, the people who actually occupy workplaces in Australia. It is workers and employers, not people who sit around in legislatures, who are at the front line of this. We cannot legislate for safety in Australian workplaces ad nauseam without buy in from employers and employees.
These amendments also ensure that workers and industry are effectively and ably represented. They free this body from unnecessary ministerial interference and they free the CEO from unnecessary interference also. They establish an audit committee to examine the finances and the expenditure of Safe Work Australia, something that you would think this government, which talks about accountability, might support—but, no, apparently not in this instance. The Deputy Prime Minister just continues to hide behind her commitment to this intergovernmental agreement as some sort of catch-all for the fact that the rest of this parliament apparently has no role whatsoever in the legislative process.

When you have an alliance between the opposition, the Greens and the Independents in the Senate and when they are supported in what they have decided to do by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Australian Council of Trade Unions—a body not necessarily noted for its friendliness towards the Liberal and National parties in this country—then it takes a particular kind of arrogance and a particular stubbornness just to say: ‘We will not even entertain any of these amendments. We refuse to go back to the states and talk to them about this even though we have information that the states might not necessarily mind. All we will do is come in here, insist that we are right and that the rest of the world is wrong and we will refuse to countenance these sensible amendments’—amendments that make the Deputy Prime Minister’s legislation better.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion) (12.42 pm)—Can I say to the Liberal Party members who have spoken that hypocrisy is thick in the air in this chamber today. If the Liberal Party had cared so passionately about occupational health and safety over 12 long years of government, you would have thought they would have got something done. But they did not. And then when you hear the Liberal Party in this place saying that somehow they care about the representation of the union movement, you know you smell a rat. You know that you smell a rat because we watched the Liberal Party over 12 long years, particularly in the Work Choices period, act to ensure that people were denied appropriate representation by trade unions. As much as anything else they were of course dedicated to disadvantaging working Australians; they were of course dedicated to making sure that 16- and 17-year-olds in their first job could be ripped off fundamentally by their first Australian workplace agreement—and they laugh with delight at that prospect; and they were of course dedicated to the destruction of the Australian trade union movement. So when the Liberal Party come into this place and say that somehow they have had a road to Damascus conversion, that they now care about the representation of the trade union movement on a body like Safe Work Australia, you will forgive me if I say that I smell a rat.

The rat that I smell has been made very clear by the leaked shadow cabinet briefing, because we actually find the true motivations of the Liberal Party in the document that went for internal discussions to its highest council in opposition, the shadow cabinet.

Mr Keenan—Madam Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: to stop the Deputy Prime Minister deliberately misleading this chamber again, I invite her to table that document, and people can make their own judgement about its contents.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—There is no point of order. The member for Stirling will resume his seat.
Ms GILLARD—The opposition’s own internal document from their highest decision-making body, the shadow cabinet, says that the proposed amendments are to ‘assist in defeating future policy proposals by state or federal Labor’. So that is what it is all about. I referred to it in parliament last week, and that is their true motivation. With that true motivation revealed, what is being said in this debate, I think, can be viewed with some clarity. What this is about is pursuing a set of amendments which, if adopted, they think would so flaw this process that it would be derailed. What I am saying very clearly to the Liberal Party is that the government is committed to delivering on the intergovernmental agreement.

Much of this debate has proceeded as if it is about decisions I have made independently of others and something that I have determined personally. Of course that is not the case. What happened here is that elected representatives from elected governments around the country sat around a table and worked out the best way forward. People compromised and exchanged views, and we got to the intergovernmental agreement that is before the parliament as the foundation stone for the bill before the parliament. So we are delivering on that intergovernmental agreement. We gave our word to use our best endeavours to do that. We will do that. I counsel the Liberal Party against digging in and derailing the occupational health and safety process, because we will make that very clear at COAG and to the business community. With those words, I move:

That the question be now put.

Question put.

The House divided. [12.50 pm]
Monday, 20 October 2008  HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES 9505

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ciobo, S.M.</th>
<th>Cobb, J.K.</th>
<th>Ferguson, L.D.T.</th>
<th>Ferguson, M.J.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Costello, P.H.</td>
<td>Coulton, M.</td>
<td>Fitzgibbon, J.A.</td>
<td>Garrett, P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutton, P.F.</td>
<td>Farmer, P.F.</td>
<td>Georginas, S.</td>
<td>George, J.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forrest, J.A.</td>
<td>Georgiou, P.</td>
<td>Gibbons, S.W.</td>
<td>Gillard, J.E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haase, B.W.</td>
<td>Hartsuyker, L.</td>
<td>Gray, G.</td>
<td>Griffin, A.P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawke, A.</td>
<td>Hawker, D.P.M.</td>
<td>Hale, D.F.</td>
<td>Hall, J.G. *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hull, K.E. *</td>
<td>Hunt, G.A.</td>
<td>Hayes, C.P. *</td>
<td>Irwin, J.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irons, S.J.</td>
<td>Jensen, D.</td>
<td>Jackson, S.M.</td>
<td>Kerr, D.J.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson, M.A. *</td>
<td>Keenan, M.</td>
<td>King, C.F.</td>
<td>Livermore, K.F.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laming, A.</td>
<td>Ley, S.P.</td>
<td>Macklin, J.L.</td>
<td>Marles, R.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsay, P.J.</td>
<td>Macfarlane, I.E.</td>
<td>McClelland, R.B.</td>
<td>McKew, M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marino, N.B.</td>
<td>Markus, I.E.</td>
<td>Melham, D.</td>
<td>Murphy, J.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morrison, S.J.</td>
<td>Moylan, J.E.</td>
<td>O’Connor, B.P.</td>
<td>Oakeshott, R.J.M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neville, P.C.</td>
<td>Pearce, C.J.</td>
<td>Owens, J.</td>
<td>Parke, M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyne, C.</td>
<td>Ramsey, R.</td>
<td>Perrett, G.D.</td>
<td>Plibersek, T.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randall, D.J.</td>
<td>Robb, A.</td>
<td>Price, L.R.S.</td>
<td>Raguse, B.B.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert, S.R.</td>
<td>Ruddock, P.M.</td>
<td>Rea, K.M.</td>
<td>Ripoll, B.F.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schultz, A.</td>
<td>Scott, B.C.</td>
<td>Rishworth, A.L.</td>
<td>Roxon, N.L.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secker, P.D.</td>
<td>Simpkins, L.</td>
<td>Saffin, J.A.</td>
<td>Shorten, W.R.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, A.D.H.</td>
<td>Somlyay, A.M.</td>
<td>Sidebottom, S.</td>
<td>Smith, S.F.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southcott, A.J.</td>
<td>Stone, S.N.</td>
<td>Snowdon, W.E.</td>
<td>Sullivan, J.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truss, W.E.</td>
<td>Tuckey, C.W.</td>
<td>Swan, W.M.</td>
<td>Symon, M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vale, D.S.</td>
<td>Washer, M.J.</td>
<td>Tanner, L.</td>
<td>Thomson, C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood, J.</td>
<td>* denotes teller</td>
<td>Thomson, K.J.</td>
<td>Trevor, C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Turnour, J.P.</td>
<td>Zappia, A.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question agreed to.

Question put:

That the amendments be disagreed to.

The House divided. [12.56 pm]

(The Deputy Speaker — Ms AE Burke)

### AYES

| Adams, D.G.H. | Albanese, A.N. |
| Bevis, A.R. | Bidgood, J. |
| Bird, S. | Bradbury, D.J. |
| Burke, A.S. | Butler, M.C. |
| Byrne, A.M. | Campbell, J. |
| Champion, N. | Cheeseman, D.L. |
| Clare, J.D. | Collins, J.M. |
| Combet, G. | Crean, S.F. |
| D’Ath, Y.M. | Danby, M. |
| Debus, B. | Dreyfus, M.A. |
| Elliot, J. | Ellis, A.L. |
| Ellis, K. | Emerson, C.A. |
| Ferguson, L.D.T. | Ferguson, M.J. |
| Fitzgibbon, J.A. | Garrett, P. |
| Dutton, P.F. | George, J. |
| Georginas, S. | Gillard, J.E. |
| Gibbons, S.W. | Gray, G. |
| Hartsuyker, L. | Hale, D.F. |
| Hawke, A. | Hayes, C.P. * |
| Hull, K.E. * | Jackson, S.M. |
| Irons, S.J. | King, C.F. |
| Jensen, D. | Macklin, J.L. |
| Keenan, M. | McClelland, R.B. |
| Laming, A. | Melham, D. |
| Ley, S.P. | Neal, B.J. |
| Moylan, J.E. | O’Connor, B.P. |
| Pearce, C.J. | Owens, J. |
| Ramsey, R. | Perrett, G.D. |
| Robb, A. | Price, L.R.S. |
| Ruddock, P.M. | Rea, K.M. |
| Scott, B.C. | Rishworth, A.L. |
| Simpkins, L. | Saffin, J.A. |
| Somlyay, A.M. | Sidebottom, S. |
| Stone, S.N. | Snowdon, W.E. |
| Tuckey, C.W. | Swan, W.M. |
| Washer, M.J. | Tanner, L. |
| Thomson, K.J. | Thomson, K.J. |
| Turnour, J.P. | Turnour, J.P. |

### NOES

| Abbott, A.J. | Andrews, K.J. |
| Bailey, F.E. | Baldwin, R.C. |
| Billson, B.F. | Bishop, B.K. |
| Bishop, J.J. | Briggs, J.E. |
| Broadbent, R. | Chester, D. |
| Ciobo, S.M. | Cobb, J.K. |
| Costello, P.H. | Coulton, M. |
| Dutton, P.C. | Farmer, P.F. |
| Forrest, J.A. | Georgiou, P. |
| Haase, B.W. | Hartsuyker, L. |
| Hawke, A. | Hunter, D.P.M. |
| Hull, K.E. * | Hunt, G.A. |
| Irons, S.J. | Jensen, D. |
| Johnson, M.A. * | Keenan, M. |
| Laming, A. | Ley, S.P. |
| Lindsay, P.J. | Macfarlane, I.E. |
| Marino, N.B. | Markus, I.E. |
| May, M.A. | Mirabella, S. (proxy) |
| Morrison, S.J. | Moylan, J.E. |
| Neville, P.C. | Pearce, C.J. |
| Pyne, C. | Perrett, G.D. |
| Randall, D.J. | Price, L.R.S. |
| Robert, S.R. | Rea, K.M. |
| Schultz, A. | Rishworth, A.L. |
| Secker, P.D. | Saffin, J.A. |
| Smith, A.D.H. | Sidebottom, S. |
| Southcott, A.J. | Snowdon, W.E. |
| Truss, W.E. | Swan, W.M. |
| Vale, D.S. | Tanner, L. |
| Wood, J. | Thomson, K.J. |
| Wood, J. | Turnour, J.P. |

Majority………. 17

[CHAMBER]
Secker, P.D. Simpkins, L.
Smith, A.D.H. Somlyay, A.M.
Southcott, A.J. Stone, S.N.
Truss, W.E. Tuckey, C.W.
Vale, D.S. Washer, M.J.
Wood, J.

* denotes teller

Question agreed to.

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Deputy Prime Minister) (12.58 pm)—I present the reasons for the House of Representatives disagreeing to the amendments of the Senate, and I move:

That the reasons be adopted.

Question agreed to.

EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2008

Cognate bill:

SCHOOLS ASSISTANCE BILL 2008

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 16 October, on motion by Ms Gillard:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr TREVOR (Flynn) (12.59 pm)—To continue my contribution on the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 and the related bill, as a recipient of the national Dare to Lead Excellence in Leadership in Indigenous Education Awards 2008 Barcaldine State School, at Barcaldine, home of the famous Tree of Knowledge in my electorate of Flynn, strongly supported the range of federally funded initiatives which assisted schools to work with communities and implement quality programs. As a result of this funding, Barcaldine State School has strong community involvement through Dare to Lead and IESIP funds, having hosted the district principals business meeting in 2008, where all district principals worked with state, national and local community members to enhance ability to deliver outcomes for Indigenous students; worked with district and state organisations to maximise resourcing and training in this field; built community capacity through parent and community employment, training, parent training, and development of current and future programs in vocational training and cultural awareness; achieved strong academic outcomes, especially resulting from ITAS, IESIP and PSPI funds, which support tutors and teachers to maximise Indigenous student potential; and used funding to overcome barriers for rural and remote schools. To quote Wendy Scott, an Indigenous parent and community member:

My son finished Year 12 and was the first in the family to do so. He did a School Based Traineeship for 2 years and this led to a full apprenticeship which he will finish in just 18 months. He wants to do more training and work in the mines, which he has dreamed of since Year 8. The support of staff helped him through the tough times.

Appropriations provided for under this bill will enable the Commonwealth to continue to exercise public leadership and maintain its support for localised initiatives similar to or the same as that which I have provided examples of and which improve Indigenous education outcomes. This role includes collaboratively setting policy directions and priorities in Indigenous education, engagement with stakeholders and investment in research and evidence in conjunction with states, territories and non-government education providers to support future reforms and systemic improvements in the education and training sectors for Indigenous Australians. I congratulate the Rudd Labor government for its outstanding leadership and I commend these bills to the House.

Mr HAASE (Kalgoorlie) (1.02 pm)—I rise today to address the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 and related bill. This proposed legislation is focused on simplifying the legislative arrangements for the Commonwealth funding of schools with a
There have been decades of effort on the part of governments to improve the lot of Indigenous students, primarily, of course, the educational outcomes. At the beginning of the current government there was much said about closing the gap in the quality of educational outcomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. There seems to be nothing, however, in so much that has been written about these proposed changes, that addresses the fundamental issue as to why people seek out and obtain an education. There seems to be a great deal of warm encouragement, a lot of carrot dangling and many suggestions about the fine outcomes that will be achieved if the gap is closed. But in Indigenous and community terms, and in understandable terms, there does not seem to be much that would change the mindset of average Aboriginal parents in an average remote community from the existing circumstance where education is not valued at all to a circumstance, pontificated on by our current Prime Minister some months ago, of closing the gap.

The hurdles that exist today in Indigenous communities to producing year-12 capable Indigenous students who go on to seek job training, employment and financial independence are monumental. What so many people in this House do not understand is just how monumental that task is. In the majority, we come from an Anglo-Saxon work-ethic background where one is born, is schooled, gets a job, works and then starts the cycle all over again. That is not the case in Indigenous communities. Until such time as our bureaucracies can develop strategies that will say in a meaningful way to Indigenous parents, ‘The future of your race is dependent upon you sending your child to school,’ there will be no great change to outputs from the education system in Indigenous communities—because most of us do not even understand the status of a child in an Indigenous community. We know a lot about children in our own community, even though we seem to be confused because we spend a great deal of money on volumes, written by somebody else, about teaching our children what to do because of what they are. But we collectively know very little about the status of Indigenous children in communities, whether or not a parent has much control over the activities of their child or whether or not the parent is in a position to tell that child to go to school whether they like it or not. Until such time as bureaucracies responsible for closing that education gap and achieving better outcomes realise that they know so little about the realities, we are not going to have any changed outcomes.

The Schools Assistance Bill 2008 is all about appropriating $28 billion for the purpose of non-government school education in non-government schools and specifically those that have a high proportion of Indigenous students. The Education Legislation Amendment Bill appropriates more than $640.5 million for non-Abstudy payments and anticipates Abstudy payments of an estimated $102.1 million, adjusted to demand. Those Abstudy payments actually do a good job. Why they are not simply study payments for secondary students and why they are Austudy and Abstudy payments I will never quite comprehend. It is difference and categorisation that is causing problems, not solving problems. But if we are going to spend approximately $102.1 million on secondary education for Indigenous students then we are on the right track because they represent a group that is on the way to making it. But the $640.5 million and the portion of it that goes to so many of my remote Indigenous schools, be they government or non-
government, provides a great deal of employment for mainstream teachers. It provides a great deal of education for those teachers—taking them into land, teaching them about culture, exposing them to some alternative lifestyles in Australia and providing a wonderful experience in learning about Australian geography and remote area dwellings et cetera—but it does not do a hell of a lot else. Until such time as educators charged with the responsibility of achieving outcomes for Indigenous students in our education system—which supposedly equips those Indigenous children for job training, employment and financial independence—and we understand that we need to know more about anthropology and psychology as well as education, that large sum of money is not going to change the outcome a great deal.

I guess I must return to this boring legislation. It is going to, I believe, fulfil an election promise of the government about continuing the coalition’s efforts in improving outcomes for Indigenous students. I will highlight some of the problems we have with sections 15, 22 and 24 of the Schools Assistance Bill 2008. Generally, the coalition, my colleagues, are going to support these amendments because there is nothing particularly offensive about them; they just miss the point. For instance, section 15 of the bill specifies grounds upon which the minister may refuse to authorise or delay a payment to a non-government school—so we fiddle while Rome burns. Parts (a) and (b) of section 15 state that these grounds include if the school is being wound up or is unable to pay its debts. Section 15(c) of the bill provides for new reasons for such refusal or delay in the case where:

if a law of the Commonwealth or a State requires the body or authority to be audited—the relevant audit:

(i) is expressed to be qualified; or

(ii) expresses concern about the financial viability of the body or authority.

This means if the audit says this is a qualified audit then we have got grounds for delaying payments for that school. We all know it is sensible that an audit should be required to confirm the financial viability of a school but not that the minister may refuse to authorise a payment if an audit is qualified. Qualifications to an audit do not necessarily reflect financial issues or viability. They could relate to any number of things, including an error or omission in the information provided to the auditor, which is much more to do with record keeping than finances, but under these amendments it would appear that, given a qualification on an audit, we have got justification for the minister to refuse to advance funds. I believe that, certainly as a coalition, we have got to stand up for our amendments to this proposed amendment bill.

Section 22 of the bill relates to the national curriculum. It says that any school receiving funding from the Commonwealth must comply with the national curriculum. I ask: what national curriculum is that? It is still being formulated. We currently only have framing documents for maths, science, history and English. We will see the final curriculum documents during 2009, and yet this bill seeks to start to tie school funding to it—to the acceptance of a curriculum that does not yet exist in its final detailed form. There ought to be concern about that curriculum because Labor is taking the national curriculum in an unknown direction. Let us face it: this is the government that is entrusting Professor Stuart Macintyre, a former Communist Party member whose major works include histories of Marxism in Britain and a history of the Australian Communist Party, to write part of our curriculum.

This legislation may also affect schools with alternative curricula, for example, those
which offer the international baccalaureate, or those offering alternative education, for example, the Montessori schools. We do not know how prescriptive the national curriculum will be, so we cannot anticipate exactly how these schools will be affected, but there may be more adverse impacts for non-government schools that affect their ability to deliver the kind of education that parents send their kids there for.

Section 24 of the Schools Assistance Bill 2008 is also of great concern. It says that a funding agreement will require non-government schools to report to the minister the financial operations, including financial viability and funding sources, of the school. I guess that would be a very substantial job.

I had the pleasure on the Saturday just gone of attending the grand opening of the library for the Goldfields Baptist College in Kalgoorlie-Boulder, my home town, in the west. I made the point in discussion with the administrators there that it is quite wonderful to visit that non-government school. It is directly across the road from a very fine government school called O’Connor Primary School. But the difference is that when taxpayers give a dollar to my Baptist college in the Goldfields they get about $10 of value and when the taxpayer gives a dollar to the state government school they get about 90c worth of value. That is because the community of the Baptist school are absolutely impassioned about the education of their children and they give of their heart and soul and their time to the education of their children; they do not simply leave it to the taxpayer funding of their school.

So when we talk about schools now being required by this amendment bill to fully report on the funding of their particular educational institution we are digging down into a complex area. Sure, if taxpayer dollars are going to be used to help an institution then it is only fair that we should know something about it. But I wonder if those developing this legislation and these amendments have thought about just how valid the call for funding is from non-government schools, where parents strive and redouble their efforts—they will do anything in their power—to assist in the education of their children. The legislators in this case seem not to be terribly concerned about the often excessive wastage that takes place in government schools.

Many of the executives from non-government schools in my electorate are saying: ‘What is this? Why are we being subjected to the third degree simply because of the philosophical bent of this current government? We have managed for the last 12-odd years to do very well—to educate thousands of students and to turn them into fine young Australians without this investigation as to where we get the meagre pennies we have to spend on that education. And now this government simply wants to lay bare all of the great donors to our schools so we can continue to get that taxpayer funded handout.’

This legislation gives the minister the new power to demand information about non-government school finances and where all their funding comes from, from benevolent scholarships and bequests to parents and friends group cake stalls. This information is not needed to calculate the socioeconomic status of the school on which the government funding is based, so why does the minister need to know? It suggests a future intervention to change the socioeconomic status approach to funding, an approach which was introduced by the coalition eight years ago and which—although Labor objected to this approach at the time—was part of Labor’s official election policy last year. It seems that there is an intention with this section to develop the groundwork for future changes to
funding that would punish schools for receiving funding through benevolent bequests, scholarships or other philanthropic acts.

I am not sure if I used the word ‘humbug’ previously, but this piece of legislation has good intent. It has been introduced to this place to simplify a process that has become complex. It has become complex because Indigenous funding over time has accumulated a large number of various programs—programs that will all be cancelled under this legislation. I am sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker, I was assured that I had a list of them in dot point form but I do not seem to have that. There were some six or seven funding programs that all my Indigenous schools knew about and tapped into very strongly wherever they could. Those programs did assist in giving additional staff for additional tutoring and introducing various activities for children to try and coerce them to attend class and pay attention in those classes. Attendance is the second most important element of a child’s education. It will come as no surprise to members of this House to learn that the most important aspect necessary as part of a child’s contribution to education is to attend the education institution, because if they are not there then they are not going to learn anything. Until such time as the students of our education programs in remote Indigenous schools, be they government or non-government, are encouraged to attend by their parents or by their principal and teachers there is no education transfer going to take place.

So I say to members in this place, consider this: the average desert Aboriginal community with a large proportion of young children needing to make their way in life need more than amendment bills to improve their shot at getting an education that will equip them for financial independence and a good life; they need some real understanding about what works in creating a total environment where the output is an educated child ready for job training. One of the things that has been overlooked, for instance, is giving a meaningful demonstration to Indigenous parents that education actually matters. We have spent all our time convincing Indigenous parents, down through the generations, that the only outcome that is really required is that you remain alive, because you will be kept alive by government handouts. We invented something that was going to be the be-all and end-all solution—it was called CDEP. It was an abject failure. What we need are very simple programs that keep young people occupied and that demonstrate to Indigenous people generally that the future is not guaranteed to be one made up of welfare payments—just consider a future where one has to paddle one’s own canoe, and that will make an education necessary. That will be the great dawning for Indigenous people, and it will guarantee their future.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (1.23 pm)—As someone who went to a state primary school and a state high school, and who sent his children to a state primary school and a state high school, it always irritated me when I heard spokespeople from the Howard government pit public education against private education, pit teachers against parents and pit states against the federal government. It was all about deflecting blame. It was all about dividing to conquer. We had values ideas that were put into the system. That was supposed to make up for funding deficiencies. So much of what the Howard government did in our education system was about neglect and pitting one local school against another local school or a primary school against a high school.

What was the legacy of the Howard government? Their legacy was a flatlining of children finishing high school and an under-
funded education system, whether public or private. I do not think it is any coincidence that the Australian public voted on 24 November last year for a Rudd Labor government and an education revolution. We are happy to listen to the stakeholders in these industries and, unlike the previous government, we are happy to have discussions with parents as well as unions, primary and secondary principals, P&Cs and the states and territories, because this is about cooperation, not about confrontation. This is about uniting and not about dividing.

We have already put significant funding into schools and this particular legislation, the Schools Assistance Bill 2008 and the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008, is all about that. The Schools Assistance Bill effectively appropriates $28 billion of Commonwealth funding for non-government schools and bodies from 2009 to 2012, including extra assistance for Indigenous students. It fulfils the election commitment made by the Rudd opposition, and I was happy to campaign on that commitment.

The legislation is about fulfilling our commitment to continue the socioeconomic status—SES—funding model and indexation from the previous government for the non-government education sector for the quadrennium from 2009. That will ensure that non-government schools fulfil requirements of performance, accountability and transparency, as will government schools in terms of the national education agreement, which is being completed through the Council of Australian Governments. The legislation before us today also establishes an Indigenous funding guarantee and ensures that those schools with high proportions of Indigenous students will receive assistance to a maximum level of recurrent funding. It will also mainstream Indigenous-specific education programs.

The Education Legislation Amendment Bill also provides significant assistance in terms of education funding which will go towards reducing the appalling gap in educational attainment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Specifically, there are some technical amendments to the legislation but it will continue, in the appropriation for 2009 through to 2012, a number of targeted programs and projects under the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000. It will provide funding for supplementary assistance to preschools and vocational education and training providers who have Indigenous students in transition from 1 January 2009 under legislation which becomes operative with the early childhood and vocational education and training specific purpose payments and the national partnerships.

The Indigenous people in my area will appreciate that. I have met with many of them to discuss these types of programs and projects. These will assist to reduce the disadvantage that Indigenous people in my electorate of Blair in South-East Queensland have suffered for a long time. The bills also provide $778.5 million over four years to fund strategic projects to enhance educational outcomes in relation to Indigenous people and in relation to preschools and VET as well.

The education revolution that we talk of will make a significant difference to high schools and primary schools in my area. The $1.2 billion put aside for the digital education revolution will make a big difference in terms of computer literacy and educational attainment of young people in my electorate. I have spoken to many school principals—both private and public education providers—and they are enthusiastic about what this will mean for their schools. They have told me that they will be making applications for funding.
The $2.5 billion that we have set aside for the Trade Training Centres in Schools Program is also being realised in my electorate. St Edmunds Boys College, a Catholic high school in the Edmund Rice tradition, is the lead school that has made an application, along with Ipswich Grammar School and Ipswich Girls’ Grammar School, for funding for a trade training centre. And St Eddies, as it is commonly and colloquially known, is probably the lead school in my electorate when it comes to manual arts, particularly the wet trades, and CAD education as well. It really is a tremendous school, and it is great to be there on speech night to see the young men of St Eddies going through and graduating in these particular trades which are so important for the local area. St Eddies has been successful in its grant application, and the Ipswich trade training centre will be established with just under $3 million allocated to it by the Rudd Labor government. I warmly welcome this money and I congratulate the principal, Brendan Lawler, and Wayne Sessarago, who has been so active on behalf of the school in achieving this funding.

But it is important that we do not rest on our laurels when it comes to education. The national education agreement will see more funding delivered to all schools across the country, including in my electorate of Blair—in Ipswich, the Lockyer Valley and the old Boonah shire. I am pleased that the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education announced on 27 August 2008 at the National Press Club that the changes under that agreement will raise the quality of teaching in our schools, improve results in disadvantaged school communities, improve the basics—literacy and numeracy—and help all schools improve and direct new resources where they are most needed. In my electorate, it is the public school system which has been so underfunded and is so disadvantaged. I welcome the campaign of the Queensland Teachers Union and the Australian Education Union, who have fought so hard for so long to assist and seek further funding for public education in Queensland in particular. Ipswich is the fastest growing area in South-East Queensland and we have a great deal of pressure put upon our local infrastructure and also our schools. Just south of where I live, at Flinders View in Ipswich, 120,000 people will be living in the Ripley Valley in the next 20 years. And just down the road, in the electorate of Oxley, Springfield has already got about 18,000 people in it, and it will have similar numbers to the Ripley Valley. The pressure on infrastructure and health and education is acute, so putting more money into public education as well as into private education is absolutely vital in the circumstances.

It is very important that we create an education revolution. We are determined to make our schools palaces of education. It is crucial that we have a population that is the most highly educated and best skilled in the world because education empowers, it gives people opportunity, it builds up individuals, it creates a more just and fairer society. It is crucial that our human capital can capitalise on its latent skills and talent. Education should not be about left and right, as the member for Kalgoorlie was preaching a few minutes ago. It is not about the arguments of the past, it is not about public versus private, it is not about vilifying what people did decades ago in terms of their political involvement. It is about economic growth and it is about social justice. It is about making our country stronger economically but fairer socially. Children who receive the best education are less likely to commit criminal acts. They are less likely to go into cycles of disadvantage. Poor educational levels go hand in glove with intergenerational poverty and disengagement from society and civic responsibility.
Our educational outcomes are crucial for our productivity and our future growth at the bottom of Asia. It is vital that our people are skilled and educated to the best of their respective abilities. Sadly, under the coalition government, education was neglected. We have, as their legacy, 6.5 million Australians with no post-school qualifications. We had a real decline in literacy levels until 2006, according to the OECD Program for International Student Assessment, and a terrible tale in underperformance, which is linked to disadvantage. Our retention rates to year 12—or senior, as we say in Queensland—had flattened to 75 per cent according to the ABS 2007 report Schools Australia statistics. The 2006 national reading, writing and numeracy benchmarks results showed that in year 7 less than half met the 2006 benchmark; literacy achievement results for Indigenous boys and those students in remote areas were dreadful. It is important that there is a whole-of-government approach in this regard. It is important that we build on the digital education revolution of $1.2 billion and what I have described locally as the trade training centre revolution of $2.5 million of programs, and that we also deliver on education tax refunds for people to ensure their children have vital computer and educational items so they do not fall behind.

This is a program of $4.4 billion, our education tax refund. At my many mobile offices, people in my area have commended the government in that regard. The Deputy Prime Minister, in her second reading speech on the Schools Assistance Bill on 24 September 2008, said:

If this country is to succeed in the 21st century we need a schooling system which delivers excellence and equity for every child in Australia.

What a wonderful thought: excellence and equity for every child in Australia.

The bills before this House deliver $42 billion for schools. They deliver $28 billion to non-government schools in 2009-12. Along with these bills, we are bringing in a national curriculum. That is so important for my area, because in my electorate I have the RAAF base at Amberley, where thousands of people work. It is becoming a superbase, with the Super Hornets going there as we phase out the F111. That base is like a construction site. I did my ADF parliamentary program there and met with many people. I attended a fantastic air show at Amberley that 100,000 people visited, where I talked to many people. What the families tell me is that their kids are so disadvantaged when they move from one state to another. So a national curriculum is so important. Eighty thousand children each year move from state to state and thousands of them live in my electorate. A national curriculum is absolutely crucial. I have spoken to great principals like Peter Doyle, the principal of Brasall State Primary School, and Jan Klotz, the principal of Bundamba State Secondary College, which is my old high school. They have talked to me about why a national curriculum is important, because they see the disadvantage the children have. We are the government that has the wit and the will to do this. A national curriculum was, in fact, promised so often by the coalition. But when we came to power what did we find? No national curriculum. It is important that we have a national curriculum. These bills we are debating today go hand in glove with a national curriculum.

In 2008-09 the Australian government budget figures show that a record estimated $9 billion will be going to Australian schools. This is an increase of $391 million, or 4.5 per cent, over 2007-08. From the federal government $2.9 billion will go to state schools and students. This is an estimated increase of $151 million, or 5.5 per cent,
The federal government will also put in $6.1 billion to non-government schools and students. That is an increase of $224 million, or 3.7 per cent, over 2007-08.

The private schools in my area are schools of excellence. I have mentioned St Edmunds. The two grammar schools are terrific schools. They have produced some wonderful people. Some have gone all the way to being politicians and chief justices of the High Court of Australia. But these schools also provide a great deal of assistance to Indigenous and disadvantaged students. Giving this money to private schools in my area will help students in that regard. A lot of parents battle to send their kids to private schools. They do it because they believe in a religious education or they believe in a private education or they just want to give their kids what they think is the best start in life. I applaud the parents in my area who really aspire for greatness for their children, because it is so vital that we give them the best chance.

Neither of my parents had the advantage of going to high school, nor my grandparents on either side before them. I am the first person in the direct line of my family ever to go to high school. It was a Labor government that allowed me to go to university. The Labor Whitlam government allowed me to go and study law, political science and economics at the University of Queensland. It has been Labor governments which have assisted those battling families in my area for so long. It is Labor governments which make a difference in the life of communities like Ipswich, the Lockyer Valley and Boonah, because we believe in social justice, equity and giving people a chance in life.

I think the state of some of our public schools in Queensland is a disgrace—and it is a disgrace that we have inherited from the Howard government. We are committed to improving the educational outcomes in Queensland from early childhood education through to our Education Investment Fund, which will make such a difference to people in my electorate. I warmly commend the bills to the House. They have my full support, and I am sure I speak on behalf of all of my electors in saying that these bills will help both public and private education to the betterment of all the communities in Blair.

Mr TUCKEY (O’Connor) (1.43 pm)—Prior to his departure, the member for Bonner made a couple of remarks which I think require a response. The first one was that we are dealing here with funding for private schools, and it appears that that funding will be tied to the acceptance by those private schools, those non-government schools, of a national curriculum. Having been a shadow minister for defence personnel, I understand completely the great pain and difficulty experienced by any family that transfers from state to state when the state governments cannot even get together and have the same entry year for their student populations. And, of course, the difference runs to all sorts of curricula. If defence personnel and others have to go from one state to another, they are entitled to know that under the government school system there is a common curriculum and a common starting age et cetera.

I nevertheless cannot understand why that needs to be applied to a private school, where the parent has some say in that particular decision and obviously can go elsewhere if the service or the curriculum does not suit them. I would like to come back to that. Unfortunately, the member for Bonner has not hung around for my good advice, because the second thing that I wanted to do was to explode the myth of the federal parliament’s contribution to government schools. The only funding of any substance that goes to the private school sector comes from the budgets approved in this place. A very small amount is begrudgingly provided...
by state governments. That is the reason that the Australian government under Menzies stepped into this particular area.

Having said that, it is the habit of the teachers union in particular to advise parents to advertise in the media that that sum of money is given to the private school sector and a lesser sum of money is budgeted in this parliament specifically for government schools. That is a fact. But it overlooks entirely the simple fact that roughly 50 per cent, between 48 per cent and 52 per cent, of all the expenditures of state governments is provided through the budget of this parliament—and, more importantly, by the poor old taxpayers, who are compulsorily contributing their taxes to this parliament because it has most of the tax-raising capacity.

To simplify that, in years gone by, Prime Minister Howard looked at the mishmash of funding arrangements and took upon himself the reform of the Australian tax system—with, I might add, the support of all of us present at that time in government—and to introduce a GST. In that process he and we, unlike those opposite with some of the decisions on taxes that were brought into this parliament in the last budget, went to that particular election telling people that if they re-elected us we would introduce tax reform including a GST. That was a huge political risk. It was exploited to the nth degree by the then opposition under Beazley and we lost quite a few seats.

What did we also promise the Australian people that we would do with the money once it was collected? We promised that we would distribute every cent of it to state governments. What did Prime Minister Howard say during the election debate? He said that this was the first time in a long time that the Australian states would have a growth tax. By the way, it has grown well beyond the predictions at the time. He said that that was so that they could do their job throughout the Australian democratic system. What was that job? To provide education, hospitals and law and order to the community.

As I said, the money has increased dramatically and, as I look around Australia, I cannot find where the money has gone. But unless we bring to account that contribution which is not spent on private schools—the billions collected and distributed—it is a farce to say that the government school system gets a raw deal from this parliament. It probably gets four or five times the amount that the private schools get. One of the reasons for that is the fact that Australia at the last count had 2,268,000 students in the government school sector and 1,148,000 in the non-government school sector.

I have corrected a couple of myths. You can bet your bottom dollar that that will not alter the misleading advertisements run by the teachers union, whose interest does not seem to be in the education of students but in protecting the power they seem to exert from time to time by closing down schooling with strikes.

The reality is that Australia has a system in which both of those sectors are available to the Australian people. Parents of those 1.2 million children—be it through a small Catholic or other Christian school or one of the more elite schools—are making a huge financial contribution towards the education of their children. Were that system to be undermined, as is the ambition of this government, then that cost would fall upon the taxpayer in ever-increasing degrees or, as is so typical in the health system, the level of service would decline accordingly.

We are here today to discuss two bills. One is the Schools Assistance Bill 2008, which provides $28 billion over four years for the purpose of giving funding assistance to the non-government school sector, some
$640.5 million for further Abstudy assistance and $102 million for other purposes related to Indigenous education. I would like to come back to some of that in a while. But all of a sudden we discover that there are some rather curly pieces in this funding arrangement. Probably the worst is the clear intention of the government to return to what I always called the ‘no new schools in the non-government sector’ policy. It was referred to under Minister Ryan as the new schools policy. What was it? If a Christian or other community wanted to open a school, until they achieved a certain student attendance they did not get any help at all. They had to say to parents interested in the establishment of the school, ‘Pay full fees.’ And they had to find premises.

I saw that in the town of Geraldton, where there was an attempt to open an Anglican grammar school. Under the so-called new schools policy they got no student assistance and no capital assistance until they achieved a certain attendance. Of course, they could not do that. The Catholic school up there lent them one of their redundant school buildings because they had amalgamated their girls and boys schools. They had a free building virtually, but they still got nothing. The present system pays up to 70 per cent of tuition fees, depending on the size and wealth of the school. But they got none of that and, of course, they could not get their numbers up and, consequently, the school was going to collapse. We then got elected and we brought in our arrangements. That school has 600 students today and magnificent premises. There has been a very significant contribution from this parliament and from the parents involved. What we are talking about today is funding, yet we see that this proposal virtually goes back to that old system and makes it impossible for new schools to be commenced. No doubt the teachers union will be laughing about that.

These are matters of grave concern. I have already made some remarks about curricula. I am all in favour of improved curricula. I also believe that in the government education sector curricula should be uniform—it should be homogenised, or whatever word we want to use. That would be a good thing. I am delighted to see that whoever has been selected to propose the new English curriculum has said we are to go back to teaching grammar. I just happen to have a granddaughter, aged nearly 15, who was fortunate enough to go on an exchange from her school to a boarding school in Connecticut for three months. The thing that struck her most was that she had to learn some English grammar. The Americans—certainly in these elite schools—are of the view that grammar is part of English! Of course, when one reads today’s newspapers, and I make this comment to those sitting up top, it has been totally forgotten that you do not finish a sentence with a preposition—for example, ‘something has been given to’ instead of ‘to whom it has been given’. Of course, the next question is: when the new curricula come in who is going to teach the teachers? I would advise them not to read our newspapers to get enlightenment!

The whole fact of life is that we had this attitude to education that did not make children think. Worse, it is a long time since we thought the first and highest capacity for a schoolteacher was the capacity to teach. I had the privilege of going to an elite government school that also produced people like former Prime Minister Hawke, former Secretary to the Treasury John Stone, and Governor of the Reserve Bank, ‘Nugget’ Coombes—all who attended a little before I did but not much. That school was an elite government school that everybody fought to get into and that you got into by scholarship. It did not matter how rich your parents were, if you could get a scholarship to Perth Mod-
ern School in those days you went there. On my arrival we got a new English teacher, who in his first address to us pointed out that if we thought he knew everything we were wrong, but he thought he knew where to look. On the occasions we asked questions he would always be able to go and find out and answer it at a later date. I cannot say that about the Deputy Prime Minister—I am still waiting for an answer to a question I put to her at the last sitting—but the whole matter was that this man, in a very laid back way, was a great motivator. He had us wanting to learn about the English language, and I am pleased to say he delivered me what we called a distinction in those days. He himself got more distinctions than the other two English teachers in that school.

This is part of the challenge, and I do not know that it has been addressed. I constantly hear the Minister for Education and Deputy Prime Minister telling us about how much money has been committed by this government, and that is welcome, but we are yet to see any of the results. I refer to it as 'measuring excellence by expenditure', and it is not the way to do it. Private school funding is of extreme importance, but I do not see that that funding should be tied to the curricula that those schools teach. There is a reference in the second reading speech to transparency. Of course, schools should make what they are teaching patently obvious. I believe that some of the so-called private schools have not got the capacity to teach some of the higher levels of maths any more than the public schools do, and they should be condemned for that because they charge the fee and do not necessarily provide the service.

Just while everyone is rushing in to listen to me before question time, I make the point for the government that out there in the retirement brigade are all sorts of professionals who should be offered relief from any means testing or anything else so that they are encouraged to go back and teach those higher level subjects—be they retired engineers or retired scientists. I spoke at the Institute of Engineers recently and asked them why they did not encourage their retired members to go back into schools part-time and teach. The fellow said, ‘We go there and we promote engineering as a profession and give the kids talks about it.’ Of course, the kids cannot get anybody to teach them the basic subjects they need to get entry to engineering when they go to university, yet the Institute of Engineers thought it was too hard to encourage their retired members.

Mr Sidebottom—What have you been doing for 12 years, Wilson?

Mr TUCKEY—Sid, I do not know what you are joking about, but the best piece of advice I could give you is what I am saying, and if you are too dumb to understand it you know where to go.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—No. The member for Braddon will cease interjecting. The member for O’Connor will ignore him.

Mr TUCKEY—We know about you mob: you only exist to prove New Zealanders can swim! Thank you, Mr Speaker, for coming in to hear my words! I appreciate I have about five minutes left, but I hope that in your party forums you will think about giving special attention to encouraging retired engineers and other professionals to go back into our schools to teach those kids those higher level subjects.

The SPEAKER—Order! It being 2 pm, the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 97. I say to the member for O’Connor that I came in because I thought he was going to be speaking on tidal power. 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 Assistant Treasurer will be absent from question time this week, as he is in Europe meeting with senior officials from both the European Union and the OECD. The Treasurer will answer questions on his behalf.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Taxation

Mr Turnbull (2.00 pm)—My question is addressed to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister rule out increasing existing taxes or imposing new taxes in the next 12 months in order to keep the budget in surplus?

Mr Rudd—The government indicated prior to the last election that we would reduce tax as a proportion of GDP. We have honoured that in the budget which has been delivered. That is an important commitment. Secondly, in terms of the maintenance of the surplus for the future, we have said consistently that our commitment is to bring about a budget surplus across the economic cycle, and that remains our commitment—from prior to the election to the future. The government has no intention to bring in other taxes.

Economy

Mr Sidebottom (2.01 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister update the House on the Australian government’s response to the global financial crisis?

Mr Rudd—I thank the member for Braddon for his question. The global financial crisis has an impact not just on credit markets around the world but on stock markets and, through stock markets and credit markets, on the real economy. That means growth and that means jobs and therefore that affects communities everywhere.

There was more evidence over the weekend that the United States economy is slowing dramatically. A prominent measure of US consumer confidence, the University of Michigan index, fell to 57.5 from 70.3 in October. This was the biggest decline ever recorded in the 30-year history of the index. US housing started to drop by 6.7 per cent in September, which was the lowest level since January 1991, and US building permits fell by 8.3 per cent in September to a new 26-year low. There is also more evidence that we see of some slowing in the Chinese economy. A Bloomberg survey of economists showed that China’s economy is expected to grow at a slower pace in almost four years in the third quarter of 2008—that is, the quarter we are currently in. Of importance, though, for Australians concerned about China’s future growth trajectory is a significant statement made on 15 October by the Governor of the People’s Bank of China, Governor Zhou Xiaochuan, who said, in referring to his own country, that policymakers needed to do more to boost domestic consumption in the world’s fourth biggest economy. The future shape of fiscal policy in China will be as important for us as the future shape of monetary policy building on the recent 27-basis-point reduction and Chinese interest rates, given the significance of China to the global economy but, in particular, to this economy.

Recent developments in the global economy point to the importance of early and decisive action in dealing with the challenges which all countries around the world face. Policies act with a lag, and that is why governments around the world need to be ahead of the curve as much as possible. For example, I refer to recent comments by President Bush delivered to the US Chamber of Commerce referring to the impact of the measures recently introduced by the United States government. He said:
The actions will take more time to have their full impact. It took a while for the credit system to freeze up; it’s going to take a while for the credit system to thaw.

The same is true in Australia. Monetary policy acts with a lag, with its full effects felt some time after rate cuts are announced, and it will also take time for credit markets to bounce back. This underlines the importance for the government to have acted recently, decisively and early on the question of fiscal policy, providing additional stimulus to the Australian economy. Of course, we have seen liquidity action already taken by the RBA through its recent 100-basis-point reduction. The government have also implemented a range of measures recommended by the Financial Stability Forum, but our Economic Security Strategy announced less than a week ago goes to the important role to be played by fiscal policy in providing necessary stimulus to the Australian economy at a time of significant global financial crisis. This package is designed not just to boost growth in the national economy but also to provide assistance to Australian households—pensioners, carers, seniors and families—while also making life more manageable for first home buyers as well as increasing training places and accelerating our nation-building agenda. I note comments by the President of the BCA recently, who stated that the government’s package was ‘well timed, well targeted and temporary’, and that is exactly how the government has intended it.

We have acted early across a range of policy fronts to help stabilise financial markets, to reassure depositors, to guarantee bank funding, to strengthen households and to strengthen the overall national economy. We have done these things early and decisively and according to a plan so that they take effect before the full force of the global financial crisis hits Australia. The beneficiaries of these actions range across small businesses and, from our recent discussions as ministers and in our collaboration with the business community last Friday in Sydney, it is quite plain that businesses, including small businesses, are facing real problems in terms of being able to access credit, which is why the government moved so early on the question of providing a guarantee to banks for their term funding requirements in order to assist in freeing up credit arrangements. Secondly, the government has also acted in relation to the housing sector. The most recent data on housing is disturbing. Since the end of last year building approvals have fallen by nearly 17 per cent. In the state of New South Wales, house approvals remained at a 44-year low. On top of that, other households have been assisted by this package—pensioners, carers, those on the DSP, widows and veterans.

These measures are designed to provide additional assistance to the Australian economy at a time when the full impact of the global financial crisis is yet to be felt across growth, across jobs and across the rest of the activity in our economy—hence the importance of acting early and acting effectively. We have done so by deliberately reducing the surplus which we crafted out of the May budget, we have done so in a manner which is responsible given the challenges that we face in providing necessary stimulus for the Australian economy going forward and we have done so responsibly by ensuring that we can deliver the next budget outcome within the framework of a comfortable budget surplus.

On Friday the Treasurer, the Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy and I, as indicated before, met in Sydney with representatives of Australian businesses at an event hosted by the Australian Industry Group. I am pleased to announce that on Friday of this week the government will be hosting a meeting in
Brisbane involving small business and representatives of small business organisations as well.  

Mr Hockey interjecting—

Mr Rudd—I notice the member for North Sydney finds that funny. The purpose of the government’s engagement with business and with the general community is to continue engaging with business and those at the coalface of experiencing what has been a significant slowdown in the delivery of global credit. That is why the government has acted. As I have said before, the government remains determined to act further in the future as is necessary—firstly, to ensure the continued stability of the Australian financial system and, secondly, to ensure that we continue to deliver additional support for growth in this economy and what will be a troubled and difficult time ahead.

Economy

Mr Turnbull (2.08 pm)—My question is addressed to the Prime Minister. I refer to the proposal to provide Commonwealth guarantees of wholesale term funding by banks, a measure that could result in the Commonwealth taking on hundreds of billions of dollars in contingent liabilities. Will the Prime Minister undertake that this important measure be the subject of legislation and debate in this parliament?

Mr Rudd—As the Treasurer and I have already indicated on this matter, when the appropriate documents are prepared by the Treasury they will be made public in the appropriate forum. I assume that at that point they will be the subject of informed debate in this parliament. I assume that they will become the subject of informed debate as is necessary in this parliament.

Economy

Mr Bavis (2.09 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer update the House on recent assessments of the global financial crisis and its impact on the Australian economy?

Mr Swan—I thank the member for Brisbane for his question. We are experiencing one of the most significant upheavals in financial markets since the Great Depression. The global financial crisis is affecting financial markets right around the world, including in Australia. More than 25 banks around the world have failed or have been bailed out, and global stock markets have seen very significant losses. This crisis is contributing to a serious slowdown in global growth. Obviously these difficulties will impact here. Growth will slow and unemployment will rise. We have been upfront about that from the very beginning.

It pays to remind ourselves what the IMF had to say only a week or so ago:

The world economy is entering a major downturn in the face of the most dangerous financial shock in mature financial markets since the 1930s … The major advanced economies are already in or close to recession …

This is not my assessment. It is the assessment of the IMF and it is also the assessment of finance ministers of the G7 and the G20, but of course the Leader of the Opposition says they have got it all wrong. Yesterday on Insiders, he said this assessment was ‘hyped up’.

Mr Turnbull interjecting—

Mr Swan—That is exactly what the Leader of the Opposition—old motormouth over there—said. In the face of all of this evidence and in the face of the Leader of the Opposition saying that he supported our stimulus package in full, he went on television yesterday saying it was just hyped up. This shows how dangerously out of touch the Leader of the Opposition is with Australian families and, of course, with Australian business. He has no idea about the magnitude of
this challenge before us and before the globe. He thinks the crisis is overhyped and, if he thinks it is overhyped, he does not necessarily agree with the solution.

This morning he was interviewed by Alan Jones and he said that he did not necessarily support the payments to families. He thought that what would perhaps be better would be some sort of general tax cut spread thinly across a wider range of people. This shows he does not actually understand what we are doing or why we are doing it, because the family payments are directly targeted to be paid in a lump sum before Christmas. That is a very important part of what needs to be done, given the magnitude of the challenge that is before us.

The Leader of the Opposition wants to have it both ways. He wants to say he supports the package, then he wants to turn around to say the problem is hyped up and then he wants to disagree with the individual measures. Listening to the Leader of the Opposition, it reminds me of that old saying of Mark Twain’s: ‘All you need in life is ignorance and confidence.’ He has it in spades.

**Economy**

Ms JULIE BISHOP (2.13 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer to the comments from the head of the Australian Industry Group, Heather Ridout, last Friday:

The information behind the decision-making process in government is crucial to our members as they seek to make proper decisions and judgements about how to steer their business through this storm.

Will the Prime Minister immediately release the information behind the decision-making process that led to the government’s announcements last week so that business can get on with making proper decisions and judgements?

Mr RUDD—First and foremost, the government stands behind its Economic Security Strategy as announced last week, as the government stands behind—unequivocally, as opposed to those opposite—the statements made by me on behalf of the government the previous Sunday to provide guarantees to depositors and to provide guarantees for term lending on the part of banks in order to unfreeze credit. We in the government have proposed these as concrete courses of action—decisions taken by the government, unequivocally supported by the government, as opposed to the ‘bob each way’ approach being adopted by those opposite. That is basically what it is—on the one hand a bit of a shuffle over here from the Leader of the Opposition saying, in a half spirit of small ‘b’ bipartisanship, yes in extremis; on the other hand, unleashing the various dogs of war on the part of those opposite to have a chip away at the housing policy, to have a chip away at pensioners and to have a chip away at family tax benefit A, and now we have a chip away at the actual underpinnings of the package.

I say to the member for Curtin that the underpinnings of this package are clear. Growth, as of when the government determined on the package, was projected ahead to be plus two; therefore the government decided on the basis of the revision downwards in growth in the IMF world forecast, on top of the collapse in consumer confidence in the world, that we needed an extra buffer for growth for the future. That is why we acted in the way in which we have done. We have done so decisively, and I would call on the member for Curtin, rather than having a bob each way—rather than being politically opportunistic one day and trying to be statespersonlike the next day—to get behind the government, because what this nation now needs is real bipartisanship, real consensus and real support, as opposed to walking
both sides of the street, which those opposite have elevated from an art form into a science.

Small Business

Mr BIDGOOD (2.16 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy. How is the government supporting Australian small businesses during the global financial crisis?

Dr EMERSON—I would like to thank the member for Dawson for his question and for his ongoing and very strong support for small businesses. I am delighted to be able to join him on 3 November at a luncheon being hosted by the Mackay Chamber of Commerce and business.

Small business is usually the first to feel the effects of an economic downturn. Our Economic Security Strategy will inject $10.4 billion into the Australian economy and that will boost consumer spending, to the benefit of Australian small businesses. The Reserve Bank’s decision to cut the official cash rate by one percentage point will both stimulate the economy and help reduce small business borrowing costs. The Rudd government’s decision to guarantee bank deposits and term funding arrangements has helped keep credit flowing to small businesses, though we obviously acknowledge that there are some difficulties there in the midst of this crisis.

Yesterday’s decision by the National Australia Bank to cut its variable rate for small business lending takes the reduction in small business borrowing costs from Australia’s largest lender to small businesses to a total of at least 1.2 percentage points. In announcing yesterday’s decision by the National Australia Bank, its Executive Director, Ahmed Fahour, said:

While our current cost of funds remain at a historical high, policy measures announced by the Australian Government earlier this month have started to have a positive impact on the credit market.

We welcome this new development and anticipate that we will see some relief in the significantly higher premium we are currently paying for wholesale funds. Should this be the case, then we hope to be in a position where we can pass on further interest rate cuts to our customers.

That would be further good news for small businesses. What the executive director of the National Australia Bank did yesterday was to lodge a vote of confidence in the government’s policies announced in response to the financial crisis.

I am delighted that the Prime Minister and I will be hosting a small business summit on the global financial crisis in Brisbane on this Friday, 24 October. The summit will also be attended by the Treasurer and by the Minister for Superannuation and Corporate Law, so it will be the Prime Minister, the Treasurer, the Minister for Superannuation and Corporate Law and me as small business minister. The summit is being organised in collaboration with the Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia, COSBOA, and with Commerce Queensland. Small business organisations around Australia and individual small businesses will be invited to share with the Prime Minister and economic ministers their experiences during these challenging economic times. We are also inviting the major banks so that they can set out their lending policies for small businesses and engage with the small business community.

The Rudd government is committed to supporting Australia’s small businesses through this financial crisis. The government greatly appreciates the contribution of Australia’s 1.9 million small businesses in creating prosperity for themselves and their families and in generating jobs for nearly four million Australians.
Employment

Mr KEENAN (2.20 pm)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations. I refer the minister to her comments on ABC’s AM program this morning that ‘we expect now unemployment to be higher’. Given that Australians are now considering borrowing money on the basis of the $10.4 billion incentive, how many Australians are now predicted to lose their jobs over the next 12 months?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for his question. As he would be aware, I have said to this House before—indeed, I have said it now on a number of occasions—that the unemployment forecast contained in the May budget was for unemployment to reach 4 ¾ per cent by the June quarter 2009, June next year. As I have indicated in this House previously—indeed, as recently as last week—the government have indicated that we expect as a result of the global financial crisis and its feed-through into the real economy that we will see unemployment rates higher than the predicted 4 ¾ per cent. As I have also indicated in this House previously, including as recently as last week, the updated forecasts will be available in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, which will be released next month.

I also indicate to the member who asked the question that the government have acted proactively on this issue. One of the main parts of the Economic Security Strategy released last week was 56,000 new productivity places. They are there deliberately. We obviously want Australians who are outside the labour force to be able to get the vital skills that they need to get into those parts of the economy where skills are still in demand. People would of course know, looking at the Australian economy today, that there are many sections of the Australian economy where employers find it difficult to get skilled labour. They would hire people if they had people presenting with the skills they need. Our Productivity Places Program throughout has been targeted at areas of skills shortage. It has been successful, with very high demand for the places. Some of the people who have taken those places have already completed their training and gone on to get a job. Making the 56,000 additional productivity places available is a proactive response to the circumstances that we find ourselves in with the global financial crisis and its impact on the real economy and, most particularly, on employment in this nation. I also say to the member that 10,000 of the new productivity places will be used to assist particular industries or regions that are strongly impacted. So we will be there to assist with structural adjustment should that be required.

Future Fund

Ms RISHWORTH (2.23 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Finance and Deregulation. Will the minister update the House on the performance of the Future Fund?

Mr TANNER—I thank the member for Kingston for her question. I am pleased to advise the House that the Future Fund is in good shape. I am particularly pleased to be able to advise the House that the Future Fund is in good shape. I am particularly pleased to be able to table the Future Fund annual report 2007-08. There has been a degree of speculation about the state of the Future Fund in the course of the last six or eight months, given the extraordinary volatility that we have seen in share markets. I am pleased to be able to advise the House that, notwithstanding these pressures, the Future Fund has been performing well. Notwithstanding the extreme volatility in markets globally, the fund has generated a positive return of 1.5 per cent for the 2007-08 financial year. It is today announcing its interim estimate of returns for the September quarter. Those returns are slightly
negative, so the net value of the Future Fund as at the end of September is fractionally lower than it was when it first began its full operations at the beginning of July last year. When I say fractionally, it is in the order of 0.2 per cent.

This is a very significant and very positive result in the circumstances that the Future Fund has been dealing with, given the huge drops in share prices not only in Australian markets but also internationally—because a significant proportion of the Future Fund’s investments is in international equities, not just Australian equities. There is every hope, of course, that these share price reductions will be corrected in the medium term. Given that the Future Fund is a long-term investment for the Australian people, it is important to note that it has in effect maintained its value in extraordinary circumstances. That value is, as at 30 September 2008, $63.4 billion, which includes approximately $8.2 billion in Telstra shares.

The fund’s equity exposures to stressed and failed financial institutions through its broad based, index related investments are about 0.1 per cent of its total portfolio. Exposure to failed institutions, such as Lehman Brothers and Washington Mutual, total less than $100,000 out of that $63 billion as at the end of September 2008. The fund has no credit or equity derivative exposure to any financial institution, and the fund’s investments in debt markets have been focused on debt securities issued by financial institutions and high-quality Australian residential mortgage backed securities. The majority of the Future Fund portfolio remains in cash. It is worth noting that, late last year, the board of the Future Fund made a very sound decision that it would proceed slowly into the equities market, given that in its assessment at the time the equities market was very fully priced. That proved to be a very sound decision. It is worth noting, finally, that Australians generally can draw upon the fact that the details of the Future Fund are broadly bipartisanly supported by both the opposition, the former government, and the government—

Mr Hockey—We set it up.

