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SITTING DAYS—2009

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FORTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FOURTH 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. Christopher Maurice Pyne 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

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Members of the House of Representatives

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## Members of the House of Representatives

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**PARTY ABBREVIATIONS**

ALP—Australian Labor Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia;  
Nats—The Nationals; Ind—Independent

## Heads of Parliamentary Departments

- Clerk of the Senate—H Evans
- Clerk of the House of Representatives—IC Harris AO
- Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—A Thompson
RUDD MINISTRY

Prime Minister
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion
Treasurer
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and Leader of the Government in the Senate
Special Minister of State, Cabinet Secretary and Vice President of the Executive Council
Minister for Finance and Deregulation
Minister for Trade
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Minister for Defence
Minister for Health and Ageing
Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and Leader of the House
Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate
Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research
Minister for Climate Change and Water
Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts
Attorney-General
Minister for Human Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism

Hon. Kevin Rudd, MP
Hon. Julia Gillard, MP
Hon. Wayne Swan MP
Senator Hon. Chris Evans
Senator Hon. John Faulkner
Hon. Lindsay Tanner MP
Hon. Simon Crean MP
Hon. Stephen Smith MP
Hon. Joel Fitzgibbon MP
Hon. Nicola Roxon MP
Hon. Jenny Macklin MP
Hon. Anthony Albanese MP
Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy
Senator Hon. Kim Carr
Senator Hon. Penny Wong
Hon. Peter Garrett AM, MP
Hon. Robert McClelland MP
Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig
Hon. Tony Burke MP
Hon. Martin Ferguson AM, MP

[The above ministers constitute the cabinet]
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<td>Hon. Chris Bowen MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Veterans’ Affairs</td>
<td>Hon. Alan Griffin MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women</td>
<td>Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Employment Participation</td>
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<td>Hon. Warren Snowdon MP</td>
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<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>
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<td>Minister for Superannuation and Corporate Law</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Nick Sherry</td>
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<td>Minister for Ageing</td>
<td>Hon. Justine Elliot MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Youth and Minister for Sport</td>
<td>Hon. Kate Ellis MP</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and Childcare</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support and Parliamentary Secretary for Water</td>
<td>Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, MP</td>
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<td>Hon. Bill Shorten MP</td>
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<td>Hon. Anthony Byrne MP</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and Parliamentary Secretary for the Voluntary Sector</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Ursula Stephens</td>
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<td>Senator Hon. Jan McLucas</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services</td>
<td>Hon. Laurie Ferguson MP</td>
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<td>Parliamentary Secretary for Government Service Delivery</td>
<td>Senator Hon. Mark Arbib</td>
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SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition  The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP
Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Leader of the Opposition  The Hon Julie Bishop MP
Shadow Minister for Trade, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government and Leader of The Nationals  The Hon Warren Truss MP
Shadow Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Leader of the Opposition in the Senate  Senator the Hon Nick Minchin
Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research and Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate  Senator the Hon Eric Abetz
Shadow Treasurer  The Hon Joe Hockey MP
Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training and Manager of Opposition Business in the House  The Hon Christopher Pyne MP
Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and COAG and Shadow Minister Assisting the Leader on Emissions Trading Design  The Hon Andrew Robb AO, MP
Shadow Minister for Finance, Competition Policy and Deregulation  Senator the Hon Helen Coonan
Shadow Minister for Human Services and Deputy Leader of The Nationals  Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion
Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources  The Hon Ian Macfarlane MP
Shadow Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs  The Hon Tony Abbott MP
Shadow Special Minister of State and Shadow Cabinet Secretary  Senator the Hon Michael Ronaldson
Shadow Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water  The Hon Greg Hunt MP
Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing  The Hon Peter Dutton MP
Shadow Minister for Defence  Senator the Hon David Johnston
Shadow Attorney-General  Senator the Hon George Brandis SC
Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  The Hon John Cobb MP
Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations  Mr Michael Keenan MP
Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship  The Hon Dr Sharman Stone
Shadow Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors, Tourism and the Arts  Mr Steven Ciobo

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

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

Shadow Assistant Treasurer
The Hon Tony Smith MP

Shadow Minister for Sustainable Development and Cities
The 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

Shadow Minister for Ageing
Mrs Margaret May MP

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

Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs
Mrs Louise Markus MP

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

Shadow Minister for Justice and Customs
The Hon Sussan Ley MP

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

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern Australia
Senator the Hon Ian Macdonald

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Transport
Mr Don Randall MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development
Mr John Forrest MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Indigenous Affairs
Senator Marise Payne

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Energy and Resources
Mr Barry Haase MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector
Senator Mitch Fifield

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Water Resources and Conservation
Mr Mark Coulton MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Health Administration
Senator Mathias Cormann

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence
The Hon Peter Lindsay MP

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Education
Senator the Hon Brett Mason

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

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

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader in the Senate
Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells
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The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins) took the chair at 2 pm, and read prayers.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mr RUDD (Griffith—Prime Minister) (2.00 pm)—I inform the House that the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts will be absent from question time this week. He is attending meetings of the Coral Triangle Initiative in Papua New Guinea. The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry will answer questions on his behalf.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Economy

Mr TURNBULL (2.01 pm)—My question is addressed to the Prime Minister. I refer to the December quarter national accounts, which recorded the highest household savings since 1992 and an economy going backwards. Given this evidence that cash handouts have failed to create a single job, why has the Prime Minister borrowed another $13 billion on the national credit card to hand out this week?

Mr RUDD—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. I am not surprised by the fact that industrial relations did not form part of his first question today. Those who observed his press conference just now will be wondering what, in fact, the opposition’s policy on industrial relations is, as of five past two this afternoon.

The Leader of the Opposition asked a question about the impact of the government’s economic stimulus strategy on employment. I refer to the fact that in the most recent national accounts Australia was still able to generate positive growth in consumption of 0.1 per cent for the December quarter—against a G7 average decline of something like 0.4 per cent. I also say to the Leader of the Opposition that consumption is critical because of its impact on the retail sector. It represents 57 per cent of demand in the economy. The retail sector generates 1½ million Australian jobs. If consumption and retail are doing okay in Australia, there is a positive impact on jobs. Therefore, the impact of our stimulus strategy is of direct relevance to those people employed in that sector, which represents 14 per cent of the Australian workforce.

The figures show that retail trade rose by 3.8 per cent in December 2008 and then grew by a further 0.2 per cent in January. Contrast that performance with, say, Canada, where it fell by 5.4 per cent in December; the US, where it fell by three per cent in December; Japan, where it fell by 1.9 per cent in December; Germany, where it was down by nearly one per cent in December; and New Zealand, where it fell by one per cent in December. I draw to the honourable gentleman’s attention that Westfield, a large owner of shopping centres in Australia, saw an increase in sales of 2.5 per cent in December 2008. Their stores in the US saw falls of 14 per cent and the UK was down three per cent. I could draw the honourable member’s attention to what Michael Luscombe, the CEO of Woolworths, had to say. In talking about the impact of the economic stimulus strategy, he said on 28 February:

… we saw it in the basic commodities and that’s been made pretty public. I would think there’s a little bit more legs in it, and there’s no doubt that the timing of the next one which is around March/April is probably about the right time for the next one to come on.

The Leader of the Opposition needs also to reflect on comments by others about the impact of the stimulus strategy. Deutsche Bank, through its chief economist, said: ‘Retailers were bolstered by the cash-bonus-inspired strength in sales, and they responded in January by’—wait for it—’retaining higher than usual post-Christmas staff levels’. I also
refer to comments by the ANZ senior economist, Katie Dean, who believes that the government’s stimulus package worked to retain jobs in January, in tandem with aggressive interest rate cuts. Michael Blythe, the Commonwealth Bank chief economist, said:

Policy is working in Australia. Lower interest rates and the first-home owners grant have lifted housing activity, and the pick-up in retail sales suggests the Government’s cash handouts have worked.

So you have the chief economists from the Commonwealth Bank, the ANZ Bank and Deutsche Bank, as well as leaders in the Australian commercial sector, from Woolworths, all pointing to the relative positive impact of December’s economic stimulus strategy on jobs and on overall sales; yet the only person who seems to be disputing its impact on jobs and sales is the Leader of the Opposition.

I would ask the Leader of the Opposition why, when he asks a question on this, the question is premised on the assumption that the opposition is opposed to this particular measure. When this was announced at the end of last year, the Leader of the Opposition said that he, the opposition, would be supporting it. On 14 October, when we released this, he said, ‘We are not going to argue about the composition of the package or quibble about it. It has our support.’ That was in October last year.

Mr Turnbull—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order on relevance. The question was about this month’s cash splash. If I could just be helpful: I will not object on the grounds of relevance—

The SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. The Leader of the Opposition knows that he can put his point of order but he cannot enter into a debate.

Mr Rudd—Those opposite and those observing the debate know precisely where this government stand: we support the economic stimulus strategy. Why? Because, although it cannot remove the impact of the global economic cyclone which is the global economic recession, it can cushion its impact on Australia—on families and on jobs here. We know where we stand on this, but where does the Liberal Party stand? When these measures were introduced, the Leader of the Opposition said:

We support these measures and we are particularly pleased about the measure, the payments to pensioners.

That was last year. Is the Leader of the Opposition now saying—today, in March—that he opposed the payment to pensioners?

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr Rudd—He mysteriously finds himself buried in his notes. Then we had this question: ‘What do you think of the housing measures?’ The response from the Leader of the Opposition was: ‘Well, we support it.’ Does the Leader of the Opposition oppose the trebling of the first home owners bonus?

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, under the standing order dealing with relevance: the Prime Minister was asked a question about detailing where the jobs are being created from in this $13 billion cash splash that is following up the cash splash in February.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Sturt will resume his seat. The Prime Minister is responding to the question.

Mr Rudd—If the Manager of Opposition Business had listened to my earlier answer concerning the impact of the economic stimulus strategy on jobs in the retail sector, including the quotes from those who lead in the retail sector, he would understand its impact on jobs, which was the question I was asked.
Then, on family payments, the Leader of the Opposition was asked again—last October—about this, and he said:
I think there are certainly people that have won a lot more than others, but again our position, Charles—
this is Charles Wooley—
was, in the spirit of the times, we give the Government our support on this.
That was an eternity ago; that was three months ago. Now we have the Leader of the Opposition saying that his position is entirely the reverse of that. Is it any wonder that here we are at 10 minutes past two, on this day—when industrial relations legislation is about to pass through the Senate—and nobody knows where the Liberal Party stand on industrial relations and the future of WorkChoices, because nobody knows where they stand on the economic stimulus strategy, because they make it up as they go along. I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to come clean with the Australian people and tell them whether he supports or opposes these payments—depending on which day of the week it is.

Workplace Relations

Mrs D’ATH (2.10 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Would the Prime Minister update the House on the government’s progress in delivering a new, fair and balanced workplace relations system for Australia?

Mr RUDD—I thank the honourable member for Petrie for her question and I record for the House her advocacy on behalf of workers and working families in her electorate in Brisbane. I noticed, as the honourable member for Petrie asked the question, there was a distinct silence on the part of those opposite, reflecting, shall we say, a want of unity on their part and a lack of clarity in terms of their position on this vital matter for the nation, the economy and working families.

Before the last election, we made a commitment to hardworking Australians that, under this government, their terms and conditions of employment would be fair and they would be protected. Before the last election, we made a commitment to Australian employers that, under the government’s new workplace relations laws, our system would be flexible, simple and workable for business. Before the election, we made a commitment that we would consult with employers and employees alike as we drafted our workplace laws.

This Labor government has delivered on that commitment. What does the new workplace relations system entail? First, it includes a simple safety net of key terms and conditions that cannot be stripped away—stripped away by industrial instruments such as WorkChoices. Second, it includes protection from unfair dismissal for Australian workers, balanced with the opportunity for an employer to have a period to assess a new worker. Third, it includes special arrangements for small business employers to deal with dismissals, and simpler processes for everyone to resolve claims. Fourth, it entails provisions to help workers and employers and employees work together to create flexible and family friendly workplaces. Fifth, it includes simpler and faster agreement-making processes. Sixth, it provides for a new, independent umpire, Fair Work Australia. Seventh, it provides the opportunity for employers and employees to agree to flexible arrangements that suit their needs, including for high-income workers.

I would say to the parliament and to those opposite that this party in government did not hide its plans from the Australian people prior to the last election. We were upfront with the Australian people. We told them
what we would do, and the Australian people overwhelmingly voted for our proposal and for the removal of Work Choices. I contrast that with those opposite, who inflicted Work Choices on Australia without the courtesy of even putting it to the Australian people first. I would ask any of those opposite: which of them stood around the ballot boxes in 2004 and said to the Australian people as they went into that election that they were going to legislate Work Choices? Not one of them did. Their party did not. Once they obtained control of the Senate, that was the direction in which they went.

The reason for that is that their fundamental belief is that Work Choices is absolutely fantastic—the ideal set of laws for every workplace. And that was what underpinned remarks and statements made in this place when they introduced Work Choices legislation into this parliament. Again, for the benefit of those opposite let me record for the House, on this important day, what the Leader of the Opposition said on the day that Work Choices was introduced:

…today is the day that Kevin Andrews—
the then minister—
introduced the work choices legislation into the House of Representatives. The single most important reform to workplace relations in any of our lifetimes …

There is no understatement there: ‘in any of our lifetimes’.

What we have had ever since then is this to and fro in the tactical debate within the Liberal Party as to whether they should be upfront about what they actually believe—which is Work Choices writ large—or whether they can tactically sneak around the side and pretend that they are actually not committed to it after all. We on this side of the House—and the nation at large—know this as a fact: Work Choices is within the DNA of the Liberal Party. Whatever they may say today about whether they oppose it or support it, we all know that, if they got back into power, they would bring it back because it is in their DNA. That is the bottom line.

In the debate about the global economic recession and its impact on families and workers across Australia, I say to those opposite that they should reflect for one moment on this simple question: what do they say to Australian workers who have a ‘take it or leave it’ Work Choices AWA, when they realise that their Work Choices AWA does not have a redundancy entitlement? Under Work Choices, it was stripped away from them without a choice and without compensation. That is the simple truth of it. What would those opposite do for those workers who now face the full force of the global economic recession? Absolutely nothing, because their industrial relations legislation provided the capacity for workers to be put on AWAs that strip away their redundancy arrangements.

This is the human face of Work Choices—Work Choices, which is in the DNA of the Liberal Party; Work Choices, which stripped away redundancy entitlements; and Work Choices, which they, the Liberal Party, would wish to bring back. Whatever the Liberal Party may say today in this debate, whatever they may say in the Senate in this debate and whatever posturing they may engage in politically on this matter, the Liberal Party cannot and never will be able to walk away from Work Choices—because, very simply, the Liberal Party are Work Choices addicts. That is what they are—Work Choices addicts. They will swear until they are blue in the face that they have given it up but, we know for a fact that, as Work Choices addicts, they cannot give it up. That is the bottom line.
As much as those opposite may be uncomfortable about the core reality, the absolute core reality is that Work Choices strips away redundancy payments. Whatever they say today about maybe pushing it to one side—and heaven knows what the Leader of the Opposition meant in that last press conference—we in the government know that we stand opposed to Work Choices, while the Liberal Party, if they get back in office, will restore Work Choices and enforce it on every Australian working family.

**Economy**

Mr TURNBULL (2.17 pm)—My question is again addressed to the Prime Minister. Given higher Commonwealth debt means job-destroying higher taxes and job-destroying higher interest rates, isn’t the Prime Minister borrowing and spending money that has created no jobs today but will certainly destroy jobs tomorrow?

Mr RUDD—The Leader of the Opposition would be aware that most mainstream economists and most leaders of business organisations in Australia have said that, in the midst of a global financial crisis and a global economic recession, the responsible thing for governments to do is to go into temporary deficit on the basis of temporary borrowing. Those opposite, if they were faintly honest about their own position and the costs associated with their own position—which we calculate to be $180 billion worth of undertakings on their part—would agree that they would be in precisely the same position. Let us just be honest about this in this chamber. Those opposite are pretending that at this point they would not be in deficit. That is untrue, because those opposite would be confronted with exactly the same reality that we have been confronted with in government with collapsing government revenues. So either you balance the budget in terms of the necessary recourse to borrowings or you simply act irresponsibly in the current global economic environment. Those opposite, presumably, would have us act irresponsibly.

The bottom line is this: whether it is the International Monetary Fund, the Business Council of Australia or the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, every responsible mainstream business organisation stands up with the government to say that, in this time of national economic emergency, a global economic recession which is washing across the shores of Australia, this is the time for governments to engage in temporary deficit and temporary borrowing in order to provide economic stimulus to the economy. The result of that is to cushion the impact of the global economic recession. The alternative on the part of those opposite is this: to simply throw people to the wolves; simply allow them to fend for themselves, as they would have working families do under their prescription on industrial relations.

Our policy on these matters is clear; those opposite seek to evade their responsibilities on this and not be clear about the extent of their own undertakings by way of policy, where that would land them in terms of deficit and the recourse which they would then have to undertake by way of temporary borrowings. We stand with the mainstream business organisations of the nation, acting responsibly to cushion the impact of the recession now. The relative economic data on Australia in the fourth quarter last year measured against most of the rest of the OECD demonstrates the positive impact which a temporary stimulus has. I would recommend to the Leader of the Opposition that he look hard at the examples which come from overseas and that he own up, directly and honestly, about the impact that his own undertakings on policy would produce in terms of deficit and debt.
DISTINGUISHED VISITORS
The SPEAKER (2.20 pm)—I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus, His Excellency Mr Markos Kyprianou. He is accompanied by the Cyprus High Commissioner, His Excellency Mr Yannis Iacovou. On behalf of the House I extend to them both a very warm welcome.

Honourable members—Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE
Workplace Relations
Mr SYMON (2.21 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Social Inclusion. Would the minister inform the House of the benefits of the government’s Fair Work Bill? Are there any obstacles to working people and employers experiencing these benefits?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the member for Deakin for his question and note his deep interest and active involvement in putting together the government’s Fair Work Bill. The Fair Work Bill brings to a culmination what the Australian Labor Party promised the Australian people in the lead-up to the 2007 election. We promised them an end to Work Choices. We promised them a fair, flexible and balanced workplace relations system.

We announced our policy Forward with Fairness in April 2007. We campaigned for it every day in the lead-up to the 2007 election, and the Australian people endorsed it. Every day since, we have worked in a consultative way with employers, with unions, with those interested in delivering a fair, flexible and balanced workplace relations system. We have worked with a business advisory group, a small business working group, a workers advisory group, the National Workplace Relations Consultative Council and the Committee on Industrial Legislation—meeting for an unprecedented number of days, working with the legislation. We introduced it into the House of Representatives last November and it has been to an extensive Senate committee inquiry. We did not sneak up on anybody with this bill. Everybody knew that this bill would be in the Senate for decision this week.

What did the Leader of the Opposition say when this bill came into the parliament? He said:

We—

the coalition—

accept that WorkChoices is dead. The Australian people have spoken.

They were the words of the Leader of the Opposition last November. They were driven by opportunism, no doubt, but Australian people listening to those words would have thought that the coalition was going to get out of the way and allow Work Choices to be brought to an end, to kill Work Choices and have a fair and flexible system introduced. And it seemed that that might happen—that was, until the member for Higgins appeared on the Today show last week and said:

It—

the government—

has to reconsider its proposals in relation to industrial relations.

So the Liberal Party went into its party room today, and the people of Australia waited. Who was going to determine the Liberal Party’s position on Work Choices? Was it the Leader of the Opposition or the member for Higgins?

Mr Pyne—You didn’t mention union right of entry last election.

Ms GILLARD—Well, now we know that it is not the Leader of the Opposition or the member for Higgins.
Ms Pyne—They’ve all gone quiet behind you.

The SPEAKER—The member for Sturt!

Ms Gillard—The startling truth is: no-one is determining their position, because they do not know what to say next. The Liberal Party gathered today to kill Work Choices and then just could not bring themselves to do it. As I am advised, the shadow cabinet went to the party meeting with no recommendation about what to do next. As I am advised, the people who hold themselves out as the alternative government of this country in the middle of a global financial crisis could not work out whether or not to kill a piece of legislation that makes it easier to sack a worker. People who were there in a party room were asked whether or not they wanted to end a piece of legislation that made it easier to sack a worker and they stayed in the embrace of Work Choices.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! Those on my left!

Ms Gillard—I can understand the catcalls to cover their embarrassment—the Leader of the Opposition: repudiated; the member for Higgins, the architect of Work Choices: seeking to drive the embrace of Work Choices even further; the Liberal Party gathered to kill Work Choices and they could not bring themselves to do it. Before today we knew that the Liberal Party is and always will be the party of Work Choices. After today we know that that is true and we also know that they are a hopeless rabble and joke, unable to keep the Leader of the Opposition’s commitment to the Australian people that Work Choices is dead.

Mr Pyne—Where’s the money coming from?

The SPEAKER—The member for Sturt is warned!

Ms Gillard—Work Choices is alive and well in the Liberal Party. We have seen it on display today. There is nowhere to run now, nowhere to hide. We will be seeing how they vote in this parliamentary fortnight, but the Australian people should know they are the party of Work Choices still.

Economy

Mr Hockey (2.26 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. I refer the Treasurer to Westpac’s *Australia & NZ Weekly*, in which Mr Bill Evans, the Chief Economist at Westpac, says that despite the Christmas cash splash it was:

... bizarre to see spending on: motor vehicles; clothing; leisure; restaurants/hotels; and alcohol/cigarettes all actually falling in the quarter.

Mr Evans states that, despite the cash splash:

... consumer spending only rose by 0.1%, well below trend and at the same pace as in the third—September—quarter when there was no such boost to household incomes.

Treasurer, doesn’t this prove yet again that the pre-Christmas cash splash of borrowed money failed and that, far from creating 75,000 jobs, you have just left our children with more Labor Party debt?

Mr Swan—I thank the former minister for Work Choices for his question, because there is no doubt that if the government had not taken action last year with the Economic Security Strategy things would have been far worse in the national accounts. Might I add, that is something which is accepted by Westpac in their analysis. Also, the figures show this quite strongly, because if you have a look at consumption in the December quarterly accounts and compare it here to the rest of the world you can see straightaway how strong, on a comparative basis, consumption was in this country.
Those opposite are continuing to play this silly political game. The first part of it is that we should not engage in any economic stimulus to support jobs. They have this proposition that Australia should simply sit and wait and see as a global recession rolls over the country. That is the proposition that those opposite are putting. This government has the view that it will do everything it responsibly can to support employment, to support business and to support demand in our economy at a time when global demand is collapsing.

Just take the World Bank report yesterday. The World Bank report yesterday talked about the sharpest contraction since World War II and it pointed to trade figures that showed the worst outcome in 80 years. On the face of that, this government moved decisively last December, and all of the evidence in the national accounts points to the fact that we strengthened demand in the economy and we supported employment. This is a bit embarrassing for those opposite because every major employer in the retail industry says that it did but the opposition think they know better. In fact, when you listen to them dismiss the retail sales figures from December and January, you get the impression that they do not think there are many people employed in retail. There are something like 1.5 million Australians employed in retail. So in the December quarter Australia had a positive outcome for consumption, when right around the world it was collapsing.

Mr Hockey—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I refer the Treasurer to the question that was asked. In fact the quote was:

... bizarre to see spending on motor vehicles; clothing; leisure; restaurants/hotels; and alcohol/cigarettes all falling in the quarter.

The SPEAKER—The member will resume his seat. That was really by way of debate, and there is no point of order. The Treasurer has the call.

Mr Swan—This is a swiftie from Joe. He just likes to fiddle the figures.

The SPEAKER—Order! The Treasurer will refer to members by their parliamentary titles.

Mr Swan—Joe knows full well that—

The SPEAKER—The Treasurer will refer to members by their parliamentary titles.

Mr Swan—This is another swiftie from those opposite, because in the month of December retail sales rose. Why was that? Why would they have risen so sharply in December? Well, they rose because of the economic stimulus package. But the shadow Treasurer seeks to quote the quarterly figure from the national accounts so he can conveniently ignore the impact of the economic stimulus package. Of course, in the month of December we had a very substantial increase in retail sales, 3.8 per cent—now listen to this: the highest in eight years. Why would that have been the case? It was the case because of the economic stimulus package. Also, we had a further increase in retail sales of 0.2 per cent in January. Why was that? It was the economic stimulus package. That is why Gerry Harvey, Roger Corbett and all of the other major employers out there are saying the economic stimulus package has been a substantial boost to demand and a substantial support to employment.

What happened elsewhere in the world during this period? In the US, retail sales fell by around three per cent in the month of December. In Japan, sales fell by two per cent in December. And of course what happened in Australia? Sales were up 3.8 per cent. So the figures show unambiguously that the Economic Security Strategy supported employment and supported jobs in the month of
December—and of course those opposite just simply want to sit and wait and see. We on this side of the House will do everything within our power to support employment, to support demand and to support the Australian economy, and it is a pity those opposite would not do the same.

Economy

Ms RISHWORTH (2.33 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 any responses?

Ms MACKLIN—I thank the member for Kingston for her question. She understands that around 43,000 pensioners, carers and families received Economic Security Strategy payments in her electorate of Kingston, and of course those payments were very important to supporting jobs in her community. Unlike those opposite, she understands that families, pensioners, carers and people with disabilities are doing it very, very tough in these economic times. We have provided considerable support to those people through our economic strategy payments in December last year and from this week we will be going further with our Nation Building and Jobs Plan.

In fact, in December four million pensioners and 1.9 million families benefited; they got some extra help from the Economic Security Strategy payments. The payments got a big tick from a wide range of different organisations—the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Industry Group through to National Seniors, Carers Australia and the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations. All of these national organisations supported the government’s Economic Security Strategy payments. One organisation did not—of course, those sitting opposite. We all remember the excruciating period the Leader of the Opposition took the Liberal and National parties through. They could not decide what their position was; they flip-flopped all over the place. Of course, at first they supported the payments; at first they supported the package. Then they said they wanted to change them, then they did not support the package, then they voted for the package, and now here we are three months later and they are wishing that they had not supported the package. The Leader of the Opposition is now saying he wishes that all of those people, 1.9 million Australian families and four million pensioners, had not received those Economic Security Strategy payments—quite remarkable when you consider what happened with the December retail figures, which demonstrated the biggest monthly increase since August 2000. As the Australian Retailers Association said:

… the Rudd government has done its job with the $10.4 billion stimulus package …

But according to the Leader of the Opposition, the Retailers Association are wrong. In his desperation—you can only call it desperation—to score a political point, the Leader of the Opposition is trashing his economic credibility and also trashing his moral credibility by no longer supporting these payments to Australian pensioners and families.

Economy

Mr HOCKEY (2.36 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to data released today: the Dun & Bradstreet business expectations survey, which says 27 per cent of firms now plan to sack workers; the National Australia Bank monthly survey, which says business conditions have fallen to a low not seen since 1992; and the ANZ job ads survey, which fell 10.4 per cent in February, the biggest monthly fall since the series began. Prime
Minister, as the buck stops with you, when will you take responsibility for the failure of the pre-Christmas $10 billion cash splash?

Mr Rudd—I thank the member for North Sydney for his question. He is right to point to data out today from Dun & Bradstreet; from Sensis, on small and medium business enterprises; and the ANZ job ads survey. All of these point to the bad economic data on the jobs front and on the confidence front, and this is a reflection of the international economic circumstances in which we find ourselves. Also, I draw the honourable member’s attention to the report referred to earlier by the Treasurer—that is, the report released over the weekend by the World Bank. The World Bank report said that the global GDP this year will decline for the first time since World War II. The World Bank went on to say that world trade is likely to register its largest decline in 80 years. This will be the first time that there has been an annual decline in world trade since 1982. Furthermore, the World Bank predicts that developing countries will face a financing gap of between $270 billion and $700 billion as a result of the crisis, which now engulfs the developing world as well. Also, I draw the honourable member’s attention to the data which was produced over the last several days in the United States. The US Bureau of Labour Statistics announced that 651,000 Americans lost their jobs in February and US unemployment climbed to a 25-year high of 8.1 per cent.

These are the global circumstances within which Australia currently operates, and these are difficult times for all governments. The alternatives presenting themselves to governments around the world are stark and clear: either you sit and do nothing and allow people to fend for themselves—which is, at its essence, what those opposite recommend—or you take action. This government has a plan of action. We will provide stability to the Australian financial sector, for the first time in Australia’s history providing a guarantee for bank deposits for Australian deposit holders. Secondly, we will provide short-term stimulus measures to provide necessary payments to support pensioners, carers, veterans, farmers and others in order to provide support to the retail sector in particular—and the statistics for December and January have just been referred to by the Treasurer. We will also provide payments to first home buyers. The honourable member asked a question about what actions the government have taken which have resulted in impacts on employment. One of the specific measures announced last October as part of that economic strategy, which the Liberal Party supported at the time, was the trebling of the first home buyers bonus.

Could I draw the honourable member’s attention to the following figures. New Treasury figures, recently released, show that nearly 30,000 Australians received the government’s first home owners boost in its first 3½ months of operation—10,000-plus in New South Wales, nearly 6,000 in Victoria, 6½ thousand in Queensland, nearly 3,000 in Western Australia and 2,400 in South Australia. Is the shadow Treasurer saying he wishes those payments had not been made to those first home buyers? That is the absolute logic of his position because he, through his leader, supported those measures last year.

I refer the shadow Treasurer to the following statements. In Sydney’s south-west, the Cornish Group sold 70 per cent of its 53 sales at the Spring Farm estate in Camden to first home buyers. Chris Lamont, from the Housing Industry Association, said were it not for the first home owner boost, a lot more people in the building industry would be out of work. Furthermore, Michael Cant, of the Commonwealth Bank, said: ‘We’ve had to put on more staff and we’ve been looking to increase staffing levels through
temps and contractors to deal with the bank’s response to the extra applications which have come in from first home buyers.’ Furthermore, if you look at the ABS figures for the period in question, you will see that the number of first home buyers increased by 17.8 per cent, pushing their share of loans to 23.6 per cent—the highest since January 2002. The number of new houses purchased by first home buyers jumped by almost 10 per cent.

The shadow Treasurer asked the question: where is the evidence that the measures taken last October have had effect? I have demonstrated—through figures from the ABS and through statements by responsible bank representatives and by corporate leaders—what that effect has been. It is quite plain that those opposite, when confronted with the global economic crisis that we are dealing with, have this as their response: the government is embarked upon an economic strategy to see Australia through the crisis; the Liberal Party is embarked upon a political strategy to take advantage from the crisis. That is the difference.

Nation Building and Jobs Plan

Ms LIVERMORE (2.43 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government. Will the minister update the House on the government’s nation-building plans, and are there any obstacles to implementing these plans?

Mr ALBANESE—I thank the member for Capricornia for her question. This is a government that believes in nation building. That is why we brought forward $560 million in our first budget to bring forward 30 separate road projects. That is why we have established the Community Infrastructure Fund, with $800 million in it, to create jobs and stimulate local economies around the nation. That is why in December we delivered a $4.7 billion nation-building package, including $1.2 billion for 17 rail projects and $711 million to bring forward national road projects. That is why we doubled the funding for the Black Spot Program. In February, of course, we brought forward the Nation Building and Jobs Plan—some $42 billion.

The Leader of the Opposition says, ‘We believe in investment in infrastructure.’ That is what they say. But you have to look at what they actually do, not what they say. While Malcolm thinks he is in the middle, he is really just in a muddle. When you look at each of—

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It has become a habit, obviously, in this question time for ministers to refer to members of the opposition by their Christian names. It is provocative—

The SPEAKER—The member for Sturt will resume his seat. The Leader of the House will refer to members by their parliamentary titles.

Mr ALBANESE—I will. But the Leader of the Opposition is indeed in a muddle, because he says that he supports pension increases but then he says that they are bad, that they should not have happened. He says that he opposes WorkChoices but then, even today, we cannot get a decision on whether the opposition will vote for or against the legislation. He says that he is in favour of infrastructure and nation building. Well, every chance that he gets, he votes against it. He voted against the $14.7 billion to modernise our schools. He voted against the $6.4 billion on public and community housing. He voted against the $800 million for community infrastructure. He voted against $150 million for boom gates on rail crossings. He voted against $150 million extra for road maintenance. He voted against $90 million extra for black spots. The opposition voted against the legislation to establish the three
nation-building funds, with $26 billion in them. During the Senate vote, of course, we witnessed some splitting and voting three ways, perhaps a precursor of things to come on the Work Choices legislation. The opposition split three ways. Some voted in favour, some voted against and some just had a dunny break—could not be bothered voting at all. But we should not be surprised, because, if we look at what they actually did in office, in road funding they slashed it, in their last year in office, from $4.3 billion to $2.8 billion.

But I am pleased to say that we are getting on with the job of nation building, and now every state and territory government has signed up to the $26.4 billion nation-building plan. Queensland, because of the caretaker period, are not able to sign at this stage, but the Queensland government have said that they will sign. The opposition leader up in Queensland, last Tuesday, said that he would sign up to the Rudd government’s offer of a $6.5 billion road and rail package for Queensland. I thought, ‘There’s an opposition leader who actually understands nation building.’ But the commitment only lasted two days, because two days later, on the Thursday, whether at the suggestion of the federal Leader of the Opposition or the Queensland Liberals or Nationals or Liberal-Nationals—whatever they are here in Canberra—he decided that they wanted the same deal that they were offered by the Howard government. Well, I have got news for Mr Springborg, because the deal that we are offering Queensland is double what was offered by the Howard government under AusLink over the same period of time. If you compare the nation-building program with AusLink, we have doubled the funding. It does say something quite extraordinary that you have an opposition leader campaigning in the Queensland election who is actually asking for less money from the Commonwealth.

We will get on with the job of nation building. Those opposite, when it comes to infrastructure, have no idea. We are building pipelines; they just offer pipe dreams. They do not believe in nation building; they do not believe in infrastructure. All you have to do is look at their voting pattern to see that that is the case.

**Economy**

Mr HOCKEY (2.49 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to his statement last week that he has a new seven-point plan to fix global debt. How does this fit in with the Prime Minister’s five-point plan to stabilise global markets, his four-point plan on bank switching, his five-point plan to fight inflation and his five-point plan for tighter regulation of lending? Prime Minister, when can we expect a plan to create jobs in Australia?

Mr RUDD—I thank the member for North Sydney for his question. He asked me also about Dun & Bradstreet before. He forgot to mention that they said that this is a demonstration that not only has the federal government’s stimulus package been necessary but more will be required before the end of 2009. I notice the member for North Sydney did not actually add that bit in his reference to the Dun & Bradstreet release.