Mr Tanner—I notice that the opposition are desperate to claim credit for anything that they can manage. After they claimed credit for recent interest rate reductions, I am waiting for them to claim credit for the NAB interest rate reduction that was announced yesterday. No doubt they will get around to that shortly.

Opposition members interjecting—

The Speaker—the minister has the call. The House will come to order.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

Mr Tanner—It is only Monday. You are very touchy. I was about to make the point that, notwithstanding the extraordinary international financial circumstances that are buffeting Australia and causing great difficulty for our economy and notwithstanding the fact that the government and the opposition have many disagreements on many important issues with respect to the state of the economy, it is important to note that one very fundamental part of the government’s balance sheet, which was created by the former government with the support of the then opposition, remains in good shape.

Mr Costello—you didn’t support the Telstra shares.

Mr Tanner—we voted for the legislation, Member for Higgins. You may not recall that but we actually voted for the legislation. Notwithstanding the inability of the opposition to maintain bipartisanship on virtually anything that it purports to be bipartisan on, it is a good thing for the Australian people that the Future Fund board and management, whose appointment I might add
was welcomed by me as shadow finance minister at the time, has done a good job to date. I welcome the contents of its annual report. I welcome the performance of the Future Fund to date. The fact that it has held its value in extremely difficult circumstances is to the great credit of the people managing the fund and to the board of the fund.

**Housing Affordability**

Mr MORRISON (2.29 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Housing. Has the government properly thought through the impact of the significant increase of the first home owners grant on young families buying their first home? What are the risks to those families of borrowing money that they may not be able to repay when more than 200,000 Australians are expected to lose their jobs in the next 12 months?

Ms PLIBERSEK—I thank the member for Cook for his question. The member for Cook has in the past been a little equivocal about his support for the boost to the first home owners grant, so I take it that today his question implies that he is not in favour of the doubling of the grant for existing homes and the tripling of the grant for new homes. I would like to remind the member for Cook that one of the largest barriers to entering the first-home market for young Australian families and individuals is the difficulty in saving a deposit for most young people, particularly at the moment, when rents are so very high because of very low vacancy rates.

Mr Morrison—Why’s that?

Ms PLIBERSEK—The member for Cook asks why vacancy rates are very low. They are very low because in your 12 years of government you did not do a single thing to support the construction of new homes in this country. That is why vacancy rates are low.

It is very important that when people are making a decision about whether to enter the housing market they give very careful consideration to their ability to service a loan. Of course it is very important that they give consideration not just to their ability to service a loan today but to their ability to service a loan in the future, because circumstances change. Perhaps someone loses some hours at work; perhaps they lose a job; perhaps someone becomes pregnant earlier than they had thought—and even a happy event like that affects the earning capacity of a family. It is a very important when people are making a decision to take out a loan that they give careful consideration to what that loan will mean for them in the future.

This is something that the government is also very well aware of. In fact, the government is taking steps to strengthen the regulation of mortgage providers, and earlier this month COAG agreed to transfer all consumer credit regulation to the Commonwealth. This means that by mid-2009 the Commonwealth will assume responsibility for the Uniform Consumer Credit Code and will extend it to include a requirement for lenders to lend responsibly and establish a licensing system that will license all credit providers, brokers and advisers, imposing comprehensive standards on market participants.

The reason that we have increased the first home owners grant—we have doubled it on existing properties and tripled it on new homes—is that we are in very difficult financial and economic circumstance. We are in a once-in-a-lifetime situation in Australia. This measure is one that, frankly, I would not have supported a year ago, but the circumstances that we find ourselves in today, with very low construction rates in an area that is
critical to the strength of our economy, are very much changed. Some young homebuyers feel that they have given up on the idea of ever owning their own home. For the sake of those young homebuyers, for the sake of the building and construction sector in Australia—an important sector in our economy and a big employer in our economy—and for the strength of the Australian economy, this is a very important measure in very difficult economic circumstances.

**Economy**

*Mr DREYFUS (2.34 pm)*—My question is to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Will the minister update the House on how the government is providing extra support to families through the government’s Economic Security Strategy and on any responses?

*Ms MACKLIN*—I thank the member for Isaacs for his question. As he knows, last week there was good news for many, many Australian families. Those families will get a big helping hand as part of the government’s $10.4 billion Economic Security Strategy. Those families who receive family tax benefit part A will receive $1,000 for each eligible child in their care. In Isaacs, that will mean 10,800 families will receive $1,000 for every single eligible child in their care. Three-quarters of all Australian families with dependent children will receive the payment, totalling $3.9 billion.

It is certainly the case that families around Australia have been welcoming the payment. In the *Australian* last week there was news of one Sydney mother, Jenny McNamara, who was planning to spend her lump sum payment. According to the article, she said: “I’ll spend it on everyday needs—things like clothes, food and maybe some presents,” … With her husband Andrew earning $52,000 as a courier driver, and monthly mortgage payments of $1300, the couple rely on annual Centrelink family benefit payments of $6000 to make ends meet. Certainly for that family Christmas is going to be that much easier. There will be four million Australian children for whom Christmas is now going to be that much brighter.

I was asked about other responses, and I have to say that the response from the other side of the House is just a little bit difficult to pin down. The opposition leader is certainly trying to walk both sides of the street on this issue. Last week, on the day that the Prime Minister and the Treasurer announced the Economic Security Strategy, the Leader of the Opposition held a press conference within hours of the Prime Minister’s announcement. He was trying to demonstrate at that point last week that he was supporting it. He said:

We’re not going to argue about the composition of the package or quibble about it. It has our support. It will provide a stimulus to the economy … But it did not take very long for this Leader of the Opposition to show his base political opportunism.

Yesterday, on the *Insiders* program, the opposition leader was so out of touch that he was saying that the government was hyping up the financial crisis that has rocked the world, saying that we have somehow hyped it up. He had this to say about the government’s Economic Security Strategy:

The second part of this $10.4-billion package basically involves giving $1000 for every child whose family are in receipt of family tax benefit A.

Well, that bit was right. Then he went on to say:

Now this has had a lot of consequences that people are writing in to me and other politicians, complaining about.

‘A lot of consequences’. What? Like consequences that families are able to buy things
that they need for their children; consequences like families are now able to buy decent presents for their children? This morning on 2GB he was at it again, working away, now trying to undermine the government’s Economic Security Strategy. I quote him again:

Look at the other side, the other half of it. They say: why wasn’t there a general tax cut that would have benefited them?

So it is hard to say: is he in favour of the $1,000 per child for these families? Is he in favour of it or not? Or does he want a tax cut on top of the thousand dollars? Maybe he does, maybe he does not. Who would know? I do not think even he does. Unlike the opposition, the government is very clear: we want to give this extra support to families. We intend to pay it in December. We know these families need extra help and we know that, as a result of paying this extra help to families, it will benefit the Australian economy.

**Economy**

Mr HAWKE (2.39 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to his $10.4 billion economic package. Prime Minister, under this package, why should a family with three children earning $160,000 a year receive the same $3,000 bonus as a family with three children earning just $42,000 a year?

Mr RUDD—The opposition, walking both sides of the street, know no limit. Last week, in an exercise in small ‘b’ bipartisanship, they supported the package. Ever since then what we have had is the housing spokesman over there, the Leader of the National Party in the Senate, and various others, including the honourable member who has just asked the question, trying to unpick it, undermine it, in an attempt to walk both sides of the street. Of course, the ultimate bottom line here is the government’s determination to provide support to those families who need assistance out there right now. There is a limit on what the budget can do. What we have done is taken an age-old definition, and that is use the family tax benefit A definition, as the best means of providing that support. It provides 75 per cent of families with this $1,000 one-off payment for each child, just as we have taken action to provide support to pensioners, carers, those on the disability support pension, those who are widows and those who are in receipt of veterans’ entitlements.

Going to the actual core of this, in terms of walking both sides of the street, the statement by the Liberal Party leader that the government is hyping the global financial crisis means that he does not understand how serious the global financial crisis is and its impact on families, pensioners, carers and those on superannuation payments. Therefore, if the Leader of the Liberal Party is out there saying that the global financial crisis is being hyped, it demonstrates that he does not understand how serious this crisis is and its implications for such basic things as the 10 million Australians on superannuation payments, which he seems to regard as a trivial matter. We do not regard these things as trivial matters. We will support Australian families and the Australian economy.

**Economy**

Mr TREVOR (2.42 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Will the minister update the House on the impact of the global financial crisis on Australian farmers and the latest developments affecting rural finance?

Mr BURKE—I want to thank the member for Flynn for the question. The member for Flynn is well in touch with the farmers in his electorate. Only recently, the Prime Minister and I visited the Burnett family in Emerald, an area which had been affected by the prolonged drought that ended, in the way it
so often does in the Australian landscape, with devastating floods over summer. During the period that we have had the drought, there has been an extraordinary increase in farm debt. Indeed, only six years ago the average farm debt was $238,000; last year that figure had risen to $702,000 for the average farm debt. In that way there is an understandable sensitivity to interest rates among Australia’s farmers.

An emergency meeting was held last Friday which I convened with the four major banks as well as other major lenders such as Rabobank and Landmark. The National Farmers Federation were in attendance, as was Keith Perrett, the head of the National Rural Advisory Council, and representatives from the accounting professions. A presentation was made by ABARE, and the banks were able to give their assessment as well, which accorded with ABARE’s assessment, that the mood in the room for the immediate term was one of cautious optimism for the sector, but there was strong optimism in the medium to long term for Australian agriculture.

The issue was squarely put on the table of the government’s expectation that, just as the cut in the cash rate needed to be passed on to the bank’s residential customers, the cut would be passed on to farming customers of banks as well. It is recognised that farmers often have quite different loan products to the products that residential customers will have. Already, prior to the meeting, Westpac had cut their farm based products by 80 basis points, and I am pleased to advise the House that, in the course of today, we have seen significant movement. The NAB yesterday announced it would reduce its business lending rates by 20 basis points, including the agricultural products. Rabobank announced that, effective today, they will cut their rural loans by 80 basis points. The Commonwealth Bank has announced that it has dropped interest rates on a range of products, within the range of 53 to 65 basis points on the products that are tied to the cash rate. I received advice after coming into the chamber that, in the period immediately before question time, ANZ confirmed that they have reduced their business interest rates, including agribusiness rates, by 60 basis points and that will be effective from 27 October. While these are still difficult times, and we should not underestimate the difficulty that many of our primary producers are going through, this news is certainly welcome relief for Australia’s farm sector.

National Security

Ms LEY (2.46 pm)—My question is to the Attorney-General. Can the Attorney-General confirm, as revealed in Senate estimates today, that the Smith review on national security and border protection was handed to the government on June 30, almost four months ago, but cabinet has yet to make up its mind on how this will inform any future national counterterrorism strategy? I ask the Attorney-General: why is he dithering and delaying on decisions that go directly to national security?

Mr McCLELLAND—I thank the honourable member for her question. The defence of the safety and security of the Australian people is the primary responsibility of government. That is unquestionably the case, and I thank the honourable member for her question. In that context, upon coming to office the Prime Minister engaged Ric Smith, a former Secretary of the Department of Defence, to conduct a review of Australia’s national security arrangements. Obviously it is vitally important that we ensure our arrangements enable agencies individually and, most importantly, collectively and across government to be as effective as they possibly can be. Mr Smith has provided his report to government. That has been made public.
The government is giving careful consideration to the contents of that review. At the end of the day, the vital thing is to make sure Australia’s national security arrangements are as effective as they possibly can be, not only to enable individual agencies to act in accordance with world’s best practice but also, more significantly, to enable agencies across the board and cooperatively to act in accordance with world’s best practice. The government is clearly giving consideration to the contents of that review. It is a practice of both sides of parliament not to comment on deliberations, but these are important matters and a national security statement regarding these matters will be forthcoming shortly.

North West Shelf Venture

Ms JACKSON (2.48 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Resources and Energy. Will the minister inform the House about the completion of the North West Shelf Venture’s LNG train 5 and also of progress on Woodside’s Pluto LNG project?

Mr MARTIN FERGUSON—I thank the honourable member for Hasluck for her question. As a proud Western Australian she understands the importance of the resources and energy sector to Western Australia and also to the Australian economy at large. I am pleased to say that last Saturday I had the honour and pleasure of joining with the new Western Australian Premier, Mr Colin Barnett, to officially open the fifth train of the North West Shelf Venture project. I might also add that on the Friday I was lucky enough to have discussions, prior to the opening, with the new Western Australian Premier about the importance of us working in a bipartisan way to actually best position the Australian community to weather the current economic storm. I only wish the same approach applied to the federal opposition with respect to the economic security package currently being debated by the Australian community.

The North West Shelf Venture is a statement about the success of key international petroleum companies—notably, Shell, BP, Mitsui, Mitsubishi and Chevron—working in a cooperative way to actually put in place a major LNG export opportunity for Australia. It is also a major achievement of our successful home-grown companies, notably Woodside and BHP Petroleum. The $2.6 billion investment effectively means that Australia, the eighth largest energy exporter in the world, will now become the fourth largest exporter of LNG. That is a major achievement.

In terms of the project itself, the project represents an investment of $2.6 billion. The North West Shelf overall now represents assets of more than $25 billion. In terms of exports, it now creates an opportunity for us as a nation, just out of the North West Shelf Venture project, to export 270 cargoes a year of LNG to major economies who depend on the Australian community in terms of having a regular, reliable supply of energy to actually drive their own economies. Given the current economic storm that is confronting the world, that is exceptionally important. This is not just about our traditional markets; it is also about our key Chinese market. We have to make sure that we continue to work in a cooperative way as we go through these economic challenges to maximise our export opportunities in the very important market of China.

The project employed 1,800 people at the peak of its construction and contributed $1.6 billion to the Australian economy. I might also say that in terms of jobs—this is perhaps something for our non-government organisations to think about—when you think about overseas aid you should not think about just the millennium goals and the percentage of
Mr TRUSS (2.55 pm)—My question is addressed to the Treasurer. I refer him to the Prime Minister’s commitment to a $76 billion infrastructure program, of which $41 billion was to be funded through a Building Australia Fund, the Education Investment Fund and a health and hospital fund. As the Treasurer has so far only allocated $26.3 billion to these three funds, is it still the government’s intention to meet the $14.7 billion shortfall from this year’s surplus?

Mr SWAN—I certainly thank the member for his question about our plans for nation building and for mentioning our investment funds, which are so important to nation building and so important at a time such as we find ourselves in at the moment. The Prime Minister has made it very clear that we will do everything we possibly can to accelerate expenditure, particularly from the Building Australia Fund. That is going to be very important to work in tandem with our Economic Security Strategy and also to work in tandem with the easing of monetary policy that has come from the Reserve Bank. So all of those things, working together, will strengthen our economy in the face of circumstances that are external to this country and which are going to slow our growth over time. We will use every lever of policy—fiscal stimulus, monetary policy and our nation building agenda—to strengthen our economy. The member asked me about the nation-building funds. He is correct to identify that there is $26 billion available. Future moneys will come out of future surpluses.

Mrs D’ATH (2.56 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Employment Participa-
tion. How has NEIS been improved under the new employment services and how is the government supporting the unemployed to establish new businesses?

Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR—I thank the member for Petrie for her question. I know that she is a very big supporter of small business in her electorate in Brisbane and beyond, across the country, because she knows—as other members on this side know—how important small businesses are to our economy and to this society. It was a privilege—it gave me great pleasure—last week to present the National NEIS Association business awards. The NEIS business awards, as the Minister for Trade knows, recognise the outstanding success of small businesses established under the Australian government’s New Enterprise Incentive Scheme. The NEIS program provides support and help to eligible job seekers to start and run their own small businesses. It was first established in 1985, so it is a program that has changed but it has certainly survived the test of time. It was a Hawke government initiative, but the fact that it was embraced by subsequent governments shows how important it has been in helping job seekers to find a different path to employment.

For that reason I was there on award night last week, providing, I guess, support for the program but also to acknowledge the winners of the particular awards. The winners covered a range of businesses and sectors, including those involved in transportation and distribution, traditional trades, the hospitality industry, and graphic arts and design, just to name a few. Melbourne business Verve Portraits was announced as the winner of the new business award. Established by Holly McErvale in 2006, with the support of RMIT NEIS, Verve Portraits has expanded from a sole trader, in just 18 months, to a company now employing more than 30 people across two studios. Indeed, Ms McErvale informed me that she is looking to start up an enterprise in Sydney also. Verve Portraits’s success shows what individuals can achieve when their ingenuity and perseverance is combined with the expertise of NEIS providers in providing appropriate mentoring and support.

Adelaide based Wise Choice Healthy Foods was named the best growth business in the category for businesses operating for longer than 15 months. It has taken its high-quality milk throughout the Adelaide region. I commend their great efforts. Finally, Melbourne based DNR Logistics won the NEIS change award. These businesses and the individuals who underpin their success show us why NEIS will continue to be an important option for job seekers and an essential element in the government’s new employment services. The government will strengthen the NEIS program, with up to 18,900 training places being made available under the Productivity Places Program for job seekers who wish to establish their own small business in an area of skills shortage.

Small business, as we know, creates much of the prosperity in communities around the country. Three-quarters of a million businesses employ nearly four million people. Therefore, their importance to our economy can never be overstated. In response to the challenging economic climate, recent measures taken by the government will improve the viability of small businesses and the availability of finance to the small business community. I listened to the answer by the Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy. He indicated that there will be a conference this Friday. I think that is another great initiative by this government, which wants to listen to the concerns of small business.

Finally, the government will continue to support the future businesses that will be
developed under the NEIS program. It is a great program. We have reformed it and provided appropriate training and mentoring. We wish all of the participants in the program from this point on every success.

**Infrastructure**

Mr ROBB (3.02 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. Minister, if the issue of spending $76 billion on infrastructure has the priority that you have asserted, why does the coordinator of Infrastructure Australia have only two temporary staff while at the same time there are four Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade staff members allocated to Australia pursuing a seat on the Security Council for 2013-14?

Mr ALBANESE—I welcome the first ever question on infrastructure from a coalition representative in this House. We have been waiting for the opposition to show some interest in infrastructure. Infrastructure Australia has been established, with its head office in Sydney. Infrastructure Australia is a streamlined organisation—we are making sure that there is no waste.

I will take the shadow minister to the offices, if he would like, to meet the many staff working for Infrastructure Australia. Infrastructure Australia—and we have said this to the opposition from the very beginning, but they just do not get it—is a coordinating body of Commonwealth, state and local governments and the private sector. If you go into Infrastructure Australia, you will see many workers seconded from state and territory governments working with expertise. That is why they have been seconded to work on the development of the infrastructure priority list. You will also see in Infrastructure Australia the Major Cities Unit. On Wednesday at a conference in Sydney on global cities I will be announcing the appointment of the head of the Major Cities Unit. A fine appointment is coming up.

Infrastructure Australia has made certain that we have had a considered approach to these issues. We have taken up these issues after more than a decade of neglect from those opposite. We have those opposite once again walking both sides of the street. They say now that they support infrastructure, but they do not support Infrastructure Australia. They attempt through this question to undermine the confidence that is out there in the business community, the federal government, the state governments and the local governments.

The last time I was at Infrastructure Australia I sat around the table with Infrastructure Australia board members, led by Sir Rod Eddington. People such as Mark Birrell, Heather Ridout and Ross Rolfe are dismissed by those opposite as not being relevant. Those people are making an outstanding contribution.

Mr Hockey—What have they done?

Mr ALBANESE—They have already met four times. They have met in conjunction with the Infrastructure Working Group. Once again, you have both arguments put. They dismiss it by saying, ‘What have they done?’ but, if on the other hand they had just plucked a list from thin air without any considered work or approach, the opposition would be critical of that as well. They will have a chance in coming weeks because we will have the BAF legislation before this parliament. Once again I predict we will see nitpicking around the sides because they do not really support nation building and they do not really support infrastructure development, and they showed that during their 12 long years of neglect.

**Nuclear Nonproliferation**

Mr PRICE (3.06 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Will the
minister update the House on action that Australia is taking to contribute towards nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament?

Mr STEPHEN SMITH—The government came to office last year with a very strong commitment to return Australia to the forefront of arguing in the international community for nuclear nonproliferation and nuclear disarmament—to return Australia to the forefront. Previous Australian Labor governments have had a very proud record in advancing nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament. And I choose my words carefully—‘previous Australian Labor governments’—because we know that those on the other side have displayed no interest in these matters, just as they have displayed no interest in the United Nations, as the previous question from the member for Goldstein made crystal clear.

The current government wants to take Australia’s rightful place and role arguing for these issues internationally, just as previous Labor governments have done with the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons and our strong support when last in office for the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. The current government is continuing in this very fine tradition. Last month, for example, in the margins of the UN General Assembly, I chaired the ministerial meeting on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, once again taking up the cudgels of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which is very much needed to advance the interests of nuclear disarmament and nuclear nonproliferation. The coming into force of the treaty is, in the government’s view, absolutely essential to advancing these very important interests. In addition, as members would recall, in June of this year, after his visit to Hiroshima, the Prime Minister announced the government’s intention to establish an International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament. And I make the point that the Prime Minister’s visit to Hiroshima was historic, the first such visit by an Australian Prime Minister. I am very pleased to indicate to the House that today the International Commission on Non-proliferation and Disarmament has its first meeting in Sydney, meeting today and tomorrow.

The commission is co-chaired by one of my distinguished predecessors, former foreign minister Gareth Evans, and former Japanese Foreign Minister Kawaguchi. The international commission is of very high quality, with a combination of international disarmament experts, former foreign ministers and leaders of their nations, including the former President of Mexico President Zedillo; the former Prime Minister of Norway Gro Harlem Brundtland; the former US Secretary of Defense William Perry, with whom I had the great pleasure in New York of discussing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty; and the former Indonesian foreign minister Mr Ali Alatas. We are very much looking forward to that commission doing very good work in this important area. To indicate the government’s very strong support of the commission, I am happy to announce today that the government, in the last month, have determined that we will allocate $3.8 million for the work of the commission in this financial year 2008-09.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr STEPHEN SMITH—We highly commend the actions of the international commission in its nuclear disarmament and nuclear nonproliferation work. I can tell from the interjections of those opposite, including those from the alleged shadow minister for the environment, that these are issues of no interest or relevance to the opposition, just as they were of no interest or relevance to them in their 10 long years in office.
Education Funding

Mr PYNE (3.10 pm)—My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education. I refer the Minister for Education to her computers in schools program. Minister, given that the Labor governments in the ACT and South Australia are simply replacing old computers with new and the New South Wales government has simply pulled out of Mr Rudd’s education revolution, will the minister now concede that the ‘computers on every desk’ policy was poorly thought through and that the education revolution has failed before the first shot has been fired?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the shadow minister for education for his question. I would possibly say to the shadow minister for education that, whilst he might think his job is all about overblown rhetoric, the error comes when you start believing it yourself—and you have made that error today. Perhaps the shadow minister for education might like to tell the 896 secondary schools who succeeded in round 1, with $116 million worth of support, that somehow this program is not working. That program is delivering 116,820 computers to those schools. Some of them are actually in the electorate of the member for Sturt, so he may want to go to those schools and say to them, ‘Well, this is of no benefit.’ But, interestingly, those schools applied, succeeded and got resources from the program. Of course, that was round 1. Round 2 has recently closed, and we had 1,420 schools across the nation apply for computers: 793 government schools, 342 independent schools and 285 Catholic schools. The shadow minister for education might want to say to those more than 1,400 schools that somehow this program is not working. They were invited to apply and did apply, because they want the resources that are available through the digital education revolution. We will process those applications and make announcements at a later stage about which schools have been successful. So round 1 has been completed—

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms GILLARD—with $116 million allocated to schools, something the Liberal Party laughs at: imagine giving $116 million to schools to assist them with computers! Doing something of benefit to schools is something that they cannot conceive. Because they did so little that benefited schools over 12 long years, it is beyond their comprehension.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I asked a question about the Labor Party’s trade-in policy on schools and computers, and I would ask the minister to come back to the question, which is—

The SPEAKER—The member will resume his seat.

Mr Pyne—has this policy—

The SPEAKER—The member will resume his seat.

Mr Bevis—You thought it was more important to give them a flagpole!

The SPEAKER—The Deputy Prime Minister is responding to the question.

Ms GILLARD—I think we can thank the member for Brisbane for the interjection of the day, possibly the interjection of the year! I say to the shadow minister for education that if he actually stopped talking for a second and started thinking he might want to consider that a program that has already delivered $116 million worth of computers to schools is a success. A program that in its second round has applications from all of 1,420 schools is a success. A program that will deliver $1.2 billion in new resources to bring computers and digital education tools to secondary schools around the country is a success.
I can understand why the shadow minister for education is asking questions like these: he knows that the former government left this nation with a legacy when it came to education that the Liberal Party should be ashamed of—falling backwards in international testing, less than 50 per cent of secondary students learning history, no national curriculum, employers and others complaining about the lack of quality in education and in grammar teaching and basic English language skills, no computers in schools program to make sure the children could learn with the learning tools of the 21st century, no Trades Training Centres in Schools Program to lift retention rates and retention rates which are poor by the standards of the OECD and our competitors. Yes, we have inherited an education system full of flaws and bearing the consequence of more than a decade of neglect. We have systematically set about bringing an education revolution to that system, including our digital education revolution, which has been welcomed by schools around the country. If any Liberal member wants to contact my office and say that they want to tell their schools to send the computers back, I will be very interested in their names.

Mental Health

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (3.16 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister: will the Prime Minister update the parliament on the government’s commitment to addressing mental health in Australia?

Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable member for Dobell for his question. Yesterday I had the privilege of walking with Andrew Johns on the beginning of his walk from Newcastle to Sydney. He is doing so in support of mental health and the great challenge which it presents to so many families and communities across Australia, but particularly in support of the great work done by the Black Dog Institute. They do a fantastic job in themselves, together with a number of other non-government organisations that work in this area. In fact, recently my wife, Therese, had Black Dog around at Kirribilli to celebrate some of the work that they are doing and to commend various of the businesses that have been supporting Black Dog as well.

Together with the member for Newcastle, yesterday we began this walk from the middle of Newcastle heading south. I piked after five kilometres; Andrew Johns is going for the rest of the week. But the important thing is this: it is showing and shining a search-light on this critical and undisclosed disease in our community, mental health. Here we are in the year 2008 and so many people still feel uncomfortable talking about it. Mental health is as real as any other form of so-called physical health and part of the problem of dealing with mental health challenges is to get people talking about them openly, talking about them candidly and talking about them as they would talk about any other disease which is affecting them, their families and their communities. But so much of the problem up until now has been this culture of silence. The time has come to lift the veil and I really commend the courage of Andrew Johns for being part and parcel—in fact a leader—in this community-led process, for causing us to have a genuine national conversation about mental health and about what to do about it. That goes to what to do about depression, bipolar disorder and so many of the other diseases which afflict so many Australians.

On the question of mental health, the government has increased its funding over the four years from 2008-09 to $783 million, compared with the $411 million which had been provided from 2004-05 to 2007-08. As part of that the government has a plan for perinatal depression—$85 million over five
years. In addition to that there is a $35 million program to support mental health nurses and psychologists training for those professions, through a particular subsidy. Government action is critical but community awareness is equally critical. Regrettably, so much of the undisclosed nature of mental health problems, mental illness and depression results in people across this country taking their lives because it remains a great disease of silence.

The great thing about Andrew Johns’s initiative and the great thing about so many other initiatives like it around the country is that we are throwing the doors open on this great scourge across our country. It is when people start talking about it, when you have government programs backing them up and when you have decent community organisations out there supporting them that we can make a difference. So my plea to all men and women of goodwill on all sides of politics—it does not matter which way you vote—is to get behind Andrew Johns’s walk all the way from Newcastle to Sydney. He is due to conclude on Friday. He is going to raise some money but on top of that raise community awareness that this is nothing to be embarrassed about. It is just like any other disease. It is important to talk about it and bring it out into the light. I commend his courage and his leadership in being out at the forefront of this national campaign.

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

**DOCUMENTS**

**Mr ALBANESE** (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.20 pm)—I note that the member for Sturt’s point of order today was the 500th this year from those opposite.

**Mr Pyne**—That’s irrelevant.

**Mr ALBANESE**—I am not sure; perhaps you should see the Manager of Opposition Business.

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The Leader of the House will present his documents.

**Mr ALBANESE**—Mr Speaker, documents are presented in accordance with the list circulated to honourable members earlier today. Details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings.

**EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2008**

Cognate bill:

**SCHOOLS ASSISTANCE BILL 2008**

**Second Reading**

Debate resumed.

**Mr TUCKEY** (O’Connor) (3.22 pm)—Mr Speaker, I hope you will remain to hear the bits of wisdom of which I intend to advise the government on this matter. Prior to question time I made the point, firstly, that when it comes to the funding of government schools, which are not included in this legislation, the Australian taxpayer contributes about 50 per cent through such taxes as the GST. In fact, whatever the activity of state governments it is typical that 50 per cent of their expenditures on whatever service is provided are funded through this parliament by the Australian taxpayer.

I also argued the case, just prior to question time, that there is a huge shortage of teaching staff in both the private and public sectors who are capable of teaching the higher levels of maths and other such subjects that are necessary to give young people the opportunity to enter university to study engineering, medicine and many other professions. In an experience known to me, an elite private school charging very significant fees talked a student into taking a lower standard of maths to ensure she got a higher TEE. When I heard this, I queried the University of WA as to whether this was a fact. The Vice-Chancellor replied, ‘Yes, we look at the TEE levels, but if the subjects by
which it has been earned are not of the necessary level for admission to these professions then the student does not get selected.’ The student, having done extremely well with her TEE levels, consequently had to take on an entirely different course from the one that she desired.

I made the point that, if this shortage of teachers exists, it is probably time for the government to give special consideration to any impediments to retired professionals coming back into schools to teach these special subjects on a part-time basis and being remunerated. That remuneration should not affect any of their other entitlements. *(Time expired)*

Mr CHEESEMAN (Corangamite) (3.25 pm)—Today I rise to speak on the Schools Assistance Bill 2008 and associated bill. The first bill is for an act to grant financial assistance for non-government primary and secondary education for the period of 2008-12 and for related purposes. Through new grants and funding structures such as the new national partnerships scheme, this government is improving the quality of education for both private schools and schools in low socio-economic communities. The Rudd government is reforming the education system to provide equality in a system that has been underfunded for too long. The debate has often been defined by the schools that ‘have’ versus the schools that ‘have not’, by private versus public, by traditional versus innovative and by the previous federal government versus the states. We are now heading into uncertain economic times and I note there has not been sufficient development in the education system since the early 1990s.

We have a responsibility in this economic climate to invest our best efforts into the education of individual students no matter what type of school they attend—whether it be public, private or Catholic. The Rudd government is committed to providing all schools with security and certainty through national school reform as a part of Labor’s education revolution. In supporting independent schools the government is retaining the current Commonwealth funding arrangements for the period 2009-12. Within these arrangements the socioeconomic status score funding model, the current indexation arrangement, will be maintained. In the long term the government is undertaking a review of funding arrangements which will include an extensive consultation process with all stakeholders. This legislation will contain a new accountability and performance-reporting framework for non-government schools and systems. This will bring independent schools in line with the framework proposed for government schools under the national education agreement which is currently being negotiated through the Council of Australian Governments.

This is an important reform of our education system, which we promised at the last election and are now delivering on. We are honouring our commitment made to the Australian people at the 2007 election. In the current economic climate, we cannot underestimate the importance of quality education and good schools to the nation’s future prosperity and social goals. This reform to our education system has not come too soon. Around the world today, governments are dealing with the most challenging global economic conditions in living memory. To give you an example, when considering the current economic climate, it is interesting to observe the effects of the last time we had serious economic upheavals. Observing school retention rates produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 1989, the secondary school retention rate was just 60 per cent. This rapidly increased for the three years to 1992, when 77 per cent of students...
It is easy just to cite figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, but, to emphasise the point, I was actually in school at that point. I was at Mount Clear Secondary College in the early nineties and I witnessed firsthand the drying up of jobs for unskilled labour. It was a common theme for a lot of the students that I went to school with that we stayed at school because job opportunities were no longer there. Some of my peers had elder siblings who had left school to undertake a trade, and those opportunities no longer existed by the time I reached that point in my life. There were a number of older students who returned to school because the employment opportunities that they had taken up had dried up as the international economy contracted.

One thing we need to keep in mind is that the Liberals in 12 years did nothing to reform our education system. Today’s challenges and tomorrow’s challenges must be dealt with through comprehensive legislation, and I believe this legislation does that. Be they secondary school leavers or graduates, we need to be able to provide all students with the skills to participate in a workforce dominated by tighter demands through this economic turmoil. This is not totally about fixing a system to accommodate unfortunate circumstances; this is also about fixing a system that has begun to fail school leavers and graduates in many circumstances. For instance, chapter 3 of the Economic survey of Australia 2008, published last week by the OECD, states:

… reading performance has deteriorated between 2003 and 2006 and a considerable gap in performance related to disadvantage remains.

The last decade has seen opportunity go missing. However, Labor are delivering on the promises that we took to last year’s federal election. We are not talking about core promises versus non-core promises, as the previous Liberal government did. We are talking about promises that we made to the people of Australia, and we will deliver on them in full. To borrow from the Prime Minister’s speech at the National Press Club on 27 August 2008:

This challenge is becoming increasingly complex as the balance of global strategic and economic power shifts to the Asia-Pacific region, as terrorism continues as a global and regional threat, and new challenges emerge such as energy security.

This is important, but we cannot do this if we cannot read or write. This government is committed to equipping students with literacy and numeracy skills so we can meet the modern and future challenges that face our country and our families. It is patently obvious that year 9 students who have difficulty with numeracy and literacy are more likely to leave school. It is our responsibility to equip every school leaver with the knowledge and skills they need to be able to tackle the demands of today’s and tomorrow’s society.

We cannot ignore the fact that nations in advanced and emerging industrial economies are investing in strategies for rapid educational improvement for their citizens. Australian enrolment rates in early childhood education are very low by international standards. In 2006 Australia maintained a 40 per cent enrolment rate as a percentage of the population aged between three and four. The OECD average was 70 per cent for the same period. Of greater concern is the fact that 30 per cent fewer Indigenous people reach year 12 qualifications in comparison to their non-Indigenous counterparts. Australia cannot take its high achievements for granted any longer. Overall, our progress as a nation has been held back by a long tail of underachievement at the bottom, with little support from the last government to address this. To
combat this, our aim is to raise year 12 retention rates to 90 per cent by 2020. We are going to halve the retention rate gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students by 2020. We are determined to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

This government is determined to make big improvements right across the board to bring an end to the culture of toleration—the idea that it is okay for some children from poorer homes and disadvantaged communities to be left behind in their education. This government has a responsibility to reform the education system and provide basic skills as well as a high level of education and critical skills for those individuals to be able to survive and prosper in our community. This government is committed to implementing an education revolution, which is obviously a policy agenda to significantly improve the quality of Australian schools. There is a need for school reform to assist education for disadvantaged communities, and this is also an opportunity, of course, to provide positive reform for schools that are doing well. I do not want to take away from the fact that many of Australia’s independent schools are achieving excellent results. All of the reforms that we are undertaking to assist students and schools and to create a national framework are available for all schools, whatever system they come from—whether they be independent, public or Catholic.

In the May budget we allocated $19.3 billion over the next four years for education initiatives. This includes a national curriculum for all students in English, maths, science and history—all very important and critical elements to any national curriculum. We also included a national Asian literacy program, which I think is a tremendous initiative that will give us the skills to respond to the growing opportunities that exist within Asia. We provided $1.2 billion for the digital education revolution, leading to the development of a world-class national curriculum and the rollout of trade training centres in schools throughout Australia. These initiatives are already well underway, with independent schools receiving over $12 million in funding to date. In my electorate, Trinity College Colac received 142 new computers. Over time, the digital education revolution will provide access to a computer for every student in year 9 through to year 12. This reform has been driven by new understandings about the best ways to improve educational outcomes.

A report by the McKinsey consultancy group titled How the world’s best-performing school systems come out on top and published in September of last year confirms the importance and significance of high-quality teaching within schools. It is obvious that we need the right people to become teachers in our communities. In Australia, the average starting wage of a teacher is 75 per cent of the wage that they will be earning in 15 years time, which is coincidentally also the peak. We need to develop the skills of educated people to become effective instructors. A great chef is not necessarily going to be a great teacher of apprentices. We need to recognise and reward good teachers and, where possible, direct the best teachers to where they are required to help educate the most disadvantaged communities. Through the new National Partnership on Quality Teaching this government will ensure that the best graduates are recruited, that the best teachers are rewarded, that school leadership is recognised and that excellent facilities are provided. Those resources will be directed to where they are required the most, irrespective of whether it is a government school or a non-government school.

Integral to the Rudd government’s reform of the education system is the establishment with the states of the National Schools As-
This government is providing $17.2 million for the National Schools Assessment and Data Centre, which will ensure effective program implementation. By analysing all data collected from educational institutions, from early learning centres through to secondary schools, we will be able to effectively direct resources where they are most needed. In order for this data to be accessible, from 1 January next year schools will be required to report on performance as part of the national education agreement. Within this framework parents will be able to see how their children are performing at school and how their school is performing for their children. In creating a standard format by which educational institutions can be assessed, there will be consistent reporting of data that is relevant to understanding the effectiveness of schools and educational providers.

There will be consistent data on student populations. There will be clear data on socioeconomic status numbers. There will be relevant data on Indigenous student numbers, students with disabilities and students who are learning English as a second language. Through these processes we can establish the differences that extra resources make. We can provide better information to parents and to students about their education and their educational provider. We can be better informed as a whole in assisting the future development of positive informed policy. This framework will give parents, the public and the government information about every school. We are creating a sound policy of equality in education standards. The same rules will apply to both public and private schools nationwide.

This government, unlike the last, has not been asleep at the wheel. The Labor Party went to the polls last year knowing full well what we were about to do—that is, to create an education revolution that would go across all school sectors. The government are intent on rebuilding the literacy and numeracy levels within our communities. We are intent on improving the quality of teaching and on providing a sound education system for both public and private sectors, with substantial improvements in educational outcomes. This is paramount to the current generation of students, who will need skills to meet the demands of the future. We have to equip all of our children, whether they be in public or private schools, with the education to improve their chances of having successful, rewarding and fulfilling lives. School reform is critical to cementing a sound future for Australia. I commend the bills to the House.

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (3.42 pm)—I rise to make a contribution to the bills before the parliament—the Schools Assistance Bill 2008 and the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008. I follow parliamentary colleagues with interest, and I particularly empathise with some of the newer members of parliament. The member for Corangamite, whom I wish well with his parliamentary career, is beset by one of the great challenges of being a new member of parliament—and that is being fitted up with speech material that the executive has provided. It fails the test of being the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It usually contains some very good debating points and is usually very good for rallying the troops at a Labor branch meeting, but it seems to gloss over many of the realities that are actually part of the debate. But the longer one has the honour and responsibility of representing a community in this place the more one becomes more alert to that and the more one does some of one’s own research just to try and make sure that the argument being put forward is rounded and reasonable.

This is something I draw into the debate today. These are an interesting combination of bills. This is actually the ’Mark Latham
insight package’. I remember when the current Prime Minister was amongst many in a cheer squad suggesting that Mark Latham would be a great Prime Minister for Australia. They were grim days for some in the Labor Party, and I acknowledge the counselling that followed for many after those difficult years. But at that time the then Labor opposition leader, supported by the current Labor leader, who is our Prime Minister, was running around the country with a hit list of schools. In some kind of throwback to divisive warfare between people claimed to be of privilege and people claimed not to be, we had a list of schools that were under attack and going to have their funding significantly reduced. Much has been said about these bills, but there is one undeniable truth—that is, they were inspired by insights gained when Mark Latham was the leader of the Labor Party. It was not a wise thing—in fact, in political terms, it was very courageous—to be open and frank with the Australian public about carving out significant funds of money from school communities.

These are school communities characterised as non-government school communities. These are school communities that, in addition to accepting the responsibility and challenge of creating an education institution that meets their ambitions and that focuses on the kind of curriculum outcome and the learning environment, develop a supportive, nurturing school community of the kind that people are prepared to commit not only themselves but also their resources to. They make a private decision to direct some of their personal income, over and above the taxes they pay, into providing a different kind of school opportunity for their children.

The debate, which I had hoped was long past, said that having made that decision—having chosen to use some of their own family’s personal income to direct those resources to the education of their children—should not immediately make parents incapable of receiving assistance that would be available to other parents for the education of their children. What was needed was a system to put in place how to calibrate that level of support. What emerged was the SES system, a model that took account of the wealth and income—primarily the income—of census collector districts in neighbourhoods where the students who attended those schools came from and then used that as a relevant proxy to calculate what was an adequate level of funding for those non-government schools. Something that is often overlooked is that people often forget that under any circumstances under the application of that model you would find that even the poorest Australian families, who go without much to support a decision to send their child to a non-government school, were not going to receive more than 70 per cent of the funding that went towards the education of a student from one of the wealthier Australian families who happened to be attending a government school. This is an interesting thing to appreciate—that no matter how impoverished a family may be, the level of assistance the Australian taxpaying community and governments provided would never exceed 70 per cent compared to funding available in government schools. This was the context. So the SES model that was put forward had that sensitivity to the income levels of the neighbourhoods from which students were derived so that those from wealthier neighbourhoods might receive as little as 30 per cent of the funding available for the education of their child from government sources compared to the situation if that child were attending a government school. That also said to students coming from poorer communities that the school community which they attended would benefit from getting a higher level of funding than if the students had come from wealthier
neighbourhoods. It also said to schools, perhaps in wealthier communities or perhaps blessed with students from wealthier families, that it was in those school communities’ interests to embrace scholarships and opportunities for those from a less fortunate background, as not only would that enrich and broaden the population within the school community but there would be some financial encouragement for it as well. This was the notion.

Mark Latham thought he would take an axe to that scheme; he would pick out a handful of school communities. No-one really quite understood how he arrived at the ones he did. I know that, in my electorate of Dunkley, school communities that had been working very hard for decades to establish themselves were in the gun sights. School communities like the Peninsula School—a school that the late Sir Philip Lynch was heavily involved with and that has prided itself on being integrated with its local community—which was one of those in the gun sights, could not quite work out why. Having worked so hard to establish itself and to get itself onto a viable financial footing, under a Mark Latham Labor government it was going to be rewarded for that enterprise and effort—for that thoughtfulness and efficiency in which it had developed that very impressive school community—by being cut off at the knees. You can imagine the non-government school community was outraged.

Political parties are learning animals. To the Labor Party’s credit, it realised that, if it were going to run the ‘me too’ microscopic differences between Labor and the Liberals leading up to the last election, to position Kevin Rudd, our current Prime Minister, as ‘John Howard lite’, it needed to make as few of these highly contentious and divisive debates as it could. So it went to the electorate saying: ‘Look, we’re going to pretty much keep the funding system that’s there. We’ll go around the countryside bagging the daylights out of it. We’ve got speaker after speaker being highly critical—and then some!—of it at the time of its introduction, but we’ll just leave it and we’ll say to those parents and those non-government school communities, “Rest safely; there is no fear in having the Labor Party elected, because we will maintain the SES funding model.”’ That was the pitch that was put to the Australian public. And this is what is embedded in this bill. The bill seeks to carry forward that election commitment and to provide the framework for which $28 billion will be apportioned between non-government primary and secondary schools in Australia from 2009 to 2012.

But what is also embedded within this bill is that it seeks to give effect to an assurance that nothing will change if you are a non-government school community participant—parent, student, teacher—with Prime Minister Rudd at the helm. That was the reassurance. Yet all of the foundations for bringing about an enormous change are embedded in this bill. This is the Trojan Horse that non-government school communities have woken up to. The only endearing feature that many in the non-government school community can point to is that those little ticking time bombs have not been activated yet and that there was an election assurance that not much would change, but while the funding triennium works its way through it seems as though everything may change and the non-government school community has many things to be concerned about. So not much will change, but Labor are setting it all up so that they can turn this funding system on its head, and that is what is causing great concern to the opposition and to the non-government school community.

The non-government school community is very diverse, and few that have not been part
of it would understand how diverse it is. You often hear in the debate references to King’s and all these high-profile, quite remarkable school communities where those critical of non-government school systems try to point to those exceptions and say they are the rule. They are exceptional and they are exceptions. For the vast majority of school communities in the non-government school sector life is very different. It is not a debate about what project of an outstanding quality to invest in next in terms of improvement in facilities and the like; it is about how you sustain the quality of the education that you are offering. You see many selfless, tireless parents in the non-government school community commit weeks and weeks, weekend after weekend, to fundraising effort after fundraising effort to make sure that the school community they are so committed to can continue to prosper and hopefully grow and flourish in the years ahead. So when we talk about the non-government school it is important to understand there are different kinds of non-government schools. The SES model introduced by the Howard government sought to identify that.

This bill seeks to carry it forward in some kind of Trojan Horse, and embedded within that Trojan Horse are a number of specific areas of concern. The first of these, which a number of colleagues have highlighted, is that there are changes to the grounds upon which the minister can refuse or delay payment. It talks about qualified audit reports as an example, without going into the fact that you can have a whole range of reasons for qualifications on the audit report that may have absolutely nothing to do with the long-term viability of the school community’s capacity to carry forward its school curriculum. That is issue No. 1.

Issue No. 2 is a new requirement that states comply with the yet-to-be-seen, yet-to-be-finalised, capital ‘N’ national, capital ‘C’ curriculum. This is quite interesting, because there is quite a lot of debate going on at this moment about the formulation of the national curriculum and a number of my colleagues have pointed to some of the interesting aspects involved in that exercise. I will not offer a commentary on the input other than to say that never has there been a more important body of work that should involve the broader school community than the national curriculum.

I contacted principals of non-government schools in my electorate. One of the things they said was that it is hard to know quite what that particular funding requirement will mean—the degree of specificity that may be in that national curriculum and the scope for an independent school to remain and retain the word ‘independent’. Are they going to have the opportunity, as happens in many jurisdictions, to work within an approved educational framework that also provides them with the scope to apply the pedagogy, the practice, the learning styles and techniques, the professional insights and the innovations that are at the heart of independent schools? Are they in fact going to be able to retain the ‘independent’ bit of the independent school tag? This is not known. We do not know at this stage whether compliance or strict adherence to the national curriculum will allow scope and flexibility in the years to come to those that choose an alternative curriculum that is highly credible and deemed to satisfy other framework arrangements. This is something of great concern. This is about making sure that ‘independent’ stays in the independent school community so that they can proceed with that innovation, so that they can address particular learning challenges and student needs in the way that they see fit, so that they can innovate and so that they can provide the kind of responsiveness and insight and particular attentiveness to their student population that
have attracted so many in the Australian public to have their students attend non-government schools. That is a particular concern.

Another one is the additional reporting requirements for schools, particularly in relation to funding sources. The new section 24(1) in this bill provides a new basis for which schools will need to provide information to the minister without actually disclosing how that information will be used. This is another one of these troubling Trojan Horse elements. It seems to actually invite participating non-government schools to provide the very material that they will then be fitted up with in whatever the post-SES framework will look like. It is unclear what the motive is in the legislation and explanatory memorandum. But if you look at some of the speeches that have been made about the SES model, and even if you listen to some of the members that are making their contributions here, you start to get a sense that there will be a new basis on which funding will be allocated, yet to be described, yet to be defined, but with some new definition of ‘need’.

Need is a good starting position, and that is what the SES model sought to address, but the complexity and composition of non-government schools and the nature of their activity make some of the glib, simplified, rhetoric-inspired notions that seem to be put forward to substitute for the SES very worrying indeed. What are the grounds that will be now explored through additional reporting requirements—reporting requirements that do not have any utility in relation to the funding model and structure as it stands, but information that will be harvested nonetheless for an application that many in the non-government school community are quite worried about? What will be made of school communities that offer extracurricular activity—some of the commitments to sports and the arts that are part of the comprehensive curricular and learning offering that non-government schools provide?

Will we get back to the old ERI—the educational resource index—days of the former Labor government, where someone tried to run around and find any avenue or source of resources that might come into the school? You started to see non-government schools overseeing conglomerates of different business enterprises as they tried to present the material in a credible way, given that that was what was encouraged of them through the ERI. What do you do about those sporting commitments? What do you do about programs of excellence—about music, about extracurricular activities and about participation in cadets? These are things that some would say are bolted on, but in many non-government schools they are integrated in the full engagement and involvement that parents and students are expected to make—or is this the Trojan Horse of the Victorian model, where a base rate is applied and then there is some justification for wiggling that one way or another or adding on other things? This is not clear. This is why the non-government school community are nervous and this is why they have written to the minister. The AISV has written to the minister seeking to have a dialogue about these things, because so much about this bill is not explained. We have the comfort that we will keep things going as they are but also a Trojan Horse where so many other motives, and not all of them terribly positive motives, seem to be given life in these provisions that we are debating today.

Then there is the removal of the new non-government schools establishment grants. I had a quick ring around the school communities in my area—particularly those that are in a formative stage and are just starting to take enrolments—and I am hopeful that they will not be disadvantaged. This is a throwback to
the old new schools policy of the former Labor government, under which there were no new schools. It was a euphemism. They had a new schools policy which did all it could to discourage the establishment of new schools.

Let us look at some practical examples. I have touched on the concerns about how adherence to the national curriculum may or may not work and how there is a desperate need for the non-government and broader teaching community to be more involved in that exercise. Many of them referred me to examples of where they felt as if they were just bystanders hearing about and learning of things through the media. They were not clear about how that was going to evolve. They were not opposed to the general idea, but they were wondering how they could be a part of it so that their interests and their school community’s objectives could be addressed and incorporated.

There were other issues. I will give you one example. There is a remarkable school community in the electorate of Dunkley. This is St Anthony’s Coptic Orthodox College in Frankston North, a school community that purchased a disused former state government primary school and over the last 13 years has established a P-to-12 curriculum in stages, meeting all the academic requirements for them and achieving very impressive academic outcomes for their students. They now have over 300 students commuting from as far away as Melbourne, some 45 kilometres away, to attend this school community, where their Coptic Orthodox faith is embedded in a very credible and highly valued educational experience for the families and students that attend.

This school community spends about $600,000 a year on transport, as it brings 300 of its 320 students to that learning institution in Frankston North each day. How will that be viewed? Will that be viewed as some displacement of resources? Will this community be penalised because of the transport levy that is imposed on its students, which is not a small amount? It is important that those students have the opportunity to be educated in the way that their family and they aspire to. I admire what Father Daniel Ghabrial and all of the team at St Anthony’s Coptic Orthodox College are doing. I hope that they will not be penalised for offering a door-to-door transport service for a population catchment that probably has about 1.5 million to two million people in it, of whom 300 make that journey to Frankston North every day. Their fundraising efforts should not be penalised. (Time expired)

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (4.02 pm)—I rise to support the Schools Assistance Bill 2008 and the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008. One of the joys of sitting in the Speaker’s chair for much of the day is that you get to hear lots of speeches. I have listened to quite a few on this legislation today. I listened to the member for Dunkley, the member for Kalgoorlie and the member for O’Connor, and the constant criticism was that we on the Labor side are the ones who create this ‘them and us’ mentality within the education system. But all of those speeches were about creating a ‘them and us’ system.

What those opposite are saying is this: ‘Parents out there whose children are at non-independent schools—government schools—are bad. They are obviously rotten parents. They are obviously bad parents because they are not sacrificing enough because they are sending their children to government schools. They are not doing enough to support those government schools.’ Everybody in this place knows that that just is not true. Everybody on the opposition side goes to countless fundraisers at government schools.

I spent my weekend at two of my fantastic schools. The Mont Albert Primary School
had an art show on Friday night. It was out of this world. It was put on by three of the parents. They got some phenomenal artists. Out of the sale of the art that was on display at the Mont Albert Primary School, a state government school, they raised much needed funds. The school supports a whole lot of recently arrived migrants who are not able to attend the school because they are in a bridging visa E situation and they are not eligible to be within the state school system because they are non-residents. The school will continue to support those kids through the funds raised, as well as giving much needed facilities to the school. The art show was held in a hall that was built through funds raised by the parents over years at the Mont Albert fete.

On Saturday, I went to Our Lady’s Primary School in Wattle Park, a local Catholic primary school that was having its annual fete. It is one of the big things in the neighbourhood. Annually, you run into literally everybody at the fete at Our Lady’s. I ran into all my nephews, I ran into my mother, I ran into my brother and his son and I ran into half the kids and parents from my school, the Wattle Park Primary School. It is a great day and we go to the fete because we want to support education in our electorate. We do not divide; we support education.

I am really over the opposition bemoaning parents who send their children to all sorts of schools, because it is wrong. There are parents out there struggling day in, day out to send their children to independent, non-independent and government schools, to send their children to TAFE and to send them off to university. They should not be lambasted for not having the resources or the desire to send their child to an independent school.

I am not going to bag independent schools; I went to one. I am a proud product of the Catholic school system. I praise my parents, who sent their five kids to Catholic schools from prep to HSC. Think about it: my dad was a bank teller. He did not have a lot of money. And my mum only returned to the workforce much later in life to teach within the Catholic education system. We are proud of that. We are proud of the fact that they then managed to send five of their children, the first generation, to university. It would never have happened unless we had had Labor governments, because we are the ones who introduced support for non-government schools. I am sorry: I am sick of the ‘them and us’ argument, and it is the opposition that keeps running with it.

The Rudd government came to office last year on a platform that highlighted several key areas in which to invest significant resources. On top of the agenda was introducing an education revolution to the Australian schooling system. We made a commitment to the Australian public that we would develop a new educational framework for investment and reform in Australian schools. Through 2008, we have been working towards that goal, setting the foundations for Australia to be at the forefront of educational outcomes into the future. Already we are beginning to see tangible components of the education revolution throughout Australia, with computers being rolled out in schools, new trades centres being planned and an education tax refund available for expenses that have occurred since July of this year.

The Rudd government also made a commitment to right the wrongs of the past and made Indigenous reconciliation a focal point of its tenure in office. The commitment of this government to the issue was made clear when the Prime Minister formally apologised to Indigenous Australians for the oppressive laws and policies of former Australian governments. One of the key messages to arise from the apology was that reconciliation
through apology and acknowledgement, while vitally important, is not enough on its own. The Prime Minister committed the government to closing the gaps that exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in key areas such as education.

It is in the context of these two interconnecting issues that I address the chamber today regarding the Schools Assistance Bill 2008 and the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008. Throughout the years of the Howard government, school funding was delivered without regard for overall quality and with little strategic framework. The Rudd government has rightly positioned education at the forefront of its agenda and will implement measures that will achieve fairer educational outcomes. A world-class educational system is pivotal to Australia’s economic and social future. It is imperative that we invest now to ensure the continued economic and social progression of our nation and that we put in place a framework from which our schools can achieve world-class outcomes.

The Schools Assistance Bill will appropriate $28 billion for non-government schools for the years 2009-12. This bill is part of the Rudd government’s minimum $42 billion commitment for schools funding during this period. This bill is in keeping with the government’s election commitment for non-government schools during 2009-12, and it will give certainty for funding for non-government schools, focus on quality and apply transparency and accountability requirements that are consistent with those for government schools. Let me reiterate that: these are things that we already require government schools to provide. It should not be an impost on non-government schools to provide them, and we are giving them certainty into the future. I certainly know from talking to the staff of the fantastic non-government schools in my electorate—Avila College, Emmaus College, Huntingtower School, Kingswood College, Mount Scopus Memorial College, Our Lady of Sion College, PLC, St Andrews Christian College and Wesley College—that they are all appreciative of the certainty of the funding.

A perpetual focus of Australia’s schooling debate for many years has been the competitive relationship between government and non-government schools. This debate stems from concepts that are somewhat misguided. There are schools from both sectors that struggle with limited resources as they attempt to serve the community. This government has signalled that it is time to move on from the past debates about the funding of government and non-government schools. Instead, we have committed to put our energy into improving the quality of school education for all students. We have indicated the need to take a national approach to our schools through a comprehensive strategy that aims to achieve higher quality in all applicable areas. One of the schools in my electorate that I mentioned, St Andrews Christian College, is a school that started from nothing and is now a growing, vibrant school. They are facing uncertainty because the land they are currently renting from Vision Australia has been sold from under them. This is a certainty in a very uncertain time for the school community of 300. By the end of 2009, they will have no home to locate to. I am working hard with the school because it is a vibrant school that many parents in my electorate choose to send their children to in order to enjoy that community. You are not going to go out there and say, ‘You are a bad school because you are a non-government school.’ We are working with all our schools, and I want to assure the community at St Andrews that, hopefully, we will be able to resolve this situation that is getting a bit stark.

To achieve this goal, the Rudd government is working with the Council of Australia
lian Governments, COAG, to develop aspirations and policy directions that will set the framework for investment and reform as we move towards a world-class education system. This will result in a national education agreement, which will be finalised through COAG by the end of this year. This COAG reform agenda will result in all governments in Australia working together to improve outcomes for all children through agreement to a single set of objectives, outcomes and outputs which will deliver consistent schooling across the whole of Australia. Again, I am not sure why there is concern about national consistency. At the end of the day—at year 12—that is what we already have because that is the set of standards that most kids apply to when they are looking for their end result. In Victoria it is the dreaded TER result. Nowadays it seems you have to get 99.9 to get anywhere in this life, and if you are not going to crack the old 99.9 it seems to be fairly devastating. Most schools work towards that final agenda, because those exams—in Victoria it is the SACs—are all set at the same level. Schools are already working towards a basic curricular formula.

We are not going to implement something that is one size fits all, because we do recognise that, within certain school sectors, the religious nature of the school will form a requirement of what they teach. I know that at Mount Scopus Memorial College, the largest Jewish school in the country, the study of Hebrew is probably high on people’s agendas. It certainly is within that school, and we will continue to respect that. This national education agreement will allow the government to tackle its three major priorities for reform: raising the quality of teaching in our schools; ensuring all students are benefiting from schooling, especially in disadvantaged communities; and improving transparency and accountability of schools and school systems at all levels. The $28 billion Schools Assistance Bill is a major building block in constructing a national framework for schooling that meets Labor’s election commitments.

Non-government schools in my electorate will welcome the introduction of this bill to parliament. Chisholm is home to many non-government schools, as I have said, that will feel reassured by the funding stability the bill offers by maintaining SES funding and indexation arrangements, one of our 2007 election commitments. Chisholm is an extremely diverse and multicultural electorate. My constituents will therefore welcome the fact that this bill targets funding for the teaching of languages other than English, with a commitment of $56.4 million over the next four years for the teaching of Asian, European and Australian Indigenous languages in non-government schools. This bill will also provide $43 million over the next four years for the English as a Second Language—New Arrivals Program to ensure newly arrived migrant and refugee school students receive support in learning English. These commitments will be well received in Chisholm, as will the government’s continued commitment to the key areas of numeracy and literacy.

An important reform to stem from this bill is the creation of consistent education reporting and accountability across all schools and sectors. Collecting and reporting on a comprehensive range of school information is critical to ensuring a fair and effective school system and for identifying and addressing the needs of students at risk of educational disadvantage. Greater school accountability was a theme that Labor heavily emphasised prior to the 2007 election. It is a theme we will now deliver on through this bill with the implementation of a simple and strong system of performance information reporting. This bill will see schools deliver high-quality accountability and reporting in a manner that
will be far less burdensome than previous arrangements. It will significantly reduce much of the red tape that resulted from reporting obligations imposed by the former government and will focus on five key areas: national testing, participation in a national report on the outcomes of schooling, provision of individual school information, provision of reports to parents and the publication of information by schools.

My endearing nine-year-old got her AIMS test recently for the grade 3 standards. She dutifully informed me how she compared against everybody else in the class, so do not think it does not go on. She knew where she fitted into that band, and she was a bit devastated that her best friend, Clare, got a couple of better scores than she did. So it is not just us who look at these things and want to understand them; it is actually our children too. Even though she had done brilliantly across the board, and I tried to emphasise to her strongly that she really did not have any worries, she went away feeling that she was not quite good enough in spelling.

It is important that government receive detailed school-level data in order to target resources more effectively in areas of need. The community cannot have a proper, fully informed debate about whether or not schools are funded adequately without information about the needs and capacities which children bring to each school and how well the school is equipped to meet those needs. Parents in my electorate of Chisholm will welcome easy-to-understand, meaningful reporting on how their child is progressing at school and how their school is performing in comparison to others. This will equip parents in my electorate with the evidence they need to make informed decisions regarding their children’s schooling. As mentioned, it will also assist the government in identifying areas where additional assistance is required. These same requirements will also apply to government schools, meaning that every parent in Chisholm will have access to the same level of information relevant to their children’s education. This does not mean league tables.

This legislation sees the government honour its election commitments to non-government schools. However, it is important to note that the government will, of course, deliver Commonwealth funding to public schools. This will occur with the arrival of the national education agreement mentioned previously, which the government is working on through the COAG processes. This will result in three important new agreements for schools which will improve teacher quality, improve literacy and numeracy standards and assist disadvantaged schools and communities to achieve desired outcomes.

Constituents in my electorate are well aware of the importance of Indigenous reconciliation and closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Many of the schools in Chisholm actively celebrated the Rudd government’s apology in the first sitting week of parliament this year. Whilst I do not have an Indigenous community within my electorate, I do have two non-government schools, Avila College and Wesley College, which actively support Indigenous education in other areas. Wesley College is actively trying to preserve a couple of Indigenous languages—they are being taught and fostered within the school—and they are assisting a remote community with creating a dictionary for Indigenous language. So people in my electorate will be welcoming these measures.

A central element of this bill is the provision of additional funding estimated at $5.4 million for all non-government schools where 80 per cent or more of the students are Indigenous and for non-government schools
in remote areas where 50 per cent or more of the students are Indigenous. These schools often serve some of the country’s most disadvantaged children, and it is therefore vital they receive significant support from the government.

This bill amalgamates several separate components of funding for schools with Indigenous students that were previously funded under the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act. The Rudd government will provide an estimated $239 million over four years under this newly combined Indigenous funding guarantee and Indigenous supplementary assistance. The government’s commitment to improving the education standards of Indigenous Australians through this bill aligns with our commitment to closing the gap between the educational outcomes of Indigenous Australians and those of non-Indigenous Australians.

It is on the issue of Indigenous education that I come to the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008, which will amend the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000. These new arrangements will result in more funding being provided to Indigenous students by the Rudd government, with more than $500 million being appropriated between 2009 and 2012 for Commonwealth-led initiatives and partnerships.

Initiatives such as the Sporting Chance Program will be maintained through this bill. It will provide support to the expansion of literacy and numeracy programs for Indigenous students and offer professional development support to assist teachers in developing individual learning plans for Indigenous students. This bill will see the Northern Territory receive an additional 200 teachers and three new boarding colleges for Indigenous secondary school students—and, from listening to previous speakers, I know this will be welcome. This bill will dramatically reduce red tape and improve flexibility for education providers to focus on closing the gap in the education outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The changed arrangements for schools will provide greater flexibility in how they support Indigenous education to achieve agreed outcomes.

The vitally important goals of halving the gap in literacy and numeracy achievement, halving the gap in year 12 or equivalent attainment and halving the gap in employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians are key priorities for the Rudd government. We are working with government and non-government education and training providers to meet these goals. The introduction of this bill can make a significant contribution to closing these educational gaps, which are crucial to improving outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

Prior to the 2007 federal election, Labor committed to undertaking an education revolution and to introducing reform aimed at closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The two bills I have spoken about today are at the core of these issues and the Rudd government’s agenda for a better Australia. The implementation of these bills will allow us to move forward confidently and work towards a world-class educational system that is supportive, fair and structured to dramatically improve the educational fortunes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians alike. Both bills will receive the support of my constituents in Chisholm. I commend the bills to the House.

Mr IRONS (Swan) (4.19 pm)—I acknowledge the member for Chisholm. As a youngster, I attended Kerrimuir Primary School, along with the member for Casey, and went to Mont Albert Primary School for sports days. I certainly do not want to punish my parents for sending me to those primary schools.
Of the two bills the House is considering today, I rise to support the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 and to oppose the Schools Assistance Bill 2008. The Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 amends the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000. The bill focuses on simplifying the legislative arrangements for Commonwealth funding of schools with a high proportion of Indigenous students. It appropriates more than $640.5 million for non-Abstudy payments and anticipates Abstudy payments of an estimated $102.1 million, an amount that will be adjusted as per demand. There is a significant Indigenous population in my electorate that would benefit from this legislation. Census statistics show that in 2006 there were 1,229 Indigenous persons below the age of 19 in Swan. The coalition is committed to improving educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians and will be supporting the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008.

The bill I oppose today is the Schools Assistance Bill. I am concerned not only with the practicality of the components of this bill but also with its dangerous ideological underpinnings. The Schools Assistance Bill 2008 was introduced to the House last month following the expiry of the Schools Assistance (Learning together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004. The bill will appropriate $28 billion to provide funding for non-government schools from 1 January 2009 to 31 December 2012.

I am pleased to note that Commonwealth funding for non-government schools remains essentially unchanged. In 2008-09 an estimated 67 per cent, or $6.4 billion, of Commonwealth funding for schools will be provided to non-government schools. The government has also retained the socioeconomic status—SES—funding regime, which it rightly conceded during the 2007 federal election campaign was the will of the people.

On the surface, therefore, it may seem that the government has retained the coalition’s policy of support for non-government schools. Indeed, on 9 October, the member for Lalor claimed:

For too long the debate about schools was diverted into unproductive avenues.

The true target of our efforts must be individual students no matter which type of school they attend.

… … …

… we are moving beyond the traditional and discredited focus of schooling debate in Australia; the debate that revolved around competition between sectors and failed to focus on the realities of need and outcome across all sectors.

Fine words. However, as I will point out later in this speech, they are not entirely honest words. Behind the cloak of bipartisanship and pragmatism this bill gives clear suggestions that the Rudd government is planning to replace the SES with the Australian Education Union’s favoured and discredited ERI model. I will return to this topic later in my speech.

Before I outline the components of the bill that I object to I would like to reflect on the importance of non-government schools to Australia and in particular to my electorate of Swan. Recent statistics show that in 2007 a total of 29.9 per cent of primary school enrolments were made at non-government schools. At secondary school level, 33.6 per cent of total enrolments were at non-government schools. In my electorate of Swan, the latest statistics from the state government show that approximately 49 per cent of all enrolments this year were in non-government schools. This breakdown shows a total of 45 per cent of primary school enrolments and 56 per cent of secondary school enrolments at non-government schools. There is thus a greater proportion of non-
government schools in my electorate compared to the national average.

This bill is clearly of importance to the many parents and children in my electorate and it is with this in mind that I will express my objections to the bill. I have spent considerable time meeting with parents in my electorate, and they are extremely critical of the Labor state’s curriculum. But they are more concerned that a national curriculum will be heavily weighted to a left-wing education overseen by a communist and will punish non-government schools for participating in the infrastructure developments of their schools. I am concerned by the inclusion of a new provision by which the minister may delay or refuse to authorise payment to a government school. This new provision is detailed in section 15(c) of the bill and states that the minister may intervene in this matter if:

... a law of the Commonwealth or a State requires the body or authority to be audited—the relevant audit:

(i) is expressed to be qualified; or

(ii) expresses concern about the financial viability of the body or authority.

In my experience there are not many audit reports that do not have some sort of qualification in them. The wording of this provision is at present too broad. General points or qualifications by an auditor meant to assist the school in its financial planning could automatically allow the minister to delay payment. Such a provision is likely to put undue pressure on auditors and schools alike to come up with the ‘correct result’ and reduce vital transparency in the auditing industry.

Secondly, I am deeply troubled by the new requirement that schools comply with the national curriculum. As honourable members will no doubt know, part of the Rudd government’s education revolution has been to develop a national curriculum in four subjects: English, mathematics, science and history. Personally, I support a national curriculum. I think that it is a fantastic idea. Requiring non-government schools to abide by a national curriculum is inappropriate. It is likely to prevent Australian citizens from taking internationally respected qualifications such as the International Baccalaureate or the University of Cambridge International Examinations, as non-government schools will find it difficult to comply with the national curriculum whilst continuing to teach within their chosen curriculum in other areas.

Similarly, it is likely that alternative educational philosophies, such as Perth Montessori School’s in my electorate of Swan, will face similar difficulties in meeting the requirements of this clause. The Perth Montessori School is based in the suburb of Burswood. Montessori education is centred on the child, with the Montessori ‘director’—or teacher—guiding rather than teaching. They are facilitators in the process of learning. The Montessori director presents the information to the child in a climate of mutual respect. By following and observing the child the Montessori director can recognise and respond to each child’s individual needs. Development of self-esteem, tolerance, mutual respect and concern for others are traits that are nurtured in a Montessori environment. In May I had the pleasure of presenting a flag to the Perth Montessori School and was fortunate enough to be given a tour of the school by principal Gary Pears. I saw for myself the benefits of their different educational approach. The school would simply not be able to function if a national curriculum were forced upon it. Diversity breeds strength, and this legislation would homogenise.

To enforce a national curriculum is to restrict parental choice and to restrict competition in the marketplace. According to an article in the *Australian* newspaper on 8 October...
2008, education is Australia’s third biggest export, worth $13.7 billion, after coal and iron ore. We cannot afford to become uncompetitive in the global market for skills, which is what this provision will propagate. This argument on its own is enough for one to seriously question the wisdom of the national curriculum provision. When one takes into account the initial steps the Rudd government has taken towards its creation, the argument becomes compelling.

The formation of the history curriculum is to be overseen by Professor Stuart Macintyre, a former Communist Party member whose major works include histories of Marxism in Britain and a history of the Australian Communist Party. I ask you, Mr Deputy Speaker: is this professor likely to provide a balanced and accurate history of Australia for the learning of our future generations? Last week the framing document for the English curriculum was released. Whilst the back to basics approach is welcome, the inclusion of critical literacy means we must reserve a decision until the full document is released. The English curriculum is being written by Professor Peter Freebody, a leading advocate of critical literacy in English courses. According to Professor Freebody:

Literacy education is not about skill development, not about deep competence.

This is not a message I would want my son to be taught under, and yet this is the man who, if Kevin Rudd has his way, will dictate what every school child in our country must learn. These choices by the Rudd government show that Labor cannot be trusted to decide on a national curriculum for our government sector, let alone our non-government sector.

Thirdly, I would like to draw attention to the additional reporting requirements for schools, particularly in relation to funding sources, that this bill would lead to. Section 24(1) of the bill indicates that the minister will be given substantial new powers to demand information about the internal financial affairs of a school community. Schools in my electorate would have to disclose details about fundraising events, scholarship funds and even PTA meetings and chook raffles, a time-honoured tradition in Australia. Similar to the first provision I spoke about, this places a high red-tape burden upon schools. Non-government schools should be focusing on providing a quality education to their students and not spending resources preparing costly reports for the federal government.

More seriously, though, this is an unwarranted intrusion into the affairs of schools and has significant implications for privacy. Parents should be encouraged to contribute, not discouraged from contributing, extra funds towards their child’s education. Can the government tell me that they do not want a group of interested parents investing in the infrastructure and, more importantly, in the safety of their children’s school? Does investing in infrastructure and the safety of the school have to be done only by the state? Why would the curriculum budget be slashed because individuals want to improve the infrastructure of a school? Why? The only reason I can think of is the politics of envy. The only other explanation for why the government would seek this information is that it is planning to return to the union-favoured ERI funding system, which has no basis in fairness. The Labor Party wants to build up its database of sensitive financial information and ultimately use it to restrict funding to many non-government schools in my electorate. I will go into this further later in my speech.

Another objection refers to the removal of the non-government schools establishment grants. The Howard government saw merit in increasing the viability of the non-government sector and encouraging new
schools where community demand and private sector interest warranted it. This was crystallised in the new non-government schools establishment grants. Sadly, section 100 of this bill only makes provision for those schools approved in 2008 to receive grants in 2009. This amounts to a phasing out of the coalition’s new non-government schools establishment grants. The Labor government would appear to be returning to the ideological position taken in their new schools policy, and ultimately this will make it increasingly difficult to set up a new non-government school.

Having stated my specific objections to the aspects of this policy, I would like to consider in more detail the ideological underpinnings of this Labor bill—in particular, the danger to the SES funding model. The Howard government established the SES, or socioeconomic status, approach in 2001. The SES model, rather than asking parents intrusive questions about their income and other personal information, links student addresses with the ABS census data on three variables: income, education and occupation. The resulting socioeconomic index is then converted into an SES score for each school. The SES scores are then compared to the average amount it takes to educate a child in Australia. Non-government schools which draw students from high socioeconomic areas are then provided with a lower percentage of this average than non-government schools which draw students from lower economic areas.

The SES works well. It is a discrete, clear and simple mechanism for distributing federal funding. The SES legislation package also guaranteed that federal funding would not be reduced for any single non-government school. Many parents make significant sacrifices to be able to send their children to schools that reflect the values they hold or specialise in programs in which their children excel. The SES model reflects government’s appropriate role in enabling those parents to make the choices that are best for their family and for their child.

The union-favoured ERI model is flawed. The model, used from 1985 to 2000, primarily measured the ability of a given school to generate funds by itself. It then took the discrepancy between this figure and a standard level of resources based on government school per-student cost to determine the level of government assistance. The model was widely criticised as too complicated, susceptible to manipulation and generally a disincentive to private effort. The funding achieved by a given school depended to a large extent on how familiar it was with the funding model and frequent changes to the formula. Many schools sought financial advice from specialist ERI advisers or accounting firms. This was a difficult cost to bear for many non-government schools and was clearly inequitable. Finally, the ERI method was an overwhelming disincentive for schools to raise income. The ERI reporting requirements meant that increases in a school’s private income could raise a school’s ERI score and reduce its federal funding. Even goods provided free of charge had a monetary value placed on them. In this way the ERI became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Despite their policy backflip to keep the SES to appease voters at the last election, it is clear that the Labor government have ideological objections to the SES model. In 2000 the member for Lalor was quoted as saying:

The last objection to the SES model is more philosophical, that the model makes no allowance for the amassed resources of any particular school. As we are all aware, over the years many prestige schools have amassed wealth—wealth in terms of buildings and facilities, wealth in terms of … alumni funding raising, trust funds, endowment funds and the like.
She went on to argue:
… it must follow as a matter of logic that the economic capacity of a school is affected by both its income generation potential—from the current class of parents whose kids are enrolled in the school—and the assets of the school. The SES funding system makes some attempt to measure the income generation potential of the parents of the kids in the school but absolutely no attempt to measure the latter, the assets of the school. This is a gaping flaw …

The member for Lalor is certainly not alone. The member for Prospect said in 2004 that he preferred the ERI, or education resources index, and the member for Eden-Monaro was quoted last year in an article in the Australian as saying that the Labor government would:
… move away from—
the SES—
and get down eventually to a proper needs-based approach.
These comments indicate a clear ideological difference between the Labor Party and the coalition. The member for Lalor’s comments in particular show that the politics of envy still dominate thinking in the Labor Party. Labor still has not accepted that funding non-government schools is the best way to provide choice for Australian families. It is in this context that the government’s provision that requests sensitive financial information becomes suspicious. It is only natural to suspect that the intent of the Labor government review of school funding in 2010 will be to radically restructure the funding model of non-government schools along the lines of the old, discredited ERI model in time for the next funding quadrennium, 2013 to 2016.

Education should be about providing the right skills and a balanced perspective for our children. I have a son in year 11 who attends a non-government school in my electorate of Swan. I want him to have an education that provides him with the skills he needs so that he can follow the career pathway he chooses. I want him to have a strong grounding in reading, writing and arithmetic. As important as that, though, is that he leave school with a balanced perspective on the history of our nation, its future challenges and our place in the world order. I do not want him to have the Marxist philosophy that would be preferred by certain members of the ALP.

The member for Lalor said over the weekend that the coalition were against a national curriculum. We are not against a national curriculum—indeed, quite the opposite. We are for a balanced national curriculum that helps Australians gain nationally and internationally recognised qualifications and do whatever they want to do in life. What we are against is a curriculum designed by left-wing academics pushing their own agenda that does not fit with the values of our nation.

In conclusion, there has been much speculation in recent times that there is little or no ideological difference between the two major parties anymore. This bill should dispel that myth. This bill will impose stifling regulation on the non-government sector and reduce competition and choice in the education market. This bill represents all the things that we do not see or hold as the values of the Liberal Party and the coalition, and therefore I oppose it.

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (4.36 pm)—In last year’s election campaign, the education revolution featured very prominently. It now features in the contract that the now Prime Minister and all Labor candidates have with the voting public of Australia. The people of Australia, including those on the Central Coast, knew that our schools were not being properly or fairly resourced. They knew that the quality of education, whilst good, was not the best that it could be. They
were fed up with our schools and our kids being used as political footballs in the corrosive blame game between federal and state governments. The now opposition has not learnt its lesson. The member for Sturt is still playing politics with our education system. The member for Sturt and the rest of the opposition are cynically trying to hold up the important legislation that we are discussing today that will benefit our kids. They are deliberately misrepresenting the government’s position to scare non-government schools and divide the community.

The now opposition has a dismal record in relation to education reform when in government. Now in opposition, they are still trying to stop the government from getting on with the job. In 2007, we had a Liberal federal government that had raised their hands in surrender with regard to reform of our creaking education systems. They had come to the political realisation that it was a lot easier to write media releases blaming state governments than to embark on real reform in educational policy. We had a lot of talk through the years from the Howard government but precious little action on education direction. As a timely interjection in today’s question time pointed out, their great contribution to the education debate was flagpoles in schools.

The then government did not strike up a national conversation on how our schools would teach children in a digital world, on the fact that Australia was slipping substantially compared to world standards in maths and science and on funding that was not giving all Australian kids a fair go. In education, the only reforms the Liberals seemed interested in were the so-called culture war issues. Instead of addressing a brain drain that was seeing our brightest go overseas to add to other countries’ economies and instead of properly resourcing our tertiary education systems to give our kids a competitive advantage in a globalised world, the Liberals shirked these challenges and instead reverted to their obsessions from their Young Liberal days, like voluntary student unionism and ideological positioning on how history is taught. The last contribution that we just heard showed that this debate is still very much at the forefront of the Liberals’ thinking.

We see the opposition continue this ‘ideology before any actual change’ tradition. A Victorian Liberal senator is currently running an inquiry into educators’ personal politics in response to a Young Liberal campaign, a campaign copied and pasted from a right-wing think tank in the United States and pre-occupied with boring and obstructionist culture war obsessions. This is what the opposition contributes to the debate in relation to education policy. In this inquiry, the former Prime Minister’s favourite historian, Keith Windschuttle, said:

As far as I can see, what this inquiry can accomplish is to simply express an opinion. I do not think you should actually do anything.

That is exactly what we have had from the Liberals on education policy for years. They have expressed opinions but have not actually done anything. Due to years of inaction, Australia was falling far behind world education standards. The former government did an incredible disservice to a generation of young people and to our nation. Their scorecard is nothing short of embarrassing. Look at what happened under the Liberals’ watch: we were ranked 18th in the OECD in percentage of GDP investment in education. Australian maths and science ranked 29th in the world. Public investment in universities fell by seven per cent compared with an OECD average increase of 48 per cent.

Imagine for a second that we were talking about the Olympics rather than education. Imagine that, instead of winning the gold,
silver and bronze, as our best swimmers were doing, we were ranking only 18th or 29th. Australians would be rightly outraged. At the last election, they were rightly outraged at the position that the Liberal Party took to that election, the position that they had for over 12 years in government and, as has been seen in the debate today, the position that, sadly, they seem to continue to adopt. If this were the Olympics, we would demand that sports departments invest more in swimming programs from the earliest years. We would demand that our children be encouraged to become the best swimmers they could be as a matter of national pride. We would not allow ourselves to lose a competitive advantage and slip well behind in swimming behind the United States, China and—God forbid—the United Kingdom.

Similarly, Australians are not happy with the way things are in schools. It may not be because of statistics or because of any particular data, but, when I speak to the mums and dads on the Central Coast, they know that more can and must be done. The then opposition leader in 2007—the current Prime Minister—brought change to a debate that had become stale and too obsessed with ideological positions rather than what was in the best interests of our kids and our nation. The Labor Party gave the commonsense argument that there is an undeniable link between the strength of our economy and the strength of our educational systems.

Nowhere more than the Central Coast can we see that we need to have this educational revolution. Retention rates for the Wyong shire show that 44.3 per cent of students complete years 7 to 12. This is when the New South Wales average is 65.66 per cent. We are 20 per cent behind the state average in relation to retention rates. Not coincidentally, we have one of the highest unemployment rates in the state as well—in excess of 7½ per cent.

The Reserve Bank governor, Glenn Stevens, made the point earlier this year that there are capacity constraints in our economy because of the need to reskill. These warnings had been given to the former government on numerous occasions, but what did they do with education? They effectively cut funding. They did not look to the future. They did not say that there were going to be problems. Their approach was simply to slash and burn and look at reducing the federal contribution to universities and educational facilities.

On this side of the House, we believe in the education of the country. We believe in an education revolution. We believe that, in a time of great economic uncertainty and economic upheaval, Australia must make real reforms to our education systems. The Rudd government is committed to delivering an education revolution from high-quality and accessible early childhood education to quality schooling and from training and retraining our workforce to world-class higher education and research. Key priorities for the government include improving access to early childhood education and working cooperatively with states and territories. By doing this—and this is something that those on the other side still have not learnt; they still try and play the blame game—the Rudd government will ensure all four-year-olds have access to 15 hours of fun, play-based early education a week for 40 weeks a year. The government will ensure our schools focus on achieving higher standards, greater accountability and better results. Delivering a high-quality national curriculum from kindergarten to year 12 will lift the standard of every one of our schools.

Having heard the contribution from the previous speaker, you would think that we were actually proposing some sort of Marxist revolution. The arguments that are coming from the other side are absurd when you...
consider the lack of contribution that they made in government and continue to make in relation to the education debate.

Mr Griffin—They’re more like the Marx Brothers.

Mr CRAIG THOMSON—It has been pointed out that perhaps their side is the Marx Brothers rather than Marxist and they are getting a little confused.

Mr Robert interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr AJ Schultz)—Order! The member for Dobell has the call.

Mr CRAIG THOMSON—Certainly we know that there is a three-ring circus on the other side. We keep seeing the ringmaster change, but we certainly do not see the policies change. The circus continues in relation to the opposition in the area of education.

The Rudd government is also investing up to $1.5 million per high school to create trades training centres in all of Australia’s 2,650 secondary schools and up to $1 million per high school to allow every Australian student in years 9 to 12 access to their own school computer with the aim of lifting school retention rates from 75 per cent to 90 per cent by 2020. As I said earlier, this is particularly important when you look at my electorate, where retention rates languish around 44½ per cent, well below the state and national averages, which shows that the opposition when in government certainly took their eye off the ball in terms of education on the Central Coast.

The Rudd government is investing over $1 billion in providing an additional 450,000 skilled training places over the next four years to help lift the productive capacity of the Australian economy. We are encouraging students to study and teach maths and science by halving their HECS and halving it again if they work in those fields after graduation. We are keeping our best and brightest in Australia by doubling to 88,000 the number of undergraduate students receiving a Commonwealth learning scholarship and providing 1,000 new Future Fellowships for mid-career researchers.

But today we are here to discuss the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 and the Schools Assistance Bill 2008. These bills are a key part of the education revolution and need to be put in that context. The Education Legislation Amendment Bill demonstrates the Rudd government’s leadership by providing for more than half a billion dollars to be spent over the next four years to establish evidence around what works and highlight good practice. By extending the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000, we provide appropriations to continue our election commitments, such as funding for additional teachers in the Northern Territory, in a bipartisan way and to continue good programs introduced by the opposition such as the Indigenous Youth Mobility Program. This funding will also allow us to continue to work with Indigenous communities, philanthropic organisations, corporate leaders and national organisations to build the partnerships that are so critical to improving outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

The government is working with government and non-government education and training providers to achieve the very important goals of halving the gaps in literacy and numeracy achievements, halving the gaps in year 12 or equivalent attainments and halving the gaps in employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians. We also aim to give every Indigenous four-year-old in remote communities an opportunity to access early learning programs. We are establishing national collaborative arrangements that will assist us to collectively work towards these targets. However, the Commonwealth must
maintain an ability to provide national leadership and perspectives to close these gaps.


In Australia, over many decades the focus of the schooling debate has been the competitive relationship between government and non-government schools. But the education system cannot simply be broken down into two groups, with a disadvantaged public sector on the one side and a highly resourced non-government sector on the other. The most cursory examination of Australian schools will tell you this simply is not accurate. There are schools that struggle with limited resources trying to serve disadvantaged communities in both sectors. There are independent schools in my electorate that struggle with resources just as there are public schools in my electorate that struggle. Funding is important, but a more fundamental debate is needed about how to improve the quality of school education for all students. We need an ambitious national strategy to improve our schools, driven by the goal of higher quality education.

To do this, the Commonwealth is working with the states through the Council of Australian Governments to develop a shared set of aspirations and policy directions which will provide the basis for school funding agreements and reform initiatives over the coming years. Working and consulting with non-government schools is a vital part of that process. The new framework will connect new educational investment in schools, teachers and families with challenging new achievement targets and clearer, more transparent reporting systems. New national partnership payments will encourage further improvements in national priority areas. The $28 billion provided in this bill is part of the government’s minimum $42 billion commitment for schools funding during 2009-12.

In this legislation, the government is honouring its election commitments to non-government schools. Those commitments are to use the existing funding formula based on the SES model and the existing indexation formula to set funding levels and to maintain or guarantee the current funding levels of all non-government schools during 2009-12 to ensure that no school loses a dollar. The Australian government is working through COAG on a new national education agreement, which will deliver the funds promised to public schools. In addition, through the COAG process the Commonwealth is working on three new national partnerships to improve the quality of schooling, particularly in disadvantaged schools. These national partnerships will be focused on improving the quality of teaching, meeting the needs of disadvantaged school communities and improving literacy and numeracy.

A central focus in moving forward is improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students. The incorporation of a number of Indigenous-specific education programs in this bill is aimed at improving the capacity of non-government schools to accelerate the closing of the gap in outcomes for these students. The bill continues the general provision in schools funding legislation for the minister to make conditions in the agreements for Commonwealth funding for schools.

However, the current act introduced an unprecedented number of specific conditions for Commonwealth funding for schools. Whilst a number of these conditions have been met, superseded or abandoned by the
bill, it retains the broad thrust of the educational outcomes accountability framework of the current act. There are now six conditions covering school performance: participation in national student assessments, participation in national reports on the outcomes of schooling, provision of individual school performance reports to the minister, provision of plain-language student reports to parents to include an assessment of the student’s achievements against any available national standards and relative to the student’s peer group at the school, provision of publicly available information about the school’s performance and the implementation of the national curriculum.

All schools and systems authorities must provide to parents or guardians of each child the student reports specified in the regulations. These reports must use plain language, include an assessment of the child’s achievements in comparison with the child’s peer group at the school and meet any requirements in the regulations. The minister would be able to determine the format of such reports and how often they had to be provided to the parents. Parents will also receive reports from national literacy and numeracy tests which will show student achievements against key indicators such as the national average, the middle 60 per cent of students and the national minimum literacy and numeracy attainment standards where these have been met. A continuous scale of achievement across 10 bands, from year 3 to year 9, with each year level reported in six bands, will mean that as students advance through the years of schooling it will be possible to track their progress in literacy and numeracy attainment.

The introduction of plain-English report cards is most welcome on the Central Coast. Parents have a right to know how their children are going at school. They need more clarity than knowing whether their kids are beginning, consolidating or established—that is, more than a graph, a line or a pie chart telling them how they are performing at school. This government is acting on this and that is why these bills are here before the House today.

Research and evidence show that the best way to boost productivity is to invest in human capital. That is why education is the pathway to prosperity. The link between long-term prosperity, productive growth and human capital investment could not be clearer from the extensive research that economists have been undertaking around the world in recent decades. The research demonstrates strong links between levels of education, levels of earnings and levels of productivity. OECD research shows that if the average educational level of the working-age population were increased by one year the growth rate of the economy would be up to one per cent higher.

Again going back to my electorate, which is dominated by the shire of Wyong, when we have only 44.3 per cent of school kids in my electorate going through to year 12 when the state average is 65.66 and the national target is 75 per cent, we can see the problems and the disadvantages that children growing up in my electorate have in terms of being able to get a job and a job that pays well. More importantly, we have the problem that the economy of the Central Coast and the economy of the nation have been affected by 12 years of inaction by the former, Howard government in relation to education. It is time that education were more than just about putting flagpoles in schools. This bill is an important step in making sure that non-government schools are properly funded. It is an important step in delivering the education revolution that our kids deserve, that the parents in our electorates demand and that the Rudd government is delivering.
Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (4.56 pm)—I rise today to express significant reservations regarding not only the education revolution, which I find now dashed indeed on the Bay of Pigs, but the Schools Assistance Bill 2008 and the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 before the House. I understand the passage of these bills is required before the end of 2008 to provide the quadrennium Commonwealth funding for non-government schools from the beginning of next year—funding amounting to $28 billion and attributed to the bills. Whilst the bills apparently preserve the total funding available to non-government schools consistent with the Labor Party election policy, the bills introduce four key changes which were not announced as part of their policy—discussed later on and of significant concern.

My concerns are further raised when, at the exact same time as these bills are being debated, the Australian Education Union is campaigning on national TV for greater funding. Furthermore, last week the member for Throsby, a former secretary of the ACTU, stated in her speech in this place that ‘the current scheme’—referring to the SES model—‘lacks integrity’. This would all seem to point towards the real agenda—perhaps a wolf dressed in sheep’s clothing—of the bills: to abolish the SES model and return to a resource based model rather than a needs based model.

Historically, the federal government has taken responsibility for funding non-government schools and the states have taken responsibility for funding government schools. Non-government educational institutions, though, relieve enormous pressure from what we all know is the ailing state government education system presided over by moribund Labor state governments. Yet non-government schools have been growing at an enormous rate of some 20,000 students a year. In fact, in the last decade the public system has grown by one per cent—that is it. That is the faith the Australian people have in Labor state government schools: the public system has grown by one per cent, yet the private system has grown by a staggering 126 per cent. The question is: which schools do you think parents actually prefer? It would be interesting to do a snapshot of the Labor frontbench in this place, and indeed the backbench, as to which schools they prefer to put their children in.

By way of background, in 2001 the former Howard government introduced a measure called the socioeconomic status, or SES, which measures the socioeconomic status of parents whose children are enrolled in non-government schools. SES uses census data to link the student’s home address to determine the relative income of the student’s family. The school is then allocated an SES score, depending on the socioeconomic status of the families that attend the school. The higher the SES score, the lower the Commonwealth funding available to the school.

This model introduced a fair and equal playing field for non-government schools. It ensures that schools in less affluent areas that are unable to charge higher school fees due to surrounding demographics receive a higher rate of funding than schools in more affluent areas. The model has worked exceptionally well, acknowledging that any reduction in the overall funding to non-government schools has the ultimate consequence of negatively impacting Australia’s public education system. A reduction in non-government school funding would force non-government schools to increase fees and, as a result, force struggling parents to turn to the state education system—which, like everything else Labor state governments touch, is not in particularly good shape.

Unfortunately, the Labor Party has not always been the friend of Australia’s non-
government independent schools. In 2004 the Labor Party, which included many of the present frontbenchers, went to the election with a schools hit list—planning to reschedule to remove funding from many private schools. That same year the Senate held an inquiry into Commonwealth funding for schools. Submission No. 33 was from our great friend the Australian Education Union—it is certainly a great friend of the Australian Labor Party. The Australian Education Union’s submission states:

The AEU has long opposed any funding to private schools.

If you want to know what the view of the Education Union is, and indeed that of their close compatriots the Labor government, there it is: the AEU has long opposed any funding to private schools. I guess their position cannot get any clearer than that.

Furthermore, the Australian Education Union’s Federal President, Mr Angelo Gavrielatos, was quoted on 17 March this year saying that the current SES model was unacceptable:

“I am not embracing the SES funding model as it currently exists,” he said.

“It has serious flaws. It does not measure the individual wealth of parents; it measures the wealth of the census area.”

I guess no-one has told Mr Gavrielatos that there are only 225 homes in a CCD or census area and that by world standards it is a very effective way to recognise and measure the wealth of an area and the individuals in it. I think the real problem for the union and Mr Gavrielatos is that they go back to their position in submission 33—that is, they actually oppose any funding for private schools—and the SES model does not suit their ideological bent and dislike for private education.

At least this is absolutely consistent with Labor’s left-wing hardliners in the form of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Assistant Treasurer. They are both on record numerous times as strident opponents of the SES model. On 4 September 2000 the current Deputy Prime Minister was scathing in her attack on the proposed SES model, outlining a five-point attack on why it is deficient. This of course begs the question: why is it that everything Labor does has five points? One could surmise that it is because there are only five fingers on the left hand. On 20 August 2001 the current Deputy Prime Minister continued her ideological assault by saying:

… the last thing that this government does is distribute education moneys on the basis of need. This government—that is, the Howard government—for its funding for private schools, has adopted a flawed index, the so-called SES model, which does not deliver on the basis of need. We know that model is flawed, because it disproportionately delivers to category 1 schools—that is, wealthy schools.

When the SES model was rolled into its second quadrennium funding in 2004, this is what the now Assistant Treasurer had to say:

The regime established by this government and continued under these bills for determining the funding arrangements for schools is the socio-economic status index—the SES index. This is a fundamentally flawed index. It replaces the Education Resources Index, which was much more based on the needs of the school and the capacity of the school to reach educational standards. I put this to the House: any regime which produces an outcome where the King’s School has more needy students than Fairvale High School is a deeply flawed calculating system.

Why, every time the Labor Party speak about private schools, non-government schools and the SES model, do they always find the time to give the King’s School a kick in the guts? What is it about the King’s School that so infuriates the government and the other side of politics? What is it that annoys them? Is it that they actually could not get into the school when they were being educated or is
it simply part of their ideological hatred of non-government schools and the politics of envy we saw rolled out with the budget?

What it does clearly show, through the various speeches of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Assistant Treasurer and through what the Australian Education Union has said publicly in inquiries and media statements, is that this Labor government wants to get rid of the SES model. And part of this legislation is to prepare the way for that to occur. It would be nice if the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education stood up and levelled with the Australian people—to take a line from the current Prime Minister, although I fear that my three-year-old on a seesaw is more level than him and his government.

These bills seek to make four changes which differ from the 2004 model. Firstly, the bills seek to make it easier for the minister to refuse or delay payments to schools—I am sure non-government schools are very pleased to hear that! Secondly, the bills introduce new requirements in school funding agreements to comply with the national curriculum by 2012. Thirdly, the bills alter the reporting requirements for schools, particularly introducing new requirements relating to information about financial viability. Fourthly, these bills remove the previous government’s new non-government schools establishment grants. These changes are paving the way for reduced support for non-government schools from the federal government. It is as simple as that.

I turn now to ministerial refusal. Currently, funding is administered from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, with the Minister for Education at its head. Section 15 of this bill gives the minister the power to refuse to authorise or to deny payments to non-government schools. The current subsections allow this to occur in the instance of an institution being wound up or if the institution is unable to pay its debts. The addition of proposed subsection (c) of the bill gives the minister new reasons to refuse or to delay payments to non-government educational sectors with respect to auditing. I understand the reasons for introducing this clause to ensure the financial viability of an institution, but the clause also seems to suggest that if an institution is audited then it may, by virtue of the audit, be in a precarious situation.

The fact that the minister can base a decision on a presumption should not be justified cause to withdraw or refuse payment. The term ‘qualified audit report’ is also a very broad basis for assessing the financial viability of a school. Any time an auditor audits a school for reasons not related to financial viability, it appears the minister reserves the right to delay or refuse payment in cases where financial viability is not in question.

With respect to complying with a national curriculum, section 22 relates to the new requirement for non-government schools to comply with the national curriculum standards before 31 January 2012, yet the national curriculum has not yet been released and there is very little information regarding its make-up. We know it will cover areas of maths, science, history and English as the basics, yet section 31 of the previous legislation required compliance with curriculum related activities such as statements of learning in five areas. The different approach to these statements gives schools individual identities and gives parents a choice of different institutions. Currently the only information available regarding the national curriculum is the initial advice on history and science. The final documents will not be available until some time in 2009. While 2012 is the last year that the Schools Assistance Bill 2008 and the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 will support fund-
ing for non-government schools, it is also the first year that non-government schools must adhere to the national curriculum.

I contend it is irresponsible to introduce compulsory compliance to a measure in this bill when the curriculum is not even drafted in any way, shape, form or means. Section 22 also has the potential to severely damage schools offering an alternative curriculum. A parent should have the absolute right to determine which school their child will go to. Steiner and Montessori schools currently represent 17,500 students and offer alternative education philosophies. I have a Steiner school in my electorate, and it was a great pleasure to welcome them here to Parliament House and to show them around recently, yet this legislation would appear to put in jeopardy their philosophies and their integrity. Essentially, it may disallow the majority of the principles of these schools from being acted upon. Passing section 22 is akin to putting the cart before the horse in every sense, and that section should be deleted from the bill.

With respect to additional reporting, the requirements in section 24(1) of the bill bring into question the government’s commitment to maintaining non-government school funding for the four years following this bill. The new term ‘funding sources’, which schools would have to publicly report on, has the potential to pave the way for a remodelling of the current fair SES, which, at the beginning of my speech, I showed the Education Union, the Assistant Treasurer and the Minister for Education, the Deputy Prime Minister, simply despise.

Qualified audit reports can include reporting on everything from parents’ and friends’ lamington fundraising—certainly it will change lots of things in the SES, I imagine—right through to bequests. Every cent that can be associated with the school must be brought not just to the minister’s attention, as is currently the case, but to the public’s attention. The minister will have substantial powers to intrude on the finances of any non-government school and to spray those across the internet. I can only assume—with the minister’s and the Education Union’s pathological hatred of private schools and the SES funding model—that this information will not be used for the greater good of schools. I can see the financial support to schools from private sources being used against a school to reduce government assistance. I bring us back to the statement by the Education Union in Senate inquiry submission 33:

The AEU has long opposed any funding to private schools.

One has to question what the minister and indeed the Assistant Treasurer have against non-government schools that would make them want to spray all of their sources of income into the public arena. How will that add value to the SES process? How will that add value to schools funding? The only thing it does is provide the information to the Education Union because the government’s union mates want payback for an electoral win.

Finally, section 100 relates to the abolition of new non-government schools establishment grants. The previous legislation, the Schools Assistance (Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Act, allowed the minister to make grants available for the establishment of non-government schools where there was community and private sector support. Section 100 in this bill only allows for grants approved in 2008 to be received in 2009. The removal of these grants will cripple many attempts to get new non-government schools off the ground. That is, perhaps, exactly what the intent is, as this entire bill’s intent is to frustrate, harry and harass private schools and the SES funding model at every quarter. The bill also removes additional choice for
parents in communities who choose non-government schools over government schools.

As I stated earlier, the enrolment in non-government schools is growing at a rate of 20,000 children per year. In the last decade government schools have grown by one per cent. Withdrawing federal government support for the establishment of new non-government schools will not only deny parents a choice of education but force parents to enrol their children in an overcrowded, underfunded state system. The Rudd Labor government needs to withdraw this section of the bill immediately.

The immediate impact of this measure on my electorate is that the federal government will withdraw any funding for the establishment of the Lutheran Ormeau Rivers District School—LORDS—that the current Queensland Premier, Ms Bligh, approved when she was the education minister but is now not approving by hiding behind her farcical regional plan, which will not allow the school to be zoned appropriately. What is ironic is that, before the moribund Queensland Labor government scuttled this school by hiding behind its regional plan, the school had already received capital funding from the federal government, and now this legislation before us today will take that source of funding away.

Considering all the available evidence, considering the public statements and considering statements at inquiries and statements in this House, only one conclusion can be reached: the Education Union does not like private schools and, as it stated in its submission, it does not like the funding of them. The current government does not like the SES model. The majority of this Labor frontbench went to the 2004 election with a schools hit list, because there are certain schools in the non-government sector that, frankly, they do not like. While this series of bills is important to move $28 billion to support the non-government system, the four changes that have been proposed have been insidiously inserted so Labor can commence the dismantling of the SES funding model and so they can get as much information about non-government funding sources as possible and give it to their mates at the Education Union. This Labor government, through these bills, speaks with a forked tongue. It seeks to give with one hand over the next four years, but, hidden within the fine print of the legislation, it certainly seeks to take with the other.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (5.16 pm)—I take this opportunity to speak in support of the Schools Assistance Bill 2008. I do not know what bill the member for Fadden was speaking on, because it certainly bears no relevance to the bill I have read. Listening to his remarks, I find no basis for them whatsoever. I really wonder whether he has taken the time to read this bill.

Mr Griffin—Nice bloke, wrong planet!

Mr ZAPPIA—He must be, because he is certainly not on the same planet that I am on when I look at this bill and see the importance of it—a bill which, in fact, guarantees $28 billion of funding for all non-government schools, in turn enabling greater funding certainty and stability and remaining part of the government’s commitment of $42 billion to schools from 2009 to 2012. That certainly creates certainty for those schools, and certainly it is vastly different to the impression that one might have got from listening to the member for Fadden.

I do note that this bill has been referred to the Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, with a report to be brought back by 27 November 2008. I also note that the coalition have moved amendments to this bill and that
they have accused the government of promoting the politics of envy, as the previous speaker has said, and have used other terms such as ‘ideological hatred’, ‘pathological hatred’ and ‘hit list’.

Mr Sidebottom—It’s the same template they’re all using. They can’t even make up their own speeches!

Mr Zappia—Absolutely; it is the same template. I take personal offence at some of those accusations. As someone who has worked hard and visited all of the schools in my electorate at one time or another, and who works in close cooperation with all of the schools in my electorate—whether they are public or private schools—I have the utmost respect for all of the education providers that I have been associated with over time and for all of the teachers in that profession. The totally unfounded accusations made by members opposite I find personally offensive. But it seems that they cannot let go of their own ideology when it comes to education. Their statements in respect to this bill are certainly baseless. In fact, when I read the bill, I find it totally impossible to understand the basis on which they continue to make those accusations. If anyone is trying to continue to promote divisiveness between public and private education, it is the members of the coalition. Certainly the member for Chisholm made some similar comments about that earlier, and I support every single thing she said about that.

Over the weekend, I took the trouble to speak to two of the principals of private schools in the electorate of Makin about this bill. Both were concerned that the bill had been referred to a Senate committee and therefore may be delayed, both supported this bill and both wanted it passed as quickly as possible. I said in my first speech in this place that it is through education and politics that the world can be changed for the better, and so I am indeed pleased to be part of a government that has placed education at the forefront of its policy reform agenda. Notably, I am pleased to be part of a government that understands that learning commences at birth and that the formal education process should commence at preschool facilities. To that extent, the Rudd government’s commitment to building a stronger, fairer Australia that is confident and ready to meet our future challenges requires an education framework enabling our schools to supply Australia with the human resources that have the right mix of knowledge, skills and talents required to achieve world-class outcomes. To achieve world-class outcomes and take our country forward into the 21st century, we need an education system that will deliver not only excellence but also equity for every child at every school and at every level within our entire schooling system.

While this bill provides funding certainty for non-government schools, it is my understanding that Commonwealth funding for government schools does not require specific legislation and is negotiated through the national education agreement, which is to be finalised by the end of 2008. While this bill will provide non-government schools with the security and certainty required to continue providing their high standards, academic rigour, pastoral care and innovative use of information technology as part of the national reform, the bill is couched in a much bigger agenda in that it presents the same funding model that is provided to government schools, along with the new accountability and performance reporting framework that will enable all schools across Australia to contribute towards evaluating our national progress in education.

The Council of Australian Governments recently agreed to establish a new curriculum, and, as promised, the Rudd government is developing the curriculum in consultation
with government, non-government education authorities, teachers, parents, students, professional organisations and business groups. The national curriculum will assemble for the first time curriculum essentials, curriculum content and achievement standards in key learning areas acquired from the best programs from each state and territory to give every child a chance to access a world-class curriculum.

I want to address my remarks on this bill specifically to the importance of the primary years of education and the importance of the primary schooling system to a child’s educational outcomes. For decades the focus of education has been on the latter or senior end of the process, with primary school education being seen as of lesser importance in the education process. Primary education is primary in its staging and primary in its importance. ‘Primary’ by definition is considered of first rank importance or value, of immediate importance rather than secondary importance or the chief, most important element. Educational outcomes of the secondary school or the university sector are frequently used by secondary schools and universities as self-promotion tools. There is certainly no denying that secondary schools and universities are very important in educational outcomes. But so too are primary schools. Yet there is far less recognition of the importance by society broadly and far less public self-promotion and competition amongst the primary school sector when compared with other education sectors. That may well change in the future with the growing awareness of the significance of good primary school education.

I want to refer to one of the comments the Australian Primary Principals Association make in their report on this matter:

It is important to note that the discussion of a national curriculum has begun with a consideration of what is appropriate for the senior secondary years. The needs of primary students rather than secondary students must provide the starting point for designing a national curriculum.

The Australian Primary Principals Association is the national voice for government, Catholic and independent primary schools, so it represents not only one particular sector; it is right across all sectors of primary education.

The role of our primary and secondary schools has changed over the years, with schools today no longer being places where children are provided with an education in the academic sense. Schools are expected to educate; provide essential life skills; encourage creativity and innovation; install social values; recognise the preciousness of our individuality yet understand the importance of community citizenship; and provide counselling and often family support, referral and information. What were once predominantly parental responsibilities have today become shared responsibilities between parents and schoolteachers. What makes the teacher’s role even more demanding and more responsible is that schooling is in itself a major new experience for primary school children. Teachers often are unaware of the child’s ability and temperament, the child’s parents’ values or the child’s home environment and specific circumstances that have shaped the child. The child is still developing. For that reason the primary schooling years are vitally important and the teacher’s influence in preparing and supporting each child for their future is incredibly important.

Primary schooling is the time that builds the foundations to a child’s future, yet the resources we provide our primary school teachers and the remuneration that they receive are grossly inadequate and far from commensurate with their level of responsibility. Not surprisingly, in a recent nationwide survey of 160 primary principals from both public and private schools, it was reported
that about two-thirds of the school principals believed that they were underresourced.

I want to quote from another section of the Australian Primary Principals Association summary that I referred to a moment ago. It says:

The staffing of Australian primary schools is emerging as a major challenge for the next decade. APPA—that is, the Australian Primary Principals Association—research shows that about one-third of primary school principals have been unable to appoint suitable teachers to fill vacant positions. The problem is more acute in schools in less preferred locations and in schools with significant proportions of children with special needs.

The same publication goes on to say:

The health and wellbeing of school principals has developed as an issue at an international, national and state level over a number of years. As reported in In the Balance, some principals doubted if they would continue in the job, even though they were not yet of retirement age. They expressed dismay at the quality of their personal lives and the transmission of these pressures on to their families.

We need to increase the number of male teachers in the primary school sector. It is interesting that we have seen a steady increment over the years in the percentage of female teachers in the primary school sector. In 1986, 71 per cent of primary school teachers were women. By 2006 the ratio was 80 per cent. A combination of underlying reasons has contributed to that decrease in the number of male teachers in the primary sector. We need to increase the number of male teachers in the primary school sector so that children can experience role models and teachers of both genders in their schooling environment. Both genders have much to offer children in their developing years.

There is clearly still plenty to be done in our schools. The most recent OECD testing results demonstrate that Australia’s average performance in reading or literacy worsened between 2003 and 2006. There were too many disadvantaged students performing below the OECD baseline. No doubt we have some excellent schools, but it is evident that performance and opportunities in education have been obstructed and held back by underachievement in the previous government’s policy directions. In contrast, the Rudd government has committed to making new resources available and consequently making some big differences to our Australian schools.

In my electorate of Makin there are over 7,000 students from 12 non-government schools and some 15,000 students from 40 government schools. These schools, along with all other Australian schools, will benefit from new resources and the new national education agreement that will set the terms of funding and accountability for all schooling for the following four years. The Rudd government is determined to improve education for disadvantaged students, which will end an era when children from low socio-economic and other disadvantaged circumstances have been left to fall behind in their education.

This bill provides automatic and maximum recurrent funding for a very high proportion of Indigenous enrolments in non-government schools. The Indigenous supplementary assistance indexation rates and remoteness classifications are aligned with mainstream programs, which will enable assistance to maintain momentum with the costs associated with education delivery. This bill also provides assistance to schools that have disadvantaged students who have literacy, numeracy and special learning needs; that require special training in languages or English as a second language for new arrivals; and that have a geographic disadvantage due to being in country areas.
This bill remains a major building block in the government’s national education agenda across both non-government and government schools. The bill recognises and respects the diversity of schooling available across Australia. High-quality education should be available to all children at all levels of their schooling, wherever they live, no matter what background or circumstances they come from and whatever education sector their school is in.

The bill provides funding certainty to non-government schools through the same socio-economic status funding formula and indexation framework proposed for government schools, allowing time for appropriation and payment to non-government schools for January 2009. The bill will also enable adequate time for the states and non-government schools to put in place actions to bring about the outcomes that are desired across the entire schooling system. This bill also focuses on quality, transparency and accountability, consistent with the government’s commitments to ensure that resources will be targeted in a way that will best improve our education system. We need to evaluate and measure where our efforts are going, where we are best able to achieve and how we can improve so that we are able to take effective action.

Together, government and non-government schools that cater for students at all levels can gather information as a result of the government’s new policy focus. Schools, teachers, parents and school authorities will be able to access information that will enable the development of new strategies that will equip our students with the knowledge and skills that they require for succeeding in the 21st century.

Over the years, as I said earlier on in this speech, I have visited and worked with many schools in my community, both public and private sector schools. I have the utmost admiration for what those schools do and how each of them adapts to the specific needs of the school community that they serve. In particular, when it comes to the primary schools, I am not surprised that the Australian Primary Principals Association believes that policies that imply that one size fits all will not always work across Australia’s primary schools. Any policy, whether it is one about a national curriculum or one about performance standards, should always be designed with sufficient flexibility to enable the individual circumstances of the school to be taken into account.

I have been particularly impressed by the importance that the primary schools that I have visited, both private and public, place on caring for each other, caring for others in the world and caring for the environment. Our primary schools can shape the lives of our children and of our country. I thank the teachers and staff of the primary school sector for the work that they do and for their dedication. The Schools Assistance Bill is an important piece of legislation. It gives effect to one of the Rudd government’s key election themes, the importance of education to our nation’s future. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (5.33 pm)—I rise today to speak on the Schools Assistance Bill 2008 and the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008, a complementary piece of legislation. I want to note from the beginning that it is important in this debate that we do not engage in class warfare in education. Indeed, it would be a retrograde step to see measures contained within these bills ignite the class warfare that we have seen in previous education debates in this country. We are in the throes of an education revolution that was outlined by the government prior to the election, a revolution that is well underway at the moment. But in that revolution we do
not see a return to pitting independent and private schools against public schools.

There are some sections of the proposed legislation before the House today about which there are some concerns in relation to that. I want to note that the member for Dobell mentioned the ‘Make education fair’ campaign. There is a sense that there is an ideological crusade that underpins a lot of the education reforms that the government is proposing. The ‘Make education fair’ campaign and the Senate inquiry that has been initiated are a response to educational bias within Australia. Noel McCoy, President of the Young Liberals, is to be commended for his attempt to inquire into educational bias within Australia.

When we look at the ideology that underpins a lot of what happens in education in Australia, it is interesting to note that the head of the Australian Education Union, which has been mentioned in this debate, Pat Byrne, said about education in Australia in 2005:

We have succeeded in influencing curriculum development in schools, education departments and universities. The conservatives have a lot of work to do to undo the progressive curriculum.

That quote underpins the ideology that is behind many of the measures contained within these bills. Indeed, the national curriculum will not be of benefit to people in Australia if it seeks to limit the choice of individuals in education and in educating their children. That kind of attitude is not helpful. There is a sense that some gloating is occurring. I do not think that we are achieving much, in lauding our respective ideological positions, in terms of educating children.

The independent and public schools that I visit within my electorate are all fine institutions. Indeed, I do not see a difference in the calibre of the people who are seeking to provide an education for children. They are all dedicated people. They are people who care deeply about the children within their care and who want to provide a high-quality education for them.

There are four major changes within these pieces of legislation that create some serious concerns that we need to discuss in this place and, if we can, remove them to ensure that the Schools Assistance Bill 2008 and the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 are good pieces of legislation. Section 15 changes the grounds upon which the minister can elect to refuse or delay payments and makes it easier for the minister to do so. Section 22 requires school funding agreements to comply with the national curriculum by 2012, as specified in the regulations. Section 24, which I want to address in particular, alters the reporting requirements of schools, and includes new requirements relating to information about the financial viability and funding sources of schools. Finally, there is section 100, which removes the previous government’s new non-government school establishment grants.

I think in some of these changes which the government is seeking to make—which were not advertised before the election, which were not part of the government’s election promises or commitments and which were not outlined in their program for improving education in Australia—we see some of the ideological attempts to reframe education in this country. At the moment, the government is preparing an inquiry into education that is to report by 2010, and some of the changes in this bill, it could be argued, are preparing a certain set of criteria, a framing and priming of the issues surrounding education, in such a way that the government will then seek to make further changes in the area of education.
The concerns that we have with this legislation are pretty simplistic and obvious in the sense that the government is setting up education for further reform which it has not advertised to the public. One of the concerns we have is that the public dissemination of all funding sources—be they simple school fetes, raffles that schools hold, parents’ donations or any other kinds of financial information—is a very interesting step to take. That is information that is superfluous to the allocation of funding through the SES. If you examine why you would seek to make that information public—if you examine what the real agenda is—you will find that you come to a conclusion that, if you make that information public, you would be discouraging the flow of money, capital and donations into education. In today’s complex world, you see that there are many choices for parents in allocating their funds. They can expand their houses, they can spend it on gambling, they can entertain themselves or they can take the kids away. And there are plenty of holidays they can take themselves on. Many parents, particularly at independent and private schools, seek to put their kids into better quality education. They make a sacrifice. Many of them donate money to their schools. Many of them spend a lot of their time, effort and hard-earned capital in funding their children’s education to a better level than it otherwise would be. It is a sacrifice that they make.