The member for North Sydney refers to the global economy. I would have thought that, as someone who himself has worked in financial markets before, he would understand the impact of global financial markets on the Australian economy. I would also have thought that the honourable member would understand that, if you have a problem in the supply of global credit to the Australian economy, it has a direct impact on the flow of credit to households and to businesses and to small businesses.
Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Prime Minister was asked a specific question about a jobs plan for Australians. We know that he is embarrassed about all his other plans. He needs to come back to his jobs—

The SPEAKER—The member for Sturt will resume his seat. In the preamble to the question, at least five other plans were mentioned. The Prime Minister is responding to the question.

Mr Rudd—I would have thought that the member for North Sydney, given his background in the financial services industry, would understand the flow-through impact of global credit supply on Australian financial institutions and Australian firms, large and small, and the impact, in turn, on employment. That is why the government, including the Treasurer, me and others, are directly engaged with other heads of government in the G20 in order to advance proposals to deal with the challenge which all global banks are now confronted with, including the particular problem which those large banks in the United States and the United Kingdom currently confront in terms of the state of their balance sheets.

The member for North Sydney knows full well that until that problem is effectively dealt with, we have a huge problem on our hands in terms of the global economy. The member for North Sydney may find this terribly amusing, but I think all seriously minded members of this House would understand that in the midst of a global economic recession, which has come off the back of a global financial crisis that came off the back of the state of the world’s global banks, we must also go back to the cause of the problem. That is what the government is dealing with.

What we are also dealing with in the meantime is sorting out what measures can be deployed responsibly within Australia to cushion the impact of the global economic recession on Australia. That is why we have advanced our policy to stabilise domestic financial markets by providing guarantees for every Australian deposit holder. That is why we have also advanced our proposals to provide short-term stimulus through payments to pensioners, to veterans, to carers and to first home buyers. That is why the government is in the business of supporting longer term stimulus by embracing Australia’s single biggest school modernisation program, embracing the biggest single injection into social housing that this country has seen—that is, 20,000 units—and investing in energy efficiency measures with the objective of ensuring that owner-occupied dwellings in Australia—all of them—have ceiling insulation by the time that that program has concluded.

What do these measures do? They stimulate jobs at the local level, they provide benefits by way of infrastructure for the long term and, in the case of the energy efficiency measure, they also reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We have a strategy and a plan to steer Australia through the crisis. The alternative is the opposition’s approach, which is not to advance a serious economic alternative but to seek to turn everything to their political advantage. That is the simple contrast here. I say to those opposite that their approach of sitting back and waiting—or doing nothing—and then simply carping and criticising whatever the government does on the positive agenda is, frankly, ultimately unsustainable if they want to advance any credentials whatsoever or to be taken seriously in the Australian body politic at present.

We are faced with a serious crisis. The government in its arsenal does not have a silver bullet. We have said repeatedly that our objective is to cushion the impact of this
crisis on Australian families and jobs. That is a responsible course of action; it is a strategy that we believe can see Australia through this crisis, and it stands in stark contrast with the absence of any strategy whatsoever on the part of those opposite.

**Housing Affordability**

Mr CLARE (2.54 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Housing and the Minister for the Status of Women. Minister, can you please update the House on the impact of the first home owner boost?

Ms PLIBERSEK—I want to thank the member for Blaxland for his question. He held a housing affordability forum in his electorate at the beginning of last year and the main issue that was discussed that night was the extraordinary number of repossessions that were occurring in his electorate. People sought advice on how to avoid—

Mr Haase—That is what you get from a Labor government.

Ms PLIBERSEK—that serious issue. That was a terrific interjection from the other side! These repossessions actually started under your government.

Mr Haase interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Kalgoorlie.

Ms PLIBERSEK—The news today is that repossessions under Labor are down.

Mr Haase interjecting—

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

Ms PLIBERSEK—Repossessions in Blaxland have gone from 60 in August last year to 20 last month, and house sales are up. Half of those purchases are going to first home buyers. Why is that? It is because of the Economic Security Strategy—the measures that we introduced—and because of the early and decisive action taken last year by the Rudd government to respond to the global financial crisis.

What we have seen around the world in comparable countries, like the UK and the US, is very serious conditions in their housing markets. We have seen people losing their homes, we have seen builders going bust at a very high rate and, of course, increasing numbers of people experiencing homelessness. In contrast, here, as the Prime Minister pointed out, over 30,000 first home buyers have taken advantage of the first home owner boost in the first 3½ months of its operation. We have seen reports of this from right around the country. Today’s Advertiser reports record numbers of first home owners grants being funded in South Australia, especially in new developments in northern suburbs like Paralowie and Salisbury. In Victoria, the Herald-Sun reports: Home ownership for many is at present a realistic achievement.

The Sunday Mail in Brisbane reported on the weekend that many regional centres and northern cities recorded surprisingly strong growth as people took advantage of the first home buyer grant, falling interest rates and stamp duty exemptions.

Of course, it is not just the tradies and apprentices who are benefiting from this increased activity and confidence from first home buyers. As the Prime Minister said, in the banking sector we are also hearing of people being put on by the banks, including the Commonwealth Bank, because of the increased demands for processing new loans. The opposition spokesman, who voted against extra spending for social and Defence housing in the National Building and Jobs Plan, keeps asking what the government is doing for the private housing market, in contrast to public and Defence housing. That reminds me a little of the Monty Python sketch What have the Romans ever done for
The first home owner boost is directly stimulating activity in the construction sector and related fields and it is supporting jobs in small businesses right across the country. We have lending data that shows that and we have the data from the home owner boost figures. We have evidence from builders and developers right across the country that shows that.

Before the first home owner boost, we already saw work start and the first families move into our National Rental Affordability Scheme rental properties. We saw projects announced right across Australia through the Housing Affordability Fund to directly bring down the cost of 14,000 homes and indirectly support lower costs for around another 300,000 homes. We are helping young people who are not yet in a position to buy to set up first home saver accounts. And, of course, that $6.6 billion of spending on social and Defence housing that the opposition voted against will employ tradies and apprentices right across Australia. I met some of them in Glebe yesterday and I can tell you that they are very grateful for the work.

Employment

Mr ANTHONY SMITH (2.59 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. I refer the Treasurer to the fact that over the course of the previous government, 2.2 million new jobs were created in Australia. I ask the Treasurer if he could advise the House of the total number of new jobs he expects to be created in Australia over the course of this parliamentary term.

Mr SWAN—I thank the member for his question. All I can say is that we can say to the Australian people that, in the middle of a global recession, we have done everything we possibly can to support employment in the Australian economy. I can say that truthfully and I can say that while I look them straight in the eye. Those opposite cannot answer that question, because they have not been in favour of one single measure which has supported employment in the Australian economy in the last 12 months. Their solution is to sit, to wait and to see, as the global recession washes its way through this country. We will do everything within our power through economic stimulus, through stabilisation of the financial—

Mr Anthony Smith—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The point of order is relevance. He was asked a specific question. If he does not have a figure, he should say so.

The SPEAKER—The question was in order. The Treasurer is responding to the question.

Mr SWAN—The assertion by the shadow Assistant Treasurer is just more game playing from those opposite to cover up their embarrassment for the fact that they do not have an alternative policy proposition to put to the Australian people about supporting employment and supporting Australian business. We do. We have specific propositions that we have put forward through our Economic Security Strategy and also through our Nation Building and Jobs Plan. We just heard from the Minister for Housing the impact that the first home owner boost is having out there right now on jobs in the Australian economy—a measure which those opposite do not support. So we can subtract all of those jobs that have been created in the first home owners grant flow-through—we can subtract all of those from any record they might have had. What we are getting here is the fact that those opposite do not have a policy alternative. We do.

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! Given his status, the member for Sturt should talk to himself sotto voce.
Mr SWAN—It is called an Economic Security Strategy, a Nation Building and Jobs Plan, which will support employment in the Australian economy. The opposition have no plan for the future; they simply have a plan for finding fault. We on this side of the House have a positive alternative, and we will continue to support Australian business and Australian jobs.

Economic Security Strategy: Veterans

Ms NEAL (3.01 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Veterans’ Affairs. How have the government’s security strategy payments assisted the veterans community?

Mr GRIFFIN—I thank the member for Robertson for her question. Some 325,000-plus Veterans’ Affairs pensioners received the one-off payment of $1,400 for singles, and $2,100 for couples, last December. That covered over 100,000 veteran service pensioners, over 90,000 partner service pensioners and over 105,000 war widows. It was a spend of some $400 million, a spend aimed at the vulnerable in our community, a spend aimed at those in the veterans community who have done the hard yards for our country at a time when our country needed it.

There has been an overwhelmingly positive response to these payments within the veterans community. When I have been out and about and also when I have received correspondence, it has been very clear that these payments have been welcome at a time when veterans have really needed them. There is absolutely no doubt about that. There is also plenty of anecdotal evidence of the fact that the money is being spent on the sorts of things that will boost the economy. I will give some examples of the comments that I have received. A veteran from Tuross Head said:

We extend our best wishes that Australia will be able to ride out the storm during this difficult financial situation and that your government can continue its plans for the future.

A veteran from the seat of Bendigo said:

This payment will be most welcome during these uncertain economic times.

And from a constituent in Brighton, in the electorate of Goldstein:

The overall action by your government in these uncertain times is very much appreciated, I am sure, by all concerned.

Well, actually, not quite by all concerned—not by his local member, not by the Leader of the Opposition, not by those on that side of the chamber. There is no doubt that this stimulus package has provided support to those who really need it, and there is no doubt it has actually ameliorated the sorts of impacts that our economy is facing in the current circumstances. Yet the opposition still oppose it or, rather, they jump from one side to the other. The Leader of the Opposition says to the Australian people that he has a plan, a strategy, and that he is a decisive leader. The only thing he is really decisive about is changing his mind. They vote for the package, then they oppose the package. They talk up the economy while, at the same time, they talk down the economy. That is the way they are approaching this debate and the way they approach the current economic situation. There is no doubt that this package has been well received. There is no doubt that it is supported in the general community and there is no doubt that the opposition have to work out what they are really doing on these issues.

Employment

Mr KEENAN (3.04 pm)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations. Will the minister guarantee that her Fair Work Bill will not destroy one Australian job?

Government members interjecting—
The SPEAKER—Those on my right will come to order.

Mr Hockey interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for North Sydney was very droll then. I did not hear the question. I will have to ask the member for Stirling to repeat the question.

Mr KEENAN—Will the minister guarantee that her Fair Work Bill will not cost one Australian job?

Ms GILLARD—I thank the ‘shadow minister for Work Choices’ for his question. I do find myself with some sympathy for his position, because clearly he has been instructed by those around him to go out and defend Work Choices—

Mrs Moylan—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. We have heard constantly throughout this question time members on the other side addressing members on this side inappropriately. Standing order 64 is very specific about this.

The SPEAKER—The member for Pearce has a point of order. If I was able to hear the answer; if the chamber could be a little quieter—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! Those on my left will come to order. The Deputy Prime Minister knows her obligation to refer to members by their parliamentary titles.

Ms GILLARD—Amidst all the embarrassment amongst the Liberal Party members about references to Work Choices, can I say the following to the shadow minister: I do have some sympathy for his predicament. He has obviously been instructed to go out and cover up the fact that the position of the Liberal Party is Work Choices and always will be.

Mr Pyne—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order, clearly on relevance. The minister was asked a very straightforward question which could have been answered with yes or no. We understand her embarrassment—

The SPEAKER—Order! The member will resume his seat. The Deputy Prime Minister is responding to the question. As has been so in the past, the chair is not in a position to direct the type of answer that is given to questions. Whether those on my left are seeking a direct answer or not, the minister can respond in the manner she is.

Ms GILLARD—As I was saying, I understand the difficulties confronting the shadow minister for whatever their policy is at the moment, but I can give the shadow minister a very clear guarantee. My very clear guarantee to the shadow minister is as follows: the Fair Work Bill offers workers greater job security than Work Choices, which was purpose designed to make it easier to sack employees and to enable their redundancy to be stripped away without a cent of compensation. What that means is that the Liberal Party, as the party of Work Choices, stand also as the party of job insecurity, because you believe that it is fair for workers to be sacked for no reason at all.

Mr Dutton—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. It goes to relevance. The Deputy Prime Minister has refused to rule—

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

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The member for Dickson has made his point. His point of order is relevance.

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The SPEAKER—I am in a position to make a ruling. The Deputy Prime Minister is responding to the question.

Ms GILLARD—The guarantee is that the Fair Work Bill is better for job security than Work Choices, which allowed people to be sacked for no reason. The other thing that I
can absolutely guarantee to the member asking the question is that this is a government that is going to be honest with people about the economic circumstances confronting this nation. In terms of those economic circumstances, we have been clear with people that the global financial crisis and global recession are going to impact on employment in this country.

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The SPEAKER—No, the member for Dickson will resume his seat. I am listening to the Deputy Prime Minister and the relevance. The member for Dickson will resume his seat.

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The SPEAKER—The only point of order that the member for Dickson can make at this stage is on relevance, and I am in a position to make a ruling. The member for Dickson will resume his seat.

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The SPEAKER—No, the member for Dickson will resume his seat. The Deputy Prime Minister will resume her seat. Clearly there have been at least two occasions during this answer where the point of order about relevance has been raised. I have ruled on those points of order, and it can be taken that, having had my attention drawn to the point of order, I will listen to the answer in that manner. The approach by the member for Dickson can have been for only one reason, and that was the point of order on relevance. He does not necessarily, by the standing orders, have the opportunity to debate his point of order. I am in a position to rule. The Deputy Prime Minister is responding to the question.

Ms GILLARD—I was saying that this is a government that will be honest with the Australian people about the outlook for employment. We are being honest with the Australian people about the global financial crisis and the global recession and the fact that our economy is not immune. What the Liberal Party are engaged in here is just a sleight of hand—the sleight of hand that they played every day up till the last election, where they said to the Australian people that Work Choices equal jobs growth and they forgot to mention the resources boom. Now, of course, desperately twisting and turning to justify their support for Work Choices, they are going to pretend that there is not a global financial crisis. Well, this is cheap—

The SPEAKER—The Deputy Prime Minister will resume her seat. I call the member for Sturt on a point of order.

Mr Pyne—This is not on relevance, Mr Speaker; it is under standing order 75, which is on tedious repetition and irrelevance. I ask you to sit the Deputy Prime Minister down.

The SPEAKER—The member for Sturt will resume his seat. As I told him last year, that standing order does not relate to question time. Whilst I have encouraged him to speak to himself sotto voce, he might read his standing orders. The Deputy Prime Minister has the call.

Ms GILLARD—I had intended to conclude, but—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order!

Ms GILLARD—Mr Speaker, can I conclude by saying this: these are difficult economic days. The Australian people—

The SPEAKER—I—

Mr Irons—Can you guarantee Kevin’s job?

The SPEAKER—The member for Swan will leave the chamber for one hour under standing order 94(a).

The member for Swan then left the chamber.
The SPEAKER—I call the Deputy Prime Minister, in conclusion.

Ms GILLARD—in conclusion, these are difficult days, and in these difficult days the government is investing in our economy and supporting jobs, something opposed every step of the way by the Liberal Party. Can I say to the Liberal Party: if you want to stand for Work Choices, have the honesty to just say it; do not feign an interest in Australian jobs when you voted against a $42 billion plan to support those jobs.

Alcopops

Ms GRIERSON (3.15 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. Will the minister please outline to the House the government’s action on alcopops and any obstacles in its way?

The SPEAKER—I apologise. There was a distraction caused by some actions in the gallery which I understand were attended to. The Minister for Health and Ageing.

Ms ROXON—I thank the member for Newcastle for her question. I know that she, amongst many members on this side of the House, is very concerned about binge drinking in her own electorate and would be pleased to know that the government acted in the last sitting week and was able to pass in this House the measure to end the tax break for alcopops. Of course, we believe this was a victory for common sense. We hope that such common sense will also prevail in the Senate in the coming fortnight. We believe that when multinational companies specifically design their products to target underage drinkers they should not be rewarded with a tax break. I have to say I am constantly amazed that the Liberal Party, on the other side of the House, seem to think otherwise. I am equally amazed that the Liberal Party are determined to give $260 million-plus back to the distillers if they refuse to pass this measure in the Senate.

Mr Dutton—that is not true.

Ms ROXON—it seems that the shadow minister is determined to disagree with this. I would draw his attention and that of those opposite to the evidence given by the tax office at Senate estimates recently when the second commissioner was asked specifically this question: what would happen if the bill was blocked? I will read this particularly for the member for Dickson, who seems determined to ignore this very basic advice that has been given. The second commissioner replied to a question from a senator:

Basically, Senator, the situation is that if it comes to pass then we would need to refund the excise, and that would be given to the manufacturers.

There it is in black and white—the Liberal Party, if they refuse to support this measure, will be delivering hundreds of millions of dollars back to the manufacturers for this amount of money. Given that we have seen the success of this measure so far, I think the evidence is becoming clearer and clearer that this measure is deserving of support. AC Nielsen figures, the figures that those opposite regularly rely on, reported a few days ago in the Sydney Morning Herald, showed that overall alcohol sales have fallen by 124 million standard drinks. This is across all types of alcohol. On Sunday the Australian Drug Foundation published figures showing that sales of alcopops have fallen by 310 million standard drinks. And of course we have the tax office figures that show that to the end of January sales of alcopops have slumped 35 per cent while overall spirit sales have fallen by almost eight per cent—far better than our original predictions.

So it is no surprise that health experts overwhelmingly support action taken by this side of the House to close this loophole. Last week a group of 20 health experts took out a half-page ad in the Australian arguing for
We trust the Senate can put aside political differences and vote on the basis of sound research evidence, rather than liquor industry propaganda. Two weeks ago a study was published by health experts in the Medical Journal of Australia arguing that the tax was working. And I might draw the House’s attention to evidence given today in the Senate inquiry by the president of the AMA, Dr Rosanna Capolingua, who supported the government’s actions and said:

The AMA would see it as a retrograde step if the alcopops tax did not go through.

The Australian Drug Foundation said:

The Senate must ensure that alcopops are not sold at pocket money prices. So we are getting clearer and clearer evidence here that is backing this measure. We have stronger and stronger support from public health advocates, from doctors, from researchers.

The only people who still oppose this measure are the distillers and the Liberal Party. It seems that these two groups get along very well together. In fact, people on this side of the House would remember that we voted on the alcopops legislation quite late one night last sitting week. As we all left the chamber, who should I run straight into but Mr Gordon Broderick, the executive director of the Distilled Spirits Industry Council, and who was he talking to? It was the member for Dickson, already huddled in a corner the instant we got out of here, getting a good pat on the head like a good schoolboy for having voted against this measure. It is about time he started listening to the real evidence, not just the advice of the distillers, and he should draw the line at giving hundreds of millions of dollars back to them even if he gets a pat on the head for voting against it.

Employment

Mr Turnbull (3.20 pm)—My question is addressed to the Prime Minister and I refer to the question that his deputy was unable to answer a few moments ago. Will the Prime Minister guarantee that his Fair Work Bill will not cost one job?

Mr Rudd—The Leader of the Opposition knows full well from the unemployment forecasts which are contained in the economic outlook that we are projecting unemployment to rise to seven per cent in the next year or so. Those figures are there for all to see. The honourable member will know therefore that we are in the midst of the jobs consequence flowing from the global economic recession—

Opposition members interjecting—

The Speaker—Order! The question has been asked.

Mr Rudd—And what people want to know is whether they have redundancy protection through it as opposed to redundancy arrangements stripped away from it, as each of those members opposite secured when they voted for the passage of Work Choices.

Trade: Banana Imports

Ms Saffin (3.21 pm)—My question is directed to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Will the minister please update the House on the domestic and international response to the policy determination regarding the importation of bananas from the Philippines?

Mr Burke—I thank the member for Page and acknowledge her strong engagement with the farmers in her electorate, including the banana growers in Page. On 3 March the Director of Quarantine issued a new determination on the importation of bananas from the Philippines. This determination had been reviewed by the Eminent Scientists Group and the independent Import
Risk Analysis Appeals Panel. The strict rules involve registration of low-risk plantations, disinfection and fungicide spraying and audit and verification by Australian inspectors, the cost of which will be paid for by the Philippines. I note the strong representations made by the Queensland Premier, Anna Bligh, on behalf of growers, both to me and directly to the Prime Minister as well.

Honourable members should be aware of the furious response that this has received from the Philippines. Filipino growers have been extraordinarily angry at this decision, on the basis that they believe these rules will actually prevent Filipino bananas from being able to enter Australia. I quote from the Manila Standard, where the head of the Bureau of Plant Industry made the comment that these restrictions were ‘very stringent, expensive and trade restrictive’. In the same way, the agricultural undersecretary has made the comment that ‘if the conditions are that strict, no industry can profit through exports’.

But it has not only been the international reaction. There was also the reaction that appeared in the Coffs Coast Advocate yesterday, where the Leader of the Nationals, on a visit to Coffs Harbour, made these comments:

I’m staggered the Government has decided to import … I always held the view that the bananas would never be allowed into the country. The reason that was so surprising was that it was not the first time he has gone to Coffs Harbour to make a comment on bananas. On 3 July 2000, the Leader of the Nationals—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr BURKE—And they say, ‘Why nine years ago?’ I will tell you why—because nine years ago he, as Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, initiated the import risk assessment on bananas for importation from the Philippines. He released the media release from Coffs Harbour—the same place—where he said:

As is the usual practice, the banana IRA will be conducted … allowing a careful scientific assessment of the quarantine risks as well as opportunities for widespread consultation with all stakeholders.

But that was not enough. Two years later, as minister for agriculture, he again made the comment:

Neither threats of trade retaliation by the Philippines or publicity campaigns by the Australian industry will be taken into account in the decision.

What is more, Biosecurity Australia, as an entity, was instituted and the legislation went through while he was the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. I table the media releases. As far as the process which has led to this is concerned, the Leader of the National Party designed it, initiated it and defended it. And yet today he is wandering around saying, ‘Oh, I wonder how this happened.’ Only in the National Party would you find a leader who actually wants you to believe that he was asleep at the wheel, because at least that is less embarrassing than the truth. Current indications are that no Filipino bananas are likely to come into Australia, but, if any were to come here, they may as well carry the label ‘Grown in the Philippines, brought to you by the Queensland National Party’.

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

AUDITOR-GENERAL’S REPORTS
Report No. 24 of 2008-09

The SPEAKER (3.26 pm)—I present the Auditor-General’s Audit report No. 24 of 2008-09 entitled The administration of contracting arrangements in relation to government advertising to November 2007—Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet; Department of Finance and Deregula-
tion; Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; Department of Health and Ageing; Attorney-General’s Department.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

DOCUMENTS

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.26 pm)—Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings, and I move:

That the House take note of the following document:

Debate (on motion by Mr Pyne) adjourned.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Australia-Korea Free Trade Agreement

Mr CREAN (Hotham—Minister for Trade) (3.27 pm)—It is my pleasure to announce to the House that the government has decided to launch negotiations on a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) with the Republic of Korea. This announcement follows the Prime Minister’s visit to Seoul in August last year, where he agreed with the President of the Republic of Korea, Lee Myung-bak, that Australia and Korea would hold preparatory talks to explore the possibility of entering FTA negotiations.

That visit and announcement, in turn, followed the release of a joint non-government FTA feasibility study in April last year that concluded that a free trade agreement between Australia and Korea that liberalised substantially all barriers to trade and investment offered significant opportunities to further strengthen our highly complementary and growing bilateral trade and investment relationship, and deliver gains to both countries through closer economic integration.

Economic modelling undertaken for the joint study established that a comprehensive FTA covering goods and services trade and investment would increase the present value of real GDP of Australia by US$22.7 billion and of Korea by US$29.6 billion over the period 2007-20.

Following the completion of two rounds of official-level preparatory talks in December last year, last week on 5 March, the Prime Minister and President Lee—while he visited this country—announced that the two countries had agreed to launch FTA negotiations. On the same day, I met my Korean counterpart, Minister Kim Jong-hoon, and we have agreed to hold the first formal round of negotiations in May.

This is a welcome development for the government, for Australian business and for the wider Australian community.

The Republic of Korea is the world’s 14th largest economy. It is Australia’s fourth largest export market, our sixth largest overall trading partner, and a growing partner for investment in both directions. Moreover, Korea is a valued regional partner with which we are expanding our broader relationship. I note here the joint statement on enhanced global and security cooperation made by the Prime Minister and President Lee on 5 March. Korea is also our third largest source of overseas students, after China and India, and tourism links between Australia and Korea are strong. Both these areas point to the good health of our people-to-people exchanges. Closer economic integration with Korea, the only one of our top four export markets with which Australia has not yet commenced or concluded FTA negotiations, promises to deliver further gains for Australian exporters, investors, consumers and the economy as a whole.
An FTA will enable Australia to protect and enhance the position of Australian business in this market, particularly in the face of trade preferences that Korea is gradually extending to our major competitors. This sentiment was a common feature of the submissions received by the government to date. An FTA will help protect Australia’s competitive advantages in this important market. It has particular importance for Australian resources and agricultural producers, including the beef industry. It will also improve opportunities for services exporters, including the financial, educational and legal sectors, and an agreement would also enhance the position of Australian investors in the Korean market. An FTA also provides a means to strengthen institutional arrangements in each country and provide a strong base for building flexible and productive commercial relationships supportive of further trade and investment. Negotiating and concluding an FTA with Korea is an important initiative which reflects the strength of the bilateral relationship and sets our two countries on a course towards even closer relations.

I have spoken before about the importance of trade to this nation. This agreement with Korea to launch negotiations comes as we continue to push for a conclusion to the Doha Round, and the G20 meeting in London next month is an important component of that push. We have also just signed, the weekend before last, the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand FTA. These are all important platforms upon which we continue the case for further liberalisation bilaterally with our sixth largest trading partner. Doha will be a matter of priority for G20 leaders when they gather in London early next month, and Australia is committed to ensuring that the conclusion of the round is firmly on the G20 agenda.

While there are obviously issues in the Doha negotiations on which we have yet to secure consensus, in relative terms Doha is low-hanging fruit in our response to the global economic crisis. We now need to harvest that fruit. That is why we continue to push to give substance to the Washington G20 leaders’ instructions that ministers should meet to finalise the Doha modalities. In practical terms, this means that we need to pick up from where we left off in these negotiations and that we do not seek to retrace past steps, so that we are able to make Doha a part of the equation in our response to the crisis.

The government’s commitment to the primacy of the multilateral trading system is well established. Australia believes the multilateral trading system developed through the WTO is vital to global prosperity. This rules-based system has provided certainty and security to trade and has helped build global economic cooperation. A successful conclusion to the Doha Round would counter a slide towards protectionism and would help stimulate economic confidence in the current economic climate. It would also help promote sustainable economic development and reinforce confidence in, and reliance on, the multilateral trading system.

Since the 1950s world trade has grown three times as fast as world output. Each successful multilateral trade round has provided a boost to world trade growth. So we need the stimulus that trade reform would bring and that the Doha Round would deliver—if we are able to conclude it. As Director-General of the WTO, Pascal Lamy, noted whilst he was visiting this country last week: by removing over US$150 billion in tariffs, Doha would provide a significant boost to global demand and consumption.

Given the extent of the downturn, more than ever the world economy needs the confidence boost that a breakthrough on Doha would bring; and this has been, and remains,
our priority. Boosting trade reform does more than stimulate economic activity; it is also the best insurance policy against protectionism. Concluding Doha will provide more insurance against protectionism through new disciplines on tariffs and subsidies.

A report released by the International Food Policy Research Institute in December showed starkly the costs of failing to conclude the Doha Round—based on what is on the table—if countries were to revert to protectionist measures. The report estimated that the opportunity cost of not concluding the round would be a drop in world trade of US$336 billion. It also assessed that a worldwide resort to protectionism could contract world trade by US$728 billion. In other words, aggregating those two figures, a failure to conclude the round could see the globe being US$1 trillion worse off.

It is also interesting that a report released over the weekend by the World Bank also dramatically demonstrated the potential impact of falling global demand on world trade. The report found that world trade is on track to register its first decline in trade volumes since 1982—the largest decline in 80 years. This emphasises the point that just as world trade is a multiple of growth when the world is growing, it also declines dramatically when the world moves into recession. So, more than ever, we need to engage with our major trading partners to do everything we can to support trade, particularly in our region.

I reported last August on the conclusion of negotiations for a region-wide ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement. A lot has happened on the global stage since then. We understood the timeliness of acting to conclude an agreement with ASEAN and the need to use the ASEAN agreement as a platform for further liberalisation. The weekend before last, I joined with trade ministers in Thailand from the 10 countries of ASEAN and New Zealand’s trade minister to sign this historic free trade agreement. This free trade agreement was a milestone in our regional economic integration. ASEAN, as a group, is our single largest trading partner, with total trade worth more than A$80 billion. It will deliver new opportunities across the board for Australian exporters, with the potential for new high-value, ongoing jobs here in Australia.

The ASEAN trade agreement is also significant in light of our agreement to start negotiating an FTA with Korea, because both of us, Australia and Korea, have now concluded plurilateral agreements with ASEAN. Extending the principles of openness to bilateral trade arrangements will culminate in freer flows of trade and investment for our respective business communities. Pursuing high-quality, WTO-consistent FTAs is one such way we can play our part in supporting growth, jobs and livelihoods at home and abroad. This government does not take the benefits of trade for granted. Securing trade deals that improve the lot of Australian business and the Australian community takes hard work. This initiative will help strengthen Australia to sustain its economic future, which is particularly pertinent given the current global economic uncertainty.

I note that our ASEAN partners have also made important commitments to maintaining open trade flows—as evidenced by the recent affirmation of ASEAN leaders to stand firm against protectionism. The commitment of ASEAN leaders to multilateralise the Chiang Mai initiative is another welcome demonstration of a regional response to a global problem. Once implemented, it will boost confidence within the region in governments’ capacities to more effectively manage short-term shocks.
The Rudd government has emphasised the importance of reviving Australia’s regional influence as an active but independent regional ‘middle power’ helping to shape multilateralism in the Asia-Pacific region. As a like-minded partner in the region, Korea is a natural partner for Australia in pursuing many of our regional and global objectives. For Australia and Korea, two important trading nations in the Asia-Pacific region, and two founding members of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, commencing FTA negotiations at this time signals to the world our shared practical commitment to trade and economic liberalisation.

A commitment to transparent and inclusive trade policies was a core part of our election platform. Our open, consultative approach to the study which preceded this announcement and the decision to enter into these negotiations honours that commitment. We have ensured that we have provided extensive opportunities for public input from all segments of the Australian community on this proposed initiative. In early December, the government called for public submissions from stakeholders on their interests or concerns regarding an FTA with Korea. More than 40 submissions have been received to date, including from companies, peak industry associations, non-government organisations, unions and individuals. Most of these submissions support the negotiation of an FTA with Korea.

The government also has commenced public consultations and will continue this in coming months, to ensure that a wide range of stakeholder views on the Australia-Korea FTA are heard. Already, the submissions received and consultations conducted have allowed us to hear from a wide range of stakeholders about their views on Australia’s possible participation. From the input received to date, the government assesses that stakeholders, on the whole, see an FTA with Korea as providing improved opportunities for trade and prosperity for Australia. This view is backed up by the Mortimer review of export policies and programs, commissioned by the government and released in September last year, which found that Australia should conclude an FTA with Korea in order to improve access to new markets.

Of course, negotiating an FTA also involves sensitivities on both sides. Managing such issues is a normal part of trade negotiations. As outlined in the document tabled with this statement, certain sectors of the economy have expressed a concern over the implications of an FTA with Korea. The government is well aware of these concerns and will continue with consultations on these sensitive areas throughout the negotiations. Taking into account this input, the government have formed the view that we should proceed to negotiations. In deciding this, one priority of the government will be to maintain and build on existing standards in our current free trade agreements, while retaining the flexibilities that we regard as important from those agreements.

I now table a document which, together with this statement, outlines the views we have heard as part of the consultation process. Taking these views into account, the government’s priorities include our desire to:

- promote trade and investment flows with Korea;
- ensure that an FTA with Korea provides a platform for comprehensive and commercially-meaningful liberalisation across goods, services and investment;
- substantially improve trade and economic integration with Korea;
- set the scene for a new phase of development in the commercial and broader bilateral relationship; and
strengthen WTO rules and contribute to trade liberalisation in the WTO.

I note that some submitting parties have requested that their submissions not be made public. While the government can see significant opportunities from an FTA with Korea, we also are aware of the need to retain domestic policy flexibility in a range of areas. In the lead-up to the first negotiating round and also following the commencement of the substantive negotiations, we will consult further with stakeholders to assist in developing Australia’s approach to the negotiations. Of course, we continue to welcome further input into the FTA negotiating process—indeed, we encourage this input, as it assists us in properly developing our negotiating positions.

As part of the government’s commitment to transparency, we have indicated to all those who have made written submissions that, should they agree, their submission will be made public today on my department’s internet site. This is just one aspect of the government’s ongoing commitment to inclusiveness and transparency. As the negotiations get underway the government will continue to consult broadly and communicate regularly with stakeholders on development of the Australia-Korea FTA.

I ask leave of the House to move a motion to enable the Leader of the Nationals to speak for 19½ minutes.

Leave granted.

Mr CREAN—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the Leader of the Nationals speaking for a period not exceeding 19½ minutes.

Question agreed to.

Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (3.47 pm)—I am happy to respond to the statement by the Minister for Trade and welcome the announcement that the next stage of negotiations for a free trade agreement between Australia and Korea has begun. I hope that these negotiations will lead to a high-quality and comprehensive free trade agreement between Australia and Korea. The minister was right to refer to the fact that Korea is perhaps the most significant of our trading partners with which we do not have a free trade agreement or FTA negotiations—although, of course, a lot more work needs to be undertaken in relation to our negotiations with China before there is anything resembling a satisfactory trade agreement between our No. 1 trading partner and Australia. There is a lot more work to be done, but it is important that we are talking with Korea, and the minister’s announcement today fills that gap.

There is a high degree of bipartisanship in relation to trade issues, and I think that helps to smooth the passing of the baton from one government to another when it happens—although I do note that there was no recognition made in the minister’s statement about the role of the previous government in getting these discussions to this point. In fact, most of the supporting documents that have been provided tend to suggest that history only began upon the election of the Rudd Labor government. So, in the interests of completeness, let me acknowledge that perhaps the first important step that was made in relation to the negotiation for a free trade agreement between Australia and South Korea occurred when President Roh visited Australia in 2006 and, with Prime Minister Howard, announced that we would commence a non-government joint study to look at the possibility of a free trade agreement. I made a number of announcements on that day about the details of those negotiations. A Melbourne based trade consultancy, ITS Global, was chosen to conduct the FTA feasibility study, and a year later it concluded...
that there would be significant gains to both countries if we were able to negotiate such an agreement.

As the Minister for Trade said, an agreement could carry enormous potential gains for Australian exporters and the wider community—perhaps an increase of as much as $23 billion in our GDP by 2020. In particular, it is important to note that Korea is our sixth largest trading partner and our third largest export market. Because of those factors, it is important that we have a mature and well-developed trade relationship underpinned by an appropriate FTA.

These negotiations became particularly urgent following the completion of negotiations for a Korea-US free trade agreement in 2007. The Centre for International Economics found in a study prepared for the National Farmers Federation that, if ratified, the US-Korea FTA could cost Australian agriculture $1.2 billion of output by 2030, with our beef industry the hardest hit. The US-Korea free trade agreement would provide the potential for favoured access to US products into Korea, and for Australia not to have some kind of equal access would inevitably have significant implications for our exports. Of course, we now know that not as much progress has been made with the US-Korea free trade agreement as might have been expected at the time that it was announced. Indeed, President Obama has made a number of very negative comments about the future of that agreement. That surprises me, I have to say, because I thought it provided a pretty good deal for the Americans and provided quite a number of leads as to what we might be looking for in an agreement between Australia and Korea. Whilst the agreement between the US and Korea is, at best, in a state of limbo in the US political processes at present, it is important that we play catch-up and that we get to a position where we might be able to negotiate and sign an agreement with Korea, hopefully in a similar time frame to that which might be achieved by the United States.

The minister has rightly spoken about the potential benefits, and I will not repeat his words. But I think it is important that we talk about the way these negotiations should be conducted. Firstly, it is absolutely important that everything be on the table at the beginning. The previous government insisted, in the negotiations with China and Japan and in other agreements, that nothing be pushed aside before the discussions began. This was a sensitive issue with Korea, and I note that there has been no particular assurance in the minister’s statement that everything will in fact be on the table at the beginning of these negotiations. Of particular interest is the question of agriculture. Agriculture is a sensitive issue, and the minister rightly attested to the fact that there are sensitivities on both sides, but it would be completely unacceptable to Australia if these negotiations were to begin with a significant sector of our exports excluded from the discussions. Whether that were done officially or just by way of a nod on the side, it would be an unacceptable beginning. There will be some difficult issues to be addressed, but an outcome that did not address some of the barriers to agricultural exports into Korea would be an unsatisfactory one.

I notice that in the documents tabled by the minister, which refer to some of the views expressed about an Australia-Korea free trade agreement, there is the statement:

Several submissions contributed by some peak industry organisations suggested that an FTA would be useful in addressing Korea’s high tariffs on beef, pig meat, dairy products, sugar, horticultural products, wine, seafood, wheat and barley. I think that basically summarises everything that can be said on the importance of dealing with these sorts of issues in this context.
When in opposition, the minister and the Labor Party criticised the coalition for pursuing bilateral trade agreements while at the same time pursuing global reform in discussions such as the Doha Round. I am pleased to see that, now in office, they have recognised that it is possible to do both at the same time. The progress on Doha seems to get slower and slower, and I think that increases our capacity to deliver some trade advances through bilateral agreements. Therefore we have, in opposition, been supportive of initiatives to continue and conclude negotiations such as those with Chile and as part of the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand FTA and to commence negotiations with Korea. These bilateral agreements can be advances and building blocks toward developing wider multilateral trade outcomes. I think it is fair to say that the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand FTA probably would not have been possible had there not been such a large number of bilaterals upon which it could be built.

The minister made a number of comments about the ASEAN free trade agreement and I also will make a number of comments. I know it is always easier to be in opposition than it is to be in government when you are negotiating these agreements, but I am reminded of the Minister for Trade’s constant criticism of the free trade agreements negotiated by the previous government when he was shadow spokesman for trade. His comments were often quite vociferous. Now that he has actually signed his own trade agreements, he has opened himself up for criticism on the same score. The ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement obviously does provide some considerable advances, but it is a long way short of the standards that the Minister for Trade, when he was in opposition, set for the previous government.

Under the agreement that has been signed by the government, by 2010 Australia will have moved 96.4 per cent of its tariff rates to zero—up from 46.7 per cent. That is way beyond what is being asked of any other country. Even New Zealand only gets to 84.7 per cent by 2010. Three countries will have moved five per cent or less to zero by 2010. There are a whole range of products that simply have been excluded from tariff concessions by a number of our partners in this agreement. Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines have excluded rice. Indonesia and Malaysia have excluded wine. Vietnam has excluded 41 items under the minerals section. With regard to motor vehicles—this was, of course, the big sticking point—and TCF, significant barriers remain in place. When we get to some of the other key areas, the outcome has been particularly disappointing. Access for exports of mandarines to Indonesia was one of the highest priorities identified by the horticulture sector, and that has been the case for several years. What has happened in relation to mandarines as a result of this deal? Absolutely nothing will happen until 2025 or potentially 2028, when the tariff on mandarines into Indonesia will be lowered from 25 per cent to 18.75 per cent. So nothing at all happens until 2025, maybe 2028, and then there will be only a 6¼ per cent reduction in the tariff. That is a very disappointing outcome.

I now turn to one of the minister’s favourite areas for comment when he was the shadow minister: sugar. I will quote to the minister, who is in the chamber, his comments in March 2005, when he condemned the coalition for the fact that there were no sugar concessions in the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement. ‘We can’t allow that sort of thing to happen,’ he said, four years ago. In May, when he signed the Australia-Chile Free Trade Agreement, he said: ‘Unlike the previous government, we are not selling out
Australian agriculture to pursue an FTA at any cost. The last government was prepared to exclude sugar from the Australia-US FTA and to agree to long phase-ins for access improvements in beef and dairy. Well, that is exactly what we have in the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement.

Several countries have made no concessions whatsoever in relation to sugar. Others have delayed what they are proposing to do for decades—huge phase-ins or, in some cases, absolutely no phase-in at all. This is not an unimportant sugar market. We sell a third of our sugar to these areas and there will be no relaxation in the tariff barriers on sugar. I have some sympathy with the minister—I know how hard it is—but I repeat to him his own words on this occasion and say that he has failed his own test about what should have been achieved in relation to this issue.

I also comment about the rules of origin in the ASEAN-Australian-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement, which break new ground. Exporters are actually going to be able to choose which test they want to apply in relation to rules of origin—they can choose a regional value content or a change of tariff classification content. I think this is the first time that this kind of choice has been available.

That, of course, would be great for the ASEAN countries, but it would not be so good for Australia, because it will mean that goods will only have had to have passed through those countries and had a minor transformation to change their tariff, if that is the easiest test, or to pass the value test, if that is the easiest test, and the goods will be treated as though they come from that country even though the majority of the input may have come from another place. This is a significant relaxation in the arrangements, which is not likely to advantage Australian industry.

I also comment about other double standards in this agreement. All Australian tariffs on agriculture—the whole lot of them—are to be reduced to zero immediately. Immediately! This is unilateral disarmament. No other country apart from Singapore is doing that—Singapore is already doing it, but there is no agriculture there anyhow.

But, when it comes to some of the government’s pet industries like TCF and cars and the like, we have a tit-for-tat arrangement—you give up a bit; we give up a bit. In a decade’s time—and in some countries, never—there will be some reductions in tariff in those ranges of manufactured goods. So we have a double standard in relation to the treatment of agricultural products with the treatment of manufactured goods. When you come to some of the other areas where changes are being made, the papers acknowledge that this new agreement actually delivers slower progress than what was actually achieved under the Australia-Thailand Free Trade Agreement for our arrangements with Thailand. Under the old Australia-Thai agreement, we got faster tariff reductions in some areas than we do under this new agreement in our dealings with Thailand.

Whilst I believe that it is worthwhile doing agreements of this nature, I think it is important to keep them in balance. Naturally, when the government announce a new agreement, they highlight the successes and the achievements, but I point out that there are also a lot of disappointments in this agreement. In the agricultural sector, particularly, there will be alarm at how little progress has been made in some of the key areas that were so important to that sector.

I want to make a final point—and I would not have raised this had it not been for the fact that the minister for agriculture made
some very provocative comments today about the import of bananas from the Philippines. I remind the minister for agriculture that, when the Philippines lodged an application to import bananas, it was naturally dealt with under the processes that were put in place, and the previous government never allowed bananas into this country. The science always said no. Now, curiously in the middle of negotiations for a new free trade agreement between ASEAN, Australia and New Zealand, the science has changed and suddenly it is okay to allow bananas in from the Philippines.

There is a whiff of odour about the way in which all of this has happened. I know there are conditions attached, but the reality is that the minister is completely wrong to suggest that somehow or other the previous government put in place mechanisms that were going to allow bananas into the country. In all our time—eight years—that the application was toing and froing between Australia and the Philippines, we never allowed bananas into this country under any conditions. This government, in the midst of new negotiations for a free trade agreement with ASEAN, has decided to allow Philippines bananas into this country. I am staggered by the decision; I find it quite incredible and I hope that they are not playing loose with Australia’s prized disease-free status. But they do really need to explain to banana farmers, and in fact to all Australians, why what was too great a risk in the past is now suddenly acceptable. This is causing serious concern in banana growing areas of Australia.

The final area that the minister referred to was the Doha Round. Obviously there is widespread disappointment at the lack of progress that is being made with the Doha Round. The talks broke up late last year, and they are obviously in deep trouble. They broke up in disarray and with a fair degree of ill will. I am disappointed that there could not be a good outcome, but I have been disturbed about the developments in the Doha Round for quite some time, because the loss of ambition has meant that there is so little left on the table that people will be starting to wonder if this deal is even worth doing. I noticed that this question was put to Pascal Lamy—when he was in Australia during the last few days—very eloquently, I thought, by one of the delegates at the outlook conference, when he said that all that was left on the table was a ‘lamb chop’. Mr Lamy’s response to that was: ‘Oh no, there’s much more than that. What it will do is stop backsliding.’ Those were virtually the comments of the minister as well—that, if we do not have Doha Round, the tariffs and the barriers might get even worse.

We have reached the stage now where there are very few advances left in the Doha Round, but there is the need to avoid slippage. I have heard the bit about the $150 billion worth of tariffs that might go, but that is water—they are empty tariffs; they are not applied tariffs. They are not tariffs that are actually being applied at the present time. I acknowledge that there is potential in some cases for those tariffs to be applied in the future, but they are not here at the present time. Unfortunately, there is little left on the table in relation to the Doha Round and that is very, very disappointing indeed.

There is a rise in protectionism—led in particular by the Europeans, with their dairy, and also by the US—and that is disturbing. We all need to fight against the rise of protectionism, even in difficult times. In fact, world recovery will slow, not speed up, if there is more protectionism. We need to remind certain Australian industries of that fact as well. We should not do trade deals that are bad deals just for the sake of getting our name on a piece of paper if they will not actually deliver better outcomes for Australia and our trading partners. I welcome the Aus-
tralia-Korea free trade agreement discussions. I hope they will remain ambitious and comprehensive, and that they will deliver an outcome that will benefit Australian industry and Australian consumers as rapidly as possible.

International Women’s Day

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Minister for Housing and Minister for the Status of Women) (4.07 pm)—International Women’s Day is an opportunity for women to celebrate and reflect on how far we have come, and how far we still have to go.

Around 100 years ago in this same House, Australia’s second Prime Minister, the Hon. Alfred Deakin MP, said:

This House testifies to the facts that after sixteen years’ experience of Woman Suffrage in various parts of Australasia and nine years’ experience in the Commonwealth, the reform has justified the hopes of its supporters.

As foreseen by its advocates, its effects have been:

1. To gradually educate women to a sense of their responsibility in public affairs.
2. To give more prominence to social and domestic legislation.

Australasian experience convinces this House that to adopt Woman Suffrage is simply to apply to the political sphere that principle of Government that secures the best results in the domestic sphere, the mutual co-operation of men and women for the individual and general welfare.

In those 100 years, the ‘mutual cooperation of men and women for the individual and general welfare’ has seen great advances in Australia, and we should be justifiably proud.

Since taking office in December 2007, the Australian government has been working hard to improve and enrich the lives of women and to support them to participate equally in all aspects of Australian life. While many women are doing well and enjoying the benefits of the enormous effort over the generations by many inspirational women in Australia and around the world, it is clear that some challenges remain. With my Office for Women, I have developed an ambitious work plan. Our agenda is modern and responds to the challenges that women of today are grappling with. The government is pursuing three key priority areas for advancing gender equality:

- improving women’s economic outcomes and financial independence;
- ensuring women’s voices are heard at all levels of decision-making; and
- reducing violence against women.

I also believe it is time to engage men on these priorities—because gender equality is the whole community’s responsibility.

Economic outcomes

The government has a strong commitment to improve economic outcomes for women. Women still earn considerably less than men over their lifetimes. They earn 84c for every dollar men earn. By the time women and men graduate from university, women are already faring less well than men, and this disadvantage widens over the life course. Women in Australia are responsible for 65 per cent of unpaid work while also steadily increasing their participation in paid work. We see too many women with too little superannuation and facing a tough outlook for their old age.

The government recognises its role in meeting this challenge and is responding. The government are working hard to deliver an industrial relations system that is fairer and more flexible for working people, including the right to request extra parental leave and flexible working conditions. We are improving the accessibility, affordability and quality of child care and have established an Office of Work and Family. The
government is considering the Productivity Commission’s final report on the merits of paid maternity, paternity and parental leave and better ways to support families in addition to the employer funded schemes to which nearly half of all working women already have access. The government are considering ways to strengthen women’s human rights and are looking at the recommendations of a parliamentary inquiry into the Sex Discrimination Act 1984, as well as conducting a consultation on the broader range of human rights.

**Women’s leadership**

The government is committed to supporting and promoting women’s leadership. I am pleased to inform the House that Australia has witnessed impressive milestones over the last year or so. Our highest public office, the position of Governor-General, is filled by a woman. Our Deputy Prime Minister is a woman, as is the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. Three out of our seven High Court justices are women. Almost one-third of parliamentarians in Australia are women, including seven federal government ministers.

While many Australian women have achieved high office individually, or success in their individual fields, we still face challenges. That is why the government works with women and women’s organisations to promote women’s leadership and equal place in society. The network of National Women’s Alliances consults with Australian women and provides informed advice to government on policy issues important to women.

I was pleased to announce on International Women’s Day at the Women’s World Cup cricket tournament that I am not only continuing a partnership between the Office for Women and the Australian Sports Commission to help produce future women leaders in sport but also increasing Office for Women funding to the Sports Leadership Grants for Women Program to $350,000 in 2009-10.

The Indigenous Women’s Leadership Program continues to be a successful program, and the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs has tasked a steering committee to oversee the establishment of a national Indigenous representative body, which will have strong representation of both Indigenous women and men.

**Leading internationally on gender equality**

Australia’s accession to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) came into force last week. Australia’s accession to the optional protocol sends a strong message that we are serious about promoting gender equality and that we are prepared to be judged by international human rights standards.

Last week I was privileged to lead Australia’s delegation to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and report to more than 190 countries on Australia’s progress on gender equality. I was honoured to share the stage with the United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, during the UN’s International Women’s Day event to inform member states of Australia’s work to reduce violence against women.

The government also supported June Oscar and Emily Carter, from Fitzroy Crossing in Western Australia, to show a documentary, *Yajilarra*, which is their inspiring story of reducing domestic violence, foetal alcohol syndrome and other alcohol related harm through the introduction of alcohol restrictions in their community.

I am grateful to the Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Elizabeth Broderick, and her staff, and to Australia’s Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Na-
tions, the Hon. Robert Hill, and his staff for their assistance in promoting a successful event that was very well received by Commission on the Status of Women delegates. The government is committed to practical support for the rights of women, including backing Indigenous women to take control of the problems caused by alcohol in their communities.

Australia’s reputation is boosted by our work at home and in our region to improve gender equality. Australia’s development assistance program recognises the importance of gender equality in achieving sustainable development. I was pleased to announce yesterday with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Stephen Smith, that Australia will provide more than $17 million to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). This funding over four years will support UNIFEM’s work in over 100 countries to reduce women’s poverty and exclusion; end violence against women; reverse the spread of HIV-AIDS among women and girls; and support women’s leadership in governance and post-conflict reconstruction.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs has also announced today that the government will change the family-planning guidelines for Australia’s overseas development assistance program to support the same range of family-planning services for women in developing countries as are supported for women in Australia, subject to the national laws of the relevant nation concerned.

Australia will also provide additional funding of up to $15 million over four years through UN agencies and NGOs for family-planning and reproductive health activities to help reduce maternal deaths. This is part of Australia’s commitment to advance the Millennium Development Goals and to improve child and maternal health. The United Nations estimates that improved family planning could save the lives of as many as 175,000 women each year. This issue was raised with me by many nations and United Nations aid agencies in New York last week and will be warmly welcomed by many of our neighbours.

**Violence against women**

Australia has made progress in addressing both domestic violence and sexual assault. We have improved support for survivors by:

- significantly increasing funding for emergency accommodation and public housing making it easier for victims of violence to leave home safely;
- supporting new programs which allow victims to remain safely in their home and remove perpetrators;
- encouraging police and judges to be sensitive to the experiences of victims of violence;
- providing counselling, including through emergency phone lines;
- improving legal and social supports for women who have been trafficked; and
- developing a tailored response for Indigenous women who are victims of family violence.

The Australian government believes we should pursue ongoing improvements in our efforts to combat violence against women. Around one in three Australian women experience domestic violence and one in five women experience sexual violence in their lifetimes.

Our key challenge is to change behaviour so fewer women experience domestic violence or sexual assault in the first place, and to offer better supports and legal responses when violence does occur. That is why, in May 2008, I formed a National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and their
Children. I asked them to develop an ambitious 12-year national plan to reduce domestic violence and sexual assault, which I expect to receive soon.

As I explained at the Commission on the Status of Women, Australia has managed to substantially reduce road deaths from drink-driving in recent decades because we have taken a well-researched, methodical, long-term public health approach. We educate drivers about the dangers; we use our laws to prevent drink-driving; and, when we catch someone drinking and driving, we expect to penalise them with the full force of the law. It is this same methodical, multipronged approach we must take in combating violence.

The Prime Minister spoke to a White Ribbon Foundation dinner last year, saying:

From birth, it must be drilled into the conscious and the subconscious of all men that there are no circumstances – no circumstances – in which violence against women is acceptable. … … …

That on violence against women, we have simple, clear policy in two words: zero tolerance.

In the same historic speech, our Prime Minister also acknowledged that violence against women is a gender issue and men need to take responsibility in reducing violence against women and children. Our new approach focuses on working with men and boys, to change attitudes that condone violence and to change violent behaviour.

Conclusion

The Australian government is once again taking the lead and promoting gender equality. In the midst of tough economic times, it is important to continue our work on increasing all people’s life choices and removing the barriers that exist to full participation. Recovery from the global financial crisis relies on every citizen having the opportunity to contribute fully and equally to their society and economy. Greater equality economically and socially between men and women is good for us all. Women benefit from equality with better life opportunities, greater independence and higher incomes. But it is good for men too. Equal caring, for example, allows fathers to share more equally in the joy that parenthood brings. Most importantly greater gender equality strengthens us as a nation.

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

Leave granted.

Ms PLIBERSEK—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent Mrs Mirabella speaking in reply to the ministerial statement for a period not exceeding 12 minutes.

Question agreed to.

Mrs MIRABELLA (Indi) (4.20 pm)—I rise to respond to the statement by the Minister for the Status of Women on International Women’s Day. I am delighted to have the opportunity to join with the minister in acknowledging International Women’s Day, which of course was last Sunday, 8 March. Australian women do indeed have much of which they can be proud. They have certainly come a long way in the last 100 years. I take this opportunity to applaud the women who are still struggling today in various parts of our nation, within various communities, whether it be in Indigenous communities or in the workforce or in a multitude of other forums in which they are struggling to improve the lot of women generally. Often they are silent volunteers, working hard because of a passion that drives them.

We are all beneficiaries of the efforts of many women who have gone before us. At the same time, however, we should acknowledge that there are many women around the world who do not enjoy the same freedoms that we do. They are denied a proper education, they are not free to make their own de-
cisions, and the laws in their countries do not protect them from violence and abuse. Their position is quite literally worse than that of women in this country more than 100 years ago.

I do not doubt that the minister’s interest and passion in the area of gender equality are genuine, and I thank her for representing the interests of Australian women in such an august forum as the United Nations. But I think it would be a pretty safe bet that last Sunday most Australian women were too busy with their regular weekend activities, preparing for the working week ahead and/or spending time with family and friends to remember that it was International Women’s Day. It is likely an even safer bet that the last thing on their minds as they sat down to Sunday brunch was Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s statements and his crew in Canberra. But it is instructive on this occasion, when women’s issues are highlighted and women’s achievement celebrated, to take stock of exactly how the Rudd government has fared when it comes to delivering on their pre-election commitments to Australian women.

Looking at the big issues that have been nominated by the government, like paid maternity leave, prevention of violence against women and child care, it is safe to say that Labor’s record on these is a microcosm of their approach to government over the last 16 months. It is best summed up as committees, reports, task forces, delays, indecision and, unfortunately, disappointment. I would like to look more closely at some of the issues that the minister addressed at the UN in her speech in March and which she has again reiterated today in the parliament. She stated that Australia is pursuing three key priority areas for advancing gender equality. They are: improving women’s outcomes and financial independence; ensuring women’s voices are heard at all levels of decision making; and reducing violence against women. These three areas are of importance to women in their quest to close the gender gap, but, unfortunately, on closer examination it is quite clear that this Labor government does not leave much to cheer about.

Improving women’s economic outcomes and financial independence is in fact a critical and important objective, but economic outcomes and financial independence often start with the security of a job—whether it is that of the woman herself, her partner or the family on which she relies. The day the current government comes into this chamber and says that they have a real plan for jobs is the day they will have done something to assist women in their advancement to obtaining economic security and relieving them of some of those economic concerns.

The minister highlighted in her speech to the UN that Australia’s maternity payment is equivalent to about nine weeks of the minimum wage and assists with the extra costs incurred at the time of birth or adoption of a child. She spoke of it in glowing terms. I am disappointed, however, that she failed to acknowledge that this enlightened initiative was introduced by the Howard government, albeit under a different name. She also failed to acknowledge that some of her colleagues were not so supportive of such a scheme at the time. In fact, the member for Rankin said in the House on 23 May 2007 in relation to the baby bonus:

I cannot for the life of me understand how any government could come up with such a scheme. I am pleased, however, that the minister herself can and has publicly acknowledged the Howard government’s initiative in this area.

As to the government’s action on paid maternity leave, I am afraid that the news is not so good. The minister informed the UN of the Productivity Commission’s inquiry into a paid maternity leave scheme but failed to
inform UN members that, as reported in the Courier Mail on 23 February 2009:

Senior Ministers have been privately warning interest groups the $40 billion hole in the Government’s budget will make it too difficult to fund the proposed $450 million scheme in this May’s budget.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was talking tough in September last year when he said that it was time to ‘bite the bullet’ on paid maternity leave. At the same time, the Treasurer also said:

We’ve had 12 years of neglect on this, it’s time Australia bit the bullet on paid maternity leave. They seem to be biting bullets all the time but achieving nothing. Even Sharan Burrows said on the ACTU website last November:

The ACTU, unions and thousands of Australian families call on the Rudd Government to include the Productivity Commission’s proposed scheme in the 2009 Federal Budget as a matter of urgency.

Now it is a very different story from this self-styled champion of women. Just last week, as she sniffed the wind and saw that her Labor colleagues were furiously back-pedalling, the ACTU President was quoted in the media as saying:

If it needs to be phased in over a couple of years, that’s a discussion that can be had, but don’t make women wait.

So there is a bit of back-pedalling to support the changed federal Labor policy. Four months ago it was a matter of urgency and now it is fine for us to have a bit of a discussion.

But even Sharan Burrows would probably acknowledge—if only privately—that neither Kevin Rudd or Wayne Swan has made a tough decision since coming to office, and they are quick to blame others when it comes to failing to meet their election promises. Given December’s $10 billion cash splash and the $42 billion spending package announced last month, the coalition has every right to be sceptical of the Rudd government’s ability to deliver on its election commitment of paid maternity leave. With such poor economic management and the racking up of $200 billion debt, it does look increasingly likely that the Rudd government will walk away from its commitment to support families and blame everyone else but themselves. In fact, the Rudd government is so sensitive on this issue that it has gone into hiding and refused to publicly release the final report of the Productivity Commission, which was given to it last week. But did Minister Plibersek include these details in her address? No, she did not.

The minister also told the UN that the government was improving the quality, cost and availability of child care. But did she inform them of the current problems in the childcare industry? No, she did not. Did she inform them that while in opposition she and her colleagues screamed for vacancy data to be released so that those involved in the industry could strategically plan where centres are in critical shortage and where there is an oversupply? I very much doubt it, as the last time such information was released was in April 2007 under the previous government. It is now almost 16 months since the Rudd government came to office and it refuses to release such figures. And where do I even begin to start when it comes to the collapse of ABC Learning? Labor’s incompetence in handling this issue is legendary throughout the industry. People will tell you privately that they are too afraid to name themselves in the media and discuss it because they are afraid of the retribution that will inevitably follow. This has only added to the stress of families and working mothers and fathers around the nation.

Then there was Labor’s election promise to ‘end the dreaded double drop-off’ by building 260 new childcare centres in
schools and on public land across the country. What has happened so far? It has taken 16 months, but plans are now underway to build six of these centres. The federal government has budgeted $114 million to build a total of 38 centres over the next four years. The fate of the remaining 222 centres that Kevin Rudd firmly promised apparently rests with the states and territories in COAG, and we all know what a parlous position state Labor’s economic mismanagement has left the states in. Now federal Labor is passing the buck to the states.

Labor’s big promise of universal access to preschool for all four-year-olds has similarly been sent to COAG to be discussed by yet another task force and to be eventually implemented over four years. In the meantime, New South Wales parents are still paying exorbitant fees and the community preschool sector faces collapse due to funding pressures. But at least Labor has a task force in place!

A very interesting article in the Courier-Mail reports that the Rudd government is giving $252 million to the Bligh Queensland government, in the middle of an election campaign, to help fund the building of 240 new kindergartens around that state by 2014. Firstly, I make it clear that the coalition welcomes any initiative that genuinely benefits Australian children, particularly in the area of early childhood development and education. But we should be highly sceptical about an announcement in the middle of a state election campaign, to the tune of $252 million, when the Labor Party cannot come up with any funding for a paid parental leave scheme about which it has built such high expectations. Given that the federal government has, to date, been able to get no more than six of its 260 childcare centres which it promised off the ground, my hopes for the Queensland government building 240 kindergartens by 2014 are virtually non-existent.

I welcome the government’s promise of a national action plan to reduce violence against women and children, which was sent to a newly formed council. The council has been working hard, going around the country, consulting and genuinely working on what is hoped will be a practical national plan. It recently asked the government for an extension of the December 2008 deadline and it is due to report this month. That is fair enough.

But let us look at what Labor did in the meantime. They callously cancelled the highly effective ‘Violence against women—Australia says no’ public education campaign and they have put nothing in its place. So we have, effectively, had a 16-month vacuum when it comes to public education on violence against women. That is not good enough. I am sure that it is not something that the Minister for Housing included in her address to the UN and, given the collective $52 billion Labor have spent in recent months—

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Economy

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Mr Speaker has received a letter from the honourable Leader of the Opposition proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The failure of the Government to position the Australian economy for job creation.

I call upon those members who approve of the proposed discussion to rise in their places.

More than the number of members required by the standing orders having risen in their places—

Mr TURNBULL ( Wentworth—Leader of the Opposition) (4.33 pm)—The three top priorities of this government should be jobs,
jobs, jobs. That is the key priority today, as we get one bit of bad news after another. Only today we see the comment from Dun and Bradstreet:

Worst yet to come as economic outlook deteriorates—27 per cent of firms plan to cut back on staff.

From the ANZ we get, in a media release titled ‘Job advertisements plunge in February’:

- Job ads on the internet and in newspapers fell by 10.4% in February ... taking the annual fall to 39.8%.

The National Australia Bank’s monthly business survey, again, shows business conditions down another nine points in February. There is plenty of bad news about. There is plenty of bad news for Australian workers; there is plenty of bad news for those who care about jobs. But the people who care about jobs are not to be found on the government benches today. We asked a very simple question today. We asked the Deputy Prime Minister whether she would guarantee that her Fair Work Bill would not cut one job.

Mr Anthony Smith—Just one!

Mr TURNBULL—Just one. That is all we wanted to know, that it would not cut any jobs. She could not or would not answer the question. So we thought we would ask the Prime Minister to see whether he could do a little bit better, and he could not answer it, either. In fact, he gave a rather rambling answer—incoherent, even by his standards—in which he referred to the importance of redundancy payments. He seems to think that redundancy payments are a good substitute for a job.

The coalition believe that of course employees should be paid their entitlements. But we do not want people to be paid redundancy payments because they are losing their jobs; we want them to keep their jobs. We want them to be paid wages, bonuses and overtime in a growing economy. That is what we want. A nation full of recipients of redundancy payments is a nation that is heading down into a very grim place, and that seems to be where the Prime Minister is prepared to take us.

We have been accused by the Prime Minister of lacking a commitment to jobs. In an article I wrote in the Weekend Australian I described the Prime Minister as being ‘possessed with remarkable chutzpah’. ‘Chutzpah’ is a wonderful Yiddish word, which is best defined as the characteristic of a man who kills both his parents and then throws himself on the mercy of the court on the basis that he is an orphan. And the Prime Minister is right up there. In fact, a new definition of ‘chutzpah’ is a Prime Minister who accuses his opponents of not caring about jobs when those opponents, during their time in office, saw 2.2 million jobs created, saw unemployment at a 33-year low, inherited Labor unemployment of 8.4 per cent and, when they left office, had unemployment at 4.3 per cent. There is no government in our history that has created more jobs than the coalition did when they were in office over 11½ years.

The Prime Minister can lecture us on many things. We listen patiently, we suffer mightily with his tedious rantings and ravings, but the hypocrisy of his claims about unemployment are too much to bear. We are the party of jobs, we are the party with a track record of creating jobs. We have acted in government and now we seek to act in opposition to hold this government to account for the jobs it is not creating and the jobs it is imperilling.

The Fair Work Bill is being debated in the Senate today. This is the centrepiece of the government’s election platform, although there are substantial parts of it that go well
beyond their election platform. This is what they are so proud of. And yet, at a time when Australians are losing their jobs and the government are asked to guarantee that it will not cost jobs, they cannot answer the question. The only reasonable conclusion is this: they know that their Fair Work Bill will cost jobs. They know that they are trading off rewards to their union sponsors on the one hand against Australians’ jobs on the other. They are paying for greater union power with the jobs of Australians.

They have had the opportunity today, twice, to demonstrate that that is not right and to contradict us, and they cannot do it. They cannot do it because they know that they have sold Australian workers out. Australian workers have been abandoned by a government that do not care about jobs. They do not care about keeping Australians in work. When the Prime Minister is asked about jobs and employment, all he can do is waffle on about redundancy payments. The longer he stays as Prime Minister, sadly, the more redundancy payments will be made in this country.

We stand for jobs. We stand for promoting jobs, and we have a plan. One of the Prime Minister’s great techniques is to say that anybody who disagrees with him has nothing to offer. Again and again—we have to put up with it every day in parliament—he says, ‘The opposition just want to sit there and do nothing,’ and he relates his plan, and then he says, ‘And the alternative is to do nothing.’ That is so dishonest. Even Kerry O’Brien took him to task about it. It was too much for Kerry O’Brien to stomach, and that is saying something. The reality is that we have proposed policies which will create jobs. There is an enormous amount of economic evidence, both from Australia and from overseas, including from key economists like Christina Romer, who sits at the very heart of President Obama’s economic policy, that permanent tax cuts provide a much greater stimulus to economic activity and jobs than do one-off cash handouts.

The government say that we supported the cash handout in December, and we did: we voted for it. But we did not say it would be an effective economic stimulus. We said we hoped they had got their advice right from Treasury; we hoped that it was going to work. We wished them well. We said we would see what it developed, what it produced, and we pointed in December, when the evidence came in from the United States, to the poor results from the cash handout in the US. We pointed to that and said: ‘Perhaps this will happen in Australia. Time will tell.’ Well, time did tell, and what it told was that, however meritorious the payments in December may have been as payments because they went to pensioners for whom we were arguing an increase in the single age pension and because they went to families, the fact is that they did not produce the effective economic stimulus that the government promised.

What is remarkable is that the ineffectiveness of those payments as an economic stimulus was almost identical to the experience in the United States. Eighty per cent of the money handed out in the middle of last year in the US was saved; only 20 per cent was spent. And, as Professor John Taylor, who the government describes as a free-market extremist, has demonstrated—and it is just the statistics speaking for themselves—it caused a big bump upwards in household income and a very modest increase in household consumption or expenditure. That is exactly what we saw in the national accounts last week: a big rise in household income, a big lift in household savings and a very modest increase in household consumption—exactly the same pattern. Whether people have different views, we certainly supported the payments on their
merits as payments to people in need, but, whether those payments were meritorious or not as payments, the fact is that as an economic stimulus they failed.

Let us give the government some credit. We will cut them the slack they have never cut us—that is for sure. Let us say: ‘All right. You made a blue. It didn’t work out in December. You thought it was going to work out. The Treasury told you it would give a big economic lift. You relied on that and it didn’t work out.’ But then the question arises: why would you back up and make the same mistake again? That is the real issue. They spent $10 billion in December on a cash handout that produced no effective economic stimulus and that did not create one job. Again, we have said to the Prime Minister: ‘Tell us it created one job. Show us the job it created.’ He cannot answer that. So it created no jobs, and yet he backs up and does it again.

The Prime Minister is fond of plans. The shadow Treasurer today ran through a select number of the many plans. They all have a number of points. There are seven-point plans and nine-point plans and five-point plans. I can reveal today, now, a new three-point plan of the Prime Minister’s. The first point in his new three-point plan is that no economic hardship in Australia is ever the responsibility of Kevin Rudd. That is the first point in the plan. Everything is to be blamed on the global financial crisis. It does not matter what policies he enacts, and it does not matter how poorly managed his policies are; every adverse consequence in Australia is due to somebody else. Far from the buck stopping with him, he has tried to create himself as some sort of economic version of ‘Teflon Man’, on whom no responsibility can ever stick.