I think this will be a weakening of our system in Australia. The public dissemination of all those funding sources will make it less attractive to people who do not want to have their donations to schools disclosed. The contention surely could not be that these people are seeking to do the wrong thing by donating money to schools and fundraising for their children’s schools, whether it be through fetes or raffles. Surely the government does not need to be involved with how much money every single school fete in every school around Australia is raising every day of the week. It is a very odd contention. Surely it is something that will be used to set up further arguments in the future. I think we are going to see a return of this section 24 in future education debates in this place. If a school is fortunate enough to have parents who donate or is able to seek or encourage parents to donate their capital, be it in property, money or assets, that school is able to build up and use that for the betterment of the education of its students. That is something that ought to be lauded, congratulated, applauded and, above all, encouraged by government policy, because the more money that can be diverted from the private sector into education, the better.

The government is not seeking to fund that shortfall if this does discourage donations to the education sector. Seeking for the first time that all non-government schools be forced to make available for publication their sources of funding, however big or small, will certainly weaken the entire system. It is superfluous under the SES funding model, so I think it begs the question: what funding model is the Labor Party seeking to change it to? I note that the Labor Party promised to support the SES funding model before the election, and we know there is this inquiry underway at the moment, but even with that promise in place—an election commitment that they would support this funding model and we would not see a shift away from it without significant improvement—it could signal a return under this government to the bad old days of the private school hit list. That, we saw, was a concerted campaign by opponents of the SES model that was designed to shut down the SES model and bring back the discredited education resource index. I come from an electorate which often is viewed as more affluent and which has a high average income. There is hidden disag-
vantage within my electorate that a one-size-fits-all, needs based model cannot take account of. We often have to look deeper than that to see where the disadvantage lies even in the affluent areas within our community.

Changes to the system of donations, and recording donations and details such as school fetes do not seem to achieve a great deal in relation to this bill. The introduction of changes to the grounds upon which the minister can refuse or delay payment could be seen as reasonable to ensure the financial viability of a school, but the subsection involved appears to presume that if an audit statement is qualified then it necessarily signals that a school’s financial situation is precarious enough to warrant the minister refusing or delaying payment. A qualified audit report is too broad a basis for assessing the financial viability of a school. It may be the case that there are grounds for an auditor to qualify an audit that does not go to the financial viability but instead to a hesitation about a school model, whether a financial hesitation or otherwise, and the change would allow the minister to delay or refuse funding in spite of a recorded financial viability. I think this would be a weaker outcome. If it is demonstrated through a proper audit process that there is financial viability, it does not appear that there is a great need to allow a minister more latitude in delaying or refusing funding in that case.

The new requirement that schools comply with the national curriculum is another source of concern in relation to this legislation before the House. At this stage we do not have a great deal of idea what the national curriculum in critical areas like maths, science, history and English will look like. There have been some framing documents released in the last few days and we have not yet had time to absorb some of those, but the history curriculum, I want to note, is being overseen by Professor Stuart Macintyre, a former member of the Communist Party. I raise that here, for some of those members who were not here for the debate, because the member for Dobell sought to raise the fact that they were always under accusations of being Marxist and that somehow the members of the opposition here are more like the Marx Brothers in the sense that we always accuse members of the government of being Marxist.

But Professor Macintyre is a former Marxist. Indeed his major works include histories of Marxism in Britain and a history of the Australian Communist Party, which is one of my personal favourites! There is nothing wrong with having a view. There is nothing wrong with having a Marxist view, I might record, other than that you might be wrong about a few important points in history. But, if you have a bias, then there is the concern that that bias or indeed one-sided views will be represented in our national history curriculum, especially when we are seeking to form a curriculum that we are asking all schools to comply with and reducing the diversity and choice of curricula within the country. So there are some concerns in relation to who is developing our curricula, and I hope that the member for Dobell notes that there are some former Marxists involved in this process.

There is a lot to be concerned about in relation to where this national curriculum will head. We do not have many documents except for the initial advices on maths, history and science, and the final documents are not going to be available until, we are advised, some time in 2009. Yet the bill before the House today seeks to tie school funding to that curriculum’s acceptance and, to me, that seems to be a particularly poor framework—to tie school funding to their acceptance of the curriculum without understanding what it is actually going to be in relation to different theories of education—and there are differ-
ent theories of education and different models of education. There has to be room for some diversity and there has to be room for choice in some curriculum outcomes. So, with the initial advice at this stage, it does not appear to be suitable to force schools to tie their school funding to the curriculum’s acceptance. We certainly want to know more detail and, with people like Professor Macintyre designing the history curriculum, we want to have a look at the detail before we ask schools to accept the curriculum outcomes.

Even if there were no controversy in relation to the framing of the national curriculum, I think this clause does elicit some concerns. Section 31 of the previous legislation required schools to commit to the curriculum related activities, such as statements of learning in five areas: English, mathematics, science, civics and citizenship education, and information and communication technology, but not a specific curriculum. To begin with, I think that the national curriculum will now cover only four disciplines. It is not yet clear how prescriptive the content and materials in these areas will be or whether it will be a framework within which the schools can develop their own content. Again, I think this is another key point: if this is not clear in this legislation, it is a bad outcome for schools all around the country. We do need to define how much latitude in content and materials schools will have within these four key discipline areas. I think that is a weakness of the proposed legislation.

Schools offering alternative curricula may well be in a difficult situation in relation to this legislation. There are some difficult areas of alternative curricula that do need to be thought out in terms of alternative educational philosophies, such as Steiner or Montessori schools, which will face great difficulties in meeting the requirements within the proposed clause before us. The schools offer specific curricula to meet the particular needs of their student cohort, and I do not see that as a bad outcome. There ought to be diversity and choice within Australian education. There is a requirement for an overarching national curriculum, but there has to be a good understanding between these institutions that seek to offer alternative education philosophies of how they will interact with the national curriculum and that their funding will be assured under the new system. Even individual education programs at special schools could be affected under a very strict interpretation of this clause, but of course no-one in this place would hope that there would be such a strict interpretation of it.

Legislation operating at a state level is also able to accommodate alternative curricula to the standard state curriculum. The Victorian legislation requires a commitment to the national goals for schooling for the 21st century implemented through the Victorian essential learning standards or other curricula deemed as broadly equivalent by the Registered School Board. I think that highlights that we do need to clarify how an alternative school philosophy offering an alternative education would fit in with the national curriculum that is being proposed by this bill.

As discussed, the disclosure of funding sources is also a great concern but, overall, I think the goal of many of the clauses within this legislation is not stated clearly in the bill. I do think that the government are seeking to make further reforms that they did not discuss in the election campaign. I am very concerned that they are seeking changes to the SES model and that this bill is in some way in preparation for those changes, to establish a system where they can make an easier argument and a more coherent case for radically altering the SES funding system. I do not think it would be a positive outcome. If that is the change they are seeking, they
ought to come forward and say, ‘We are going to break our election commitment to supporting the SES funding model’—which is the commitment they gave before the election—‘and these are the reasons we are seeking to break it.’ I do not think we should be supporting legislation here as a backdoor way of changing the SES funding model.

The final area of change is the removal of the new non-government schools establishment grants. Over the last decade the previous government saw merit in increasing the viability of the non-government sector—encouraging new schools where there was a community demand and a private sector interest which warranted the aspiration that we supported in terms of new non-government school establishment grants. I think that is a worthy thing to recognise. The aspiration to start a new non-government school ought to be recognised by the government and assisted. We ought to have choice in education within Australia.

The legislation which allowed for the minister to make these grants was in part 6 of the Schools Assistance (Learning Together—Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004, and the comparable section in this bill makes provision only for those schools approved in 2008 to receive grants in 2009. So, with the phasing out of these grants, which is going to happen immediately if this legislation is passed, Labor would appear to be returning to the position they took at the previous election—not the one that we have just had but the one before that—which was in their new schools policy, which was to make it more difficult to set up new non-government schools. Again, what is the agenda in relation to that? Why do we need to make it more difficult to set up new non-government schools? Why wouldn’t we continue what is a worthy program of allowing new non-government schools to establish themselves and offer choice of education within Australia? Again, that is not highlighted within this bill.

Overall, I do think there are some serious concerns in the four sections of this bill that I have outlined. There is a contention being made that this legislation is purely a funding mechanism. The bill does appropriate money, but there are a number of hidden barbs for the SES funding model in the amending bill that will be used in future education debates both outside and inside this place to radically alter the way we fund education in Australia. If that is the government’s agenda, they ought to come here and say so. If the government are seeking to make changes to the independent and non-government sector, they ought to come here and say so. I want to put on record my support for the independent and non-government schools in my electorate and across the country. We stand behind public and private—non-government and independent—education within Australia for the excellent job that they do.

Mr BUTLER (Port Adelaide) (5.53 pm)—It is a pleasure, as always, to follow the member for Mitchell. It is many a year since I last heard an argument along the lines of a Marxist conspiracy taking over our education system. It almost makes one nostalgic for the old ideological debates of the Cold War. It is heart-warming to follow the member for Mitchell and take that trip down memory lane.

The Rudd government was elected last November with a clear mandate for change. Australians had had enough of political posturing, empty rhetoric and cowardly buck-passing that only resulted in squandered opportunities and neglect. The nation voted overwhelmingly for a government that would provide long-term reform—a government that would focus that reform on building a stronger, fairer Australia. I am proud to be part of that government. The strength of this
country will always lie in its people. Education is the most effective route to empowerment, and the better the quality of the education that this nation can provide its people, the stronger this nation will be. Our long-term prosperity is dependent on our productivity. A skilled workforce is vital to boost and to maintain productivity. Investing in the education of our children is investing in the skill base of the future and our economic growth. It is an investment for us all.

The Rudd government is committed to creating an education revolution. We are shunning the divisive policies of the past that saw private institutions pitted against public, state governments pitted against the Commonwealth and parents pitted against teachers. We are committed to revolutionising our education system through collaborative effort. It is a revolution that sees the community, parents, institutions and both tiers of government working together to ensure that high-quality education is accessible to all Australian children and a revolution that focuses on individual student outcomes, not on where students happen to be studying.

Disadvantage tends to be cyclical in nature, and education is the best method of breaking that cycle. Education brings opportunities. Education leads to better jobs, larger pay packets and higher standards of living. A telling statistic is that each additional year of schooling is associated with a 10 per cent increase in earnings. Poverty is directly linked to criminal activity, health problems, family breakdown and social division. This drains our community’s resources, security and pride, which in turn fuels the cycle. Education is the surest solution to breaking the cycle of poverty by giving the next generation the opportunity to reach their full potential and achieve the fulfilment, social engagement and living standards they deserve.

In this government’s first budget, we allocated $19.3 billion to education initiatives. We have mobilised to set this revolution in motion, with millions already flowing through programs such as the digital education revolution and the trade training centres. The Rudd government’s education revolution aims to create not just a stronger Australia that will have the skills and knowledge to compete in the global economy but also a fairer society. We are working to improve the transparency and accountability of all schools at all levels. Unless we know what is working we cannot hope to improve the quality of our system. This government is not interested in cheap political point-scoring. We need to collect performance data to ensure that resources go where they are needed, to ensure that parents can make informed choices and to ensure the proper evaluation of program effectiveness. Resources need to be targeted.

The 2006 National report on schooling in Australia highlighted the appalling disparity in educational outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Literacy and numeracy achievement rates showed a difference ranging from 13 per cent to 32 per cent in years 3 to 7. Thirty per cent fewer Indigenous students obtained year 12 qualifications than non-Indigenous students. In remote Australia, the figures are even more disturbing. English literacy and numeracy are the foundation for educational achievement in Australia. Without these skills, our children face an uncertain future with social exclusion, low socioeconomic status and personal frustration. Students who score badly in literacy and numeracy tests at year 9 level are more likely to be unemployed or, if they are employed, more likely to earn a low wage.

These problems are compounded for Indigenous students who have English as a second language. Attainment of a year 12
qualification or equivalent is another significant indicator of better employment prospects. It opens the door to further education that can provide not just the skills needed for workforce participation but also the confidence to rise to the challenge of a competitive environment. This government recognises the enormous contributions made by the Indigenous community to our nation. It also recognises the potential wasted by the inertia and complacency of our predecessors’ policies. We are committed to ensuring that our Indigenous community has the necessary tools to forge ahead. We want to assist that community to achieve economic independence and ensure that entrepreneurial ventures are not hampered by a lack of skills and knowledge. As recent submissions to the House of Representatives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs committee have made clear, the most valuable contribution we can make to promote the success and longevity of Indigenous enterprise is an investment in education.

The Prime Minister opened this parliament with an apology to Australia’s Indigenous people. That apology was about us maturing as a nation, acknowledging the wrongs of the past and embracing a future of respect, dignity and equal opportunity for all Australians. As the Prime Minister stated, to achieve that future we need to forge a new partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and to have at the core of that partnership a commitment to closing the gap in life expectancy, educational achievement and employment opportunities. These gaps are inextricably linked. This government is working hard with state governments and education providers to achieve the concrete goals of halving the gap in literacy and numeracy achievement rates within a decade and halving the gap in year 12 or equivalent attainment by 2020. My electorate of Port Adelaide has one of the highest population proportions of urban Indigenous people in South Australia. As their federal representative, as a member of this government and as an Australian citizen, I want to ensure that we as a nation do all that we can to achieve these long-overdue goals. The bill before this House will assist us in this important work.

The Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 is complementary to the Schools Assistance Bill 2008 and is part of the legislative upheaval that must form part of the education revolution. The Commonwealth and the states are working together to create the national education agreement. Until new arrangements are finalised, it is vital that we maintain our support for and show our leadership in the continuation and development of programs that improve educational outcomes for Indigenous communities. This bill allocates more than $500 million between 2009 and 2012 for a range of targeted projects funded under the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000. It will maintain commitments to successful programs such as Sporting Chance and the Indigenous Youth Mobility Program. It will enable the expansion of effective projects in the targeted areas of intensive literacy and numeracy programs for Indigenous students. In addition, it will provide professional development for teachers to construct quality individual learning plans for Indigenous students in need.

The bill allocates over $100 million for the continuation of the away-from-base aspect of Abstudy from January 2009 to June 2013. This will ensure that education providers can continue to offer intensive residential courses to Indigenous students as part of distance learning. More than $160 million has been appropriated for supplementary assistance to preschool and vocational education and training providers as a transitional arrangement until January 2009. This will en-
sure funding certainty and the continuation of services to Indigenous families while we implement further reform. This bill will reinforce our new framework of transparency and accountability. It will strengthen reporting structures to ensure that we have a greater understanding of where the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous education outcomes arise and, even more importantly, why. Good government means practising what you preach. As part of our pursuit of transparency and accountability, the Prime Minister has undertaken to provide a report to parliament on the first sitting day of each year about closing the gap for Indigenous Australians. This underlines our commitment to achieving this vital goal after the years of callous neglect shown by the previous government. This bill assists the arrangements for that report.

The marginalisation of our Indigenous community has no place in modern Australia. This bill is part of a wider legislative upheaval that will see Indigenous education recognised as a mainstream education issue. This will give education providers more freedom to develop and use the programs that provide the best outcomes for their students and their individual circumstances. It will reduce red tape, increase flexibility and allow teachers to get on with the important job of improving participation, literacy and numeracy rates. It will also ensure equity of funding indexation arrangements.

It is not a revolutionary concept that education is the key to building a stronger society. What is revolutionary after the Howard era is implementing a strategy that actually provides meaningful reform and tangible results. The Labor Party have promised an education revolution and we intend to deliver it. This bill is a vital cog in the workings of that revolution. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr FORREST (Mallee) (6.04 pm)—I am pleased to be on my feet speaking on these education and school bills and particularly to follow the member for Port Adelaide. His predecessor, because of his former education experience, always spoke very strongly on education bills. I found myself agreeing with the current member for Port Adelaide, mostly because most of his remarks were addressed to the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008, which is not particularly controversial. I found myself thinking back to 1996 and then to 1998, when I chaired the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs, and to my shock when, after I arrived at this place, one of the first inquiries that we did was in relation to Aboriginal health. I remember just how significant Aboriginal education was even way back then. I do not share the pessimism expressed by the member for Port Adelaide about the Howard years. We did an enormous amount in bringing that issue to the fore.

So I find myself not in disagreement on the Education Legislation Amendment Bill. Most of my anxiety is in relation to the cognate bill, the Schools Assistance Bill 2008. I noted that the member for Port Adelaide made reference to paranoias and ideological positions that are often taken. I was amused to read the editorial of the Age on Thursday last week. The editor introduced his editorial with this comment: There are few matters that evoke as much passion or ideological division as the education of our children. I do not have an ideological position in respect of the Schools Assistance Bill, but I do wish to express the anxieties that have been expressed to me by the schools in my constituency. There are 127 schools in the division of Mallee, and I am proud of every single one of them and the educational outcomes they achieve. Some of them are ex-
tremely remote and some of the primary schools have fewer than a dozen children, but the parents wish for that form of access for their children in isolated locations and they fight vigorously to keep their schools open. Of those 127 schools, 29 are non-government schools—primary schools and secondary colleges—scattered right across the north-west of Victoria. They have expressed some concern about what this bill gives the minister jurisdiction to do. I would like to put those anxieties on the formal record just to ensure that those fears are not realised—not my fears but the anxieties that have been expressed to me.

It is interesting that, of those 127 schools, three are new independent schools that have been established since 1998. One of those is an Islamic primary school in Mildura. The other two are Christian primary schools. Parents had expressed a desire to have their children educated in that environment, where the value emphasis could be formally part of the school curriculum. Those new schools, in particular—having tried to get established through the previous period, when the Australian Labor Party were in government with the new schools policy, which was effectively a ‘no schools’ policy—waited patiently for many years for the Howard-Fischer government to make it possible for those parents to have their aspirations realised and have schools operating to a curriculum that they felt best suited their children. They expressed anxiety at some of the provisions this bill introduces.

The Schools Assistance Bill is primarily an instrument for non-government primary and secondary education in Australia for the 2009-12 period and for appropriating $28 billion for that purpose. Passage of this bill before the end of 2008 is necessary to provide continued Commonwealth funding for non-government schools into January 2009. However, while the bill apparently preserves the total funding available to non-government schools, consistent with the government’s election commitment which they made in 2007, the bill introduces a number of changes to school funding agreements. This is where the concern that has been expressed to me from the non-government sector is generated.

This concern gets added to when they hear comments from senior government ministers, like the Deputy Prime Minister and other Labor members, in relation to their perceived opposition to a socioeconomic funding model, the SES model, which serves their purposes well. They are not huge capitaly funded schools; they are small schools with 50 to 60 children. They express anxiety when they see in this legislation the power that a minister might have to interfere with a parental choice they make about the schooling of their children.

There are four main areas where this non-government sector can be potentially negatively impacted. Firstly, there are the changes to the grounds upon which the minister can elect to refuse or delay a payment. Section 15 of the bill makes it easier for the minister to be able to do that—I will go into that concern shortly. The second area is the new requirement for school funding agreements to comply with the national curriculum by 2012—and the anxiety and concern about those changes has been expressed by many speakers already in this debate. It has been an interesting exercise, listening to the contributions from members—which drew me to that reference by the editor of the Age about the diverse ideological positions that people can have. The third point of concern is the alteration of the reporting requirements for schools, particularly new requirements in relation to financial viability. And the fourth point is the removal of the previous government’s new non-government schools establishment grant, which has benefited those...
schools that have recently been established. Let us go through these one by one.

It might be reasonable, as other speakers have said, that the minister could react to a qualified audit report and either threaten to withhold funding or withdraw it completely. I would like to make the point that auditors—a bit like civil engineers—are very, very conservative people and they can qualify an audit report for all sorts of different reasons. It can be in regard to a school’s plans and strategy to invest capital so that it can improve its value to make way for a new building they plan to construct in two years time. An auditor can qualify an audit report to warn of the dangers of that.

Mr Kerr interjecting—

Mr FORREST—What this bill does not make clear is to what extent a qualified audit can justify the minister’s threat to withdraw funding. That is the point I am trying to make. It is one thing if the future viability is clear—that it is not going to continue—and there have been terrible mistakes made. But a lot of things can happen before that point is reached. So I am making the point as expressed to me by the schools in my constituency. They want to know what extent of a qualified audit report pre-empts or creates this outcome for them. As I said, auditors are extremely conservative and very professional in the way they present their reports. That is a point that I put on the record. The interjection from the member for Denison could well be correct, but I want to make sure I am on the public record saying so on behalf of my schools.

The second point relates to the changes occurring to national curriculum and the necessity to teach the four basic disciplines of maths, science, history and English. If they are the priorities, it would be a good outcome for me. I was fortunate when I was at school to love maths and science. I struggled a little with English, which is fairly clear from my contribution here, I imagine, but the nation desperately needs qualified technical people, and very often nowadays we have to import those people from overseas because we have not had that focus on making maths and science an exciting area for young people to take an interest in.

The framing document for this was recently released, so things are all up in the air with respect to the outcome for independent schools in my electorate if they want to place an emphasis on religious education—for example, Islamic schools that wish to reinforce their faith and value systems. Other parents have made a decision for their children to attend Christian schools and Catholic schools. They all want to know how a requirement that they comply with the national curriculum will impact on the particular emphasis in their schools, a view which is very strongly supported by their parent communities.

The last point I would like to raise about the concerns expressed to me is the additional reporting requirements for schools in relation to their funding sources. The member for Port Adelaide may have been generally correct when he asserted that this level of anxiety is closer to paranoia, but it does make one very suspicious of what is behind this substantive new power for the minister. The conclusion that I draw is that it is designed to undermine the SES model. Other speakers have made reference to that and my schools have expressed anxiety about it. And it is not right to say that coalition speakers raising this concern are simply paranoid. It is something that the new government is going to have to work on in its communication and consultation with the breadth of the school industry and education sector in general.

It was not helpful that in this debate the member for Throsby said that the SES model
lacks integrity. Other government members, including the Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard herself, and the Assistant Treasurer, have made comments about the SES index in particular. The Assistant Treasurer stated:

The regime established by this government and continued under these bills for determining the funding arrangements for schools is the socio-economic status index—the SES index. This is a fundamentally flawed index. It replaces the Education Resources Index, which was much more based on the needs of the school and the capacity of the school to reach educational standards.

When my schools, which are not large, capital based schools, read comments like that from senior ministers, they automatically interpret them in plain English as a government intent on moving away from a model that served their interests very well.

This bill requires schools to report on their additional monetary support, and that support can come from a whole range of sources. It can come from the alumni of the schools themselves—former students who were so impressed by the start in life their school gave them that they make a contribution. It can be raised by parents’ clubs after hundreds and hundreds of fundraising activities. We have all been involved in those activities as our own children have gone through the education system. Those activities are extremely hard work. Activities could include running the barbecue, cooking lamingtons, running school fetes and a plethora of other activities that people engage in to raise funds for their schools. In Mallee, often some of my smaller rural schools will use a form of share farming. They shear sheep and sell the clip for the school’s benefit. They might sell part of their crop, whether it is dried grain, grapes or stone fruit. All schools are involved in those activities. The government has this implied threat where it wants to know in detail where schools’ funding is coming from, and again I say that members of my school councils are expressing concern at the final direction of this new measure that the minister has proposed by the introduction of this bill. I am not opposed to the bills; I am just expressing those concerns on behalf of my constituency, which is my job as a member of the House of Representatives. I am delighted to put those comments on the record.

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (6.20 pm)—I rise to speak in support of the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 and the Schools Assistance Bill 2008. Before I address some of the points that I was intending to make, I will pick up on the comment by the member for Mallee about his supreme confidence in the conservative nature of auditors. I must say that, in the current climate, I find that somewhat surprising. Notwithstanding that, I think the point that needs to be made is that the powers to be given to the minister in relation to schools that have received a qualified audit report obviously only trigger the capacity for the minister to then undertake certain action. Whether or not that would occur, obviously, would be a matter for the minister to consider in the circumstances, and obviously it would be something that the minister would address with great care and diligence at that point. So I do not think that the degree of concern expressed by speakers from the other side is warranted, but these new powers are an important component of the underpinning principle of transparency that is also incorporated in the philosophy of the bills before the House.

This of course is a case of Labor implementing and honouring an election commitment. The then shadow minister for education and also the opposition leader at the time, on 9 October 2007, made a very clear statement in relation to the future of school funding under a future Labor government. That statement said:
As part of its Education Revolution, a Rudd Labor Government has committed to:

- Adopt the existing Socio-Economic Status (SES) funding model for the next funding quadrennium, from 1 January 2009 to 31 December 2012; and
- Make the four year 2005-2008 Funding Agreement and the current schools indexation formula its minimum starting point for the Commonwealth’s negotiations with the States, Territories, Catholic and Independent school systems.

The bills before the House implement those commitments. There can be no question about that. Indeed, notwithstanding the protestations to the contrary from some on the other side, I do not believe that anyone has seriously suggested that that is not the case. These bills do implement that commitment. That is something that I think is an important part of the Rudd government’s education revolution. One of the commitments that we made as part of those specific commitments was that we wanted to ensure that schools of various persuasions—whether they are government or non-government schools, in the form of Catholic or independent schools—were very much able to plan ahead with some certainty in relation to the levels of funding that they would expect to receive under a Rudd Labor government.

Clearly, matters of certainty are important. Schools that are not government schools have to operate in a fashion where they can make the various decisions that they need to make in order to pay the various bills that come in and to raise the revenue that is necessary. That funding certainty is something that is essential to allow them to continue to provide the service that they provide to students, and indeed to parents, and to do that in a way in which they do not have to start increasing fees in order to compensate for a lack of funding or an inability to plan for the future. So it is important that we deliver on this commitment.

One of the first things that I chose to do as the member for Lindsay was to organise a forum of school principals. In fact, I had two forums. The first forum related to secondary school principals and the second forum related to primary school principals. Approximately 20 principals attended the first forum of secondary school principals. It was a very interesting opportunity for us all to get together. A number of comments were made on the day. One longstanding principal who had taught at a number of schools within the area indicated that this was the first time in his many decades of teaching in the area that he had been invited to join in a gathering and discussion of that sort. That surprised me because, frankly, I felt that one of the first ports of call as a new member was to sit down and discuss with principals and various school communities the challenges, the needs and the aspirations that they have for local students within the community.

One of the points that I was at great pains to make was that I had deliberately chosen to invite the principals of all of the schools. It was not a case of having separate meetings with the principals from government schools and then a follow-up meeting with the Catholic school principals and then the independent school principals. I wanted to meet with all of the principals together, in large part to demonstrate that my commitment is to the educational future of all of the students within my community. So, too, the Rudd government’s commitment is to the educational opportunities and futures of students right across the spectrum. One of the important points that the Labor Party in opposition consistently made is that we believe that, ultimately, funding decisions need to be made on the basis of need. Sometimes there may be a correlation between need and whether or not schools happen to be gov-
ernment or non-government schools, but in my experience I would have to say that that is not always the case. Indeed, sometimes there can be schools—and I have seen many of them throughout Western Sydney—that may be low-fee, non-government schools that do not necessarily have the resources and funds available that some of the private schools in other parts of New South Wales have. I confine my comments largely to New South Wales because that is the extent of my direct knowledge of these matters. Some of the local schools that I have encountered that are low-fee-paying private schools do not have the same resources that many others have. In fact, there are some government schools, and in particular some selective schools, that I have observed that have some educational opportunities available for students that are not necessarily on offer at non-government schools. So I think it is important that when we are allocating funding we do so on the basis of need and that needs should be properly assessed in respect of individual schools.

There has been some consternation on the part of those opposite in relation to some of the transparency requirements, but I think it should be a given that, where public funds are expended in relation to non-government schools, there should also be an expectation that certain key measures are delivered upon in relation to the performance, reporting and ongoing compliance with broader objectives that the government might set for schools right across the spectrum that are in receipt of government funds. I do not believe that any of the requirements that are being proposed in these bills are in any way oppressive or unreasonable. Certainly none of the discussions that I have had with principals and educators within my local community have yielded any real concern about these matters. These are matters of accountability, and I think it is right that they are to be introduced as part of these bills.

I think it is important to reflect on the role that these measures play within the broader agenda of the government. We obviously talked a lot before the election about the education revolution and, now that we see the government approaching its first year in office, we have already begun to see some of the tangible results of that education revolution. I have to say that, in my local community, I was very pleased to see over 2,000 computers being funded under the first round of the digital education revolution computers in schools initiative. The fact that so many schools within my local community were funded under the first round—and, of course, the first round of funding gave preference to those schools that did not have such a high ratio of computers to students currently within their schools—and received such a significant complement of computers is evidence of the fact that the initiatives of this government are making some real gains in providing greater opportunities for local students within schools in my electorate.

I have to say that those computers were spread across the spectrum. Funding decisions out of that first round meant that government, Catholic and independent schools were recipients of funding. In one sense I think that that too is evidence of the fact that need is not always able to be ascertained in a very simple and crude way by having a look at whether or not the school happens to fit within the ambit of being a government or non-government school. One of the aspects of my particular philosophy in relation to educational funding is that I think it is important that we do respect the desire of parents to send their children to particular schools for a particular faith based reason. I think the strong history of not only the Catholic school system but also other independent schools within our education system
that are very much focused on providing an education within the context of an individual's faith is something that should continue to be supported. Indeed, that has been largely a matter of bipartisan policy, at least for many decades, and I am certain that that will continue.

In relation to the fruits of the education revolution, I mentioned earlier the digital revolution, which has been of great value to many local schools in my community. I also note the focus of this government on trade training centres. Clearly, education is one of the most significant areas of policy that we in this place are engaged in determining. That is the case because for so many people educational opportunity can open doors to future prospects in life that they may never have otherwise been able to realise. The Labor Party of course historically—and this continues to be true today—has been the great party of delivering opportunity to people.

When it comes to educational opportunity, one fact that I reflected upon recently, if I can just turn my thoughts to tertiary education, was that in my local community approximately two-thirds of all of the students that graduate with a university degree from the University of Western Sydney are the first in their family to have received a degree. That is a significant figure in demonstrating the fact that opportunities over the last few decades have been expanded to more and more people within our community, allowing them to go on and broaden the extent of their education.

One of the things that I like to try and stay focused on in this debate is that, whilst university education does provide people with tremendous opportunities, universities are not the only place where young people—or older people, for that matter—are able to receive the opportunities that they may need in order to realise their potential. I think one of the great things about the Rudd government's commitment to building trade training centres in schools is that it sends a very clear message to people within the community, particularly young people and students, that the pursuit of a trade is not in any way less respectable or less desirable than the pursuit of a university education. This is particularly the case when we consider the climate we have been in for the last few years where emerging skills shortages have been such that tradespeople have been increasingly in great demand. It is important for us as a nation not only to skill ourselves up in our universities but also to ensure that we have the tradespeople and the other skills that are necessary to provide for our economic prosperity. That is why I think our commitment to trade training centres is very much a key part of the overall education revolution.

The education revolution begins in early childhood education but it does not operate only in a direct line through school directly to university and TAFE; it also provides other opportunities that might branch out in other directions in order to allow individuals to realise their potential by harnessing their respective talents. As a measure in the context of the overall education revolution, I think this commitment, delivering on our election promise to maintain levels of funding for non-government schools, will provide the ongoing reassurance to many parents, particularly in my local community, that this is a government that is committed to continuing to govern for all Australians and to providing educational opportunities to all Australians.

I note from the comments of those on the other side, and in particular some of the comments of the shadow minister, that there have been certain amendments proposed. Indeed, the moving of these amendments even potentially threatens the passage of this
legislation. I think it would be a great shame if those on the other side were to vote against these proposals, because in doing so they would be blocking the funds that we are looking to make available for non-government schools—indeed, the $28 billion of funds that we are looking to make available over the quadrennium to non-government schools.

I saw in the Sydney Morning Herald this morning an article under the heading ‘Private school funds at risk, union warns’, and in that article Mr Watt, the Federal Secretary of the Independent Education Union of Australia, was quoted as saying that the delay—he was referring to the potential delay that could be caused by the coalition choosing not to support the bills—would ‘put funding for teaching jobs in the private sector at risk’. In the article he went on:

“The IEUA has long supported the need to reform the current Federal Government SES funding model,” he said.

“The previous Federal Government’s approach to the funding of schools was not transparent—it was a tragedy that a proper and open review was not conducted by the Howard government in 2007.”

I think those comments should be borne in mind, and certainly I hope that those opposite reflect upon them, because to do what it appears they are attempting to do—that is, to make political points that frankly are without substance, because we are delivering on the election commitments that we made, and those commitments provide for a sustainable and prosperous future for non-government schools—would be a great shame and would really throw into question the opposition’s ongoing commitment to working with this government to deliver educational opportunities for all Australians. So I call on those opposite to have a good hard think about whether or not they want to block these bills. Certainly I am very pleased to stand up and speak in support of these bills and I commend them to the House.

Mr LINDSAY (Herbert) (6.39 pm)—I rise to speak on the Schools Assistance Bill 2008 and the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008. I am privileged to have been in the House of Representatives since 1996 and during that time I have seen a bit of water go under the bridge. I have seen the Labor Party in opposition and I now see them in government. During the term of the Howard government I saw the Labor Party philosophy and their position on various matters of public policy, one of them being education. I saw for many years the Labor Party railing against, and voting against support for, private schooling. I have become, in my old age, just a bit cynical, and I just wonder—

Mr Morrison interjecting—

Mr LINDSAY—Is that unfair, the member of Cook? I just wonder how fair dinkum the Labor Party is about changing its spots and now saying that it supports choice in education. There is a bit of evidence to support my cynicism—and we have seen it go through the parliament very recently—in the form of the Labor Party’s attack on private health insurance. Again, that is a matter of choice. The former government felt very much that choice should be available to the people of Australia and that we should not seek to influence which service people take up; they should make their own decisions.

We very much supported the notion of private health insurance because if people paid a component of the cost of providing their health it took them out of the public system and they were able to get the benefits that they wanted to pay for. Of course, we saw hundreds of thousands of pensioners scrimping and saving to have their own private health insurance at a time when they really needed it. And we have seen the Labor
government take action through the parliament very recently which will see pensioners having to give up their private health insurance. This is the ideology that you get with the Labor Party. And it is driven basically, I guess, by the union movement. The public sector nurses do not want us to have a successful private system and we are seeing moves to gradually take that private system away.

So that is why I am cynical about the bills before the parliament tonight. We have said that this is an attack on choice in education, dressed up in another way. It is the ideology of the teacher unions coming through. There is all sorts of evidence for that, and there can be no better evidence about the ideology that exists in education than in my home city of Townsville. We have the best performing Australian technical college in the country. It has 300 students. It is providing magnificent outcomes. It is providing the best training for apprentices that you could possibly have, and Labor are in the process of closing it for ideological reasons. They want this sort of education to go back into what they call trade training centres in schools.

What are trade training centres? They are nowhere near being a patch on Australian technical colleges. They will be a small addendum to a school, with no money provided, as I understand it, for the capital cost. It sounds great to say that there will be a trade training centre in every school in Australia. Yes, there will, but the outcomes from those trade training centres will be nowhere near the outcomes that Australian technical colleges could achieve. It was certainly a great disappointment for my community, who knew and understood how good the technical college was, to learn that we may well see the demise of that particular institution.

We have also seen, as part of this debate, comments from the member for Lindsay about the digital revolution and the education revolution. Goodness me, digital revolution! Whatever happened to the national broadband network proposed by Labor? It could have been up and running today—now—but there is no prospect of it even starting yet. That is a fantastic revolution, isn’t it? If I were the member for Lindsay I would not be in the Australian parliament skiting about the digital revolution. In fact, it is the digital disaster. What about the education revolution? Where is it? You have to ask yourself about all of these concepts and see if there is any substance behind them.

The member for Lindsay also said that the amendments we are proposing to these bills threaten the passage of the legislation. They do not. This is the Parliament of Australia. The Labor Party can accept the amendments. The amendments are sensible. As the member for Cook observed over the weekend, Labor is treating the parliament with contempt. We saw it again with the Deputy Prime Minister today refusing to debate the Senate amendments on a bill, saying: ‘We’re the government. We’re going to have our way. We don’t care what the Senate thinks.’ She said that even though the Green senators, the Independent senators and the coalition senators all voted for the amendments. That is pretty high-handed. It is as if parliament were irrelevant.

We also saw that here in question time. The opposition asked sensible questions. They were not politically motivated; they were sensible questions at a time when this country needs a strong opposition asking sensible questions. What did we get? No answers. I think people are starting to realise that the government simply does not answer questions. The whole tenet of a parliament in the Westminster system is that the government must be accountable to the people
through the parliament. In the great democracies of the world question time is one key way you can have the government accountable to the people through the parliament. We are not seeing that happen here in the Australian parliament. You wonder how relevant the parliament is when the government seems to think it can thumb its nose at the parliament and get away with not answering questions.

The amendments we are proposing to these bills look at the attack on choice in education. Local non-government schools in my electorate certainly face an uncertain future under the changes proposed in this legislation. Schools like Annandale Christian School, which is a fantastic non-government school—I love going there; the people are so beautiful and the kids are so polite—Calvary Christian College, Townsville Grammar School, St Margaret Mary’s College, St Patrick’s College, Ignatius Park College and the Cathedral School of St Anne and St James, which I should mention or I will be in strife, are genuinely threatened by the changes made in this legislation.

Of course, the funding that is going through is welcome. But the legislation has to be right. Granting extra power to the minister to delay or end funding for non-government schools because of an audit qualified for non-financial reasons is a silly public policy to have in this legislation. Surely, the Labor Party can see that. How can you leave a school with no funding if it suffers an audit qualified for non-financial reasons? The minister can just withdraw the funding. I appeal to the Labor Party: have a bit of sense about this and do not continue along those lines. It has been made very clear in other debates about the required adherence to a national curriculum that, without the flexibility, it puts at risk some of the special non-government schools. I think Labor members too will feel some disquiet about that.

We have the ability to force non-government schools to comply with a requirement to inform the minister of every single dollar that they make, including at the local chook raffle. How bureaucratic is that? The funding of schools under this legislation is not determined by those sorts of factors and yet the Labor Party wants to know how much the local school makes at a chook raffle. We should be about less bureaucracy, not more bureaucracy. We should be about not requiring bureaucracy at all if the information is not going to be used. I think Labor colleagues may feel some disquiet about that. I will be supporting the amendments that will be sensibly moved by the opposition. I hope that my Labor colleagues will support those amendments as well.

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (6.51 pm)—Education is the key to the future of this country. That is a simple idea that I believe and that this government believes. That is one of the reasons why we made education a core economic issue at the last election and that is why we have put it at the centre of the government’s agenda this year. The Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 and the Schools Assistance Bill 2008 before the House today represent a major step in that education revolution. We are committed to building a world-class education system for all Australians.

The Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 provides for the continuation of funding for a range of targeted programs and projects under the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000. This funding goes to improving Indigenous education outcomes and assisting the communities and schools in closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians—something I certainly support.
Recently I was on a tour at the technical college in my electorate, and there was a group of Indigenous students who were studying at Rostrevor College also there. They were at the technical college having a look at the commercial kitchen and some of the trade courses there. They had come from outback Western Australia, from Kununurra, from Darwin and from Arnhem Land, and it was a tremendous opportunity for them not just to improve their education but also to give them an idea of what was on offer in other parts of the country. So it is a tremendous part of the bill and something that I would certainly commend.

The Schools Assistance Bill represents the government’s commitment to providing funding certainty for every Australian school, no matter what type it is, no matter where it is and no matter how many students it has. In determining schools funding, the government has dispensed with the old politics of the past—and we heard references to the old politics of the past from the member for Herbert. We have dispensed with those politics and made good on our election commitment—that is, that the current SES funding agreement model for 2005-08 with its formula has determined the minimum in funding for the next funding quadrennium from 1 January 2009 until 31 December 2012. There is going to be minimum upfront funding of $42 billion for all schools over that period and funding of $28 billion for recurrent and capital assistance to non-government schools specifically delivered by this bill. So every school in Australia will get certainty and will be able to plan for the next four years and beyond.

I think it is good that in this bill the government is adding to what schools are getting and not taking away. It ensures that schools like St Mary Magdalene’s School in Elizabeth South, St Columba College in Andrews Farm, St Joseph’s School in Clare, the Horizon Christian School in Balaklava and the Trinity College North campus, which had 80 students in the national parliament just last week, can continue to provide top-quality educational opportunities to students. Despite what the opposition say—both while they were in government and now—the Rudd government is here to add to funding for schools, not wreck them; to lift all the boats; and I think that is an idea that is just sensible and responsible.

The funding provided for by this bill includes an Indigenous funding guarantee as well as reforms to Indigenous supplementary assistance to make sure that schools that cater to Indigenous students receive the support they need and continue to receive that support. The funding in this bill also provides for targeted assistance for the teaching of languages other than English, for English for new arrivals to Australia, and for literacy and numeracy for students with special learning needs as well as for students in country areas.

Many of the non-government schools in Wakefield make a particular effort to support Indigenous students. I think the northern suburbs have got about 50 per cent of the urban Indigenous population of Adelaide. So this funding is certainly welcome in my electorate. This bill will ensure that a streamlined $239.1 million fund for Indigenous supplementary assistance is put in place, ensuring that every Indigenous student attracts supplementary funding that is indexed and gives schools greater flexibility in how they cater to the unique needs of Indigenous students.

It is something that is fairly close to my heart. One of my best friends in high school was a fellow named Jimmy Karpany. He was a very smart person but left school in year 10 and, when I reflect back on it, I think it was probably because he and his brother were the only Indigenous students in my high school.
He later went on to university and became a very fine police officer. When I think of these measures, I think of him. Tragically, he passed away in a car accident about a year ago, so I would just like to take this opportunity to remember him in this speech.

Importantly, this bill makes school infrastructure funding a priority. Bricks and mortar, facilities, ovals—all of these things are essential to schools functioning and are a key part of the education revolution. This bill delivers over half a billion dollars for this purpose through the capital grants program. This just adds to the education revolution. I do hope that schools like Xavier College, Craigmore High School and the new regional Catholic technical college in Elizabeth can benefit from this infrastructure funding, as well as from funding through the Trade Training Centres in Schools Program. I know they are looking forward to applying for that funding. Both government and non-government schools, I believe, can have a big impact in creating skilled school leavers in the north. I think one of our biggest problems is that we have got areas of acutely high youth unemployment in my electorate. But, not so far away, we have areas like the Barossa Valley which have virtually zero unemployment, so they have problems getting skilled labour. So that is an area that we hope these funds will have some impact on.

This package of funding comes from a government that is determined to fund our schools and to see that that funding works—that it works for teachers, parents and students. That is why the funding is linked to the requirements in the national education agreement, which is currently being finalised by COAG, to make sure that non-government schools are as accountable for their performance as government schools. This link will make sure that non-government schools are involved in meeting the three key national priorities that are central to the strength of the education system: improving the quality of teaching; raising outcomes in disadvantaged school communities; and delivering a new era of transparency that will help to guide parents, teachers and policymakers in making the best possible decisions for our schools.

The central element of transparency is ensuring that there is a simple but effective framework to assess schools’ performances. This bill provides for such a framework so that parents and students know how their school is performing. This will help to ensure that we can all understand how a school performs over time and in relation to schools serving similar communities. This will not lead to the creation of simplistic league tables, which I think have been fairly disastrous in the United States, but instead it will lead to an effective education system that can identify and address the needs of students and schools that might be at an educational disadvantage. To identify these risks this bill provides for five simple activities that are essential to achieving transparency. That is five activities, in contrast to the excessively bureaucratic approach of the previous government.

The key activities as a part of this revolution in transparency are: national testing, national outcome reporting, the provision and publication of individual school information and reporting to parents. These requirements will apply to all schools in Australia, public or private, and are fundamental to ensuring that parents know how their children are progressing at school and that we as a parliament and a community know where additional assistance is required.

They are really a straightforward set of concepts. National testing in literacy and numeracy will continue for students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 but will also reach beyond the basics and include such important areas as
civics and citizenship and information technology literacy. The results of national testing will be a part of the national reporting requirements of schools and these reporting requirements will also provide information on important aspects of schooling more generally, such as attendance and year 12 attainment. Attendance is a particularly important issue and it is one of the things that I was most shocked about. I have regular meetings with the Education Union in my electorate and one of the more frightening things that came through bits of anecdotal evidence that teachers gave me was that attendance is a big problem, particularly in the transition from primary school to high school. It is an area that we need to focus on.

The collection of this information is important if we are to make sound policy decisions that are about addressing educational disadvantage. Such information will be important as we work with state governments, particularly the state government of South Australia in my case, to make sure that local schools see the rates of truancy drop and the rates of year 12 completion rise in the northern suburbs of Adelaide. As I said, that has been a particular problem in some of these schools in the northern suburbs of Adelaide. Once we have that information we can start to make evidence based allocations of resources to ensure that no Australian is excluded from the opportunity to get—an education.

Without such information we cannot make realistic assessments about which schools need more support and which schools have discovered something that works. This information is essential in directing those education resources to where they are needed most and in promoting education ideas and concepts. Often it is the teams in the schools and the leadership in the schools that inspire better students. Without this critical information I know it will be those with the most marginal educational opportunities who suffer, who are ignored and who are denied the resources they are entitled to on the basis of their need. The bill also requires more information to be available to parents, including report cards that are in plain language and that provide an accurate assessment of how a child is progressing. These reports will include reference to students’ achievements against key indicators, including the national average, and will allow for a meaningful way of tracking students’ progress through their time at school.

Finally, the bill requires that schools follow a range of accountability procedures from simple requirements for information to be available about a school’s mission and values to the reasonable expectation that non-government schools will successfully complete their independent audits. These are all sensible expectations of the community and reflect the government’s approach to education—investing in opportunity, increasing transparency and delivering better results. When the national education agreement is concluded, government and non-government schools will get their first idea of funding. This framework will ensure that our schools are more transparent and accountable, that parents have a much better idea about how their child is performing and how their school is teaching and that policymakers will have a much better idea how to direct resources. These bills are an important step on the path to a world’s best quality education system and I commend the bills to the House.

Mrs MIRABELLA (Indi) (7.05 pm)—I rise to speak on the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 and the Schools Assistance Bill 2008. I begin by saying that the coalition has a strong record in delivering results for both public and independent school sectors in Australia. The results speak
for themselves, whether in large capital grants, smaller grants or other funding mechanisms. Right across Australia in the cities and in the country there are living examples of the former government’s commitment to quality education—quite often in funding essential programs and infrastructure that incompetent, lazy and neglectful state governments had either refused or been unable to fund.

As has been noted by many of my colleagues, the Schools Assistance Bill 2008 introduces some new requirements about which the opposition is quite concerned. These new requirements have generated significant concern within the non-government education sector already—namely, the requirement of complying with the national curriculum, which we have not even seen yet; the changes to the reporting requirements for schools, particularly as they relate to funding sources; the removal of the former government’s non-government schools establishment grants; and the powers granted to the minister in relation to refusing or delaying payments to non-government schools.

This bill reopens the debate about parental choice in schooling in Australia. There is a hidden agenda here, none of which has been dispelled by Labor’s sudden and questionable conversion to the merits of the SES formula. Sadly, old habits die hard for the political extremists who put their theoretical socialist agenda before common sense. We are witnessing the return of the politics of envy and we have to ask: did it ever really go away? When the former coalition government brought Catholic systemic schools under the SES funding agreements, Cardinal Pell said:

The socio-economic funding model fits in well with the Church’s concern to make education available to all Catholics and especially to families on low incomes who make up the bulk of our schools’ clientele.

In other words, when Labor members wax lyrical about Scotch College, the King’s School or Xavier College, they miss the point entirely. A flourishing network of low-fee Christian and independent schools has opened up right across my electorate and indeed right across Australia. Those schools provide the choice in education that parents want. That is why their enrolments are growing. But the Labor Party think choice in education is a dirty word. Certainly we on this side of the House think very differently.

Every journey starts with a first step. And the measures in this bill could well be the first step towards Labor revisiting their envy soaked 2004 schools hit list. Mr Latham may be gone, but the ideological battleground is still well and truly alive for those on the other side of this House. The ghost of the former member for Werriwa remains in this place, channelled perhaps most forebodingly in the current Minister for Education. She was, after all, his numbers man and now she wants to revisit his disdain for the independent, Catholic and low-fee Christian school sectors.

My colleagues have pointed out that the current Minister for Education had previously bemoaned the former government’s immensely successful SES funding formula—the socioeconomic status formula—as ‘a flawed index’ which ‘does not deliver on the basis of need’. Earlier in her career, in a speech in this place, she bemoaned the SES formula based on her own five objections. Four of them had policy grounds, but the fifth was the most telling, where she focused on her own ‘philosophical’ objections. It is here where the true nature of Labor’s obsession against the independent school sector comes home to roost. But it would be entirely unfair to quarantine the Labor Party’s attacks on the SES formula to just the Deputy Prime Minister. We had the member for Throsby last week say that the current SES
scheme ‘lacks integrity’. We had the awkward moment for Labor in the last election campaign when their candidate for Eden-Monaro said the SES was a ‘ridiculous postcode system’. The member for Prospect—now sitting on the government’s frontbench—must have got his speaking notes from the Deputy Prime Minister when he said in 2004 that the SES model was a ‘fundamentally flawed index’.

Do we really need to delve any further to see that Labor has form on criticising the SES model? Their rhetoric on schools funding is there for all to see. There is a clear pattern of disturbing commentary against the model of school funding put in place by the former, coalition government. Now the Labor Party want us to put all that behind us and simply believe them when they say there are no risks to school funding from this bill—in spite of their serious indifference to the SES model. All their pronouncements make very clear that the Labor Party’s real agenda is to abolish the SES model and to return to a resource based model, rather than a need based model. This would be a disastrous step for education in this country and students right across the independent and Catholic system would be worse off.

My fear is that there will be a revival of the sectarian wounds of the past. This is the ideological battleground where the Deputy Prime Minister herself is most comfortable. And she has form. In the past, she gave her time to helping the MUA in the wharfies dispute despite being John Brumby’s chief of staff at the time. She threatened the business community when she warned business groups against becoming propagandists for the Howard government—saying they could get ‘injured’ if they campaigned in favour of Work Choices. She threatened the private health sector when they sought assurances on the private health insurance rebate. And now she is in charge of an education bill worth some $28 billion over the 2009-12 period for the non-government school sector. Is it any wonder parents across the nation are concerned and worried at what this minister will do to the schools to which they send their children?

The mandating of conformity to the new national curriculum without exception troubles us because we feel it is unfair to force schools to adopt a curriculum that has not yet even been seen. This is not even touching on the concerns that may well eventuate in the near future with ideologues such as Marxist historian Stuart Macintyre along with critical literacy guru Peter Freebody in charge of the task of framing the national curriculum. The requirement that non-government schools make available for publication all of their sources of funding will do nothing to promote transparency and will have everything to do with making life difficult for non-government schools. The fact that such information is superfluous to the requirements to calculate the SES funding simply highlights this and makes you want to ask why they are imposing such onerous conditions on schools. Why do they want them to waste their time providing such information when it is not even essential?

In closing, the opposition have highlighted the very serious concerns we have with this legislation and accordingly moved amendments. It would be nice and it would show some common sense if the government were to seriously consider these amendments, but in light of the Deputy Prime Minister’s past form and that of many of her colleagues that is, sadly, highly unlikely. The great losers—and some people on the other side know this—will be the students of this nation. It may well take many years for the damage that is done to be recovered. I will obviously be making known my concerns with this legislation to my local schools and will continue to seek their feedback.
Mr HALE (Solomon) (7.14 pm)—I rise today to make my contribution and voice my strong support for the Schools Assistance Bill 2008 and the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008. The Schools Assistance Bill will appropriate $28 billion and provide funding certainty for non-government schools from 2009 through to 2012. This bill is very important for the 16 non-government schools in my electorate of Solomon because it provides funding certainty. The Education Legislation Amendment Bill will see the continuation of the appropriations from 2009 to 2012 for a range of targeted programs and projects that support improvements in Indigenous education outcomes and assist in closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. These improvements will see more funding flow to Indigenous students.

Our government’s commitment to Indigenous affairs is focused on closing the substantial gaps that exist between the socioeconomic outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. In the Prime Minister’s national apology to the stolen generations back in February this year, he said:

Today’s apology, however inadequate, is aimed at righting past wrongs. It is also aimed at building a bridge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians—a bridge based on a real respect rather than a thinly veiled contempt. Our challenge for the future is to now cross that bridge and, in so doing, to embrace a new partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians … But the core of this partnership for the future is the closing of the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians …

Education and closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians are two issues I am absolutely passionate about. As a very proud father of five Indigenous kids, I am totally committed, just like all my colleagues are, to succeeding in these two crucial areas.

By way of background, education is a subject that has always been very close to my heart. Both my parents are teachers, my sister is a teacher and I have almost finished a teaching degree. Collectively, there is a combined teaching experience of over 80 years. My grandmother was also a schoolteacher. Most of this teaching experience has been gained in the Territory. There is a great wealth of knowledge in Indigenous education. In fact, my father was the principal at Karama Primary School for many years—10 to be exact—and was in charge when the school won a national award for excellence in Indigenous education. At the time, the school had 145 Indigenous students out of a total student population of 510. Under the leadership of my father, the school implemented innovative staffing and education practices by raising the ratio of Indigenous staff employed in the school to reflect the fact that almost one-third of the student population came from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

In 2006 the gap in the national benchmarking test results of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students for years 3, 5 and 7 in reading, writing and numeracy was somewhere between 13 and 23 per cent. The Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008 seeks to address these figures, because more needs to be done to accelerate the pace of change if we are to achieve our challenging targets—halving the gap of literacy and numeracy achievement, halving the gap in attaining year 12 or equivalent and halving the gap in employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians. The government is working with government and non-government education and training providers to achieve these targets. We are establishing national collaborative arrangements that will assist us to collectively work towards these targets.

However, the government must maintain an ability to provide national leadership and
perspective to close the gap. This bill will provide more than $500 million over the next four years to facilitate this leadership by establishing evidence of what works and highlighting good practice. This funding will allow us to continue to work with Indigenous communities, philanthropic organisations, corporate leaders and national organisations to build the partnerships that are so crucial to improving outcomes for Indigenous Australia. This bill provides appropriations to continue our election commitments such as funding for an additional 200 teachers in the Northern Territory. We are also going to ensure that good programs such as Indigenous work mobility programs and Indigenous leadership programs continue. Together, we also aim to see every Indigenous four-year-old in remote communities have the opportunity to access an early learning program. This bill will reduce the red tape and improve flexibility for education providers to focus on education outcomes for Indigenous Australia.

During the election campaign, Labor made it clear that Australia needs nothing less than an education revolution—a substantial and sustained increase in the quantity of our investment and the quality of education for all Australian youth. This is required at every level of education, from early childhood education through to the education of mature-age students. Education is the platform of our economic future. Our prosperity rests on what we commit to education now.

One thing I learnt from my parents is that education is not something that you just go through the motions with. Education is not something that you just do to win an election. Education is the commitment we make for the society that we want to become. Unfortunately, for a long time in Australia there has been a debate focused on competitive relationships between government and non-government schools—a very counterproductive ‘us versus them’ debate. Unfortunately, only today the National and CLP senator for the Northern Territory, Nigel Scullion, got on radio and mischievously resurrected the old divisive ‘us versus them’ school debate. When discussing the bill on radio today, the senator cast doubts about the future of the very hardworking and committed non-government schools in Darwin. In suggesting that schools may close as a result of this bill being passed the senator is doing nothing more than misleading people and playing politics with education. Let me assure the good people of Solomon that this government recognises there are different pathways in providing high-quality education. In fact, this bill actually gives funding certainty to non-government schools.

This government believes educational experts in consultation with the community, rather than politicians, are best placed to develop a world-class national curriculum. As promised by the Rudd Labor government, the new national curriculum is being developed transparently and in consultation with government and non-government education authorities, teachers, parents, students, academics, professional organisations and business groups. There are schools around Australia, in both the government and non-government sectors, that struggle with limited resources.

Funding is important, but a more fundamental debate is needed about how to improve the quality of school education for all students. We need an ambitious national strategy to improve our schools, driven by the goal of higher quality. To thrive in the future, we need a schooling system which delivers high-quality education for all students regardless of their address or their school. Since the beginning of 2008, the Rudd Labor government has been working through the Council of Australian Governments to develop a new framework for in-
vestment and reform in Australian schools. The COAG reform framework means that, for the first time, all governments in Australia will agree to a single set of objectives, outcomes, outputs and, hence, educational priorities and reform directions for the education system. This will result in a national education agreement to be finalised through COAG by the end of this year. This will provide future Commonwealth funding for government schools.

This legislation provides the funding arrangements for non-government schools. Separate non-government school legislation for 2009-12 is required to ensure that funding will be appropriated in time for payments in January 2009. As well as meeting these commitments, the legislation will make important changes to funding for Indigenous students in non-government schools. This legislation gives funding certainty to schools in Darwin and Palmerston, with a focus on quality, and it applies transparency and accountability requirements. For parents to fully understand the choices they make for their children, we need to be more transparent and consistent so that they can examine their options. In order to target resources in a way that will improve the education system, we need richer sources of information. We need to know where efforts are bearing fruit and where they are not so that we can take effective action. For schools, teachers and education authorities to learn which strategies work in which circumstances, we need comprehensive information about both performance and circumstances.