The second point in the Prime Minister’s new three-point plan is that history began in November 2007. I am surprised that he has not gone as far as Robespierre and tried to renumber the calendar so that we have BK, before Kevin, and AK, after Kevin. History began in November 2007 and therefore it follows that the relative strength of the Australian economy is due solely to the accession of the Rudd government and has nothing to do with the previous coalition government that paid off $96 billion of Labor debt, took the heavy burden of unfunded pension obligations off the shoulders of our children and grandchildren, ran big surpluses, put money at bank, reformed the financial system—nothing good today has got anything to do with the government that was there for the previous 11½ years.

The third point, the one I referred to a moment ago, is that there is no alternative to the Prime Minister’s plans on anything. If you do not agree with the Prime Minister then you support nothing. When he came up with his $42 billion plan, we proposed a measured response: tax cuts, demonstrated to be more economically effective than one-off cash handouts again and again, and most eloquently as seen in the national accounts; and a genuine incentive for investment in terms of doubling the rate of depreciation for investment in energy and water efficiency in the built environment. That is a measure that will not only have environmental benefits but will clearly create jobs in the here and now. That measure again has no counterpart on the government side. We support a well-planned, well-prioritised investment in schools instead of trying to spend $14½ billion dollars over 2½ years on primary school assembly halls and libraries, whether they want them or not. Even Michael Costa, the former New South Wales Labor Treasurer, had to concede it was impossible for the state governments to deliver that in a timely or efficient way. We propose to spend $3 bil-
—more effective, better targeted and capable of being delivered.

In addition to that, we recognise that the biggest employers are in small business. They are doing it the hardest. The Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy is sitting opposite me here and he said that the best proposal was to give small businesses a 30 per cent cut in depreciation if they buy new equipment. What happens if your cash flow is declining? What happens if you do not need any new equipment? A plainly superior measure is the one we proposed, which is to relieve small businesses for a period of two years of a portion of their superannuation guarantee contribution, to rebate it in fact at the expense of the Commonwealth, thereby putting more cash in their hands and thereby directly reducing the cost of employment.

So, whether it is on the basis of our record in government or whether it is on the basis of our policies proposed in opposition or the issues we are taking up with their Fair Work legislation in the Senate this week, we stand for jobs. Labor stand for unions, they stand for ideology, they are opposed to an economy which will have the vibrancy and the flexibility to create the jobs we need. (Time expired)

Dr EMERSON (Rankin—Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy and Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation) (4.48 pm)—The Leader of the Opposition declared that this MPI is all about jobs, jobs, jobs. The problem is that the only job the opposition leader is interested in is his own. Indeed, I refer to statements by coalition members. In this newspaper article the headline is ‘Costello wants the top job, say Liberal MPs’. That is the one job with which the coalition is concerned: the top job. I noticed during the speech that the member for Higgins did grace the parliament with his presence. I was looking at my colleagues here and they did not seem to be particularly taken by the opposition leader’s speech, but someone who was especially bored and could not stop yawning through that whole performance of the opposition leader was the opposition leader in waiting, the member for Higgins. He could not stop yawning, and the film footage will show that.

The decision by the opposition leader—that is, the present opposition leader—to oppose the Nation Building and Jobs Plan was taken not by him, not initially, but by the member for Higgins. We all remember the member for Higgins appearing on Lateline and just about every program he could appear on saying that the Nation Building and Jobs Plan constituted ‘a poor quality spend’. It was the setting of the terms of the debate on the coalition side by the leader in waiting, the member for Higgins, that led the opposition leader subsequently to oppose the Nation Building and Jobs Plan. Yet they have the hypocrisy to come in here and say that they are interested in jobs. Here is a $42 billion fiscal stimulus that they opposed, and in voting against that fiscal stimulus, the Nation Building and Jobs Plan, the coalition voted for higher unemployment. That is the truth of the matter. But they say they are interested in jobs.

Let us have a look at the impact of the first stimulus package. The first stimulus package, the Economic Security Strategy, was announced late last year. The coalition, led at the time on that by the present Leader of the Opposition, said: We support these measures and we are particularly pleased about the measure, the payment to pensioners.

He was asked:

What do you think of the housing measures?

He said:
Well, we support those. He also said at the same time:
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, that’s for certain.

Let me repeat that. This is the opposition leader saying that the Economic Security Strategy ‘will provide a stimulus to the economy, that’s for certain’.

What are they doing here today? They are criticising the Economic Security Strategy—the very strategy that at the time, on 14 October, the opposition leader said would provide an economic stimulus. And he was right. It did provide an economic stimulus. Let us look, for example, at the retail trade figures. In December, retail trade in Australia rose by 3.8 per cent. That was the biggest monthly increase since August 2000, when the economy was booming. That is a huge increase in retail sales. But what happened around the world? Retail sales fell in that same period, in December: in Canada by 5.4 per cent, in the United States by three per cent, in Japan by 1.9 per cent, in Germany by 0.9 per cent and in New Zealand by one per cent. They are the sorts of comparisons that are relevant—retail sales rising by 3.8 per cent here in Australia and at the same time falling in the advanced countries of the world outside of Australia.

You do not need to just concentrate on those figures. Let’s ask people who are in the retailing business what the Economic Security Strategy actually caused. Michael Luscombe, the CEO of Woolworths, when asked if he had seen evidence of the Economic Security Strategy payments being spent, said:

Yes … we saw it in the basic commodities and that’s been made pretty public. I would think there’s a little bit more legs in it, and there’s no doubt that the timing of the next one which is around March/April is probably about the right time for the next one to come on.

So that is the CEO of Woolworths. Tony Meer, Deutsche Bank Chief Economist, said retailers were ‘bolstered by the cash-bonus-inspired strength in sales’ and went on:

… they have responded in January by retaining higher than usual post-Christmas staff levels.

That means jobs! Katie Dean, ANZ Senior Economist, believes that the government’s stimulus package ‘had worked to retain jobs in January, in tandem with aggressive interest rate cuts’.

Michael Blythe, the CBA chief economist, said:

Policy is working in Australia. Lower interest rates and the first home owners grant have lifted housing activity, and the pick-up in retail sales suggests the government’s cash handouts have worked.

Sara Hoeing, the economist with the Commonwealth Bank, said:

If there were any doubts about the efficacy of government fiscal stimulus packages, and Australian consumers’ willingness to spend, the December retail sales report is a clear rebuttal. That is a clear rebuttal of what the opposition leader said here today—a clear rebuttal of the opposition leader’s claim that the Economic Security Strategy had not led to an increase in retail sales and had not led to an increase in jobs over that which otherwise would have occurred.

Greg Evans, of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said:

By and large we think (the first round of the fiscal stimulus package … was effective in making today’s numbers stronger than otherwise would have been.

I will finish with Saul Eslake, ANZ Chief Economist, who said:

The December quarter GDP figures would have been weaker than they were without the government spending.

So there are a whole range of economists and a whole range of retailers saying the
Economic Security Strategy worked. You had the opposition leader at one stage saying they supported it, that it would definitely provide a fiscal stimulus and that the opposition would not quibble about it. And what is he doing here today? Quibbling! He has changed his position yet again—yet again, at the behest of the member for Higgins, because it is the member for Higgins who is determining policy positions on the other side of the parliament. It is the member for Higgins who is the de facto leader of the opposition. That is the truth of the matter, and it is the opposition leader who is following the lead of the member for Higgins—the true Leader of the Opposition.

We hear the coalition talking about all the bad news of what has happened with jobs, and saying ‘Isn’t it terrible!’ You do not hear them talking about Woolworths, for example. Woolworths said, in a press release of 27 February, that it would create more than 7,000 jobs nationally in the second half of the financial year, while pointing out that the announcement follows the creation of 9,000 new jobs in the last half of the last financial year—that is a major retailer talking about the creation of jobs here in Australia. Aldi needs to hire 2,600 new employees. We have got Domino’s Pizza, who say they are on the hunt for 2,500 drivers. So let’s rejoice in some of the good news in otherwise challenging economic circumstances here in Australia, created by the financial crisis which descended into a global financial recession. This is the deepest recession—one described by the International Monetary Fund as long, deep and serious—and yet we have in Australia our retailers and our small businesses doing their very best against the wishes of the coalition, who just want to talk the place down. They say it is all about jobs. The truth is, it is only about their jobs.

I have here a list of small business organisations—and, mercifully, I will not go through all of them—who have supported the Nation Building and Jobs Plan and the Economic Security Strategy. Restaurant and Catering Industry Australia said:

The small business tax break, as part of that strategy, may be just what our small businesses need to convince them to buy that new piece of equipment in this market.

We just had the opposition leader saying that that tax break, worth $2.7 billion—a 30 per cent investment allowance—would not work because there is no cash flow. Wouldn’t you actually back the restaurant and catering people of Australia and not listen to the Leader of the Opposition? I would certainly back their views on this over those of the Leader of the Opposition. The Pharmacy Guild of Australia welcomes the tax break for small business that the Leader of the Opposition has just said here, again, that they think is a really bad idea. The National Farmers Federation describes the stimulus package as an ‘economic jump-start’—now there is a good rural analogy. But, no, not according to the Leader of the Opposition! We had the Master Builders Association Australia welcome the boost for the building industry. The New South Wales Business Chamber described it as ‘a shot in the arm for the New South Wales economy’. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia described it as a timely shot in the arm for small business. The Council of Small Business of Australia described it as a ‘confidence booster’ for small business. They are ringing endorsements of an Economic Security Strategy that is designed specifically to boost jobs and to protect jobs here in Australia, and all the evidence in relation to the Economic Security Strategy of late last year is that it has been very effective in its stated objectives.

It always worries me when you hear the coalition talking about superannuation. You
see, the opposition leader’s position, reiterated here again today, is that what should happen instead is that the government should pay some of the superannuation contributions of workers for a period. He said, at the outset, that it should be about half. Let’s just try to understand what he is really saying. It was Labor who introduced superannuation coverage for the working people of this country—it was the coalition who opposed it with every breath in their bodies. And, when we start talking of policy options to boost employment and to boost the position of small business, what does the opposition leader target? Superannuation! They are true to form—the leopard never changes its spots. These superannuation payments are part of the wage settlement with the working people of Australia, and they want to go after the superannuation and say, ‘Well, we will give a temporary bonus or a payment in relation to that.’ But the truth is that this a very sneaky way of getting stuck into superannuation for working people, which they have always wanted to do. And let’s look at the cost of it—it would cost $20 billion.

The coalition have said, ‘We can’t have $200 billion debt. Under us’—the coalition—’we will have $180 billion debt,’ because they said they would only have a fiscal stimulus package half the size of our $42 billion. But then they came up with this proposal, which is another $20 billion. You add that up and you get what? Two hundred billion dollars! It is the same position as ours. On the one hand they are saying: ‘Don’t do anything; sit and wait.’ Follow the advice of Professor John Taylor in the United States. Be the Dusty Springfield of Australian politics—sittin’ and a-hopin’ and a-wishin’ and a-prayin’. That is what they want. But on the other hand they are saying, ‘We’d have debt of $200 billion too.’ This is the pattern: he wants it each way; he occupies every possible position. An each-way better in a two-horse race—that is what Malcolm Turnbull is. That is what the Leader of the Opposition is: an each-way better in a two-horse race, so he can say later, ‘I picked the winner—I was for it, I was against it, I was for it, I was against it.’

There are plenty of examples of that. Even in relation to the very nature of the global financial crisis he said, ‘Kevin Rudd has hyped up this financial crisis.’ That was on 19 October last year. On 20 October, one day later, he said, ‘It is undoubtedly a very grave—the gravest—global financial crisis that we have seen since the Great Depression.’ Well, gee—something must have gone real bad overnight because the night before he said it was all hyped up by Kevin Rudd. The next day it is ‘the greatest financial crisis since the Great Depression’. There he is, each-way betting so he can say he got it right.

Here we go again: the opposition leader said, ‘There is nobody that would have predicted these events a year ago, or even a few months ago,’ and then he said, just shortly after: ‘Regrettably, Mr Rudd’s government missed the warning signs at the beginning of the year.’ One day, no-one could have predicted it; next day—’Oh, you missed the warning signs.’ He always occupies two positions on any issue.

Here we are today talking about jobs and, again, the coalition did not have it in them to bury Work Choices. I was on Sky News’s Agenda today with the shadow small business minister, and I said this: ‘Steve said earlier in the year that he would oppose any unfair dismissal laws for small businesses fully and totally and absolutely.’ Mr Ciobo said, ‘Craig is putting words into my mouth. I said nothing even remotely close to that.’ Well, let’s find out what he did say.

Mr Keenan interjecting—
Dr Emerson—‘Verballing’. Righto. This is a briefing to SmartCompany on 7 December 2007 and it says:
Ciobo says any attempt by Labor to cut down the 100 employee threshold for exemption from unfair dismissal laws will receive his “absolute and confirmed opposition”.
I reckon that is pretty absolute and pretty confirmed, and he says today: ‘I didn’t say anything like that. Craig Emerson’s putting words in my mouth.’

The truth is they never had the heart to bury Work Choices today because they were, they are and they always will be the party of Work Choices. By voting against the Nation Building and Jobs Plan, the coalition voted for higher unemployment, and that is the hypocrisy of this MPI today. The coalition’s positions are being driven by the not-so-retiring opposition-leader-in-waiting, the member for Higgins—the bored member for Higgins. That is why he is doing so much media. Having to endure the sort of speech that that he had to endure here today, no wonder he is bored. The temporary Leader of the Opposition is attempting to shore up his shaky position by pretending to be all things to all people in the coalition party room. It will not work. He is an opportunist. (Time expired)

Mr Keenan—The minister at the table interjects ‘supports’, but of course they cannot decide whether it is ‘create’ or ‘support’. It used to be ‘create’; now it is ‘support’. Of course, when it comes to the re-regulation of the labour market contained within the Fair Work Bill, the government’s analysis of what that is going to do to the employment market is completely and utterly absent. Indeed, the Prime Minister exempted his minister from having to provide a regulatory analysis as is required under his own legislation. There is a reason for this: the government understands that their changes are going to cost Australians jobs.

The new Fair Work Bill has taken Labor’s pre-election commitments and turned them into a policy that first of all goes beyond those commitments and, secondly, massively expands union rights and discourages employers from creating jobs. I just want to deal with the minister’s pre-election commitments and what has turned up in the Fair Work Bill, because they are two very different things. The minister will stand in this chamber and swear black and blue that the Fair Work Bill crisis. It is not our problem. We don’t have anything to do with it. People are going to lose their jobs, but it is all happening overseas.’

The global financial crisis cannot be used as an alibi for every job loss that has occurred in Australia and that will occur once Labor makes its industrial relations changes. Every time the government makes an announcement about a new policy it is accompanied by a cash splash. Any stimulus package is accompanied by a figure of the number of jobs they believe that this new policy will create. Apparently it is very easy for Treasury to look at what the government is doing and decide how many jobs that particular policy is going to create.

Mr Gray—Supports.

Mr Keenan—We had the amazing spectacle in question time in this House today of a Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations who is about to change the industrial relations system in this country but is unable to guarantee that this system will not destroy jobs. Similarly, the Prime Minister was asked if he will be able to guarantee if his industrial relations changes—the new Fair Work Bill—will not destroy the livelihoods of thousands of Australians. There was no answer, no guarantee. The government just shrug their shoulders and say, ‘Oh well, there is a global financial
is an accurate implementation of the Forward with Fairness policy. Of course that is complete and utter rubbish.

Let us look at union right of entry as perhaps the most grievous example. This is breached in the Fair Work Bill in two ways. Firstly, it allows union officials to have access to the records of non-union members and, secondly, it massively expands the rights of a union to enter a workplace for discussions. Prior to the election, the minister said on 28 August 2007:

We will make sure that current right of entry provisions stay. We understand that entering on the premises of an employer needs to happen in an orderly way. We will keep the right of entry provisions.

It cannot be clearer than that. On 28 May, after they won the election, the minister reaffirmed that: ‘We promise to retain the current right of entry framework and this promise will be kept.’

Within their own policy they explicitly said that there would be no changes to the existing right of entry provisions. In a speech to the Press Club on 7 November 2007—and this is without a doubt my personal favourite—the minister, when asked about proposed changes to the right of entry provisions, said, ‘If I could pledge to resign, if I could take a contract in blood, take a polygraph, give you my mother as a hostage—whatever you like—we will be delivering our policy as we outlined it.’ I am not sure where Ms Gillard Sr resides, but she should be awfully worried because her daughter has grievously breached the commitments that she gave to the people prior to the last election.

Union right of entry has been massively expanded in both the areas that I have pointed out. The records of non-union members can be accessed by union officials if they suspect a breach within a workplace. This totally disregards the rights of privacy that employees should have in regard to their own personal information. Employee records are something that are specific to them. They may contain deeply personal information such as medical records or disciplinary action that might have been taken against them. Employees should have a say over whether a union official can access those records.

In regard to the right of entry, a second aspect is the massively expanded access of unions to workplaces. The government promised that under Labor there would be no changes. Yet what we see within the bill is that union officials can enter a workplace under a massively expanded range of circumstances. Similarly, there are changes in the area of compulsory arbitration—something that was explicitly ruled out by Labor in the lead-up to the last election. Indeed, their policy said exactly that: that there would be no compulsory arbitration under Labor’s fair work proposals. Let us just have a look at what the minister said. On 30 May 2007, in a speech to the Press Club, she said that it was ‘completely untrue that Labor’s Fair Work Australia will re-empower union bosses and reintroduce compulsory arbitration’. She went on to say that under Labor’s policy ‘there will be no automatic arbitration of collective agreements’. She continued this insistence beyond the election, right up until about three weeks before this policy was announced and then, lo and behold, we find within the bill compulsory arbitration. Of course, it is just by another name.

Other concerns for the coalition about this bill are about those areas where it will cost Australians jobs—for example, on greenfields agreements. These are the agreements that you make when you are starting a new project. Under the existing arrangements, you can go ahead and make those agreements and you are not required to notify anyone before you do so. Under the Fair Work Bill, you are required to notify every possible union who could represent an
employee within that enterprise. So, if you think about the context of starting a mine in my home state of Western Australia, you might be required to notify the AMWU, the CFMEU and up to 10 separate unions or more. They are required to sign off on the employee arrangements before this new project can go ahead. If the workers in this new mine were covered, for instance, by the CFMEU, then in Western Australia you would need to go and get the agreement of Kevin Reynolds and Joe McDonald. They would need to sign off on those employee arrangements before that project could go ahead. If you were to look at that in the context of Victoria—let us say that you had a new building site and that you had electricians on that building site—you would then need to go to Dean Mighell and ask his permission before this new project could go ahead.

Similarly, the new provisions for transmission of business are blatantly anti jobs. Under the present arrangements, if a transmission of business occurs, the employment arrangements are required to be kept for 12 months afterwards. Under the new Fair Work Bill, those arrangements will need to be kept in perpetuity. They cannot possibly change under any circumstances. So if you were to go and purchase a business that is failing—it might be failing, for instance, because it has uncompetitive industrial arrangements—there would be nothing you could do to change that. So you would be faced with two options when you went into that business. You could accept that the existing arrangements were there and that they could not change—something that many businesses obviously would not be able to do if that business was underperforming—or alternatively you could just get rid of all the employees within that business. Why would you possibly do that within this climate? Why would you provide an incentive for employers to get rid of the workforce? Why would you blatantly have such an anti-jobs provision in the teeth of what are the most challenging economic circumstances that we have seen in this country for a generation?

I will move on to unfair dismissal, the sixth area in which the coalition has concerns about the government’s Fair Work Bill. I do not believe that anyone in the government understands what it is like to run a small business. I do not believe that they understand the pressures that small business people face. These changes to the unfair dismissal laws are a reflection of that. They do not understand how difficult it is for a small business to be called up and hauled before Fair Work Australia to have to answer for an unfair dismissal case. They do not understand that it is impossible for that business to find the time to do this, and that it certainly does not have the money to defend itself from these sorts of claims. So what will happen under the government’s new proposals is what has happened in the past: you will see go-away money because the small business does not have the capacity to defend itself from claims—some of which, of course, may be completely and utterly arbitrary.

This side of the House stands for jobs. The other side of the House has no understanding about what creates jobs. They have no understanding of what sustains jobs. That is very clear from the policies that they pursue—in particular, their changes to the industrial relations system. They have not shared with the Australian people the effect that those changes will have on employment. The minister and the Prime Minister cannot guarantee that it will not cost Australians jobs, and that is why we will move an amendment in the Senate to protect Australians from the spectre of unemployment.

Mr MARLES (Corio) (5.13 pm)—With the collapse of Lehman Brothers in Septem-
ber last year, we had crystallised the single biggest economic shock to the globe since the Second World War. It led the Leader of the Opposition to say that it was ‘undoubtedly a very grave, the gravest global financial crisis that we’ve seen since the Great Depression’. It was a very appropriate comment indeed. But then again it should not be surprising that the Leader of the Opposition would make such a comment, because the Leader of the Opposition has the unique capacity to make just about every comment possible on any issue with which he is confronted. In relation to the same phenomenon, he described it, I think, as ‘hype’. The Leader of the Opposition, a former barrister, absolutely knows how to argue a case and, if you give him an issue and you give him a few days, he will be able to argue every case possible in relation to it. He has the ability to defend and prosecute the same case within a matter of moments. But, on this occasion, the quote that he made in relation to the global economic crisis was perfectly correct.

The World Bank is now forecasting that the world will experience a shrinking in its economy for the first time since the Second World War. It is forecasting that world trade will record its biggest fall in 80 years. The Rudd government’s reaction to the global economic recession has been swift and decisive. In October last year we announced the $10.4 billion Economic Security Strategy package. In February this year we announced the $42 billion Nation Building and Jobs Plan package. This represents a plan which sees this government not just ahead of the game here but ahead of the game internationally. Indeed, the way in which this government has been dealing with the economic crisis has seen Australia become a leading economy in the world, performing better than almost any other economy.

During this time, what have we seen from those in the opposition? You might have expected that, during this grave crisis confronting the Australian people, we would have seen some bipartisanship on the other side, but not a word of it. Instead, we have seen flip-flopping, vacillating and a frenzy of position-changing, which has led to a complete lack of activity. We have seen a total absence of any plan from their side of the House. We see this in relation to the various stimulus packages. The opposition supported the government’s Economic Security Strategy in October last year, but since then they have been busily talking it down at every opportunity. And, of course, they opposed the Nation Building and Jobs Plan this year.

We saw that same form play out in industrial relations. At the beginning of this term of government, their first term in opposition, we saw a bitter fight amongst their ranks as to whether or not they should be supporting our industrial relations plan. At the end of the day they decided to support what the government plans to put through this parliament. But in the last few days we have seen them saying that they will move significant amendments to the government’s industrial relations legislation. So where that leaves them in relation to the whole package is anybody’s guess. Whilst there may appear to be confusion on the outside, we should be under no illusion that underneath, on the heart of every member on the opposition benches, you will find tattooed two words: Work Choices. There is absolutely no doubt what they believe in. The only question is how prepared they will be to publicly say that in the debates which ensue in the coming weeks.

We see the same thing in relation to climate change. Their benches are littered with climate change deniers, but the Leader of the Opposition has been a supporter of an emissions trading scheme. Then again, since the announcement of the white paper they have been busily running from electorate to elec-
torate all over Australia saying we should not have an emissions trading scheme yet—but the Leader of the Opposition says we should have a target to reduce greenhouse gases by 25 per cent by 2020. So their position on climate change is, again, anybody’s guess. From alcopops to whether or not this government ought to run a deficit in the next budget in the current economic climate, we see the opposition going from one place to another in terms of what they think they should do.

You would be forgiven for thinking that the way in which the opposition run things is with the spin-the-wheel school of public policy. I am sure if you go to the Leader of the Opposition’s office you will find one of those big wheels that you see on Wheel of Fortune. Every morning the Leader of the Opposition spins it. Whatever public policy line comes up, that is what he does on that day. Then the next morning he walks in and spins it again, and a different line comes up and that is what he says. Yet the apparent randomness of their position actually belies an underlying commitment and a steadfast direction which I will actually concede exists on their part.

If you want to draw a line in the opposition’s behaviour then look to the political opportunity. If you want to understand what they are about, do not ask about the public policy or what is good for the country, but ask about the politics of the situation and what is good for the Liberal Party. The Leader of the Opposition will sniff out a political opportunity, a media grab, a quick political point here or a cheap shot there. He will sniff all of that out with the focus of a truffle pig. All the while, public policy becomes completely incidental to what they are doing. In voting against the Nation Building and Jobs Plan, the opposition actually voted against jobs. By contrast, the Rudd government in this crisis has come up with a plan which is entirely focused on jobs, and we heard from the Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy about what we are doing.

Mr Ciobo—Name one job.

Mr MARLES—I will do that. In the electorate that I represent, in Geelong, we have a very large car industry. Through the $6.2 billion car industry plan we have seen an enormous change in the way in which the car industry in this country operates. Of that money, $1.3 billion is going to the Green Car Innovation Fund and $3.4 billion is going to a greener and better targeted Automotive Transformation Scheme. The plan led to an extraordinary announcement by Ford, one that I am sure the member for Moncrieff will be interested in. In July-August of 2007, after 11 to 12 long years of the Howard government, when the car industry was completely demoralised, we saw a decision made by Ford to close the engine plant in Geelong, with the consequent loss of hundreds of jobs. It was a decision which absolutely rocked our city. Yet within just a few days of this government announcing its car industry plan, within just a few days of Ford realising that they have a government which is willing to work with them, to have an activist industry policy and to invest in the industry they work in—and listen for it, because this is where it comes—Ford reversed their decision. They reversed their decision with a consequent saving of 1,300 jobs in my electorate: 400 direct and 900 indirect jobs which would have been lost if that engine plant had closed. I know those people. That is the result of an activist industry policy and a government which cares about jobs and changing people’s lives.

Doesn’t that stand in stark contrast to the way in which the Howard government, the now opposition, ran industry policy over those 11 or 12 years where we did not see
any industry policy to speak of? All we saw was flat-earth economics which went a long way towards creating an industrial desert in this country. It has been sprinkled with random acts of stupidity, such as those of Senator Michael Ronaldson, the Liberal duty senator for the area where I live, when he said that what the government ought to do is have only hybrid cars in its fleet. Forget the fact that we do not make hybrid cars in this country yet. That is a comment which, if acted upon, would mean that the government would not buy a single Australian made vehicle at all. How that would go in helping jobs in Geelong, how that would go in helping jobs in Australia, is anybody’s guess.

The Rudd government has a plan. The Rudd government, through the Economic Security Strategy and the Nation Building and Jobs Plan, has been investing in this economy in a way which sees jobs being created. The Rudd government has a plan for creating jobs in this country. It stands in stark contrast to the rolling circus of garbled quotes without any direction whatsoever which characterises the way in which the opposition has gone about its business in opposition. The Rudd government cares about jobs and it votes for them. The opposition cares about political opportunity, and that has only led it, at the end of the day, to vote against jobs. (Time expired)

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler) (5.23 pm)—It is a pleasure to follow the shadow minister for employment and workplace relations, the member for Stirling. I came in during a fatuous presentation from the government side. It is interesting that the government member talked about flat-earth economics. I will put one to him from his own lexicon. Let me ask you this: you proposed to spend $550 million on local projects for councils and they have to be finished by 30 September this year; so, pray tell, as you have not yet told the councils, which ones are being approved—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—The member for Hinkler will refer to the member by his seat. Otherwise, you are asking the Deputy Speaker, and I will not give you an answer.

Mr NEVILLE—I ask those many members through you, Mr Deputy Speaker: how are we going to finish all those projects by 30 September this year? Now that is flat-earth economics.

A government member interjecting—

Mr NEVILLE—Well, not many councils in my area know much about it. I come from the Wide Bay statistical region, which is made up of the electorates of Hinkler and Wide Bay. I take some pride in having worked on a lot of projects that got unemployment down in my area in the time I have been the member, especially under the Howard government. When we came to power, one month after we actually came into the parliament with the removal of the Keating government, unemployment in my area was 8.3 per cent. In the month before the Rudd government took office—you will recall they did not sit over the Christmas-New Year period; they sat in February—unemployment was sitting at 3.9 per cent. But it is moving up: 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.5 again and 4.8 in the last five months.

My Centrelink figures are interesting too. They came down to nearly one-third of what they were under Labor. The figure was 6,000 under Labor, down to 2,300 in the time that I was a member of the Howard government. But, since Labor came to power, the figure of 2,300 has now gone up to 2,800 on the Centrelink lists, and in Hervey Bay, the other part of my electorate, it has gone from 1,000 to 1,400. In the face of those sorts of figures, how you can honestly look this parliament in the face and say, ‘We have created 75,000 jobs with our first package and we’ve con-
solidated 90,000 with the second,’ is totally and utterly bewildering.

But let us move on to some other features of the package. The sum of $12.4 billion to primary and special schools for libraries and assembly areas is quite a commendable objective, as are the $1 billion for science labs and language centres and the $1.3 billion for maintenance, up to $200,000 per school. Have you really sat down and looked at how you are going to do that? You will find that, if you analyse this, in the school package you are going to have to build 20 buildings or major renovations per day—not per week or per month but per day—and over 2½ years you will have no chance. Let me say this to you: the fact that it has got to the point where you have to bail out the state Labor governments says it is the most appalling demonstration of their utter failure to look after the kids in state schools across this country.

Mr Perrett—Give them a flagpole!

Mr Neville—Yes, indeed. But this is also very interesting.

Mr Perrett—Don’t give them classrooms!

The Deputy Speaker—Order! Member for Moreton!

Mr Neville—It is okay, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker—I will decide whether it is okay, member for Hinkler.

Mr Neville—I like to be generous in spirit! If you are going to filter it through the state bureaucracies, I will tell you to get ready for two things. The first one is that it will go through the state bureaucracies, the works departments and agencies like QBuild and you will be in for a very long wait. There is another thing: there will be steep administrative costs, if not a massive cost shift. Those are the things you are looking at. If we want jobs, we are going to have to do better than some of the things Labor has put up in this package. Even with regard to the level crossings, there will be only 200 level crossings out of how many? Nine thousand, four hundred—(Time expired)

Mr Hale (Solomon) (5.28 pm)—I would like to acknowledge the contributions from the Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy and the member for Corio in this very important debate on a matter of public importance today, which has been raised by the Leader of the Opposition. Sometimes you come into this place and really start to wonder where the opposition is with regard to the global financial crisis. More than 30 banks have collapsed or have been bailed out. Major economies like the USA, the UK, Germany and France have all fallen into recession. Unemployment is set to rise in practically every country around the world. Six out of 10 of our trading partners are now in recession. Growth in China and Japan, two of our largest markets for exports, has slowed dramatically. In December China had its slowest growth in seven years and Japan had its largest contraction since the 1974 oil shock. But we continually come in here and find that it is as if the opposition is in denial as to what is actually occurring around the world.

What we as a government had to do was to take action. We took action to cushion Australia against the full impact of this global recession. The government has been early and decisive, and it has been proven, because we have not had the same effect as a lot of other countries have experienced; we are in front of the game. Unfortunately, we have had to take out a deficit in doing so, but we are in front of the game and we are better situated than a lot of other countries. It was done by guaranteeing bank deposits in order to shore up our own financial institutions and
by setting up the Australian Business Investment Partnership.

It was necessary to stimulate the economy, and we did that by putting money into the economy in December, which was welcomed in my electorate of Solomon. I have spoken to small business owners in Solomon who have said that they were able to keep staff on through December and January, when they usually might have had to put staff off; that there was demand in the economy; and that it was working. People were very grateful for that. We increased the first home owners grant, and that has enabled companies to stimulate work, because young people are now able to get into the market, something that was not happening under the previous government. Retail trade rose 3.8 per cent in December, so there were things that were measurable and that rose due to that stimulus package.

So why did we come in here today on this very important issue? It is mind blowing. ‘The failure of the government to position the Australian economy for job creation’ is what was said. I look forward to reading the papers over the next few days to find out what really happened in that party room to the Leader of the Opposition today, because what happened was that the member for Stirling and the Leader of the Opposition came in here and straightaway went on to bashing unions. That is what they do. That is in their DNA, as the Prime Minister says; it is about bashing unions. It is the only way that the Leader of the Opposition could save face today, because once again he has been rolled by the member for Higgins in the party room. I think the Leader of the Opposition is a pretty decent bloke. He has some good things on climate change, but they rolled him on that. Now they have done him over once again on Work Choices, because they really believe in Work Choices. He wants to strike Work Choices away; the member for Higgins and the old guard have done him over once again today in the party room. The only way that he could try to save face with those members was to come into this place today on this MPI and not talk about jobs; it was about getting into the unions and union-bashing—scaremongering once again to the Australian public about unions coming into workplaces. Modern unions work well with modern business.

It is amazing that he would use this. People like Saul Eslake say that the December quarter GDP figures would have been weaker without the government spending. There are people who support our package. There are people who believe in that package. The Leader of the Opposition just walks both sides of the street on this: one day he will say one thing and the next day he will do another. He just makes it up as he goes along. It is clear to everyone that the only job that the Leader of the Opposition really wants to support and save is his own job. He does not care about the Australian public at all. (Time expired)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. KJ Andrews)—Order! This discussion has concluded.

COMMITTEES
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
Appointment
Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (5.34 pm)—by leave—I move:

That:

(1) paragraph (2) of the resolution of appointment of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade be amended to read:

“That the committee consist of 34 members, 13 Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Government Whip or Whips, nine Members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Opposi-
tion Whip or Whips or by any independent Member, five Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Senate, five Senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and two Senators to be nominated by any minority group or groups or independent Senator or independent Senators”; and

(2) a message be sent to the Senate acquainting it of this resolution and requesting its concurrence.

Briefly, this motion is being moved by the government in order to facilitate the appointment of the Independent member for Lyne to this committee. The member for Lyne has expressed an interest in it as a priority committee for him to serve on. As members would be aware, Independent members in the chamber are recognised as non-government members when it comes to committee positions. The opposition, up to this point, has not facilitated membership of the committee for the member for Lyne. Hence the government is taking this action in order to make sure that that is rectified. I commend the motion that I have moved to the House. I understand it has been the subject of discussion between the Chief Government Whip and the Chief Opposition Whip and will therefore receive the consensus support of the House.

Question agreed to.

Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
Membership

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. KJ Andrews)—Mr Speaker has received advice from the Chief Opposition Whip that he has nominated Ms J Bishop to be a member of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade in place of Mrs Mirabella.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (5.37 pm)—by leave—I move: That Mrs Mirabella be discharged from the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade and that, in her place, Ms J. Bishop be appointed a member of the committee.

In speaking very briefly to the motion, I congratulate Ms Bishop, the member for Curtin, on her appointment. It is appropriate that the shadow minister for foreign affairs serve on that committee. She seeks to do so, and the government is pleased to facilitate that appointment.

Question agreed to.

AUDITOR-GENERAL AMENDMENT BILL 2008 [2009]
CORPORATIONS AMENDMENT (No. 1) BILL 2009
MIGRATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (No. 1) 2009

Assent

Message from the Governor-General reported informing the House of assent to the bills.

AUSTRALIAN ENERGY MARKET AMENDMENT (AEMO AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2009

Referred to Main Committee

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (5.38 pm)—I move: That the bill be referred to the Main Committee for further consideration.

I indicate to all members that the Chief Opposition Whip, the honourable member for Fairfax, concurs with this motion.

Question agreed to.

APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 5) 2008-2009
APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 6) 2008-2009

Referred to Main Committee

Mr PRICE (Chifley) (5.38 pm)—by leave—I move:
That, unless otherwise ordered, at the adjournment of the House for this sitting, the bills be referred to the Main Committee for further consideration.

I indicate to all members that the Chief Opposition Whip, the honourable member for Fairfax, concurs with this motion.

Question agreed to.

**APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 5) 2008-2009**

Cognate bill:

**APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 6) 2008-2009**

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 26 February, on motion by Mr Bowen:

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Mr TRUSS (Wide Bay—Leader of the Nationals) (5.39 pm)—Appropriation Bill (No. 5) 2008-2009 and Appropriation Bill (No. 6) 2008-2009**

The stated intent of these bills is nation building—Labor’s catch-all term for just about all spending these days. Put a pink batt in someone’s roof and that is nation building. Install a boom gate on a remote rail crossing—that is nation building. Build a library in a school, even if it is replacing one built only a few months ago, and that is nation building. Anything can be packaged up by Labor’s spin doctors and logrollers as nation building these days, so it seems. And so much of what is being proposed under the various infrastructure projects is simply ill thought through. The projects have not been properly identified as priorities.

The titles are also a rather grandiose description of what the government might like to think the public expected from these projects but which they will rarely deliver. For instance, consider the Nation Building and Jobs Plan—the government has acknowledged that it is not actually going to create any jobs at all. All it does is, it claims, sustain 90,000 jobs. That works out at about $450,000 for every single job sustained—hardly, one would think, a sound investment if its objective is preserving just 90,000 jobs.

Then it talks about nation building, but so few of the projects that are being funded by the government in its spending sprees will actually deliver us a stronger and more robust nation. So much of the money is simply going in cash splashes—money being sent out to enjoy five minutes of sunshine but which we will be paying back for generations. If you are going to invest money in tough times to try and boost the economy, surely it should be invested in things that will have a lasting benefit for our economy—even if some of those projects may not completely stack up in a cost-benefit analysis. If you are building a road or a rail line or a port, there is something there to help our country recover—to grow and be stronger in the future. Investments in infras-
structure have a lasting benefit and can genuinely be called nation building, but so much of what is listed—in fact, most of what is listed in the government’s so-called nation-building package—is just spending. It is about spending, not about building the nation.

Former Labor leader Mark Latham could not have been clearer or more accurate when he described his former party’s approach to dealing with the economic downturn gripping Australia. He said:

They have jumped all over the financial crisis, not with a clear economic strategy in mind, but with an urgent sense of the political opportunity it presents.

Those are the words of Mark Latham.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education has, in particular, reinforced the words of President Barack Obama’s Chief of Staff, who said, ‘A serious crisis should never be allowed to go to waste.’ The Deputy Prime Minister is going to be a very busy minister as she has demanded that all the schools that receive new libraries and other buildings under the government’s $42 billion spendathon must invite her to the opening. If she cannot make it, a local Labor party official will get the nod to unveil the plaque. The opposition has previously drawn attention to the unsatisfactory conditions associated with these openings.

This will be the first time that the conditions will actually allow for a branch member of the ALP—with no qualifications, no skills and no particular relevance to the project—to be invited along to do the opening. There may be sitting in the audience a member of the opposition, the local member of federal parliament, or even a shadow minister or a parliamentary secretary. He or she will not be invited to do the opening, but some local person who just happens to be an ALP member—who has paid his membership, or the union has paid his membership or a branch stacker has paid his membership—can do these official openings. I think that is a very disturbing development in the politicisation of what should be recognised as a government program and taxpayer funded expenditure. But that is not what the Deputy Prime Minister proposes to do. In the end, I guess all these plaque unveilings are going to be a form of paid advertising for the Australian Labor Party.

To meet the deadline set by the government, some 100 new facilities will have to be opened every school week—for years after I and the Deputy Prime Minister have left this place and are known largely only to the pages of Hansard. Generations of schoolchildren will look at these bronze plaques in every schoolyard in Australia, and they will ask: ‘Who is Julia Gillard?’ I just hope that the teacher has the presence of mind to tell the students that it was Ms Gillard and her boss, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, who created the federal debt that those children and their parents will have to pay off. In reality, what the schoolchildren of Australia will be getting over the next two years is a new building—whether or not they want it—plus $9,500 each in debt that will have to be repaid. In return for their school building and the rest of the cash splash, they will each have an obligation to pay back an average of $9,500 to cover the $200 billion credit limit that the government now has on its credit card. Apart from the Bradford batts makers, another section of Australian industry that is obviously going to do very well out of Labor’s nation building is the plaque makers. Every project will have to have a plaque and an opportunity for a Labor apparatchik to turn up and have their photo taken at an official opening.

My concern about this legislation is the utterly haphazard way in which the federal Labor government is spending money and
the way it is determining priorities and accumulating taxpayer debt at a level never before seen in this country. Many of these plans have been designed simply to be announced in time for the six o’clock news or drafted on the drink coasters on the VIP flight to Papua New Guinea. They are not carefully thought through strategies. There has been no modelling of their likely impact. The government is walking away from the most basic claims about whether or not these projects will be able to create jobs. There is no evidence as to how the stimulus will actually flow through into the economy; it is simply designed to get a cheap headline in the six o’clock news.

As an example, without a shadow of doubt rail is an area where the government has demonstrated that it has not got a clue what it is doing. Last February, the Minister for Finance and Deregulation announced that he had drilled into proposed federal spending and found $500 million that could be stripped out as part of the government’s now-forgotten war on inflation. Remember the war on inflation and the inflation genie that was out of the bottle? The government had to cut expenditure because it was so worried about inflation. Now it is spending like money is going out of fashion to do precisely the opposite. Not only could the government not read the economy at the time; it also clearly had no idea how to draft a coherent economic strategy for the future.

Among the spending that was targeted in this $500 million cut—most of which was in regional Australia—was $65 million to upgrade the railway line between Parkes and Cootamundra in south-west New South Wales. This was to be deferred for two years, the finance minister said. This funding had actually been brought forward by the previous coalition government, because we recognised the importance of upgrading these working rail lines which are necessary for the movement of freight through the eastern states. The government obviously disagreed. All that fine talk of nation building, removing infrastructure bottlenecks and increasing Australia’s food security counted for nothing last February when this crucial upgrade was canned. The finance minister and the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government both linked the two-year deferral to the fact that the final route for the inland rail between Melbourne and Brisbane had not been determined. They chose to ignore the fact that, whatever route was chosen, the line would still need upgrading. That truth was confirmed in Labor’s $4.7 billion infrastructure package, where the project is among those to be brought forward by two years. The project had been deferred for two years, and now it is to be brought forward by two years, which puts it precisely where it was when the previous government left office. The reason given was: a full upgrade of the corridor needs to be undertaken to bring it to interstate network standard—which is exactly what the coalition has been saying all along.

This reminds me a little bit of the announcement about the study into the inland railway. This was canned in the finance minister’s statement, and then the minister for infrastructure announced exactly the same study—using a press release with hardly any words changed from the one by the former minister for transport, Mark Vaile—when re-announcing exactly the same funding a few months later. It was cancelled one week and then, a couple of months later, re-announced as though it was some great new initiative by the Rudd government, except that he used exactly the same press release as was previously used by the transport minister when it was first announced by the coalition many months earlier. Instead of starting some of these projects in 2008, which was the time frame indicated by the previous government,
now they are going to start a bit later because of the bureaucratic incompetence of this government. So much for ‘urgent nation building’ under Labor.

The majority of funds sought in this bill relate to increasing equity in the Australian Rail Track Corporation by $1.189 billion so it can continue its infrastructure investment program. Primarily, in this instance, the investment will be in the Hunter Valley region of New South Wales, where rail lines have been allowed to run down and become impossibly congested under the Carr, Iemma and Rees state Labor governments. The coalition recognise the critical importance of upgrading the interstate rail network—something which was comprehensively ignored by the Hawke and Keating governments. We provided $2.4 billion over five years to fund the ARTC and to upgrade those poorly maintained rail lines so that rail could again play an important part in moving freight and passengers around Australia.

It is absolutely critical for Australia’s future transport task that rail accepts a larger share of the responsibility. Unless rail can double its workload over the next 15 to 20 years, we will have to treble or quadruple the number of trucks on our national highway system—and no-one believes that that is an acceptable alternative. As the transport task doubles, we will inevitably need to have double the number of trucks, double the number of trains and double the number of ships if we are going to be able to maintain that task. If one of those partners in the transport task does not achieve its share of the load, the others will have to pick up a bigger share of the burden.

So rail needs to do a lot, lot more. I am one of those who believe that rail can efficiently and reliably provide long-haul freight to keep the Australian economy moving and do it reliably and well. It has not done it for such a long time. Trains have lost market share not because their freight is more expensive but essentially because they have a reputation for being unreliable. A lot of that certainly goes back to the bad old days when the rail system was run by the trade union movement, which was more interested in finding ways to stop the trains than to actually keep them going, where disputes between various trade unions held the public to ransom rather than have those matters properly sorted out through appropriate negotiations.

It is a disappointment that the government now, through its new so-called Fair Work arrangements, seeks to reinstate some of the rules and regulations that led to the bad old days of the past. Union power is to be restored as a part of their reward for backing the Labor Party in the last federal election and providing many millions of dollars of political funding for their campaigns. The reward unions are getting will certainly result in a high price having to be paid by the Australian people, for less reliable services, higher costs, lost jobs and a less efficient economy.

Remember the bad old days, when we were told that it was simply impossible for the cranes on the wharves to load more containers—it could not be done. Well, it is being done and, in fact, now Australia goes close to world standards in relation to moving freight around the ports. Our ports have become more reliable, and that is part of the reason that our export industries have been able to grow and that we can have strong coal, iron ore and other industries in Australia. But, if we let the unions back in control of those sorts of operations, it will be back to the bad old days—the times that we thought had been well and truly put behind us.

I notice that the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and
Local Government has previously criticised the coalition for providing funding to the ARTC. When we provided three payments, between 2004 and 2006, totalling $820 million, for rail upgrades around Australia, the now minister was a staunch critic of that action. I welcome the fact that the government has again, it seems, had a change of heart and that it does recognise the importance of the ARTC investing in building a better rail infrastructure network across the nation. A lot more still needs to be done to unify the entire network—to get those states and those sections of the line that are not part of the system at the present time included—so that we can have a more seamless movement of rail freight traffic across the nation. Unless most of the traffic between east and west and the long hauls between north and south are converted to rail, our road network will become even more gridlocked and expenditure on roads will have to grow enormously.

So I move now to the proposals in this bill in relation to road funding. The bill proposes to bring forward $711 million to accelerate spending on roads such as the Bulahdelah bypass on the Pacific Highway, the Western Ring Road in Melbourne and the Douglas Arterial Road on the Bruce Highway in Townsville. Movement on all of these projects is welcome. But I do make a few critical points. This work would not be possible if the coalition government had not had the foresight to do the necessary preliminary work and agreed to pay for them. The Pacific Highway is a case in point. In the early 1990s, Prime Minister Paul Keating signed a deal with the then New South Wales coalition government that would see responsibility placed upon the state to upgrade this highway. All proceeded for a little while, until the Carr government came to town and effectively slowed down the spending on the Pacific Highway—which contains some of the worst black spots in the nation—to a trickle.

In 1996, the coalition came to power federally and put in place a program that took federal spending up to about one-third of the overall cost of upgrading of the Pacific Highway. This later grew to fifty-fifty, and now it seems—with the decline of the truly dreadful New South Wales government—even more federal dollars will have to be stumped up to keep the upgrade process going, as New South Wales reduces its spending by $300 million. I am indeed alarmed that New South Wales has not paid a higher price of reneging on this deal in relation to funding of the Pacific Highway. It is disappointing that the federal Labor government seems to believe it needs to step in and prop up the Rees government, which is walking away from its responsibilities, by providing additional federal funding. That additional federal funding comes at the cost of other projects in New South Wales and other projects in other states that are not being funded because the federal government has decided instead to bail out the underperforming New South Wales government.

In the Hunter Valley, we have the link road between the F3 and the New England Highway, between Seahampton and Braxton. This is a ‘shovel ready’ project, because the coalition in government got it to that stage 16 months ago. If you ever wanted to get a project started today—a project employing hundreds of people and providing a short-, medium- and long-term return to the nation—this is such a project. But, after years of allegedly supporting it from opposition, what has happened to this vital project since the Rudd government came to town? It has been thrown on the backburner. The Minister for Defence and member for Hunter told local media right up to election day that Labor would ‘absolutely match’ the coalition’s commitment. But what happened the
day after the election? Labor did not have the money anymore. That was certainly news to the federal Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, which had, after consultations with the New South Wales government, concluded that a federal contribution of $780 million, on top of the $107 million already delivered, would be enough to complete the necessary 40 kilometres of dual divided carriageway.

I will now turn to my own electorate and the upgrade of the Cooroy to Curra stretch of the Bruce Highway. It is a sorely needed project and could have started almost immediately had the Labor government matched the coalition’s commitment of $700 million for the construction from AusLink II. I am disgusted that the retiring Queensland roads minister, Warren Pitt, is quoted in the Gympie Times today as saying that this project could start almost immediately if federal funding is approved. This is a dishonest, pre-election stunt by Mr Pitt—whom I note is actually retiring at the next election. He knows that the Rudd Labor government has slashed AusLink funding for this road to just $200 million—and that has to last until 2014. To go to the people of Gympie, who desperately want this road constructed, and say to them that all that is required is approval from the federal government when he knows that the new federal government has slashed the available money for this project is simply dishonest and deceitful.

Since 2000, 54 people have been killed on this road, and there have been four fatal accidents since the government lowered the speed limit on this section of the national highway to 90 kilometres an hour just before Christmas. This road is a killing field. Accidents are reported almost every week. There are horrific accidents. It is unthinkable that any government should cut funding for the upgrading and improvement of this road. I appeal to the Rudd Labor government to put aside the politics and to do something about upgrading this road—and to do it promptly. It will require a lot of money, but the $700 million that the previous government had allocated and was available would make a good start and would help to make work on the remaining sections of this road more achievable.

For all the talk about bringing dollars forward, the Rudd government is still proposing to spend some $5 billion less on roads and rail over the next five years than was committed by the former Howard government. In spite of what the minister says about increased road funding, Labor will actually spend $5 billion less than was committed by the previous Howard government. The forthcoming Infrastructure Australia priority list will identify some more proposed spending but, given the way the federal dollars have disappeared in 2009, it does not look as though the Prime Minister’s promise to spend $70 billion on infrastructure is likely to be honoured—so much for real nation building!

The next section of the bill that I would like to make some comments about is the $500 million provided over this year and the next three financial years for water buybacks in the Murray-Darling Basin. This of course relates to the deal done between the government and South Australia’s Senator Xenophon, which enabled the passage of the government’s $42 billion economic stimulus. Again, the best way to describe Labor’s approach to a wider issue is to focus on one example of its action to date: the absolute farce that was the federal purchase of Toorale Station, near Bourke—a once productive farming property that will be turned into a national park, with its water allocation stripped away and at least 100 jobs lost. This was an illogical use of government money, just as the government’s decisions to con-
tinually buy back water from irrigators in the Darling Basin are a lazy way out of delivering water to the Murray.

Infrastructure upgrades, new channels and better water management can deliver more water to the river for environmental flows, without laying waste productive farms, destroying local industries and destroying regional jobs. This government is taking the lazy way by simply going to distressed farmers and seeking to acquire their water licence. It needs to be emphasised to everyone that they are not actually buying any water, because the water is not there; they are buying licences. To actually include $500 million for more water buybacks in what is considered to be a nation-building package, a stimulus package, is clearly ridiculous. This purchase will not stimulate the economy; in fact, it will slow it down. It will guarantee that any recovery is slower, because these regional communities will not have any water to use when the rains return to help contribute to our nation’s economic growth. Whole irrigation districts are at risk of being closed down. Whole rural towns are losing their basic infrastructure because the government is taking a lazy way out in trying to obtain water for the environmental flows for the Murray-Darling system.

We all agree that more water needs to be provided in the system for environmental purposes—and it can be done without stealing the water from the people who are using it now. We can maintain the productivity and still get more water into the system by spending the money—money provided by the previous government—on capital works, not on lazy buybacks. If you build more pipelines, get rid of the leaks and improve the management, you effectively create more water, and that water can be used for environmental purposes. The government’s whole approach to the supply of water to the Murray-Darling Basin is ill considered and inappropriate. It is not nation building; it is nation destroying. The work that has been done by previous generations is being undone by a government that does not have the imagination to fix a problem but prefers to exercise its ideological bent, its distaste for farmers, to try to drive out of existence a whole range of rural and regional communities.

Of course, a lot of this is a stunt as well—for instance, the visit by Minister Wong to Toorale Station a few days ago so that she could have an official opening to open up the valves and let water flow into the river. She wanted to have a picture opportunity. She said, when the government bought the property, that they were going to get rid of the weir, but when it filled up with water she wanted a picture taken of her releasing the water down the river. Because the dam was at the point of overflowing, they actually had to let some go. Water that could have gone into the environment some time ago was being held behind this weir. The minister wanted a picture, so they closed the gates to allow it to fill up again so she could get her picture taken. That is the kind of stunt that is driving the government’s approach to water management and infrastructure.

I will comment favourably on another element of this package. I am sure the shadow parliamentary secretary will also be impressed by the fact that this bill provides a little bit of money for the East Kimberley development package, expanding the Ord. Expanding the Ord has been a dream of the people of Western Australia, and indeed all thinking Australians, for some time. The Western Australian government is now committed to opening up some new irrigation areas, extending the available irrigated area from 14,000 to 28,000 hectares to provide possible large-scale expansion of agriculture in crops like rice and cotton, sandalwood and high-value timbers. It would be
It is good to see the Western Australian government seizing the initiative to proceed with the Ord and that the federal government is providing some additional funds to enable some of the infrastructure to be provided.

The reality is that this bill provides funding for some worthwhile projects. In normal circumstances it would be warmly welcomed by most on both sides of the House. But, given Labor’s appalling record in management and delivery, I have great doubts that any of the grand visions of nation building, job retention and economic stimulus that the government has been talking about over recent times will ever be delivered. If they are, they will be out of cost, out of time and delivered in an inefficient and, as usual, incompetent way.

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (6.09 pm)—It is almost 18 months since the Rudd government was sworn into office, vowing to meet Australia’s future head-on, and since each of us had to face our electorates and make commitments to them. I rise today to speak in support of the Appropriation Bill (No. 5) 2008-2009 and cognate bill, because this package of legislation is our government’s response to the most unprecedented economic challenge of our time. You would not get the feel for that, Mr Deputy Speaker, if you listened just to the previous speaker, who wanted to hark on matters past. It is going to require consistent and sustained effort from our community to meet that challenge, but this government is committed to meeting that challenge.

These appropriation bills support the government’s historic nation-building package. It is designed to support jobs and small business in the short term. It will build on quality schools through the largest school modernisation program in Australia’s history. Some $14.7 billion has been committed to doing that. It is designed to stimulate the building and construction industry with the construction of 20,000 new homes, supporting the thousands of tradespeople working in that industry and addressing the tragic plight of homeless people in modern Australia. It will tackle climate change and help families save on their energy costs through access to insulation and solar hot water. It is designed to upgrade our roads and local infrastructure for the long-term benefit of our respective communities.

It is only a couple of weeks ago that the Prime Minister, in the Monthly, wrote:

The global financial crisis has demonstrated already that it is no respecter of persons, nor of particular industries, nor of national boundaries. It is a crisis which is simultaneously individual, national and global. It is a crisis of both the developed and the developing world.

This is a serious economic situation that we are facing—there cannot be any debate about that. We know that we cannot totally remove ourselves from the impact of this global onslaught, but the government is determined to take the necessary steps to protect Australia and Australian jobs, and reduce the impact that the global recession is likely to have on this country.

I will continue to work with the Prime Minister and ministers to ensure that the people of Werriwa receive the full benefit of the commitments that were made in the lead-up to the last election. In particular, I would like to make reference to the widening of the F5 between Ingleburn and Campbeltown. This is a project I campaigned long for under the Howard government, but it fell on deaf ears. It is only since the lead-up to the last election, when Labor committed to widening the F5, a $140 million project, that progress is now being made on road infrastructure in
the south-west of Sydney. This work has now commenced—I was at the opening of the works the other day—and it will make a huge difference to the families and local businesses that rely on this busy road network. Residents are eagerly awaiting the finalisation of this project.

The F5 is one of the busiest road routes in the country. It is used by over 81,000 vehicles per day. This $140 million project is expected to create hundreds of full-time and part-time jobs. I offer my congratulations to Nace Civil Engineering, a local engineering company from Prestons in my electorate, which won the competitive tender to widen this vital piece of road infrastructure in south-western Sydney. I know that George Kypreos, the General Manager of Nace, and his team will deliver high-quality construction work that will—as I have said many times in this House before—bring considerable benefits to my local communities.

I would also like to indicate the fact that residents and businesses in my neck of the woods turned out recently—three weeks ago, in fact—to hear from the Prime Minister directly at the recent community cabinet meeting in Campbelltown. They witnessed personally the commitment the Rudd government has in these difficult times, and they know that we are acting decisively on local community issues to support jobs and to improve the quality of local infrastructure through this economic downturn.

We, on this side of the House, have too long known the buck-passing, the rivalry and the lack of cooperation which unfortunately have beset the three levels of government in this country and have undermined Australia’s ability to build a modern economy capable of meeting these challenges for the future. The Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, Anthony Albanese, as part of this community cabinet took time out to meet with the mayors of Campbelltown, Liverpool, Camden and Wollondilly councils to discuss with them a number of local concerns. During this meeting, the minister was able to announce the successful projects that were being funded from the $800 million Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program. This announcement, I have got to say, was very much a welcome relief for our local communities, who are feeling the pinch of this global recession. This program will help local communities in the south-west of Sydney to respond to the global financial crisis by supporting jobs and, more importantly, boosting our local economy—which, again, is job sustaining.

It should be known that more than $3 million of Commonwealth funds have been provided to build the upgraded community infrastructure in and around my electorate of Werriwa. Campbelltown City Council received $1.5 million, Liverpool City Council received $1.2 million and Camden Council received $606,000. This is more than $3 million that will help meet the urgent needs of the community, creating long-term local infrastructure, which will have a direct impact on the quality of life of residents within my local electorate. This is a chance to get moving on those important pieces of local infrastructure—things like sporting fields; things that we take for granted, but things which are necessary, particularly for growing, young families. Sporting fields, amenities blocks, environmental watering systems and cycle-ways—these are things which are going to be provided for. It will enable the local government to get moving on the important grassroots projects that will benefit our region and do so into the longer term.

It was not just the local mayors that had the opportunity of meeting with ministers. Following the public forum, ministers had prearranged one-on-one meetings with a
number of people—local residents and business people alike. I understand that there were a lot of locals’ concerns raised. One of those was the construction of sound barriers along the freight line being constructed by the ARTC, along the rail corridor between Casula and Liverpool.

Local residents, who I have been talking to almost every day, understand that this freight line is an essential piece of infrastructure that will alleviate the bottleneck that currently exists in south-west Sydney, where freight trains share the existing rail lines with the Sydney metropolitan passenger service operated by RailCorp. Residents are concerned about the existing noise levels, which have been independently recorded as being of not an acceptable standard, but they simply should not be expected to put up with an exacerbation of that noise by the freight line. They expect and demand the construction of sound barriers along that particular easement. They full well understand that the construction of this rail line will be very good for the economy of New South Wales and the economy of Sydney, but it should not be at the expense of the wellbeing of local residents living in its immediate vicinity along that rail corridor.

That is something that I know was actually put to the minister when he visited out there as part of the community cabinet. I indicate that I will continue to work with those local residents, together with the member for Macquarie Fields, Dr Andrew McDonald, and Wendy Waller, the Mayor of Liverpool City Council, to find an appropriate balance in providing these essential community services, as well as protecting the quality of life and wellbeing of local residents.

The government’s First Home Saver Accounts and the National Rental Affordability Scheme are helping many to aspire to home-ownership around Australia and, more importantly, in and about my electorate of Werriwa in the south-west of Sydney. But more recently—and I would like to spend a little bit of time on this—as part of its first Economic Security Strategy, this government doubled the first home owner grant. This grant is having a significant impact in my local electorate. In fact, the south-west of Sydney is enjoying a mini property boom, despite the financial crisis, with many new homebuyers entering the market in areas such as Liverpool and Campbelltown and related suburbs.

According to Saturday’s Daily Telegraph, half of the homes sold in these areas have been bought by first home buyers, adding about 8,500 contracts that have been exchanged in the last three months. This is a real example of people taking advantage of the first home buyer grant and moving from rental accommodation into their first home. Recently, data from the New South Wales Office of State Revenue shows that the property sales across all Western Sydney suburbs for the last three months to February soared up to 20 per cent on the last year—with Liverpool, Campbelltown and Fairfield recording approximately a 12 per cent increase in sales over that period.

Less than a year after the region was in the grip of a housing affordability crisis, young families—not investors, I might add—are driving this new boom. More than 50 per cent of all sales are first home purchases and most homes are being sold for under $500,000. This is a good news story in the outer metropolitan areas of Sydney and I have no doubt it is being repeated around the country. We are seeing tangible benefits flowing directly from the first economic stimulus package, in which the first home owner grant was doubled.

I also understand that the Commonwealth Bank has recently indicated that it has been
forced to hire more staff as the increasing demand for the first home buyer grant has seen the processing time for loans start to blow out. It has been reported that the Commonwealth Bank has been inundated with people seeking first home buyer loans, with a 40 per cent increase in applications in the last month. The bank’s head of retail products, Michael Cant, says first home buyer volume has more than doubled since the grant was introduced in October and aggregate mortgage volume is up by 40 per cent since the middle of February.

Whilst the stimulus packages are welcome, we have to look at what they are doing in our local economies. As indicated by the Commonwealth Bank and other reputable sources, the stimulus packages have been stimulating a growth in sales. That shows that people have confidence to enter into that area of the market, and I think that confidence was not there prior to the first round of the economic stimulus package coming into operation.

I would like to spend a bit of time talking about the Rudd government’s commitment to education. The Rudd government is committed to seeing real improvement in Australian schools as an investment in our kids and in our future. I have a deep interest in education because I have kids and grandkids. All parents have a deep interest in education. It is something we want for our children. If we are going to be serious about this in terms of our commitment to the economy, education has to be something we invest in for the long term. Labor, in the lead-up to the last election, made it clear that Australia needs an education revolution—a substantial and sustained increase in the quantity of our investment and in the quality of our education system. It is required not just in primary school, in secondary school or in tertiary education; it is required at every level of education—from early childhood education to mature-age students.

We should be focusing on improving educational standards because all the research shows us that what we invest in education now will have direct productivity benefits within the next 10 to 15 years. That is why many on our side still draw attention to the fact that the former government withdrew $1 billion from the education system and this contributed to this country’s skills shortage in the not too distant past. Education is the platform on which our future economic prosperity is based. That is why we are introducing a national vision for Australia to become the most educated country, the most skilled economy and the best trained workforce in the world. The historic nation-building investment announced last month includes the largest school modernisation program in this country’s history. Building the Education Revolution is a $14.7 billion long-term investment to improve the quality of facilities such as gymnasiums, libraries, science labs and language centres in Australian schools.

I would like to talk about what this means for my electorate of Werriwa, which, as everyone knows, is in the outer metropolitan area of Sydney. I have 43 primary schools in my electorate. Under Primary Schools for the 21st Century, every one of those 43 primary schools can access up to $3 million for essential new buildings. That is an extraordinary amount of money—but think about the investment we are making. I spent some time with some local tradesmen the other day. They are discussing this in terms of ‘jobs per school’. Apart from the investment in education, this is a substantial contribution to creating jobs for this country now and into the future. I also have 19 high schools in my electorate. Under Science and Language Centres for the 21st Century, every one of those 19 high schools in my electorate can
apply for funding for the construction of a new science block or language centre. Once again, that is very good news for carpenters, electricians and all those involved in the building of those centres. Under Renewing Australia’s Schools, all 62 schools in my electorate will have access to up to $200,000 for refurbishment and maintenance.

This package is good news for my local schools and it is good news for the economy of Werriwa. Applied across the board, this is great for education and for the economic prosperity of this country. We are investing in education and that is where we see productivity growth in the longer term. This package is also fabulous because it generates employment opportunities for all the tradespeople and those involved in the construction and maintenance of schools. I commend this bill to the House. This package is welcome in my community and, no doubt, in all communities represented in this chamber. *(Time expired)*

**Dr SOUTHCOTT** (Boothby) (6.29 pm)—In speaking to Appropriation Bill (No. 5) 2008-2009 and Appropriation Bill (No. 6) 2008-2009, I would like to focus on the measures which appropriate funds for employment services and for incentives for apprentices. In this legislation, there is $36.8 million for the provision of intensive customised assistance for newly redundant workers, $43.7 million additional funding to cover increased commencements and completion claims under the Australian Apprenticeships system, and $38.8 million to assist out-of-trade apprentices.

I will look firstly at the intensive customised assistance for newly redundant workers. Treasury forecasts now see unemployment reaching seven per cent by June 2010. I caution that, as recently as the May budget, the forecast was for an unemployment rate of 4.75 per cent. That, of course, was the most optimistic of any around. There are a number of other economic analysts who are putting forward more pessimistic forecasts than a seven per cent unemployment rate by June next year. For example, ABN AMRO are suggesting that unemployment may be as high as eight per cent by the end of the year.

One of the concerns the opposition has is that the government has delayed providing this additional support. We highlighted the lack of early intervention in the government’s new employment services model on 7 August and have been telling the government and the Minister for Employment Participation that more early intervention would be required with a deteriorating labour market. In a media release on 7 August 2008, the opposition highlighted that new employment services would provide nothing more than assistance in writing a resume and information on the local labour market for the majority of new job seekers in their first three months.

Almost six months ago, in response to a ministerial statement on employment services, we demonstrated that only 12.8 per cent of resources would be provided for stream 1 job seekers, who are the majority of new job seekers. In fact, 61 per cent of new job seekers will be in stream 1, and they will be receiving only 12.8 per cent of the resources for employment services. We said that to reduce the early intervention for employment services was risky, inflexible and showed a lack of foresight. Unfortunately there are 80,000 more Australians who are unemployed since we first warned of the problem with Labor’s new employment services.

As many members will know, it was the Howard government which introduced the Job Network, which privatised employment services and had employment services delivered by not-for-profit organisations, by chari-
ties and by private companies. The Job Network was highly successful. It reduced unemployment from 7.7 per cent in May 1998 to below four per cent in February this year. However, the Minister for Employment Participation, in a discussion paper, said:

The Job Network is no longer suited to a labour market characterised by lower unemployment, widespread skills shortages and a growing proportion of job seekers who are highly disadvantaged and long-term unemployed.

In a nutshell, the Rudd government designed an employment services model for a period of full employment. They designed a model when unemployment was around four per cent. It was designed to work in periods of low unemployment, full employment and strong labour market growth. The mistake the government made was to assume that the vast majority of job seekers would find jobs themselves. They came up with the wrong model at the worst possible time. It has been very obvious to employment service providers, the not-for-profit sector, the opposition and industry groups—everyone except the Minister for Employment Participation—that this model, these new employment services, would not work in a climate of rising unemployment and weak or negative jobs growth.

We had a breakthrough last month when the Rudd government and the Minister for Employment Participation finally acknowledged what had been obvious to everyone else: there was a problem with their model. The $298.5 million extra being put into employment services is welcomed by the opposition. In this specific appropriation there will be $36.8 million, which will be providing intensive customised assistance. We think that this will go some of the way towards addressing the problems with new employment services. However, we point out that this is almost exactly the amount which was ripped out of employment services in last year’s budget. In last year’s budget, one of the major savings measures of the Minister for Finance and Deregulation was to cut funding to employment services by $279.8 million.

As I said, the Rudd government have known about the shortcomings of their employment services model for months. Since we first warned of this problem in August, 80,000 Australians have lost their jobs and have not been afforded this support, due to the Rudd government’s refusal to act earlier, to act decisively. It has been no surprise to anyone who has been following employment that we are facing a period such as this. We had matters of public importance discussions in June when it was impossible to get a Rudd government minister to acknowledge that there was a problem with jobs and job security, and yet the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations has its very own leading indicator of employment now showing 14 consecutive months of falling employment growth.

The measures that we are discussing do nothing for the 200,000 people who will not gain employment as a result of the economic climate—people who are returning to the workforce, school leavers and mums returning to the workforce after raising a family. There is nothing in the Labor government’s announcements on employment services for these people. There is nothing in this appropriation bill for these people. The link in this bill—and it shows a wider problem, which we saw during question time today—is that it seems the Rudd government’s focus is on preparing people for unemployment; that is, not keeping people in jobs and actually focusing on creating jobs but focusing on redundancy payments. In question time today we saw a Treasurer who was unable to identify what the government’s ambitions were for job creation over this term of the parliament. We had the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations unable to give a
guarantee that the Fair Work Bill would not destroy a single job. The Prime Minister backed her up, again, by failing to guarantee that Labor’s industrial relations legislation would not destroy a single job.

We also see nothing in this appropriation bill and nothing in the employment services announcement for the tens of thousands of workers who were made redundant between 24 November 2007 and 24 February 2009. Over those 15 months more than 25,000 Australian workers were made redundant. There is nothing, for example, for the 1,500 workers at the BHP mine at Ravensthorpe who were laid off when the mine closed on 21 January. They are therefore not eligible for the intensive customised assistance. They will go into employment services, and beginning on 1 July the vast majority of those people will receive very little assistance in the first 12 months of unemployment. Unfortunately, the reality is that the focus of the Rudd government is not on creating jobs and it is not on getting people back into jobs; it is on preparing people for unemployment. Young people in particular will need support. In the last recession in the early 1990s we had the disgraceful situation of more than one-third of young people aged between 15 to 19 unable to find full-time employment under the Keating government.

I turn now to the measures that relate to support for apprentices. The opposition does welcome this support; however, we point out that, in a month when the government spent $42 billion on its cash splash, it only spent 0.37 per cent of that on helping apprentices who have lost their jobs. Again, there is a thematic consistency, I have to say, with the Rudd government. This is consistent with the broader approach in that it is targeted at apprentices who have already been made redundant. It does nothing for employers who are struggling to keep apprentices in employment. This is akin to closing the gate after the horse has bolted. It highlights what a low priority apprentices are for the Rudd Labor government that, in a month when it found $42 billion to spend in its cash splash, there was only $145 million, or 0.37 per cent, of that available for apprentices who have been made redundant.

Apprenticeship commencements have already decreased over the last 12 months. Employers are reluctant to take on as many apprentices. In the month of January we saw, in Western Australia, apprenticeships in construction decrease by 50 per cent. It is concerning that the government, in response to a question on the Notice Paper, was still forecasting the commencements, completions and numbers of apprentices in training to increase by one per cent a year over the next four years. That does not seem to stack up with the experience with the recession in the early 1990s when we saw the number of apprentices fall from 160,000 in 1990 to 120,000 in 1993.

There are three specific measures as part of this appropriation bill. The first one is $1,250 or $2,500 for a registered training organisation where an apprentice or trainee who has been made redundant completes their off-the-job training. This is available after 21 July, so it is not part of this appropriation. The second measure is $1,800, made up of $150 per week for 12 weeks where an employer recommences an out-of-trade apprentice or trainee who has been made redundant. The third measure is $1,000 to an employer, including group training organisations, that successfully completes an eligible apprentice or trainee on or after 1 January this year, and that will run over a two-year period. So effectively these incentives will apply for apprentices who have lost their jobs and who were in their last two years of their apprenticeship or traineeship. It will be paid through the Australian apprenticeship centres, which I welcome. There has
been a lot of speculation about the future of the Australian apprenticeship centres, and we have been unable to get any guarantees for their future from the minister. I see the fact that these incentives are going to paid through the AAC as a good sign. They have been a very useful mechanism for making it very easy for employers to take on apprentices.

But, as I said before, my concern is that there is nothing there for employers who are doing the right thing by trying to keep their apprentices in what is a very tough period of trading for them. It is emblematic, I think, of the wider approach of the government—not increasing confidence, not focusing on creating jobs, not focusing on increasing job security but instead actually preparing people for bad news and unemployment.

The link between these two measures in the appropriation bill is that they will only be available to people who have been made redundant, beginning this year. It precludes, as I said, the tens of thousands of Australian workers who have lost their jobs over the 15 months since the Rudd government came to office, based on Treasury’s own forecast. It does nothing for the 200,000 Australians who will be joining the ranks of the unemployed, people who are entering the workforce after raising a family. There is nothing in this appropriation bill for them and nothing in Labor’s announcement on employment services for them, and that is a shame.

Ms McKEW (Bennelong—Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and Childcare) (6.46 pm)—I rise to speak in support of the Appropriation Bill (No. 5) 2008-2009. The total additional appropriation being sought through this supplementary additional estimates bill is $384 million. This funding will support and secure the jobs and training of apprentices, trainees and adult workers who are vulnerable to redundancy in the economic downturn, and it will provide assistance to workers recently retrenched. It is a package also designed to support economic development in the East Kimberley region through investment in social and common use infrastructure.

In the time available to me I would like to particularly draw to the House’s attention a critical component of this bill—that is, the $34 million in funding to keep the 262 ABC childcare centres open until 31 March this year, ensuring continuity of care for Australian families. The collapse of ABC Learning is a problem not of this government’s making. It was the previous government which, in 1996, removed operational and capital works subsidies for community based not-for-profit childcare centres. It was the previous government which uncapped the provision of long day care services. And it was the previous government that sat on its hands while ABC Learning constructed its empire, an empire that has turned out to be so very flimsy.

There was not a strong enough emphasis on quality, sustainability or viability; there was merely a belief that the market would deliver. An important question for my colleagues opposite is: how is it that, for so long, the failed corporate giant ABC Learning was unchecked by the previous government, at the very time that it was underwriting its activities through millions of dollars of subsidies every year? That question remains unanswered. But this government has had to deal with the consequences.

At no stage has the opposition argued against the Rudd government’s timely intervention to secure the 1,100 ABC centres and to provide security for children, families and staff. When Mr Groves’s empire, laden with $1.6 billion in debt, came crashing down in
November last year, the chorus from the community to government was unanimous: ‘Fix it.’ The opposition’s spokeswoman on child care, the member for Indi, was also part of this chorus. I note that the member for Indi was in the House not so long ago, with a range of baseless accusations about the government’s performance on early childhood policies. It was pretty breathtaking. The member for Indi failed to mention the work that is progressing on the first national quality framework or the fact that around 2,500 people participated in public consultations last year so that we could hear their views on what is important. The clear message that we received loud and clear from that consultation was that there is considerable impetus for reform in the early childhood sector. And no wonder because, for the first time in 11 years, the sector is being given the serious attention that it deserves.

The member for Indi also failed to mention the development of the Early Years Learning Framework, which will guide early childhood educators around the country on how to provide quality programs for young children. I would also refer the member for Indi to this additional fact. Over 11 years the coalition government left the states and the sector to go their own ways. But, in just 15 months, there are now childcare centres around the country taking part in a trial of the first ever national Early Years Learning Framework. The member for Indi also failed to mention the $126 million commitment to training.

The miserable inheritance, after 11 years of cavalier coalition government, is a workforce where 40 per cent of those who care for children have no qualifications. Labor are redressing that. In 2009 TAFE fees for early childhood diplomas and associated diplomas across the country have been waived and university students are taking advantage of the 500 extra places for early childhood teachers. It is early days, but we are seeing strong enrolments from childcare professionals who are only too eager to take advantage of the government incentives in this area.

I also note that the member for Indi was concerned about reports that the Queensland government will receive $252 million over the next five years to deliver early childhood education. I make no apologies for that. Indeed, if the member for Indi were to acquaint herself with the COAG Early Childhood Education National Partnership she would find that the Commonwealth commitment is to provide funding to all states. Indeed, the commitment to the member’s home state of Victoria is $211 million.

The member for Indi also raised questions about the structure and supply of the childcare market without making the critical link that the operational market has changed dramatically with the collapse of the huge corporate provider ABC Learning. Interestingly, there were no complex arguments about interfering with the market when Labor acted decisively last year, just a clear expectation by the community that the government would be the central player in managing the future of one-quarter of the childcare market.

With the collapse of ABC Learning, the Rudd government was left to sort out the mess. Through the combined efforts of the Deputy Prime Minister and me, the task force set up by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, and various receivers, we are all moving to resolve this mess. The appropriation, then, of $34 million in this bill is central to the government’s work here.

This government’s actions in the weeks and months following the collapse of ABC stand in stark contrast to the previous government’s inaction over many years. ABC Learning went into receivership on 6 No-
vember last year. It is worth bearing in mind that, at that point in time, there was a real risk that hundreds of ABC centres could have ceased operating immediately. Mass closures would have been catastrophic for tens of thousands of children and their mums and dads and for thousands of workers and their families and would have had a significant economic and social impact. The Rudd government did not sit back and let this happen. We acted with speed and with responsibility.

On 7 November, following discussions with ABC’s banks and the ABC receiver, McGrathNicol, we announced that up to $22 million in funding would be made available to keep open until 31 December last year those centres considered to be loss making. Importantly, this created space for the receiver to carry out a proper assessment of the viability of the centres. By 10 December, the receiver was able to identify 720 centres which could continue under the ABC business model. The receiver also announced that 55 centres would close on 31 December, as there were suitable alternative centres close by. Critically, all children were offered alternative places at a nearby centre, and the majority of staff were redeployed.

At the same time, the government announced additional funding of up to $34 million, the subject of part of this bill, to keep open into 2009 the residual 262 centres that were judged by the receiver to be unviable under the ABC business model. The government believes that a number of these centres could be viable under different arrangements and that these centres, now known as ABC2, represent an opportunity to gain greater diversity in the childcare sector. So this $34 million has been crucial to thousands of Australian families and workers.

Some might ask, of course, why the government is providing funding at all. Let me say that ABC has proved to be unique. It is very important to note that these funds are not for the directors or the owners of ABC Learning; rather, these funds are simply aimed at keeping loss-making centres open for a period of time while sustainable long-term options are resolved.

But fixing this state of affairs is more than just about providing funding. The government announced that we had established a process for managing the operation of these centres through the appointment of Steve Parbery and Daniel Bryant, of PPB corporate recovery, as court appointed receivers. This has ensured that an orderly process is being conducted to determine a sustainable future for these centres while minimising disruption for families and employees. The expression-of-interest process, which the court appointed receiver formally commenced on 14 January, is progressing. By 31 January, PPB had received 470 non-binding offers for the centres from a diverse range of parties. In line with the agreed selection criteria and with their duties as court appointed receiver, PPB provided short-listed bidders with access to more detailed information on the centres. On 25 February this year, over 180 interested parties submitted formal binding offers, highlighting that the market believes that there is a viable future for many of these centres. The court appointed receiver is working progressively through each offer to determine the optimal outcome for all stakeholders, most importantly the children and their families and centre employees.

The government has asked the court appointed receiver to ensure that future operators are going to be able to deliver high-quality early-learning and care programs that meet community needs; that they have the necessary organisational capacity; that they are financially sustainable; and, of course, that they will meet the requirements of workplace relations, occupational health and safety and other laws.
In conclusion, we want to see a varied range of organisations, be they for profit or not for profit, gaining a share of the market, and ideally we would like to see some larger not-for-profit entities building their presence in the sector. So, from a position in November last year where it appeared—the possibility was there—that 1,100 childcare centres were in jeopardy, we are now in a position where the future of just a quarter of that number remains to be determined and in the coming weeks we can expect much greater stability in the sector. In managing this situation, the government has the interests of parents, their children and ABC Learning employees front and centre in wishing to offer stability and help to ensure that parents can continue to access quality child care. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr JOHN COBB (Calare) (6.57 pm)—Like others, I rise to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 5) 2008-2009 and Appropriation Bill (No. 6) 2008-2009. When you look at what money the federal government is bringing forward, when you look at what it is doing with its $42 billion stimulus package, you wonder why it is so determined to wreak havoc on the people who live within the Murray-Darling Basin. There are almost two million people who reside within the Murray-Darling Basin. Not only do a very great percentage of those people provide about 40 per cent of Australia’s food and particularly a very high percentage of its fresh food; they depend upon water for their livelihood, for Australia’s wellbeing and for the world to have access by export to the cleanest, greenest and best foodstuff produced anywhere in the world—or at least as good as what is produced anywhere in the world.

When I look at the amount of money that is being made available around Australia, $42 billion, and I look at how it is being spent, I think to myself: is this being spent to help productivity, to maintain jobs at a time when, as the Prime Minister tells us every question time, we are in a global recession—nothing to do with him, but a global recession which we are one of those countries unfortunate enough to be touched by? Of course we are in a recession and Australia is going to be affected by it like everybody else despite the Prime Minister and his government.

I would like to return to the question of water, the Murray-Darling Basin and the livelihood of the two million people who reside in it. I and everybody in the basin are well aware of the fact that the one million people who reside in Adelaide at this time and historically have, even though it is not within the basin, made use of the water of the Murray-Darling for domestic water for Adelaide. So they should, and I have no argument with that, and I think you will find most people in the basin do not. However, I think we do need to remember that this is not just about people in Adelaide getting water, as indeed they should and always will. This is about the two million people in the basin who do not reside in Adelaide as well.

Senator Xenophon made a lot of headlines by doing a deal with the Prime Minister and his government to get a lot of headlines and what have you. As a result, a lot of money is being brought forward, to do what? To invest in the Murray-Darling Basin? To help the infrastructure? To make it more productive? To preserve jobs? No, not exactly. In fact, it would be true to say that the exact opposite is going to happen. They have brought forward one heck of a lot of money, to do what? To take money out of the Murray-Darling Basin, to take jobs out of the Murray-Darling Basin, to take productivity out of the Murray-Darling Basin, at a time when, in the Prime Minister’s own words, Australia faces recession. He was forced into actually using the word ‘recession’ recently when the last
quarter figures came up. It is a fact and we have to have the courage to face what Australia is involved in. But are we moving to preserve jobs where two million people reside? Are we moving to improve productivity where two million people reside? It does not really seem so.

To get his package through and to satisfy the blind, idealistic drive of the Minister for Climate Change and Water, the Prime Minister did a deal with Senator Xenophon which is actually not going to do a lot for Adelaide at this time and is certainly not going to do anything for the two million people in the Murray-Darling Basin. Does it mean that they now have $420 million in total to spend over the next few years? No. It is to spend between now and the end of June—in other words, really in the next three months. It is going to be interesting to see how they do that. It provides for something over $500 million to be spent buying water out of the Murray-Darling Basin in the year 2009-10. Is it well over $1 billion in the next few years? No—in about the next 15 months.

They have had a lend of the senator, because they cannot possibly do that. If they do manage to do it, they can only do it by throwing money like confetti at water and buying properties. If they buy much out of that from Queensland, they will not just be having a lend of Senator Xenophon and the people of Adelaide, they will be having a lend of everyone. Almost none of the water from Queensland is on a regulated system. It is all water that only reaches down the Murray River every other Pancake Day. The Queensland water is not regulated, it is not held by dams; it is water that flows and is only pumped when flow situations reach a certain level. So what are we left with? We are left with the state of New South Wales. The amount of water that can be bought in South Australia is very minimal at the best of times. Victoria has had the character to say, ‘This is ridiculous. We are not having any part of it.’ So we are left with the state of New South Wales. In other words, they are going to spend around a billion dollars over the next 15 months buying water out of New South Wales. As I said earlier, I am very sympathetic to the people in Adelaide that need water, but they will get that water. On the contingency plan, Adelaide and the towns along the Murray-Darling system have first priority, as indeed they should. That is not the issue. The issue is that if they could possibly in the next 15 months spend over $1 billion then that would be absolutely devastating not just to the irrigators but to the towns and communities and to productivity not just for the farmers but for everyone that lives in the Murray-Darling Basin, for everybody that lives in Australia. There is going to be far less fresh food produced, but the real point is that they are going to devastate productivity.

If they really wanted to do something about jobs, if they wanted to do something constructive towards the Murray-Darling Basin, why aren’t they doing what the current Leader of the House suggested when he was shadow minister for water and spending the $1 billion on infrastructure to help with the efficiencies of water, to lift productivity and to get water through savings? No, that does not suit the idealism of either the Prime Minister or in particular the senator who is the Minister for Climate Change and Water. Just last week the Shires Association of New South Wales was meeting and the comment made by the association was that the nation’s food bowl is further gutted by the water buyback scheme. Councils in the state’s south-west fear that the federal government’s water buyback scheme could gut their local communities, which have already been decimated by the ongoing drought.

If they somehow manage to spend a billion dollars over the next 15 months, they
can only do it if they pay so much per megalitre of water that nobody can resist the midas touch from Senator Wong and Prime Minister Rudd. They would buy very little water for a lot of money in New South Wales, or they would go to Queensland, where people have been in trouble for some time, and buy water which can never be guaranteed, which is not regulated, which is not held by a dam and which is only pumped when overland flows reach certain stages.

It is a straight-out attack upon the irrigators of New South Wales, and, as I said, I have absolute sympathy for the million people in Adelaide. They should get their water and they will—contingency plans which we put into place with state governments will ensure that they will. I also have a lot of sympathy for the two million people who live in the Murray-Darling Basin. The reason that this is such a political ploy rather than a practical one, or one which will help the basin, is that Prime Minister Rudd and Senator Wong know very well that there is no political downside for them because all the 14 or 17 seats in the Murray-Darling Basin are held by the coalition. There are three seats that the Labor Party holds—all of which only just touch on the southern, the far southern, the far eastern and the far northern headwaters of the Murray-Darling Basin. There is no downside for them, and that is why they are so relentlessly pursuing the people of the basin—they do not see them as their friends and they do not care what happens to them. That is very plain from the water policies they are pursuing.

As we look at the $42 billion which is soon to go out, I cannot help but look back at agriculture once again beyond the straight-out issue of water and irrigation and the communities that depend upon it, and look at what the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is intending to do at a time when jobs, production and exports are so very crucial. They are not crucial just because we are paying back the $100 billion that Labor previously got the country into trouble with; they are important now when we are heading into further trouble, quite obviously. I see that the minister for agriculture fully intends to follow the recommendations of the Beale report, as he said he is going to accept all those recommendations and take $32 million away from the export meat industry—the 40 per cent, or the $32 million out of $79 million which it cost AQIS to perform meat inspection for exports. The industry currently pays about $47 million of that, and the government picked up the tab for the other $32 million. This basically paid for the administration and the Commonwealth inputs and what they wanted to come out of it.

The Australian Meat Industry Council is rather staggered by this, as indeed they should be. We are talking about an industry that provides something like 50,000 jobs around Australia. It is responsible for exports worth around $8 billion, and here we have the minister for agriculture—who never touches policy, because he knows he knows nothing about it—who just wants to get through his portfolio without getting into strife. He is not going to change anything; he is just going to accept every report that gets put to him and proceed in that way and hope that he keeps his head above water. I think an $8 billion export industry surrounded by 50,000 Australian jobs is worth protecting— he may not. But regarding the $32 million he took away, at about the same time or just after he said he was going to accept the Beale report, he had the gall to say that he was putting $27 million into methane research to help agriculture work out how to deal with emissions from stock—sheep and cattle in particular. I think that is great except that it is not true. Well over half of that is in kind, from government departments. Virtually at the same time, he is flogging $32 mil-
lion from an industry that is export orientated, an industry that is bringing money in from overseas. Jobs, jobs, jobs—it is a little bit hard to get away from that. I said in my local bailiwick, the seat of Calare, the other day that, while ever the breadwinner or breadwinners in your family have a job, your family does not have a recession. I think that is something they need to focus on, rather than just focusing on what they can hand out. I heard a very good description of the stimulus package the other day: walking down to the deep end of a swimming pool, putting a bucket of water into it, walking up to the shallow end and pouring it back in again. It does not matter how often you do it, the level does not change very much.

I look at the stimulus package—or, more correctly, the spending package—and at the appropriations, and I think about what to do if you are really serious about wanting to stimulate the economy in a way that is ongoing and in a way that is going to help pay this back at the end of the day. Let us all remember that at the end of the day every cent that is borrowed does have to be paid back from wherever we might buy it from, whether we do it by bonds or whatever. We had enormous trouble—in fact we totally failed—to engage the New South Wales government in infrastructure while we were in government. It did not matter whether it was the inland rail from Melbourne to Brisbane, which was going to avoid the bottleneck of the Sydney basin, or if it was putting a freeway through the Blue Mountains. Both projects would have had enormous outcomes, not just for Central or Western New South Wales but for Sydney to help it escape the bottleneck and the crowding—great outcomes for everybody involved.

If you are going to throw around $42 billion, why not spend it on serious infrastructure? I think that only about $250 million out of $42 billion was going to be spent on roads and black spots. I did work out once that, of the $96 billion we had to pay back—from the last 20 years—about $108 billion was interest. My heaven, we could have built some infrastructure with that. For the same reason, if they are going to spend $42 billion, why aren’t they spending it on something like putting that highway through the Blue Mountains and putting rail with it—not just a freeway but rail with it, so that we can move goods out of that bottleneck of Sydney. It would be like taking the top off a sore, to let Sydney expand out past the Blue Mountains. This would be ongoing infrastructure development which would pay back to the states GST, which would pay to the Commonwealth income tax. It would be ongoing jobs that would not come to a dead end like most of the infrastructure spending that the $42 billion is designated for will. It will come to a dead end; whereas what I am talking about here today would be ongoing, would increase productivity and would increase the opportunities for businesses to move west out of Sydney.

I can see the day when perhaps Penrith could become a suburb of Orange. Some people might disagree with that. This is common-sense stuff. This is spending money where it will continue to regenerate itself, where it will continue to not just produce jobs now but produce a return in the future.

Mr Gray (Brand—Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia) (7.17 pm)—I rise to speak in favour of the Appropriation Bill (No. 5) 2008-2009 and the Appropriation Bill (No. 6) 2008-2009. On 12 December last year, the Prime Minister announced the government’s nation-building plan—an investment of $4.7 billion in infrastructure projects to strengthen the Australian economy, support jobs and provide much-needed infrastructure. As part of nation building, the Prime Minister announced that the Australian government
would provide up to $195 million to support further economic development in the east Kimberley region of Western Australia through investment in social and common use infrastructure. The legislation appropriates funds for an initial investment in the east Kimberley as part of this initiative. This is real regional development—an economic and agricultural investment made sustainable by social investment.

The Rudd government’s investment in the east Kimberley region, for which this legislation appropriates funds, follows the decision of the Western Australian government to invest in the expansion of land for irrigation around Kununurra. The state government’s plan is to double the amount of irrigated land—from 14,000 to 28,000 hectares. This is popularly known as the Ord stage 2 project. Western Australia’s investment in the Ord stage 2 project will be matched by the Australian government’s financial contributions, creating real regional development which will provide an ideal opportunity for both the state and the Commonwealth governments to make a sustained impact to cut the levels of social and economic disadvantage experienced in the east Kimberley.

In a statement on 16 December in Kununurra, the Prime Minister said that the Commonwealth’s contribution was conditional on a joint assessment by the Commonwealth and Western Australian governments to identify the most effective infrastructure investments to meet the social and economic development needs of the region. As Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia, I am leading the Commonwealth’s participation in this joint assessment. I have been asked to report to the Prime Minister and the Premier of Western Australia on the outcome of this assessment process by the end of March.

I have taken four guiding principles into the joint assessment. First, the Commonwealth investment will be used to fund social and open access infrastructure that will bring long-term benefits to the whole east Kimberley region. Second, the Western Australian government will fund those infrastructure works directly related to land use, the expansion of the irrigated land and the new irrigation and drainage channels. Third, where possible, the Commonwealth’s new investments will be delivered into the east Kimberley through existing arrangements and frameworks to minimise delay and cost and to avoid duplication. Fourth, we have an agreed national approach to managing Australia’s water resources, reflecting the National Water Initiative—an initiative of the then Howard government minister, former Western Australian Senator Ian Campbell, who signed the National Water Initiative at the Council of Australian Governments meeting on 25 June 2004. It should be noted that Western Australia did not actually sign up until April 2006.

The Ord stage 2 proposal builds on the potential of the water resources of the east Kimberley. It creates the potential for significant agricultural developments, supporting jobs in a sustainable, agricultural economy. In supporting the proposal, I want to take the opportunity to ensure that the future operations of the Ord scheme, existing and new, reflect the agreements already made between the Australian and WA governments. Water is a resource that we have to use sustainably. That is why the National Water Initiative is central to the development of the water economy of the region. If the state invests in water delivery, drainage and land access, what types of infrastructure might the Australian government invest in? In its initial submission, the WA government identified some social and open access infrastructure projects that it considers are re-
quired in the east Kimberley. The list includes improvements to the main schools and hospitals, early childhood and aged-care facilities and services, Indigenous development and the Kununurra airport.

I have talked to ministerial colleagues, including the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister for Education and the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations; the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; the Minister for Health and Ageing; the Minister for Resources and Energy; the Minister for Tourism; the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; the Minister for Ageing; the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts; and the Minister for Climate Change and Water about what the Commonwealth is currently doing in the east Kimberley region and their departmental ideas about how the Commonwealth’s new investment of $195 million can be best used to benefit the whole east Kimberley community and to support the expansion of the Ord.

The proposals that I take to the joint assessment will be projects that support the expansion of economic activity in the Ord region such as agriculture, tourism and mining; provide benefits to the whole region and its citizens; fit with and add to the work the Commonwealth is already doing in the east Kimberley; and align with current Australian government policy goals and frameworks, such as ‘closing the gap’, social housing initiatives, boosting regional economies and our environmental and water policies, including the National Water Initiative.

The communities in the east Kimberley, and particularly Indigenous Australians there, face extreme levels of unemployment, social disadvantage and poor health, with a serious shortfall in available social and community amenities and services. This situation was again identified in a work recently published by Dr John Taylor of the Australian National University. Dr Taylor, one of Australia’s leading social and economic demographers and an expert on Indigenous affairs, concluded:

The evidence from 20 years worth of census analysis regarding the relative socioeconomic status of Indigenous people in the Kimberley region compared to that of Indigenous people elsewhere in Australia, indicates that outcomes in the Kimberley are amongst the most disadvantaged in the country and have shown no sign of change. If anything, they appear to have worsened over time.

That analysis is carried in the document relating to the relative socioeconomic status of Indigenous people in the Kimberley, published by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research just last month and launched by the Western Australian minister, Brendon Grylls.

Sustained Indigenous population growth, low Indigenous economic status and limited human capital for mainstream economic participation will reinforce this disadvantage unless we act. Education is a key foundation for life and economic participation. The levels of engagement in schooling and literacy outcomes amongst Indigenous people highlight the need to close the gap in schooling in the east Kimberley. Taylor points to Indigenous enrolment rates for compulsory school ages which is at about 85 per cent. These relatively low levels of Indigenous school enrolment are compounded by low school attendance. In some of the larger schools, Taylor notes, ‘no more than roughly three-quarters of those enrolled attend class at any year level’. This means that less than 65 per cent of the target population receive effective teaching at any given time. The combination of lower levels of Indigenous enrolment and attendance lead to poorer overall education outcomes for young Indigenous people. Indeed, the retention rates for Indigenous stu-
Students in east Kimberley schools will need to be increased to improve the job prospects of young Indigenous people and provide more employment opportunities in the mainstream workforce.

Likewise, health statistics reflect the poverty of Indigenous communities in the east Kimberley. According to Dr Taylor, a primary barrier to the enhanced participation of Indigenous people in the east Kimberley labour market is poor health status and associated high morbidity and mortality. In Western Australia, the ABS estimates that Indigenous male life expectancy at birth is under 59 years and just over 67 for females. Compare this to the estimates of ‘over 79’ for all Western Australian males and almost 84 for all females. Closing the gap is a mission for all of us. Dr Taylor’s research points to injury and poisoning, non-specific causes and respiratory diseases as well as infectious diseases, diseases of the nervous system, the digestive system and skin diseases as notable causes of morbidity. These disease conditions are third world.

But—if it is possible—it is worse than that. Aboriginal people suffer the illnesses of the First World as well as the diseases of the Third World. Cardiovascular and heart disease, trachoma, drug and alcohol substance abuse, as well as diabetes have a deadly grip of disease, deprivation and despair in the east Kimberley. The factors that cause skin disease are also implicated in liver and kidney disease—and they are preventable.

In the Prime Minister’s Closing the gap report, delivered in this House, he highlighted the success of some of Australia’s best Indigenous organisations. He quoted the Productivity Commission chairman, who found that, ‘The best among these Indigenous bodies actually outclass most mainstream organisations or enterprises in Australia.’ That means they outclass even many government initiatives and NGOs. We need to support such Indigenous solutions. The Prime Minister also referred to the work of Dr Chris Sarra, Director of the Queensland government’s Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership and former principal of the Cherbourg Primary School in Queensland. Dr Sarra’s leadership and vision facilitated many changes at the school, which saw a dramatic improvement in attendance and increased community involvement in the life of the school.

Increasingly, we see that, when Indigenous people are given control of their future—when they have functional leadership and the accountability that goes with that—we have the best protection for Indigenous people. In this place, we need to be careful that we do not become paternalistic and take leadership away from Indigenous leaders. Dr Taylor’s research on east Kimberley housing shows that the number of Indigenous people per house has only fallen from 7.5 to 6.3 people over the past 20 years, compared to an average of 3.9 persons per Indigenous dwelling recorded for WA as a whole.

The poor education, health and housing in the Indigenous population all make it harder for Indigenous people to be healthy, get enough sleep, get an education and obtain and retain work. The Australian and Western Australian governments need to work together and to work with Aboriginal organisations to resolve these problems—and we are. We are working closely with our Western Australian ministerial and state government colleagues—in particular, Premier Colin Barnett, Brendon Grylls—my friend—WA regional development minister and WA Minister for Education, Dr Liz Constable.

In January, I again visited the East Kimberley to listen to the community and its representatives. I wanted to hear their ideas directly. During my stay, different community
groups gave me their ideas across a range of factors in which they considered the Commonwealth should invest. We discussed a range of priorities, including teacher training facilities, employment and training, particularly how more local Indigenous people can successfully join the mainstream workforce. We discussed broader Indigenous issues: access to accommodation and housing affordability—an issue which directly affects labour supply; health and aged-care services that meet particular local needs; education and early childhood services, which encourage local kids to stay at school and help them be job-ready and ready for further study and vocational training; and potential new agricultural, tourism and business activities and opportunities to broaden and deepen the East Kimberley economic and employment base.

Over the next three weeks I will be working closely with the Australian and Western Australian government ministers to finalise our ideas. I will also be working with the Western Australian government to jointly assess their proposals and ours, so that, when I present my report to the Prime Minister and the WA Premier at the end of this month, the projects I am recommending for Commonwealth funding have the support of both governments and some can begin immediately. I will also revisit the east Kimberley in the coming weeks to hear from the community again. I want their ideas to directly feed into the joint assessment.

I would like to finish by coming back to the reasons that the Australian government decided to invest in social and open access infrastructure to support the expansion of the Ord irrigation area. The Ord scheme, as most of us know, has played an important role in broadening the economy of northern Western Australia. In 1941 a small experimental farm was established on the Ord River by the Western Australian Wilcock Labor government. It closed down in 1945 when a joint Commonwealth-state research station was established at Ivanhoe Plain, to the north of Kununurra—named after Frank Wise and now known as the Frank Wise Research Station.

For the next 12 years the research station experimented with crops such as rice, safflower, linseed and sugarcane. In 1957 Prime Minister Menzies announced that the Commonwealth would provide the WA Hawke Labor government with a general development grant to develop WA north of the 20th parallel. A change of WA governments did not halt the progress in the Kimberley, and in 1963 the first stage was completed under the Brand government and the future Premier, Charles Court, as minister for the north west. It was during this time that Kununurra was established as the main construction town associated with the irrigation scheme. By 1966, there were 31 farms on the Ord River plain. In 1972 the next stage of the scheme was completed, with the opening of the huge Lake Argyle Dam by Prime Minister William McMahon and state Premier John Tonkin.

Many WA state governments of both political persuasions have considered plans to expand the Ord. The Court government did so in the 1990s, the Gallop government did so in the early 2000s, and the Carpenter government did so just two years ago. But it has been the Barnett government that has put forward a submission to double the size of the irrigated land in the region and to place the irrigation scheme on a more sustainable footing. The Rudd government is willing to invest $195 million to support and leverage those plans, to ensure that the benefits are widely shared.

Expanding the Ord scheme also presents opportunities for the Northern Territory. I have already held discussions with the WA government and the Northern Territory minister for primary industries, Konstantine Vat-
skalis, about the Territory’s plans for expanding agriculture. On Friday, 13 February, I had meetings with Minister Vatskalis and the WA minister for agriculture, Terry Redman, in Canberra to discuss the Ord development. I am considering a joint approach with the WA and Territory governments to explore how the three governments can work together to maximise the opportunities generated by further investment in social and economic infrastructure in this region.

I want to ensure that we take a properly thought out, regional approach to development in the east Kimberley across the state boundary. By continuing the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce, which submitted its mid-term report in February, the Rudd government have already shown our willingness to seriously explore opportunities for the development of land and water resources across the whole of Northern Australia, including in the Kimberley. I commend the work of Senator Bill Heffernan with regard to the creation of this task force.

Members of the House will be aware that major direct and indirect benefits have already come to the region through the local mining sector, particularly via Rio Tinto at the Argyle mine site. But the region’s future must be made more sustainable by broadening its economic base. Mining, agriculture and tourism together offer the potential for a sustainable, broadly based local economy. The decision by the WA government to expand the Ord scheme represents a tremendous opportunity for all members of the east Kimberley community—and one which the Rudd government is pleased to support and build on. These bills commence the funding for this initiative, and I commend the bills to the House.

Mr TUCKEY (O’Connor) (7.33 pm)—I welcome the remarks of the member for Brand, the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia, on Appropriation Bill (No. 5) 2008-2009 and Appropriation Bill (No. 6) 2008-2009. We were partners in crime years ago when I was trying to protect the jobs of forest workers around Australia, particularly in Western Australia, when he and his father-in-law and one-time minister for finance in the Hawke government were of a similar view to me that the then state Gallop government, in pursuit of winning government—as has occurred so often—were prepared to sell out the forest workers of Western Australia and to take their jobs. And for what? So that we could cut more trees down in Indonesia and of course burn the rest, as occurred in Victoria the other day. So I welcome his interest.

Something the parliamentary secretary may be aware of in this debate about the development of the east Kimberley is that the Carpenter-Ripper government were approached by the then Howard government with regard to this development that is now proceeding. The offering of the sort of money that is now being proposed—and which I endorse—was rejected by the Carpenter government. The reason given privately was that, if that area was expanded, the locals were going to grow ‘illegal’ plants—as if there was going to be some great marijuana harvest up there. Do you know what they were talking about? They were talking about GM cotton. They were so hung up on this GM debate—‘Got to keep the greenies happy; got to keep myself in a job’. It did not keep them in a job, and that is a lesson to all of us. The fact of life is that they denied earlier development, but possibly not by a great deal—and, to the credit of this government, it has continued.

I think the parliamentary secretary might, in his special responsibility, realise that, while good things are happening in the east Kimberley, his government is still progress-

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ing with a World Heritage order on the west Kimberley—which, by any measure, is probably a better prospect. It has enough tidal energy to supply all Australia with energy, and that includes motive power. It has very substantial mineral resources, and it too has some pretty impressive rivers. If cyclical climatic circumstances are to continue, Australia is going to have to move people up there. People constantly talk about piping the water to the south—you would think it could run down hill all the way—but it will in fact be much better to transfer the people to the resources rather than the resources to the people.