With the states and territories, our government has announced the establishment of the New Schools Assessment and Data Centre. The data centre will ensure performance and other information about early learning outcomes for every school is effectively analysed and used to inform program implementation. Within a year, we want to see increased information on individual student performance available to Australian parents and, within three years, a report that shows not just how their child is doing but how their child’s school is performing compared to similar schools. This framework will mean consistency of reporting on the variables and the outcomes that are relevant and important in understanding the effectiveness of schooling. They include national test results and participation in international assessments and they include aspects of the student population like socioeconomic status, numbers of Indigenous students, numbers of students with disabilities and numbers of students learning English as a second language. This framework will lead to better informed parents, better informed policy makers and a better informed public debate. The framework will also require reporting on the income streams into schools so we can properly analyse what difference extra resources make. All of these are consistent with Labor’s election commitments to deliver an education revolution, provide funding certainty for non-government schools and, most importantly, ensure that no school is disadvantaged.

The Schools Assistance Bill 2008 is a major block in building a fair, transparent national framework for schooling. It will help create a basis for reporting and accountability that is consistent across all schools in all sectors. Perhaps the most significant initiative in the bill—and one that seeks to provide enhanced support—is contained in two linked programs: the Indigenous Supplementary Assistance, ISA, program; and the associated measure, the Indigenous Funding Guarantee, IFG, program. The ISA program will provide almost $240 million dollars for four streamlined programs that provide funds for supplementary recurrent assistance schemes, homework centres, Indigenous tutorial schemes and English-as-a-second-
language schemes for Indigenous language speakers. Funding is allocated on a ‘per Indigenous enrolment’ basis, with remote area loadings and indexation of funding built into the program. The IFG program is a transitional measure that will ensure non-government providers have their funding maintained at 2008 levels. This capped guarantee scheme means that providers who might otherwise lose funding under the new arrangements will not lose precious resources.

In my own electorate of Solomon, measures such as the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme are vital tools that serve a real need. I am delighted that, for many Indigenous kids in Darwin and Palmerston, non-government schools will have an in-school tutorial program funded at a level that supports quality learning outcomes. These tutorial schemes help our local Indigenous students stay on track in class and assist with the completion of homework. These are programs that work, and I am extremely happy to see them receive funding security.

I have 16 vibrant, energetic non-government schools in my electorate. They deliver quality education to thousands of kids in the Darwin and Palmerston area, from the early learning years through to the primary grades and the all-important secondary grades. I love visiting the schools, and I will name a few of them: St John’s College, where I went as a student for five years; St Andrew’s Lutheran School, where I did the hokey-pokey a couple of weeks ago with the children in year 2 and was a very big hit; O’Loughlin Catholic College, where I have assisted them with their football side; Marrara Christian College, where my father still works from time to time and where I unveiled a plaque for their new basketball area; Palmerston Christian School, which is another very well-regarded and respected private school; Kormilda College, which does a fantastic job in enabling kids from remote Indigenous communities to board and get an education; and the Essington School in the northern suburbs of Darwin, out on the peninsula of Nightcliff, where I had the great privilege of opening their fete recently.

I speak to the students, teachers and parents. They tell me about their schools and their communities, and I am always impressed by the quality of the young people that our schools produce, the professionalism of the teaching staff and the dedication of the parents of the students. It was only a few weeks ago, as I mentioned earlier, that I went back to St John’s College to present some awards. It was quite a humbling experience to be back and to speak to the school. It was also great to catch up with the principal, Sister Philippa, her fantastic staff and of course the kids. In fact I met up with my old woodwork teacher, Mr Noel Muller, and his wife, Carol, and it was amazing how many of the people who taught me some 22-odd years ago were still there, still getting around and still educating after all this time. I must admit there was a little bit of reminiscing about the old days, and things came back. We had come a long way: we did not have air-conditioned classrooms back then, but now they have these interactive smart boards. If it is anything like my computer in my office, I probably would not be able to use it.

I recently also had the privilege of advising the principal of Marrara Christian College, Mr John Metcalfe, and the principal of Kormilda College, Mr Malcolm Pritchard—two very dynamic, non-government schools in Darwin—that their schools were successful in obtaining funding for trade training centres. Kormilda College and the Northern Territory Christian College were successful in obtaining up to $1.5 million each. The training centres will provide a metals fabrication and a construction training workshop along with an engineering studies centre for
students from St John’s College, Marrara Christian College and Kormilda College. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff of all those schools in my electorate and congratulate them on the fantastic job that they do.

The Prime Minister said in his address to the National Press Club in August this year:

… I want people to understand that our reforms are essential to Australia’s future—because quality education is good for our economy, good for our community and good for individuals. It will help create jobs and higher wages, and will create better opportunities for all Australians.

The Government wants the next generation of Australians to be the best educated, best skilled, best trained in the world.

We don’t apologise for this ambition—and we stand by this commitment. He went on:

Today, we take one further practical step towards achieving the education revolution that Australia needs.

One step further to building a stronger, fairer and more secure Australia, and one capable of handling the great challenges of the 21st century that now lie before us.

I absolutely agree with him.

In conclusion, it being the start of Carers Week, I thought it would be appropriate to mention carers and the fantastic jobs that carers do within our communities. My mother is involved in a carer role: there is a young guy with cerebral palsy within our family, and Mum is doing some respite care with him. We certainly have an affiliation with what carers do. Certainly it was a great pleasure today to be down at Old Parliament House for the opening of Carers Week. We acknowledge the carers; we certainly respect the contribution they make to our community. A lot of it is unpaid work: it is 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks of the year. They do a fantastic job and they should be honoured and respected for the job that they do.

As far as education is concerned, this is a good bill: it is good for Australia, it is good for Australian kids, it is good for Australian communities, it is good for Australian families. Education should be something where we do not have an ‘us against them’ or a ‘private schools against public schools against independent schools’ way of thinking. This model will look after all schools to give all children the best chance they have got—that is, a solid education to make sure they do well in their lives and fulfil their potential. I commend the bills to the House.

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler) (7.34 pm)—I want to make it perfectly clear—as I have in the past in this chamber—that I am not an apologist for either private or public school systems, but I am a fierce advocate of choice and equity in education. I represent a provincial seat with two major population centres with private and public schools, with a number of smaller towns that are fortunate to have their own schools, and country areas where the schools are quite often the essential centre of the community. My kids have gone to both types of schools; I am familiar with both systems.

At first blush, to many the Schools Assistance Bill 2008 will seem like a continuation of the coalition’s policy—and in some part it is. I can see the member for Solomon has stayed in the chamber, and he laments that it looks like the resurrection of the private schools against public schools debate. When you get down to the fine print in this bill and the various covenants laid down in a series of conditions for grants, it is in them that you see the real intent. Is it any wonder that Senator Scullion wanted to alert the people of Darwin and the Territory?

Mr Hale—I bet you not one of them closes!
Mr NEVILLE—They may not close, but I think they are going to have a much more torrid time than they did under the previous government. Let me give one example. The establishment assistance grants were made available by the previous government to non-government schools. There was $500 per full-time student equivalent for the first year of the school’s operations and $250 per full-time equivalent in the second year. That was very important in getting non-government schools established and, quite often, it was helpful to the state system because it was in an area where perhaps you could not justify two state schools but where you could justify a state school and a private school. Under this bill, that provision has been thrown out. I would ask the member for Solomon: that gives you no worries?

One of the most contemptible aspects of the previous Labor government’s regime— I am talking about the Hawke and Keating governments—was its implementation of the so-called new schools policy. In effect, it was the exact opposite; it was a no new schools policy. It was a surreptitious measure of Susan Ryan’s to limit the number of non-government schools, and any objective observer would say that was the intent and that is what happened. One could be pardoned for believing that we are moving back that way. I ask the member for Solomon: why else would you contemplate reintroducing it if you did not have some secondary intent in doing so?

Of course, we have a number of conditions laid down for SES funding, too. I will not go into all of those, because they are quite extensive, but I will pick out a few. They say that you must agree to testing, benchmarking and assessment. I am not against those, but it is interesting that when we first proposed that in the first half of the Howard government’s regime it was bitterly opposed by the ALP and the teachers union, as was one of the other conditions: that school reports had to be fair in their assessment of students—that they could not use generalities, they had to use real assessment tools—and that the reports had to be understandable to parents. That was opposed, too. Now these things are coming in. On top of that, there is the further condition that they must accept the government’s curriculum. I will come back to that later, because I have some reservations on that.

While the SES was nominally adopted by the ALP at the last federal election, it is clear that they are in a mood to water it down. Several Labor MPs in speeches on the public record opposed the spirit of the SES, including the member for Prospect and the member for Eden-Monaro. They were quite unapologetic in their view. If we go back one further election, we had the spectre of Mark Latham and his infamous hit list of private schools—schools that were seen to be sufficiently well endowed to be punished for their success or for the generosity of their P&Cs or their old boys associations.

I remind the government that the capacity to fundraise is not limited to non-government schools. It is open to any government school association to do the same thing. Indeed, I have a number in my area that have been highly successful in raising funds for school facilities—in fact, two assembly halls. It is no mean feat for any school, private or public, to raise that sort of money. Why then would you punish the non-government school for the generosity of its school community, given that the same parents who have helped raise this money also pay fees over and above their voluntary contributions to the school?

The requirement in the bill that schools must report all forms of income is quite insidious. Quite apart from giving competing schools insight into what other schools are
doing, it is an infringement of commercial-
in-confidence. If the government knows that
the school has a particularly highly moti-
vated P&C which raises quite a deal of
money for a school, or that a school has an
old boys association that is providing sports
equipment and the like, or a local committee
runs bingo for the benefit of the school, what
business is that of the government? That is
over and above work done by the commu-
nity. I have personal experience of all three
of those. Some of my kids went to a school
in Bundaberg that raised money through
bingo. The old boys of the boarding school I
went to got together and raised money for a
rowing shed and skulls and all that sort of
paraphernalia so that they could get into the
Head of the River and those sorts of sporting
events. Having seen that firsthand, I would
be horrified that schools would have to ac-
count for that sort of thing to the govern-
ment.

Where does the government’s intrusion
into the privacy of a school stop? If I were
cynical I would say that having this sort of
information on the public record would be
used by Labor further down the track in
modifying the SES funding. And what would
the method be? First, flush it out; second,
demonise it, which Latham did; third, win
public sentiment through the politics of
envy—‘What about these rich schools of
King’s and this and that?’—and then, with
Latham-esque aplomb, change it. Sadly, for
his sake, he did not get the chance to do it.

Let me now deal with the philosophy of
SES funding. The formula which is used is
based on the socioeconomic status of the
various census collection districts in Aus-
tralia, and all the students are placed in the
CCD areas. That means that a school that has
these CCDs under its influence receives
money according to the socioeconomics of
the kids who come from those CCDs. Noth-
ing could be fairer than that.

Mr Perrett—Why do 80 per cent not do it?

Mr NEVILLE—They do.

Mr Perrett interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC
Scott)—Order! The member for Moreton
will not interject outside of his place in this
chamber.

Mr NEVILLE—They do. It is quite sim-
ply that the CCDs are the basis upon which
funding for those schools is paid. That is a
fair system. It is also an encouragement to
some of the more affluent schools to take on
a cross-section of less affluent kids by way
of scholarships or reduced fees or whatever it
might be. That enriches the profile of their
school and it gives other kids the opportunity
to go to good quality schools.

Under that system, when the coalition
government was in power, the schools that
drew students from challenged communities
could get up to about 70 per cent of the cost
of educating the student. That certainly still
placed a burden on the family—30 per cent
for people from low-socioeconomic areas
was a big effort. The ones who have been
bleating about the more endowed schools
should recognise that those schools serving
the wealthiest communities ended up with
only 13.7 per cent of that figure—of course,
the schools in between moved on a sliding
scale. That system deliberately left school
fees and the school’s assets out of the equa-
tion, because, as I said before, it would un-
fairly penalise parents for spending their own
time and money on the kids’ education.

Under the former coalition government, a
record amount of funding was delivered to
state schools. For many years, Labor state
and territory governments failed to match the
level of school funding provided by the coa-
lition government. For example, in 2006-07
the states and territories increased their fund-
ing to state schools by an average of 4.9 per
cent, while the Australian government boosted its funding by 11 per cent. At that time, if the states had bothered to keep pace with the Commonwealth’s investment, there would have been an extra $1.4 billion available for funding our state schools.

In this argument, and in all others, we must recognise that taxation, whether it comes from income tax, the GST or state taxes, comes from the pockets of the average taxpayer. The ultimate test of fairness is seeing where the money ends up after going through the state and federal systems. In the 2005-06 financial year, recurrent government spending per student—that is, the funding of pupils—in state schools averaged $11,243 per student. In the non-government schools, it was $6,287—nearly half. Total funding to state schools for the same financial year was $2.3 billion from the Commonwealth, $23 billion from the states and an estimated $1 billion from parents, a total of $26 billion. Funding for the private schools was $5.1 billion from the Commonwealth, $1.8 billion from the states—pretty measly, I might add—and $4.7 billion from the parents in school fees and through the enhancement of the schools in the other ways that I mentioned before, a total of $11.6 billion, less than half the funding.

Let me move now to literacy. I must admit that I am concerned about the requirement that schools entering into a funding agreement with the Commonwealth must implement the new national curriculum in mathematics, science, history and English. Let me qualify that: if it was the core curriculum, I would agree with it. But, until we see the extent of these requirements, there is a doubt in people’s minds that this will be an all-embracing thing which will decide absolutely everything that is taught in the classroom. I agree with consistency of content and testing. I have serious doubts, however, that the national curriculum being developed by the government will deliver that.

Firstly, parliament has little idea of what the national curriculum will look like, because the framing documents have just been released for some scrutiny. Secondly, the philosophies of a number of the people spearheading the creation of these documents are political in the extreme. For example, the history curriculum is being overseen by Professor Stuart Macintyre, a former member of the Communist Party—not that there is anything wrong with that today, I suppose. But it does give an insight into his background. His major works include histories of Marxism in Britain and the Australian Communist Party.

In the English curriculum, we have Professor Freebody, a leading advocate of critical literacy—whatever that means—in Australian English courses. According to Professor Freebody, literacy education is not about skills development and not about deep competence. That troubles me. Although we have only just laid our eyes on the framework crafted by Professor Freebody, I have to say that I simply do not accept that being literate does not require a person to have skills or competency. Literacy is the very foundation of all future learning. Once children can read and write, they can go on to higher levels of learning and they have the ability to teach themselves without guidance.

A large number of people who come into my office from businesses around town tell me that kids find it difficult to put the simplest letter together, that they cannot punctuate and do not know where to use a capital letter, a comma, a semicolon or whatever. That troubles me, too. Literacy goes beyond literature to functional expression. If that is failing then we all fail. I acknowledge that various learning difficulties or disabilities will always prevent a percentage of people from acquiring basic literacy skills. But any
attempt to dumb down the national curriculum by suggesting that literacy is not at the core of literacy skills is quite outrageous.

Parents are urged to read to their children, our teachers bust their guts to give their students the best education possible and the community in general laments declining literacy standards. And if competency and skills are not fundamental to reading and writing, why are there national campaigns for the Reading Writing Hotline for people who need a helping hand with their literacy? This runs in contradiction to the government's own policy. I urge those drafting these frameworks and those working on the development of the national curriculum for English, history, science and mathematics to set the bar high, not low, in spite of the apparent rush job in getting this material together.

The government knew that these bills had to be passed by the end of this year to ensure some continuity of funding for non-government schools, but the framing documents have only recently be completed and this parliament is expected to pass these bills with scant scrutiny of those documents. Worse still, the government is saying that if it does not get its way on these bills it is going to pull them. That is a form of blackmail that I have not heard before in my life.

I would like to talk briefly in the minutes remaining about the so-called education revolution. One of the great benchmarks of this revolution was going to be every child in secondary school having a computer. Then it was going to be every child in year 9 onwards; then it was every child in years 10, 11 and 12; then it was going to be a computer between two children. Now it will be implemented if the states can employ the requisite levels of electric power to be able to run the computers. What a bleeding indictment of Labor governments across this country. It is an indictment that they cannot even get three-phase power into schools to run such things as computers, the modern office equipment that kids have to learn how to use, and even things like air conditioning in hot areas.

Under our system, Investing in Our Schools, I used to go up there, and it was simply marvellous to see what you could do. At $600 a computer, you could get 20 computers into a primary school in a little country area for about $12,000. It was a joy to go to those schools, and if it had been left to the Labor state governments they would still be waiting for them. You, Deputy Speaker Scott—not that I want to involve you in a political way—would know that only too well, having 52 major towns in your electorate.

Finally, I come to Australian technical colleges and the new trade training centres in high schools. I am ambivalent about this. All schools do have trade training centres—or didn’t you know? Haven’t you been around your high schools in the past? Some might argue they could be at a higher standard; some might argue they could have some more technical equipment. One particular school in my electorate, Kepnock State High School, had a principal, Siegy Schmieman, who was an absolute wizard at getting good equipment for his schools. He did not need a government trade training program to do that.

Why would we want to close down the Australian technical colleges? It just makes me wonder if the Labor Party has heard about the school-to-work transition, because this is an important feature of getting kids work-ready. There are two fine examples of that—I have not got time to describe them—in Toolooa State High School and Tannum Sands State High School in Gladstone, where school-to-work transition was mastered at a
very high level. I do not think that these trade training centres are going to add a lot to that.

I support the amendments to this bill and I call on the government to treat all schools fairly in the process.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (7.54 pm)—I want to clarify my background. My authority to speak about education does not come from the fact that my children went to school—I only have a three-year-old, and he has not gone to school yet. It comes from 11 years of teaching in private and state schools and five years of being a union organiser in private schools as well. In the interest of clarification to the member for Hinkler, I was a candidate in the 2004 election, so I did have a bit to do with the previous ALP education policy. I assure those opposite that if anyone is trying to blow the class war dog whistle it is not this side of politics. We have a very simple education policy which is about giving the best education to all students in Australia. We are not trying to revive a carcass that is long dead. With that background, I rise to speak in support of the Schools Assistance Bill 2008 and the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008. I will address the Schools Assistance Bill first.

This bill provides $28 billion for recurrent and capital funding for the non-government school sector and, in doing so, honours the government’s election commitment to continuing the existing indexation arrangements known as socioeconomic status or the SES funding system. It was touched on by some of the previous speakers in that it utilises the CCDs, the census collection districts—the smallest data collection districts used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics—of the parents of the children enrolled at the school. It was interesting to hear the member for Hinkler outline how a school that he was connected with had deliberately targeted people with low socioeconomic status to artificially inflate the SES rating for that school. It is certainly something that I had heard rumours about, but it was interesting to hear the member for Hinkler say that it was a targeted activity in some schools.

Under that system, the higher a school’s SES score, the lower the per-student funding rate—in other words, the wealthier a school community, the less it received in government funding. That was seen to be a reasonably fair initiative; every fair minded person supports the aims of such a funding arrangement. I say ‘the aims’ of it because, as I inappropriately interjected earlier when I was away from my place, the system did not quite work. So many schools, approximately 80 per cent or so, are funding-maintained schools. Still, the aims of it—judging a school by the wealth of a parents—are something every fair-minded person would support.

However, in the lead-up to the last election the Rudd government made a commitment to bringing about an education revolution in all Australian schools, public and private, Catholic and independent, city and country. We want an education revolution to take place in all of these schools. We were not interested in what the sign above the school said or what religious symbol was over the school entrance; we wanted to make an assessment of what was best for the school community irrespective of where students came from. Our education revolution is about raising the quality of teaching in our schools, ensuring that all students, especially those in disadvantaged areas, are benefiting from schooling. It is also about improving the transparency and accountability of
schools. Transparency and accountability are not swearwords.

The legislation before the House establishes a platform to help meet these objectives in the non-government schooling sector. As a condition of funding, all schools will be required to sign up to the national curriculum by 2012. The National Curriculum Board is currently developing this curriculum. I was interested to read some comments from the member for Warringah in an article in the *Australian* from 13 October under the heading *Call to study more British history*. The article said:

OPPOSITION frontbencher Tony Abbott wants school students to study more British history, saying Britain has shaped the world and should get the credit for it.

The National Curriculum Board today will release a draft curriculum which places a greater focus on world events in history classes.

Mr Abbott said he was in favour of world history but said the focus should be on Britain.

“People have got to know where we came from, they’ve got to know about the ideas that shaped the modern world, and in a very significant sense, the modern world has been made in England,” he said in Canberra.

… … …

“We are a product of western civilisation, in particular we are a product of English-speaking civilisation.”

It is certainly interesting to see the member for Warringah’s focus on understanding world history and the important role that the English, particularly, played in world history. He does talk about the British at one stage but he seems to focus on the English; that is no disrespect to the Welsh, the Scottish or the Irish. Unlike the member for Warringah, I believe that we should have a particular world focus. I was doing a bit of research for this and asked: why do we have a subject called English? Charles Dickens certainly did not study English. He spoke English but he never studied English; he might have had a bit of Latin and a bit of Greek and some of the other classics. But if we delve down into why we study a subject called English, one suggestion is that it might be from Thomas Macaulay’s speech back in 1835, ‘A minute on Indian education’, where he stated:

We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother-tongue.

He was talking about the fact that the British were colonisers. One of my former lecturers, Helen Tiffen, in her book *The Empire Writes Back* states:

The study of English has always been a densely political and cultural phenomenon, a practice in which language and literature have both been called into the service of a profound and embracing nationalism.

There is a suggestion from Batsleer’s work in 1985 that the:

… historical moment which saw the emergence of ‘English’ as an academic discipline also produced the nineteenth-century colonial form of imperialism.

Viswanathan suggests that:

British colonial administrators, provoked by missionaries on the one hand and fears of native insubordination on the other, discovered an ally in English literature to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of a liberal education.

From this it can be seen that basically the colonial administrators of places like India saw that the culture, particularly the literature of England, was something that could be used to help control the natives, so to speak. That is why they came up with this suggestion: ‘Rather than teach Latin or Greek, why don’t we come up with a subject called English?’ So, back in the early 1800s, they turned to the professors at Oxford and Cambridge and said, ‘What should be the works in the canon? What are the significant works
of literature that the good citizens of India should be studying? So the chairs of Oxford and Cambridge at the time—in the 1830s, 1840s or 1850s—said, ‘Obviously the poets we studied when we were young are very important.’ Who had they studied? Of course, they had studied the Romantic poets—Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and Wordsworth. That is why, in the schools of South Africa, Zimbabwe, the Caribbean, India, Pakistan or Australia, every student, certainly in the 1960s and 1970s, studied Wordsworth’s *The Daffodils*. Every student studied the same works of literature deemed appropriate by the dons of Oxford and Cambridge in the 1800s. Of the schools of English, one was created in Oxford in 1893 and one at Cambridge in 1917. That is why we need to unpack the member for Warringah’s comment about why we need to focus on English. Obviously he was a loyal student of English history and maybe of English literature, I am not sure—I know his football team allegiances; I cannot speak for his literary allegiances—but we have moved on quite a bit since then. Unlike the member for Warringah, I believe in an Australian literature. That is why I am a strong supporter of the National Curriculum Board. It is a great way to look at the flavours of Australia, of our national dish. I think we have moved on a bit from roast beef. I think we now have some Australian flavours in our national dish.

Mr Hale—Barramundi.

Mr PERRETT—Yes, barramundi—I will take that interjection from the member for Solomon—and there are lots of other flavours. In fact, while we do have a national dish, obviously Queensland is a bit different from the Northern Territory, from Western Australia, from Tasmania, from Victoria et cetera, so we will still need to have the local flavours in this national dish, be it barramundi or something else. We still need the other types of literature that are peculiar to certain areas, because obviously a student from the middle of the Northern Territory is not quite the same as a student from the middle of Sydney.

As a former teacher of English, I am a strong supporter of this government initiative and, as someone who still has a lot of friends who are teaching English in private and state schools, I can say that people are quite excited about this initiative. As I touched on with the history of the subject which we now call English and which we take for granted, it has changed quite a bit from its original intent to now being all but the lingua franca of this part of the world. The subject of English was just as much about learning about English or British culture as it was about the study of a language.

Back in the 1800s the British understood the importance of culture as a unifying force and, perhaps, as a controlling force, so it is appropriate that more than 100 years later we do the same in Australia, that we step up to the idea that things have changed since Federation. At the time of Federation Australian citizens were basically British citizens. Now Australian citizens have a different dish in front of them, hopefully. The horse and buggy days are over and we need a much more palatable national dish for the digital age.

The bill before the House also introduces a number of other conditions on funding to ensure greater accountability and transparency in the sector. As a result, Catholic, Anglican, Christian, Muslim, grammar, Jewish and independent community schools will all be required to do some quite straightforward things that are aspects of accountability and transparency. Firstly, they will have to participate in national student assessments and reports on schooling outcomes. There is nothing controversial in that, despite the suggestions from those opposite. Secondly,
they will have to provide individual school performance reports to the minister and plain language student reports to parents. What is controversial about that? What is sinister about that? Nothing at all. Thirdly, they will have to make publicly available information about a school’s performance. I should stress that these are not new initiatives. Every decent school is probably already doing a lot of these things, such as providing plain-language student reports and making information about school performance publicly available. If you get on the web and look up the schools in your electorates, you will find that most schools—state and private—are already doing many of these things.

This bill before the House also contains a new financial accountability measure requiring schools to report all funding sources. These funding conditions are about ensuring that parents and school communities can have a clear picture of how their school is performing; then they will be able to compare like with like. The small Catholic primary school in the middle of the bush that I attended will not be compared with Brisbane Grammar—it is in the middle of the city with different resources. It is more important to compare like with like and let parents make assessments about how their school is performing, especially with regard to the funding sources available to that school. The Minister for Education will be able to make informed decisions about which schools are succeeding and which ones need more support to lift their standards. This bill only addresses funding for non-government schools as public school funding will be negotiated at COAG and delivered through the national education agreement.

The Rudd government are serious about ensuring our kids get the best education possible and we are committed to a new era of cooperation to achieve this aim, not the old turf wars of the past. The national education agreement will provide the same measures for accountability for government schools as this bill provides for non-government schools. As I said at the start, the Rudd government are committed to making decisions based on the students, not whatever sign is above the school gate. Many teachers from my electorate have expressed some concerns to me about grading schools. However, there is agreement that the community benefits from comparing like schools with like schools in similar environments, and this will transcend their concerns. I stress that this is not about league tables. On occasions, it is hard to assess the great work of people like learning support teachers or the people that put extra time into sport, music and those things. This is why we are not a government that are about league tables. I have got some incredible schools in my electorate, including places like Southside Education, which has a significant Aboriginal population. A lot of their students are people with special needs. There is also Milpera State High School, which is basically the first school that people attend when they arrive in Brisbane as refugees. Places like Yeronga State High School have significant migrant populations as well.

I now turn to the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008. The bill is a key part of the Rudd government’s efforts to halve the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade. To halve the gap is a great commitment. Indigenous education, school attendance and school retention rates are simply not good enough and we must do more to support Indigenous communities to improve education. I saw this in my five years of being a union organiser with the Independent Education Union. I got to go to a lot of schools—predominantly Catholic schools, obviously, but also Anglican schools and independent schools like Wadja Wadja.
High School and the Murri School. They are both Aboriginal independent schools. Wadja Wadja is west of Rockhampton and the Murri School is across the road from my electorate in Acacia Ridge. It is great to see how this initiative will flow on to these schools.

This bill amends the Indigenous Education (Targeted Assistance) Act 2000 to provide more than $760 million for Indigenous education programs. Of this investment, $160 million will go towards preschools and vocational education and training providers working with Indigenous students. This funding will come into effect in time for the new school year. Away-from-base Abstudy payments will receive $109 million, which will help fund education providers with Abstudy recipients who are undertaking distance education, and $505 million will fund target initiatives to boost Indigenous education. This will deliver (1) an additional 200 teachers for the Northern Territory; (2) three boarding facilities in the Northern Territory; (3) the Indigenous Youth Mobility Program introduced by the opposition; (4) the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program; (5) the Sporting Chance Program; and (6) other targeted initiatives. I commend those opposite for the Indigenous Youth Mobility Program, and I do so in a fair dinkum spirit of bipartisanship. It is a great initiative.

The above points are only part of the government’s $1.5 billion investment in Indigenous education over four years. As we saw with the apology on my very first day in the parliament, symbols are very important but actions speak louder than even the most noble of words. That is why it is important to be able to back up words with actions. The bill before the House also contains a number of reporting requirements for the minister to ensure that open and accountable government is taking place. The minister will be required to report on outcomes such as Indigenous enrolments in preschool, progress on the National Indigenous Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, and the year 10 and year 12 retention rates for Indigenous students. Indigenous families will be able to go on the web and find out how the school they intend to send their children to is progressing. The Prime Minister will also report on progress on closing the gap for Indigenous Australians on the first sitting day of parliament each year.

This bill proves the government is serious about improving Indigenous education. We do not believe it should sit in the too-hard basket any longer. All Australian children deserve the same education opportunities regardless of their parents’ bank balance or where they live. It is all part of the Rudd government’s education revolution to raise the standard of education around the country. This commitment includes a half-billion dollar investment in early childhood preliteracy and prenumeration; halving HECS for those studying maths and science at university and then halving HECS again if they choose to pursue a career in teaching or working in maths and science; a new national curriculum in the core subjects of maths, science, English and history; a new national action plan on literacy and numeracy; $2.4 billion in education tax refunds; and a $1.2 billion digital education revolution to give every year 9 to 12 student access to a computer. We are investing $30 million to boost education for Indigenous children in remote areas, including a trial linking family and welfare payments to school attendance. This is the plan the Australian people voted for and it is the plan we are committed to delivering. The bills before the House are another step along the way to achieving this education revolution. I commend the bills to the House. 

(Time expired)

Mr BRIGGS (Mayo) (8.14 pm)—This is my first opportunity to speak on legislation
following my maiden speech. I thank you for the opportunity to speak on important bills. As these are joint bills being discussed, I will start with the Education Legislation Amendment Bill 2008, which I welcome. I think the minister and the government are doing the right thing in providing additional funding for Indigenous education. I think one of the great legacies of the Howard government was the intervention in the Northern Territory last year because it finally recognised that what we need to get right in the Indigenous communities in our country is, first of all, law and order and then educating the young kids—because, as we all know in this place, education empowers people to build a better and brighter future for themselves. I think that intervention is a generational battle, and the generational battle will be won in the field of education, so I support the move of the Education Legislation Amendment Bill.

On the other hand, the Schools Assistance Bill 2008 does worry me to a degree. There are four parts of it which concern me, and some of my colleagues have raised issues, not least the shadow minister for education, the member for Sturt, who has raised these arguments in this place. The four changes that I think are most concerning are the changes to the grounds upon which the minister can elect to refuse or delay payment under clause 15, which make it easier for the minister to do so; the new requirements in school funding agreements to comply with the national curriculum by 2012, as specified in regulations, which are in clause 22; alterations to the reporting requirements for schools, particularly new requirements relating to information about financial viability and funding sources; and removal of the previous government’s new non-government schools establishment grants under clause 100, which again troubles me.

Of course, the SES funding method, which is the fairest method for funding private schools, was introduced by the previous government. It was never one that was liked by the other side of the House, it would be fair to say. In 2004, when the previous leader of the Labor Party and the Deputy Prime Minister’s political hero—at that stage—was the leader of the Labor Party, we had the famous private schools hit list, which probably reflected the true views of those on the other side at the time. What they did last year, of course, was to cover up some of those true views very well and introduce policies which appealed to middle Australia, making it look as if they had changed their tune on this issue. However, what this bill does is to start to build the case to reintroduce the private schools hit list.

Mr Perrett—The old dog whistle!

Mr BRIGGS—Well, you’d know about it! It does so as I described in the third point that I made, on the alterations to the reporting requirements for schools, particularly new requirements relating to information about financial viability and funding sources. The previous government received this information. I pay tribute to the Parliamentary Library for the Bills Digest they released on this, which says:

Previously, the financial information that was collected was treated as commercial-in-confidence and, therefore, individual school financial information was not released. However, the Bill—this bill—contains another new provision which empowers the Minister to ask for reports about individual school information in a way determined by the Minister. Potentially, under this provision, the Minister could make these reports publicly available.
We all see the game being played here by the Deputy Prime Minister, which is, of course, to get the information from King’s College—which is the Labor Party’s favourite attack point on this issue—and release it publicly as part of an argument to say, ‘You’ve got to reduce the funding for these schools; you can see King’s College have this massive benefactor,’ when we know that what they are really trying to do is to undermine the choice in the Australian school system. They are trying to undermine the private school system, which has always been the Labor Party view.

Mr Perrett—Didn’t Whitlam bring in funding for private schools?

Mr BRIGGS—Well, we will go back to 2004 and the Deputy Prime Minister’s former political hero.

Mr Sidebottom interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Order! The member for Mayo has the call.

Mr BRIGGS—Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for your protection. Back in 2004 we had a true Labor policy, and I think Mark Latham represented those true Labor principles. Certainly the Deputy Prime Minister thought so at the time; she was quite enamoured of the former member for Werriwa at that point. Let us remember what that policy did. It changed the SES funding model.

Mr Perrett—You’re the voice of the future, are you? You’re the visionary?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—the member for Moreton will desist from interjecting.

Mr BRIGGS—Again, thank you for your protection, Mr Deputy Speaker. I think it is important that the Australian people see where we are going with this bill, because what we are seeing here is a very clever lawyer tactic. I give the Deputy Prime Minister credit; she is a very good performer in this House. I must say that in this House I have had the opportunity to see her acting as the Prime Minister for a couple of days in question time, and she certainly does a much better job than the incumbent. She is very good at building a case, and I think that in this case that is what she is doing: she is building the case and getting the information there so that, at a later stage when it is more convenient or there is a big enough case for her to drop that out there, that is what she will do. It gets back to what the Labor view on public versus private is. The Labor Party do not like the private choice; they are not interested in the private school system. They want to make it as hard as they can for parents to send children to private schools. I think that is what that clause is largely about.

The other section which concerns me greatly is the removal of the previous government’s position on new non-government schools establishment grants, which of course gets to the same point—that they are not keen on these private schools being built and developed. That gets back to the true colours of the Labor Party. I think nothing reflects it better than a couple of key quotes from the Deputy Prime Minister. On 4 September 2000, before her time on the frontbench and when she was trying to reinvent herself for government and so forth, she said in this House—I think you were here at the time, Member for Braddon:

The last objection to the SES model is more philosophical, that the model makes no allowance for the amassed resources of any particular school. As we are all aware, over the years many prestige schools have amassed wealth—wealth in terms of buildings and facilities, wealth in terms of the equipment available, wealth in terms of alumni funding raising, trust funds, endowment funds and the like.

So this is what this is all about.

I heard the member for Moreton in his previous remarks mention he went to a re-
gional Catholic school, I think he said, or a regional private school. I did too. I went to St Joseph’s College in Mildura. I think we should protect that choice. My parents sacrificed a lot to be able to send me to that school, which you would never class as having King’s School type costs.

Further, the Deputy Prime Minister went on:

… it must follow as a matter of logic that the economic capacity of a school is affected by both its income generation potential—from the current class of parents whose kids are enrolled in the school—and the assets of the school. The SES funding system makes some attempt to measure the income generation potential of the parents of the kids in the school but absolutely no attempt to measure the latter, the assets of the school. This is a gaping flaw …

This was the flaw that the schools hit list attempted to address in 2004. It is where the Labor Party will go back to. This is the step along the way. This bill is part of the case building up to when they want to reintroduce the schools hit list. This bill is part of the case building up to when they want to reintroduce the schools hit list. That is where they want to go. That is the Labor Party’s intention and that is where we will go.

We are 12 months into the so-called education revolution. In October it seems appropriate to talk about the education revolution. This is the revolution that replaces computers in schools—the second-hand computer scheme in South Australia—but then does not actually keep up with them. It is little wonder that even the New South Wales government saw through that one. The education revolution has failed without firing a shot—as the member for Sturt said today. This is all part of getting back to the old Labor beliefs that Mark Latham outlined so convincingly in 2004. We should not forget what the member for Kingsford Smith, the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, said during last year’s election. He said that when they got in they would just change it all. This is what it is part of: ‘We will just change it all. We will get back to what we really wanted to do.’ This is part of the guise that the Australian public saw last year from Kevin 07—

Mr Perrett—he really enjoyed the 2004 election campaign. He’s reliving it in his speech.

Mr BRIGGS—Well, it is part of a case. Member for Moreton, you might be embar-
rassed by it. I understand. But this is part of the case. We are back to building part of the case which is back to the attack on private schools. This legislation is about reducing choice. Otherwise, what is the point of the provision for asking for schools to report financial information to the minister? More importantly, what is the point of the provision to allow the minister to release this publicly? Maybe the minister in her final remarks can answer that question, because it seems to me a very strange provision to have in the bill, unless you intend to release that information publicly. And, if you are intending to release that information publicly, what is the point? I ask the member for Braddon to ask the Deputy Prime Minister that question.

I imagine this will elicit a response from those on the other side. We all know what this is about: it is about supporting their friends and allies at the teachers union. Ultimately that is what we are getting back to. This is what we are building to. The education union certainly does not like private schools.

This brings me to standards. Standards are something I think are extraordinarily important in the education system that we are building. I have two young children and I certainly want them to go to schools where they report on a basic A to E report card and where the parents are able to glean from the reports basic information about how they are going, not political correct mumbo jumbo where eight criteria are ticked and the students are asked to self-assess. I think what the education system needs is good, strong competition where kids who do well are rewarded; and kids who decide that they want to go off into trades and so forth also have the ability to do so. We need an education system based largely on choice and reward for effort. This bill does not do that.

While I support the bill’s intent of providing the funding to the private education sector—because, of course, this is dealing largely with the private education sector—I do not support the provisions which allow the minister to report on the additional fund-raising sources that private schools are able to use. I think it is important that the minister address those questions in her final remarks.

The bill also makes some changes to the grounds upon which the minister can elect to refuse or delay payment, making it easier for the minister to do so. It might be reasonable to introduce this clause to ensure the financial viability of the school, but this subsection appears to presume that, if an audit statement is qualified, it necessarily signals that the school’s financial situation is precarious enough to warrant the minister refusing or delaying payment. That raises questions about the need for that provision.

The new requirement that schools comply with the national curriculum raises questions in my electorate with schools such as the Montessori school at Aldgate, which will have trouble complying with the section which requires that the five areas of statements of learning are met: English, mathematics, science, civics and citizenship education, and information and communications technology. I think it is very important that that issue be dealt with, because it raises some questions from some of the schools in my electorate.

In summing up, I think this bill has some fundamental flaws, particularly the section which relates to reporting on funding sources. It raises questions about why the minister is undertaking to do so. I think this is getting back to the old Labor days of 2004 with the Latham-Gillard combination back again. I support the member for Sturt’s amendments to the bill.

Debate interrupted.
PETITIONS

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

Mr Richard Manthorpe
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.
This petition of RICHARD MANTHORPE, citizen of The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, presently residing in Australia under terms of the subclass 410 visa (for retirees) Draws to the attention of The House, that, under the rules governing this visa, my wife and myself are barred from becoming permanent residents and citizens of Australia. We therefore ask The House, giving due regard to
(i) our unbroken residence in Australia since May 1994,
(ii) although not meeting the “balance of family” test demanded of some migrants, we are members of a larger family group, including our son, twin grandsons, my wife’s sister and family, my wife’s brother and family, and other, more senior, citizens, all of whom are permanent residents of Australia,
(iii) our intention to continue to live in Australia,
(iv) our “self funded retiree” status resulting in no call on centrelink benefits,
(v) during my career in the public service occasional duties alongside A.D.F. personnel, to grant myself and my wife leave to apply for permanent residence and, subsequently, citizenship of this country.

by Mrs Irwin (from 2 citizens)

Age Pension
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.
This petition of: The Moreland Senior Citizens Action Group draws to the attention of the House: As pensioners we simply cannot survive on the present pension rate of 25% of the Male Average Weekly Wage earning as it cannot be applied to the current increased prices and cost of living because we have completely lost the spending power.
We therefore ask the House to: Take into consideration our situation and ask that the Federal Government raise the pension level to a new basis adjustment of 30% of the Male Average Weekly Wage earning in order that we pensioner may not be below the poverty line.

by Mrs Irwin (from 195 citizens)

Immigration: Asylum Seekers
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.
WHEREAS the 1998 Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne carried without dissent the following Motion:
“That this Synod regrets the Government’s adoption of procedures for certain people seeking political asylum in Australia which exclude them from all public income support while withholding permission to work, thereby creating a group of beggars dependent on the Churches and charities for food and the necessities of life;
and calls upon the Federal government to review such procedures immediately and remove all practices which are manifestly inhumane and in some cases in contravention of our national obligations as a signatory of the UN Covenant on Civil & Political Rights.”
WE, therefore, the individual, undersigned Attendees petition the House of Representatives in support of the above mentioned Motion. AND we, as in duty bound will ever pray &c.

by Mrs Irwin (from 17 citizens)

Bendigo Electorate: Community Radio
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.
This petition of the undersigned citizens of Central Victoria draws to the attention of the House the proposal of the Australian Communications and Media Authority to re-allocate the 89.5 MH3 radio frequency in Bendigo that is presently used by the community radio sector to the ABC’s NewsRadio service.
This community radio service has been operating successfully for the past 26 years, therefore we ask the House to allocate “Goldfields Community Radio Co-Operative Ltd” (trading as The Fresh 895 FM) a New Full Time Broadcast Licence to continue operating on this frequency.

by Mrs Irwin (from 2,502 citizens)

Australia Post: Services
To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.

This petition of concerned residents of Australia draws the attention of the House the need for a Post Office in Jewells. We the undersigned believe that there should be a Post Office in the Jewellstown Shopping Centre Your petitioners therefore respectfully request the House to consider the opening of a Post Office at Jewells, as this area has the population to support their own service.

by Mrs Irwin (from 980 citizens)

Petitions received.

Responses
Mrs Irwin—Ministerial responses to petitions previously presented to the House have been received as follows:

Olympic Dam

Dear Mrs Irwin
Thank you for your letter of 4 September 2008 concerning a petition in relation to the proposed expansion of the Olympic Dam mine.

As highlighted by my colleague the Hon Peter Garrett AM MP, Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, the proposed expansion of the Olympic Dam mine requires approval under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC). Minister Garrett has also stated that there is an opportunity for the petitioners to comment on the proposed expansion during the public comment period after BHP Billiton has released its Environmental Impact Statement. This is a comprehensive process which will take account of all the environmental, social and economic impacts of the proposed expansion of the mine.

The government’s policy on uranium mining ensures that uranium mining occurs only under stringent controls, including world’s best practice environmental, health and safety standards. The government is also strongly committed to ensuring that Australian uranium is only used for peaceful purposes. We will only allow the export of uranium to countries that observe the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and with which we have a bilateral safeguards agreement.

As the world’s second largest producer and exporter of uranium, Australia has a leadership role in ensuring the sustainable development and responsible use of this important energy resource.

I too would encourage the petitioners to take advantage of the public comment period through the formal review process under the EPBC Act to express any concerns they may have with the project.

Thank you for bringing this petition to my attention.

from the Minister for Resources and Energy, Mr Martin Ferguson, petitions presented on 26 May 2008 by The Speaker and 1 September 2008 by Mrs Irwin (from 123 citizens)

ABC Radio Service in Nannup

Dear Mrs Irwin
Thank you for your letter dated 4 September 2008 concerning a petition submitted for consideration to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Petitions concerning Nannup residents’ request that the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) make every effort to facilitate their reception of an ABC Local Radio service featuring the South West programming produced in Bunbury.

I sought the advice of the ABC on the matters raised by the petition as it is responsible for the provision of its radio and television services.

The ABC Local Radio service broadcast to Nannup on 98.1 FM features programming the Nannup transmitter receives by satellite from ABC North West studio in Karratha. The ABC has advised that sourcing Local Radio programming via satellite is the only viable option for providing...
such a service to a number of communities in regional and remote parts of Western Australia. These are locations where it is neither technically nor financially viable to provide Local Radio directly from the closest ABC regional studio.

The ABC currently has the capacity to provide only one of two satellite-fed Local Radio services to these locations which offer a mix of either Goldfields (Kalgoorlie) or North West (Karratha) programming with metropolitan Perth programming. These two programming streams have been selected by the ABC to best address the needs of the numerous satellite-fed Local Radio transmitters in Western Australia. The ABC is therefore unable to satellite feed the Nannup transmitter with South West (Bunbury) Local Radio programming.

The ABC has further advised that ABC Local Radio services across Western Australia generally broadcast identical content for the majority of the day but with separate content for the breakfast and morning programs. The programming broadcast by the Karratha and Bunbury services is identical for 18 hours of the day on weekdays, for 22 hours on a Saturday and for 24 hours on a Sunday.

While the ABC will attempt to provide the most appropriate Local Radio content to each location, this is not always possible due to the limitations of the distribution network and the cost of expanding its use of satellite delivery or alternative distribution links. Funding for such works would need to be considered by the Australian government in the budget context and in light of competing national broadcaster related priorities.

The ABC is, however, aware of the importance of its Local Radio broadcasts, particularly during emergency situations. Although the ABC Local Radio service received on 98.1 FM in Nannup emanates from the studio in Karratha, the ABC has the ability to temporarily alter the satellite program source so that the most relevant information is made available to affected residents during natural disasters.

The ABC also maintains a portable ‘Flyaway’ FM transmission facility based in Perth which is designed to be used temporarily in any location. This is to provide redundancy and reliability for a particular ABC Local Radio service should it be disrupted in times of natural disasters.

I am advised that Nannup is within the predicted coverage area of the ABC’s Bunbury Local Radio service broadcast on 684 AM, and on the fringe of coverage for the Manjimup ABC Local Radio service on 738 AM and the Wagin ABC Local Radio service on 558 AM. It is not, however, practical to increase the strength of any of these services to improve coverage.

The ABC also provides information about improving radio and television reception at its website at http://www.abc.net.au/reception/

The ABC and the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) can also be contacted by telephone to discuss reception issues further. The ABC can be contacted on 1300 139 994 (local call rate) which operates from 8.00 am to 7.00 pm (AEST) Monday to Friday and ACMA can be contacted on 1300 850 115.

ABC Local Radio content is also available from a dedicated Internet website for the South West of WA (Bunbury) which includes local news, weather, events and emergency information at www.abc.net.au/southwestwa/radio.

I understand that the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy will be appearing before the committee’s public hearing on 24 September 2008 to discuss this petition.

Thank you for bringing this matter to my attention. I hope this information assists the committee in its consideration of this matter.

from the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Conroy, to a petition presented on 2 September 2008 by Ms Marino (from 182 citizens)

Immigration: Asylum Seekers

Dear Mrs Irwin

Thank you for your letter of 2 June 2008 concerning additional petitions recently submitted by the Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne to the Standing Committee on Petitions regarding income support for asylum seekers.

I understand my colleague, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator the Hon Chris
Evans, has written to you to advise of initiatives underway by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) to reform visas and to provide information in relation to the bridging visas issued to the group of asylum seekers referred to in this petition.

Whilst some asylum seekers have limited entitlements to Centrelink payments, they do have access to Centrelink Social Work services and Multicultural Services Officers. These officers work with the community to provide information and support to this group of asylum seekers.

Centrelink also works closely with DIAC and community organisations to assist asylum seekers understand their right to access income support as soon as they are granted visas which entitle them to receive Centrelink payments.

I agree to have this response applied to previous petitions received on this issue from the Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne. Once again, thank you for writing on behalf of the petitioners. I trust my comments are of assistance.

from the Minister for Human Services, Senator Ludwig, to petitions presented on 26 May, 2 June, 2008 by The Speaker and 1 September and 22 September 2008 by Mrs Irwin (from 107 citizens)

Statements

Mrs IRWIN (Fowler) (8.31 pm)—I advised the House in September that I would be visiting the Scottish parliament, among other places, to witness firsthand the way that petitions are dealt with and what the new Standing Committee on Petitions may learn from other parliaments. I have had many fascinating experiences in recent weeks, and I look forward to reporting my observations of Scotland, the UK and the United States in due course. In the time available to me tonight, however, I would like to advise all members of an exciting development in the history of petitions in this place.

As I have advised the House on earlier occasions, the petitions committee has been making good use of its ability to look into matters relating to petitions. So far we have held two public hearings in Canberra, where government departments have been invited to inform the committee about responses and reactions to petitions presented from around Australia on widely varying themes. We have also spoken to a young petitioner, Mr Chris Inglis, about his petition on child soldiers. The committee has also noted on previous occasions the vastly improved rate of ministerial responses to petitions. I am now pleased to announce the next step in ensuring that Australians’ voices are heard.

Next week the committee will visit Melbourne to meet with petitioners from all over Victoria. We will meet in Fitzroy Town Hall and hear from many members of local communities who have sent petitions to the House of Representatives. We hope that in future we will be able to announce dates for other states and territories as the committee continues to make sure that petitioners have access to the House of Representatives. While in Victoria we will speak with petitioners on issues as diverse as the social impacts of khat, disability funding for schools and income support for asylum seekers. We look forward to meeting with students of a local high school who prepared a petition relating to Indigenous Australians. We will also be inviting members of the community to make statements to the committee about their petitions.

Members of the committee continue to be aware of the importance of petitions in the democratic process and are enthusiastic about meeting directly with petitioners, first in Melbourne and eventually all around Australia. I and committee members look forward to keeping the House advised of progress in these and other areas.

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (8.34 pm)—I am pleased to have the opportunity as a new member of the Standing Committee on Peti-
tions to say a few words about the work of the committee. May I say at the outset that the bipartisan nature of the committee and the manner in which members from both sides of the House have conducted themselves in the several meetings that I have been a part of has been a feature of my early days in this place. I would like to commend the committee chair, the member for Fowler, and the deputy chair, the member for McMillan, for the very warm welcome I have had to the committee, along with the committee staff, who are doing a great job in support of our work.

One question that sometimes arises is whether petitions still have a place in our modern society, particularly given that there are so many other avenues for communication between citizens and members of parliament. I am a very strong supporter of giving people as many opportunities as possible to become directly engaged in decision making and the public policy-making process. We have a great democracy in Australia, and providing opportunities for Australians to have their say at the ballot box is obviously one of the most critical components of that democracy. But expressing a view through methods such as petitions is an important avenue, I believe, for allowing the wider community to bring attention to a particular issue or concern, perhaps between electoral cycles.

Judging from the petitions that the committee has received in recent times, people still see petitioning as having a role in bringing an issue to the attention of the parliament, although it is certainly not the only means for residents to make their concerns known. One of the most important aspects of petitioning is what actually happens to the petition once it has been received in this place. If the petition merely ends up in the basement and is ignored, or is recorded in Hansard and nothing else happens, there would be little point in encouraging or even continuing the practice. However, that is certainly not happening under the current arrangements with the petitions committee and the changes that were introduced at the start of this year. There has been a real attempt to give the petitions process some extra meaning and impact and for there to be a firm response to petitioners and some serious consideration of the issues raised for the attention of parliament.

Anyone who has been studying petitions recently may be amazed at the range of topics that are of concern to individuals and groups in our community. Some are quite general. We have had petitions on environmental issues including water management, education funding, pension rates—which is quite topical—roads, telecommunications issues, and medical and dental services, to name just a few. Petitions can also be quite local and very specific to individuals. We have had petitions relating to personal grievances, either of a legal nature or on immigration matters, and funding for local infrastructure such as road crossings or intersections, sporting facilities and Australia Post outlets.

It is interesting to note that with regard to postal services this has been going on for a particularly long time. Two petitions received by the House in the very first parliament over 100 years ago called for the retention of ‘postal conveniences’ at locations in Erskineville and Woolloongabba. If you will excuse my slight parochialism for the moment: the more things change, the more they stay the same. From the electorate of Gippsland, during the by-election, a petition by some 3,821 people was tabled in the House on 25 June this year calling for the Franklin Street post office in Traralgon to be retained. The committee sent the petition to the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, who provided advice that Australia Post had not yet made any decision.
on the relocation of services from that site but was undertaking a review assessing the postal services to the entire city of Traralgon.

The petitions committee subsequently had representatives of Australia Post attend a public hearing in September, and we were advised at that time that the Franklin Street location would be retained and there would be extensive community consultation on other proposed changes. It may seem like a minor issue to some but, certainly for the people of Traralgon who bothered to sign the petition, to have that follow-up from the minister’s office and then have Australia Post appear before the petitions committee was a very good process. The outcome has been very warmly received throughout the Traralgon community. Having a mechanism like the petitions committee to pursue this matter directly with the minister and then provide that feedback to the people of Gippsland has been a very satisfying process for the people concerned.

I have received advice of many similar results from other members. The member for Riverina has advised me of efforts to retain a museum in Wagga Wagga which attracted about 2,700 signatures on a petition. I think that many on both sides of the House would agree that there is no finer advocate for that region, in terms of the passion she shows in this place, than the member for Riverina. She presented that petition to the House on behalf of her constituents. Again, I do not wish to overstate the role the petition has played, but the original decision has been changed and I understand that the petitioners’ request has been granted. I am sure the member for Riverina will speak more fulsomely on that in the future. Regardless of the actual subject matter, all petitions are considered by the committee in the same way and the principal petitioners are assured of receiving a response. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr KJ Thomson)—Order! The time for statements has expired.

COMMITTEES

Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government Committee Report

Ms KING (Ballarat) (8.39 pm)—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, I present the committee’s report entitled Rebuilding Australia’s coastal shipping industry: inquiry into coastal shipping policy and regulation, together with the minutes of proceedings and evidence received by the committee.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

Ms KING—As Chair of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, it gives me great pleasure to table the inquiry report Rebuilding Australia’s coastal shipping industry. It is no surprise, given that we are a vast island nation, that our economy is highly dependent on sea trade. However, while almost all of our export trade is moved by ship, domestic freight is predominantly transported by road and rail, with shipping representing 24 per cent of the total freight task in 2004-05.

The Australian coastal shipping industry has been in decline for some time. Increasingly, foreign vessels have been employed to carry goods around the Australian coast to the detriment of the Australian coastal shipping fleet. The Australian registered trading fleet has reduced from 75 to 46 ships in the decade from 1996 to 2006. With Australia’s freight task set to double by 2020, there is significant room for growth in Australia’s shipping industry.
The Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government has signalled a clear wish on the part of the government that Australia’s coastal shipping industry be revitalised. This committee was tasked with reviewing policy and regulatory arrangements for the coastal shipping sector with a view to developing a more competitive and sustainable Australian coastal shipping industry. This report identifies strategies to grow the coastal shipping industry, including employment in the sector, and considers the implications of coastal shipping policy for defence support, maritime safety and security, and environmental sustainability. In undertaking the inquiry, the committee has been encouraged by the work that has been done between the industry and the unions to move the industry forward.

Obviously, the major reason for revitalisation of our domestic shipping export industry is an economic one. A renewed domestic shipping industry can provide new job opportunities and grow the maritime sector. A renewed domestic shipping industry can also help reduce land transport bottlenecks, infrastructure constraints and impacts on the environment. But there is no denying that the industry faces many challenges.

In order to be competitive in the transport market, it is essential that shipping is competitive against road and rail. It must be able to offer a reliable and affordable service. Limited shipping infrastructure and skills shortages throughout the industry are challenges the industry must overcome. Revitalisation of the Australia’s coastal shipping sector begins with regulatory reform. The committee has recommended reform of part VI of the Navigation Act 1912, the Navigation (Coasting Trade) Regulations 2007 and the Ministerial Guidelines for Granting Licences and Permits to Engage in Australia’s Domestic Shipping to better reflect current government policy.

These regulatory reforms should underpin a new policy framework which, the committee recommends, should include: a single national approach to maritime safety for commercial vessels; an optional tonnage tax regime in Australia that is linked to mandatory training requirements; reintroduction of accelerated depreciation arrangements; a one-year review of the maritime crew visa; amending the Seafarers’ Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1992 and the Occupational Health and Safety (Marine Industry) Act 1993; creating a national port development plan to address Australia’s current and potential capacity constraints; creating a national maritime training authority and the introduction of a national training vessel; reviewing of section 23AG of the Income Tax Assessment Act 1936; and establishing a reform implementation group to implement any future Commonwealth government reforms.

This report is focused on revitalising the Australian shipping industry. In the time permitted it is not possible for me to go into detail on each of the recommendations, but central to the report is the introduction of an optional tonnage tax and accelerated depreciation, which are designed to encourage growth in the sector. Such schemes have proven very successful in revitalising the shipping industries in countries such as the United Kingdom.

In presenting this report, I wish to thank my colleagues on the standing committee. I particularly want to thank the deputy chair, the member for Hinkler, who has a long-standing interest in Australia’s freight task. I thank him very much for his support and the bipartisan support of the committee. I also want to thank committee members. Particularly I want to thank the committee’s secretariat, led by Ms Janet Holmes and latterly Mr Richard Selth, but I also want to acknowledge Michael Crawford, who under-
took the bulk of the work on the complex inquiry in a very short time frame. I also acknowledge the work of Katie Ellis, Jazmine Rakic and Emma Martin.

The revitalisation of our coastal shipping industry has long been a topic for discussion and review. I want to acknowledge the many participants in the inquiry for their passion for this industry, which was evident throughout their appearances before the committee. Previous reviews have raised significant expectations on the part of industry participants. It is the hope of the committee that this inquiry provides the opportunity for the government to significantly revitalise Australian coastal shipbuilding into a much more competitive and sustainable industry.

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler) (8.45 pm)—I would like to support the Chair of the Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, the member for Ballarat, and also on behalf of the coalition acknowledge the work of the secretariat: Janet Holmes and then Richard Selth; Michael Crawford, the inquiry secretary; Katie Ellis, Emma Martin and Jazmine Rakic. I would also like to acknowledge the work of my colleagues and the effort that they put into this.

You would think that a country like Australia, sitting as it does in the southernmost part of the world, would have developed great expertise in shipping. You would think that that would be the one area in which we excelled. If we look down through the history of shipping, right back to the Phoenicians and in more recent times, in the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, to the Dutch, the Spanish, the Portuguese and the British, we see that all of them enhanced their national standing, their terms of trade, their political influence and their national wealth by the expertise of their national shipping fleets. I think there is a lesson in there for us. There was a time when we had quite a vibrant shipping industry, but I think we did two things: we overregulated it and we costed it out of existence. This inquiry looked at some of those things, and I felt it did a very good job.

Our terms of reference dealt with the characteristics of Australian shipping, regulatory arrangements, the need for a skilled workforce, coastal shipping policy and the competitive nature of our shipping industry, as well as naval, environmental and security implications. Time does not permit detailed consideration of the report, but what emerged was a recommendation for a national approach to maritime safety. To me that was one of the key elements, because this committee and its predecessors, all the way back to when the Hon. Peter Morris chaired the committee and was largely the author of the report called Ships of shame, have all focused on that matter of maritime safety.

We recommended the reintroduction of accelerated depreciation. As a member of this committee for many years, as the member for Ballarat said, to me the thing that has always stood out as being deficient in encouraging a better charter aviation fleet and better coastal shipping has been the lack of accelerated depreciation. We also talked about a one-year review of the maritime crew visa; a national maritime training authority, which I think is most important; and a national training vessel, which brings it down to the really key elements of how our seafarers should act and be in demand on the Australian coastline. We called for section 23AG of the Income Tax Assessment Act to be reviewed. That is a very important consideration for our seafarers. Finally, we called for a group to implement the reform agenda so that this does not just slip back into the ether again. There were other aspects
raised, such as single permit voyages—this is a knotty area; you cannot overenhance those without damaging the existing shipping arrangements.

One thing that stood out to me—and I certainly do not want to be misquoted on this—was that when we were cross-examining Canada Steamship Lines they said that one of the reasons that they were able to have five vessels now in Australian coastal waters was the workplace arrangements of the previous government. I said, ‘Does that mean they are paid less?’ The witness said, ‘No, they are paid more.’ The point I am making there is not that I want a reawakening of that workplace agenda but rather that I think there is a lesson to be learned—that in the future of Australia’s maritime industry we need to have EBAs that are sensitive to the needs of a specialised industry. *(Time expired)*

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

Ms KING (Ballarat) (8.50 pm)—I move:
That the House take note of the report.

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

Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government Committee

Report: Referral to Main Committee
Ms KING (Ballarat) (8.50 pm)—I move:
That the order of the day be referred to the Main Committee for debate.
Question agreed to.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Committee

Report

Mr MARLES (Corio) (8.51 pm)—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, I present the committee’s report, incorporating additional comments, entitled *Open for business: developing Indigenous enterprises in Australia*, together with the minutes of proceedings and evidence received by the committee.

Order that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

Mr MARLES—It is with great pleasure that I present this report and the recommendations in it, which have been made unanimously. I would like to start by acknowledging the Ngunnawal people, the traditional owners of the land on which we meet here tonight. That has been a practice that we have engaged in in all the hearings that we have had in relation to this inquiry.

In all the public policy which has been pursued by the Rudd government in the area of Indigenous affairs, the guiding light has been closing the gap—the 17-year life expectancy gap which exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. That gap is underpinned by a range of other gaps—social and economic—not the least significant of which is between the rates of unemployment. The Indigenous rate of unemployment runs at three times the rate of unemployment of non-Indigenous Australians. And we will never close the gap in relation to life expectancy until we come to terms with this unemployment, which is a key indicator of the economic health of the Indigenous community.

And when we dig a little deeper we find another gap that exists—the rate of self-employment amongst Indigenous Australians who are employed is only one-third of the
rate of self-employment amongst non-Indigenous Australians who are employed. If you consider this as a proxy for the relative size of the small business sector in Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia, and when you think that small business throughout the economy generally employs more than half of our labour force, it is clear that we have to address the gap in relation to small business if we are going to have an impact on those employment figures. That really has been at the heart of the inquiry that the committee has undertaken in this area.

But ultimately we have come to a rather empowering conclusion, because this is about Indigenous entrepreneurs engaging in enterprises and hiring Indigenous people. It is Indigenous people helping Indigenous people, and the committee have been enormously impressed, with respect to all the Indigenous entrepreneurs we have met, by the determination they have shown not only in running their own businesses but also in the grander social objectives of providing self-sufficiency for their communities, getting Indigenous people off welfare and providing role models for the Indigenous community.

We have also been impressed by the diversity of Indigenous businesses which currently exist. We tend to think of the strengths in the Indigenous business sector being in arts and tourism—and indeed they are—but during the inquiry we met Indigenous entrepreneurs who were engaged in the selling of car sound systems, in building and painting, and in earthwork contracting.

This was a short but intense inquiry where we had hearings in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Darwin, Kununurra, Perth and Canberra. We are making 15 recommendations which range from better collection of data around Indigenous enterprises and empowering Indigenous people in the negotiations that they have in relation to Indigenous land use agreements to a better coordination of government programs in this area.

But there are two particular recommendations that I would like to highlight. The committee is recommending the establishment of an Indigenous supplier development council, which will assist Indigenous businesses in getting a better share of private sector procurement. In the United States and Canada such organisations exist, and indeed they came out and we heard from them during the inquiry. They told us that there are 100 corporate members of theirs who would be willing to commit to a similar Indigenous supplier development council in this country. So the committee is recommending that the government provide seed funding for the establishment of such a body, with a review after five years. The second major recommendation that we are making is in the area of public government procurement policy, where we argue there ought to be targets for all government departments on the level of Indigenous procurement. When we are building houses in Indigenous communities it is right that Indigenous businesses should participate in that construction.

I would like to thank all the participants in this inquiry. I would like to thank the deputy chair, Mr Andrew Laming, and I would like to thank all the authors of the submissions that we received. I would like to thank all committee members for their work, including you, Mr Deputy Speaker Kelvin Thomson. I would also like to thank the secretariat for all their work, including, in particular, Pauline Brown, who is expecting her first child in the next week. We wish her all the best.

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (8.56 pm)—I have said in this chamber before that Fred Hollows came a decade early for mainstream Australia, which was not ready for him, and a century late for Indigenous Australia. In fact, in the generation since Hollows, many
would say that we have developed a notion in mainstream Australia that Indigenous conditions and the Indigenous environment are either non-viable or less viable for the free market or for new business. Nothing could be further from the truth.

It is an enormous challenge but, by the same token, what has come from this inquiry is that small things can make enormous differences. And nothing could be more important than recognising the vital contribution that Indigenous business can potentially make to the economic and social sustainability of remote, regional and urban Indigenous communities.

Let me support the chair and the other members of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs—and I note that the member for Bonner is here in the chamber tonight. I recognise the enormous amount of travel that goes with any Indigenous or ATSI report, and also the hard work of the secretariat: Anna Dacre, Loes Slattery, Melita Caulfield, Claire Young and, of course, Pauline Brown, who has already been mentioned. Through some marvellous confluence of events Pauline has managed to time the gestational period of a parliamentary inquiry to coincide with her own parental leave, which I understand started this week.

I would like to refer to some of the recommendations that were not able to be mentioned in the short time that was available to the chair, starting, obviously, by acknowledging the important role that Indigenous business currently plays, and the significantly larger role that it could play if we were to collect the data and the information that would enable us to have a better understanding of the current state of this sector—its structure, location and the economic contribution that it makes. Another recommendation is that there is a vital contribution being made right now to economic and social stability, and that business could certainly play a role in that. We are not talking about offshoots of community groups; we are talking about businesses that can operate under principles of the free market.

I would also like to mention that federal departments and all agencies right across the federal government could do well to coordinate their efforts and better understand the way in which agencies are delivering services and how that affects the potential for Indigenous business to take root. It was also recommended that there be further partnering work with CSIRO, particularly in their areas of natural resource management and carbon emissions reduction, which has been so topical in the last five years and which may well lead to commercialisation opportunities for Indigenous communities.

It was also very clear to the committee that there was a need for additional networking and for a better business networking model that takes into account the diversity of Indigenous businesses across states and territories and between regional and urban areas. Certainly it became clear to us that there was a need for a one-stop shop that allows potential Indigenous businesses, and ones that are in their early stages, to have an assigned case manager—we have a model for that already in Austrade—to allow them to obtain mentoring and business-ready skills and the advice they need on establishing appropriate governance structures that can ensure the sustainability of businesses beyond just three months, six months or a year.

It is also very important, as has been mentioned, to examine further the potential for an Indigenous supplier development council to have potential for microfunding, which would allow, particularly in the remote areas, entrepreneurs to establish enterprises, as the committee’s chair has already mentioned, in tourism and the arts in particular, and that we find ways to encourage Indigenous start-up
business, potentially through a review of the taxation system—something I am sure the government will be turning its mind to.

In conclusion, it is important to me that I do not finish without mentioning that substantial economic advancement will also require, in our view, a private sector consciousness being developed within Aboriginal Australia. It is vital that it becomes more and more natural to both accumulate capital and take risks. They were important lessons learnt from this committee.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr KJ Thomson)—Order! I am reluctant to interrupt the member, but the time allotted for statements on this report has expired. Does the member for Corio wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a later occasion?

Mr MARLES (Corio) (9.00 pm)—I move:

That the House take note of the report.

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

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Committee

Report: Referral to Main Committee

Mr MARLES (Corio) (9.00 pm)—I move:

That the order of the day be referred to the Main Committee for debate.

Question agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

United Nations

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (9.01 pm)—I move:

That the House:

(1) notes that the 24th October is United Nations Day, celebrating the entry into force of the United Nations Charter on 24 October 1945;

(2) celebrates Australia’s key role in the formation of the United Nations and the drafting of the United Nations Charter;

(3) recognises that Australia has been a consistent and long-term contributor to United Nations’ efforts to safeguard international peace and security and to promote human rights, for example, by being the 13th largest contributor to the United Nations’ budget, by contributing to many United Nations’ peacekeeping operations, and by firmly committing to increasing Australia’s development assistance and seeking real progress towards the Millennium Development Goals;

(4) notes further the Australian Government’s commitment to the multilateral system as one of the three fundamental pillars of Australia’s foreign policy; that Australia is determined to work through the United Nations to enhance security and economic well-being worldwide, and to uphold the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter;

(5) notes that, as the only truly global organisation, the United Nations plays a critical role in addressing the global challenges that no country can resolve on its own and that Australia is determined to play its part within the United Nations to help address serious global challenges, including conflict prevention, international development, climate change, terrorism and the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction;

(6) notes also Australia’s commitment to, and support for, reform of the United Nations’ system in order to ensure that the organisation reflects today’s world and is able to function efficiently and effectively; and

(7) reaffirms the faith of the Australian people in the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

As a former United Nations staff member, it gives me great pleasure to move this motion, noting that 24 October is United Nations Day, celebrating the entry into force of the
UN Charter on 24 October 1945. Australia played a key role in the formation of the United Nations and the drafting of the UN Charter. Dr Herbert Vere Evatt, Australia’s Minister for External Affairs in the Curtin and Chifley Labor governments, was the leader of the Australian delegation to the founding meeting of the United Nations held in San Francisco in 1945, at which Australia became the champion of the small and middle powers in the drafting of the UN Charter. Some three years later, in 1948, Dr Evatt was the third President of the UN General Assembly when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted—a document which, along with the UN Charter, he had worked hard to achieve. Of course, this year we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

These two documents remain of key importance today, not only in defining the course and framework of international relations but also in setting standards and principles to guide nations in the treatment of their own citizens as well as respect for each other. This is the normative function of the UN—setting the benchmarks against which nations compare themselves and to which nations aspire in order to be regarded as good international citizens.

As when the UN Charter was drafted, the problems of today’s world can only be addressed by a truly international organisation. The serious global challenges of conflict prevention, development, climate change, terrorism and the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction cannot be resolved by any one country acting on its own. While most people tend to think of the UN in connection with war zones and conflicts between member states, in fact there are countless ways in which member states cooperate with each other for the common good through the UN: coordinating assistance in natural disasters; regulating civilian air traffic or the carriage of goods by sea; providing development assistance; promoting respect for human rights, the rule of law, democracy and good governance; tackling HIV-AIDS and other global health issues; providing support to peace processes; supervising elections; and advancing universal education and environmental protection. Much has been achieved in 63 years, but it is clear that much remains to be done.

As the Secretary-General noted in his most recent report on the work of the organisation:

We must deliver results for a more secure world. Once again, during this past year, in too many places around the world, children bore arms instead of holding textbooks, the earth was scorched instead of cultivated, and national revenues were diverted to arms instead of being spent on education and health care. Every life lost and every penny spent on war is stolen from future generations.

I am proud to be part of the government that has recommitted Australia to a path of multilateralism and support for the UN as one of the three key pillars of its foreign policy, including ratifying the Kyoto protocol and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and taking steps to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Australia has participated in the negotiation of a new treaty to ban cluster munitions, has established a commission to promote a new nuclear disarmament treaty and is seeking a seat on the UN Security Council for 2013-14. Australia is also committed to tackling the Millennium Development Goals within its region, with programs to eradicate poverty and advance health, education and infrastructure.
With regard to this parliament’s interaction with the UN, each year a parliamentary delegation attends the UN General Assembly. There has been a UNICEF Parliamentary Association since 1987 and I am proud to chair that association, along with Senator Simon Birmingham as deputy chair. As of last week, there is a new Australia-UN parliamentary group, of which I am the chair, Senator Russell Trood is the deputy chair and Senator David Feeney is the secretary. I note with appreciation the encouragement of John Langmore, President of the United Nations Association of Australia, former member for Fraser and former senior UN official, for the establishment of the UN parliamentary group.

I would like to finish with a quote from one of my heroes—the only person to have received a Nobel Peace Prize posthumously—the second UN Secretary-General, Dag Hammerskjöld, who died in somewhat mysterious circumstances in a plane crash in the Congo on 17 September 1961. In his last address to UN staff, nine days before he was killed, he said this:

It is false pride to register and to boast to the world about the importance of one’s work, but it is false humility, and finally just as destructive, not to recognise—and recognise with gratitude—that one’s work has a sense. Let us avoid the second fallacy as carefully as the first, and let us work in the conviction that our work has a meaning beyond the narrow individual and has meant something for man.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER—Is the motion seconded?

Mr RUDDOCK (Berowra) (9.06 pm)—I am happy to second the motion. It may be unusual but can I commend the member for Fremantle on proposing this motion. I have no problem with its terms and that will be clear. If we did not have the United Nations, no doubt people would be actively looking at how they might well form another—perhaps with even greater difficulty if you look at the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I have been assured that some would have greater difficulty acceding to terms and conditions today than they did earlier, in the 1940s.

Australia has had a continuous commitment to the United Nations and all of its activities in relation to social affairs and development and technical agencies. I was looking at a list of those that I have had association with over a period of time: the United Nations Drug Control Program, the United Nations Children’s Fund, the High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Intellectual Property Organisation, amongst some of the specialised agencies. The numbers of bodies are legion. Australia has made financial contributions which have assisted in its activities overall period of time. We are proud of our participation in the UN’s peacekeeping operations and in its humanitarian relief, agricultural development, sustainable development and support of free and fair elections in newly-emerging democracies.

If you look at the importance of associated organisations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, both UN based organisations that are playing a significant part in dealing with some of the problems we now face, the importance of the United Nations and its agencies cannot be overlooked. I would recognise that we do have a vital role in addressing the problems of failing states and addressing poverty. Through many activities, such as the UN’s Millennium Development Goals, we are seeing important developments. But I am glad that the member in her motion also noted:

… Australia’s commitment to, and support for, reform of the United Nations’ system in order to ensure that the organisation reflects today’s world and is able to function efficiently and effectively.
Like the honourable member, I do recognise the importance of Australia having an active engagement in ensuring that we are able to contribute better to the functioning of the body itself; to improve its focus on key global, regional and thematic themes; and to ensure that UN organisations are able to actively work collaboratively and cooperatively.

The honourable member mentioned some new bodies that we are recently party to. I noted recently a paper presented by the Human Rights Council—a document I was presented with when I was recently in Geneva—welcomed the establishment of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. It welcomed the entry into force on 3 May of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the optional protocol thereto which created the ninth human rights treaty body, which will begin its work in 2009. I might say that I was party to Australia signing that convention. That happened before the change of government. It acknowledged with appreciation the adoption of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance by the General Assembly on 20 December 2006 and noted that when it enters into force it will establish an additional treaty body.

I mentioned that because what it is doing, of course, is continuing some of the inefficiencies that we have seen in the way in which treaties that we are party to are dealt with. I welcome the measures that the council has been taking, because if you read the report further, it makes mention of the need for reduction of duplication in reporting requirements, the harmonising of general guidelines, the preliminary list of states that need to coordinate the schedule for consideration of reports, and the limiting of the length of state parties reports—and I could go on with efficiencies that are being suggested. But the real problem is that, until you are able to deal with the multiplicity of treaty bodies, which nations seem unwilling to address, those efficiencies which are needed will be unlikely to occur.

I think it is very important to note the changes that are occurring in the Human Rights Council, but I think it is also important to note the reforms that are being undertaken at the moment in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. I note particularly the structural and major management change in the processes that are occurring right now in that organisation. These sorts of developments are going to be important for the United Nations to be able to retain its pre-eminent role. I wish it well in the years ahead. (Time expired)

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (9.11 pm)—Australia has played a proud part in the formation of the United Nations and in its continuation, nurturing and support—give or take the lack of enthusiasm by some administrations most recently, but being restored by the Rudd government. The United Nations has three noble aims worth pursuing no matter what the faults and foibles of the organisation are: to end the scourge of war, to affirm faith in fundamental human rights, and to promote social progress and better standards of life. They are three noble aims. The organisation is 60-odd years old, and I thank the member for Fremantle for bringing to the attention of the House the remembrance of the anniversary of its founding.

I would like to share with you in the little time that remains a number of the views expressed by others that ably sum up how I feel about the United Nations and also raise some of the concerns that others have with the United Nations. The former speaker, of course, raised the necessity of reform as the United Nations evolves. The first I would
like to share with you comes from an interesting book by Alison Broinowski and James Wilkinson called *The Third Try: Can the UN Work?* I recommend it to anyone who likes a good read on this. It says:

The United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Genocide Convention are extraordinary documents. They changed the course of history by moving not toward a world government, but toward global embrace of the universal principles that have guided the world’s most advanced democracies: rule of law, democratic processes, equal opportunity and justice for all. This vision remains valid, relevant, and superior to any alternative.

The beginning of the next paragraph says:

America is the keystone nation.

I was taken by the comments of Professor Sir Adam Roberts, who is in the Department of Politics and International Relations at Oxford University and a noted observer of the UN. The book says:

… cautioned us that those who believe the UN can save the world will be disappointed, because the UN, having nation states as its members, will always be a cockpit of power politics … Sir Adam Roberts pointed out, the Charter is not a complete global security system.

Most poignantly, he said:

But the perfect should not be the enemy of the good, and the Security Council has demonstrated it can succeed when the will is there. The UN remains the sole repository of international legitimacy. While it has failed to live up to its potential, evolution is far more likely than revolution to improve its capabilities and performance.

Just on the other side of the question, I note several writings that I came across in the last couple of years when I did some studies in international relations of an extraordinary conservative from the United States called Jesse Helms, who is a great hater of the United Nations and did not hold back. He most forcefully put that case directly to the UN Security Council. This is the type of attitude that has borne fruit in the United States, unfortunately, let loose by Ronald Reagan and his cohorts some time ago and reinforced by George W. He said:

No UN institution is competent to judge the foreign policy and national security decisions of the United States … The UN is seeking to impose its utopian vision of ‘international law’ on Americans.

However, as the book says:

… he was willing to praise UN ‘core tasks’ of peacekeeping, weapons inspections, humanitarian relief, and helping sovereign states work together. But:

… he mocked the notion that a majority of Americans support international cooperation by saying he had done poorly in the polls but always won election.

We will see about that.

I will conclude with the same authors that I commenced with:

The 1945 goal of a world made more secure, prosperous, and just through international cooperation is as worthy today as it was then. The alternatives, as Roosevelt told Congress on his return from Yalta, involve unilateral actions, spheres of influence, and exclusive alliances, which ‘have been tried for centuries—and have always failed.’ At the time, FDR’s words were intended to persuade Americans to support the UN. Today, with the third try in progress, they have the ring of chastisement and forewarning.

(Time expired)

Mr JOHNSON (Ryan) (9.17 pm)—I am pleased to speak on this motion. I commend it. It is a very good motion. I am particularly pleased to speak after my colleague and friend from Tasmania. I also want to acknowledge all the people of Ryan who might be listening to this presentation. I know that there will be many, because they have contacted me in relation to the government’s support for the UN, the opposition’s support for the UN and, indeed, my own support for the UN. I want to say at the outset that as a
student at Cambridge University I had the distinct privilege of being the president of the Cambridge UN Society. Personally, I have a very strong affection for the UN and what that global body can do to make life better for the billions of people on planet Earth.

I want to also at the outset commend the young Australians who are seeking to host the Asia-Pacific model UN conference at the University of Queensland, which is located in the Ryan electorate, next year from 12 to 17 July. I commend them, I wish them well and I look forward very much to supporting them and working with them. My electorate will be hosting some 600 students that will be coming in from all over the Asia-Pacific region to participate in that conference. It is fantastic to see young Australians engaged in that kind of activity.

Australia has been a consistent and long-term contributor to the United Nations. We have contributed to many UN peacekeeping operations. Our country, in fact, participated in the first peacekeeping operation under the UN flag in 1947, the UN Consular Commission to Indonesia. Australia had a place at the table when the UN was formed, as my colleagues have said. The UN replaced the League of Nations, which was created by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. The UN officially came into being on 24 October 1945 following the signing of the UN Charter in San Francisco in June of that year.

Since then, Australia’s record has been very good and honourable. All of us can be proud of our participation in the UN, our support for it and our deep interest in the place of the UN in the global architecture. Australia has participated in more than 30 UN peacekeeping and peace-monitoring operations, in areas including Korea, the Middle East and Cambodia. Speaking of Cambodia, I had the great privilege of leading Australia’s contribution to the UN observer mission to the Cambodian elections in 2003. Cambodia has had recent elections, which is a positive step for that country’s fledgling democracy. But at the same time, and I will touch on this a little bit later in my presentation if I get the time, I acknowledge that Cambodia is also in the spotlight at the moment with its border dispute with Thailand.

Australia’s core interests in terms of the UN’s agenda lie very much in the areas of international security and disarmament, the environment, human rights, developmental programs and those technical agencies dealing with issues such as agriculture, refugees and international nuclear safeguards. Australia has been a member of the UN Security Council on four occasions: from 1946 to 1947, 1956 to 1957, 1973 to 1974 and 1985 to 1986. I note the Rudd government’s determination to have Australia back on the UN Security Council. For my part, I support this. It is a worthy initiative. But if we are going to do it, let us do it properly. Let us give it full resources and let us make it happen in a bipartisan fashion.

Australia is the 13th largest contributor to the UN regular budget and to the funding for UN peacekeeping operations. This is a very good thing. Australia also provides voluntary funding to many UN agencies. In 2007-08, Australia will provide $80 million for core funding to UN development agencies compared with $70 million in 2006-07. That is a welcome initiative. I state for the record that I support that very much.

I want to touch on some broader points. The UN does have its limitations and constraints. As I said, I am for the UN. It is an indispensable part of the global architecture. But from the time of its foundation to the 21st century, the world has changed. Let us ask this question: does today’s UN genuinely and legitimately reflect the 21st century.
global landscape? I am not so sure. There has been the rise of China, India and Brazil in more recent times. We have seen a completely different Eastern Europe emerge with the collapse of the Soviet Union, with the Russian Federation now dominating that part of the world. In our part of the world, Japan still remains the second-largest economy in the world and India, the world’s largest democracy, perhaps should have a place on the permanent UN Security Council. I very much want to acknowledge all the great challenges facing the UN. We can solve these together. (Time expired)

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (9.22 pm)—As we approach United Nations Day, celebrating the establishment of the UN on 24 October 1945, I too join in thanking the member for Fremantle for causing us to stop and reflect on the importance of this truly global organisation, one which is dedicated to the security, economic wellbeing and genuine humanitarian conditions that apply throughout the nations of this earth. The United Nations plays a critical role in addressing the challenges that no single country can ever hope to resolve on its own.

Australia was a founding member of the United Nations back in 1945 and played a leading role in drafting the UN Charter’s articles for the Security Council. As a nation we have had a long and active engagement with this organisation. Australia has been a consistent contributor to United Nations efforts to safeguard international peace and security. As the member for Ryan indicated, we are the 13th largest contributor to the UN budget. We have contributed to many UN peacekeeping operations and we are firmly committed to increasing our development assistance as we seek real progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. In the larger multilateral system we are energetically pursuing international trade liberalisation through the Doha development round, and that is for the benefit of all countries, both developing and developed alike.

I would also like to take the opportunity to reflect on the significance of Australia’s peacekeeping record as I think it is one that should be recognised. Multinational peacekeeping is a difficult and often dangerous activity. The record of Australia’s contingents in this regard, be they military, police or civilian, has long been impressive but, tragically, not always casualty free. The member for Fremantle herself has made a significant contribution at a senior level, working with the UN in peacekeeping, reconstruction and humanitarian roles in Kosovo, Gaza, Lebanon, Cyprus and at the UN headquarters in New York. As a member of this organisation, I indicate how proud we are to have the member for Fremantle be so active on matters of international concern.

Australia’s contribution to peacekeeping operations throughout the globe has been in wide-ranging support roles such as governance, institution building, electoral reform and border control. Australia presently is supporting UN missions in the Middle East—Israel, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt—the Sudan, Cyprus and East Timor, and it is also a partner in coalition peacekeeping operations in the Sinai, in the Solomon Islands, in Afghanistan and in Iraq. It is quite a formidable list.

Through my involvement with the Police Federation of Australia I know that Australian police have an excellent record in international peacekeeping, with the Australian police contingents in the operation in Cyprus since 1964 through, more recently, to much larger contingents now deployed in Cambodia, East Timor, Bougainville and the Solomon Islands. Today there are some 900 Australian Federal Police, state police seconded to the AFP and territory police officers on overseas based operations. This is in addition
to contributing a total of 75 officers to three United Nations peacekeeping missions in East Timor, Cyprus and the Sudan. The AFP has continued to enhance its strategic engagements through the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

Australian police officers have served continually as part of the UN’s peacekeeping operations in Cyprus since 1964, making a valuable contribution to the maintenance of peace and the stability of the island. There are currently 15 Australian police officers stationed there. The AFP maintains a contingent of 50 police in the United Nations police component of the UN Integrated Mission in East Timor. This mission is mandated to support stability, democratic governance and national reconciliation within East Timor. UNPOL performs executive policing functions as well as supporting the formation, restructuring and rebuilding of this economically and security challenged young nation.

We are committed to pursuing such goals as the Millennium Development Goals, addressing climate change and signing the Kyoto Protocol and now joining as a full member— (Time expired)

Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP (Mackellar) (9.27 pm)—In the 2½ minutes available to me, I would like to add my comments to this motion recognising the establishment of the United Nations and the important part that it plays in world politics. The United Nations learned very much from its predecessor, the League of Nations, and the failure of the United States to ratify its treaty, which left it rather a body waiting to fail. The United Nations has been successful in establishing many important organisations which have served the world well, particularly the World Health Organisation, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Australia has played a very large and successful role in peacekeeping operations, as others have pointed out during the course of speaking to this motion, but I would like to say that very often the United Nations can also be a source of profound disappointment to us. One of the best examples of that has been the inability of the United Nations to take any meaningful role in preventing the devastation and murderous behaviour that has occurred in Zimbabwe under the dictatorship of Mr Mugabe. Although he purports to have elections, we see again and again how this fails and how the United Nations is totally unable to deal with it in any way. On the other hand, when it establishes something like the Millennium Development Goals and we see the accent and importance it has placed on the development of microcredit, which has the ability to open up the lives of, particularly, women right across the world by giving them loans which enable them to establish their own small businesses and to succeed in providing for their families in a way that is quite new and quite refreshing and that empowers them, one can only say that this is the sort of thing where the United Nations is truly successful.

There are many examples that others have given in speaking to this motion, but I would simply like to say that Australia’s contribution has been profound right from the beginning. The four times we have served as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council have been marked by our success. The UN has grown from 51 member states to, in 1996, 192 member states.

ADJOURNMENT

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

That the House do now adjourn.

RAAF Museum, Wagga Wagga

Mrs HULL (Riverina) (9.30 pm)—On 24 June 1995 there was a huge celebration for current and ex-Defence members from right across Australia on the official opening of
the RAAF Museum in Wagga Wagga by the then Air Marshal of the Royal Australian Air Force, Les Fisher AO. The Kapooka Army Band was there, with parade inspections by Air Marshal Fisher. RAAF officials, politicians, mayors, ex-members of Defence from across the nation and proud community members all lined up to be associated with the extensive display documenting the history of RAAF operations. The Point Cook Museum donated $10,000 and the community raised over $26,000. It was a most impressive museum, described by the Air Force’s own newspaper as being ‘the guardian of history’.

In 2001 it was determined that there was a need to remove bonded asbestos from the museum building, so the museum was closed for refurbishment. This refurbishment was completed in around 12 months. However, after some time, members of the public became concerned as to why the museum had not reopened, so they started asking questions. But no answers were forthcoming until just recently, when the answer came that the museum had officially been closed in 2001. To rub salt into the wound, it is now understood that the RAAF hierarchy had never intended to reopen the museum when they advised us that they were closing for refurbishment. In addition, the terminology of ‘RAAF speak’ had changed; we suddenly found that it had been downgraded to being an annexe, not a museum.

The community had been cheated and they were not happy, nor were thousands of people across Australia, who numbered 2,713 after just over one week of the circulation of a petition. We were told that Air Force policy is to support only one museum, the RAAF Museum at Point Cook. We were told by a Defence spokesperson that this policy has been in place since 1985. It is funny that there is a museum at Williamtown, at Townsville and at Point Cook—and maybe there are even more. It is funny that the RAAF did not know of that policy when Mrs Gabi McCormack was taken off her normal duties at RAAF Wagga Wagga in late 1994 in order to work on the museum project full time. It is funny that Air Marshal Fisher was not aware of this policy when he officially opened the museum on 24 June 1995 amongst enormous fanfare and official speeches, and it is funny that Point Cook did not know of this policy when they donated $10,000 to the project.

I am sure that if 97-year-old Alma Skeers had known of this policy she would not have donated her beloved summer uniform that she proudly wore in the 1940s, her identification discs and her pay books—and nor would there have been donations by the owners of the scale model of a 1700 naval vessel or the owners of nursing uniforms, of medals and of countless photographs, all of which now sit in a box after having been taken by stealth to Point Cook.

Last week I tabled a petition calling for the reopening of the RAAF Wagga Wagga Museum, and the persistent efforts of Mr Geoff Auld; Mr Ted Heskett; Mr Bob Gnezdiloff, the principal petitioner; and a young woman journalist at the Wagga Wagga Daily Advertiser, Rebekah Holliday—along with the sensational support of the Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support, the Hon. Dr Mike Kelly—are to be admired. The parliamentary secretary has been a powerful and passionate ally in this fight and, obviously because of his own service, he understands the intense emotion felt by those who have given their treasured possessions, those who have served this nation and who have played an integral role in its history.

The people have been heard. Dr Kelly announced on Friday that the museum will be reopened. I genuinely thank Dr Kelly for putting the people first, and I pay tribute to
all those who maintained the passion and the commitment to see our history returned to its rightful place in Wagga Wagga. It was a joyous day on Saturday to see the front page of the Daily Advertiser saying that the museum had been saved. I pay tribute to all those believers in the past and all those people who served our country selflessly and who have a right to have their history recorded.

Pensions and Benefits

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (9.35 pm)—I rise tonight to indicate that the government recognises that pensioners in our respective electorates are doing it tough and that it is necessary to have a true and fundamental reform of our pension system. Importantly, we need to get the terms of the review right. The government pension system will be finalised, subject to the Palmer report in February, and the final shape of the pension system will be detailed in the context of the next budget.

But what I want to talk about this evening is the lead-up that took place in terms of advocacy in respect of pensioners in Werriwa. I have written to many of our seniors groups, certainly to those who are very strong and passionate advocates for seniors, and encouraged them to participate in this review. As I reminded local pensioners, I have some 17,000 people in Werriwa who are receiving an age, disability support or service pension or who are Commonwealth seniors card holders. I expect that any review should hear and understand the views put forward by local people and generally reflect the true nature of what it is like to exist on the pension.

One of my constituents wrote to me, and I would like to outline his version of events. He has various expenses and financial burdens. He indicated to me that things we take for granted—participating in hobbies and social activities and interactions—are important at all stages of life. Unfortunately, he feels constrained because, being on the pension, these things are now beyond him. More importantly for Mr Marshall is the fact that his sister is extremely unwell and in a nursing home in Queensland. He put it to me that he cannot afford to visit her. He is actually counting his pennies as he predicts that at some stage he is going to have to at least make the trip to Queensland to attend her funeral. He was not putting that to me in a vexatious way but simply outlining the true economic circumstances that he found himself in.

Another pensioner who wrote to me, Mrs Gwen Bartho, made a valuable contribution in her submission to the pension review. Mrs Bartho raised a range of issues, including the level of possible earnings for pensioners and also the additional health costs that she is definitely incurring. She says:

The aged pension in and of itself provides barely enough money to permit me to pay my regular bills … For many pensioners social isolation is a major issue and this is made far worse if there are cost imperatives which make it even harder to get out and about.

These are genuine views out there and there is no doubt that pensioners will welcome the interim contribution that has just been made by the Rudd government. The contribution, in accordance with the Economic Security Strategy, will provide lump-sum payments to the tune of $4.8 billion to age pensioners, veterans, disability support pensioners and carers. This assistance builds on the additional support provided for pensioners in the government’s first budget and recognises that pensioners are calling for more help. Payments are intended to provide additional support for the nine months leading up to the next major adjustment, which will result from the budget and the recommendations of the Harmer inquiry.
The global financial crisis is placing increasing pressure on family budgets across all areas and all electorates. That is why taking early, decisive action to provide support for pensioners is, as has been indicated to me over the last week, very much welcomed by pensioners in my electorate, their advocacy organisations and seniors groups. The government are reforming the pension system and, to prepare for the challenges of the future, we are committed to actually getting it right.

Mr Hockey—Getting it right?

Mr Hayes—I am sure the member for North Sydney actually agrees with that, because I have probably spoken for his pensioners as well. (Time expired)

Armenian Genocide

Mr Hockey (North Sydney) (9.40 pm)—I thank the member for Werriwa for that endorsement. In 1939, Adolf Hitler addressed his battle commanders at Obersalzberg with these chilling words:

I put ready my Death’s Head Units the order to kill without pity or mercy all men, women and children of the Polish race or language. Only thus will we gain the living space that we need. Who still talks nowadays of the extermination of the Armenians?

On the basis of the worldwide apathy to the plight of an entire generation of Armenians who were rounded up and systematically slaughtered, Hitler embarked on his own diabolical plan of extermination. Some 70 years after Hitler’s words, the Armenian community is still struggling to achieve recognition for their own genocide at the hands of the Ottoman military during World War I. In the dead of night on 24 April 1915, 250 Armenian political, religious, educational and intellectual leaders in Istanbul were arrested, deported to the interior of the country and murdered. On that same day, 5,000 of the poorest Armenians in the city were rounded up and slaughtered on the streets and in their homes. This is now recognised as the beginning of an official attempt by the Turkish government to exterminate its Armenian population.

Over the next three years, the Turkish government ordered the deportation of the remaining Armenian people in the Ottoman Empire to concentration camps in the desert between Jerablus and Deir ez-Zor. They were marched through the country on foot in a hard and cruel journey. Women and children were forced to walk over mountains and through deserts. These people were frequently stripped naked and abused. They were given insufficient food and water, and hundreds of thousands of Armenian people died along the way. Around 1½ million Armenians were murdered during the Armenian genocide out of an estimated total Armenian population of just 2½ million people.

The intention of the Ottomans was the complete obliteration of not only the Armenian nation but any memory of the Armenian people as well. During the operation, reporting and photography were forbidden by the Turkish government. The mere existence of Armenians in Turkey was officially denied. Maps and history were rewritten. Churches and schools were desecrated. Children who were taken from their parents were renamed and raised as Turks. Back in 1915, the word ‘genocide’ did not exist, as the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was only adopted in 1948 in the aftermath of the Holocaust. But there is simply no other word for what happened to the Armenian people of Turkey. They were indeed the victims of an act designed to destroy an entire race.

A few starving surviving Armenian refugees returned to their former homeland only to see their country subsequently conquered by the Bolshevik Red Army and incorporated
into the Soviet Union for seven decades until 1990. These survivors were able to tell the world what had happened to their people. There was outrage across Europe as news of the atrocity spread. Today the government of Turkey steadfastly refuse to recognise the genocide of its Armenian citizens. They campaign actively, claiming a lack of evidence. Indeed in Turkey, under article 301 of the Turkish penal code, individuals, intellectuals, journalists and publishers can be prosecuted for insulting Turkey. Therefore, whenever referring to the genocide in that country, people refer to it as the ‘alleged genocide’ to avoid prosecution.

In spite of this, many countries have officially recognised the Armenian genocide. As yet Australia has not done the same. This weighs heavily on me, particularly as my own grandfather was himself a survivor of the genocide. He never knew the fate of his siblings and his friends as they were presumably led to their deaths. Similarly, this lack of recognition weighed heavily on the hearts of Armenian-Australians, especially when on 28 August our ABC aired the Family Footsteps program on an Armenian-Australian who had travelled back to the homeland of her ancestors. Throughout the program, the narrator repeatedly refers to the ‘alleged’ genocide. The doubt that is cast over what happened to the Armenian people by this offensive word has no place in an Australian television program. It is divisive and offensive.

Australians deplore this sort of racism and barbarity. This country has prospered though the immigration of people from countless nations, including Armenia. I urge this parliament to recognise the Armenian genocide for what it was—not alleged, not supposed and not so-called. It was the intentional attempted obliteration of an entire people. To refuse to acknowledge this genocide is to ensure that future Hitlers can capitalise on the world’s reticence in taking a stand.

International Day of Older Persons

Mr BUTLER (Port Adelaide) (9.45 pm)—Earlier this month a number of us marked the International Day of Older Persons with the presentation of recognition awards to just some of the extremely worthy older persons who have helped shape the community of Port Adelaide.

The first Meals on Wheels kitchen in Port Adelaide was opened in 1954 and is now named after the organisation’s founder, the extraordinary Doris Taylor. Despite being paralysed and almost completely dependent for her physical needs, Doris was a dedicated social campaigner who fought for the rights and dignity of the underprivileged and the vulnerable. A staunch Labor supporter, she also successfully managed the first election campaign of one of South Australia’s most progressive premiers, Don Dunstan. Following the lead of Doris Taylor were six recipients of this year’s recognition awards: Jill Curtin and Margaret Robertson, who have both provided 30 years of service to Osborne Meals on Wheels; from the Woodville kitchen, Annie Raets, with 31 years of service, and Margaret Evans, with 32, including many years as welfare officer; and, from the original kitchen in Port Adelaide, Lorraine Nicholls, with 35 years of service, and Judy Hunter, with 42 years of continuous service, including 14 as committee secretary.

Neighbourhood Watch, with its emphasis on social responsibility and community cohesion, also provided a number of recipients worthy of recognition: George Bonsor and Floss Holman, who have both been involved with the Pennington group for 18 years and have served in numerous committee positions; from the Royal Park-Hendon group, my friend Pat Bell, for her many years of service as area coordinator and now secre-
tary, and Alice Knibbs for her longstanding committee membership and co-editing of the newsletter; from Woodville, Clarrie Bell, who as sole editor and publisher has at last count produced 223 editions of the newsletter since its inception; and, finally, Doug Marsh, whose dedication is best illustrated by him single-handedly taking on the job of removing graffiti from the Woodville train station—no easy task, as this station sees many aspiring young artists, but he has been cleaning it on a weekly basis for 18 years and, at the age of 90, is still doing it today.

It is perhaps not surprising that our service associations find a dedicated volunteer base from within their particular membership. This year’s recognition awards were given to Albert ‘Macca’ Mackinder, from the Semaphore and Port Adelaide RSL, who volunteers seven days a week and will not even take a public holiday off; from the Port Adelaide Naval Association, Geoffrey Cotton, who serves as a jack of all service, and Len Ruth, who keeps the lest-we-forget tradition alive by educating local children about Anzac Day and Remembrance Day; and, nominated by the Merchant Navy Association executive, John Williams and Keith Ridgeway, who, amongst a litany of volunteer activities, managed to organise the only parade in Australia to commemorate the first national Merchant Navy Day.

Our churches have always been a driving force for social inclusion, and they inspire their members to be active in their community. Recognition awards went to John Devine and Marge Lytwyn from the Seaton Christian Family Centre for their services to their church and the community; Nu Yen for her weekly efforts in her congregation’s kitchen; and, from the Le Fevre Christian Family Centre, Fred ‘Tiny’ Lennell for being an active member whilst also caring for his disabled wife and training young boxers. Tiny, in fact, trained one of my local parlia-
families do not qualify for either an age pension or a concession card, and therefore they are not eligible to receive the one-off payment. The reasons for this are as follows: (1) their landholdings are such that they fail the income and asset test and do not qualify for the pension or (2) because of the need to subdivide and sell off the family farm to invest enough cash to receive an income stream on which to live, they again fail the income and asset test and subsequently do not qualify for either a pension or the Commonwealth seniors health or concession card. The rural retired families that do not qualify for a pension are totally reliant on family support for all of their day-to-day needs, are all too often too proud to ask for external help and are living well below the poverty line.

Self-funded retired farming families have sometimes suffered larger losses than other self-funded retirees because their only source of income is their investments, which they must live off and use to pay for all the same everyday expenses as you and I, with the added expense of having to pay in full for often essential medical treatment and prescriptions because they do not qualify for the healthcare card that provides subsidised prescription medicines.

Then there are the rural families, many of whom are living in abject poverty, who have totally fallen through the cracks. I raise the plight of these people because, for a considerable number of years now, my wife and I have been trying to assist these people. These people do not have the benefit of family support for one reason or another, do not qualify for any Commonwealth government support and are totally self-sufficient. I am personally aware of people in these circumstances because of the work that my wife, Gloria, has undertaken over the past six years, providing food, toiletries and clothing packs to assist these families to cope with everyday lifestyle pressures caused by a debilitating and soul-destroying drought. It is a drought which, I might add, has not been an issue for just one or two years; in the case of these communities, most of them isolated away from the major regional centres, drought has been a debilitating, stressful and damming issue that has affected their lives for over six years.

I do not know whether the government is able to assist these people, but I think that, whilst they are the beneficiaries of exceptional circumstances funding packages, which assist them to cope with the ordinary day-to-day bills such as electricity and fuel and assist in offering them meagre sustenance to put on the table each day, they really have got a very serious situation—to the point where even the children are starting to be affected by it. Today we received some carloads of toys in my office at Goulburn which we will distribute to these people.

I would therefore ask the government to consider this one-off payment being made available to those in rural areas who, for the reasons I have outlined, are unable to have access to this incentive package, let alone any other social security benefits.

Economy

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs) (9.55 pm)—Like the member for Hume, I want to speak about the $10.4 billion Economic Security Strategy that the Prime Minister and Treasurer handed down last week in the midst of the global economic crisis. Unlike the member for Hume, I want to applaud the package, not criticise it as so many of those opposite have.

The financial package is early and decisive action that I welcome. It will strengthen the Australian financial system, inject billions of dollars into our economy and help to ensure that Australian families are protected from the economic turbulence taking place. More than 10,000 families and 20,000 other people in my electorate, including pensioners
and carers, will receive one-off payments to help shield them against the economic storm ahead. The flow-on effects to everyone in my electorate will be substantial.

On a national level, this is unprecedented action. We are doing what a good government should do, which is help protect Australian working families and businesses from a crisis that is beyond our control. Nearly 1.7 million Australian families will receive $1,000 per child—that is extra money for clothes, household items and, of course, Christmas presents for the holiday period ahead. Not only is this Christmas bonus a boost for working families and pensioners; it is also a boost for Australian businesses, who will reap the benefits of increased spending and confidence in the Australian economy.

But it is clear that the Leader of the Opposition wants to score cheap political points rather than recognising the gravity of the economic situation. On the Insiders program yesterday morning, the opposition leader said, ‘Kevin Rudd has hyped up this crisis.’ Perhaps the opposition leader is from another planet, because the global economic crisis has brought down banks in the US and Europe and has shaken the world’s financial system to its foundations. The opposition leader yesterday made baseless allegations against the government for supposedly not considering other options to the Economic Security Strategy. Yet just last week the opposition leader was quoted in the Herald Sun as saying about the financial package:

It has our support. It will provide a stimulus to the economy, that’s for certain ...

So which is it? Does the opposition leader support the $10.4 billion Economic Security Strategy or not? I know I am confused by the opposition’s chopping and changing, but I think the electorate is smart enough not to buy the opposition leader’s extremely poor jibe that the Prime Minister has—and I quote again—‘hyped up’ this crisis for personal gain.

Perhaps the opposition leader should come out to my electorate of Isaacs and tell the 10,743 working families there who will receive $1,000 per child that he wants their money back. Does the opposition leader want to come out to south-east Melbourne and say that the almost $20 million going to these working families in my electorate before Christmas should be taken away? Is he going to say to the pensioners and carers in my electorate that they will not be getting their additional payment before Christmas? The Economic Security Strategy helps protect these very people—working families, pensioners, young families looking to enter the housing market—from the present economic challenges.

It was also a very strong move by the Rudd government to guarantee all Australian bank accounts—no matter the amount—for three years. I was receiving calls before this announcement from people in my electorate concerned about what protections their financial accounts had if a bank failed. While our banking sector is among the strongest in the world, the government has responded to make sure it stays that way. I believe those who had concerns over their own bank accounts have been sleeping a bit easier over the past week.

I am proud to be part of a government that takes decisive action in times of crisis—decisive action that will give assistance to 38,900 people in my electorate, decisive action that will help more than five million people across the country, decisive action to secure all Australians’ bank accounts, decisive action that will strengthen our economy at the time it needs it most.

House adjourned at 10.00 pm
NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mrs Moylan to move—

That the House:

(1) recognises the serious state of housing availability and affordability in the public, not for profit and private sector in many cities and towns in Australia and the hardship it causes those on low and fixed incomes;

(2) notes that:

(a) it is having a serious impact on many in the community including those on low and fixed incomes, pensioners, disability pensioners, veterans, young families and students;

(b) the situation has been exacerbated by the dereliction of duty of State governments in failing to maintain adequate stocks of public rental properties, with unacceptably long waiting-lists for public housing;

(c) in Western Australia (WA), for example, it has been reported that there are 16,000 families on the Homeswest waiting list in May 2008 with similar trends in other states;

(d) there has been a contraction of approximately 30,000 public dwellings, which, factoring in population growth over the last decade, amounts to a loss of 100,000 dwellings in the public sector;

(e) this dereliction of duty is increasing the reliance on the private rental market where housing is in short supply, new building approvals are plummeting and rental vacancy rates are at the lowest levels in 20 years;

(f) Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) is not adequately addressing the gap between the high level of rent being paid and what is affordable and that in many areas there are few, if any, housing choices available;

(g) despite the twice yearly adjustment of CRA to the Consumer Price Index of 4.3 per cent, the average rental increase has been 7.1 per cent;

(h) the median weekly rent of three bedroom houses has increased on a nationally weighted average by 46.75 per cent, and in fact, from June 1998 to June 2007 rents have increased by 93.55 per cent in WA and by 105.88 per cent in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT);

(i) rent assistance as a percentage of median weekly rent in WA has dropped from 31.8 per cent in June 2001 to 20.4 per cent in June 2007 and in the ACT from 25.6 per cent in June 1998 to 17.4 per cent in June 2007;

(j) overall, renting has become less affordable nationally even for those in receipt of CRA;

(k) according to national figures from the Australian Government Housing data set in June 2006, over one-third of CRA recipients pay more than 30 per cent of their income on rent, after CRA is factored in; and

(l) public housing approvals have plummeted to 131 new council approvals in March 2008, well short of the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ decade average of 350 new public housing approvals monthly; and

(3) calls on the Federal Government to:

(a) work with State governments through COAG to urgently address the national shortage of public, not for profit and private housing including delays in local government development approvals;

(b) urgently review the adequacy of CRA paid to those on low and fixed incomes;

(c) investigate making CRA or similar payment available to eligible recipients who are purchasing their own homes and who are experiencing severe mortgage stress, with the aim of keeping people in their own homes and taking some of the pressures off the public and private sector rental market;
(d) consider changing the CRA formula to reflect the lack of choice and the increasing cost of rent beyond inflation, by linking CRA to actual rent using the highest median rent in each area;
(e) target a proportion of assistance for development of housing in high employment growth areas, in recognition that for those looking for work in areas of high labour demand, high rents are acting as a disincentive for some people to escape the poverty cycle; and
(f) pay particular attention to development options for multi-dwelling supported accommodation models to provide for those with disabilities who may formally have been housed in institutions.

Mr Hale to move—
That the House:
(1) commends the Australian Government for its Economic Security Strategy initiative in the face of a global financial crisis;
(2) supports the extra assistance to sustain economic growth and the cost of living pressures for rural and regional Australia;
(3) acknowledges the Government’s efforts to ensure that pensioners, seniors and carers are included in this strategy while the Harmer Committee of Inquiry continues to ensure long term issues related to the most vulnerable in our community are properly assessed; and
(4) acknowledges the Government’s efforts to help families receiving ‘key family payments’. (Notice given 20 October 2008.)

Mr Forrest to move—
That the House:
(1) notes with concern the high level of market concentration in the retail grocery sector;
(2) notes this is a situation that the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission describes as ‘workably competitive’ and that this is not a term found in competition law; and
(3) calls on the Government to address the issue of market concentration in the grocery sector and to implement policies to achieve improved outcomes for consumers, food manufacturers and producers. (Notice given 20 October 2008.)
Monday, 20 October 2008

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke) took the chair at 6.40 pm.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Flinders Electorate: Arthurs Seat Chairlift

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (6.40 pm)—I wish to raise the loss of the Arthurs Seat chairlift on the Mornington Peninsula. The chairlift announced its closure late last week. There are three key points. Firstly, this has been a vital part of not only the economy of the Mornington Peninsula but in particular its heritage and its identity. It has lasted over 40 years. At its height, we had 100,000 people per year coming to ride the chairlift. It is a great part of the Mornington Peninsula and its loss is a tremendous blow.

Secondly, this has come about because of the neglect of the state government. For five years now, the owner, Mr Richard Hudson, has been seeking state government support in relation to the chairlift. The chairlift has been hindered by WorkSafe’s failure to give it fast passage. This could have been resolved and action could have been taken. I am extremely disappointed at this loss.

Thirdly, there is a solution. The state now needs to step up to help the owner, to help ensure that there is a transition and a successor chairlift. This chairlift is vital to the Mornington Peninsula. It is an important part of our heritage. I say with great respect to the Premier of Victoria: please do not let this be the end of a chairlift for the Mornington Peninsula, for Arthurs Seat and for our heritage. (Time expired)

Franklin Electorate: Bruny Island Tourism

Ms COLLINS (Franklin) (6.41 pm)—I stand this evening to put on the public record a great success story that involves an ecotourism adventure business in my electorate of Franklin. For those of you who do not know, the seat of Franklin boasts a number of Tasmania’s popular tourism destinations. One such location is Bruny Island. Bruny Island has much to offer with regard to the environment. It also has a prominent place in Tasmania’s history.

There is a Bruny Island based tourism company that is leading the way in ecoadventure cruises. The owner-operators, Robert Pennicott and Michaye Boulter, have seen the value in linking tourists with Bruny Island’s wild and beautiful environment. Their vision has afforded them recognition on both a state and a national level. This year alone Bruny Island Charters and Tasman Island Cruises have won an impressive five awards. These awards have recognised their concern for the environment, their financial contribution to conservation, the quality of their ecotourism cruises and their use of responsible business practices. The Bruny Island Charters ecoadventure cruise takes its tourists on a 50-kilometre trip along the spectacular coastline of South Bruny, from Adventure Bay to a place they call the Friars. Bruny Island has an abundance of birdlife and coastal wildlife and it boasts some of Australia’s highest sea cliffs. It is pleasing to see a local tourism operator in the seat of Franklin achieving such great results. I congratulate Robert and Michaye on their recent achievements and for bringing both local and international tourists a little closer to the diverse, rich environment of Bruny Island. (Time expired)
Essendon Airport

Mr HAWKER (Wannon) (6.43 pm)—Tonight I want to talk about the importance of keeping the Essendon Airport going. I say this in the context of the local member, the member for Wills, and the state Premier, John Brumby, both seeming to have some idea that it should close. I think this is further proof that Labor really does not care about the regions, because Essendon is an airport that is all about servicing regional Victoria. We have regional air services like Sharp Airlines, which comes from Hamilton and looks after people from right across Western Victoria. We also have the life-saving Air Ambulance. This provides access, directly down the Tullamarine Freeway, to three major hospitals: the Royal Children’s Hospital, the Royal Melbourne Hospital and the Royal Women’s Hospital. Then we have the Police Air Wing, the Elvis firefighting helicopters and a number of other emergency services based there. Clearly this is a very, very important facility for people in regional Australia. In 2007, Air Ambulance had 3,400 fixed-wing flights into the Essendon Airport, there were nearly 770 helicopter flights, and 136 newborn babies were transferred to newborn units in Melbourne hospitals in emergency situations. The suggestion that you could move this to another airport is unworkable. I think it shows very clearly that Labor does not understand the importance of Essendon Airport for the regions. When we look at the development, Sharp Airlines is now catering for 20,000 customers a year. I could go on a lot more. (Time expired)

Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (6.45 pm)—On 10 October, I had the honour of closing the 2008 Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia Fairground Youth Conference in Fremantle, which was attended by around 230 youth sector workers and young people from across WA. The conference addressed the notion of a fair and equitable playing field for young people, with discussion of such issues at the conference as youth homelessness, access to public space and Indigenous youth. The YACWA conference was a significant contribution to our democratic process following on from the 2020 Youth Summit held in Canberra earlier this year.

Conference attendees were pleased with the Rudd Labor government’s commitment to hearing young people’s views through the new Australian Youth Forum launched earlier this month by the Minister for Youth, the Hon. Kate Ellis, which is intended to be a communication channel between the government, young people and the youth sector. The conference heard from inspiring young people, including Bronwyn Taylor from the Balgo community, where she now works as a full-time youth worker, and Alexandra Shaw, who was the Western Australian Young Person of the Year for her work as a leader in the deaf community.

Australia’s young people have critical role to play not only in our future but also in our present, especially when you consider the implications of our rapidly ageing population together with global issues of climate change, the fast rate of technological change and the downturn in the world economy potentially having catastrophic long-term effects on retirement savings and investments, among other things. Young people need to be involved in today’s solutions, since they will bear the brunt of yesterday’s failings. (Time expired)

State Politics

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (6.46 pm)—This weekend past was a significant one in state politics. The New South Wales by-elections allowed locals to send an unequivocal message to the Labor state government, the ACT election saw a change in the political landscape and on the
Gold Coast the Liberal-National Party’s inaugural candidates were chosen to contest the Queensland state election. These candidates are Dr Alex Douglas for Gaven, Richard Towson for Broadwater, Tania Wright for Southport and Michael Crandon for the newly formed seat of Coomera. As all members in this place would know and appreciate, putting your hand in the air to contest an election is not a decision one should take lightly. I wish all these candidates the very best of luck in their endeavour to have local people support them as their representatives in state parliament when the election is called.

One thing that has struck me in my short time as the member for Fadden is the array of state issues that seriously impact on local residents and continue to do so with little hope for progress on their being fixed. Despite my representation of the northern Gold Coast at a federal level, people tend to see me as someone who they can approach about all issues, whether it is the Queensland Health horror story, local roads or infrastructure, the state system dragging their feet at the LORDS school in Ormeau or the importance of dredging in the Broadwater. These are stories that are raised with me every day. They are demonstrative of the importance of solid and proactive representation at the state level to ensure these issues are resolved. I wish our candidates all the best as they go forward.

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (6.48 pm)—I rise in the chamber today to mark the sudden passing of a great member of the Parramatta community, Mr Noel Maybon. Noel was the Chairman of the Anderson Avenue Vineyard Creek Bushcare Committee in Dundas. The campaign for regeneration of the many creeks in my electorate that feed into the Parramatta River is one I am passionate about, and I hosted a number of meetings for Landcare groups and stakeholders in bush regeneration earlier this year.