Let us hope that other initiatives—or good luck or change—might fix the problems and overcome the present drought in what represents 42 per cent of the agricultural production of Australia, around the Murray-Darling river system. If it does not, Australia is not short of fresh water. We have just had the example of the flooding in half of Queensland after rain up in that country. I lived in Carnarvon and watched the same sorts of events occur in the Gascoyne River over many years. It unfortunately does not have natural dam sites. I might as well shock and horrify everybody in the chamber. Many years ago, as the shire president, I proposed that we introduce the American Program Plowshare and literally make some storages below ground level. I have seen an eight kilometre movie of the Russians doing just that. I remember a state politician saying we might end up with radioactive cabbages. What I am saying is that there is a huge amount of money in these proposals, but they will come to naught if only half of the Kimberley region and its huge resources are being proposed for development while another minister in this government is running around trying to lock up the other half of the Kimberley, which is probably the better prospect for development in the future for our grandchildren and so forth. What is more, it can provide all the renewable energy at a price equivalent to the pre-Christmas cash splash.

Other aspects of these appropriation bills that are of interest to me are the proposals for jobs. As I said, there was a time when the father-in-law of the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Development and Northern Australia and I were on the same plane because we both believed that, above all, the responsibility of the Labor Party was to generate jobs. A pretty interesting thing happened in question time today, which was referred to by our leader. When asked if the new legislation on industrial relations—and, one might add, the emissions trading scheme and all the other things that are in the legislative pipeline—would create even one job, the Prime Minister said he was not sure about that but he would guarantee all people who lost their jobs a redundancy payment. I am sure they will all go home and have a bottle of champagne tonight on the strength of that—a Prime Minister of Australia saying, ‘The only thing I can guarantee is a redundancy payment when you lose your job.’

It smacks of trade union rhetoric. I have said for years that they have paid more attention to making sure that retrenched workers get redundancy payments than to keeping them in a job. Why would you keep them in a job? The answer is pretty simple. People want to keep their job. There is a lot of pride in it for the average citizen and they are better paid. We know how long a redundancy payment lasts and, of course, they cannot get unemployment benefits until they have spent the lot. Why would a Prime Minister say, ‘That’s the best I can promise Australia?’ That is what he did today, and he should be roundly criticised for it, because it shows they are giving in. And there are opportunities. I repeat: the cash splash may have sold a few extra flat screen televisions et cetera, but
do you make a stimulus package to improve the statistics or to have a real response in employment? I would go for the real response in employment.

I was recently lent a book about public works in Western Australia. I have been reading that nearly every existing water storage in Western Australia was constructed during the Great Depression. It was pretty tough. People worked for ‘sustenance’, as it was then known, which was not a lot of money. The largest of the dams cost some £300,000. We have had the efforts of Roosevelt in United States held up to us as an example. He, of course, built the Hoover Dam. And Barack Obama, the present oracle of world politics—and I do not say that critically—has been held up in this place day after day. What was his first stimulus initiative? He cut income tax. People talk about cutting payroll tax, but income tax is a payroll tax. If an employee’s income increases through a reduction of $20 per week in income tax, he does not have to go to the boss, who is struggling to find orders in a tough environment, and ask for a raise. It follows. And income tax is across the board, as compared to payroll tax, which does have some thresholds and is not applicable to every employer.

I am saying: where is the strategy? I have made a submission to the Senate inquiry, and I hope shortly to put to it my proposals which, for less than the cost of the pre-Christmas cash splash, could have seen renewable tidal power installed in just the smallest part of the Kimberley, as identified by the World Energy Council. This is not some figment of Wilson Tuckey’s imagination. We could have produced 4.2 gigawatts of electricity—an additional 120 per cent of electricity if all of it were applied to Western Australia. But for $10 billion you could also interconnect that system with all of Australia via Western Australian’s AC transmission system. Instead of knocking off $10 billion—and there is ample evidence that it had a very limited effect on Australia’s economic performance—you could have put the money into such a project and any number of benefits would have flowed to future generations. Why wouldn’t we do that instead of taking the piecemeal approach we have here of ‘just another $2.215 billion’.

We have gone beyond any pretence that the government propose to balance the budget. In fact, they have legislated to give themselves the right to borrow up to $200 billion without any further reference to parliament. I was interested to read in today’s press that the first and, of course, our smallest state government went out to sell bonds for $100 million the other day, and they did not fill that application. I mean, in years gone by, they would have been knocked down in the rush—even Tasmania. Now what is the message from that? They apparently went cap in hand back to those who originally did decide to buy a few bonds and said, ‘Can you buy a few more?’ A state government hawking debt around the countryside! And why? Well, Big Brother is out there and borrowing money at a rate never heard of and the financial institutions are short of money—and they are going to get shorter of it, because Australia has never had a reputation for accumulating large amounts of savings.

There is a lot of criticism of the banks because, in the case of their business lending, they are not lowering rates to reflect the decisions of the Reserve Bank. But the Reserve Bank does not lend them money. It will meet them on an overnight basis, the ‘cash rate’, as it is known. That is, if you are a little bit short for the day, you go and do some sort of deal with the Reserve Bank and they give you some money, but they want it back tomorrow or the next week. They have got to borrow in the open market place, and, if Big
Brother—otherwise known as the Australian government—is in there putting out bond issues in the billions virtually weekly, where is the money going to come from? The United Kingdom has apparently made the decision that you just print it, which takes us back to the Whitlam days—when you start printing money that does not exist. It is interesting that it happened then, and I reminded people prior to this election that the last time we changed the government in Australia because ‘It’s time’ we got Whitlam. And boy, are we seeing the similarities build up each day!

This is a serious matter—we are looking at all sorts of appropriations here. We can see agriculture, fisheries and forestry—it only gets $0.7 million. I do not see anything in it for exports. Defence gets a very small amount. Education, employment and workplace relations gets $285 million—what is that for? To advertise the benefits of Fair Work Australia! That is what I told my party room this morning.

Why is it that Pacific Brands has decided to leave the Australian workplace in a very significant way and go overseas? Why is it that the Boeing company, who were employing 400 people here on very important work, packed up and went? I might remind you that for two years they were under attack by the trade union movement because about a quarter of their workforce wanted to be different and they wanted to have a collective agreement for the other three-quarters. Fisher and Paykel—almost an iconic name in white-goods for Australia and New Zealand—has also gone. And BP Solar, on leaving, said, ‘We need to consolidate our activities, so we are taking all the expertise we have learned in Australia to one of our other manufacturing facilities.’ But, if consolidation was the only issue, they could have brought that other plant, located somewhere else in the world, to Australia.

I have just given you four big examples. Day after day, as I correspond with or talk to my small business people, they are all going through their workforce and deciding who should go before this legislation is enacted—they are not going to cop another round of so-called unfair dismissal, which they knew as ‘go-away money’. I could spend the rest of my speech giving examples of the abuse and rorts which were applicable in that area and condoned by the trade union movement and which the trade union movement wants back. Why would you do that? Why would you get into a position where you have got to create a circumstance where people, in preparation, are getting out of it? I come back to those four big names that I just mentioned—I do not know what was said in their boardrooms, but none of them can blame the economic crisis, because they are not restricting their business; they have just taken it somewhere else. These are the problems—we have a government now legislating, to my mind, for a depression, because it is just going to be too difficult to employ people in Australia in any industry other than in the service industries like McDonald’s or others who, it appears, will be well looked after.

I want to talk for a moment more about the Kimberley region. If there are some components of that region—apparently the whales cavort up there—that need some protection, why do we need to go to Geneva to have it? I know the Kimberley, and I think it was a Labor minister—I think we knew him as ‘Biggles’—who once said of Kakadu that it was ‘beaten-up buffalo country’. Well, I think there are some better parts than that, although I also take this opportunity to repeat the remarks made, I think, in the Australian newspaper about ‘Kakadu or Kakadon’t’—and, if any government wants to start shaving their expenditures and promoting the Australian economy, they might go to all their ‘Kakadon’t’ departments, because I
reckon about 50 per cent of the workforce
today employed in the public service is in
some sort of activity to tell you what you
cannot do.

That is just so different to my experience
of the North West when Sir Charles Court, as
we knew him in later years—Charlie Court,
as we knew him then—was the Minister for
the North-West and drove development at an
amazing rate. In half an hour, I, as a local
government practitioner, got a deal with him
and two other ministers standing on the
ground to develop, as a council, 500 blocks
of land—and two ministers were sent back to
Perth to deliver the approvals to my council
within a week. Imagine any council in Aus-

tralia today just trying to develop some
blocks of land at the right price! I might add
that when we developed them, including
levee banks, we sold them for $2,000 a
block—could you imagine it! The reality is
that ‘Kakadon’t’ has got to the point where
people are denied low-cost housing blocks, if
only because of the interest the developer has
to pay while he jumps all the preliminary
hurdles of approval.

So there are all sorts of things this funding
might do. We are going to look after appren-
tices after they have lost their jobs. That is
pretty good but, with other initiatives, they
might have kept their jobs. I do not know
how many might be employed on the pro-
posal that I have put before the parliament,
but it would have been a lot. And it would
have been high-tech stuff and it would have
been in an area of renewable energy, where
Australia could take a technological lead. We
are told that there will be so many jobs in
renewable energy. But in what—wind
power? But wait a minute—the Scandinavi-
ans and others have done that. They have
learnt that it does not even work as well as
they would have liked, but they are happy to
flog it to us. And it is the same with solar
power. BP Solar were here, but they have
gone. They were driven out because of their
concerns about other initiatives of this gov-
ernment. They could have brought more of
their technology here—we are not short of
sunlight. By the way, the transmission sys-

But the whole thing about it is that this is
just asking this parliament to approve more
money. It will be borrowed—(Time expired)

Ms ANNETTE ELLIS (Canberra) (7.53
pm)—I welcome the opportunity to speak on
Appropriation Bill (No. 5) 2008-2009 and
Appropriation Bill (No. 6) 2008-2009. These
bills are designed not only to help Australia
avoid the worst of the current financial crisis
but to ensure Australia’s prosperity in the
years to come. Since I last spoke in the
House the world’s financial situation has
worsened. Worrying financial news comes
from America, Japan, China and other large
trading partners on an almost daily basis. It is
in this climate that we must make serious
decisions concerning Australia’s future, and
it is with this in mind that I rise to speak this
evening.

These appropriation bills demonstrate the
Australian government’s commitment to im-
plementing its Nation Building and Jobs
Plan. They demonstrate the government’s
ability and willingness to act decisively to
protect Australia’s interests. The government
is acting while the opposition is playing po-
litical games with Australia’s economic fu-
ture. The people of the electorate of Canberra
are concerned, like everyone, about the fi-
nancial situation throughout the global econ-
omy and what effects it will have on them.
Due to the government’s decisiveness in its
response to the crisis, when I speak to con-
stituents I am able to outline what action the
government is taking to ensure that the worst effects of the global financial crisis are avoided or reduced to the lowest level.

These bills are providing funding to several projects which will improve conditions throughout Australia and here in Canberra. Nationally, Appropriation Bill (No. 5) 2008-2009 will fund 241 ABC Learning childcare centres until 31 March 2009, allowing the parents of children attending the childcare centres which are under financial duress to find alternative childcare arrangements if necessary, as well as providing centre operators the time to restructure their finances to help avoid closure. This decisive action by the government will enable parents with children in child care to avoid taking days off to provide care for their children, and hopefully it will allow us to continue with a healthy childcare sector.

There will be $6.5 million provided for literacy, language and numeracy training places to assist young Australians to achieve those basic skill requirements that are absolutely essential to start along the skills pathway which will assist them to achieve in the world of work. Although graduation rates from year 12 have increased over the last 20 years, we need to continue to work to ensure that more Australians gain these basic skills.

I am glad to see the strong support this government is giving to help those who are learning a trade. We are ensuring that we create an effective learning and working environment for younger apprentices and employees. This support includes $43 million for new apprenticeships and apprenticeship centres as an investment in Australia’s future. This will enable apprentices to improve their skills and it will consequently build an economically stronger Australia. This includes $38.9 million to help trade apprentices find new employers and to reduce delays for business and employees in finding work and workers in these difficult times. Additionally, $36.8 million will be spent to assist redundant workers by providing early access to employment programs to help reduce the costs that families incur, both economically and socially, when a family member loses that employment.

In addition, $16.4 million will be spent to increase development in the east Kimberley region as part of a larger package of $194 million to help develop roads, ports and power in that region. I am keenly aware of the importance of Australia developing its infrastructure. Here in the ACT we have benefited from $2 million worth of local infrastructure programs. These programs include, within my electorate, a $1.4 million youth recreation centre in Woden. Canberra will also gain from a $600,000 upgrade to Glebe Park in the city precincts. These projects will not only improve the quality of life for Canberra residents now and into the future but, importantly, they will also provide jobs in construction and associated industries here in my local community.

The bill provides an additional $11.1 million for the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs to expand emergency relief to families in distress. After the financial events of the last few months, and as we see these events continue, we must ensure that we strive for the best outcomes for those who are in need due to events that are out of their control.

Provided in the bill is $68.7 million for a number of agencies to assist with the implementation of the Nation Building and Jobs Plan. As I have said, this plan is part of the Rudd government’s commitment to help Australia avoid the worst effects of the global financial crisis. The investment of these funds will ensure that the Nation Build-
Appropriation Bill (No. 6) has several key elements, including an injection of $1.189 billion in the Australian Rail Track Corporation, and will provide funding for 17 major projects aimed at improving the reliability and competitiveness of the nation’s rail and freight network—and I cannot see any reason for anyone objecting to that particular initiative. One of these 17 major projects that this bill will fund is the expansion of the rail corridors to the Port of Newcastle. The funding will increase the capacity of the port from 97 million tonnes per year to 200 million tonnes per year and will provide incredible opportunities for the Hunter region to contribute to Australia’s economy through improved export infrastructure capacity.

The Rudd government is committed to ensuring Australia’s long-term prosperity, and this appropriation bill is part of that commitment. Investment in Australia’s rail network will help stimulate the economy at a time when the world’s economy is in a major downturn. This bill is not just about stimulating the economy here but also about providing for Australia’s future by allowing business to operate effectively in the future. While I am talking about rail, I cannot let the chance go by to say that I understand that Infrastructure Australia’s interim priority list—which is a list of major infrastructure projects they are considering throughout the country—has on it, along with a lot of other projects, a very-fast-train proposal involving Victoria, the ACT and New South Wales. This is something that this region has talked about for many years. No-one would be more delighted than me if we could see that coming to fruition at some point in the future. That is the sort of project that infrastructure is really all about. It would change the face of infrastructure in the region and revolutionise transport in this particular corner of the country. So our fingers are crossed, even though it is a very large project to bid for.

Appropriation Bill (No. 6) provides $392 million for the AusLink program. This will form part of a commitment to bring forward $711 million to invest in roads, including the already successful Black Spot Program. As the chair of the ACT consultative panel for the AusLink Black Spot Program, I appreciate the savings and benefit to society as a whole through this program. With relatively low-cost changes to road condition, we have been able to save lives and decrease the vehicular accident trauma level. An evaluation of the Black Spot Program showed it has prevented at least 32 fatalities and more than 1,500 serious injuries in its first three years of operation. For every dollar the government invests in this program, society receives an estimated saving of $14 from road trauma costs.

I know from our local point of view there is always a very strong interest in the local Black Spot Program. Within my electorate between 2007 and 2008 the Black Spot Program funded road improvement projects at locations with recurring vehicles crashes in suburbs such as Red Hill, Griffith, Gordon, Kambah and Weston. The additional funding that has now been announced through this appropriation bill will continue and improve this work in reducing the road toll in the ACT and in other parts of the country. Furthermore, government investment in road improvements assists businesses to operate more effectively by reducing the risk and costs from accidents as well as eliminating bottlenecks and the subsequent delays, which contribute to cost increases.

Included here also is $250 million to accelerate additional water purchases by the Commonwealth government. Water has become one of the most valued commodities...
within this wonderful country in which we live. With the bizarre weather that we are facing, where we have fire at one end of the country and flood at the other, water is still very much integral to our planning. We must accept that we face a future of limited water resources and work to ensure that we manage this commodity well into the future.

The Canberra community understand the value of water, and the federal government has worked with the ACT and NSW governments to ensure the best use of this precious resource for us. Recently we have had the announcement of the granting of a 150-year lease over the Googong Dam to the ACT government. The finalisation of these arrangements has ensured the long-term water security of Canberra, Queanbeyan and the surrounding community, along with other programs that are in place to work in line with that.

These bills demonstrate the Australian government’s commitment to improving the lives of all Australians. The government is working to ensure that Australia does what it can to avoid the worst of this global financial crisis, a crisis that every day brings worse news with it. But we must simply remain optimistic, work with the government and the programs that are coming forward, and make sure that this investment is an investment in our and our children’s futures. I commend the bills to the House.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (8.04 pm)—It is good to be able to rise tonight to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 5) 2008-2009 and Appropriation Bill (No. 6) 2008-2009. I would like to begin by talking about what is clearly the most important issue in this country at the moment, and that is jobs, jobs, jobs. I know that, within the electorate of Cowan, jobs are critical. It is all about personal and family economic security. You can talk about a lot of other issues within this great country at the moment, but ultimately it always comes down to the ability of parents, or carers of some kind, to put food on the table and to operate with certainty and security in their lives. So there is little doubt that the greatest priority in the country is jobs.

Looking at what has happened across this country, I would like to focus obviously on the electorate of Cowan. There are many suburbs within the 195 square kilometres of Cowan. When I drive and walk the streets of Cowan to speak to people, I see never-ending strings of houses in the new districts with the classic tradies’ and subbies’ vehicles parked out the front. These people depend on the economy for their livelihood.

It is very important that we have confidence in what is going on, confidence in the government. I will get to confidence in the government in due course—and I would like to talk about the great level of confidence that was held in the past government—but, before I do that, I would just like to report that there was some fabulous news yesterday morning. The Woolworths shopping centre at Carramar, in the north of the electorate of Cowan, was opened yesterday morning, with 120 local jobs for people in the Carramar, Tapping and Banksia Grove area.

I know that the government will try to suggest that somehow what happened in December relates to the 120 new jobs in the Carramar district. But, of course, a shopping centre within Carramar, in the north of the electorate of Cowan, was opened yesterday morning, with 120 local jobs for people in the Carramar, Tapping and Banksia Grove area.

I know that the government will try to suggest that somehow what happened in December relates to the 120 new jobs in the Carramar district. But, of course, a shopping centre within Carramar has been on the plans for the last 10 or 15 years. Woolworths had plans to establish there some years ago. What we have seen then is a delivery of a need in the local area. Certainly there is no great value in what has happened in the last year under the current government.

Let us look back a little at what happened over the previous 11½ years before the last federal election. As we know, somewhat differently from the current circumstances 2.2
million jobs were actually created and $96 billion of debt was repaid. So it is of little surprise that there was a great deal of confidence within the country, within Western Australia and within the electorate of Cowan in those days.

When I look back at what Cowan was like in the mid-1990s, I see that things have changed a lot. The northern suburbs of Perth east of Wanneroo Road—and I do not expect anyone here to know these areas—had a lot of market gardens and areas where there was field after field of horticulture. These were often owned by Italian families, who have such a rich and important history within the district of Wanneroo in the northern part of Cowan. As time moved on and people’s confidence improved towards the end of the 1990s, lots of these market gardeners sold their land and the developers moved in. We now have suburbs that did not really exist 10 or 15 years ago, including the suburbs of Madeley, Darch, Landsdale and, further north, Hocking, Pearsall, Sinagra, Ashby, Tapping, Carramar and even Banksia Grove. These suburbs to the east side of Wanneroo Road within the electorate of Cowan were not much more than market gardens 15 years ago. Yet, due to circumstance and a great degree of confidence, people felt that these were developments that needed to be made and that housing was needed to serve the population. I consider that to be a great legacy of the confidence built up under the previous government.

As I said, when you had jobs being created, confidence being injected into the community, zero government debt, savings being generated and a government that really knew what it was doing, people felt that it was the right time. First off, the market gardeners sold and moved further out, the developers came in and created the suburbs—the environment for our suburbs within Cowan—and finally people took the opportunity to buy into these great little suburbs. Now we find ourselves in the current circumstance.

I now turn to what the government calls the stimulus package and its centrepiece. I know that a lot has been made about the semantics of the ‘75,000 new jobs’—well, some on the other side have said ‘supported’ jobs. It is important to look back through some comments in *Hansard* so I can assist the House with what was actually said. I think that we can all have confidence that *Hansard* is an accurate reflection of that, otherwise the proofs would have been amended. I would like to draw upon my assistant, the member for Solomon in this case. In a speech on 10 November he talked about the so-called economic security package: He said:

It will help create up to 75,000 additional jobs over the coming year.

That is interesting. That does not sound too much like ‘supporting’ jobs; it sounds more like new jobs. But I guess, when we have another eight months to go, there might still be time for another 75,000 new jobs to be created. There does not seem to be much progress so far, but maybe there will be an acceleration in the future. It is worth clarifying whether the member for Solomon was alone on this. On 11 November the Minister for Finance and Deregulation said:

… this investment means that the Economic Security Strategy is expected to create about 75,000 additional jobs for Australians.

I am beginning to see a bit of a pattern here. But it is important to go on just in case those two members are mistaken. I go forward to 24 November, when in fact the Treasurer, in answering a question from the member for Leichhardt, said:

It is a very important strategy which will add between half and one per cent to GDP and create up to 75,000 jobs.
I guess even one job is ‘up to’ 75,000 jobs, but I think that the implication is pretty clear that there is an aiming mark here and it is clearly 75,000. I will move forward to see who else is involved with this, just in case the Treasurer got it wrong on that occasion. On 25 November, after a question from the member for Hasluck to the Treasurer, the Treasurer said:

Our strategy is expected to boost growth by one-half to one per cent and help to create up to 75,000 additional jobs.

I think everyone is working off the same script here—the script that they were given in any case.

On 27 November the member for Corio asked the Prime Minister a question, to which the Prime Minister replied:

As a rule of thumb, a $10 billion injection by government in the economy is capable of generating up to 75,000 jobs.

To me, that does not seem to be supporting; it seems like it is creating. I think that is a reasonable expectation from what we see in the documents. But we cannot leave 1 December out, when the member for Flynn asked a question of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister responded:

… the $10.4 billion package we announced in October which was capable of creating some 75,000 jobs …

It is all moving forward in the same direction, isn’t it, Mr Deputy Speaker? The Deputy Prime Minister, on 1 December, responded to a question by saying:

… the economic activity that it is obviously going to prime are worth 75,000 jobs.

Then, in a speech on 3 December, the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government said:

At COAG just last Saturday, we announced a $15.1 billion package to help create 133,000 jobs …

That is something a little bit different, but I guess that is another 133,000 jobs that will be created. We look forward to maybe seeing that one day.

I will just go to 12 December where at a press conference the Prime Minister, in a media release, again said that 75,000 jobs were capable of being created through the Economic Security Strategy. I guess the point I am trying to make here is that the language that has been used by the government in this sitting of parliament, in 2009, has changed quite significantly. No-one over there ever mentions ‘creating’ anymore; it is all about ‘supporting’. Unfortunately, Hansard shows a different record of what is trying to be put across now. The government was most definitely putting out a ‘creation’ perspective towards the end of 2008 and the rhetoric has now changed.

In the last session of parliament, in the last week, in the last few days and also today we have had comments from government ministers where they have pointed a finger at us and said, ‘You supported the first economic handout, the first cash handout.’ That is true. When we were told that 75,000 jobs were going to be created—and I think I have shown that the government suggested that to us on many occasions—there was some reason to expect that the government would have gone through Treasury and done the modelling which suggested that the creation of the 75,000 jobs would actually happen. So, taking the government at face value, we gave them a shot.

Unfortunately, it now seems that we were misled about what the government said they were going to do and what they said would happen on many occasions last year. They have just dropped back a little bit on the rhetoric about that. Now it is all about supporting jobs rather than creating jobs.
I do not think the government has exactly created a whole lot of confidence. And, as I said before, this is about confidence. It is a time when the people of Australia need confidence. They need to be told what is good about this country and what is working. They do not need to be told things that sound good one week and will just be ditched at the right time in the future. This is certainly not the way to create confidence. As we are aware, the level of confidence in this country has been dropping for a long time. If you look at the Westpac business survey you will see that that was certainly the case towards the end of 2007 where confidence was dropping and it continued to drop.

I would like to refer to the $42 billion that the government has advanced in previous bills but which these appropriation bills refer to. As we all know, the opposition opposed it. The government will continue to say, ‘We had no alternative.’ The reason why the government say that there is no alternative is entirely incorrect. As the Leader of the Opposition has said again today, there are four main elements within the opposition’s alternative policy. First off, we began with tax cuts, which have been demonstrated to be more economically effective than one-off cash handouts. Then of course we also had, as the opposition leader said, a genuine incentive for investment in terms of doubling the rate of depreciation for investment in water and energy efficiency in the built environment. This is a measure that will have environmental benefits right now and will create jobs right now.

The opposition also support a well-planned and a well-prioritised investment in schools. We proposed $3 billion, which would be more effective, better targeted and capable of being delivered. I would just like to mention one of the schools within the electorate of Cowan. Under the former government’s Investing in Our Schools Program, $150,000 was provided to this school for the enclosure of the undercover area. Thanks to the contractor who was imposed upon the school by the former government in Western Australia, it took 12 months for them to even get a tender document provided or put out there. When the tender came in, the project was going to cost far more than $150,000, so of course the school had no capability to enclose that undercover area. So when we talk about trying to get so many buildings built by, I think, June 2010, I have some grave doubts as to whether the states will be able to deliver on that. I will move on to the fourth element of the—

Mr Perrett—Have a bit of faith in the Western Australian government, Luke.

Mr SIMPKINS—Well, I have no faith in the former Western Australian government, but that was through bitter experience. The fourth point I would like to talk about is one that the government have never even touched to any degree, which makes me think that they think it is a pretty good idea—that is, to relieve small businesses for a period of two years of a portion of their superannuation guarantee contribution. Basically, the Commonwealth would be putting cash into their hands and thereby directly reducing the cost of employment.

I think it is pretty clear that we have an alternative that is effective and cost-effective as well. We know that what has happened in this country is that there has been a dramatic lack of confidence. We had a lack of confidence because the government, of course, did not help when they were talking about the inflation genie. They scared a lot of people at that point. They probably even scared some of the regulators, like the Reserve Bank, by talking up how bad inflation was. It was difficult for the Reserve Bank to do anything but put up interest rates. So that certainly did not create confidence in the Aus-
Australian economy. When we look at the state of the Australian economy versus the state of other economies around the world, with our regulations and with our government surplus we were in an enviable position. There was every reason to have confidence that this country would be better off than others in facing the challenges ahead. But unfortunately there were those within this place who were doing their utmost to undermine that confidence, so we have been in a very difficult situation over the last 12 months or so. I will just finish by saying that what we need to concentrate on right now is jobs, jobs, jobs. There is no doubt about it; confidence—(Time expired)

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (8.24 pm)—I point out to the previous speaker, the member for Cowan, that nothing undermines confidence like armchair generals, who sit on their hands, who wait for the government to act and who then dispute every feature of the proposals we put forward and the measures we put forward. Nothing undermines confidence like armchair generals. I think they ignore the fact that we face an international set of circumstances, an international crisis, that has not been seen since the 1930s and that fundamentally things have changed. They have changed from what occurred in 2006 or well before that.

As of the end of 2008, some 17 OECD countries were entering recession: the US, Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Singapore, Hong Kong, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Portugal, Turkey, Ireland and New Zealand. There are another 10 OECD economies which have had at least one quarter of negative growth; France, Canada, Korea, Norway, Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic and Mexico. So we now face a situation where we have an international economic downturn, six of our top 10 trading partners in recession, 27 countries having experienced one negative quarter of growth and 17 being in recession, and we have speakers from the opposition harking back to the good times, as if they could click their fingers and click their heels and get back there.

This crisis has claimed nearly 30 banks that have either collapsed or had to be bailed out or nationalised. Nobody would have foreseen the Royal Bank of Scotland being in state control, which is what has occurred. No-one would have foreseen Northern Rock, in the United Kingdom, being nationalised. No-one would have foreseen the contraction of credit that has occurred.

We have had the most serious economic contraction, the most serious economic crisis, since the 1930s. Really, for opposition speakers to be going down this sort of memory lane journey, as if they can magically transform things, is to do a great disservice, I think, to the Australian people, because what we really need to do is critically examine the economic fundamentals that have governed markets for the last 20 years or so. This has not just been done in this country; it has been done internationally, by people like George Soros, who made a great deal of money as a hedge fund manager in the derivatives markets in the world financial markets. He has written a book called The New Paradigm for Financial Markets: The Credit Crisis of 2008 and What It Means. Basically, in that book he disputes the sort of neoliberal concept that markets have a self-correcting equilibrium, a belief that was founded on mathematical models, which is occasionally right but, as the crisis proves, is sometimes spectacularly wrong.

Soros believes—and he has made money out of these ideas, so they must have some basis in reality—that markets are not self-regulating bodies but rather have a prevailing bias which defies the concepts of rational expectations of investors and other players in
the market. He believes that that prevailing bias factors in imperfect knowledge that the participants have and perceptions of self-interest. Most importantly, he finds that it actually produces self-perpetuating beliefs. His point is that this prevailing bias often defies reality—that is, prices are often higher or lower than they should be, than the fundamentals govern—and that the market may not be able to self-correct or reach equilibrium. So what happens is that you do not just have these sorts of downturns but occasionally the prevailing bias gets so out of touch with the realistic value of assets that you have an implosion. This is what we saw in the 1930s and it is what we have been seeing in the last year or so. Soros speculates that there may well have been a superbubble that developed that was tested at times like 2001, when the Fed dropped its rates, and the fact that it survived those tests actually perpetuated the belief.

Debate interrupted.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order! It being 8.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

**Flinders Electorate: Coastal Villages**

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (8.30 pm)—I want to address a series of issues in relation to the coastal villages within my electorate of Flinders. The coastal villages are the significant towns of Blind Bight, Warneet, Cannons Creek and Tooradin, and to those you would also add Pearcedale, which, whilst not technically a coastal village, is certainly an honorary member of the group. I want to raise three things in relation to their future which I believe and they believe need to be addressed.

First, I have been contacted by a number of residents who are genuinely and deeply concerned about the fact that they are surrounded by coastal scrub, that they have just a single road providing access in and out of the townships and that as a consequence they are particularly vulnerable to scrub fires and bushfires. We have been very fortunate in the electorate of Flinders that no homes and no people have been lost to the tragic bushfires within Victoria. We have, however, seen at least two fires within the electorate, which were put out by the tremendous work of the local CFA. We have also seen that in the Casey City precinct there was a significant fire. Blind Bight, Warneet, Cannons Creek and Tooradin are all within Casey, so these are areas which are proximate and which are at risk. The message is very clear: the overgrown scrub in and around the foreshore is tinder dry. I know these towns and I know that people live there precisely because of the natural values, precisely because, whether it is Cannons Creek or Rutherford Inlet, they are beautiful waterways bounded by magnificent natural reserves. But the message from the people of these towns is, respectfully to the councils, to the Department of Sustainability and the Environment, to Parks Victoria where appropriate, that we need to thin out the undergrowth and we need to make sure that there is appropriate fuel reduction because these are areas with a dangerous combination of high scrub, highly untouched, right next to residential areas. Perhaps most concerning for those in Warn- eet, Cannons Creek and Blind Bight is that there is only one way out of town, there is only one road. If that were to be blocked in the course of a major fire then we would have an extraordinary risk.

As a consequence, we have seen that there has been a community meeting, that Blind Bight Community Centre had people come together to discuss their concerns, to raise their fears and to seek action. For my part I have written to Premier Brumby to seek his
assistance in ensuring that the local councils are not only empowered but encouraged to take steps which will lead to fuel reduction and to seek his assistance that the DSE will also take those steps necessary to engage in fuel reduction. We need a regular program of fuel reduction in vulnerable local areas such as Blind Bight, Tooradin, Warneet, Cannons Creek and the nearby town of Pearcedale. I hope that these issues are taken forward as part of the royal commission. So first and foremost is the safety of the coastal village communities from what could be a terrible calamity, whether by accident or otherwise. They are vulnerable, they are relatively high-density areas of residential communities in such strong natural environments, and therefore they need high levels of protection.

Secondly, I want to make sure that we fight and fight to get gas to these communities. They have waited too long. They deserve a natural gas connection. They have not been given that by the state. We will fight for that and we commit to fighting for that.

Thirdly, that leads to the fact that in the near future I will be seeking a community meeting with the people of the coastal villages to work for the long term on the fire protection front, on the natural gas front and on any other issues which are of importance to the wonderful people of these great towns. I say I am with you when you seek help and protection, and we will do all that we can, firstly, to protect and, secondly, to ensure that you have the maximum utility in your own homes.

**Grandparents Raising Grandchildren**

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM** (Braddon) (8.35 pm)—I would like to talk about grandparents raising grandchildren. The issues grandparents raising grandchildren face are complex and continuous. Indeed, stress is a significant health issue for many custodial grandparents. The compounding effects of financial, legal and emotional stress can lead to significant health problems. Unfortunately, the stress of meeting the demands and responsibilities of caring for their grandchildren, coupled with the grief, guilt or anxiety felt for the plight of their grandchildren’s parents, often compromises the health of the grandparents and diminishes their ability to cope.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that in 2003 there were 22,500 grandparent families with 31,100 children aged between zero and 17 in the care of the grandparents. I suspect that those figures have risen quite dramatically since 2003. In Tasmania, the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Tasmania project is funded by FaHCSIA through the National Illicit Drug Strategy strengthening families initiative and managed by Early Support for Parents Inc. The project is in its fourth year and is funded until 30 June 2009. Before I return to this, I would like to point out that the Tasmanian Department of Education statistics in 2008 recorded 494 grandparent families from prep to year 12. The Department of Health and Human Services identified 160 informal grandparent families in 2008. In Tasmania informal grandparent families are those families where the grandchildren are not under the care and protection of the state. Of 173 children in kinship care on 15 September 2008, at least 51 were being cared for by a grandparent. Unfortunately no relationship has been recorded for 99 of the children in kinship care. Other relatives are recorded as the carers for the remaining 23 children.