Thanks to the work of the Vineyard Creek bushcare group, Vineyard Creek is now a tranquil, family friendly area that is enjoyed by many people in the community. It is a transformation that would not have happened without the drive and commitment of Noel Maybon. I worked with Noel on a number of occasions. He was always extremely friendly, hardworking and self-effacing. It was my pleasure to have known him. I offer my condolences to the Maybon family and to all of Noel’s many friends. We will miss Noel. We are poorer for his passing, but we are richer for his life and the gifts he gave us.

Mr IRONS (Swan) (6.49 pm)—Last Friday morning I was invited by radio station 6PR to speak about my experience as a foster child and also to help promote the concept of ‘every child needs a great family’. The 6PR interview was held at Forrest Place in the Perth CBD, a place that Robert Menzies addressed crowds in years ago. The interviewer was Simon Beaufort, who handled the interview with passion and with the necessary sensitivity required for the subject. I was proud to be able to talk about the positive experiences I had as a foster child. I was fostered by the Irons family in the early sixties, was embraced by the family as one of their own and immediately gained four siblings. One of those siblings is my sister Lucy, who will be in Parliament House this week with Vision Australia. It will be great to catch up with her.

The need to recruit more foster carers is real and critical. Over the past five years there has been a steady increase in the number of children coming into the care of the Department for
Child Protection and non-government fostering agencies across WA. There are five types of foster care: respite care, emergency care, short-term care, medium-term care and long-term care. Children come into foster care for a number of reasons, varying from physical and sexual abuse, violence and neglect through to parental problems such as drug and alcohol abuse and relationship problems. These children need love and care, along with help to raise their self-esteem and reduce their stress. They need to live their lives and enjoy their lives in the way that most children in our society do. I would urge anyone who is contemplating fostering to take the step over the threshold and commit to helping a child or children in need. I would not be where I am today if the Irons family had not made that commitment.

Hasluck Electorate: Ellis Brook Valley Development Project

Ms JACKSON (Hasluck) (6.50 pm)—I had the pleasure on Friday last week to be involved in the celebration of the completion of the Ellis Brook Valley Development Project. The celebration was held in Honeyeater Hollow, a beautiful and peaceful area that reminded me how important it is not only to preserve our bushland but also to share the experience as widely as possible. I am fortunate, as are the other residents of Perth, to have such a stunning area so close to the city and, of course, within my electorate of Hasluck. The Commonwealth government worked with the City of Gosnells, the Western Australian Planning Commission and the Friends of Ellis Brook Valley to improve the facilities at Ellis Brook Valley. There are now extra composting toilets, shelter structures, seating and barbecues as well as excellent signage and improved trails. Importantly, many of these trails are accessible paths that allow people with disabilities to enjoy the natural beauty of the area.

I would particularly like to acknowledge the hard work done by the Friends of Ellis Brook Valley—I do not know anywhere else where we can attract such large numbers of volunteers as we do to our bushcare areas—the wonderful crew at the City of Gosnells, particularly those outdoor workers who work in the natural resource areas and parks, and the local Australian technical college students who constructed some of the barbeques. The infrastructure that has been provided by this project will encourage more visitors and locals to enjoy this unique area. But not only that: the work has been done in a way to ensure the environment and habitat are protected, and I congratulate everyone involved with this project. (Time expired)

Cowan Electorate: Telstra

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (6.52 pm)—It is not often that someone stands up in this place and says good things about Telstra, and I am not going to start tonight. But I will in the future if they do the right thing with regard to the phone booth at Amberton Avenue in my local suburb of Girrawheen. This phone booth is the scene of antisocial behaviour after dark. There is littering. Needles have been found. In fact, up to 15 needles were found in a backyard just next to the phone box. There has been broken glass and graffiti. There have even been people disturbing locals by knocking on doors at night and asking for money. According to the people who live nearby and want action on this matter, most of the people arrive by car and when they leave, squealing the tyres and damaging front lawns of people’s properties is normal. This just is not good enough. Telstra needs to relocate the phone box or merely remove it. I call upon Telstra and Mr Peter Fairclough, the state manager, to do the right thing and look after the local people and clear this away. In the end, the people that use this booth—as most travel by car—can go to other places. It is not right for the local people to have to suffer this consistent antisocial behaviour.
Fremantle Electorate: United Nations Youth Association

Ms PARKE (Fremantle) (6.53 pm)—As someone who worked for the United Nations for a number of years, I have the pleasure of meeting many young people actively engaged in international affairs. As a 17-year-old—sadly, a long time ago now—I was fortunate to have the opportunity to spend one year in France as a Rotary exchange student, and this further sparked my interest in the wider world. It is exciting now to see young Australians involved in both local and international issues through the United Nations Youth Association. I have had visits in my parliamentary office from Henny Smith—formerly of Fremantle—Alex Rafalowicz and Mark Katsiaris from the UN Youth Association. Two other young Australians dedicated to ensuring young people have their voice heard on global issues are Beth Shaw and Melanie Poole, who are this year’s youth ambassadors to the UN and are now in New York for the UN General Assembly. Before going to New York they toured around Australia at their own initiative and expense, gathering the views of as many young people as possible.

The electorate of Fremantle is a multicultural one in which young people grow up with exposure to a variety of cultures. I regularly see young people wanting to make improvements to our global community. Recently, Oxfam held a Make Poverty History event at Murdoch University, attended by students from the Fremantle and other electorates, focusing on the impact of climate change on world poverty. As we approach United Nations Day at the end of this week and the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights this December, I am pleased to know that there are so many young people preparing to lead and find solutions to the challenges of the future. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order! In accordance with standing order 192A the time for members’ statements has concluded.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

GROCERYchoice

Debate resumed, on motion by Mr Hartsuyker:

That the House notes with concern, the failure of the GROCERYchoice website to provide meaningful information to consumers, in particular the:

(1) failure of GROCERYchoice to provide meaningful information in a timely fashion;
(2) failure of GROCERYchoice to enable a comparison of price and quality; and
(3) inherent bias of GROCERYchoice against independent retailers.

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (6.55 pm)—During the 2007 election campaign, the then Leader of the Opposition, Kevin Rudd, bombarded our TV screens with promises to put downward pressure on the cost of living. When he came to power, he very quickly forgot those promises. On coming to government, what was Labor’s policy response on the cost of living? The response was to be seen to be doing something when, in fact, Labor is doing nothing at all. To address the rising cost of fuel, we have Fuelwatch, a scheme which would disadvantage independents, potentially drive up the cost of fuel and introduce price fixing to our fuel markets. The scheme has been widely ridiculed. Most recently, Annabel Crabb in the Sydney Morning Herald said of Fuelwatch, ‘The scheme should be taken out the back and shot to put it out of its misery.’ That sentiment is widely shared by a range of motoring groups. Then we had the ‘son of Fuelwatch’, or GROCERYchoice, which was a rolled-gold, gilt-edged waste of taxpayers’ money—in fact, a waste of $12.9 million.
Let us examine the points raised in the motion. On the first point, the issue of meaningful information delivered in a timely fashion: if you log on to the website, you are greeted by a cartoon size map of Australia, with large areas covering thousands of square kilometres, if not millions of square kilometres, all included in the one part of the site. That is particularly so in the north-west of Western Australia, where there are millions of square kilometres in the one GROCERYchoice area. You cannot identify the town where the sample was taken and you certainly cannot identify the store. Is a person in Coffs Harbour going to drive to Taree or, more absurdly, a person in Broome going to drive to Geraldton to shop for their groceries? Surely not. The selection of the areas alone is evidence enough that the Labor government now in office pays only lip-service to cost-of-living issues. The sample size—some 500 items—is ridiculously small when compared to the 25,000 to 30,000 which typically are available in the average large supermarket. Not only is the information geographically useless but also it is hopelessly out of date. Prices in stores change every week, every day and every hour, yet GroceryWatch monitors prices once a month.

On the second point, the comparison of price and quality: the contents of the basket are not published by the ACCC, so the consumer knows only the price of a mystery pack of items, some of which he may never purchase. What does a ‘general groceries basket’ mean? I am confused. And what meats are in a meat and seafood basket? Are they premium quality? Are they low quality? We are left in the dark. So what does the taxpayer get for his $12.9 million? The resounding answer is: not much—certainly not value for money and certainly not useful information. At best, you get vague, out-of-date information courtesy of the ACCC.

I move now to the issue of bias against independent grocery stores. If I am a competitive independent, I am lumped in with others who may be far less competitive than my store. The sample taken will almost certainly not be in my store, yet I may be greatly disadvantaged depending on which stores are sampled by the ACCC. Independent retailers come in all shapes and sizes. Some—like super IGA stores—compete directly and effectively with Coles and Woolworths. Other independent retailers serve smaller communities or compete with larger supermarkets based on convenience and service rather than on price. GROCERYchoice classifies all independent retailers in the one group. Regardless of whether the store is a large metropolitan supermarket or a smaller regional store, they are listed beneath one heading.

I have been informed that stores of less than 500 square metres have been surveyed for GROCERYchoice. It is obvious that a small store does not and cannot compete with a large supermarket, so including such stores is meaningless. This means that the prices charged by small independent stores in rural areas may be averaged together with prices charged by super IGA stores, to give a biased final result. According to NARGA, many large independent stores are directly price competitive with Coles and Woolworths, but this fact is concealed by the method the ACCC uses to calculate the average basket prices. GROCERYchoice would have you believe that independents are around $6 to $12 more expensive than Woolworths or Coles for a complete trolley of goods—every store, every time. This result is an average, and when the consumer goes out to shop he does not pay the average price; he pays the price that prevails in the store at the time. However, with GROCERYchoice, he cannot identify that store. It is proof positive that the material provided by GROCERYchoice does not benefit consumers.
The methodology used to compile the information severely disadvantages independents who are trying to compete with the major supermarkets. GROCERYchoice is misleading consumers into believing that all independent retailers are more expensive than major supermarket chains. This all comes down to one thing: a lack of transparency. The whole GROCERYchoice exercise has been shrouded in secrecy. As I said earlier, no-one knows which supermarkets have been surveyed, which products have been surveyed or what is in a basket of groceries. As a result, the information provided by the website is of no benefit to consumers. It discourages shoppers from visiting independents. It is just a farce.

The grocery price website tells me that I could save almost $19 by buying a basket of staple goods at the German owned supermarket Aldi instead of an independent supermarket. But it is ridiculous to compare the quality of generic products sold at Aldi with the premium branded products sold at traditional supermarkets. The GROCERYchoice website consistently portrays Aldi as being the cheapest place to purchase your groceries. While this may be true, the website is misleading because it ignores the fact that private generic products sold by Aldi are often inferior in quality to those premium branded products.

To add to this deceit, the Assistant Treasurer is on the record numerous times espousing the virtues of shopping at Aldi. He is the minister for Aldi, the minister for a German, foreign firm, and he is recommending Aldi over our local independent stores. I never thought I would see the day when we would have a federal minister espousing the virtues of a foreign competitor over our hardworking local businesspeople. Why has our Assistant Treasurer become the voice of Aldi? Perhaps he is learning German in his spare time! Does he have a vision of a life after politics as the German ambassador? I would have thought that he would be supporting the diverse range of independent stores who provide good service to the local communities they support and who work hard to provide groceries at the cheapest possible cost under the structures within which they operate.

GROCERYchoice is one of the great political frauds of our time. It fits the mould perfectly with regard to the Rudd government’s stance on cost-of-living issues—being seen to be doing something when in fact you are doing nothing at all. Providing out-of-date information at great cost to taxpayers is of no use to anyone. That is the definition of a waste of taxpayers’ money. The Assistant Treasurer should apply the advice of Annabel Crabb with regard to that other great political fraud Fuelwatch and take GROCERYchoice out the back and shoot it. It will save us all a lot of taxpayers’ money.

Ms NEAL (Robertson) (7.04 pm)—Thank you for that invigorating address, Member for Cowper! I rise to speak in the chamber today in opposition to the motion moved by the member for Cowper. The cost of groceries is a real issue that certainly impacts on the lives of many Australians. An average Australian household spends between 12 and 14 per cent of their disposable income on groceries. The average growth in grocery prices over the last 10 years has been well ahead of the CPI. This is a worrying trend and one that is putting pressure on many household budgets. This problem is exacerbated by the concentration of the grocery industry in Australia. Coles and Woolworths together make up about 60 per cent of the market. This means that the knowledge to choose is becoming even more important.

This government recognises that it is a problem and has taken action to address the problem. Labor believes that the government can best assist consumers by informing them that they can act in their own interests when selecting what products to purchase. That is why this
Labor government has acted to help out consumers and to better inform them on the choices that they make. This will improve the community’s capacity to determine where the cheapest groceries are available in their region. In August this year, the government announced the establishment of the GROCERYchoice website. The sum of $12.9 million has been provided to create and maintain the website and also to survey grocery products over the next four years. We are putting more information into the public domain. This was the delivery of the commitment made by the government while still in opposition.

This website was established to provide independent information on the cost of a basket of goods in 66 supermarket outlets. There are approximately 500 products being monitored. The products are divided into seven typical baskets which reflect the weekly grocery choices of the average Australian household. These goods and their prices are surveyed in 61 regions across Australia; therefore, you can go into the website as a consumer and see whether Coles, Woolworths, Franklins, IGA or one of the other supermarkets is cheaper that particular month in your region. The exact items which form part of the baskets are not disclosed so as to preserve the integrity of the process. Obviously, if the grocery items were known, the retailer could manipulate the system by dramatically reducing the price of particular items in the basket and therefore skew the results. This would mean that consumers would be duped rather than assisted by the site.

I have to say that I continue to be amazed by the coalition members opposite, part of the old and tired Howard government, who took no action themselves during their 12 years in government to deal with this issue and only have a negative and carping approach to the government’s positive actions. Would the coalition deny consumers access to this valuable information? Whose interests are they putting forward if they are not interested in assisting consumers to make a real choice? With this whingeing view of GROCERYchoice, the opposition are showing that they are out of touch with the community, because their views are not shared by the community, by consumers, by consumer advocates or even by economic commentators. Choice, the leading consumer group, responded positively to the price watch in their release of 5 August, saying:

The grocery price website has the potential to increase competition in the sector … Consumers who choose to use the GROCERYchoice website will be able to accurately gauge which supermarket in their area is the cheapest for various baskets of goods.

Also, on Thursday, 7 August Alan Kohler said:

Poking around the ACCC’s new Grocery Choice website that was launched this morning, one thing becomes instantly clear: it is not a stunt, as Opposition Leader Brendan Nelson says.

Alan Kohler then went on to say:

And the truth, collected by ACCC contractors with notebooks going around supermarkets all over Australia once a month, is both enlightening and very powerful—as the truth can be sometimes. But, most importantly, the jaded view of the opposition towards GroceryWatch is not shared by consumers, who are voting with their feet or, should I say, with their fingers. Consumers have accessed the GROCERYchoice website over four million times since its establishment. This is a real testament to the need in our community for real information about grocery prices and also to the value placed on this information by consumers.

This government does not guarantee that prices will come down from their present levels. The biggest impacts on grocery prices are international factors and climate events like
drought, and of course we accept that these are beyond the government’s control. But this site gives consumers the information they need so that they are not going to be ripped off. What can be said is that consumers have accurate information about the price of groceries at different stores, and this will put downward pressure on prices and foster real competition.

This site has had its teething problems. When the site was first posted, some issues were raised about the layout of the site and accessibility for those with sight disabilities. These issues have now been remedied, and the site will continue to be sensitive to consumer needs. It will need to be improved over time to be the most useful for consumers that it can be. I have to say that I am surprised by the member for Cowper and his lack of support for this initiative. I know that many of his constituents are doing it tough, and I am sure that they could do with some help on grocery prices.

The most important principle is that this government is genuinely concerned about the real issues that working families face and the challenges that they have in balancing their budgets. This Labor government is taking action to empower consumers and to give them real choice. GROCERYchoice is only part of a range of initiatives being taken by this government to assist consumers. We have seen the introduction of a range of initiatives to help consumers, which I am very proud of, including the ACCC inquiry into grocery prices, which was the most comprehensive inquiry into the supermarket sector since Federation and gave rise to this website.

The clarity and pricing legislation, which I spoke about last week, limits component pricing. Reforms have passed the House that will finally give the consumer accurate information about the total price that they will pay. The product safety issue, which has been furthered by the Assistant Treasurer, has delivered a national product safety reform package which will see our national product safety laws applied across the nation. The Ministerial Council on Consumer Affairs has delivered a national consumer law which will see one consumer law based on the consumer protection provisions of the Trade Practices Act. These will apply across the nation, will also include an unfair contract provision and will apply to all sectors of the economy with the exception of the finance services sector.

The Productivity Commission has estimated that taking these steps could result in benefits to Australian consumers and businesses of up to $4.5 billion a year. This government is acting, not just complaining.

Mr LINDSAY (Herbert) (7.12 pm)—The member for Robertson might explain to me how GroceryWatch works for a person on Thursday Island, 1,500 kilometres away from the nearest supermarket, or how it works for a person in Townsville, 1,000 kilometres away from the supermarket in Mount Isa whose prices are checked. How does a person in Townsville go to Mount Isa to shop because there might be something a bit cheaper? Clearly GroceryWatch is a sham—an absolute sham. It is meaningless. In North Queensland, GroceryWatch is meaningless. That is the sad part about this. For such a large area of Australia, incorporating from Mackay north and west to the border, the information presented on the site bears no relation to what the prices really are in the supermarkets. That is hopeless.

When you go to the site, it tells you that it is solely intended to provide a general understanding of the subject matter to help people assess whether or not they need more detailed information. It is clear evidence yet again of a sham. The site also tells you that you may not reproduce, retransmit or distribute material without the written permission of the director of
ACCC publishing. For goodness sake! It is a site that is supposed to help consumers compare grocery prices and the site itself says that you cannot tell anybody about it or distribute the information. It is public knowledge but you are not allowed to distribute it without the written permission of the director of ACCC publishing.

Consumers know that the GroceryWatch website is in fact a sham. They know they can go to the Coles website, the Aldi website or the Woolworths website and get absolutely up-to-date information on pricing on the spot. They know that they can go to the catalogues, which are put in our letterboxes with such great frequency, and get information on the specials that are available. Of course, that means that GroceryWatch does nothing to bring prices down.

The Labor government went to the last election promising to bring prices down and, of course, they sold us all a pup. When the electorate began to realise they had sold us all a pup, up came the smoke and mirrors—let’s have GroceryWatch. So we got GroceryWatch, and now the consumers are waking up to it being another pup. Kevin Rudd’s promise that he would bring down fuel and food prices in fact has not been delivered. There are all sorts of reasons why it has not been delivered, but it has not been delivered. He has done nothing, the government has done nothing, and GROCERYchoice changes nothing.

The GROCERYchoice website does not compare stores; it only compares regions. What is the point in comparing the North Queensland region with some other region? We get the information that something in Brisbane is $4 cheaper than it is in the North Queensland region. Are people really going to go 1½ thousand kilometres to Brisbane to save $4? Of course they are not going to do that. Despite the expenditure on setting up and maintaining this website, it is not worth a cracker. The money should be used for more meaningful things to help consumers with their choices, and GroceryWatch is certainly not one of them. I agree with the motion that is before the House tonight and I agree that GROCERYchoice has been an abject failure for this country.

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (7.17 pm)—I have listened carefully to the two previous speakers from the opposition, the member for Cowper and the member for Herbert. It is incredible that the opposition has for decades presented itself as the party which represents business interests and small business and which believes in and supports the workings of our competitive domestic market economy, yet it is so clearly and deliberately obstructing this initiative that will assist Australian consumers to make their choice. It will give them knowledge and empower them when they are doing their shopping.

The purpose of GroceryWatch is to increase consumer knowledge of prices placed on supermarket goods. Increasing consumer knowledge is, one would think, fundamental to a healthy, competitive market. One would also think that supporters of our economic system would absolutely welcome additional input to foster competition between supermarket chains. One would think that an opposition that had, over several months in both this and the other place, presented itself as being concerned with limitations on consumer demand and the purchasing power of citizens around this nation would welcome an initiative that fosters competition and the ability of consumers to increase their purchasing power and the quantum of goods that they can access with their nominated budget.

It really is disappointing that the opposition, the self-appointed party of business interests, is siding in this debate with the largest businesses. It is standing by the largest supermarket chains in attempting to limit the public’s knowledge of the prices placed on goods that Aus-
tralian families need in their everyday existence. They are standing up here and in the other place against an initiative designed to foster competition. This has to be amongst the most disappointing episodes in the opposition’s disappointing performance in recent years.

Australians want heightened competition in the grocery market. The public demands clarity of pricing, and consumers want to know as best they can the relative value offered by alternative suppliers. This Labor government is standing with the consumers in this debate. The opposition clearly is standing with the interests of big business, limiting consumer knowledge and deriding those speaking in the interests of the consumer. The Liberal Party has, I suppose, turned into an oligarchs’ party. The Rudd Labor government are working in the interests of the consumer and we are totally unapologetic about it.

A notable contribution to this debate was the report of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission on the grocery sector, which identified areas in which competition is compromised. Already, working within this place and through the Council of Australian Governments, this consumer focused Labor federal government has commenced the development of a nationally consistent unit price regime for consumers’ easy and accurate comparison of prices of a given product. I will repeat that: easy and accurate comparison of prices of a given product. One would think that people would be welcoming the opportunity for consumers to be able to compare prices of a given product. It has opened up discussion on potential creeping acquisition laws, addressing large market players’ overpowering of the market and decreasing competition through incremental mergers and acquisitions.

Most recently, the government has introduced ‘clarity in pricing’ legislation through amendment of the Trade Practices Act to reduce the misrepresentation of the cost of goods by omitting additional fees and charges that any consumer would necessarily have to pay for a purchase. Labor knows there is real reform to be pursued in relation to the grocery sector, in the interests of the consumer, the customer, the public we represent and those interests that we act for. The inquiry also revealed the potential for large players to play games with local planning systems to delay or prevent new competitors entering the market.

The Rudd Labor government is committed to working in the interests of the public and increasing the downward pressure on grocery prices through competition. The government has already relaxed restrictions that have prevented competitors buying vacant land to build new supermarkets, increasing competition. These measures are in addition to the amendments of the misuse of market power provisions within the Trade Practices Act and the criminalisation of serious cartel conduct.

Here we have a government committed to removing barriers to competition within the grocery market, fostering competition between retailers and improving the purchasing power of the public, and the opposition can do nothing but snipe and obstruct the government’s good work, aiding and abetting the grocery market superpowers through the limitation of information that consumers have at their disposal. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. JE Moylan)—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.
Tasmania: Drought

Debate resumed, on motion by Mr Adams:

That the House:

(1) recognises the difficulties farming communities in Tasmania are facing because of the prolonged drought;

(2) congratulates the Tasmanian State Government for its efforts in getting emergency water to the hardest hit areas;

(3) commits to the extension of support programs to allow those areas to assist rural areas in dealing with the mental trauma of drought; and

(4) continues to support the introduction of new schemes for water delivery and water recycling.

Mr ADAMS (Lyons) (7.23 pm)—Drought—It is a word that conjures up all the negative thoughts about farming. It affects us all in some ways because, without water, our food cannot be grown. If we do not grow food, we will have to import it, and that becomes expensive and nonsensical. Those on the land have to deal with the heartbreak of seeing their stock founder and their land turn to dust. And that dust pervades everything. It seeps under doors, through houses and into everything that you are doing. It saps the spirit along with the skin, and hope goes out the window. It is as if nobody cares.

Many do not understand that we have drought in Tasmania, yet driving around the Midlands and the east coast anytime last year or this year you got the feeling that you were in another land. Even when a little winter rain starts greening up the surface, the ground is hard and unforgiving and water runs off the land rapidly into channels and out to sea. Practically, how can we help? The state government in Tasmania has started the process of recycling the water being used by our electricity generator and piping it to the worst spots. The use of water is now being audited and it is becoming a valued commodity. This is happening, and I congratulate the state government for developing a water strategy for the state. I urge everyone to support the emergency supplies and the development of the new schemes. We do have a lot of water in Tasmania, but it is in the wrong places.

But how do you help heal the spirits of those whose livelihoods have been drained away? This question has been taxing the thoughts of those in the Southern Midlands, who are having to cope in one of the most stressed areas in Tasmania. One man has taken up the cause with a vengeance. A successful farmer living just out of Kempton, John Jones, whose family have farmed there for generations, is a councillor on the Southern Midlands Council. He has experienced firsthand the depression that has settled on his community and he has fought to get recognition for practical help for many farmers who are suffering through these drought years. In the last couple of months, John has wrangled, begged, fought for and found funding from a multitude of sources for a locally developed suicide prevention initiative, Rural Alive And Well Tasmania. John says we all have to show that we care and understand the problems communities face.

Yesterday I had the pleasure of launching the program, based at Oatlands, on behalf of the Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon. I announced the allocation of $216,000 for the employment of a project worker and administrative support for an initial 12 months. This is part of the federal government’s initiative to assist local communities to develop their own...
local solutions to the serious issues that suicide presents for individuals, their families and the community. Yesterday was a great day.

The Australian government has joined with the Tasmanian government, farmers and community groups to put together this package. The program will draw upon the experience of the other national suicide prevention strategies providing services aimed at helping to prevent suicide, with their main focus being on males, by strengthening community capacity in areas of need. Although this program has only been running since July this year, it has already made a significant impact, and my belief is that it will be a model for other such services around Australia to deal with the soul-destroying feeling of uselessness that people experience when the country is in drought—uselessness that leads to depression and then to the risk of self-harm.

I know the government is committed to consulting widely, including with consumers and carer representatives. I also know we must ensure that an adequate workforce is on hand to help. There are other good programs too that will help address the real illness of depression. But, to get help to people, it must somehow be recognised that men in particular do not find it easy to ask for help. The program in the Southern Midlands is actively going out to seek those who need help—without scaring them further. It will have a mature male worker who will be able to spend time talking over the farm fence and taking help into homes. I believe this program will require ongoing funding to continue the task started and also to spread areas of practical help, including helping those on the land to find alternative land uses when their traditional land use has become unviable. This is where health issues overlap with training and research issues. This is merely helping people to once again become valued members of the community, with positive directions for the future. I am very pleased that both the state and federal governments have now recognised the very deep problems of drought and what it can do to communities. (Time expired)

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (7.28 pm)—Obviously the member for Lyons has a large heart for his community. The issues raised by the member for Lyons highlight the difficulties being faced by farming and rural communities around Australia. Speaking in support of this motion, the member for Lyons detailed the response to a particular situation in his Tasmanian electorate. It would no doubt come as a surprise to many Australians not familiar with Tasmania’s Central Highlands that it could be affected by the dry conditions that have had such a devastating impact on other parts of rural Australia. The same could be said of the West Gippsland region of Victoria, which is encompassed by my electorate of McMillan. This is an area known historically for its temperate climate, lush vegetation and the reliability of its rainfall—conditions that have proved ideal for the development of one of Australia’s premier dairying districts. But, as in the electorate of Lyons, an extended drought saw farmers in my electorate last year faced with the previously unheard of situation of having to pay up to $200 a day to transport water to their stock. Mostly self-sufficient in fodder, dairy farmers in McMillan also had to compete with other drought-affected regions for hay and saw their fodder budgets quadruple.

A decade ago it would have been considered impossible for West Gippsland to qualify for exceptional circumstances drought relief, yet that was the situation we found ourselves in. The experience of the electorates of Lyons and McMillan illustrate just how serious the water supply situation is in most areas of rural Australia. It tells us the face of agriculture will have to

MAIN COMMITTEE
change if we are to meet the challenge of a future in which some experts tell us we will have
to live with more and longer dry spells.

Australian farmers have demonstrated in the past that they are able and willing to adapt and
innovate to increase their efficiency and productivity. One of the examples of that I am most
familiar with is the dairying industry. Less than 40 years ago there were 60,000 dairy farmers
in Australia, each milking an average of 22 cows. Today there are around 6,000 dairy farmers
and the average herd is 300 cows. They produce an additional two billion litres of milk an-
ually, while milking one million fewer cows. Education and training will be even more impor-
tant to the farmers of the future, with large operations more likely to be employing pasture
managers or irrigation managers.

As has been demonstrated in the seat of Lyons and in McMillan the management of water
resources will be vital and will involve the farming community, governments and communi-
ties. Governments also will have to re-evaluate how they will respond to the possibility of
longer and more frequent drought conditions. They will need to revise the guidelines for ex-
ceptional circumstances and other drought relief measures to redress inequities in the system
as well as the level of support that can be sustainably provided, whether it be income support
or interest rate subsidies. The management of water resources is going to be the major chal-
lenge confronting us as we enter an era of climatic uncertainty, and it is a challenge for which
we must prepare now.

The people in the electorate of the member for Lyons have suffered a green drought and we
have suffered a green drought. Others will come through our communities and say, ‘But look
at the place; it’s green.’ They do not understand the instability and the vulnerability of the
people within the area. Second, the member for Lyons called for help for those who are deal-
ing with a wounded spirit. It is a community with a wounded spirit that has been caused by
drought and by the suffering that that has caused families. The member for Lyons told a story
about the activity within the community of John Jones. His story would be repeated across
this great south land from Western Australia to Tasmania and all the way to the tip of Cape
York. There are people just like that man who actually go out of their way on behalf of their
communities to make sure that they receive the benefits that government can give to them.

There is just one thing we cannot do. There is one thing no government can do. It can only
be done by a community that is alive and aware to an individual situation. It is this. If you are
doing it hard, either financially or emotionally, get help. Somewhere, somebody is there to
help you. There are hotlines, there are people available, and we say to you, ‘Get help early.’
The response from government, and from all those involved, to the drought in Tasmania to my
thinking has been exceptional. Whether it is the fly fisherman the other day who was worried
about turbulence, the pipeline they want to put in for new irrigation, desalination, recycling or
water efficiencies, they are all things we ourselves are going to have to address coming into
this next season.

Ms CAMPBELL (Bass) (7.33 pm)—I would like to thank my parliamentary colleague the
member for Lyons for raising this important issue, and I was more than happy to second his
private member’s motion. Some in this House may well be surprised to learn of the dire situa-
tion of many farmers in my home state of Tasmania. While Tasmania may generally be asso-
ciated with lush landscapes, the reality unfortunately could not be further from the truth. In
my electorate of Bass farmers in the north-east and on Flinders Island are particularly af-
They have been forced to ship stock to the mainland of Tasmania, as there is simply no longer enough feed on the island. This is quite simply the worst drought on record. It has been going and getting progressively worse since 2005, and farmers are now looking at yet another dry summer on the back of yet another failed spring. Even the largest and formerly most productive farms are running out of feed and grain.

I have spoken with the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association and what they are reporting is frightening, disturbing and, frankly, quite heartbreaking. The TFGA estimates that more than 2½ thousand workers have left the rural sector. Businesses across the state and in all sized communities are suffering. The association is aware of suicides and schools are reporting behaviour from students which is uncharacteristic, and that is being attributed to the pressure and stress that farming families are suffering. Mothers are no longer going to parent-teacher nights because they simply cannot face them.

As we look to summer, things are only becoming worse. This is the time when farmers build stockpiles for the winter but they can barely feed the stock they have now, let alone consider looking to the future. There is nothing for them to stockpile.

I can inform the House that there are two declared exceptional circumstances areas in Tasmania. These cover 48.7 per cent of Tasmania’s agricultural land—almost half. The Australian government has provided more than $3½ million in income support payments to 490 Tasmanian farm families and small business owners and a further $4.7 million in interest rate subsidies to over 174 farmers and small business operators in Tasmania.

The National Rural Advisory Council has already commenced its reviews of the Tasmanian EC areas as part of the review of 52 EC areas that are due to expire at the end of March. As part of its review NRAC consider advice from a number of sources, including state departments, the Bureau of Rural Sciences, the Bureau of Meteorology, landholders and agricultural and business consultants. As part of this process they may also visit areas.

I am informed by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry that the council will visit Flinders Island in December. I can inform the House that this news was welcomed by farmers and landowners on Flinders Island. I was on the island last week and there is a growing sense of desperation. Nothing has changed; there has been no rain and farmers and their families are struggling. I was pleased also to inform the community of a commitment given to me by the agriculture minister, the Hon. Tony Burke, that he would visit the island. I thank him for that commitment and his commitment to the people of Flinders Island. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage the state Minister for Primary Industries and Water, Minister Llewellyn, to visit Flinders Island so that he too can experience firsthand the challenges the island faces.

The government aims to announce extensions and cessations well before the expiry date, giving producers plenty of time to make decisions for their farms. There is, as I said, a growing sense of desperation within Tasmania’s farming community. There is also, I believe it is fair to say, a realisation that this is perhaps the way of the future, that climate change has indeed changed how we farm in my home state. I would encourage that approach. On this side of the House we are all too aware that climate change is real. It is a threat to our entire way of life, particularly life on the land. This is in stark contrast to those opposite, who for so long denied the threat of global warming, denied the existence of climate change and, in the process, held back the wider community’s efforts to adapt. In the meantime, however, it is impera-
tive that governments of all levels do whatever is necessary to support our farmers and the communities which they support.

As at the beginning of August, the Tasmanian and federal government had invested around $4 million in the provision of interest rate subsidy payments to 125 farming businesses under the exceptional circumstances interest rate subsidy. As I mentioned previously, the National Rural Advisory Council will be undertaking a review of the exceptional circumstances declarations later this year to determine whether there is a need for the program to continue beyond the second round. There is a very clear need for that to occur; nothing has changed—it has not rained and farmers and communities can little afford to wait. The Tasmanian government has ongoing water projects and I congratulate it for that. It should be noted, however, that water development is a long-term industry development with many projects some four to six years away. I, like the TFGA, welcome these initiatives but note that farmers need assistance now.

Mr HAWKER (Wannon) (7.38 pm)—I would like to join in this debate, and I commend the member for Lyons for bringing this motion to the House. I too represent part of regional Australia—in western Victoria—and, like my good friend and colleague the member for McMillan and like the member for Bass and the member for Lyons, I am only too well aware what the drought has been doing. This year in the northern part of my electorate it continues to cause considerable problems and many grain growers are looking at heartache yet again. It has not just happened over one year; it has been going on for several years now. It is not just the dry years. It does cause immense difficulties. The points that the member for Lyons and the member for McMillan have raised about the impact on individuals and the need for individuals to know that there is someone who can help cannot be overemphasised. We really do have to try as hard as we can to communicate with people on those issues.

I was fortunate enough to visit the Midlands of Tasmania on 8 October, so I saw firsthand some of the issues that the member for Lyons mentioned. I had the opportunity to speak with some of the local farmers of the Clyde River Water Group at Bothwell, in the member’s electorate. We had quite a few there who raised many concerns. They were very worried about what was happening and in some ways they were very frustrated. They did draw attention to a couple of issues. One of them was the fact that there is water up the river at Lake Sorrell and they were having a problem in trying to get agreement to release, as they put it to me, just 20 millimetres off the level of Lake Sorrell to provide sufficient water to get their irrigation going.

Mr Adams—Millimetres?

Mr HAWKER—Yes, millimetres—very little. They said that that would be enough. But of course there was an argument going on and the people who were opposing the most were in fact the angling lobby. I think that may say something about the difficulties that farming faces these days when the angling lobby apparently can get the ear of the minister as much as the farming communities.

The other point that came through—and I think this one really does have to be emphasised, although I recognise that the minister for agriculture at the federal level, and indeed probably at the state level, has been very conscious of what he can do—is that there have been some real frustrations with the federal Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts. Talking about this water from Lake Sorrell: the application was put in prior to the last federal election and obviously came across the new minister’s table very quickly. It took him six months to
say that, no, he could not do it. You can imagine the level of frustration at this delay. Then it
got worse, because the opportunity under the EPBC Act to get an extension to consider this
had fallen out. The minister then said that he really did not have to look at it anymore, be-
cause the time had expired with regard to the application that had gone in. This really does
show that colleagues opposite have got to work a bit harder on the federal minister for the
environment. I do not think that he is quite conscious of the real desire of some of the people
in that region.

I think that the other points that have been raised are very important and, again, I would
like to revisit the views that the member for Lyons and the member for McMillan have talked
about regarding the effect on individuals. I think that we have all seen what this drought has
done to families and, tragically, what it has done to some individuals. We can only continue to
try and emphasise the need and the local support that is there in many forms.

I would just like to take exception to another point, one that the member for Bass raised:
that some people are denying climate change. I think there is evidence to show that as far as
we can go back, for at least 600,000 years, climate change has been normal. We have seen
times when we got wetter; we have seen times when we got drier; we have seen times when
we got warmer; we have seen times when we got colder—things have not changed. So what
we are looking at right now is part of an ongoing series of cycles. Yes, what the drought is
doing to individuals is devastating, and who knows what the future holds? Some people are
making some pretty wild predictions, but now they are already saying that their predictions
have been wrong and that it is going to get worse. That tells you that the models have got a bit
to answer for. But in the short time that I have left to conclude I again say that this is a very
important issue. I think that it is very important that it has been raised here and I hope that the
wider community and the people in the senior echelons of government will take this on board
and realise that we will have to do more.

Ms COLLINS (Franklin) (7.43 pm)—I rise today to support the motion put forward by my
Tasmanian colleague the member for Lyons. I acknowledge the points that he has made in the
motion and in the House today. This month the Bureau of Meteorology reported that parts of
Australia have experienced the longest, hottest drought on record. In fact, the words used to
describe the situation by the bureau were ‘very severe and without historical precedent’.

The drought that the bureau is referring to is now in its 12th year and Tasmania has not
been immune to its devastating effects. The Bureau of Meteorology data shows a record 12th
year of low rainfall over most of northern and north-eastern Tasmania. The temperatures are
generally higher now, by around one degree. The impact on water supplies is much greater
than for any other previous long-term dry period. So far in 2008 it has been especially dry in
eastern Tasmania. Three-year rainfalls are now at record low levels in numerous locations. In
the seat of Franklin many areas have experienced drier than average conditions, and rain
gauges at Hobart airport, Dover and Grove have registered below-average rainfall for what
can only be described as a very long time. It is in fact the driest 12-year period on record.

You only have to compare annual rainfall figures to understand just how dire the situation
is. In 1996, a small town in the south of Tasmania called Dover recorded an annual rainfall
figure of 1,071.8 millimetres. In 2007, its annual rainfall fell to 761.4 millimetres, but this
year to date Dover’s rainfall is yet to reach 500 millimetres. This is in what is normally a pris-
tine, green area of Tasmania. The Huon Valley and southern Franklin are usually the most
green and lush of Australia’s temperate agriculture districts, but even the Huon has not escaped the drought. For the first time in many years, most farm dams are not full and many have not had inflow over winter. Rainfall for the past 12 months has been at least 20 per cent below the average in most of north and north-eastern Tasmania. Unfortunately, the bureau predicts that there are no rain clouds on the horizon. Drought is set to continue across areas of Tasmania with the bureau predicting a 30 to 40 per cent drop below the average rainfall as we head towards the end of 2008.

This prolonged drought has had a devastating effect on the many farming communities around Tasmania who are facing difficult times. Even local residents are having to buy water to fill their tanks, having previously relied on rainwater to do this for them. Many eyebrows are raised in amazement when people are confronted by how dry Tasmania is. In fact, Hobart is the second driest Australian capital city and this year it is the driest. With the continuing drought and substantially hotter temperatures across the state, you can understand why people are so concerned. With drought come myriad issues—the social, the financial and the economic—and, sadly, in many instances, there is an impact on the physical and mental condition of those who endure such bleak times. This is why governments play such an important role in ensuring that communities are supported and why governments need to step up and become problem solvers on issues of water and climate change.

I know the Tasmanian state government is working hard to ensure that water continues to flow to areas that have been affected by the severe lack of rainfall. Direct cash assistance to farmers has been provided for feed and water to sustain essential breeding stock. So too an exceptional circumstances interest rates subsidy program has been implemented.

The Rudd government is also cognisant of the need to secure a long-term water supply for all Australians. A national plan has been developed to adapt our usage of water to ensure we use this precious asset in a smarter way. With climate change, the long-term drought already affecting many parts of Tasmania means that every drop of water counts. As rainfall decreases, it means we have to take a pragmatic approach and look at new ways of conserving our water. In my electorate of Franklin a new water scheme has been established. We announced it in the lead-up to the election campaign and stage 1 of the south-east Tasmania recycled water scheme will give the Coal River district access to additional water.

The $10.5 million contribution by the Rudd government is to allow many small to medium sized irrigators to take advantage of increased recycled water supplies, replacing the mains water with reclaimed, recycled water. If we are not collecting water from rainfall as we used to, then we need to look at new ways of conserving our water. This is one way governments can play an active role. It is a complex issue that needs action but we must also act on the catalyst of climate change. I take the opportunity to thank the member for Lyons for bringing this important motion to the forefront of our minds. We must, as a priority, continue to act responsibly in light of this most severe and brutal drought. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (7.48 pm)—As the member of parliament with the most drought affected electorate in the whole country, drought is something I am only too distressingly familiar with, as obviously are my constituents. I very much sympathise with the Tasmanian farmers and all our colleagues, be they farmers or otherwise. Drought is very much an insidious creature and it does not discriminate between people. Certainly, New South Wales
has had a bigger share of it than most and Western Australia has its bad times but is significantly blessed in wheat areas for it.

In Tasmania, facing the loss of their sixth growing season, rainfall figures are on average one-third of the usual levels and, despite the green appearance, many paddocks have no growth. I recently heard it rained more in the desert than in parts of Tasmania in the winter just gone. Stocking rates are down to 40 per cent, wool cuts are halved and lambing percentages are down by 60 per cent.

Unlike other states, the Tasmanian government seems to have no drought policy prepared, certainly not for the current, ongoing drought situation in Tasmania. In its budget recently, there was no allocation for drought assistance. Requests for anything extra will obviously require time and delaying cabinet approval. I am somewhat surprised the member for Lyons moved this motion congratulating the state Labor government—although, following what happened in New South Wales over the weekend, I am not surprised he is trying to paint the Tasmanian Labor government in a good light, but drought wise I do not think there is a lot to paint them for.

The TFGA, the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association, with whom I have had a long association, put it succinctly last month:

TFGA drought and climate change manager Nick Flittner said the strategy—
the strategy that was needed—
would avoid the uncoordinated and ad hoc approach to drought management that had been the hallmark of the handling of the current drought.

The acting general manager, Chris Oldfield, said:

The State Government clearly has struggled with this current drought …

It sounds horribly similar to the New South Wales Labor government, who, quite frankly, skite about what they have done in drought, whereas the federal government—our previous one and the current one—have put more into two shires in my electorate, I think, than the state government has put into the entire state as far as drought assistance goes. So it seems to me that, while drought was once totally a state issue, now the states, particularly New South Wales—and obviously Tasmania is not going to go broke over it—seem to be ducking out of it. The New South Wales government has been so arrogant that it has allowed irrigators to pay all the charges for water which they cannot deliver. However, it will let them put it off for a year or so if they pay 13 per cent interest—and the government said that three years ago, when interest was about eight per cent. I would urge the member for Bass, who spoke earlier in this debate, to read the TFGA’s media release and to think through a strategy which might help the farmers in that state.

They say that adversity breeds kindness, and I have seen many acts of generosity during the six or seven years of drought in my electorate. Rotary and the CWA have been towers of strength. They give enormous support to rural communities. In fact, I recall that we asked the CWA to allocate nearly $10 million in New South Wales, probably twice that amount around Australia. Organisations like that do an incredible amount to help, and they do what is not a pleasant job. I remember that, in just a week, donations to a fodder and grain drive being organised by the Rotary Club of Everdale included 100 bales of hay, eight tonnes of pallets and
grain and almost $10,000 in cash. This was a group of people getting together to help farmers who were not in their part of the world. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. JE Moylan)—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.

**Fair Trade Chocolate**

Debate resumed, on motion by Mr Pyne:

That the House:

(1) notes:

(a) today there are hundreds of thousands of children working on cocoa farms in Ivory Coast and Ghana and that these children routinely carry heavy loads, and work with fire, chemicals and knives, with little or no protection. Many of them have no chance of going to school;

(b) about 70 per cent of the cocoa beans used to make chocolate around the world come from West Africa, namely Ivory Coast and Ghana; and

(c) the principal reason that child labour is employed to grow cocoa is because cocoa farmers are paid so poorly for their produce;

(2) commends World Vision Australia for its ‘Don’t Trade Lives’ campaign to draw attention to the plight of child exploitation in the world today; and

(3) calls on the Prime Minister to take action to ensure that the chocolate industry knows Australia is serious about ending child exploitation and slavery by introducing a policy requiring vending machines in Australian Government offices to stock Fair Trade Chocolate exclusively.

Mr PYNE (Sturt) (7.53 pm)—The maxim ‘think globally, act locally’ is one that every member of this House should bear in mind when confronted with facts such as those set out in this motion. It is overwhelming to think that, as we sit here, children as young as six are being forced to work 80 to 100 hours per week to produce the raw ingredients for products that we consume here in Australia, to produce products that most members have probably consumed this week if not today—particularly the former member for Corinella, now the member for McMillan.

I have been corresponding with members of the government about the issue of child slavery and the cocoa industry since it was first brought to my attention by the Reverend Tim Costello in April this year. In April I wrote to the Prime Minister asking him to use the Australian government’s purchasing power to support people, especially children, who are victims of trafficking and slavery by stocking only fair trade chocolate in vending machines in Australian government buildings. As I pointed out to the Prime Minister, it is a simple economic principle that what the consumer demands, the manufacturer will supply.

The Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance responded to my initial letter to the Prime Minister by outlining a number of steps that the government is already taking to address labour rights abuses in the cocoa industry. I was informed by the Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance that the government supports the voluntary use of labels domestically to certify that imported goods have been produced without exploiting children. I was also informed that the Confectionary Manufacturers of Australasia are currently supporting an action plan, agreed to under the 2001 Harkin-Engel
Protocol, to establish a global certification system. I am sure I do not need to point out to members that this protocol was agreed to in 2001 and that it is now 2008.

Not only has the cocoa industry been slow to act; it is now breaching deadlines that it has set itself. On 1 July 2008 the chocolate industry failed to meet yet another deadline to tackle labour exploitation in West African cocoa fields. World Vision has called on the Australian chocolate industry to make a genuine attempt to tackle the root causes of child labour and exploitation in cocoa production. This parliament should do the same. The Confectionery Manufacturers of Australasia, on behalf of Australian chocolate manufacturers, have been asked to make a statement that they are actively committed to eliminating the worst forms of child labour and exploitation from their cocoa supply chains and to guarantee farmers a fair price for their cocoa, an initiative I am sure all members of the House would support. I look forward to speakers from the government endorsing that goal.

The Confectionery Manufacturers of Australasia have been asked to publicly outline a detailed and costed plan of action to ensure that our products are free of child labour and exploitation by 1 December 2008 and to commit US$14 million per year for the next 10 years, or approximately one per cent of industry revenue in Australia, to the rollout of this plan.

Point 93 of chapter 14 of the 2007 Labor Party platform, I am sure I do not need to remind honourable members of the government, states: Labor will also give high priority to supporting international efforts to eradicate the exploitation of child labour.

The parliamentary secretary specifically acknowledges that ‘practical measures are required to protect children effectively’ and cites the following examples as practical measures taken by the government to address the root causes of exploitative child labour practices: Australia’s international development assistance program, Australia’s support of UNICEF, Australia’s ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two optional protocols, and Australia’s ratification of the International Labour Organisation Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

I accept and acknowledge these facts as important measures in the fight against child slavery but, with all due respect, isn’t all this good work undone by the fact that I could go to any vending machine in any Australian government building and purchase a chocolate bar that contains cocoa farmed by child slaves? How can the government claim that Australia is serious about eradicating child labour when it will not even use its own purchasing power to send a clear message to the chocolate manufacturers of the world that they must do more to stamp out slavery?

This government claims that ‘since control of concession agreements under which vending machines are operated was developed to individual agencies, there is no centralised control which would facilitate enforcing a requirement that all vending machines in Australian Government offices sell only fair trade chocolate.’ That sounds like something the Prime Minister would say. Why bother doing the diplomatic hard yards of ratifying UN conventions and protocols and funding aid agencies and UNICEF when we cannot even ensure that chocolate consumed by employees of the Australian government is not made from cocoa farmed by child slaves? This government appears to be thinking globally, but I cannot urge them strongly enough to start acting locally. In every aspect of our lives, we can all act towards eliminating trafficking and slavery in our lifetime.
My office has recently been certified as a fair trade workplace by the Fair Trade Association of Australia and New Zealand, but I note with sadness that I am the only Australian member of parliament whose office is certified. I am sure that everyone present tonight will rush out to make sure that their office is certified as a fair trade workplace. I encourage all members to take action to convert their office to a fair trade workplace by complying with two simple goals: (1) using fair trade certified products within your workplace and (2) promoting fair trade within your workplace.

I am holding a ‘Walk Against Child Slavery’ in my electorate on 22 November to coincide with the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery. The walk will consist of a series of interactive stations that will highlight the key issues that affect millions of children around the world who are victims of modern-day slavery. The aim of the stations is to educate the community on the extent of the global problem and how they can respond positively to stop the exploitations of children around the world. The stations will show how and where children are being trapped in conditions of slavery and what Australians can do to be part of the solution. I am delighted that the Reverend Tim Costello has agreed to be part of my Walk Against Child Slavery on 22 November and will be present to speak and lend his support to my campaign to change the way the Australian government purchases its confectionary.

These two projects have not been onerous ones. I cannot ask the government to act locally if I am not prepared to do the same. I ask that all members do everything in their power to support international efforts to eradicate the exploitation of child labour by acting locally. It is not an onerous task for the Prime Minister of Australia to ask that his department ensure that the chocolate offered for sale in the vending machines in offices of Australian government departments is fair trade certified chocolate. It is a small thing to ask. The reality is that when a public servant turns up to their vending machine and finds that the bar they have been used to purchasing is not available, they will inevitably ask, ‘Where is X, Y or Z chocolate bar?’ When they get told that it is not fair trade chocolate, it will spread virally throughout Australia and the world that at least the Australian government has been prepared to act. It will be one of those trigger points that cause the whole world to change the way it views the production of cocoa and to demand a fair price for a fair day’s work in West Africa; it will change the way we operate around the world. I urge members to support this motion and I look forward to the support of Bruce Billson, the shadow minister for cities and sustainable development and member for Dunkley, a longstanding member of this House who will be supporting this motion.

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (8.03 pm)—I welcome this motion and thank the member for Sturt for bringing it to the attention of the House. I hold up my ‘End Slavery Now’ T-shirt—

An opposition member—Wear it with pride!

Ms BURKE—I wear it in the gym most mornings—which I had the pleasure of being presented with at a recent event that I and Tim Costello spoke to at the Syndal Baptist Church under the Catalyst banner. I have spoken now at about three or four of these events. One was held at Emmaus College, a terrific school in my electorate, under World Vision’s Stir banner. The interesting thing about the recent event was that they did not want a ban on chocolate. They do not want consumers to go out and ban chocolate buying at the moment. What they are asking consumers to do is to go into stores and purchase the chocolate, but write to the manufacturers, particularly Cadbury’s based here in Australia, and let them know that they
would like to ensure that their product is not being made via the processes of child slavery. So they are not looking for a ban, but they are asking us as consumers to do our bit.

I have also had the privilege of having Oaktree Foundation members from Monash University and Deakin University come and see me in my office. They are a terrific group that operate in my area and they are pushing for fair trade on campus. I am supporting their moves there. Certainly in my office, like the member for Sturt, we use fair trade tea and coffee and we do not encourage too many people to eat chocolate bars out of vending machines.

I suppose when most people think of slavery, they imagine slaves shackled to a ship or to each other, as used to happen during the days of the African slave trade. I think we all hoped it had ended with William Wilberforce, but sadly it has not. The truth is these days the chains are often mental chains, psychological ones of coercion, fraud, deception and fear of harm to families. Many Australians would be shocked to learn that slavery and human servitude currently exist within Australia. This often involves sexual slavery and human-trafficking. We are not immune from it even here.

The issue of slavery, particularly child slavery, is something I feel very passionate about, and I have spoken on the issue at many, many local community events. It is an issue of great concern to my electorate. It is estimated that as many as 27 million human beings are enslaved across the globe in what is a multimillion-dollar trade. Slaves are found in Africa, Asia, South-East Asia, the US, Europe and indeed Australia. According to the Anti-Slavery Society:

> Although there is no longer any state which legally recognises, or which will enforce, a claim by a person to a right of property over another, the abolition of slavery does not mean that it ceased to exist. There are millions of people throughout the world—mainly children—in conditions of virtual slavery, as well as in various forms of servitude which are in many respects similar to slavery.

There are several organisations performing fantastic work advocating on the issue, including World Vision Australia, through its Don’t Trade Lives campaign, and Catalyst, through a campaign called ‘Not For Sale: Campaign to End Slavery’. On their website, Catalyst touch on the issue of child slavery being used to farm cocoa beans:

In the Ivory Coast young men are enslaved on cocoa plantations. They are forced to work long hours, receive no pay, and are mercilessly beaten if they rebel. Anti-slavery groups estimate that up to 90% of Ivory Coast cocoa farms have slaves. Given the Ivory Coast supplies almost half the world’s cocoa, it is quite possible the cocoa used in the chocolate you eat or the topping you put on your ice-cream has involved slave labour.

The pleasure that we derive from eating chocolate could possibly be at the expense of child slaves in Africa. As the Trade and Environment Database puts it:

> The problem of child slavery then is not simply a faraway abstraction with no immediate implications for anybody else except those who are directly affected, but rather it is an issue that everybody around the world should be concerned about and demand action to eradicate.

Again I commend the member for Sturt for bringing this motion to the House, and I call upon people to do that, to eradicate slavery by letting manufacturers know that they object to the notion that child slavery has gone into the manufacturing of their chocolate.

Very interestingly, at one of the events I went to, someone from the confectionery manufacturers was brave enough to turn up and present to the crowd. She admitted that, yes, they had failed to meet their last two deadlines and that again there would probably be little hope of their agreeing to meet. But there was a good discussion between the manufacturers and Tim
Costello at this event to recognise that it was an issue that the confectioners were taking on board. Again, this is something that has happened through public effort, through public concern, through action such as this today, through actions in the community to ensure that when people buy something—if they buy that Cadbury’s chocolate bar, for example—they write to the manufacturer and let them know that they are deeply concerned about this issue. And it happens through people trying to ensure that they purchase fair trade chocolate. It is just as good and it is out there. Coffee, tea and the whole range of produce are available, and we should be ending slavery. It is absolutely obscene that in this day and age people are still enslaved.

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (8.05 pm)—It is hard to imagine that an international effort to guard against ‘mistreatment’ could be so interwoven with the ‘treat’ of chocolate. The mistreatment that this motion seeks to shine a light on is the plight of hundreds of thousands of West African children and how too many, enslaved by their family poverty, face back-breaking work on cocoa farms in Ivory Coast and Ghana, producing nearly three-quarters of the cocoa beans used to make chocolate. This is not the kind of ‘chipping in’ many kids from Australian farms or small business families may be familiar with at harvest or stock-take time; the exploited children often face dangerous, unprotected and unrelenting work, with the risk of being owned and traded as a bonded labourer, tending the cantankerous crop in a unique, extreme environment instead of attending school.

We commend World Vision Australia for its ‘Don’t Trade Lives’ campaign to highlight this grave concern. I commend my friend and colleague the member for Sturt for bringing this motion forward and urging the Rudd government to take decisive action within its field of influence. While views vary on whether we can live without chocolate, we unite as one to say that kids must live without slavery, must be free not to be traded and must be free to be free.

This simple and unarguable premise has inspired many, including some within my local community. In early May I met with local ambassadors and allies of World Vision and the Oaktree Foundation—Lizzie, Sage, Tillie, Ella, Stacey and others—to discuss a campaign to end slavery. Year 12 Frankston High School student Emily Roycroft led the Mornington Peninsula ‘Don’t Trade Lives’ campaign by organising a forum in conjunction with the student VGen vision group of World Vision. Having participated in this forum, I delivered a petition to the Confectionery Manufacturers Association and canvassed many of the issues with an open, interested and receptive CMA CEO, Trish Hyde, and communications manager, Kay Blandthorn. At a Melbourne CBD ‘Don’t Trade Lives’ forum in early August, Trish and I joined with the recuperating Jonathan Treagust, who shared his excellent international insights, and the irrepressible Ms Brett Louise Woods, urging the audience to get active. At this forum we learned about the many small farmers who combine their fragile and temperamental harvest through agents who then aggregate this production to supply the commodity market which in turn provides the vital cocoa input to the major confectionery manufacturers and boosts the fragile West African economy.

Yes, we know the supply chains are long and opaque, but it is not too much to ask that a non-essential foodstuff like chocolate is produced without slavery. Coordinated international steps are being taken to achieve and validate this most basic of ethical and humanitarian preconditions in partnership with NGOs, the governments of the Ivory Coast and Ghana, and industry. I am optimistic that the independent verification report due to be completed and re-
leased in December will show that we can all have confidence in this most basic of supply chain requirements. As consumers and advocates, we can be clear in our call for meaningful progress and genuine action by the local confectionery manufacturing industry and retailers—a shared purpose to do what we can domestically to pursue objectives of the ‘Don’t Trade Lives’ campaign.