I am informed that the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Tasmania project in 2009 services a mailing list of 232 grandparent families. And indeed grandparents, as I mentioned before, raising their grandchildren experience a complexity of issues across both the state and federal jurisdictions and it is something that we will have to come to terms with more and more.
I return to acknowledge the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Tasmania project. 
This is a statewide family support project sponsored by Early Support for Parents Inc. 
and funded by our government. This is a confidential, free service to grandparent families 
created in recognition of the growing numbers of grandchildren who care for one or more of their grandchildren in the effective absence of the biological parents. 
These families experience many inequities compared to other out-of-home carers because of a lack of recognition both legally and financially. These types of gaps in the system, as I have mentioned, add to the enormous stress these families are already experiencing on a daily basis.

The regional family support worker at the heart of this project can help by offering support and counselling via phone contact, visits to service offices and home visits; assessment of family needs and the tailoring of assistance to specific needs; one-on-one advocacy—for example, assistance to communicate with services such as Centrelink, schools or health services, assistance with inquiries through child protection, and offering support with accessing legal processes; provision of relevant information, particularly on grandparent family issues; provision of sessions around information on skill development, particularly strategies for behaviour management, conflict resolution, reducing stress and promoting self-care; referral to other specific agency resources or services regarding legal and financial matters; and a link to other grandparent families in the area who understand what it is like to be parenting again.

I am going to continue to raise the issue of grandparents raising grandchildren and to look to developing a national approach to this. It is something we have to do. It is something we have to deal with. They need all the support we can give federally, state-wide and locally.

**Interest Rates**

Mr WOOD (La Trobe) (8.40 pm)—The issue I want to bring to the attention of the House tonight is, sadly, those who are on fixed interest rates when the rate has been fixed at a high level. These people were actually expecting some relief from the government, especially when we go back to the Insiders program on the ABC in August 2008, on which the Treasurer, Wayne Swan, said:

... we put in place our bank switching package so customers could vote with their feet if they were unhappy with their bank and shift banks. Now, that package will be fully operational in November this year. So, if customers are unhappy with the behaviour of their bank, they can more easily shift their account.

I can tell the Treasurer—mental note to self that this is actually not happening. It is really sad. I have people in my electorate of La Trobe stuck on high interest rates. For example, I have Bryce O’Byrne, who feels absolutely abandoned by the Rudd government. Bryce and his partner, residents of my electorate in a suburb called Boronia, purchased their property in August 2008 and locked in a fixed interest rate of 8.65 per cent on their loan, which they took out in July.

Remember the comment by the Treasurer: ‘The inflation genie is out of the bottle.’ Bryce was one of those who was greatly concerned in listening to the Treasurer that, if he did not fix his interest rates, then he would see even higher rates. For Bryce, it is actually a double whammy because, sadly, he has also lost his job. Look at the Commonwealth Bank, which Bryce has his loan with. When he tried to look at getting out of the loan early, the Commonwealth Bank came along and said, ‘You leave us and it’s going to cost you $30,000,’ which is an absolute disgrace.

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**CHAMBER**
We have seen the Prime Minister with his $42 billion spending package. It is not helping people like Bryce and others stuck in fixed interest rates. In 2007, 20 per cent of all home loans in Australia were fixed interest rate loans. It hit a high of 23.9 per cent in March 2008 and since that date it has been going down.

Another constituent—and I am more than happy for the Treasurer to speak to any of these constituents, because they have written to the Treasurer through me—Tyrone Solomonz, of Berwick, is another person who is stuck on a fixed interest rate, this time at 8.3 per cent with the ANZ Bank. When Tyrone tried to get out, his exit fee was $8,000, which, compared to others, is not that high. But Tyrone has lost his job and he cannot get out of this fixed loan and is most likely going to be forced to sell. He is trying his darnedest to do everything he can to save his house.

Mr Rodney Lamb, of Berwick, has also contacted me. He was forced in late 2008 to sell his home and was told the exit fees were $26,000. Upon contacting the bank just six weeks prior, they were only $16,000. So they jumped up by $9,000. He sold his home on 13 February this year, costing his family more than $25,000.

We look at what the Rudd government have done for banks. They have committed to a $4 billion bailout of commercial borrowers abandoned by foreign banks but will not spend one cent to bail out homeowners trapped in fixed high interest rates, not even those losing their jobs.

It is just amazing. Look at the Executive Director of the ANZ Bank. He took home a package of $12.9 million last year and will not help Tyrone, trying to cope with his exit fees of $8,000. We look at the chief of the Commonwealth Bank, which charged Bryce $30,000. Last year the chief of the Commonwealth Bank received $8.6 million. And we have ING turning a blind eye to Rodney Lamb, demanding he spend $25,000 in exit fees.

The government are supposed to have this amazing, great relationship with the big banks. Why don’t they use some weight and help people who are stuck on these high fixed interest rates? It is killing them, especially as more and more people lose their jobs while stuck on fixed interest rates. All I can say is: please, Mr Rudd, help these people out. They are desperate.

**Brisbane 2 Ipswich Challenge**

Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (8.45 pm)—Tonight I want to talk about a great community event in my electorate and much more broadly in the western corridor: the annual Brisbane 2 Ipswich Challenge. It was formerly known as the Mall 2 Mall bike ride, and it has been running since 2001. It started in my electorate, and I am the patron of the organisation and the ride. It started with the Centenary of Federation Links in the Chain ride, with 30 local riders who thought they would mark the occasion and follow in the steps of the bicentenary ride that came through to Canberra. It grew to become the Mall 2 Mall with 120 riders, and then 350, and then 500, and then a thousand riders, and today we have got the Brisbane 2 Ipswich Challenge. You might ask why this ride is so popular and successful. There are a number of very good reasons. One is that it is linked to Ipswich city through the mayor, Paul Pisasale, and Ipswich Events Corporation. It is part of the festival that comes to Ipswich every year, and it is also about fundraising and doing some really great things for people. It is about linking the two cities, Brisbane and Ipswich; it is about having a bit of fun and getting families to cycle together; and it is about a message of fitness and also goodwill between the two cities.
I am very proud of what the ride has achieved over the past eight years. This year will be the ninth ride. We have done some really great things for our local community, and it is made up of so many great local people—some who are riders and some who are not. The Brisbane 2 Ipswich Challenge involves a whole range of people, including, of course, the thousand riders who actually ride the 50-odd kilometres between the two cities and raise funds for the Ipswich Hospital Foundation and the Royal Children’s Hospital in Brisbane. But it is also made up of volunteers who just want to help out in their community and do their bit, like the local naval cadets run by Sharon and Allan McIntosh. Year in and year out, they cook the thousand burgers that we feed people after the ride. It is great to see them there giving a helping hand.

There is also the Goodna RSL services club, who are our major sponsor and who have been with us for a number of years, and there are other great supporters like Mix Events; Truck Cranes; John Grant, at Ipswich Central Motors; the Springfield Land Corporation; and the Yellow Jersey Bike Shop—to name just a small handful. There are so many supporters of this great community event.

We get people riding who are in their 70s, and we get people as young as 10 years old. People get out there on their brand new, very expensive bikes or their very old bikes from the back shed that they dust off. It is about families getting together. We often see mums and dads riding tandem bikes with little trailers so they can tow the kids behind as well. The Ipswich BMX Club get involved, and we get people from interstate, right up and down the east coast. It is amazing, when we get the registrations in, to see where all these people come from who want to support those two great local charities, the Ipswich Hospital Foundation and the Royal Children’s Hospital. We even get people from Canberra.

Stephen Hodge, who is well known down here in the cycling world, comes up and rides and supports the ride as well. We get people from the Squadra team also.

There are so many great stories and great riders, and they all have a common theme. There are professional people like doctors and engineers and there are also tradies. They are all ordinary people who not only enjoy cycling but also want to contribute, through the sport that they enjoy, to help out the community. We have groups like FSow out of Brisbane, a great bunch of riders who do a whole heap of community rides and try to do their bit for charity. We also have the Springfield Riders Group, who do more than just get together on a Sunday to have a coffee ride—or a bakery ride, as they are often referred to. We have people like Matt Britton, and I will single him out because he rode from Southport to Sydney to raise funds for cystic fibrosis. We have people like Allan Norsgaard, who just completed, on his own, a Brisbane to Sydney ride—and he is going to go and do another one because he wants to raise money for Legacy. These are people who really enjoy cycling but want to contribute to their community in some way.

There are so many good people involved. It is a real pleasure to be a part of this great group. I want to finish by saying that cycling has got a lot to offer. Not only is it a great community sport; it is great for fitness. It should also be treated as a great alternative transport—with the transport issues and problems we have in our cities—and it is a way of dealing with sustainability within our cities, greening our cities and making sure that a complete transport and sustainable cities plan involves cycling, walking and all forms of transport. In noting this great local community event, I also want to note the great contribution of so many people. (Time expired)
Mrs MIRABELLA (Indi) (8.50 pm)—I rise this evening to talk about something that is very distressing to rural and regional Australia and, I know from direct experience, to my part of the world—north-east Victoria and the border with Albury-Wodonga. That is the demise of area consultative committees. The Rudd government’s decision to shut down the network of regional development agencies by June this year will have major consequences. It has hit our regions and it has hit those who have served on these committees in volunteer capacities very hard. I think one of the harshest things of all is the personal effect it will have.

There are individuals who have volunteered their time for many years. In fact, some of them have served on these area consultative committees for longer than some people’s marriages survive. Not only have they been told, ‘No thanks; we don’t need you anymore,’ but they have not even been thanked for the job they have done over these many years. Let us remember that these are volunteers. They include people like Eric Lund, who chaired the North East Victoria Area Consultative Committee, and Shane O’Brien and Joan Ross, also from NVACC. They include Bert Eastoe, who chaired the Albury Wodonga Area Consultative Committee, Ray Hortle—also from AWACC—and all the committee members who have served on both these area consultative committees.

I want to go on the record today and say thank you. Thank you for going through those mounds of paper and selecting the best local projects. Thank you for helping our councils, other community organisations and individuals develop their applications so they could be the best applications possible—to get funding not only through the Regional Partnerships program but through other government programs. I know that the small-business officers who worked in area consultative committees have gone well beyond their duty in assisting locals, individuals, organisations and local government in putting together applications—for state funding as well. They have been an invaluable resource and they have not been given a thank-you from the government; they have just been told very hastily that they are no longer needed. This was after they were told there would be transitional arrangements.

Imagine: you have all these volunteers and you have a smaller group of paid staff, who not only have this extraordinary experience with the funding programs previously available but also know what projects and needs exist within the regions that they have operated in—and their expertise is not even being utilised in this transitional process. I call on the government to have some sort of small ceremony to acknowledge those who have worked as staff and those who have worked as volunteers—to acknowledge their efforts. It is a small thing to do in return for the efforts that they have put in over many years. It is not just good manners; it is the right thing to do. Quite rightly, some of these people have taken the sudden shutting of these area consultative committees as a bit of a personal slight. The government has not even thanked them, and they have put in so much.

I know many of them will continue to put a lot into their communities in other ways, but I think the government should follow the lead elsewhere and actually provide some sort of job security for local ACC staff. It is interesting that, at a time when the government attacks private enterprise for its lack of job security and its callousness, the government has shown the exact same—worse—callousness in first promising transitional arrangements and then dumping on the staff, at very short notice, saying: ‘No thanks,
you’re not even needed for transitional arrangements.’

Thank you very much to the area consultative committees for the money you have helped bring to our region, whether it was for libraries, whether it was to help with telecommunications, whether it was to help with community halls, whether it was to help with the sheds, whether it was to help with childcare centres or whether it was to help with maintaining and learning about our heritage through Ned Kelly restoration works at Glenrowan or myriad other projects. Thank you very much for what you have done. Our communities have been enriched, and we have had the services that otherwise would not be there. I want to put that on the record, and I call on the government to follow my lead. (Time expired)

Economy

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (8.55 pm)—I rise to comment on the government’s approach to dealing with the global financial crisis, which of course is now moving into the next phase, which many commentators are calling ‘the global economic recession’. As we move through the months ahead, it will be no surprise to anyone in this place that the challenges that we face throughout the Australian economy—largely driven by the global factors that are at play—will mean that more and more Australians will find themselves out of work in the coming months. This is the harsh reality that we as a nation have to confront. It is a very sad and personal cost for each and every person who ends up unemployed and for their families.

The role of governments in times such as these is to act early, to act decisively and to act in a way that seeks to buffer the Australian economy from those global forces. That is what we have seen from the Rudd government. There has been much speculation and much comment in recent times about the impact of the Economic Security Strategy that was put in place before Christmas. I would simply make the observation that most of the people who are now coming forward and being critical of that package not only supported the package but also voted for it and expressed their support for it both in this place and outside this place. But we are now seeing a revisionism taking place from those people, who seek to distort what occurred before Christmas. The Economic Security Strategy—which was the first example of the Rudd government acting early and in a very strong way to ensure that we protect local jobs within the Australian economy—was welcomed in the first instance by the Leader of the Opposition and by the opposition, who said that they were not going to quibble with that package. But there has been a lot of quibbling since. There was a lot of quibbling in the days after that commitment not to quibble, and we have only seen that intensify over time.

If we look at what occurred prior to Christmas, we see that there was a significant increase in retail spending within the Australian economy. In the December quarter, we see that retail trade increased by 3.8 per cent. We have seen through the national accounts figures that there was a contraction in the economy in the last quarter. But, when we take into account that the Economic Security Strategy payments only began to flow through in the final month of that quarter, we can see that the government were right to take that action, that the economy
was beginning to slow and that urgent and decisive action was required—and that is why we acted.

I want to go to the issue of the so-called sugar hit or the so-called cash splash that we hear those on the other side talk about. Let us not forget that the so-called sugar hit or the cash splash was about providing some assistance to those people doing it tough, to those people in need—whether it be pensioners, low- or middle-income families with children, veterans or carers. Remember when those on the other side started to crank up the issue when it came to pensioners? When it suited their political convenience, they were out there drumming up support for the pensioners. They did nothing whilst in office for the last decade but, all of a sudden—from, I guess, the luxurious position of opposition—they decided to start to crank up the issue. We all remember that the then shadow minister for ageing started up a petition to increase the pension. That campaign got a bit of momentum, but later that day she was slapped down by the then shadow Treasurer, who is now the Leader of the Opposition. The only reason the opposition continued to put an increase in funding to pensioners on the agenda was the action of the then opposition leader, the member for Bradfield. So we saw back then the fact that the then shadow Treasurer, the member for Wentworth, was opposed to providing that increase. But, when the government acted decisively to provide that assistance to pensioners, we saw the member for Wentworth backtracking.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—Order! It being 9 pm, the debate is interrupted.

House adjourned at 9.00 pm

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Clare to move:

That the House:

(1) welcomes the drop in home repossessions and the increase in housing sales in Western Sydney in the last few months;
(2) recognises the importance of the Rudd Government’s First Home Owner’s Boost and interest rate cuts in improving housing affordability; and
(3) condemns the Coalition for their criticism of this important stimulus to the economy and its opposition to the Nation Building and Jobs Plan.

Ms Hall to move:

That the House:

(1) recognises the extraordinary deeds of John Simpson Kirkpatrick who demonstrated courage above and beyond the call of duty when he and his donkeys rescued injured soldiers from the battle fields of Gallipoli;
(2) calls for the Government to award a posthumous Victoria Cross to ‘Simpson’ in accordance with the wishes of his World War I Commanding Officers and the many thousands of Australians both young and old who demand this recognition for his acts of bravery;
(3) believes it is a travesty of justice that he has been denied the award of the Victoria Cross for all these years; and
(4) notes that all Australians would strongly support the posthumous awarding of his honour.

Ms Hall to move:

That the House:

(1) is made aware that Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis (JIA) affects as many as 1 in 250 Australian children, and that its associated eye disease is the leading cause of childhood blindness in Australia today;
(2) recognises the physical, emotional, and financial burden that this chronic disease places upon the family unit; and
(3) calls on the Government to:
   (a) establish a National Database for JIA, so that early diagnosis and professional support can be given to these families
through the Australian Paediatric Rheumatology Group; and

(b) implement specialised clinics with Visiting Medical Officers at major regional hospitals throughout Australia.

Mr Katter to move:
That, recognising the necessity to preserve manufacturing in Australia to address rising unemployment and the plight of people about to be dismissed at Pacific Brands, the House:

(1) calls on the Government to:

(a) introduce ‘an emergency measure under WTO rules’ to provide an interim 15 percent tariff on goods that are imported to replace textile clothing and footwear (TCF) items such as those produced at Pacific Brands; and

(b) abandon its intention to abolish the existing TCF tariff regime; and

(2) directs the Government to finance a loan to allow Pacific Brands workers to purchase significant shareholdings in the company through salary sacrifice arrangements in order to purchase a share issue made to provide the refinancing funds needed to enable continued manufacturing by Pacific Brands in Australia.

Mr Katter to present a bill for an act to amend the Trade Practices Act 1974.

Mr Katter to present a bill for an act to amend the Quarantine Proclamation 1998.

Mr Hartsuyker to move:
That the House:

(1) condemns the Government’s decision to allow the importation of bananas from the Philippines in view of the direct threat such imports pose to the disease free nature of the Australian banana growing industry; and

(2) expresses concern that:

(a) there is a high prevalence of banana pests and diseases in the Philippines;

(b) the decision has apparently been taken in disregard of previous failings by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service to secure our borders against damaging infections and diseases; and

(c) the health of the Australian banana growing industry will now depend on the inspection regime in the Philippines.
QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government: Regional Offices

(Question No. 329)

Mr Truss asked the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, in writing, on 15 September 2008:

(1) Further to the answer to question No. 148 (Hansard, 26 August 2008, page 60) concerning the closure of regional offices of his department, has the Government decided to close the regional offices of his department in: (a) Brisbane; (b) Perth; (c) Adelaide; and (d) Melbourne; and (e) any other location; if so, where.

(2) Since November 2007, how many staff of his department have been offered re-employment or redundancy from offices in: (a) Brisbane; (b) Perth; (c) Adelaide; and (d) Melbourne; and (e) any other location.

(3) What is the planned closure date for offices of his department in: (a) Brisbane; (b) Perth; (c) Adelaide; and (d) Melbourne; and (e) any other location.

Mr Albanese—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(1) (a), (b), (c), (d) these offices are now closed.

(e) No

(2) (a) 9

(b) 9

(c) 6

(d) 9

(e) Nil

(3) Refer to part 1.

Prime Minister: Overseas Travel

(Question No. 335)

Mr Pearce asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 17 September 2008:

Since becoming Prime Minister, what has been the total cost to the Government for overseas travel for the Prime Minister and accompanying personal and departmental staff.

Mr Rudd—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

I refer the honourable member to Senate Question in Writing Notice No 750.

Hon. John Howard: Overseas Travel

(Question No. 336)

Mr Melham asked the Prime Minister, in writing, on 18 September 2008:

For the period 1996-2007, what was the total cost to the Government for overseas travel for former Prime Minister, the Hon John Howard, and accompanying personal and departmental staff.

Mr Rudd—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:
### Visits Abroad by Prime Minister The Honourable John Howard AC 1996 - 2007

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<td>Australia – Cook Islands – Australia (South Pacific Forum)</td>
<td></td>
<td>$306,660</td>
<td>$7,394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 – 30 Oct 97</td>
<td>Australia – Thailand – UK – Malaysia – Indonesia – Australia (CHOGM)</td>
<td></td>
<td>$277,588</td>
<td>$38,347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 – 26 Feb 98</td>
<td>Malaysia and PNG (visit cancelled)</td>
<td></td>
<td>$14,481</td>
<td>$5,186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 – 25 Apr 98</td>
<td>Australia – Thailand – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$78,784</td>
<td>$30,376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 – 19 Nov 98</td>
<td>Australia – Malaysia – Australia (APEC)</td>
<td></td>
<td>$263,845</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 – 22 Feb 99</td>
<td>Australia – New Zealand – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 – 27 Apr 99</td>
<td>Australia – Bali – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – 18 Jul 99</td>
<td>Australia – Japan – USA – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 13 Sept 99</td>
<td>Australia – New Zealand – Australia (APEC)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – 8 Oct 99</td>
<td>Australia – PNG – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 – 16 Nov 99</td>
<td>Australia – South Africa – Australia (CHOGM)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>28-Nov-99</td>
<td>East Timor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Apr – 4 May 00</td>
<td>Australia – Turkey – France – Israel – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 – 21 May 00</td>
<td>Australia – Korea – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – 9 Jun 00</td>
<td>Australia – Japan – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – 12 Jul 00</td>
<td>Australia – UK – India – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – 8 Sept 00</td>
<td>Australia – USA – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 – 30 Oct 00</td>
<td>Australia – Kiribati – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 – 17 Nov 00</td>
<td>Australia – Brunei – Australia (APEC)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 – 26 Feb 01</td>
<td>Australia – New Zealand – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – 4 Aug 01</td>
<td>Australia – Japan – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 – 14 Aug 01</td>
<td>Australia – Indonesia – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 – 18 Aug 01</td>
<td>Nauru - represented by Hon Peter Reith MP Minister for Defence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dates</td>
<td>From – To</td>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>Total Trip Cost PM &amp; official staff</td>
<td>Total Trip Cost Departmental staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 – 14 Sep '01</td>
<td>Australia – USA – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$593,250</td>
<td>$60,661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 – 22 Oct '01</td>
<td>Australia – China – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$515,542</td>
<td>$23,215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2002</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Jan – 8 Feb '02</td>
<td>Australia – USA – Indonesia – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$1,109,757</td>
<td>$130,849</td>
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<tr>
<td>18 – 23 Mar '02</td>
<td>Australia – UK – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$164,658</td>
<td>$25,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – 11 Apr '02</td>
<td>Australia – UK – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$137,352</td>
<td>$20,898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 – 24 May '02</td>
<td>Australia – East Timor – Singapore – China – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$406,894</td>
<td>$73,418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 – 15 Jun '02</td>
<td>Australia – USA – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$467,442</td>
<td>$100,714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Jun – 13 Jul '02</td>
<td>Australia – Germany – Greece – Italy – Belgium – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$38,799</td>
<td>$14,009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 – 17 Aug '02</td>
<td>Australia – PNG – Fiji – Australia</td>
<td>(Pacific Island Forum)</td>
<td>$269,163</td>
<td>$58,508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 – 27 Sept '02</td>
<td>Australia – New Zealand – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$476,442</td>
<td>$100,714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 – 18 Oct '02</td>
<td>Australia – New Zealand – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$476,442</td>
<td>$100,714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 – 30 Oct '02</td>
<td>Australia – Mexico – Australia</td>
<td>(APEC)</td>
<td>$269,163</td>
<td>$58,508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2003</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 – 16 Feb '03</td>
<td>Australia – USA – UK – Indonesia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$219,163</td>
<td>$58,508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 – 10 Mar '03</td>
<td>Australia – New Zealand – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$476,442</td>
<td>$100,714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – 10 May '03</td>
<td>Australia – USA – UK – Qatar – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$476,442</td>
<td>$100,714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 – 20 Jun '03</td>
<td>Australia – Philippines – Japan – Korea – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$269,163</td>
<td>$58,508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 – 19 Aug '03</td>
<td>Australia – New Zealand – China – Australia</td>
<td>(Pacific Islands Forum)</td>
<td>$269,163</td>
<td>$58,508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-Aug-'03</td>
<td>Australia – Solomon Islands – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$6,062</td>
<td>$558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 – 13 Oct '03</td>
<td>Australia – Bali – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$15,103</td>
<td>$1,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 – 22 Oct '03</td>
<td>Australia – Thailand – Australia</td>
<td>(APEC)</td>
<td>$38,799</td>
<td>$14,009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – 15 Nov '03</td>
<td>Australia – UK – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$269,163</td>
<td>$58,508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – 9 Dec '03</td>
<td>Australia – Nigeria – Australia</td>
<td>(CHOGM)</td>
<td>$269,163</td>
<td>$58,508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-Dec-'03</td>
<td>Australia – Solomon Islands – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$3,146</td>
<td>$1,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2004</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06-Apr-'04</td>
<td>Australia – New Zealand – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$8,363</td>
<td>$5,222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 – 26 Apr '04</td>
<td>Qatar, Iraq and Kuwait ( meet the troops)</td>
<td></td>
<td>$1,050</td>
<td>$5,222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 – 8 Jun '04</td>
<td>Australia – USA – UK – France – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$257,040</td>
<td>$55,401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – 8 Aug '04</td>
<td>Australia – Samoa – Australia</td>
<td>(Pacific Islands Forum)</td>
<td>$39,224</td>
<td>$5,717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 – 20 Oct '04</td>
<td>Australia – Indonesia – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$10,772</td>
<td>$5,124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 – 23 Nov '04</td>
<td>Australia – Chile – Australia</td>
<td>(APEC)</td>
<td>$24,704</td>
<td>$38,955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 Nov – 1 Dec '04</td>
<td>Australia – Laos – Australia</td>
<td>(ASEAN)</td>
<td>$29,810</td>
<td>$6,948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2005</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – 7 Jan '05</td>
<td>Australia – Jakarta – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$19,265</td>
<td>$11,307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 Jan – 3 Feb '05</td>
<td>Australia – Switzerland – Singapore – Banda Aceh – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$269,163</td>
<td>$58,508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 – 21 Feb '05</td>
<td>Australia – New Zealand – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$29,810</td>
<td>$6,948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 – 29 Apr '05</td>
<td>Australia – China – Japan – Turkey – Greece – Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td>$225,741</td>
<td>$41,026</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Dates From – To Notes Total Trip Cost PM & official staff* Total Trip Cost Departmental staff#

15 – 27 Jul 05 Australia – USA – UK – Iraq – UAE – Australia $356,793 $66,311
11 – 18 Sept 05 Australia – USA – Australia $442,902 $78,042
25 – 27 Oct 05 Australia – PNG – Australia (Pacific Islands Forum) $58,137 $35,876
16 – 28 Nov 05 Australia – Korea – Pakistan – Malta – Australia (APEC & CHOGM) $300,073 $71,269
13 – 15 Dec 05 Australia – Malaysia – Australia (East Asia Summit) $43,093 $15,389
**2006**
10 – 13 Jan 06 Israel and Singapore trip cancelled $227 $15,564
5 – 9 Mar 06 Australia – India – Australia $187,326 $118,914
12 – 25 May 06 Australia – USA – Canada – Ireland – Australia $387,443 $84,210
25 – 29 Jun 06 Australia – Indonesia – China – Australia $68,841 $34,691
18-Jul-06 Australia – East Timor – Australia $3,182 $6,115
23 – 25 Oct 06 Australia – Fiji – Australia (Pacific Islands Forum) $31,455 $17,310
16 – 21 Nov 06 Australia – Vietnam – Australia (APEC) $119,843 $41,676
29 Nov – 1 Dec 06 Australia – Malaysia – Australia (East Asia Summit) trip postponed $24,170 $12,241
**2007**
12 – 14 Dec 06 Philippines – Australia (East Asia Summit) $8,084
14 – 15 Jan 07 Australia – Philippines – Australia (East Asia Summit) $48,983 $40,576
15 – 16 Feb 07 Australia – New Zealand – Australia $20,076 $9,747
11 – 19 Mar 07 Australia – Japan – Afghanistan – Iraq – Australia $174,443 $53,905
26 – 27 Jul 07 Australia – East Timor – Indonesia – Australia $27,624 $3,154
11 – 18 Oct 07 Tonga (Pacific Islands Forum) Prime Minister Howard represented by the Minister for Foreign Affairs Total $230 $2,672

* The Department of Finance and Deregulation advises the following:

Costs covered include Mr Howard, his spouse, Members of Parliament (Staff) Act employees and a physician.

The information in the table above represents payments made by the Department of Finance and Deregulation (Finance) and its former entities, in relation to overseas travel by former Prime Minister the Hon John Howard AC.

The table has been compiled from three sources:

1. payments made during the period 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1998 - Media Releases issued by the responsible Minister.

**QUESTIONS IN WRITING**
(2) payments made during the period 1 July 1998 to 30 December 2007 - Parliamentarians’ Travel Paid By The Department of Finance and Deregulation documents tabled in the Parliament on a six-monthly basis.

(3) payments made during the period 1 January to 30 September 2008 - Transaction reports generated from Finance’s Entitlements Management System (for travel undertaken while Mr Howard was Prime Minister).

On 1 July 2002, funding for Special Purpose Aircraft (SPA) costs was transferred from Finance to the Department of Defence. The cost of travel by SPA for trips after this date is not included.

Finance changed its entitlements management and reporting system on 1 September 1999. Although based on publicly released information, the accuracy and completeness of amounts reported for payments made prior to 1 September 1999 can not be guaranteed.

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet advises the following:

Departmental records between 1996 to 1999 are in some cases incomplete. All available figures are included in the reply.

Innovation, Industry, Science and Research: Program Funding

(1) Which agencies and departments in the Minister’s portfolio will return money to budget in the 2008-09 financial year as a result of underspends in the 2007-08 financial year; and what sum of money will be returned to budget from these programs.

(2) From 1 December 2007 to 30 June 2008, what sum of money has the Government committed to spending under Regulation 10 of the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997 for applicable departments and agencies under the Minister’s portfolio; and how much of this commitment was approved: (a) at the department and agency level; and (b) by the Minister for Finance and Deregulation.

(3) What sum of depreciation funding: (a) is available for each department and agency in the Minister’s portfolio as at 30 June 2008; (b) was spent by each department and agency in the Minister’s portfolio in the 2007-08 financial year; and (c) was spent by each department and agency in the Minister’s portfolio in the 2007-08 financial year to directly replace assets for which it was appropriated.

Mr Hockey—The Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research has provided the following answer to the honourable member’s question:

(1) The Department and IP Australia will be returning money to budget in 2008-09 that relates to underspends in the 2007-08 financial year. The amounts are $69,287,028 and $22,102 respectively.

(2) From 1 December 2007 to 30 June 2008, the Department, the Australian Research Council and IP Australia committed to spending under Regulation 10 of the FMA Act a total of $455,589,215, approved as follows:

(a) $335,589,215 at the Department and agency level, and

(b) $120,000,000 by the Minister for Finance and Deregulation

(3) (a) It is not possible to accurately identify the depreciation funding available since the implementation of accrual accounting.

(b) The depreciation and amortisation expenses for the Department and agencies for 2007-2008 were as follows:
The amounts spent on the purchase of assets for the Department and agencies for 2007-2008 were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>$'000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research</td>
<td>26,016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation</td>
<td>110,765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation</td>
<td>34,876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Institute of Marine Science</td>
<td>11,782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Research Council</td>
<td>1,709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo - Australian Telescope Board</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Property Australia</td>
<td>14,079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lower Lakes

(Question Nos 560, 561, 562)

Mr Secker asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, in writing, on 3 February 2009:

Will the Minister commission an Environmental Impact Statement for South Australia’s proposed introduction of seawater into the Lower Lakes of the River Murray.

Mr Garrett—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

Yes. The South Australian Government is required to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

The EIS will be released for public comment.

Lower Lakes

(Question Nos 566, 567, 568)

Mr Secker asked the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, in writing, on 3 February 2009:

Given the Lower Lakes of South Australia (SA) are subject to a Ramsar Agreement, will the Minister ensure an Environmental Impact Assessment is undertaken in respect of the proposed construction of a weir at or near Wellington in SA.

Mr Garrett—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

Yes.

On 3 July 2007, it was determined that the South Australian Government was required to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

The EIS will be released for public comment.
Mr Ciobo asked the Minister for Resources and Energy and the Minister for Tourism, in writing, on 23 February 2009:

In respect of the Government’s funding of organisations and projects between 3 December 2007 and 20 January 2009: (a) which organisations and projects based in the Moncrieff electorate received funding from his department; (b) what sum of funding did each organisation and project receive; and (c) for what purpose was each funding commitment made.

Mr Martin Ferguson—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

(a) There are customers under the Ethanol Distribution Grants program located in the Moncrieff Electorate. The Ethanol Distribution Program (EDP) is an eligibility-based grants program targeting retail service stations. It provides a grant of up to $10,000 to reduce the infrastructure cost to enable a service station to supply 10 per cent ethanol blended petrol (E10) and a grant of up to $10,000 to reward increased E10 sales at that service station.

There has been one Tourism funding project granted in the electorate of Moncrieff through the Australian Tourism Development Program (ATDP). The following table outlines:

- which organisations have received funding;
- how much they received; and
- for what purpose was each funding commitment made.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Applicant Name</th>
<th>Location Name</th>
<th>Suburb</th>
<th>Amount received during nominated period</th>
<th>Purpose of funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caltex Australia Petroleum Pty Ltd</td>
<td>Caltex Worongary</td>
<td>WORONGARY</td>
<td>$10,000.00</td>
<td>Infrastructure Upgrade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caltex Australia Petroleum Pty Ltd</td>
<td>Caltex Worongary</td>
<td>WORONGARY</td>
<td>$5,000.00</td>
<td>Sales Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-Eleven Stores Pty Ltd</td>
<td>7-Eleven Ashmore</td>
<td>ASHMORE</td>
<td>$6,160.93</td>
<td>Infrastructure Upgrade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-Eleven Stores Pty Ltd</td>
<td>7-Eleven Ashmore</td>
<td>ASHMORE</td>
<td>$10,000.00</td>
<td>Sales Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caltex Australia Petroleum Pty Ltd</td>
<td>Caltex Southport</td>
<td>SOUTHPORT</td>
<td>$10,000.00</td>
<td>Infrastructure Upgrade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP Australia Pty Ltd</td>
<td>BP Benowa</td>
<td>BENOWA</td>
<td>$7,197.38</td>
<td>Sales Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP Australia Pty Ltd</td>
<td>BP Benowa</td>
<td>BENOWA</td>
<td>$10,000.00</td>
<td>Sales Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Shell Company of Australia Limited</td>
<td>Coles Express</td>
<td>BUNDALL</td>
<td>$5,000.00</td>
<td>Sales Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-Eleven Stores Pty Ltd</td>
<td>7-Eleven Mermaid Waters</td>
<td>MERMAID WATERS</td>
<td>$6,160.93</td>
<td>Infrastructure Upgrade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-Eleven Stores Pty Ltd</td>
<td>7-Eleven Mermaid Waters</td>
<td>MERMAID WATERS</td>
<td>$10,000.00</td>
<td>Sales Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian’s Auto Centre Pty Ltd</td>
<td>Brian’s Auto Centre</td>
<td>MIAMI</td>
<td>$10,000.00</td>
<td>Sales Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Shell Company of Australia Limited</td>
<td>Coles Express Miami</td>
<td>MIAMI</td>
<td>$10,000.00</td>
<td>Sales Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draculas Pty Ltd</td>
<td>Dracula’s Haunted House</td>
<td>SURFERS PARADISE</td>
<td>$11,000.00</td>
<td>Carpentry, electrical and plumbing works</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) See answer to part (a)

(c) See answer to part (a)