Nurturing a distinctly Australian, fair dinkum partnership committed to sourcing cocoa from the most ethical and best verifiable suppliers that reliably label and convey this information to consumers; promoting the campaign on product packaging; aligning industry, philanthropic, volunteer and aid projects with international efforts; seeing confectionery executives travel to West Africa, perhaps with a young person from a manufacturing plant area, to see things firsthand; for the industry to sponsor the ‘Art for Aid’ campaign; for CMA members to offer employees salary deductions for World Vision child sponsorship; and proactively reassuring concerned consumers, like my wife’s mothers group, that Australian confectionery manufacturers embrace our motives, endorse the ‘Don’t Trade Lives’ objectives and bat for our DTL team and are not merely bystanders—we can do all of this and we should.

My own experiences as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, with responsibilities including aspects of AusAID’s magnificent work, highlighted the plight of too many children where the kids themselves are the most valuable asset or chattel a profoundly impoverished family has or are too easy a recruit, forced or otherwise, in a world where as many as 300,000 children under the age of 18, some as young as eight, serve in government forces or armed rebel groups in 33 ongoing or recent armed conflict in nearly every region of the globe. There are examples close to home of sexual servitude where, according to a parliamentary inquiry, possibly hundreds of people from South-East Asia and China are traded as property in the sex industry in our own country. This motion advances the need to increase public awareness and action and to encourage all of us to take decisive steps. I commend the motion to the House and commend the member for Sturt for his excellent initiative.

Ms HALL (Shortland) (8.14 pm)—I would like to start by commending the member for Sturt for bringing this issue of child exploitation to the House. I think it is a very important issue and, whilst I did not hear his contribution tonight because I was in another place, I did hear the contribution that he made on 29 May this year. When I heard his contribution then it raised my awareness of this issue and it is from then that I became interested in it.

Mr Pyne—I remember you were in the chamber when I said that.

Ms HALL—Yes, and I am happy to do everything I can to raise community awareness to see whether we can get some action on this important issue. As a person who is committed to seeing that the millennium goals are achieved and as a person who is committed to the elimination of poverty, I was horrified on that particular day to learn of the abuses and exploitations that take place in the production of chocolate.

West Africa collectively supplies nearly 80 per cent of world cocoa. Large cocoa producers such as Cadbury’s, Nestles and Hershey buy cocoa from the Ivory Coast and it is mixed with other cocoa. Thirty per cent of children in sub-Saharan Africa are engaged in child labour, mostly in agricultural activities, including cocoa farming. There is a lot of recorded information on this. In 1998 a report from the Ivory Coast office of UNICEF concluded that the Ivory Coast farmers used enslaved children. From then on there have been a series of reports. In 2001 there was the report A taste of slavery: how your chocolate may be tainted. The BBC
reported on children from Mali being sold as slaves. A British television documentary also claimed many Ivory Coast plantations were using slave labour. In 2002 there was another report and in 2005 there were a number of reports. In 2006 there was a study showing children working on the farms. In 2007 UNICEF representatives on the Ivory Coast made some pretty telling statements.

The one thing that has remained constant is that no matter where you go in the world you find reports on the fact that this abuse of children exists. Children are being abused, sold into slavery, bashed and made to work long hours—between 80 to 100 hours a week, it is reported in just about every piece of information I have read on this issue. Nothing changes. There have been attempts in the US to introduce a voluntary code. They failed to meet the time requirements and there was an extension to 2008. Once again that was not met. It really is time that some action is taken.

The Don’t Trade Lives campaign by World Vision should be supported not only by members of this parliament but by all Australians. There are little ways that we can make differences. When we go along and talk to community groups, we should be raising this issue. We should be making people aware of the fact that this abuse exists.

In today’s Newcastle Herald there is a report that tonight at the University of Newcastle a convention of 350 health students is being run where this particular issue is being looked at. Students in the area of health are going to be looking at the production of chocolate and how as individuals they can make a difference. My message to the parliament tonight is this: join together, make a difference and do not let this abuse continue. Once again, I would like to congratulate the member for Sturt for bringing what I believe is a very important motion to the parliament.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams)—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.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

Debate resumed, on motion by Ms Saffin:

That the House:

(1) notes that:
   (a) the 19 June 2008 marks the 63rd birthday of Nobel laureate and leader of the democracy movement in Burma, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi;
   (b) Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has been held under house arrest since May 2003, and periodically before then since 1989;
   (c) the Burmese military dictatorship has refused to acknowledge the results of the 1990 election, in which the National League for Democracy of which Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was General Secretary, won an overwhelming majority; and
   (d) Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has refused a number of opportunities to leave Burma, even to visit her dying husband, knowing that she would be denied the right to return to continue the struggle for democracy and human rights in Burma;

(2) welcomes the Australian Government’s continued advocacy on behalf of democracy in Burma;

(3) calls on the Government to continue to pressure the Burmese regime to immediately and unconditionally release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners in Burma including a number of
Members of Parliament and to commence an inclusive national reconciliation process to restore genuine democracy in Burma; and

(4) congratulates Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on her birthday and for her efforts to campaign for human rights and democracy on behalf of the people of Burma.

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (8.19 pm)—This motion is to draw attention to the plight of the approximately 54 million people of Burma, Myanmar, who not only live in poverty but also live in fear. I would like to give my thanks and appreciation to the honourable member for Pearce, who is joining me in supporting this motion tonight. I know that the issue has bipartisan support.

The motion draws attention to the plight of Aung San Suu Kyi, who is known to all of us in this place and beyond. It talks about her birthday, which was on 19 June, so it is a belated happy birthday to her. Aung San Suu Kyi’s plight is shared by many others, by all of her people. She does not seek attention for herself. She seeks to draw attention to the plight of the people of Burma and also her fellow political prisoners, of whom there are a large number. The number is always debated, but it could be as many as 2,000 people. U Tin Oo is a prisoner and he is one of Aung San Suu Kyi’s deputies. The UN committee on arbitrary detention has declared that he is being arbitrarily detained. I am familiar with that matter because I lodged the application with the committee and got that declaration. U Win Htein was recently released from prison for between 15 and 17 hours in Katha and then taken back into custody following a radio interview. No-one knows where he is. I express my sentiments to his family, who are obviously very distressed about those events. Khun Htun Oo and Sao Hso Hten were given prison sentences of 90 years and 75 years respectively, which seems excessive when their ‘crime’ was political action. And then there is Su Su Nway and many others.

Burma is a state that has silenced political voices, political leaders, by incarceration. But it can change—and everyone wants change in Burma. I welcomed the release of U Win Tin, Burma’s longest-serving prisoner, who appears to be as intellectually robust as ever. He said through the media that he was not released but evicted, and he stayed in his prison blues to make a point about how bizarre it is. He was one of just seven political prisoners among the 9,002 prisoners released. It looked great—9,002 prisoners released—but only seven of them were political prisoners.

Burma’s situation, as we know, is dire. The challenges are many, including reconciliation. Reconciliation requires discussion, it requires dialogue, it requires conversation—and that is one of the missing elements there. There was a constitution which went through a process in May. It was declared to be the constitution that the regime is going to the election with. The process was neither free nor fair. In 1973 they went through the same process, which was neither free nor fair, and that heralded a constitution that did not bring any political settlement, any constitutional settlement, any reconciliation to the state. It feels like history is being revisited.

Change does not come easily, but the people desire it. Even those who rule the country can change. If asked to define a characteristic that has marked or seared the psyche of the nation of Burma, I would have to say fear. There is fear at all levels—fear of authorities, fear of speaking, fear of doing, fear of acting, fear of thinking—because people end up being trapped in straightjackets. Despite their record of brutality and inept government at all levels, the top generals are also afflicted by fear—fear of foreign incursions and fear of their own people,

MAIN COMMITTEE
particularly the ethnic nationalities. The reality is that, for reconciliation to occur and for peace and prosperity to prevail, the generals—led by the SPDC Chairman, General Than Shwe, and the SPDC Prime Minister, General Thein Sein—need to be bold enough to step up to the plate of leadership. That is what the other leaders, like Aung San Suu Kyi, have challenged them to do. As they only rule with command and control, they do not lead. They must lead efforts to broker peace, because it is peace that is missing in Burma. Such a transition would ideally include a range of initiatives, and it would have to include speaking to each other.

Mrs MOYLAN (Pearce) (8.24 pm)—There are many dreadful human rights abuses in the world, and the previous motion by the member for Sturt gave us a glimpse of the terrible trade in children for the purposes of the cocoa industry. Amongst some of the worst human rights abuses in the world are those hideous human rights atrocities perpetrated on the people of Burma by the regime in that country, and I want to thank the member for Page tonight for bringing again to the attention of this place the incredible courage of and the sacrifices made by Aung San Suu Kyi and of course her brave and loyal followers, because they have endured much in trying to bring democracy and freedom to the country of Burma and to the people of Burma.

Burma is ruled by one of the most brutal military dictatorships in the world, a dictatorship charged by the United Nations with crimes against humanity for its systematic abuses of human rights and condemned internationally for refusing to transfer power to the legally elected government of the country, the party led by Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. When one sees the challenges facing Burma, one begins to appreciate how very fortunate we are to live in a politically free nation where people have freedom of thought and action. It is something we often take for granted. But unfortunately the Burmese people do not have that luxury.

Consider the plight of Aung San Suu Kyi, now in her 13th year of detention. She is not allowed to see her family or friends, as all visitors are banned. Her phone line is cut and her post is intercepted. She is now serving her third term of house arrest after being detained on 30 May 2003 after the regime’s militia attacked her convoy and killed up to 100 of her supporters.

People outside Burma are becoming more aware of what the Burmese people are enduring, and a global movement to bring democracy and human rights to the country is gathering considerable momentum. However, this cannot be achieved without the governments of the world, who must stand united against Burma’s brutal military dictatorship, and that is why I welcome this motion calling for continued advocacy for democracy in Burma.

Given our geographical position, Australia must take a leading role in calling for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and for democracy and freedom for the people of Burma. This issue does have bipartisan support, calling on the government to continue to put pressure on the Burmese regime. As the motion suggests, the Australian government must push for the immediate and unconditional release of Aung San Suu Kyi, as well as other political prisoners in Burma. This includes those members of parliament who have been imprisoned.

I join the House in congratulating Aung San Sui Kyi on her 63rd birthday, which she actually celebrated on 19 June. In this world some people have a choice and that choice is whether they live for nothing or die for something. Despite having numerous chances to leave Burma,
including when her husband was dying, Aung San Suu Kyi has proved that she is willing to die for what she believes in—a free Burma. She has never turned her back on her people and what she believes to be right. We must in this place applaud her bravery and her commitment to delivering democracy both to her country of Burma and to the people of Burma. We must also applaud the incredible bravery of those who follow her in that quest.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams)—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 13 October.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DGH Adams)—The question is:

That grievances be noted.

Swan Electorate: Roads

Mr IRONS (Swan) (8.30 pm)—Tonight I am going to talk about the dangerous intersection of Orrong Road and Pilbara Street in the suburb of Welshpool, in my electorate. Orrong Road is a major arterial road linking the Farmer Freeway and the Roe Highway and tracks through residential, light commercial and industrial areas. Orrong Road is an extension of the Farmer Freeway and, consequently, carries a large proportion of traffic, which it fails to cope with. Since the completion of the Farmer Freeway, traffic volumes have dramatically increased on Orrong Road. One section of Orrong Road recorded a significant increase, in the order of 26,000 vehicles per week day.

Recently on ABC radio, breakfast announcer Eion Cameron, a former member for Stirling, interviewed Mr Ben Meredith, who raised the issue of the dangerous Orrong Road-Pilbara Street intersection. Mr Meredith works opposite the intersection and he and his 26 staff have seen firsthand the danger and carnage at this black spot. He said that the black spot posed a constant danger to motorists, with at least one major accident occurring every month. The most recent serious incident, on 17 September, involved a motorcyclist, who was killed.

Main Roads statistics indicate that there have been a total of 64 crashes at this intersection, with a total of 25 casualties, a result that Main Roads identify, statistically, as being higher than expected. Mr Meredith attributes these incidents to poor design at the intersection, exacerbated by poor driver awareness and traffic volume, with drivers using Pilbara Street as a short cut from Kewdale Road to Orrong Road to avoid the intersection traffic lights of those two roads.

Mr Meredith has said that, as part of his duty of care in his workplace, he has advised his 26 staff to avoid the intersection. Given the daily risk to lives, one would have thought that fixing the issue would have been an urgent priority. Black spot funding has now been allocated to this dangerous intersection, with Main Roads confirming that there will be a set of signals at the intersection. However, my office has been informed by Main Roads that work will not start on the project until mid-2009.

I will work with the local people and the new Liberal state government and, in particular, the new Minister for Transport and Disability Services, the Hon. Simon O’Brien MLC, to bring this date forward. We cannot afford to wait any longer for this vital project to start. How
many more lives must be lost before we fix this problem? I am not a road expert but, if the Main Roads department is going to treat this matter with low priority, I suggest a simple pragmatic interim solution to this problem. Main Roads, or the local council, could make the south exit from Pilbara Street onto Orrong Road a ‘left in, left out only’ intersection. The barrier or the island could be shaped to still allow traffic to turn left into Pilbara Street from Orrong Road by users heading east. This may sound simple and some may say it will inconvenience all the drivers who take short cuts, but I ask them: are you prepared to risk your lives or your passengers’ lives to save a couple of minutes? We need to take a mature approach on this issue to prevent further fatalities.

In an article by journalist Adam Brockman in the Canning Times newspaper, Main Roads is quoted as saying, ‘Temporary measures to modify the intersection would affect productivity for businesses.’ I would have thought that lives at risk would take precedence over business productivity and, in my discussions with Mr Meredith, he said that most of the businesses in Pilbara Street would support a temporary measure.

Yesterday I drove through another intersection at Challenger Avenue and Manning Road, in Manning in my electorate, that had been identified as a black spot intersection. It has had a temporary barrier design put in place to reduce crashes at that intersection. The problem there is similar to the problem on Orrong Road. The intersection had been altered to make it a right turn and left turn in but only a left turn out onto Manning Road. My congratulations go to the City of South Perth and the Main Roads department for acting to save lives and making the intersection safer. I ask that the same is done for Orrong Road and Pilbara Street until they can install the traffic lights.

This is not an isolated example of road safety problems in my electorate of Swan. The seriousness of road safety problems has been steadily increasing in recent years. Since mid-2005, the number of road deaths per 100,000 population in Western Australia has risen dramatically above the national average. According to RAC WA there are over 10.5 road deaths per 100,000 population in WA, compared with the national average of above seven deaths per 1,000 and the national target, which is now below 6.5 deaths per 1,000. There have already been 142 fatalities in WA this year. These worrying statistics have not gone unnoticed by the people of WA.

The RAC WA recently undertook a survey into driver attitudes in Western Australia. RAC WA represents more than 650,000 people in WA. This is more than one in every two WA households and 50 per cent of drivers. The survey measured the issues concerning its members. The result was conclusive: the top issue concerning RAC WA members, at 34 per cent, was poor road conditions. The cost of road safety to society is enormous and road trauma is also a major public health issue. According to the Office of Road Safety, while there were just under 1,800 deaths on WA roads in the 10 years up to 2004, there were 20,000 hospitalisations. It is estimated that crashes on our roads cost the WA community more than $2.8 billion per year in associated costs. These are: $2.43 million per death, $600,000 per hospitalisation and $20,000 per medical visit.

Upgrading the roads would help to reduce WA's societal cost by more than half. Every $1 invested in road infrastructure returns up to $5 of economic benefit, according to the CEDA infrastructure report of 2005. In WA four in every 10 fatalities are single car run-off-road accidents involving either a tree or a pole. In 2007, 63 per cent of road fatalities happened on
WA’s regional road network. Given the carnage across my electorate and across Western Aus-
tralia, it is important to assess, first, what is going wrong and, second, how we can improve. I
want to start by considering the current federal mechanisms that have been designed to
counter the road safety problem.

I spoke recently on the AusLink (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2008. AusLink
was first established by the former, coalition government in 2004 and represented the most
significant change since Federation in the way the Commonwealth tackles the national trans-
port task. I supported the continued funding for AusLink in the national land transport bill.
The continuation of the Howard government’s investment in the AusLink national network is
laying the foundation for a much safer interstate highway travelling environment. It is good to
see that the Rudd government has decided to continue it.

It is estimated by the National Road Safety Strategy that 700 lives could be saved on Aus-
tralian roads each year. Of those 700 lives, it is estimated that 40 per cent, or 332, could be
saved by making our roads safer. Part of the AusLink scheme was the Roads to Recovery pro-
gram. The program has allowed local councils in my electorate to plan, propose and execute
local road projects. This of course leads to an upgrade of local roads which helps to improve
road safety. Since its reintroduction in 1996, the Black Spot Program has saved an estimated
130 lives and prevented 6,000 serious accidents by upgrading 4,200 dangerous sites on state
and local roads.

The success of these projects makes the terrible road situation in WA seem surprising.
There appears to be bipartisan support for investment in our country’s road network. The sta-
tistics suggest it is succeeding. Unfortunately, the answer is that the Carpenter government,
which administered these schemes, failed to properly take advantage of these policies. On
speaking to members of the incoming Liberal-National government in WA, I was not sur-
pried to learn that there had been a serious underutilisation and poor targeting of federal
funding. Indeed, the RAC identify that 40 per cent of AusLink 2 allocations went towards
supporting port infrastructure at Port Hedland, Bunbury, Dampier and Esperance. I agree that
building future infrastructure for ports in WA is important. But I would have thought that tar-
geting money at life-saving road projects would be imperative.

The Orrong Road intersection is another case in point. Black spot funding should have
been allocated months ago by the state government. The incompetence of the Carpenter gov-
ernment in dealing with road safety on state roads is not good enough and the people of West-
ern Australia deserve better. They deserve a government that values their lives and that of
their families. I urge the Rudd government to use this program to work closely with the new
Barnett Liberal government and direct funding into neglected areas.

In conclusion, I would like to commend Mr Ben Meredith for raising this issue in my elec-
trate. The subsequent media coverage over the last few weeks has shown the degree of con-
cern in the local community over this issue and the Western Australian road death issue. The
road death toll in Western Australia is unacceptably high. One of the reasons for this high
death toll is underutilisation and poor targeting of federal government programs, as previously
stated. I will continue to work to ensure that black spot funding for Orrong Road is delivered
sooner rather than later for the benefit of my constituents and road users passing through my
electorate.
Dobell Electorate: Surf-Lifesaving

Mr CRAIG THOMSON (Dobell) (8.39 pm)—My grievance is with the fact that the Central Coast surf-lifesaving movement has missed out on holding the national surf-lifesaving championships for the next three years. This of itself may not seem such a big issue, because it was a competitive tender, but we were the only surf-lifesaving area that tendered. As you would know, Mr Deputy Speaker Adams, in politics when it is a one-horse race you expect that horse to be the winner. But that was not the case with the bid from the Central Coast.

It was not that the bid did not meet the criteria. In fact, the President of Surf-Lifesaving Australia spoke about ‘the excellent bid put together by the consortium from the Central Coast’ which had ‘many natural advantages’. Unfortunately—and I am sure I will not have the member for Fadden onside but I may have some sympathy from the member for Paterson—it went to the Gold Coast. The Gold Coast, which did not even put in a bid for the surf-lifesaving championships, has been awarded them for another three years. This is an outrageous situation.

Mr Baldwin—Terrible!

Mr CRAIG THOMSON—The member for Paterson would have some sympathy knowing that from the area of his electorate down to Wollongong there are more active surf-lifesavers than in the rest of Australia. So, quite clearly, the area that the member for Paterson and I come from is one that deserved to hold the surf-lifesaving championships. Let me say I am not speaking against Queensland. I have a particular fondness for prime ministers, treasurers and governors-general who come from Queensland. But when it comes to the merits of this issue and the right that should have been done, the Central Coast has been dudded.

The Central Coast, as well as being one of the most beautiful areas in Australia, has the most beautiful beaches in Australia. With those beaches we have a very strong beach culture and the surf-lifesaving movement has flourished on the Central Coast. We have 14 very proud clubs that have served the Central Coast since the 19th century. We have some very historic surf-lifesaving clubs, including the one at The Entrance, which I am a member of. People have been coming to The Entrance to swim since the mid- to late 1800s. It is an area that has a long tradition in surf-lifesaving. In fact, Soldiers Beach, which is at Norah Head in my electorate, was where the use of rubber duckies in surf-lifesaving was first developed. So it has a long history not only of surf-lifesaving but also of innovate measures being adopted by surf-lifesaving clubs, which have been to the benefit—dare I say—of even surf-lifesavers on the Gold Coast. Here we have an area with a great, innovative tradition in surf-lifesaving, which has given things to the rest of the surf-lifesaving movement and which has been dudded.

These 14 clubs are more than just sporting and social areas for residents of the Central Coast; they are part of the fabric of society on the Central Coast. From a very early age, young boys and girls join the Nippers. They are down there learning water safety with their parents, who are making sure their kids develop proper water skills so that they do not get into difficulty when they are swimming. Because we have had that long history of surf-lifesaving on the Central Coast, almost all families are in some way connected to a particular club. It is something that pervades the culture we have there.

It was with a great deal of optimism that we were able to put together a consortium of interested parties to try and bid for the Australian Surf Life Saving Championships from 2010 to
2012. In fact, we were able to bring together two councils which do not see eye to eye on almost any issue. They both backed a single bid for a single beach, which happened to be in my electorate. Local people said to me: ‘Well, this is almost historic in that we’ve got the two councils to agree on something! Surely we can’t lose this bid.’ We were also able to have the New South Wales Business Chamber and the Central Coast Tourism board as part of the consortium, and Events New South Wales agreed to underwrite the bid. So there was no question that the money would be available for this bid to go forward and there was no question about our having the community and all the community organisations that are so integral to surf-lifesaving and tourism on the Central Coast behind this bid.

I must say that we got a little bit too optimistic when we found out that we were the only bid, and so we are incredibly disappointed that we have missed out on these particular championships. A great deal of credit for putting the bid together has to go to Chad Griffiths—and I am sure he is absolutely shattered—from the Central Coast surf-lifesaving movement who worked tirelessly to put this bid together to make sure that we would meet the technical requirements that Surf Life Saving Australia would put on our bid.

The importance of winning the bid for the national championships cannot be understated. In Dobell, for instance, we have unemployment at 7.4 per cent. Our industries that employ the most people are retail, followed by tourism, and this was going to be a huge shot in the arm for tourism on the Central Coast and the provision of jobs. And, because it was for three years, it was going to provide ongoing infrastructure. The council had agreed to a range of works that they would undertake in relation to making sure that it worked properly. We were able to meet the criteria of having 30,000 beds available—because the championships are remarkably large: they attract around 7,500 competitors, which makes them the biggest multi-discipline event in the world. Just by way of comparison, the Melbourne Commonwealth Games only attracted 4,500 athletes. In addition to the athletes, it is estimated that you have 8,000 families and supporters and 1,000 officials, and over the six days of competition it is estimated that 100,000 people turn up to the championships, with the crowds on the championship day, Sunday, in the region of 30,000 to 40,000.

In terms of money that the championships would have brought to the area, it is estimated that they bring between $15 million and $30 million to the local economy. The Aussies, as the championships are called in surf-lifesaving, were in Perth for the last few years, and they brought in $25 million to the economy. So $30 million to the Central Coast economy is something that we really could have done with. It would have been a real shot in the arm for tourism, helping to further develop tourism, and that would have had a benefit for all tourists, who are always trying to come to the Central Coast because it is such a beautiful place to visit.

There also would have been some environmental benefits. There had been some damage to sand dunes in the areas caused by erosion, and there were also some areas that needed to be revegetated. All of that was going to be restored to a pristine condition as part of this bid.

On behalf of the Central Coast community, can I say that we are very disappointed in Surf Life Saving Australia. They did not sit down and explain to us why our bid, the only bid, was not successful, when it met their criteria. We will try to get them to do that and work it out, but it is disappointing for the community that the great Central Coast, with its great surfing tradition, has missed out on something it should have had: the Australian Surf Life Saving Championships between 2010 and 2012.
Banking

Mr BALDWIN (Paterson) (8.49 pm)—There is no doubt that these are difficult global economic times. They are difficult times because there has been a breakdown in integrity, in honour and in trust within the international banking sector. Australian banks are being cited internationally as an example of responsible, well regulated banking; however, there are some problems and, therefore, more needs to be done.

Tonight I bring to the attention of the parliament a serious breach of trust between several major Australian banks, they being the Commonwealth Bank of Australia and the National Australia Bank, in their dealings with an international counterparty bank in China, the Bank of China, and Australian business.

Tonight I will cite an example of a serious breach of trust, honour and integrity between these banks and between the Bank of China and Australian businesses developing in China. It is disappointing that Australian regulatory authorities have been notified by the affected Australian business and that the serious breach has progressed under their scrutiny. The Australian regulatory authorities say that they are powerless to enforce the necessary prudential standards to enforce the honour and trust that we rely on in our banking sector.

Simply put, this is not acceptable. The Australian government must do more to support our businesses in these circumstances. As we, as a nation, embark on further and free trade with China, changes must be made by our government to better regulate dealings between Chinese banks and Australian banks.

In August 2006 an Australian company, Energreen Wind Systems Pty Ltd, was seeking funds for several major renewable and energy efficiency projects in China. Monibrook Pty Ltd, an Australian company, undertook to raise the necessary funds for these Energreen projects. Monibrook was the beneficiary under a promissory note issued by a Chinese development company, Gas-Fired Estates, and the promissory note was endorsed by the Bank of China through its Duyun branch in Guizhou province in China with full bank responsibility.

Promissory notes are an important tool in international business. They have been used for decades to ensure payment. They are recognised under the laws of China and are common in international banking. The expression ‘full bank responsibility’ has the effect in law that the bank guarantees payment. If banks do not honour their obligations of full bank responsibility, there can be serious consequences. Such consequences can be at micro and macro level.

At a micro level the particular transaction is endangered and the recipient business is left without payment on presentation of the note. The Bank of China endorsed the promissory note to Energreen with full bank responsibility but despite that it has refused to meet its commitment under the promissory note. No Australian business can sustain that sort of non-payment by an internationally accepted bank, particularly when that bank, such as the Bank of China, has a licence and approval to conduct banking activities in Australia.

At a macro level the reputation of both the bank and the country of the bank are tainted by such actions. At a time of difficult international economic conditions, such uncertainty, especially with China, has potentially adverse consequences for Australia at a national level. The actions, or perhaps more correctly the refusal of the Bank of China to honour bank instruments issued by its officers within its own branches of the Bank of China and the refusal of the Bank of China to explain itself, are not the expected actions of a major international busi-
ness institution committed to acting in a manner consistent with the highest principles in business behaviour.

Furthermore, such impropriety is not acceptable within the Australian banking regime. The promissory note issued by the Bank of China was secured for US$50 million, maturing on 18 August 2008. That promissory note had been delivered bank-to-bank by the Bank of China courier from Guizhou province in China to the Commonwealth Bank of Australia at its Toormina branch near Coffs Harbour. The Commonwealth Bank received letters from the Bank of China confirming that the Bank of China had endorsed the promissory note.

The Commonwealth Bank advised both Monibrook and Energreen on several occasions that inquiries made by it to the Bank of China confirmed that the promissory note was authentic and that the Bank of China would honour it on presentation. The Bank of China confirmed the bank-to-bank to the Commonwealth Bank and that it would honour its obligations of full bank responsibility. The promissory note was used by Energreen to secure prepayment, to secure predevelopment funding and then to provide for these projects in China.

In February 2007 the promissory note and related papers were collected from the Commonwealth Bank. In about April 2008 Energreen commenced preparatory discussions with the Bank of China in Sydney for redemption of funds under that promissory note. The National Australia Bank Ltd was requested to present the promissory note to the Bank of China in Guizhou province for payment of the US$50 million on the due date, which was 18 August 2008. The NAB did so on a bank-to-bank basis and sent the original promissory note to the issuing branch of the Bank of China. However, the Bank of China has refused to pay under the promissory note. The Bank of China, through its manager at the issuing branch in Guizhou province in China, replied:

We have never endorsed subject promissory note and are not responsible for honouring any drawings. We refuse to handle the said collection.

This is despite the Bank of China having advised the Commonwealth Bank that the promissory note was authentic and would be honoured. The NAB has repeatedly requested the Bank of China to return the original promissory note. The Bank of China refused to do so. The actions of the Bank of China are inconsistent with the ICC’s Uniform Rules for Collections and is in breach of the Australian banking laws. One cannot purport to abide by such rules but do so only when it suits. How can the Bank of China expect to retain an Australian banking licence when it does not conform to our banking regulations and laws?

On 13 August 2008 and 26 August 2008 the most senior officials in the Bank of China in Beijing were notified by letter requesting the Bank of China to honour the promissory note. No reply as yet has been received. The named Bank of China officials on those letters were Li Lihui, Vice-Chairman and President of the Bank of China, and Xiao Gang, Chairman of the Board, Bank of China. The Bank of China has not provided any satisfactory explanation for its behaviour. One would expect the fullest cooperation of the Bank of China but this has not occurred. A mature and responsible attitude on the part of the Bank of China should have been forthcoming but this has not occurred. International commerce is dependent on the integrity of the financial sector, especially banks. Without this, integrity, commerce, trust and relationships are damaged. The actions of the Bank of China can only damage the standing of that bank and of China itself both internationally and in Australia.
Energreen initiated contact with the following Australian authorities in about April 2008 and those authorities have reviewed the promissory note and associated papers: the Australian Prudential Regulatory Authority, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, the Australian Federal Police and the Fraud Squad of the New South Wales Police Force. None of those Australian authorities has indicated either verbally or in writing that the promissory note is a fraud.

The Bank of China’s refusal to honour the promissory note is forcing this Australian business to take public action in the New South Wales Supreme Court to enforce the promissory note. The question must be asked: why should Australian business suffer such loss and damage and resort to litigation to enforce the conduct of Chinese banks in Australia when they choose to operate outside accepted ethical banking standards? The actions and conduct of the Bank of China both in Australia and in China have been nothing short of unprofessional, obstructive, secretive and ethically challenged. There is a raft of documentation to support all of these claims, which may be sighted on request.

In this grievance the government of Australia is being put on notice that dealings with Chinese banks, and in this particular case the Bank of China, are ethically challenged and are not compliant with Australian banking regulations. Regulatory changes are needed. Furthermore, the government of Australia must stand behind Australian businesses forced to take public action in the courts. It is unacceptable that Australian business must invoke the courts to deal with the ethical challenges of dealing with China, and in this case the Bank of China. After this grievance is noted today I will be making representations on behalf of Energreen Wind Systems Pty Ltd to the Prime Minister, to the Minister for Trade, to the Treasurer, to the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and to the Chinese ambassador in Australia, his Excellency Mr Zhang Junsai, on this matter—which has the consequence of damaging business relationships with China.

Through my visits to China and the delegations I have received from China it is abundantly clear that China has been very active in seeking Australian companies with which to do business and invest for the long term. However, any business relationships are built on trust. In fact any relationship is built on one key element, and that is trust. Today, sadly, that trust has been breached and I urge the Australian and Chinese governments to intervene in this matter so that that trust can be restored. (Time expired)

Mr TURNOUR (Leichhardt) (8.59 pm)—I rise tonight to talk about the Torres Strait, a great part of my electorate that I enjoy visiting. The time that I spend in the Torres Strait is invaluable. This is a very special part of the world, and I am proud to represent, in Canberra, the region. The local community is passionate and proactive, and I appreciate hearing first-hand from locals about the issues that are important to them. Residents and businesses in the Torres Strait have endured some tumultuous times over the last few weeks.

On Friday, 3 October, Lip-Air, which trades as Aero-Tropics, was grounded by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority as they had determined there were serious risks to the safety of travelling passengers. Aero-Tropics was the only provider of regular scheduled services in the Torres Strait. The decision to ground Aero-Tropics occurred at approximately 4 pm on that Friday afternoon, at the end of the school holidays. This was the second time in a matter of months that CASA had taken action to ground Aero-Tropics. While I believe the safety of
passengers is the No. 1 priority, one cannot ignore the impact this has had on the Torres Strait community and it was particularly frustrating that it happened late on a Friday afternoon. Children were preparing to return to school and there was a wedding and a ‘tomb stone opening’ on Thursday Island, meaning that many people were stranded by the grounding.

In the immediate aftermath of the grounding, my electorate office on Thursday Island worked hard to assist local residents. I have been made aware of cases where entire families were stranded and unable to return to their home island. Some families arrived with only a small amount of cash then found themselves needing accommodation and food while they tried to source alternative ways of getting home. However, these problems were quickly overcome through the work of many in the community who rallied round to help those in need. My hat goes off to the Torres Strait community. I know that local motel businesses, council-lors and family members have all been working together to ensure that people have been looked after and have been able to access flights as quickly as possible. Barrier Aviation, another charter airline in the tropical north, have also been accommodating in their efforts, but they are not a scheduled carrier of passengers in the Torres Strait region. This has been an unfortunate situation but it has demonstrated some of the great benefits of living in a supportive community such as that in the Torres Strait.

On being alerted to the grounding, I immediately started working with ministers and their offices to ensure that disruptions were minimised and to try and get replacement services back into the region as quickly as possible. The response from the federal ministers and their government departments has been appreciated. Centrelink has assisted approximately 249 students across various islands to return to school. Within a matter of a few days, the majority were rescheduled onto other charters and were back at school for the start of a new school term. For those remaining, additional alternative flights were arranged and all were at their desks within the following week.

Last week I met with the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, Anthony Albanese, and discussed at length the impact of Lip-Air’s grounding on residents and businesses in the Torres Strait. Since the grounding, I have maintained daily contact with the minister’s office to ensure the government continues to do all it can to minimise disruption and get services back to the region. Soon after hearing about CASA’s decision to ground Lip-Air, I spoke with the Mayor of the Torres Strait Island Regional Council, Mr Fred Gela, about the local situation. He has written formally to me seeking assistance in getting air services back to the Torres Strait, and I spoke to his CEO last week. I know the state government is working hard to attract replacement air services in the Torres Strait. I am willing to assist any operator interested in establishing a service in the Torres Strait and to facilitate any meetings that they need to have if they are having difficulty arranging them. It is critical that all levels of government work together to minimise any further disruption to the community.

CASA is an independent authority and needs to, at all times, put safety considerations first. I understand that there were serious incidents that led to this grounding. It is critical that it responds quickly, however, in assessing applications from any alternative operators so that we can get air services back to the Torres Strait. I understand how important air services are to remote communities. I represent a very large and vast electorate and I rely on such travel
when I visit its regions. I will be doing all I can to limit the impact of this grounding on residents of the Torres Strait region.

The remoteness of the Torres Strait means that local residents face a number of different challenges when compared to those residents of metropolitan or regional communities. We all know that across the country at the moment people are struggling with the rising cost of living. After the car has been filled up, the mortgage and other bills have been paid and the grocery shopping has been done, there is not a whole lot left. Imagine what it would be like if your grocery bill were almost double what it is now and if fuel were over $2 a litre or even $3 a litre in some situations. That is what my constituents in the Torres Strait face on Thursday Island, and those on the outer islands face even higher prices.

I recently launched a grocery monitoring scheme in my electorate of Leichhardt based on Wayne Swan’s scheme, which has been running for a number of years. Eighteen supermarkets across the tropical north were surveyed, from Cairns to Port Douglas, Mossman, Cooktown, Weipa and Thursday Island. The three major supermarket brands in the tropical north were the focus of the survey: Coles, Woolworths and Supa IGA. Thursday Island was the only exception to this rule—IBIS is the only major supermarket in the Torres Strait, so it was included in the survey. Everyday prices—that is, the regular prices of items when they were not on special or otherwise marked down—were recorded in the survey, as were the checkout prices, which included specials. The basket of goods on Thursday Island cost $152.42 more than it did in Cairns at the average everyday price. It cost $159 more when compared to the checkout price in Cairns, which included the specials. The basket had only 44 grocery items, things that are typically purchased by Australian households: toiletries, dairy goods, bread, pet food, tinned goods and washing powder. This is a staggering price difference.

Thursday Island residents not only have to pay more for their groceries but face a more limited product range, often having only one brand available. Additionally, Thursday Island was also the only store in which no specials were recorded, whereas up to $7 was saved at the checkout in Cairns stores and over $15 in Cooktown. It is important to remember that Thursday Island is the major centre in the Torres Strait, so those living on the outer islands do pay even more for groceries and have an even more limited range to choose from. These high grocery prices impact on people’s health. Type 2 diabetes is at almost epidemic levels in the Torres Strait, not only in the adult population but in children. Easing cost-of-living pressures in the Torres Strait is something that I am pursuing through federal ministers, including Jenny Macklin, the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; Nicola Roxon, the Minister for Health and Ageing; Anthony Albanese, the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government; and the Assistant Treasurer, Chris Bowen. I am also raising this issue with the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs.

It is important that freight prices are kept at reasonable levels, and I have raised with ministers concerns about the lack of competition on freight to the Torres Strait. A freight subsidy is something that I also believe should be examined for the Torres Strait, given the real disadvantage experienced by these communities. The Howard government cut the fuel freight subsidy to the Torres Strait in 2006. The cutting of this subsidy increased the cost of all fuel to the Torres Strait for local families and businesses by close to 20c a litre overnight. The scheme costs only a little over $3 million a year. It also bumped up airline travel costs and impacted
on the local fishing industry. Local fishermen fish not only to feed their families but to produce discretionary income, as many of them run small fishing businesses.

I find it surprising that Liberal Senator Sue Boyce has suddenly realised the high cost of living in this region and wants an inquiry when it was her own Liberal Party that axed the fuel freight subsidy to the Torres Strait. She raised this through a media release in my local paper last week, but when I contacted the relevant Senate committee I found out that it had not been discussed with the secretary or the deputy chair. I certainly welcome any interest in cost-of-living pressures in the Torres Strait, but I can assure you that I will be pursuing this issue, as I already have been, with ministers and through the House of Representatives committee. There is a precedent for freight subsidies to island communities. Governments of both persuasions have been subsidising freight movements between Tasmania and the mainland since 1976. This year more than $136 million is budgeted for the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme. Given the social disadvantage of communities in the Torres Strait, it is hard to argue why they would be less deserving than the residents of Tasmania of a freight subsidy.

One way the Rudd government is already trying to assist locals with cost-of-living pressures is by helping people to grow their own food. There used to be a strong gardening culture in the Torres Strait and we need to support communities to return to growing much of their own food. The Rudd government has delivered a $300,000 boost to the Torres Strait Regional Authority to promote and improve horticulture in the region. This funding will encourage and promote the production of food locally. Obviously, freshly grown local produce is going to be cheaper and will benefit the health of local Torres Strait Islanders.

The Torres Strait is a fantastic part of the world and they have great people. It is a great honour and privilege to represent this part of the world in federal parliament. The grounding of Aero Tropics is creating real problems for the Torres Strait. I am committed to finding a solution to this, but it is a very difficult situation. The long-term challenge of cost-of-living pressures in the Torres Strait is something that I will also continue to work with the region to overcome. Supporting the growing of more food locally is one way that I am working with the local community through the Rudd government. I will continue to raise these issues in Canberra and I look forward to working hard for these local communities. (Time expired)

Economy

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (9.09 pm)—I wish to bring to the attention of the parliament a significant grievance. It is no surprise that my grievance lies with the government and its nervous little Treasurer. At the beginning of the year, the government pulled out all stops to show that the Howard-Costello government had left a legacy, apparently, of rampant inflation. They were not content to accept that the 1996 debt was paid off and a Future Fund of $60 billion was put aside to take care of future liabilities; not content with negative debt repayments—that is, savings—or for a budget imbalance with a strong surplus; not content with $18 billion in surplus in the 2007-08 financial year project and the hallmarks and foundations of the current $22 billion surplus; and not even content to say thank you, which would have been nice. They pulled out all stops to try to demonise the previous government in some vain attempt to show that some inflationary evil monster had been left behind. There were comments such as ‘inflation monster’, and indeed a day before the Reserve Bank met to discuss interest rates the Treasurer rolled out, ‘The inflation genie is out of the bottle.’ The mental picture that he portrayed to the nation was an almighty, ugly, monstrous genie that had come out to wreck the
nation, because that is what a genie out of the bottle is—a day before the Reserve Bank met. It is no wonder that the Reserve Bank exercised its monetary policy responsibilities and interest rates went up twice.

The then shadow Treasurer and now current opposition leader warned the government that the prevailing storm of the subprime crisis was cresting the horizon, that what was needed was prudent monetary policy and not scaremongering tactics with respect to inflation rates and that interest rates did not need to go up; they needed to go down. The last movement of monetary policy was down one per cent. Eleven of the 19 respected economists believed only half a per cent was necessary and the other eight believed one-quarter of a percentage was necessary. That has certainly vindicated the member for Wentworth, the current opposition leader, that indeed Reserve Bank increases went too far, that indeed the inflation genie was not out of the bottle and that indeed the cresting storm of the subprime wave would hit.

It is interesting that the hedge funds and the mortgage funds saw it last year. Those astute funds could see when the first tranche of subprime mortgages would come back for redoing themselves with respect to interest rates. They could see that coming in 2008 and the respected funds moved up to 60 per cent of their fund holdings into cash. The market could see the subprime collapse coming—indeed, the coalition warned the government—but not the Treasurer. He did not mention it at all. He did not speak about it at all. He simply rolled out this farcical line of inflation to try to paint the government with inflationary woes, causing the Reserve Bank to put up interest rates—now to come down again, and now for the Treasurer to realise indeed the folly of his ways.

Unfortunately, it led to the biggest crash in consumer confidence since records have been kept. That crash has certainly impacted the small business capital of the nation, the Gold Coast. Gold Coasters have been, since the beginning of the year, worried about the status of their employment and the future of the local economy. This has been exacerbated by the lack of confidence driven by this government and in particular its Treasurer. Only 10 days ago the Brisbane property developer of a $40 million apartment project at Biggera Waters was forced to lay off the majority of its office staff after already cutting jobs within the company. The Harbour Quays project, to be located on East Quay Drive, Biggera Waters, was approved by the Gold Coast City Council in June and had an expected completion date of 2010. This is one of many multimillion dollar projects the developer Petrac had planned for the next few years. The future of these projects is now unclear and has been so since the beginning of the year, when consumer confidence collapsed—before the subprime wave hit the nation.

This news comes off the back of significant redundancies in Fadden’s boat manufacturing industry. Coomera based Telwater recently announced it had sacked 100 staff. Maritimo was forced to offer redundancies to 100 staff. This, in combination with the losses out of Riviera Marine, takes the total boat-building losses to well over 500 employees and contractors in one of the biggest industries in Fadden and an important export industry—all before the subprime tsunami hit and all because confidence was shattered by the words of the Treasurer.

A report released by the Gold Coast City Council in August—noting we are now in October—prior to the economic tsunami hitting, showed the coast’s average unemployment had risen to 4.5 per cent compared to 4.2 per cent for Queensland. Until recently it was more common that the coast’s unemployment rate would be lower than the national and state averages. The effects of the global financial crisis are clearly now starting to filter through. It is
hard to tell what the long-term impacts of this situation will be. The Gold Coast’s most significant industries are exposed more than others to economic downturns. Tourism and luxury products are more likely to be the first items to be removed from a household budget when times are tough.

The shadow Treasurer, the member for Curtin, is aware of this, and this Friday she will be visiting businesses within the mighty electorate of Fadden to talk about the strategies the opposition will be putting forward to combat the global downturn and to discuss how to maintain jobs on the Gold Coast. In direct comparison to the current Treasurer, she will not be talking down the economy, she will not be pulling bottles out of handbags and talking about genies and monsters ravaging economies. She will be talking about solid strategies, about how businesses can cope, and she will be engendering confidence.

We will be talking to the marine industry, an industry that was the first to be hit—only a few months ago, an industry that saw sales drop by up to 40 per cent because of the effect on consumer confidence when the Treasurer’s uncalled for and unwise statements hit the national media. Maritimo will be meeting with the shadow Treasurer and me. We will also be visiting Dreamworld, a significant employer within the electorate, to discuss the impact the worsening economic conditions will have on the Gold Coast tourism industry. We might also have a look at the Indy to get an idea of what else is happening with Gold Coast tourism. We will be visiting heavy earthworks equipment manufacturer Digga in Yatala. Digga produce some of the most advanced gearboxes and mining equipment in the country and are the country’s largest exporter of gearboxes. Obviously a downturn in construction may have an impact on Digga’s fortunes. The shadow Treasurer and I will have the opportunity to discuss this with the company’s management, to look at the export market that Digga has driven and to look at the effect of this government’s cutting of export grants and the Commercial Ready program.

Fadden, along with the other Gold Coast seats, is one of the centres of small business in Australia. These are some of the first businesses to suffer, the first to lay off workers and the most likely to close during difficult economic times. Small business needs the support of government to ensure their continuing success and ability to employ Gold Coasters. I was interested that last Friday the Prime Minister met with big business to discuss a range of strategies that business can take in the current climate, but there was not a single small business operator in the room—not one. As a token effort, the Prime Minister dragged along the Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy to show that he cared about small business. But, at a time when a concise view was needed from both large and small business in the same room, small business was absent.

Despite the global nature of the problem, the government must take some credit for the economic climate that they began with unwise, unnecessary words. At the start of the year and indeed back to the 2007 election campaign the government talked up inflation in an attempt to discredit the Howard-Costello government’s economic record. It was reckless, it was unwise and it has had dreadful and dire consequences. At best, it was foolhardy. It created unnecessary panic at a time when the government should have been talking up Australia’s prospects. It was a time when Australia needed confidence, prior to the economic tsunami. Australia did not need the unwise words of the Treasurer. The genie was out of the bottle, according to the Treasurer. The RBA was put in a position where it had to act and interest rates were put up. The economic crisis at that stage had not arrived on our doorstep. The information regarding
the subprime fallout was known within industry but clearly not within the cabinet of this government.

This grievance is significant. The Gold Coast has been hurting from a lack of consumer confidence, driven by the Treasurer and this government’s unwise words, and it is now further hurting as the economic tsunami waves continue to pound against the shores of the coast. I look forward to the government’s more mature and wise response going forward.

**Millennium Development Goals**

Mr SYMON (Deakin) (9.19 pm)—My grievance today relates to the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals by developed countries and particularly Australia. Many people and organisations have contacted my office in regard to this issue over the last few months, and I feel it is important that their concerns are recorded in this place.

In the year 2000, all 191 member countries of the United Nations, including Australia, committed to eight targets, the Millennium Development Goals, to halve poverty by 2015. However, with only seven years to go until 2015, progress has been slow. Urgent action must be taken by all nations if they are to fulfil their promise to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. There are eight UN Millennium Development Goals and, for those who may not have heard them, I shall briefly list them before going on.

Goal 1 is the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, with targets of halving, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than $1 per day and, in the same time frame, halving the number of people who suffer from hunger.

Goal 2 is the achievement of universal primary education, with a target of ensuring that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

Goal 3 is the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, with a target of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005—which has already gone, of course—and at all levels of education by no later than 2015.

Goal 4 is the reduction of child mortality, with a target of reducing by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the mortality rate of children under the age of five.

Goal 5 is the improvement of maternal health, with a target of reducing by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio.

Goal 6 is the combating of HIV-AIDS, malaria and other diseases, with targets of having halted the spread of these diseases by 2015 and of having begun the reversal of the spread of HIV-AIDS and the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

Goal 7 is ensuring environmental sustainability, with targets of integrating the principles of sustainable development into countries’ policies and programs and reversing the loss of environmental resources, and halving by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water. This goal also includes the target, by 2020, to have achieved significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

Goal 8 is the development of a global partnership for development, with targets in many areas, such as financial and trading systems, tariffs, the debt problems of developing coun-
tries, affordable access to essential drugs and access to new technologies, especially information and communications technologies.

On 7 July this year, I received a delegation from the Holy Saviour Parish in Vermont South, a church outside of my electorate but with many members from my electorate of Deakin. This group, led by Joe Annetts, brought in a local petition with 186 signatures in support of the Make Poverty History goals, with a particular emphasis on maternal and child health. Joe Annetts has since written to me and informed me that over the last weekend more than 800 people stood up to pledge ongoing support for the Millennium Development Goals as a part of the Make Poverty History campaign’s global ‘Stand Up and Take Action’ event.

On 16 July this year I met with a group of constituents representing Parents Against Poverty, a campaign organised by Make Poverty History and led by Natasha Staunton. The group was accompanied by several very well behaved children, who presented me with two oversized baby bottles full of petitions in support of faster action in implementing the MDGs, particularly in the area of child and maternal health. Whilst pleased with the increased overseas aid development budget and commitment in Australia’s 2008-09 budget, the group noted that a lot more remains to be done in a short period of time.

On 9 September I was visited by Melissa Boyle, also a member of Parents Against Poverty, and her daughter Alexandra. They were also very interested in making sure that developed countries like Australia commit to increasing foreign aid to improve maternal and child health.

On 19 September I met with a delegation representing the Micah Challenge. Lyn and Daryl Jackson, and Jan and John Shattock brought with them a sample of a home-birthing kit that is distributed, as an example that aid is not just about large amounts of money but also about practical assistance to individual people. They stressed that having people trained to help is in many cases as important as the aid itself and spoke about their personal experiences in Nepal. They also want to see Australia commit more resources to supporting our Millennium Development Goals pledge. I also attended the Micah Challenge launch on 14 October here at Parliament House, although I am yet to sign the special painting that was commissioned by the artist Nell Potter.

In relation to child maternal health, the Make Poverty History campaign provides the following statistics. It is estimated that around the world almost 10 million children under the age of five will die each year, mainly from preventable and treatable causes. Add to those approximately 500,000 women who will die each year from illnesses related to pregnancy. As an example, the rate of maternal mortality in East Timor is 80 times that of Australia. In South-East Asia and the Pacific, 16 of the 22 developing countries in the region are not on track to achieve goal 4, which is reducing child mortality by two-thirds. Another seven countries are behind in achieving goal 5—that is, reducing maternal mortality by three-quarters.

Increasing the percentage of international development aid was a commitment that Labor took to the 2007 federal election, with the aim of reaching 0.5 per cent of gross national income by 2015. In the 2008-09 budget we increased Australia’s funding of official development assistance to 0.32 per cent of GNI. This equates to a figure of $3.7 billion. It is the highest GNI ratio since 1995-96 and is much higher than the amount of $3.17 billion spent in the 2007-08 budget. When this is increased, as forecast, to 0.38 per cent in 2011-12, it will be our
highest percentage of funding to GNI since 1986. On reaching 0.5 per cent in 2015, this will be Australia’s highest percentage of official development assistance since 1974.

It is worth remembering that we are starting so far behind many other developed countries and, even with the massive increase, Australia will still not be in the group of leading nations in terms of the proportion of our GNI going to development assistance. This is a great improvement on the efforts of the Howard government. However, it will need more to get Australia up to the level of 0.7 per cent as targeted by the United Nations. The MDGs should not be treated as some pie in the sky ideal. They can and should be treated as modest and achievable goals.

Although not contained in the MDGs, the issue of child slavery is in many instances a product of poverty. I listened with great interest tonight to the private members motion regarding the cocoa industry moved by the member for Sturt. I followed the debate and was pleased to see the bipartisan support that was put forward without reserve in revealing the evil trade of child slavery in West African cocoa plantations. It reminded me that in May this year I was visited by Chloe Morfoot, Alice Burgess, Lauren Grounds and Madeline Armstrong, a group of secondary school students from two local schools in Deakin: Tintern Girls Grammar School and Ringwood Secondary College.

The students came as representatives of the Oaktree End Child Slavery campaign and provided a very thorough briefing on the terrible problem of child slavery in West African cocoa plantations. They also informed me of the Harkin-Engel Protocol, as signed by all the major chocolate corporations in 2001, and the subsequent delay in its implementation. The effect of the protocol, when finally in operation, will be to certify that all cocoa sourced from the Ivory Coast and Ghana is free from child slave labour. The students were also concerned that it was nigh on impossible to buy such certified chocolate in Australia at the present time except from some very specialist shops. I really do commend their initiative and concern and I encourage others to join in this cause and to keep the issue alive in the public eye.

The interest and concern of so many local constituents fills me with great hope that Australia, through the power of its citizens, will one day soon be contributing its fair share to eliminating poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—There being no further grievances, the debate is adjourned. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Main Committee adjourned at 9.29 pm
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Job Capacity Assessments
(Question No. 270)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister representing the Minister for Human Services, in writing, on 2 September 2008:

What course of action is available to job seekers wishing to contest a Job Capacity Assessment referral for them to change programs.

Ms Plibersek—The Minister for Human Services has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

Customers cannot directly contest a referral to an employment service. However, customers can discuss their concerns with their employment service provider, who can dispute a referral with the Job Capacity Assessor within 28 days of the customer being referred to their service, or until Centrelink makes an income support decision, if earlier.

Job Capacity Assessments
(Question No. 271)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister representing the Minister for Human Services, in writing, on 2 September 2008:

To date: (a) how many Job Capacity Assessments have been appealed; and (b) what proportion is this of the total Job Capacity Assessments conducted.

Ms Plibersek—The Minister for Human Services has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

Job Capacity Assessments are not subject to appeal.

Job Capacity Assessments
(Question No. 272)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister representing the Minister for Human Services, in writing, on 2 September 2008:

Can he indicate whether the Department of Human Services has looked into the high staff turnover of Job Capacity Assessment providers; if so, what are the findings.

Ms Plibersek—The Minister for Human Services has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:
The issue of staff retention for Job Capacity Assessment providers was considered as part of the Government’s review of the Job Capacity Assessment processes. The Job Capacity Assessment Review Summary Paper is available at:

Job Capacity Assessments
(Question No. 273)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister representing the Minister for Human Services, in writing, on 2 September 2008:

How many Job Capacity Assessments that are appealed result in a changed program referral for the job seeker.
Ms Plibersek—The Minister for Human Services has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

Job Capacity Assessments are not subject to appeal.

Referrals to employment services by Job Capacity Assessors, however, can be disputed by the employment service provider before the assessment report is finalised (within 28 days or until Centrelink makes an income support decision if earlier). As this occurs informally in discussion between the two parties, no data is available on the number of disputes or the proportion which result in a changed program referral.

Job Capacity Assessments
(Question No. 274)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister representing the Minister for Human Services, in writing, on 2 September 2008:

To date, what proportion of Job Capacity Assessments have been conducted over the phone.

Ms Plibersek—The Minister for Human Services has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

From 1 July 2006 to 5 September 2008, 3.9 per cent of Job Capacity Assessments were conducted over the phone. This usually occurs when the customer was unable to attend in person, for example due to illness or hospitalisation.

Job Capacity Assessments
(Question No. 275)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister representing the Minister for Human Services, in writing, on 2 September 2008:

To date, what proportion of Job Capacity Assessments conducted over the phone were for people living in remote areas.

Ms Plibersek—The Minister for Human Services has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

From 1 July 2006 to 5 September 2008, 20.6 per cent of Job Capacity Assessments conducted over the phone were for people living in remote or very remote areas. The Department of Human Services is currently working with providers to pilot an approach to improving Job Capacity Assessment Services in remote communities, which will facilitate face-to-face assessments in these communities.

Job Capacity Assessments
(Question No. 276)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister representing the Minister for Human Services, in writing, on 2 September 2008:

To date, what proportion of Job Capacity Assessments conducted over the phone were for people incapacitated at the time.

Ms Plibersek—The Minister for Human Services has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

From 1 July 2006 to 5 September 2008, 18.3 per cent of Job Capacity Assessments conducted over the phone were for people on Newstart Allowance or Youth Allowance who had lodged a medical certificate indicating that they were incapacitated for work. A further 26.5 per cent of assessments conducted over the phone were for people claiming Disability Support Pension or having their Disability Support

QUESTIONS IN WRITING
Pension reviewed. Some of these customers were also incapacitated at the time of interview and were therefore unable to attend.

**Job Capacity Assessments**

(Question No. 277)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister representing the Minister for Human Services, in writing, on 2 September 2008:

To date, what proportion of Job Capacity Assessments conducted over the phone are challenged, compared with those conducted in person.

Ms Plibersek—The Minister for Human Services has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

Data is not available on this matter.

**Job Capacity Assessments**

(Question No. 278)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister representing the Minister for Human Services, in writing, on 2 September 2008:

To date, what number of Job Capacity Assessments have resulted in referrals to the Personal Support Program.

Ms Plibersek—The Minister for Human Services has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

From 1 July 2006 to 5 September 2008, 133,039 Job Capacity Assessments recommended a referral to the Personal Support Program. Data on the number of people with a recommended referral to the Personal Support Program who actually commence with a service is not held by the Department of Human Services. This data would need to be requested from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

**Job Capacity Assessments**

(Question No. 279)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister representing the Minister for Human Services, in writing, on 2 September 2008:

To date, what number of Job Capacity Assessments have resulted in referrals to Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

Ms Plibersek—The Minister for Human Services has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

From 1 July 2006 to 5 September 2008, 155,357 Job Capacity Assessments recommended a referral to Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Data on the number of people with a recommended referral to Vocational Rehabilitation Services who actually commence with a service is not held by the Department of Human Services. This data would need to be requested from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.
Job Network
(Question No. 284)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister for Employment Participation, in writing, on 2 September 2008:

For the 2007-08 financial year, how many job seekers: (a) requested a transfer to a new Job Network provider; and (b) were transferred to a new Job Network provider.

Mr Brendan O’Connor—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
In the 2007-08 financial year, 230,000 job seekers were transferred to a new Job Network site. In this period, 55 requests to transfer were declined.